Chapter I

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T.S. Eliot is one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. His contribution to poetic drama is noteworthy. R.P. Blackmur has rightly observed that Eliot’s sensibility is typically that of a Christian and of a poet. His plays, while retaining their integrity as dramatic art and their popular appeal as living theatre, seek to offer thematic as well as dramatic links between the sacred and the secular and to communicate religious values in a secular age to a secular audience.

Believing that drama, of all literary genres, has the greatest capacity to recreate a complete and ordered world, “Eliot became a king of the dramatic structure, to lead the audience to a sense of religious awareness”. (Language in India www.languageinindia.com 9 : 4 April 2009). His religious concern to integrate the real with the ideal made him carve out for himself a special space place in English literature. In each of his plays he has portrayed the plight of the individual who perceives the order of God, but is forced to exist in the natural world and has to strike a balance between both realms: “To portray the impact of spiritual principle on the lives of man in a form which could be artistically ordered without losing contact with actual experience has remained the basic dramatic goal in all his plays”. (Smith 31)
It was in 1934 with the writing of *The Rock* that the opportunity came for Eliot to declare sharply his Christian faith by which hope and meaning can be achieved to the infinite cycles of time, the absence of which will draw man farther from God and nearer to the dust. In this work Eliot declares the need to remember death, remember God and build the Church. The importance of His church is reiterated and the need for a leader is also set forth. This idea runs through all the plays of Eliot. Eliot portrays the awakened soul lightening the path of un-awakened ones.

The spiritual Quest which begins by a sense of guilt leading to the recognition and acceptance of sin, making a choice and surrendering oneself to the divine order culminates in the realizing of the *best self* in the hero or heroine; in the other set of characters and chorus there is the realization of the *second best self*. Eliot was able to use drama as a vehicle to express his spiritual and religious views since it provided him with objectivity and subdued any manifest moral teaching. But all the plays are attempts to communicate a religious message.

This high calling of literary vocation can be traced to the personality-molding years of Eliot's childhood and the influences on his thinking. Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in 1888 in St. Louis, Missouri. His father, Henry Ware Eliot was a St. Louis merchant and his mother Charlotte Champe was a school teacher. In 1670 Eliot's ancestors had migrated to
America from East Coker, Somerset in England. In America the Eliots were new England Puritans who became comfortably wealthy.

The Eliots were not heroes but they had a taste for a kind of moral challenge. His grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot was an ideal Eliot, who stood for piety and social uplift. He was a professor of metaphysics, and a Unitarian leader, advocated women's suffrage and prohibition. From the beginning Eliot was found to be an exceptional boy. His mother, perceiving his mature thinking, spoke to him as an equal. High-minded and plain living, Charlotte Champe Eliot exhorted her children every day, to strive towards perfection and to make the best of every faculty and control every tendency to evil. The poet inherited from his mother the love of poetry and moral zeal, but his father was more than a friend to him.

Eliot was a highly sensitive person, so his mother always tried to protect him from apprehending the jarring aspects of New America, especially in his childhood. As he grew up he had to face the most important of his grandfathers' laws-the subordination of self-interests to the good of community and church. Eliot developed a personality, both complex and elusive. The poet-to-be went to school is St. Louis studied at the University of Harvard, at the Sorbornne in France and at Oxford, where he also taught until he settled in London in 1914; in 1927 he became a naturalized Englishman.
Myriad were the influences that shaped Eliot in his formative years. As a thinker, he evinced great interest in Byron from his teens. His characters are seldom heroic but they share in common with Byron’s heroes, in the Eastern romances, a characteristic burden of blight and guilt attributable it may be, to a common Adam’s curse of Calvinism. Anyone of the band of Eliot’s ‘Hollowmen’ could say with Byron’s Childe Harold himself that he looked upon the peopled desert past, as on a place of agony and strife, where, for some sin, to sorrow he was cast to act and suffer.

Eliot was aware of this kind of sin and spiritual malady even as early as 1914, though he became a Christian believer only by 1927. Having been brought up as a Unitarian he himself confesses in a letter to his sister as to how he had had no faith at all. But gradually he moved from complete skepticism to religious faith. This acceptance of religious faith is referred to as his conversion. But even before his conversion he was preoccupied with the concept of the original sin and man's tendency toward depravity.

At Harvard Eliot was a disciple of Irving Babbitt. It is said that it was he was made Eliot "truly cultivated". (Gordon, 19) Babbitt inspired his students to read the classics and also warned them against the dangers of secularism that characterized the modern world. While in Paris, Eliot enjoyed the lectures of the French poet, Henri Bergson. Eliot adopted Bergson's methodology for the new kind of poetry in which he cultivated indirect habits of mind. "Discard solid intellectual supports", Bergson urged
“admit only the fluid consciousness and intuitions in the making”. (p. 38)

Eliot had left for Paris as a student of poetry and returned a student of philosophy.

Eliot’s austere upbringing and the Unitarian faith to which he was unable to subscribe made him a friend of Realists, especially Bertrand Russell, who became a real friend to him. Their friendship had started from the time when Russell visited America while Eliot was still at Harvard. But in 1914 when Eliot came back to London from Paris he could no longer accept the philosophy of Russell on symbolic knowledge. Instead Eliot turned to Indian philosophy and for two years devoted himself to the work of Oxford idealist, F.H. Bradley. His doctoral dissertation was "The experience and objects of knowledge in the philosophy of Bradley". During this period he taught philosophy to the undergraduate classes. Apart from his interest in philosophy, He evinced great interest in musical concerts and operas since his return from Europe.

Eliot's literary career was nurtured by the profound influence of Masters of the literary tradition of his time and the past. The French symbolists, who acknowledged Poe as their master, inspired Eliot to regard poetry as consisting in the musical evocation of moods, vague, subtle and evanescent. Eliot acknowledges his debt to the English poet, Arthur Symmons through whom the French Symbolist movement had reached English poetry. He also greatly appreciated La Forgue, whom he set up as
his master in conversational rhythm. The French poet Baudelaire initiated Eliot into the new possibilities of a new stock of imagery of contemporary life and to him Eliot has paid tremendous tribute. His followers proved that "Poetry is not to inform but to suggest and evoke; not to name things, but to create their atmosphere". (Weinberg, 1969)

Even before he became a Christian, Eliot had always reverenced Dante both for the grand simplicity of his style and for the profundity of his genius. The Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, Donne and the metaphysical poets contributed to the making of Eliot as a poet. Eliot also owes much to the poetic drama of Webster and Tourneur from whom he learned dramatic speech rhythms that united thought and passion. Eliot was also a keen student of psychology; some of his student cards at Harvard show his interest in mysticism and the psychology of religious experience.

From Dostoevsky he learned to exploit personal problems in his writing - how the genuine and personal universe of characters can be explored through the study of their weaknesses and infirmities. Eliot admired the new English writers like Hawthorne and Henry James. He marveled at their "exceptional awareness of spiritual reality, their profound sensitiveness to good and evil, and their extraordinary power to convey horror" (Matheissen, 9). All these influences can be discerned from his poems, plays and critical writings. These influences made him see the world as a very relativistic and disorderly place.
Eliot's inclination to be a religious poet surfaces in his early poem, The Wasteland which was published in 1921-22 seems to have originated in the purely personal record of a man who saw himself as a potential candidate for the religious life but was constrained by his own nature and distracted by domestic claims. Eliot's family life with his wife Vivienne Highwood, who was highly emotional and prone to mental depressions, brought about a great crisis in his life. Finally Eliot separated from her in 1933 after eighteen years of incompatibility, though he continued to be good to her and spent a lot of money on her medical bills.

In 1923 he went into a financial crisis and since his affairs were in a chaos, he started turning to the Church of England seeking comfort for his aching heart. He entered the church as communicant and was baptized in 1927. William Force Stead, a Church of England leader, introduced Eliot to the writings of a seventeenth century Anglican Bishop, Lancelot Andrews, whose exposition on the incarnation of Christ greatly appealed to the poet in Eliot. Slowly Eliot surrendered to the Anglo-Catholic belief because he thought that it was a means to set up a moral code for the individual who lived in the midst of a pagan and worldly generation. He declared himself to be anglo – catholic in religion, royalist in politics and classicist in literature.

Eliot was profoundly influenced by T.S. Hulme regarding the concept of Original Sin. To Hulme, man is limited, a sinful creature, bitterly aware of perfection, but aware, also, of much that falls short of perfection.
By strict discipline he can achieve a limited decency but it is folly for him to dream of a world of men like gods in any distant future. He modified and elaborated this view in a more traditional Christian fashion. He felt that the meaning of history has to be found not in history, but in man's relation to God, and God's relation to man. By self-examination, by prayer and by the purification of one's soul, man can make sense of time in his own times by relating it to eternity.

At the age of thirty-eight when Eliot came into the fellowship of the Church of England, he realized the possibilities of saintliness within the fold of the Church - the mourning for the passion on Christ and the church. To Eliot, acceptance of traditional Anglo-Catholic dogma seems to have served as a release from his guilt-complex. In "Dry Salvages" he said that the sense of failure and guilt and consequent isolation which was a manifestation of original sin can be overcome by "prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action". (T.S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages", Section V)

Eliot also learned that it is not only the saint but the layman who can do his saint's work unobtrusively among ordinary people in the home, in the bank or the field. The heroes whom he created after his conversion - the martyred Thomas, the missionary Harry, his own reminiscing self in the Four Quartets work out their salvation at home, among mostly common people and familiar English scenes.
Thus, Eliot, deeply rooted in the American Puritan tradition, high moral idealism, consciousness of the nature of evil commingled with severe self-discipline, became a poet who emphasized the importance of culture and community life. Beginning his literary career as a moralist he ended up as a religious poet. He laid stress on the need to cultivate a kind of art that flavors of Christian ideals. He did not want art to disintegrate into religious propaganda. Being a powerful Christian thinker he set out to exemplify many of his ideas in his Idea of a Christian Society. He "set himself to discover modes of experience absent from the world into which he was born: the saintly life, the Christian community, religious fear and hope". (Gordon, 140)

Baudelaire, whose influence on Eliot had been mentioned earlier, had been alive to the spiritual decadence and corruption around him. But, in spite of being sensitive religiously, he could not convey any message to the world, whereas Eliot prompted by his faith arrived at a universal exhortation of mankind. Eliot can be called the true voice of the western world, with a message for the whole world which was being alienated from traditional moorings. Eliot believed that it was his duty to give humanity an old-new Raison d'etre, an aim of existence. In all his works, these three keywords order, discipline and control occur, and these watch-words could be made meaningful only in relation to society and community "a body of
indefinite outline composed of both clergy and laity, of the more conscious, more spiritually and intellectually, development of both". (Eliot, 14).

Eliot said that this community would form the conscious mind and the conscience in individuals, and the conscience of the nation. Since drama is the most social of all literary genres, Eliot was able to make his dramatic endeavor the matrix of the soul searching dictum which the Greeks explored in a different context - knowing oneself or the attaining of self-knowledge. Within the Christian framework, Eliot strove to depict the spiritual pilgrimage of the self, the theme he returns to again and again in his poetry, and especially his plays.

It is interesting to trace a pattern in the moods of T. S. Eliot as a writer from his works. Eliot came to write drama at a later stage, but in his verse there always was found dramatic potentialities. He is seen always as "a self-examining poet". (Howarth 333). In his poems as well as plays there are characters who are sincerely self-searching characters. In the earlier works this search or quest leads the characters to an experience of spiritual awakening sometimes not fully realized: but in the plays there is a marked spiritual achievement on the part of the characters, at least the protagonists.

As early as 1914/1915, there is an arresting personality, a would-be saint, called Narcissus, found in the manuscript, who Eliot named after a second century Bishop of Jerusalem. Eliot's 'The Death of Narcissus'
reflects the ongoing spiritual struggles and journeys. He concentrates on the inner life of this peculiar character who feels most intensely alive when God's arrows pierce and mar his flesh. He wishes to be a dancer for God, he deliberately isolates himself, finds no divine light and his own flaws became magnified in his eyes "his self-enthrallment his indifference to others, his masochistic delight in the burning arrows". (Gordon 91).

In *The Wasteland* (1921-22) is reflected the mood of complete disgust with the extreme horror of modern civilized existence, preoccupied with the sensual and the squalid; commingled with a sense of melancholy. It changed into the mood of ennui and exhaustion while he was writing the ‘Hollowmen’, which seems to stem from an intensely agonizing self-conflict. Slowly this mood changes into one of humble and helpless self-surrender in ‘Ash Wednesday’ and the ‘Ariel Poems’.

By now Eliot had turned dramatist. In the 1940s emerges the mood of refreshing and renewal as it were, with a relatively healthy self-confidence and positive faith. Carol Smith remarks:

In Eliot's theme we can see a relationship to his growing religious awareness of the need for an ordered universe in nature and in art. The experience of discovering the world of the spirit and the painfulness of its demand cuts through both the intellectual and
artistic efforts of the critic-poet of this period and the emotional and spiritual agonies of the convert of the next. (13)

Launching on the dramatic enterprise he chose poetic drama since he believed that reality can be experienced in the mode of poetry more authentically than in prose. Helen Gardner has pointed out that in the attempts to visualize the boredom and horror and the glory of life in dramatic verse. Eliot has given us "the finest dramatic verse that has been written since the seventeenth century". (Gardner 217) In Eliot's early dramatic monologue The Love song of Alfred Prufrock, Prufrock desires to ask a question; it is not actually asked but suggested. It is a question that only Lazarus who comes back from the dead can answer. Therefore it is a question that calls for an answer from beyond death and time and space.

The motif of straggler-combatant is probably Eliot's favorite theme. After his searching for a decade or more, Eliot's views were turning definitely Christian. At this juncture, an answer to 'the question' is hinted at in Sweeney Agonistes. The title means Sweeney the Straggler or Combatant. Milton uses this title for Samson in the Old Testament, calls Samson as Samson Agonistes. Originally, the term meant a contestant in public games in the Greek context. The focus of this usage in Eliot is more on the internal struggle full of menace and disaster for Sweeney, who, incidentally, appears in several of T. S. Eliot's poems before this play.
The following quotation from St. John of the Cross, a sixteenth century mystical ascetic is found in the title page of the dramatic poem 'Sweeney Agonistes', "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings." (Collected Poems)

Neville Coghill remarks that this aphorism is the reservoir out of which Eliot draws his conception of sanctity and his answer to Prufrock's overwhelming questions. It points the way out of the suffocating wilderness of the intellectual and material world, into the purifying wilderness of the spirit, where overwhelming answers are to be found.

The answer lies in the way which is one of denial and detachment. Those seeking answers to the ineffable things of life become the individuals who make a spiritual Quest. Quest is a theme treated in most modern literature, but it differs in Eliot in that it is based on the Christian frame work. The Knight Quester in The Wasteland goes on this quest. In 1920, Eliot suggested that the answer lay in the grail legend and he hinted at the hooded figure of Christ on the road to Emmaus.

Who is the third who walks always
Beside you? When I count, there are only you
And I together But when I look ahead up the
White road There in always another one walking
Beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
But who is that on the other side of you? (Eliot, Collected poems, 77)

The idealist's quest for union with the vision forever elusive in this world is Eliot's standard poetic theme. The concept of ineffability means something, too great to be described with words. The heroes and heroines of Eliot, like those of La Forgue and Conrad, try to probe into the questions of meaning, truth, reality and their relationship to time. In all the plays of Eliot, the main character is portrayed as a king whose soul is in the throes of religious conversion.

Neville Coghill suggests that Eliot would have definitely read the theories of the Psychologist, William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience wherein two types of religious minded men are distinguished. The Once-born souls are the worshippers of God and believe in the all-forgiving mercy of God and do not pay much heed to the concepts of evil, and sin. On the other hand the Twice-born or sick souls who are conscious of their sinfulfulness, believe in the Day of Judgment, Justice, righteousness and asceticism. They prefer Protestantism to Catholicism, Puritanism to either. Consciousness of sinfulfulness helps an individual to be born again within evangelical traditions in Christianity that Eliot keeps reiterating.
As pointed out by D.E. Jones, the central theme of Eliot's plays is the role of the spiritually elect in society. The dilemma of the spiritually aware individual struggling to live in a world unaware of spiritual reality is common to all the plays. The spiritual perception that the individual gains, renders him or her isolated from others. The central figure goes on a spiritual pilgrimage and attains the divine vision. Eliot believes that evil is not only external but found also within the hearts of human beings. He elaborates and modifies the concept of original sin from T.E. Hulme who said that man is a sinful creature aware of both perfection and limitations. Eliot believes that individuals must reach out to the Divine through self-examination and prayer.

From the beginning Eliot is concerned with the isolation of the sensitive individual in modern society permeated by competitions and moral compromise. Man must accept that he is 'befouled' and it is at that point of recognition that new vistas of reconciliation and harmony will open. This sin and guilt is universal not pertaining only to individuals. So the spiritually aware self has to come apart and separate himself or herself, and follow the way of the Cross or 'the bright angels' as in "The Family Reunion".

Such an experience of recognising and following the spiritual path leads the individual soul to another intensity and deeper communion with the Divine. *Self at the crossroads* has to make choices regarding the path to
follow: All the protagonists of Eliot are confronted with choices. The choice lies between two kinds of actions choosing either the way of the Saint or the Second best way of acceptance. All the five plays of Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion*, *The Cocktail Party*, *The Confidential Clerk* and *The Elder Statesmen* deal with the different levels of spiritual experience of the saint and the ordinary mortal.

*Murder in the Cathedral* is indebted to Greek tragedy. It is actually a series of episodes knit together by choral odes. Eliot did not just copy the Aeschylean chorus; he has given it a Christian dimension and through it his visions. The spiritual conflict in Becket is objectified through the choral odes. The myth of the Aeschylean here Orestes serves to convey the self-realisation process of Harry Monchensey as a saviour of his family in *The Family Reunion*.

Eliot has taken the death-rebirth symbolism from the Alcestis of Euripides as a framework for the path of action that Celia takes in *The Cocktail Party*. Ion of Euripides becomes the mythical framework for the search of fatherhood by Colby Simpkins in *The Confidential Clerk*. The final play, *The Elder Statesman* has a general likeness to Oedipus at Colonus of Sophocles. Like Oedipus the exiled king, Lord Claverton, the retired statesman, reaches the last resting place. Thus the myths and the characters are endowed with Christian significance by which Eliot has been
able to produce poetic drama, making it a vehicle to depict the permanent human nature in its modern predicament.

The term *Saint* means a person of great holiness, virtue, or benevolence. Saints are ordinary men and women, who are made holy, sanctified by purity. The saint's sacrifice helps to illuminate the lives of others; as in the case of Thomas Becket, Harry Monchensey and Celia in the first three plays, and Colby Simpkins in *The Confidential Clerk* and Lord Claverton in *The Elder Statesman* who may not be saints making physical sacrifices; but they definitely follow the path of redemption. There are also those who play subordinate roles in these plays who succeed in achieving enough detachment to live a real life. It is represented by the Chamberlaynes in *The Cocktail Party*, the Mulhammers in *The Confidential Clerk* and Charles Hemington in *The Elder Statesman*.

The main characters either accept isolation or struggle to escape from it. Leonard Unger says, "In a sense all Eliot's works in verse are variation on the theme of isolation". (Unger, 118) On the larger scale the individual is isolated or estranged from the rest of the world. This is paralleled on a narrower scale by the breakdown in communication between man and woman. Like Henry James, Eliot also was an artist of an isolated and exclusive sensibility. But he had an advantage over James in that he surrendered to dogmatic religion which bridged the gap between the surrounding world and the individual.
The plays of Eliot highlight the choices that the self at the crossroads has to make regarding the path to follow, "A single moment of choice, the Kierkegaardian choice, is set before the main character. The rest of the play leads up to and leads away from this moment." (Bradbrook, 145)

There are no minor interests or digressions, no subplots. The moment of choice is the same for all. Sometimes there is the repetition of the same theme as Eliot himself has said in The Four Quartets: "You say I am repeating / Something I have said before / I shall say it again". (20)

Eliot confronts Society with choices with basic alternative reminiscent of a prophet again; "Choose you, whom you will serve." It cannot be God and Mammon. Or even God and nice philosophies. Like Kierkegaard who posits an "either/or ", it has to be despair and sensuality or religion absolutely.

The choice lies between two kinds of actions, choosing either the way of the saint or the second best way of acceptance. In the case of Becket, Harry and Celia, divine love holds sway at the point of making the choice. Divine love precedes life. Sacrificial death comes before human considerations. Becket embraces the death of the martyr. Harry's choice leads him away to an unknown future, which also kills his mother. Celia chooses death instead of life. Colby also has to make the difficult choice of giving up human love for divine love. Only in the last play The Elder
Statesman human love becomes a substitute for divine love or a reflection of divine love. Thus Eliot as made his study of self-realization on the part of his main characters a focal point in all his plays. In order to make this serious kind of drama more effective and interesting Eliot incorporated into modern drama conventions from ancient drama.

The main characters in Eliot's plays—Becket, Harry, Celia, Colby and Claverton—begin their search for the real self and they move forward till they reach their goal. In Murder in the Cathedral, Becket's goal is Christian martyrdom. He begins with the realization that a true martyr should give up desire for the earthly pleasure and himself become worthy of it, by giving up first an amity with the king for mirth and sportfulness, then by rejecting Chancellorship and, finally, a coalition with the English Barons.

Becket's encounter with the first three Tempters is suggestive of Becket's progress towards a realization of the true implication of martyrdom, and his own fitness for that role. The Fourth Tempter marks a distinct progress as he reveals Becket's newly achieved knowledge that martyrdom also requires a renunciation of the desire for the glory after death. Thus, Eliot traces the different stages of the whole of the process through which the self reaches its goal.

Becket's awareness of Sin and redemption is on a higher plane than the others and he becomes the isolated Self, who has to choose the tougher
self, following the path of the saint. The process of becoming the saint in whom the egotistical dimensions of the personality has to be annihilated or denied. This is depicted by the spiritual conflict that takes place in Becket. The spiritual struggle of Becket is projected through the dialogues that he has with the other characters in the play.

Becket being pursued and slain by the murderers is not the most important aspect of the play. It is in his spiritual refinements and the perusal of the way of the Saint that have to be considered as of paramount importance. Standing alone, Becket launches on a moral quest which can be seen as 'the spiritual conflict'. His sensitivity and sensibility to the ineffable truths lead him to understand the essence of true martyrdom which is the annihilation of his will and yielding to the will of God. By doing it he attains perfect freedom.

Becket's memories of his past are revealed by the first three tempters. He is tempted with the happiness of this world but ultimately rejects the worldly comfort. These are temptations from the material world: the first tempter speaks of a renewal of friendship with the king and the mirth and sportiveness in the court; the second tempts him with the power and glory of the chancellorship that he resigned when he was made an archbishop; the third suggests a "happy coalition of intelligent interest" with the English Barons.
Though these temptations are hastened to Becket even in this significant moment, these are somewhat detached from the depth of his soul and appear to have made up the surface of his consciousness. For, Becket has already conquered the temptations which are offered. "The Fourth Tempter alone delves deep into Becket's consciousness and finds out his hidden aspiration that he has so long cherished for the glory of martyrdom." (Haldar 130)

The first three tempters disclose things desirable, but no longer possible. His non-sensuous will is finally overcome by his 'formal,' better self, and makes him worthy of being a martyr. Overcoming self he has a vision of reality. His apprehension of morality as an end in itself is described by the chorus. The play reveals their gradual emergence from passivity into recognition of their share in the universal burden of sin.

Just as the Tempters symbolize the conflict in Thomas, the choice set before him and his final surrendering to the will of God, the Chorus, consisting of the women of Canterbury, provide the background and counterpart to the action through its reaction to the events of the martyrdom of Becket. Helen Gardner remarks: "The Chorus is the real protagonist, the progress of the Christian Community is represented by the women through sympathy and shared guilt to the repentance and thanks giving". (Gardener 138)
Becket's absolute knowledge of his self yields to an ethical righteousness. His perfection of will is needed before embracing martyrdom; otherwise his sacrifice would lose its ethical value. Becket understands that the desire for glory that comes with martyrdom would deprive him of the real essence of martyrdom. His hidden motive is exposed to him through his acute self consciousness and he moves towards reality when he overcomes the self. When he gets rid of that motive from his soul he is ready for martyrdom.

Becket has to recognize the fact that he must embrace martyrdom in the right spirit. He has lost his will in the will of God, and the irreconcilables have been reconciled. On the natural plane, action and suffering are two different identities; but on the optimal plane they become identical. When the wheel turns those on the outer circle of the circumference turn towards the centre; all must suffer that it may be willed and suffer that they may will it. When the love of Christ constrains him to reciprocate with love, then the eternal design or pattern becomes alive and valid.

Becket identifies himself in the sermon he preaches with Christ who said, “thy will be done” (Math; 6:10) to the Father. It is here that the second phase of the pattern culminates. History has been the point of intersection of the cosmic frame which is timeless with temporal time. The twice born soul or the spiritual man or saint grasps this eternal truth with zeal, sacrifice and
self surrender.

The plot of The Family Reunion begins with the scene at a family party to celebrate the birthday of its senior member, Lady Moichensey, the mother of the protagonist, Harry. A shadow is cast over the proceedings by the fact that Harry's wife, whom the family always disliked, has been drowned by falling overboard, during a voyage at sea. Everyone assumes that this is either suicide or an accident. However, when Harry returns, he disconcertingly reveals that he either has, or believes he has pushed her overboard. The family is convinced that it is an outcome of the working of his fevered imagination. However, he is a modern Orestes pursued by the Eumenides. Moreover, the crime is not just his, for it has been repeated in the family; his father has also wished to murder his mother. Harry has to suffer to atone for his crime.

It is possible

You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,

It's a bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.

Indeed it is possible. You may learn hereafter,

Moving alone through flames of ice, chosen

To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer. (105)

Harry leaves his family to follow the 'bright angels' or the Eumenides. The murder which is an unexplained mystery might not have
even happened. It has only a symbolic significance. Harry has a load of
guilt on his mind: "There are passages of great poetic beauty, and
statements which are the fruits of a lifetime devoted to poetry". (Grant 378)

The concrete scenes of life - the mother's birthday, the family house,
the brothers' accidents, the hero's home-coming, the previous death of his
wife, the death in the last scene of his mother - act as girders to the play.
Harry, like Orestes, has apparently committed or thinks he has committed a
murder; this murder is merely incidental to, or at most symptomatic of, a far
more basic and less particularized sin which he has to expiate. The
Eumenides who haunt him appear at first sight to be subjective phantoms
but are discovered, to the hero's own belief, to be forces outside him. His
expiation on the face of it seems to consist in leaving his home forever; this
is in fact the outward and visible sign of a profound spiritual change.

Harry has chosen the ascetic life, submitting to the call of greater
love. It is the way of dispossession, of detachment, of divesting oneself of
the love of created beings. He is the modern man who experiences a sense
of loneliness, guilt and disgust. Isolation is spotlighted against the
background of ordinary living, the ineffable depths against the known
surfaces.

Thus Eliot portrays the Christian concept of human freedom. The
central character recognizes the necessity for God; Harry answers the divine
call of election. He frees himself from subjection to human desires of the flesh, from the horror of world's apparent disorder and ultimately from the human limitations of physical death. The hero makes the choice by his own volition. Harry may not be a Saint like Becket, but the whole play depicts the spiritual education of Harry. He attains self-knowledge and ultimate union with God.

In the beginning of the play, The Cocktail Party Celia Coplestone does not feel guilty about her illicit relationship with Edward Chamberlayne, a married man. The play portrays her pathetic and desperate state due to her failure of love, unfulfilled desires and discouragement. Her sense of defeat, hopelessness and fear of the future gradually lead her to spiritual awakening. Celia abides by the timely counsel of Henry Reilly and withdraws from the sinful life. She successfully moves from apathy and evasion to lively faith and humble acceptance of a life of sorrow, suffering and sacrifice. Living a godly life, she finally dies as a martyr. Her martyrdom is a triumph of self realization. It is not an act of conscious will but the outcome of her complete submission to the Will of God. Her right decision ultimately enables her to emerge victorious. Celia as a self centered person is a distengrating person, but when she loses herself in the will of God through self-surrender she becomes a wholesome personality.

The Cocktail Party is in part, the fruition of a long devotion of the greatest of religious dramatists. In applauding the play, John Dryden opines,
“It assumes orthodox Christian morality, and laughs at human nature for not living up to it” (57). One major feature of this play is its insistence of logic. It is mainly concerned with spiritual discipline in the life of common man, as well as in the life of the Saint.

A play with a contemporary setting, *The Cocktail Party* keeps the experience of the saint away from the centre and brings into foreground of ordinary experience. In a naturalistic, yet a poetical comedy, the problems of holiness are shown in a comparatively godless daily lives. While at the same time as it presents secular world of maladjusted marriages and troubled relationships in sex, the play convincingly presents a spiritual calling analyzed in the unfolding of a pattern of personal relationship and psychological states in psycho-analytical terms. An understanding of life, reached towards the end of the play, is in terms of fulfillment through successful marital relations at the human level and Christian martyrdom at the transcendental level, which reconciles grief and joy and eternal values and temporality. These two modes are not exclusive entities but interdependent.

Sin and guilt are recreated in order to emphasize the moral order, the religious sense, and self-realization. Eliot points out the extreme agony in the minds of Harry and Celia is the result of the conflict between their belief in religion and their physical passion. All the three plays, *Murder in the Cathedral*, *The Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party*, as a whole are
directed towards the illumination of the spiritual life. The central characters are people with special insight who take journeys through this world, the purpose of which may not be clear to other mortals; but they are a part of the eternal scheme of things. With an answer they go from cure to cure.

In *The Confidential Clerk* and *The Elder Statesman*, there is a conflict between love and religious faith in the portrayal of Colby and Claverton. In the character of Colby Eliot explores a highly conscious self, particularly at moments of crisis and conflict which lead to decisive acts of life. In the plays suffering precedes self realization which is closely related to the reality of suffering which continues during the entire time of spiritual crisis. According to C.H. Smith there is a sense of disorder both in the internal and the external world, and a search for a system that characterizes Eliot's thoughts all through his work.

Colby also has to make the difficult choice of giving up human love for divine love. Only in the last play, *The Elder statesman* human love becomes a substitute for divine love or a reflection of divine love. Eliot makes his study of self-realization on the part of his main characters a focal point in all his plays.

In the last play, *The Elder Statesman* Eliot has brought about certain experiences of Christian meanings which he feels are universal. Personal identity or self-hood can be attained only after social identities have been
attained. Here Lord Calverton achieves his true identity through the love of Monica and Charles, of course not before the false roles and false concepts drop off from his personality. The fact that he was living a life of pretence as a great public personality had failed to give him his ‘identity’. Neither his attempt at living an isolated private life provided him with one. “Lord Claverton has sacrificed his private world of personal relationships for his public roles and has lost hold of both worlds”. (Smith 219)

The action of the play is Lord Calverton attaining selfhood. ‘Love’ becomes an important element in the process of achieving self-knowledge. Throughout the play the relationship which develops between his daughter Monica and Charles is used to control and reflect the events of the play. It is Monica who helps her father to make an analysis of himself by her interest and care over his physical condition and the darkness which seems to surround him because of the return of Culverwell and Maisy Montjoy into his life.

Lord Claverton surrenders his self. Surrender then is not a grudging compulsion but a happy yielding of himself to the love and goodness of God, to God himself. When he allows his mind to be remade and his whole nature becomes transformed, that it is not engrossed thinking about itself, it wants and desires, its hurts and its slights, its self-pity and resentments. It is a mind that is circling around a new centre, Christ, and therefore becomes healthy, constructive and creative. Self-surrender delivers him from self-
preoccupation. His whole nature is thus transformed. Eliot's characters through self-surrender conquer the unsurrendered ego.

The artistic merit of the work lies in the subtlety with which the story-line coheres with the exploration of moral values expressed in a movement from belief to faith and accomplished through exposure of the protagonist to life's constraints. The experience creates questioning, self-consciousness and a search. Ideals of justice, freedom and responsibility as essential elements relate the spiritual quest to the tensions of modern living. Sin and guilt are recreated in order to emphasize the moral order, the religious sense, and self-realization. The burdens, produced by the unsurrendered self, cling around and make them doubly burdensome. But once the self is surrendered the burdens automatically drop off because they have been produced by the unsurrendered self.

The preoccupation with the theme of evil and good, rather than the problem of right and wrong is recurrent in Eliot works. He seems inclined to the belief that in the ultimate analysis it is God's justice that is predominant over the vague concept of man's justice. The problem of evil and suffering is at the centre of the human tragedy. According to him, the action of the characters is a part of the total pattern of the plot that slowly unfolds itself the whole motif being complex and almost bordering on the incomprehensible to the rational mind.
Becket, Harry and Celia have excellent capacity for self realization and are a contrast to Colby and Claverton who may not be saintly but can apprehend sainthood and are also aware of their limitations. The characters in Eliot's plays fall into these three categories and the saintly ones are in the centre. Through the reflections of these central figures as they embark on internal journey towards self realization leading to act of choice, Eliot seeks to clarify what exactly he means by reality to be exposed in poetic plays. Further, the individual's act of free choice which is also conceived as the highest moral act forms the climax in each of the plays.