Explore the significance of shakespeare’s use of soliloquies in hamlet essay samp...

ASSIGN BUSTER

Shakespeare changed the nature of drama in England. Arriving in London in the last decade of the sixteenth century, Shakespeare began his play-writing career by adapting the forms of already-successful plays – plays about historical characters (both English and Roman), the Senecan ' Tragedy of Blood', Romantic Comedy and plots centering on the Machiavellian villain. From the very first, however, Shakespeare transformed everything he touched: characters developed from the elementary stock characters of earlier traditions – such as the young Hero and Heroine, the Stern Father and the Tyrannical Ruler who must be overthrown – into recognizable human beings. Chronicle plays dealing with the sequence of English monarchs in consecutive order were replaced by studies of good governance – what made a ' good' king? And how – after over a hundred years of turbulence – was England to be well managed? The last decade of the sixteenth century, and the first decade of the seventeenth century, saw the greatest period of English drama. The theatre became an established part of London life, both presenting and subverting contemporary political and social ideas.

Shakespeare, acknowledged as the greatest of English writers, needs to be studied both through his own texts and in relation to the literature and society of his time. This course will show the chronology of the plays, his development as a dramatist, and his principal themes. He was able to find universal human qualities and put them in a dramatic situation creating characters that are timeless. Yet he had the ability to create characters that are highly individual human beings. Their struggles in life are universal. Sometimes they are successful and sometimes their lives are full of pain,

suffering, and failure. In addition to his understanding and realistic view of human nature, Shakespeare had a vast knowledge of a variety of subjects.

These subjects include music, law, Bible, stage, art, politics, history, hunting, and sports. Shakespeare had a tremendous influence on culture and literature throughout the world. He contributed greatly to the development of the English language. Many words and phrases from Shakespeare's plays and poems have become part of our speech. Shakespeare's plays and poems have become a required part of education in the United States. Therefore, his ideas on subjects such as romantic love, heroism, comedy, and tragedy have helped shape the attitudes of millions of people. His portrayal of historical figures and events have influenced our thinking more than what has been written in history books. The world has admired and respected many great writers, but only Shakespeare has generated such enormous continuing

Was Shakespeare a good dramatist?

There are a lot of similarities involved with all plays, they tend to concentrate on the problems and actualities of everyday living, when external factors may be unpredictable. Shakespeare had many problems to conquer when he wrote his plays, and one major one, was the fact that many, many playwrights can and could write dramas that follow the same patterns and feature the problems of everyday life. So there had to be something special about Shakespeare's plays, that set him aside from other playwrights.

The utmost important factor that affected Shakespeare's popularity was that his plays presented a fuller, more complex sense of the nature of experience

than all other writers. He does this by cleverly using the language that he uses; his writing is so full of meaning every word is used with emotion. This is generally the reason why Shakespeare is so hard to understand, for in every speech, he is not just making the actors speak, he is making them matter. With every speech comes a problem or revelation, this makes the plays difficult to comprehend, for they always raise more issues than any single reader can ever fully understand. Shakespeare's plays all tackle issues of life, that at one point have had to be faced by someone, or are everyday problems that can occur on any occasion, to anyone.

The play Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare, is a very good example of the structure of a dramatist's play. We see that in general dramatist's plays fall into certain stages. The first stage is where we are introduced to the characters, and there is a slight mystery about these characters, because for now, we know little of them. However, very soon, perhaps as soon as the first scene, we are presented with the central theme, the problem then slowly unfolds. The play becomes even more elaborate at this stage, as the characters face the seemingly difficult dilemmas of the plot. We can see this pattern reflecting in Romeo and Juliet, where first we are introduced to the two families – the Capulets and the Montagues. Arguments commence sporadically between the two families, but nothing of apparent importance. It is understood at this point that the two families are rivals. However it is at this point that Romeo (a Montague) and Juliet (a Capulet) meet for the first time, and fall

" Preface to Shakespeare":

The two important works of Jonson as a critic are:-

(i) Preface to Shakespeare; and (ii) (ii) Lives of the Poets.

Let us consider the first of the two and see what idea of Johnson as a critic it gives. Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare appended to his edition of Shakespeare is, in the words of David Daiches, " one of the noblest monuments of English neoclassic criticism…and an exposure of some of the weaknesses, contradictions, and unnecessary rigidities of some widely accepted neoclassic principles…Its pungent style, emphatic clarity, and tendency to epigrammatic summing up of each argument carried its ideas home with enormous force." No modern editor of Shakespeare can ignore what Johnson has to say about Shakespeare–his comments on characters, his quite illuminating notes on the meanings of words, and his general assessment of Shakespeare as a poet and dramatist. The Preface represents effectively all the good and bad qualities of Johnson as a critic.

It is, according to a critic, " certaiftly the most masterly piece of literary criticism. All Johnson's gifts are seen at their best in it: the lucidity, the virile energy, the individuality of his style, the unique power of first placing himself on the level of the plain man and then lifting the plain man to his, the resolute insistence on life and reason, not learning or ingenuity, as the standard by which books are to be judged." Johnson neglects the merits of other Elizabethans and pays this glowing tribute to Shakespeare: " The stream of time which is continually washing dissoluble fabrics of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakespeare. Poetic reputations blaze up and dwindle and the fire which heartened one generation will be but cold ashes to the next. Yet for three centuries Shakespeare's fame has giowed so steadily that he has come to be looked on as the supreme

expression not only of the English race but of the whole world." The basis of Johnson's exaltation of Shakespeare is essentially neoclassic. He does not passively accept the decision of generation after generation. According to him " nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature".

This is the neoclassic expression of Aristotle's conception of imitation. Shakespeare is great because he is a poet not of freaks and whims but of general humannature which " is still the same." Shakespeare's " persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion." The emphasis on general truths rather than on the investigation of details is a basic tenet of the neoclassic school. " To generalise is to be an idiot," said Blake; but the neoclassicists did not count the streaks of a tulip. Johnson is, however, not a strait-jacketed neoclassicist. He admits of an occasional departure even from his pet principles. As he puts it, " there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature." The imitation of general nature which he insists on should, in his opinion, be subjected to moral and didactic considerations. " The end of writing," Johnson says, " is to instruct: the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing."

And this is Shakespeare's " fault" : " He sacrificed virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose." Thus, one of the reasons we praise Shakespeare for is treated by Johnson as his " defect." This also explains Johnson's plea for poetic justice. He supports the happy ending ofKing Lear as manoeuvred by Nahum Tate and others. He admits that a play in which

the virtuous suffer and the wicked prosper " is a just representation of the common events ofhuman life." But even then the playwright should preferably show " the final triumph of persecuted virtue," as that will please the audiences more. Johnson does not show evidence of any real grasp of Shakespeare's-poetic powers. He feels that Shakespeare was better at comedy than tragedy. Nor is he aware of the psychological subtleties of his characterisation. His criticism of Shakespeare's verbal quibbling is also indicative of his deficiency of perception. Shakespeare's puns, truly speaking, are not always senseless. When Margaret in Richard III says : And turns the sun to shade; alas! alas!

Witness my son, now in the shade of death, she is not just playing on the words " sun," " son", and " shade." She is in fact fulfilling a deeply compulsive psychological necessity. Her wordplay is, in the words of Oliver Elton, " in the nature of a safety valve, with a grim kind of hiss in it, for the escape of passion." " The Lives of the Poets":

Johnson's most mature and sustained critical work is The Lives of the Poetsoriginally published as Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets, between 1779 and 1781. It was intended to be a series of introductions to the works of the English poets from Cowley and Milton down to Johnson's contemporaries like Akenside and Gray. As many as fifty-two poets are dealt with. It is characteristic of the work that it deals with only the poets of the neoclassical tradition. As David Daiches says, " for the most part Johnson is dealing with men writing in a tradition he understood and employing the kind of verse for which he had an extremely accurate ear."

Many of the poets dealt with are read by nobody nowadays-Thomas Yalden,

Edmund Smith, William King, James Hammond, and Gillbert West. Only six of the rest-Milton, Dryden, Pope, Thomson, Collins, and Gray—are of real significance today. In each of the LivesJohnson gives the biographical facts about the poet, his observations on his character, and then a critical asessment of his poetry. Except in the case of the minor poets he makes little contribution to biographical facts.

Anyway, his style is attractive throughout. We may not accept The Lives of the Poets as a guide, but, certainly, it is a good companion. Johnson's criticism is of the " judicial" kind. He passes a clear verdict on every poet. He defined, in his Dictionary, a critic as " a man skilled in the art of judging literature; a man able to distinguish the faults and beauties of writing." Obviously, the emphasis is on judgment and discrimination. His method and conception of the function of a critic were later to be opposed by the poets and critics of the romantic school, who put emphasis not on judicial verdict but on the " imaginative interpretation of literature." Dr. Johnson's premises as a critic in this work are as essentially neoclassic as in his criticism of Shakespeare. Again, his insistence on the function of poetry-" to instruct by pleasing"-is ubiquitous.

All poetry is the work of genius, and genius is " that power which constitutes a poet; that quality without which judgment is cold and knowledge is inert; that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates." Invention, imagination, and judgment are included in genius. What is a poet, according to Johnson? The answer as interpreted by David Daiches is as follows: " The poet is a man seeking to give pleasure by conveying general truths about experience with freshness and skill, the questions to be asked of a given

poet are: what kind of a man, living in what age and circumstances, was he, and being that sort of a man, with what degree of success did he produce works capable of giving pleasure by their truth and liveliness?" The emphasis is again on " just representations of general nature." Any departure from this basic neoclassic prerequisite is stoutly opposed by Dr. Johnson. Of course, some strong personal prejudices also have a free play in his criticism. Thus Milton is partly attacked on political grounds: " Milton's republicanism was, I am afraid, founded in an envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence; in petulance impatient of control, and pride disdainful of superiority." Johnson's contempt for Milton's sonnets is due to his dislike of the sonnet as a poetic form.

He is harsh to Swift as he somewhat suspects his religious sincerity. Such instances of prejudiced views can easily be multiplied. We certainly agree with George Sherburn that Johnson's " errors are gross, open and palpable." However, most of Johnson's adverse opinions spring not from his literary and non-literary prejudices but his central point of view regarding the purpose and function of literature. This point of view is built mainly on the neoclassical premises, though with some very vital differences. Take, for instance, his condemnation of Cowley and the entire line of metaphysical poets. His views are in strict accordance with the spirit of his age. The chief fault of the metaphysicals, in the eyes of Johnson, is their sacrifice of the general for the particular and their excessive love of heavy learning. He observes : " The fault of Cowley, and perhaps all the writers of the metaphysical race, is that of pursuing his thoughts to their last ramifications, by which he loses the grandeur of generality."

This is what he has to say about metaphysical wit: “ The most heterogenous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs and their subtlety surprises…” Dr. Johnson has been frequently pilloried for his condemnation of Milton’sLycidas. His condemnation was not, however, the unthinking stricture of a fanatic, but a natural product of his fundamental attitude. The poet, as we have already pointed out, must, according to Johnson, give representations of general nature with, to use Daiches’ words again, “ truth” and “ liveliness” (that is, novelty). He should maintain a delicate balance between the two. If he adheres to truth too strictly at the cost of liveliness, the odds are that his “ representation” will become mechanical as he will usually employ highly traditional diction, idiom, and imagery. On the contrary, if he strives too much for novelty, it is likely that he will depart considerably from truth and get bogged down in his own whimsies. The first is the fault of Milton (in Lycidas) and the second that of the metaphysicals. Both are faults, but the latter is somewhat less serious than the former.

David Daiches observes that “ in the last analysis, Johnson held that exhibitionist novelty was better than the mechanical repetition of hereditary similes.” In condemning Lycidas, Johnson still shows his sense of the beautiful poetry which Milton has been able to create even with his “ schoolboy” similes and images. This deficiency in appreciating the strictly aesthetic merits of poetry leads Johnson to unfair criticism of Gray and Collins who are often called the precursors of Romanticism. His disapproval of Gray is not really due to his disapproval of all romantic tendencies, but

due to his disapproval of all artificial and extravagant language, the same for which he takes Lycidas to task. Basically, Johnson was against the use of classical mythology in modern English poetry.

He maintained a vigorous independence from most neoclassical dogmas. His leniency about the three dramatic unities and his disregard of the rigid conception of " kinds" and the rules of decorum are instances in pojnt. Further we must remember that he made important concessions. He helped Percy over the Reliques; he appreciated // Penseroso and Grongar Hill; he praised theCastle of Indolence; and he got over his dislike of blank verse while dealing with Milton, Thomson, and Akenside. His objection against blank verse was not that it was not good but that good blank verse was seldom written. His aesthetic capacity might be questioned but not his liberalism as a critic. He was not at all deaf to the newer and richer poetry which had begun to be written in his age. However, he is at his best when dealing with the poets who write that kind of poetry with which he is effortlessly in rapport. His criticism of Dryden and Pope is really remarkable. The famous passage in which he compares the two poets, in the words of David Daiches, " has had a permanent effect on the history of the reputation of those two poets…"

This post is part of a series I am doing on the Shakespearean comedies. The series is purely an exercise in self-indulgence: I want to explore for myself the humanistic and philosophic themes that are illustrated in Shakespeare's comedies. If you want to come along for the ride, feel free.

This introductory post explains the differences between tragedies and comedies and looks at how Shakespeare blends elements of both.

I am basing my comments largely on an essay by Helen Gardner. I found this in the Signet Classic edition of As You Like It. The Signet editions are my preferred editions of Shakespeare. They provide good introductions, historical background and critical commentary, along with well-annotated texts of the plays themselves.

Antony and Cleopatra as Tragicomedy

If Shakespeare matched Lope de Vega in designing plays which perpetually surprise and challenge audiences by unexpected reversals of character and plot, it is only to be expected that these expedient discontinuities should challenge the ingenuity of academics pursuing the high rationality that the original Academy of Plato was designed to foster. Shakespeare's contemporary, Lope de Vega, specifically advises dramatists to pursue such an oscillation of incident: " In the first act state the case; in the second entangle the incidents in such a way that until the middle of the [last] act no one can even guess at the solution. Always deceive anticipation and so it may come about that something quite remote from what is intended may come about.' (Gilbert, 546) Lope's aesthetic makes such gyrations less philosophically agnostic and more a function of pursuit of audience " affect." Such swings in audience expectations are a useful guide to understanding the design of another of Shakespeare's problematic historical plays: Antony and Cleopatra.

Marvin Rosenberg has helpfully documented the seeming discontinuities in its characterizations which leads him to break down the history of criticism and production into two irreconcilable camps: " for" and " against" Cleopatra, with both camps being largely determined by equally selective readings of Cleopatra's character. As an example of just how unpredictable this play is I should recall that it was cited as the climax of my investigation into the nature of Shakespeare's Sexual Comedy, yet I now find myself writing about it as a key example of his tragic series. In Shakespearean Tragedy and Its Double Kent Cartwright asserts that " the play creates a domain of action in the positioning of the characters towards each other – their emotional distances, their maneuverings for psychological advantage – beyond the Aristotelian rise and fall of their fortunes."(228)

He goes on to cite A. C. Bradley's essay on the play which expresses bafflement at its first three acts in which " people converse, discuss, accuse one another, excuse themselves, mock describe, drink together, arrange a marriage, meet and part, but they do not kill, do not even tremble or weep" and neglect events which ' appeal most powerfully to the dramatic feelings – scenes of action or passion which agitate the audience with alarm, horror, painful expectation, or absorbing sympathies and antipathies." Oxford Lectures, 283-4) These views seem to confirm that the play largely fits into some kind of mixed genre like that favored by Cinthio and Lope de Vega. However, the various divergences of evaluation of the script and its characters are not the result of genuine alternative readings that are incompatible with each other. The oscillations of tone and attitude reflect a deliberate strategy of constant invitations for the audience to revise its

expectations and judgments which effectively acts as a device to compel its attention to the constantly shifting perspectives. A consistent adherence to one view or another on such issues as our estimate of Cleopatra, or to finding a consistent aesthetic pattern would misrepresents the calculated multi-textured character of the script.

Any attempt to make it tonally consistent is a betrayal of its complex audience effect, such as I regretted in a production at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland. The director obviously resented the script's alternation of humor and pathos and avoided this at the climax of the play by simply eliminating huge chunks of comic dialogue in the script in the final scenes, most obviously cutting all the Clown's sardonic remarks about women as he presents the fatal asps to Cleopatra. However, Lope de Vega sides with Shakespeare on this issue when he says: I deny that it is contrary to nature and to poetic art in general that persons great and those not great should be introduced into one plot.

What tragedy has there ever been that did not have many more servants and other persons of similar station than men of great consequence? Who unfastens the admirably tied knot in theOedipus of Sophocles? Not the king, nor the queen, not Creon, not Tiresias, but two servants, guardians of herds. Then it is not contrary to the nature of the art that there should be united in a play persons of high rank and those of low station, not merely under the name of a mixed play such as is tragicomedy, but under that of tragedy. (Gilbert, 508) However, there can be no doubt that Shakespeare's ultimate shock effect is Cleopatra's notorious destruction of Coleridge's postulated "

willing suspension of disbelief” by audiences, when she reminds Elizabethans of what exactly they have seen and are seeing: The quick comedians

Extemporally will stage us, and present

Our Alexandrian revels: Antony

Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see

Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness I’th’posture of a whore. This is deliberate, almost Brechtian-style alienation, reversing the audience’s emotional empathy with a celebrity’s death to an awareness of the unexpectedly comic effect of transvestism. One Renaissance authority for such mingled effects is Guarini, whose Il Pastor Fido is the source for The Faithful Shepherd of Shakespeare’s collaborator John Fletcher. The preface to Fletcher’s play introduces the concept of a new genre into English as illustrated by his pastoral drama, that of tragicomedy, with which Guarini had earlier defended his own play from its critics. Guarini had asserted: that it is the mingling of tragic and comic pleasure, which does not allow the hearers to fall into excessive tragic melancholy or comic relaxation. From this results a poem of the most excellent form and composition, not merely fully corresponding to the mixture of the human body, which consists entirely of the tempering of the four humors, but much more noble than simple tragedy or simple comedy. (Gilbert 512)

In the comparable case of Antony, I have repeatedly seen performers flush with rage after audience laughter greets his Bottom-like clumsiness in his suicide attempt: ” How, not dead? Not dead?” (4. 14. 103), an indignation coming from a failure to realize that the ultimate tragedy of Antony (like Lear) is to become ridiculous. There is a similar grotesqueness found in all

directors' struggles to make a smooth effect out of the lifting of the mortally wounded Antony to the gallery of Cleopatra's monument, as specified by the stage direction " They heave Antony aloft to Cleopatra." (4. 15. 37)

In their unavailing attempts to avoid awkwardness directors fail to see that this clumsy and insignificant rise of Antony is a gross parody of the apotheosis to lovers' heaven that he has anticipated in planning his romantic suicide (4. 14. 44-54). Lope again argues Shakespeare's case: With respect to actions that are great or not great, I cannot see for what reason it is unfitting that they should appear in one single plot, not entirely tragic, if they are inserted with judgment. Can it not be that amusing events intervene between serious actions? Are they not many times the cause of bringing perils to a happy conclusion? But then, do princes always act majestically?" (Gilbert, 508)

If we accept this approach of seeing a deliberate inconsistency in sequential moods as the key to the staging of Antony and Cleopatra, it neutralizes the schism presented by Marvin Rosenberg, and allows us to see it as a forerunner of the " romances" which follow it, such as Cymbeline, which is in many ways a sequel to it, just as Antony and Cleopatra is a sequel to Julius Caesar. The plays make up a trilogy in which the career of Octavius Caesar is the linking theme, from his rise through his challenges at either extreme of his empire. In this sense Cymbeline marks a resolution of issues raised not only in the two Roman plays but it also provides a similar transcendence of the problems raised by the career of Cymbeline's predecessor as king of ancient Britain in King Lear. All these plays mingle comic low life with high state affairs and royal personalities, matching Lope's specifications: " The

tragic mixed with the comic, Terence with Seneca, although it be like another Minotaur of Pasiphae, will mark one part grave, the other absurd: and this variety gives much delight. Nature give us a good example, for, because of such variety, it has beauty," (Gilbert, 544)

A NEGLECTED CLASSIC GONE AWRY

The story of Antony and Cleopatrashares with Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet those two indispensable elements of tragedy: love and death. While Romeo and Juliet is perhaps Shakespeare's best known play, Antony and Cleopatra is all but neglected. This is all the more surprising considering contemporary interest in its principal characters. " Rome," the BBC miniseries, contains the story's most recent popular dramatization. On the big screen, no telling is more famous than the 1963 epic, Cleopatra, starring Liz Taylor and Richard Burton. And as if all that isn't enough, Stacy Schiff won a Pulitzer Prize for her bestselling Cleopatra: A Life(2010). One could go on. It would seem that interest in Cleopatra and her famous lovers Julius Caesar and Mark Antony has never been higher.

It would seem a real treat, therefore, to seeAntony and Cleopatra performed at A Noise Within's new home in Pasadena. The company has a beautiful, large theatre seating more than the usual 99 or less, a performance space ample enough to stage large battle scenes involving dozens of characters, a modern lighting and sound system and a talented cast. So what could possibly go wrong? While the production is mildly diverting and well-staged, directors Julia Rodriguez-Elliott and Geoff Elliott have distorted Shakespeare's tragedy into a tragicomedy, turning it into an epic of Fellini-

esque proportions. (The comparison is particularly apt at the beginning of the play as cackling laughter continually bombards the ears.)

As Shakespeare wrote it, Antony and Cleopatra not only contains the aforementioned tragic elements, but is a story of love and lust gone awry with disastrous consequences for armies and nations. Above all, it tells the story of Cleopatra's second love, Mark Antony (Julius Caesar was the first), who jointly rules the Roman Empire with Octavius Caesar and Lepidus. When Antony hears of the death of his wife Fulvia, he returns to Rome and helps Caesar and Lepidus defeat the turncoat general Pompey. To cement his renewed bonds with Antony, Caesar offers Antony the hand of his sister Octavia in marriage, after which Antony returns to his beloved Cleopatra in Egypt where he is pursued by Caesar and defeated at the Battle of Actium. Rather than face exile or subservience, both Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide.

A soliloquy is a dramatic speech spoken by a character who is alone on stage, or believes themselves to be alone. This device allows a character in a play to speak directly to the audience about their motives, feelings and decisions. They reveal the characters innermost thoughts and traditionally contain no lies or deception as the character is revealing their true thoughts and emotions. Hamlet's soliloquies give the impression of a man discovering himself as he speaks. The importance of the soliloquies in Hamlet are therefore crucial to the development of his character and of course the development of the play.

Hamlet's first soliloquy in Act 1 Scene 2, reveals that Hamlet is depressed to such an extent that he does not wish to live; these feelings emerge following the death of his father and the indecent swiftness of the remarriage of his mother to his uncle and, the new King, Claudius.

' O that this too too solid flesh would melt ,

Thaw and resolve itself into a dew...' Act 1-2-129/130

The word ' too' is repeated to enhance the emphasis on what Hamlet is saying; here the prince wants to vanish, he wants his body to melt away which provides the audience with a weak initial portrayal of Hamlet's character. This is how dreadful Hamlet's psychological state is in the beginning of the play.

Part 2

Q: 1

Shakespeare is living today more than when he was alive not in his body or in his time but in our heart and in our mind.
Diagrams abound. These are most useful in the complicated " avoidance sonnets," in which the speaker, like an Elizabethan Houdini, ingeniously evades unhappy conclusions, and the " betrayal sonnets," in which the speaker, the young man and the mistress all appear. Of Sonnet 42, which ends on this couplet of contrived inclusion, " But here's the joy, my friend and I are one: / Sweet flattery! then she loves but me alone," Vendler writes: " Shakespeare offers four models to describe the relations between the three persons in the triangle. The models become increasingly tortured, as the speaker tries to find a way to include himself in the relationship of the young

man to the mistress." She tracks the speaker's gradual loss of love through the pronouns, which move from second to third person address, explaining: " The aesthetic pathos of the poem arises from the loss of the power to say thee any longer. ' Thou and I are one,' is the pathetic second-person shadow-statement, unsayable, behind the third-person fantasy-statement, ' My friend and I are one.'"

" Shakespeare almost never repeats a strategy," Vendler argues, and the numerous ways in which she describes the sonnets-as " homily," " cross minuet," " apotropaic charm" and " jeu d'esprit"-support her claim. Sonnet 76-in which the speaker responds to a complaint by the bored young man against the monotony of his receiving " old-fashioned" poems that are so tediously constant in form that anyone can identify them as Shakespeare's-she reads not as apology but as " apologia, a reply in self-defense." O know, sweet love, I always write of you, And you and love are still my argument; So all my best is dressing old words new, Spending again what is already spent: For as the sun is daily new and old, So is my love still telling what is told. Vendler takes up and continues this defense: " The young man is a reader who reads only for theme; and the poet freely admits the monotony of his theme (you and love). But Shakespeare is a writer whose eye is on style. The verbal lexicon of any language is finite, as is the generic lexicon of any poetic: there are no words but old words.

Style is dressing them new." When Vendler argues that " as the painter must serve color, and the sculptor volume, the poet must serve language," she formulates a reading of the sonnet form that functions for Shakespeare much as a " signature style" does for a painter-that is, as something to work

with and against. Just as Rothko’s canvases viewed side by side demonstrate a variation within the bounds of the “ given” form of stacked blurred rectangles, the sonnet form (with its similarly rectangular elements-three quatrains and a couplet) allows for even greater invention within the “ restrictions” of rhyme and meter. An exercise in close reading in the New Critical tradition, The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets teases out alliterative chains, hidden words (Sonnet 68’s “ bouquet of five invisible roses” embedded in the words shorne, flowers, bowers, others, and store) puns (Sonnet 87’s hitherto uncommented-upon “ aching” hidden in “ a king”), anagrams, and so on. Vendler’s visual perspicacity allows her to unlock the strategies that underlie Shakespeare’s “ erotics of the eye.”

On the compact disc that accompanies the book, Vendler reads from sixty-five of the sonnets, and her performances foreground the unique “ contraptions of language” she has uncovered in each one. Appropriately enough, the book is also an effort of close listening. Vendler has a kind of “ sonnet radar”: from the text of the sonnet she interpolates echoes of what the sonnet’s addressee has just said, what the speaker is trying to avoid saying, and what the speaker wants to hear. Consider these lines from Sonnet 116: Let me not to the marriage of true minds Admit impediments; love is not love Which alters when it alteration finds, Or bends with the remover to remove.

O no, it is an ever-fixed mark That looks on tempests and is never shaken. While 116 is commonly read as a “ true love” sonnet, Vendler finds in it “ an example not of definition but of dramatic refutation or rebuttal.” She imagines what the lover may have said prior to the poem’s composition: “ I

did love you once; but you have altered, and so there is a natural alteration in me." To support this reading, Vendler scans the line with an iambic rather than trochaic reading of the first foot (" let ME? instead of " LET me"), and then points out that the many negations that follow imply a pronounced difference of opinion. Later, analyzing sonnet 126, a " six-couplet poem," in which Time triumphs over the young man,

(a)factually hamlet did not love Ophelia :-false

(b)stratford was the birth place of shakespear :- true

shakespeare wrote a PLAYS ?

nswer is: Lyrical Ballads