Chapter II

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SINNER TO SAINTHOOD

The plays Murder in the Cathedral, The Family Reunion and The Cocktail Party prove to be revelation of the self in various stages. The first step in self-surrender is to see that it is the open door to God’s everything. Though Becket, Harry and Celia are not worthy to deserve, they are willing to surrender. By surrendering themselves they fulfill the very purpose for which Christ died: “His purpose in dying for all was that men, while still in life, should cease to live for themselves, and should live for him who for their sake died and was raised to life” (II Cor-5:15). By surrendering to God they are fulfilling the central purpose of the atonement.

The following are the consecutive stages where the characters surrender to Jesus Christ. First they draw near, they are exploring- but it is a tentative state. It is a big thing to turn over the one thing they own, their very self, to another. They want to and yet don’t want to. They are afraid if it is a leap in the dark, and if they leap it may land them in an abyss of doubt and fear. So they hesitate. God has to upset them on one level to set them up on a higher level.

The second stage is the stage of decision when they desire to belong to Him. They weigh the alternatives: They have to decide whether they belong to themselves or to Him. They are ready to belong to Him. That is
their destiny and they fulfill that destiny. By walking in the light, holding nothing back, they have a continuous fellowship with Christ and a continuous cleansing of their problems and sins. This continuous surrender saves them from the psychiatrist’s couch where they have to unburden themselves through torturous months and years of piled-up problems, resentments, fears, self-preoccupation, and guilt buried in the subconscious.

Becket, Harry and Celia unburden themselves and gain a doubtful absolution by penances. They have unbroken contact with their Redeemer. They seem to say ‘Lord, I’m willing to be made willing’ and thus surrender their hesitation. With a complete self-surrender they are not now with the old resources based on a self-centred and self-reliant person but turned new, with new resources, new direction, a new attitude, a new faith, not in them but in Him, they are anew in everything, live day by day, moment by moment. They are confident that the future will take care of itself, and that future will be as bright as the promises of God. Self-surrender not only takes away loneliness, it takes away fear of death because they are already dead.

The characters are ready for the third stage when they make up their mind to belong to Him, from that moment. And they act as if they belonged to Him. Since the mind and the will are in agreement about it, the emotions sooner or later gives their approval. They thank him by faith. Their faith is followed by fact of feeling.
The fourth stage is the outcome of the last one having given their very self to God they are bold to take their self, their all for His all. He leads them as they are. He takes them as they are and begin to make them do what they ought to be. Through identification with Him they begin to learn to take from Him. They emerge strong in His strength, pure in His purity, loving in His love, victorious in His victory,

Eliot's main purpose is to dramatise the way of the Saint in his play. The focal point around which the whole play, Murder in the Cathedral revolves is Becket's apprehending the truth that the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God. Therefore there can be perceived at different levels of moral refinement into which the various characters of the play can be categorized.

Becket experiences a kind of supernatural awareness. His words appear vague and ambivalent at times. He is led to speak in riddles and paradoxes since he had glimpsed into the ineffable meaning of the hidden truth, the reality ‘in the moment out of time, of which human kind cannot bear much reality’. The fact that he has a moral refinement inside of him makes him capable of communing with the ineffable and the mysterious which renders him the spiritually elect.

Commenting on the saints, Eliot remarks in “The Rock”, “And the son of Man was not crucified once for all. The lives of the Saints not given
once for all. But the Son of Man is crucified always and there shall be Martyrs and Saints”. (P 175) Murder in the Cathedral is a play about England’s most famous Saint. In the character of Becket Eliot exemplifies the theme of spiritual election. The life of Thomas Becket had been treated earlier by George Derley and Tennyson in their verse plays. It is said that historically these writers have presented Becket as an arrogant man. But Eliot depicts him as a humble servant of God, submissive and accepting death, without any resistance.

The first part of the play depicts the inward conflict and the second the outward. In the first part Becket is seen battling with forces and ideas which lead to self-analysis. The motif of suffering in Thomas surfaces and he decides not to act. The second part presents the motif of action; Becket suffering on behalf of others through which the meaning of suffering is learnt by the chorus. “His moral struggle teaches him the meaning of martyrdom as the perfection of will.” (Grover 195)

After his return from France apprehensive of the dangers that lurk around him, his mind is assailed by temptations. One of the ghosts of the past that rears its head is the temptation of falling back and succumbing to the worldly aspirations and materialism and prosperity. The next ghost that surfaces is the attraction and desire of power and status and authority that he had possessed as the indomitable chancellor of England. Thirdly the temptation is to join hands with the displeased and frustrated barons against
the king. These three temptations pertain to the carnal and mundane realms which Thomas Becket can always overcome.

The last and the fourth which startles Becket’s composure is the temptation to do the right deed for the wrong reasons, to lay down his life as a martyr in order to be glorified. But Becket recognizes the spiritual pride that will negate the purpose of God. He knows that God will not share His glory with man. As Becket allows his ego and pride to be destroyed he submits to the eternal design, ‘The true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr’.

(p 49)

Before Becket appears on the scene in the beginning of the play the first priest describes Becket as proud, to quote,

I saw him as Chancellor,
flattered by the King.
Liked or feared by countless,
in their overbearing fashion,
Despised and despising, always isolated,
Never one among them, always insecure,
His pride always feeding upon his own virtues,
Pride drawing sustenance from impartiality,
Pride drawing sustenance from generosity,
Loathing power given by temporal devolution,
Wishing subjection to God alone. (14)

Thomas Becket has been proud of his own integrity. When he returns from France he is only halfway to being a martyr. In him is found the willingness to embrace death in vindication of the cause. He clearly states “End will be simple, sudden, and God-given”. (18)

Soon after Becket returns from France he is faced by Temptations which revive the past. He undergoes temptations that may prompt him to avoid the difficult path of martyrdom, and compromise his principles to achieve worldly power that he wielded once; to join the faction of the political power against King Henry. This confrontation with the Tempters crystallizes the self within Becket.

Eliot places Becket's conscience within himself, treating the Tempters merely as “objectified facets of his own consciousness”. (Kenner 158) The Tempters give glimpses of his life as Chancellor and his intimacy with the King. When the tempters are prepared to attack Becket, he realises how he has in the past wasted his time on worldly aspirations. He realises for a moment the meaninglessness of earthly endearment just as Paul says in the Epistle to Philippians, “what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ”. (Phil 3:7)
Meanwhile the fear of the Chorus reaches a crescendo as they sense the conflict between good and evil and wonder if evil will after all triumph.

The first Tempter remarks:

Your Lordship won’t forget
that evening on the river
when the King, you and I were all friends together...

Fluting in the meadows, viols
      in the hall
Laughter and apple-blossom
      floating on the water,
Singing at night fall, Whispering
      in chambers,
Fires devouring the winter season,
Eating up the darkness, with
      with and wine and wisdom. (18)

He suggests that though such times have gone there is still hope to restore the former friendship with the king.

Becket shudders at the possibility of drifting towards pride and Eliot has already hinted at the price that has to be paid if the protagonist gives into it. He could easily become a victim of pride. Pride is an abomination to God. Pride goes before fall. Having conquered human pride, Becket walks
up and emerges a victor in the struggle. The following dialogue brings out
the dilemma. “Thomas: you talk of seasons . . . Think of penitence and
follow your master” (19)

What Becket considers as self-sacrifice proves to be a refined
species of self assertion and self-glorification. The self is still there. The
second Tempter who stands for temporal power tells Becket: “Your
spiritual power is earthly prediction / Power is present, for him who will
wield”. (21)

The tempter appreciates him for discharging his duties as Chancellor
most efficiently. He has controlled and suppressed the ambitious barons,
maintaining the law and order of the country. Becket agrees how he himself
has been powerful, “I was the King, his arm, his better reason”. (22) He has
not only enforced the King’s authority over all ranks of people but has also
championed the cause of the poor and lowly. Since Becket had been so
outstanding as Chancellor and Archbishop, the Tempter representing
various political interests want him to make peace with the King and accept
the office again to continue as Archbishop.

Tempter: ... You my lord

In being with us, would fight a good stroke

At once, for England and for Rome
Ending the tyrannous jurisdiction of king’s court over bishop’s court

Of king’s court over baron’s court

..................................................

Kings will allow no power but their own;

Church and people have good cause against the throne. (23, 24)

The following words of Becket prove how he has emerged victorious.

If the Archbishop cannot trust the Throne,

He has good cause to trust none but God alone.

I ruled once as Chancellor

And men like you were glad to wait at my door

..................................................

Shall I who ruled like an eagle over doves

Now take the shape of a wolf among wolves?

Pursue your treacheries as you have done before:

No one shall say that I betrayed a king. (24)

Becket is successful in resisting the first three tempters since he had
expected them. He finds it easy to resist them first since they offer only
temporal and material benefits.

The entry of the fourth tempter, entering with congratulations,
is endowed with a more sinister import. The appearance of the fourth
Tempter throws him off his guard and he asks:

Who are you, tempting me with my own desires?
Other's have come, temporal tempters,
With pleasure and power at palpable price.
What do you offer? What do you ask? (27)

"I expected three visitors, not four." (24) Meeting with no
answer more definite than "I always precede expectation" (24)
Though the question is repeated he evades to answer Becket's
question as to who he was. The tempter states a case with which he
can only agree. He Counsels too, "Think of pilgrims, standing in line
Before the glittering jeweled shrine". (26) Becket replies: "I have
thought of these things." (26)

The Tempter confuses him with obliquities; then his advice
becomes more explicit:

Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest
On earth, to be high in heaven.
And see far off below you, where the gulf is fixed,
Your persecutors, in timeless torment,

Parched passion, beyond expiation. (27)

Thomas is able to see an ultimate vitiation of his martyrdom through hypocrisy and he bursts out:

No!

Who are you, tempting with my own desires?

. . . Others offered real goods, worthless

But real. You only offer

Dreams to damnation. The tempter retorts, “You have after dreamt them” (27)

The fourth Tempter lashes out the same words.

You know and do not know what it is to act or suffer,

You and do not know, that action is suffering,

And suffering action, Neither does the agent suffer

Nor the patient act, but both are fixed

In an eternal action, an eternal patience
to which all must consent that it may be willed

And which all must suffer that they may will it

That the pattern may subsist that the wheel may turn and still be forever still (27, 28).

“The whole dialogue with the tempters has symbolized an
introspective process and that hitherto it has been a comparatively simple matter for the Archbishop to isolate and discard the temptations. Thomas is no longer the vigilant custodian over his own mind but is involved in a tangle of motives which he himself can only partially analyze. Some external prompting is needed to help him to his final decision.” (Kenner 68)

Becket quickly recognizes the danger of succumbing to martyrdom for self-glory, which signifies self-deception. Eliot has portrayed the most subtle and scrupulous self analysis which enables Becket to overcome the spiritual pride that lurks deep within his personality. The Tempter tells Becket that he is offering him “a vision of eternal grandeur” to which Becket says that others have offered him worthless things, but he, the fourth Tempter is only offering “Dreams to damnation”. He recognizes that fact that he should refrain from any deliberate action and utters these words.

Is there no way, in my soul’s sickness,

Does not lead to damnation in pride?

I well know that these temptations

Mean present vanity and future torment.

Can sinful pride be driven out

Only by more sinful? Can I neither act nor suffer
Without perdition? (27)

Immediately the Tempter is baffled. Becket utters the same words that he himself had spoken to the women of Canterbury:

You know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer,
You know and do not know that action is suffering,
And suffering action. Neither does the agent suffer
Nor the patient act. But both are fixed
In an eternal action, an eternal patience
To which all must consent that it may be willed
And which all must suffer that they may will it,
That the pattern may subsist, that
the wheel may turn and be still
Be forever still. (27, 28)

Given the choice he chooses neither to act nor to suffer which culminates in his act of death; but he has nevertheless gone through the process of self-abnegation and self-surrender having been a victim of pride and self-will earlier. Becket realises that unless the sufferer refrains from willing to suffer and from soiling his hands with his own blood he cannot be a true martyr. The fourth Tempter has made Becket clear himself of the wrong notion that he had of martyrdom. When he recognizes his pride, his pride is humbled.
The encounter with the Fourth Tempter is needed to purify Becket’s mind and heart and make them a sacrifice acceptable unto God. The moment of triumph is when Becket says

Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain:
Temptation shall not come in this kind again
The last Temptation is the greatest treason
To do the right deed for the wrong reason. (30)

This comprehension of divine truth is echoed in East Coker, the first movement of Four Quarters. “Humility is endless / The only wisdom is the wisdom of humility”. (199)

Becket is able to conquer his self when he attains self-knowledge. He begins to understand that a Christian Martyrdom is never the design of man. It has to be the design of God. In losing his will in the will of God Becket has achieved triumph. Howarth remarks, “His resistance to the fourth Tempter involves on problem beyond the common experience, at any rate beyond the common awareness – in abstaining from the Tempter’s offer he wins a victory over nature which is not intelligible to many people”. (321)

Eliot’s handling of the Becket theme shows that like Bradley he too accepts the duality of the self. His sensuous selves in the form of the first three tempters are subdued by his will which is non-sensual. And this conflict brings out the dramatic
tension in the first part of the play. The first three tempters disclose things desirable, but no longer possible. The fourth brings out the ambition that follows unobserved. When the last leads to a non-sensuous will finally overcome by his 'formal,' better self, Becket is worthy of being a martyr.

Becket's vision of reality and his apprehension of morality as an end in itself are described by the Chorus, a group of poor women of Canterbury. The play reveals their gradual emergence from passivity into recognition of their share in the universal burden of sin. (Haldar 131)

Becket goes through the process of making his will perfect because he is willing to learn and educate himself. He has to give up his own will, he has to yield to God's mastering of the soul. As Becket accepts his death he recognizes the great moment of intercession of the timeless with time in the incarnation of Christ. The ritual act of martyrdom in its timeless significance has a relationship to the historical fact of Christ's atonement. Having had the vision of the ineffable Becket says that he is prepared to meet his assassins.

It is not in time that my death shall be known;

It is out of time that my decision is taken

If you call that decision

To which my whole being gives entire consent
I give my life
To the Law of God about the Law of man. (46)

He has understood that to lose one’s will in the will of God is to realize the eternal pattern in the flux of time. The spiritual triumph of a saint becomes the pivot or central point which gives rise to religious fellowship.

It is pointed that the temptations Becket is confronted with are analogous to the temptations of Christ in the wilderness. The first Tempter tempts Becket’s physical appetite similar to the suggestion of the Devil that Christ should turn the stones into bread to satisfy his hunger. The Devil offered Christ the Kingdoms of the world. The second and third Tempters offer power that is temporary and worldly. The last Tempter tempting Becket to accept martyrdom for the wrong reason:

But think, Thomas, think of glory after death
when king is dead there’s another king
And one more king is another reign.

King is forgotten when another shall come:
Saint and martyr rule from the tomb
Think, Thomas, think of enemies dismayed,
Creeping in penance frightened of a shade;
Think of pilgrims, standing in line
Before the glittering jeweled shrine,
From generation to generation

Bending the knee in supplication. (26)

This is similar to the devil asking Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple and prove his divinity for angels will come and minister unto Him.

In Murder in the Cathedral the Chorus is not only an observer but becomes a participant in the moral progression of the play. The elements of the spiritual conflict in Becket are objectified in the antiphony of the chorus. In the beginning the women of Canterbury resist the idea of being the centre of focus. The fear of the Chorus gains momentum when Becket resigns his will to the will of God and chooses to embrace death.

The women of Canterbury, the choric representatives of laymen offer praise and thanksgiving for the sacrifice of the martyr that revives the church. But they gain this kind of serenity having undergone shock and fear they have had: They seem to have a better insight into the situation though they are fearful and this is in contrast to the second priest with his false sense of security. They become witnesses to the impending disaster and they become the vicarious partakers of the suffering that is imminent to the arch bishop. As suffering is a part of Christian faith they are part of the fellowship of the body of Christ. The chorus becomes a link between the ritual and the believers in the choir, the articulate voice of the body of
worshippers. (Williams 180). They are “the small folk drawn into the pattern of fate, the small folk who live among small things” (16) and they feel that involvement in any terrible happening will be a strain to their brain. They do not want to get involved. They are willing only to be witnesses. But they have a sense of premonition of some terrible occurrence. They are drawn towards the Cathedral not voluntarily but involuntarily.

The Tempters gather their forces for a united attack on Thomas—now that he has recognized the vanity of this own aspirations, he is assailed mentally by an unqualified skepticism about the value of all earthly endeavour. In the words of Eliot, the Chorus’s fear mounts, through an oppressive sense of the evil at war with the good in him, “The earth is heaving to parturition of issue of hell” (28), to a sudden panic at the possibility that the ‘Lord of Hell’ will triumph: They fear even more the impending ‘disturbance of the quiet seasons’, the eruption of the unknown, into the familiar round of their lives, which they have carefully ordered to create a feeling of security, conveniently forgetting what should make them question the false sense of safety and permanence, “Are we drawn by danger? / Is it knowledge of safety that draws our feet. / Towards the cathedral?” (11)

Eliot uses a seeming contradiction, in the above mentioned line, characteristically, to stress the point. The Chorus is hyperconscious of both
danger and safety and know that the danger only indirectly threaten them, "There is no danger for us." (11) The Chorus, the women of Canterbury at the outset appears merely as lookers-on, emphasizing their own impotence. The following lines evoke an atmosphere of strain and expectancy.

While the laborer kicks off a muddy boot and stretches his hand to the fire,

The New Year waits, destiny waits for the coming.

Who has stretched out his hand to the fire and remembered the Saints at All Hallows,

Remembered the martyrs and saints who wait? And who shall Stretch out his hand to the fire, and deny his master?"

(11)

The chorus knowing that the present is perilous and a change for the better hardly possible burst out again. "Ill the wind, ill the time, uncertain the profit, certain the danger." (15) They appeal to Thomas to return to France: "You come with applause, you come with rejoicing, but you come bringing death into Canterbury: A doom on the house, a doom on yourself, a doom on the world." (15)

To these women, who "do not wish anything to happen," who go on "living and partly living," Thomas' return seems only to presage catastrophe. The intensity of their foreboding increases. When they
have done the Second Priest reproves them for croaking "like frogs in the treetops." Thomas, entering, reproves him in turn.

Peace. And let them be, in their exaltation.

They speak better than they know, and beyond your understanding.

They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.

They know and do not know, that action is suffering
And suffering is action. Neither does the agent suffer

Nor the patient act. But both are fixed

In an eternal action, an eternal patience

To which all must consent that it may be willed
And which all must suffer that they may will it.

That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action
And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still be forever still. (17)

There is a marked progression in the women who appear capable of glimpsing into the mysterious while the priests are incapable of apprehending anything spiritual beyond the physical aspects of the events.

Some presage of an act

which our eyes are compelled to witness,

has forced out feet
towards the Cathedral.

We are forced to bear witness. (11)

Some malady is coming upon us. We wait, we wait,
And the saints and martyrs wait, for those who shall be martyrs and saints.

Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping the still unshapen:
I have seen these things in a shaft of sunlight.

For us, the poor, there is no action, But only to wait and to witness (11).

The last lines of the Chorus in the first part reiterate the point:

God gave us always some reason, some hope; but now a new terror has soiled us, which none can avert, none can avoid, flowing under our feet and over the sky;

Under doors and down chimneys, flowing in at the ear and the mouth and the eye. (29)

The Chorus, Thomas’ spiritual dependents after an orchestral crescendo of doubt and confusion, suggest a single sense of horror and panic:

The forms take shape in the dark air:
Puss-purr of leopard, footfall of padding bear,
Palm-pat of nodding ape, square hyaena waiting,
For laughter, laughter, laughter. The Lords of Hell are here. (29)

It is with their last cry, identifying their own balance between hope and despair with Thomas decision, that resolution breaks across his hesitancy, “O Thomas Archbishop, save us, save us, save yourself that we may be saved/Destroy yourself and we are destroyed”. (30)

The horror is not like the horror they are familiar with in life. This is surely out of time, an instant of eternity of evil. Dimly they realize it is God-ordained and God-sent. They call upon everyone to wash all things each little thing including stone, bone and skin and cleanse them by removing the filth in them.

The women of Canterbury are assailed by a vision of horror beyond life:

- Emptiness, absence, separation from God
- The honor of the effortless, journey to the empty land
- Which is no land, only emptiness, absence the void. (44)

After this vision of horror they turn to the comfort of their Saviour, Jesus Christ.

- Dead upon the tree, my Saviour,
- Let not be in vain Thy labour;
- Help me Lord, in my last feat. (45)

The Chorus refers to sea-bird ‘driven inland’, as they are driven
from their wonted security. They mention of a spring which is more like death than birth. They highlight the unnaturalness of the season:

What sign of the spring of the year?
Only the death of the old

Longer and darker the day, shorter and colder the night.
The starved crow sits in the field...
The owl rehearses the hollow note of death.
What signs of a bitter spring (35)

The Chorus becomes resonantly affirmative, sounding their praises of God in terms of a creation that has lost all its frightfulness. The purring leopard, the patting ape, the waiting hyaena—these are all recognized as necessary units in an intelligible whole, imply, even by negation, the glory of God like the Psalmist says, “The darkness declares the glory of God.”

The martyr has redeemed the crumbling faith, of the chorus who are free to sing triumphantly of what before they had so dreaded, the act of death and the benison proceeding from it. Gradually, they build a firm statement of this recaptured peace,

The archbishop, realizes that his decision is no longer personal or autonomous. Whatever his decisions are they will affect the wellbeing of
the church, particularly of these members of it, the women of Canterbury. After the Knights accept Becket and shower insults on him in the beginning of the second part, the Chorus begins to consent to the death of Becket:

I have smelt them, the death bringers; now is too late
For action, too soon for contribution.
Nothing is possible but the shamed swoon
Of those consenting to the last humiliation.
I have consented, Lord Archbishop, have consented. (42)

They ask Becket to forgive them because they have acknowledged their responsibility for the imminent death of Becket and consented to the eternal design. Their recognition of the reality of sin is a sign of new life.

The women who are of all the audience realize their timidity leading to their inaction, not being able to help Becket. But they are only a part of the design. The martyrdom has been necessary because man has to turn to God, and turn away from his own will. Becket becomes wise in that he recognizes the love of God. This invincible experience, something that cannot be explained in tangible terms is expressed in the words of the chorus. Though they do not want Becket to die, they realize that the death of Becket is inevitable for the eternal design to be fulfilled. They also recognize that being witnesses to his death they have also become guilty of
the sin of murder. That is why they seek the forgiveness of Becket.

The immediate reaction of the martyrdom on the women is a sense of nothingness — the horror of effortless journey to the empty land—that leads ultimately to an intense longing for a movement onward. The horror that the chorus experience of the separation of the soul and God is the consequence of the fall of man that led to the separation from God which needed. Christ had to come and shed his blood on the cross and redeem mankind. Even things and situations unpalatable like the betrayal of Christ by Judas and the rejection of Jesus by the jews were a part of the eternal design of the atonement of Christ. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.

Immediately after the murder they begin to identify themselves with Thomas’ sacrifice. They feel a sense of sanctification in the ritual act of martyrdom and in the last chorus of the play they declare that Gods glory is displayed in all the creature of the earth. They even say, “Thy glory is declared even in that which denies Thee, the darkness declares the glory of light”. (54)

Thus the Chorus which begins in fear and apathy has progressed towards faith and humble acceptance of the working of God, “Therefore, O God, we thank Thee who hath given such blessing to Canterbury”. (54)

In the words of Kenner, “Salvation is presented, not by talking
about it, but by showing it operating in the consciousness of the Chorus.” (160) The Martyrdom of Becket has a great impact on the women of Canterbury they acquire true faith and humility as opposed to their earlier indifference. The transformation of the chorus and their acceptance of spiritual truth is symbolized by images of the seasons. From the spiritual aridity of the wasteland and the parched land they are waiting for blessings in the future. The martyrdom of Thomas has renewed the faith of the chorus who were until the death of Thomas fearful, desperate and full of apathy. Now they have witnessed the martyrdom and Thomas's example has filled them with hope and courage.

The universe which till a few minutes back appeared to them evil and corrupt, now appears a glorious thing affirming the glory of God in all its aspects. Both light and darkness, the hunter and the hunted, the strong and the weak, men and beasts affirm His existence and His glory and praise Him. Even the poor oppressed women of Canterbury praise Him. They praise God not only for the beautiful things of the earth but also for the killing of good men who become martyrs and saints, for by their death, faith in God is renewed. The blood of martyrs is a seed that grows forever however much it is suppressed or ignored. The chorus thanks the Lord for giving Canterbury another martyr.

The chorus realises how as a group have been much lacking in faith and, pray for forgiveness. They have been spiritless, afraid of God's
blessings. Now they accept their weakness and acknowledge their spiritlessness and admit their share in the death of Thomas, and pray to God to have mercy on them. They beg Thomas to pray for them. In accepting Thomas’ witness, they accept Christ’s sacrifice with the pattern of Atonement re-emphasized.

The audience is also invited to participate in the action through the act of watching and hearing and to strengthen its links with the communion of saints. The Chorus in Eliot represents “in effect the great mass of individuals which Christ came to save”. (Jones 53) The play has emphasized the relationship or link between the Saviour and the Saint as is made manifest in the last speech of the Chorus:

Lord, have mercy upon us
Christ, have mercy upon us
Lord, have mercy upon us
Blessed Thomas, pray for us. (54)

Thus Thomas Becket who has surrendered his self and will to God and His Eternal Design achieves Sainthood. Becket has found his peace in the will of God and Dante’s epigrammatic line which appeals to Eliot “E’n la sua volunteer nostra pace. In his will is our peace – is established in the first Christian play Murder in the Cathedral.

The priests and the knights just perform their dramatic functions in
relation to Thomas' self only as spectators and the agents or executors of death respectively. The priests respond differently during the quick progression of the action of the play according to their own capacity to react to the dilemma of Thomas. Of the four priests the first priest resembles the women of Canterbury, in the beginning when they feared that Thomas' death would be catastrophic to them and the world. The Second priest's spirit is that of an opportunist akin to the practical minded knights. He is unsaintly and thus becomes a foil to Becket. The third priest is the most spiritual of the lot. But he remains an observer unable to participate in the sacrifice, as the women do, though he has grasped the final meaning of it.

Even the first priest fails to see the significance of Thomas's death, "The Church lies bereft, alone, desecrated, desolate without God". The third priest has to point out to him – and through him to the audience – that the Church is stronger for this action, triumphant in adversity. "It is fortified by persecution: supreme, so long as men will die for it". (p 84) He emphasizes the fact that no weapon can prosper against the Kingdom of God as Christ said "you shall have tribulation but be of good cheer and be overcomers of good over evil". (John 16:33) And the church will be strengthened as men become martyrs and die for their faith.

The priests bar the door to prevent the four knights from entering. But Thomas does not want the Cathedral to be turned into a fortress and asks them to open the door. The Church knows how to protect itself—not by
building walls of oak and stone. Thomas says that the priests judge an act by its external results. But his impending death is not an external act in time. His death is not merely an act in time. It is God's design in eternity. Again it is not for him to decide to become a martyr. He must readily and willingly do what is his duty at this time to defend the love of God against that of man. He orders the doors to be opened to let the knights in. The priests should not fight by means of stratagem, or resistance. Thomas has already fought with the tempters and overcome them. Now he has merely to endure patiently God's will. This is the triumph of the cross; victory through suffering and sacrifice.

The first priest has not understood the significance of Becket's death. He thinks on natural terms. Looks at the physical consequences of a church left without a leader. But the church will be strengthened as men become martyrs and die for their faith. The death and sacrifice of Becket is a reaffirmation of the great sacrifice on Calvary that brought about atonement which can be interpreted as at-one-ment, the reconciliation brought about by the shedding or Christ's blood between God the Father and mankind which had gone astray by the love of the evil one.

As the Chorus reiterates that even in seemingly mean and small things God's design may be manifest, the four knights appear. Of the four knights three are king's men, that is they have taken an oath of allegiance to the king; they are lords of land doled out to them by the king. The
knights reply crudely that they will kill the Archbishop and tell the story as an after dinner tale to others. Though foreseen, the great moment comes suddenly and unexpectedly. Thomas has been setting his papers in order when the knights arrive.

The knights call Thomas contemptuously to come down to be killed. Thomas says he is just and states that he does what is right. So he is without fear like a lion, so this Daniel will not fear to go down to the lions' den. He is not a traitor to the king, but a priest who must serve a higher law, and if the king opposes the higher law, Thomas has to disobey him. Christ gave his life to save mankind, and by his example inspires all Christians to sacrifice their lives for the sake of others. The church has always triumphed by them sacrifice of its followers, churchmen as well as laymen. As Christ gave his life to save Thomas's soul Thomas will now give his life to the greater glory of God.

The knights call upon Thomas to revoke all orders he had passed against the king and his supporters. He refuses to do so and says he is ready to die so that the church will have peace and liberty. He forbids the knights to kill any of his parish or flock. They now call him a traitor. Thomas says that one of the knights, Fitz Urse by name, is his man, that is, his vassal. He owes him allegiance as to his feudal lord for he had worked under him and has received benefits from him and now he is being a traitor to him. Urse is also a traitor to his spiritual lord, the Archbishop, and to
God in desecrating the church. He replies that Thomas having proved a renegade traitor to the king can no more claim his allegiance.

Thomas ironically comments that the knights show a new sense of loyalty to the king. For many years, when he was Chancellor they obeyed him and were loyal to him. Now suddenly they are loyal to the king and oppose him. The first knight's charge is that though Henry has offered to make peace with Thomas, the Archbishop had deliberately left England, gone to France to stir the catholic king of France and the Pope against the king. The second charge is that the king out of his kindness, has been forgiving, has made peace and has requested Thomas, to come back. Though the king has granted all that Thomas has asked, Thomas is still intransigent and has excommunicated the bishops who have assisted at the coronation of the young son of Henry. Thomas opposes and punishes the king's loyal servants, bishops and barons alike.

The king now has ordered that Thomas and his supporters should leave England and live abroad in exile. Thomas replies that he has spent seven long years away from his flock and will not leave them again. The first knight points out that Thomas is flouting the king's authority; He replies that the king and the knights are fighting not Thomas but the Church, the Pope, and God. Thomas points out that if they kill him, the Pope and God will take up his cause and punish them. The knights go away threatening to come back armed to kill the Archbishop.
Thomas refutes the allegation. He remarks that he has always obeyed the king except when his loyalty to the church clashed with his loyalty to the king. The word 'order' refers to holy orders, that is priesthood. The knights, on the other hand, believe that it is ambition, pride, envy and hatred, insolence and greed that made Thomas oppose the king. It is interesting to note that the jealous knights who are seeking after worldly power are analogous to the jews who were jealous and power thirsty which made them crucify Christ. Further the knights also insult Becket just as Christ was abused and insulted at his trial. But though Becket is tempted, slain and exalted for other men's sins, he only re-enacts the sacrifice of Christ, as told in “The Rock”, and cannot really atone for the sins of others. He has surrendered to the eternal design in self-abnegation, effacing his will and subjecting it to the will of God.

The Knights by malice become the final agents between God and Becket. The knights reenact the primal sin. They become the 'sordid' instruments of the 'eternal design'. The murder they commit is not just a historical event; It is a part of the design. When the knights return and call to Becket “Come down Daniel to the lions' den, Come down Daniel for the mark of the beast” (46) they are mockingly acknowledging the triumph of the martyr, even as they are identifying themselves with the 'beast'. The jealous Knights seeking, worldly power serve to project Becket's imitations of Christ and his act of obedience. They bring false accusation against
Becket and shower insults on him just as Christ was subjected to at his trial. He is ready to meet his end, but the priests drag him inside the church and bar the doors. Thomas says the church knows how to defend itself, and orders the priests to open the door. The drunken knights enter and ask if he is ready to change his ways. Thomas says he is ready to die for the church and God. He commends himself to God. The knights kill him.

After Thomas’ decision “The curtain falls on a scene of resignation in which he is finally and irrevocably dedicated to what he recognizes as his necessary purpose (Kenner 163) In the Christmas Sermon in which Becket explicates the truth of the design of a Christian martyrdom, a martyr is not a Christian who has merely been killed for being a Christian, or a good Christian who has become a saint. A martyrdom does not happen accidentally, but is planned by God. Nor can a man will himself to become a martyr. He alone is the true martyr who surrenders his will to God's and desires nothing for himself, certainly not the crown of martyrdom. It is by giving up everything, his own desires included that he is raised to the highest position. Thomas points out that the martyrdom is like the Mass, a re-enactment of Christ's Passion. The spiritual crisis demands suffering that continues till the crisis remains. Often the suffering arises out of an apprehension of a disorder both in the internal and the external world. He visualizes that he has to make his will perfect before embracing martyrdom.
In his sermon he focuses on the Christian conceptions of 'rejoicing' and 'peace'—and then analyzes the idea of martyrdom, the relevance of the Crucifixion to any other martyrdom, Becket says, "Just as we rejoice and mourn at once, in the Birth and in the Passion of Our Lord; so also, in a smaller figure, we both rejoice and mourn in the death of martyrs". (33) and the whole meaning of Thomas' self-abnegation, is explained:

A Christian martyrdom is never an accident, for Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a Saint, as a man by willing and contriving may become a ruler of men. A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. (33)

Thomas has arrived at a right understanding of his mission in life, what he must do, at the end of the first part of the play. This insight, now he shares with his congregation. As a true martyr, he has resolved, in the words of Jesus at the time of the crucifixion, to let "Not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). The scene shows that Thomas fully understands the meaning of martyrdom and also by his preaching this sermon, he involves the congregation in the act of martyrdom. They too participate vicariously in his final sacrifice and its results.
The characters of Becket substantiates the fact that the act of obedience to the will of God is not made once and for always, though the discovery of what it means to submit wholly and without reserve is a decisive step. It must be renewed from moment to moment. To lose one's will in the will of God is, as we have seen, to realize the eternal pattern in the flux of time:

As martyrdom requires the right attitude God on the part of the martyr, so also it requires the right attitude on the part of the great mass of men. A martyrdom is not efficacious unless it is accepted by them as the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them back to His ways (49).

So prone is man to turn his back upon the love of God which is revealed in Christ – for the demands it makes are not light – that he must from time to time be shocked into recognizing it afresh by a violence comparable to the Crucifixion. To quote the words of Becket:

The son of Man was not crucified once for all, The blood of the martyrs not shed once for all, The lives of the Saints not given once for all; But the Son of Man is crucified always and there shall be Martyrs and Saints. None of this violence and bloodshed fulfils its purpose unless it remains ordinary men and women of God's love. The witness must extend to them.
Theirs is a passive witness as opposed to the active witness of martyr, but they also most suffer the action, if only in the sense of permitting it or consenting to it. This is your share of the eternal burden. (34)

Murder in the Cathedral focuses on Becket's spiritual agony while purifying his motive for martyrdom that he undertakes. Becket's suffering is intolerable when his heightened consciousness exposes his deceitful nature symbolized through the four tempters. The device of the tempters in revealing Becket's motives is unique, The objectified facets of Becket's consciousness serve to confirm religious implications, and thereby add to the integrity. Eliot conceives of the mind as fluid. And the only moment of reality in this fluidity is characterized as the 'still point'—a moment of rare consciousness and sudden illumination. Such moments are the only meaningful moments in an individual's life, when the individual visualizes his or her 'station' and prepares himself or herself for its duties. For Becket, this illumination comes when he is prepared to sacrifice himself as a saint. He visualizes that he has to make his will perfect before embracing martyrdom.

The essential conflict in Murder in the Cathedral between Becket and himself as represented by the Tempters, whereas in The Family Reunion, the hero is struggling with himself. In The Family Reunion, Eliot portrays the fulfillment of a spiritual election in a man who discovers in
himself such an election”. (Jones 92) Eliot has taken the story of Orestes from the Oresteia of Aeschylus. Clytemnestra, the wife of Agamemnon plotted the murder of her husband. He was slain at Argos. Her son Orestes slew his mother for her crime. He is confronted and pursued by the Eumenides the terrible creatures of vengeance. Driven by the Eumenides he seeks the help of the gods. The agents of retribution begin as blood-thirsty, avenging furies but by the intercession of Apollo and Pallas Athene and the citizens of Athens, they allow creatures to go free after fair trial and argument. They become benevolent and even pronounce a blessing on Athens. Eliot uses this myth not for its historical interest, but to find a Christian parallel to the classical story to suit his ideas of sin and expiation.

Four years after publishing Murder in the Cathedral wherein he affirms that the true martyr of God is one who has found peace in His will, Eliot returns to drama in 1939 with the writing of The Family Reunion. Helen Gardner has pointed out how the play attempts to present outwardly what was implied in “Ash Wednesday”. The discovery is in the experience of a meaning that makes the whole personality reintegrate and changes the direction of the ‘Will’; this experience is at the centre of the play.

Harry, the eldest son of Lady Monchensey, returns from abroad after an absence of eight years. He returns to his family house, for a reunion with his family. During this time he has taken a wife whom he later murdered or thinks he has murdered, and since then has been pursued, like Orestes, by
the Eumenides. Presently he becomes aware of some 'origin of wretchedness' behind his childhood, and upon questioning Agatha, his aunt, he learns that his father, long since dead, had really been in love with her, and had lived with his wife for a few years with no love lost between them. He had wished and even planned to murder his wife. After this revelation Harry comes to a decision to leave home again in pursuit of expiation - a decision that is directly responsible for his mother's death at the end of the play.

*The Family Reunion* presents the progressive liberation of a man from the awful privacy of the insane mind. It is never clearly revealed in the play whether Harry's belief that he has murdered his wife is, or is not a delusion. What is revealed is that the cause of his misery lies in the distant past, in the loveless relation between his father and mother, from which his father had sought release in love of his mother's sister, Harry's aunt, Agatha. He had, rather naively, plotted to kill his cold and dominating wife. And it is powerfully suggested that this murderous impulse of Harry's father towards his wife is repeated, more terribly, in his son, who is thus under a 'curse'.

*The Family Reunion* as the drama of the emancipation of a son from the devastation wrought in him by the loveless relation between a weak but kindly husband and a self-righteous and dominating wife, by means of the continuing and purified love of his father's sister, becomes not only moving
but convincing too. We can believe alike in the condition of awful isolation in which Harry is imprisoned, and the reality of his liberation from it. Harry Monchensy becomes the twice-born or sick soul who emerges as “a man who is profoundly imbued with a sense of guilt but is unable to explain it except in the vaguest terms. He becomes in other words, a mouthpiece of obsession” (Hoskot 110). He is the modern man who experiences a sense of a loneliness, guilt and disgust.

The play is thus built around Harry’s discovery of spiritual election. The significance of the other characters depends upon their relationship to the central perception. “They arrange themselves almost schematically in degrees of spiritual perception.” (Jones 103) Agatha’s mental and spiritual capabilities make her Harry’s spiritual guide and she is the one who interprets the action of the play to the audience. The third person in this group is Harry’s unintellectual servant, Downing who because of his innocence and purity of heart sees a little more than all the others. Contrasted with these three characters are those who are spiritually dead and form a type of Chorus; but Amy, Dowager Lady Monchensy, Harry’s mother alone stands firmly rooted on her worldly cares and assertions. Amy’s sisters Ivy and Violet, her late husband’s brothers CoL The Hon. Gerald Piper and the Hon. Charles Piper who are individuals with distinct personalities get drawn together as they lack comprehension of what is going on.
Harry Monchensey has returned home after an interval of eight years. The play opens with aunts and uncles assembled together at Wishwood, his home. His mother Amy, Dowager Lady Monchensey has not only invited them to celebrate her birthday but also to welcome home Harry. Except Agatha, the youngest sister of Amy, the other two sisters Ivy and Violet and Amy's brothers-in-law Gerald and Charles form a kind of chorus who are just spectators in a drama. Harry believes that he had murdered his wife a year ago when she fell from the ship into the sea while they both were on a cruise sailing on the Atlantic Ocean.

Harry’s marriage to a girl of his choice had been disapproved by his mother. The wedding was attended only by Agatha. Harry’s defiance in choosing his life partner had been an act of rebellion against the domination of his mother. Amy desires that they all should behave naturally and pretend as if nothing strange had happened to Harry. She had been struggling hard to maintain the Wishwood Estate just as it was when Harry left, eight years ago. She eagerly awaits the arrival of her two younger sons, Arthur and John who do not make their appearance on stage.

It is only through his conversation with aunt, Agatha, his spiritual mother that he is able to understand himself. It is she who explains to Harry that his father never loved his mother. As years passed by his mother had taken complete control over the household of Wishwood and dominated her husband till he left Wishwood for good and died abroad.
‘Wishwood’ had enabled his mother to exist and she had clung to the upkeep of the place inorder to dominate her children. Agatha tells Henry how during that period when she was an undergraduate at Oxford and while on holiday at Wishwood, on a summer day she and his father had suddenly realized the bitter truth that they were in love. A few months later she found that Lord Monchenesey was wanting to get rid of his wife by murdering her while expecting Harry. But Agatha had dissuaded him from destroying Harry who was then only a thing called ‘life’. She felt that it was her own child.

Harry on his return is not comfortable. He feels isolated and disappointed at the insensitivity of his relatives about his past life. He says:

You are all people
To whom nothing has happened, at most a continual impact
Of external events. You have gone through life in a sleep
Never woken to the nightmare. (65)

Harry is conscience-haunted, believing himself guilty of the murder of his wife - insists that they do not understand. “Harry attributes his ‘sickness’ to the whole world he lives in. His crime is not an isolated event for which he alone is responsible. It is a concrete manifestation of the disease of entire humanity”. (Hoskot 100) He is not sure whether he killed his wife, and he insists that he is not troubled by guilty conscience and that
it is something deeper. He declares:

It goes a good deal deeper.

Than what people call their conscience; it is just the cancer

That eats away the self. I knew how you would take it.

First of all, you isolate the single event. It is not my

conscience,

As something so dreadful that it couldn’t have happened;

Because you could not bear it. So you must believe

That I suffer from delusions. It is not my conscience,

Not my mind, that is diseased, but the world I have to live in.

And again:

You go on trying to think of each thing separately, Making

small things important, so that everything

May be unimportant

I was like that in a way, so long as I could think

Even of my own life as an isolated ruin,

A casual bit of waste in an orderly universe.

But it begins to seem just part of some huge disaster.

Trouble is both within him and without. (67)

Harry has returned to Wishwood to seek his real self, but he only

meets his own deceptive self. It is true that it is Mary and his aunt Agatha
who help him to realize himself. Mary only helps him to recognize his guilt, but it is Agatha who acts as the spiritual agent who enables him to accept the guilt and thereby attain a sense of liberation. As long as Harry seeks to flee from the pursuing Eumenides he cannot be successful in his search for redemption.

Mary, who Amy wants to have as a submissive daughter-in-law in the future, reminds Harry of his childhood. Mary reawakens his first feelings of love as a child. He tries to seek freedom from his sense of innocence and happiness in childhood. He thinks he can hope for something from his relationship with Mary and thinks he is attracted by her, but the Eumenides appear and the attraction glimmers for a moment in his mind and the glimpse of innocence, the flicker of hope, that could have lit up, is extinguished.

Mary, is sensitive to the plight of Harry and she says:

The cold spring now is the time
For the ache in the moving root
The agony in the dark
The slow flow throbbing the trunk
The pain of the breaking bud.
These are the ones that suffer least:
The aconite under the snow
And the snowdrop crying for a moment in the wood.

Harry replies:

Spring is an issue of blood
A season of sacrifice
And the wail of the new full tide
Returning the ghosts of the dead
Those whom the winter drowned
Do not the ghosts of the drowned
Return to land in the spring?
Do the dead want to return? (82)

Harry tells Mary as she reminds him of the memories of their childhood.

You bring me news
Of a door that opens at the end of a corridor,
Sunlight and singing; When I had felt sure
That every corridor only led to another
Or to a blank wall; that I kept moving
Only so as not to stay still.

Harry returns with torments with which he is obsessed. He feels that he is being pursued by the Eumenides, the agents of vengeance. He soon gets distracted by the presence of the Eumenides. Their intervention is
significant. They stop him from getting emotionally involved with Mary because his succumbing to the attraction of human love can deter the progression of one's spiritual maturity. When Harry looks at the Eumenides, and Mary tries to soothe him saying that there is no one there, Harry feels let down because Mary is obtuse that she cannot see the Eumenides. At the end of the speech he says:

They were here, I tell you they are here . . . . . .
You are no use to me. I must face them
I must flight them. But they are stupid.
How can one fight with stupidity? (84)

It is this conversation with Mary that helps him to realize the need to face the Eumenides. It is Agatha who is able further to initiate him into a higher love.

Harry realizes that there is something outside himself, something universal – a curse which can be cured only by accepting it and not by avoiding it. In the beginning of the play He is isolated from the rest of the family because of his sense of guilt. But his flight from the Eumenides makes him desperate. At first he seeks refuge by almost placing hope in the renewed friendship with Mary, his cousin. But that does not help him much.

Harry's psychosis is intensified by the failure, the collapse, of verbal communication. Agatha encourages him to speak in his own language
without stopping to debate whether it might be too far beyond the understanding of his audience; "The sudden solitude discolouring the bone." (66)

The love that Agatha teaches Harry is of two kinds. The Love of attachment to the people and love of detachment from all created things that leads to divine union. The maxim of St. John of the cross that Becket has followed is once again advocated in this play. Agatha becomes his spiritual mother because even before birth she has been responsible in saving him when the father wanted to kill his mother before Harry was born. This truth about the father's intended guilt liberates Harry from his sense of guilt. He remarks:

This is the way things happen.
Perhaps my life has only been a dream
Dreamt through me by the mind of others
Agatha replies:
What we have written is not a story of detection
Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.

It is possible
You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,
It's bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame. (105)

Agatha who had been carrying the burden of guilt on behalf of the
family because she alone had understanding of the truth, now relinquishes this burden to Harry, her spiritual child who has grown in his spiritual stature. She along with Harry’s father had looked through the little door when the sun shone on the rose-garden. The moment in the rose-garden is a central symbol of Eliot representing the moment of illumination which can be achieved only by ascetic contemplation and denial of the self.

Harry’s search for identity is mainly his search for the real past. The point on which the play converges is Harry’s discovery of the real past and what it requires of him. In his urge to know the past of which is always present, he even identifies himself with the house:

I am the old house
With the noxious smell and the sorrow before morning,
In which all past is present, all degradation
Is unredeemable. As for what happens -
Of the past you can only see what is past,
Not what is always present (66)

His sense of sin arises out of his responsibility in the unnatural death of his wife—'I pushed her,' he says—and his suffering attached to this sense of sin is aggravated by his knowledge of the unnatural death of his father which is a past incident but remains 'present' in him. To break this chain and to win over suffering, Harry must try to acquire knowledge which is
different from what the common people call fact. It is Agatha, Amy's sister, who discloses the 'real' past to Harry and the deeper organization beneath the surface is exposed. “Agatha recalls a summer day of unusual heat which symbolizes her secret relationship with Harry's father”. (Haldor 33, 34)

There are hours when there seems to be no past or future,

Only a present moment of pointed light

When you want to burn. When you want to stretch your hand

To the flames. They only come once,

Thank God, that kind (104)

In the opinion of Maud Bodkin:

Harry learns that his sin against the wife he hated was foreshadowed in his father's sin of intention against his mother; that his suffering has its counterpart in that of the woman, his aunt, who loved his father, and had known and loved himself as though he had been her son. The revelation of the nature of the haunting sin, with fellowship in suffering, is found to liberate. The specters seen again by their victim, released from the 'awful privacy of the insane mind,' are seen without fear or wonder. (Grant 386, 387)

“Only when his knowledge of the past is complete. Harry realizes that the years of his passive suffering lead him nowhere and that only
through an act of free choice he will be able to accept the life of suffering that is no more passive”. (Haidar 134) Getting to know the family sin, however, things get clearer. In the case of Harry's father who was guilty of desiring his wife's death; the motive, was highlighted - he was in love with Agatha, it made him guilty of three sins, murder, adultery, because he lusts after another woman, and fornication since there is no love between him and his wife.

This story releases Harry from his terrible sense of guilt. He now feels that his instinct when he had felt like murdering his wife is not something that surfaced from the depths of his own personality but by some hereditary characteristic to which he is not responsible. He has been tormented with the idea which seemed like a dream that he has pushed his wife into the sea. But now he has no difficulty in being convinced that it is not a reality. He says, “Perhaps my life has only been a dream / Dreamt through me by the mind of others. / Perhaps I only dreamt I pushed her”. (105)

This sense of release from guilt makes him understand so many puzzles. He is able to analyze how his unhappy childhood was due to the absence of love between his parents and the domination of his mother over himself; he is able to understand why his father deserted him in childhood.

It is a great thing for him to realize why his mother has always
wished a docile daughter-in-law who wouldn’t deprive her of her son’s love and also why she has been bitter for thirty years towards Agatha who has deprived her of her husband’s affections. Harry realizes that he himself has transferred his animosity from his mother to the girl he has married against her wishes. His own loveless marriage has been a recapitulation of his father’s experience. He has been the true successor of his father. This feeling enables him to be released from inner guilt.

Eliot makes this expiation of guilt and freedom from guilt not only psychological but supernatural. Harry exclaims that he is quite happy and feels that things have come to an end to which Agatha adds that it is also a beginning. He is not able to understand himself but also others. His liberty from sin is not his own but others also partake of it.

Agatha plays the role of a spiritual guardian to Harry and further leads Harry to make a decision in favour of the following the spiritual quest and she prophesies that he has a long journey to make which he also realises is the “only one way out of defilement” (106), which can lead to reconciliation. Harry leaves home and his mother’s death is brought about by his abrupt departure.

Only after Harry leaves, Amy is able to recognize the real past and understand the truth of the ‘present’ she feels that she is “an old woman in a damned house” (115). She has been living a life of pretence, doing things
beyond her means and capacity to keep alive the institution of Wishwood. Now it is too late for her to change; so she has to follow the only path open to her and she goes out to die. And the play ends with Agatha’s words:

And the curse be ended
By intercession
By pilgrimage
By those who depart
In several directions
For their own redemption
And that of the departed -
May they rest in peace. (122)

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. When Amy asks him to stay with his family and not go, he says his family members are fugitives from spiritual realities and therefore he is not safe there. If he stays after having had a vision of the ineffable he might become enmeshed in the death-in – life situation of Wishwood. The furies who pursue him have now become his ‘bright angels’ whom he will follow. The last speech of Harry is an affirmation of the spiritual journey he is about to undertake, the way of the cross:

Why I have this election
I do not understand. It must have been in preparing always
And I see, it was what I always wanted. Strength demanded
That seems too much, is just strength enough given.
I must follow the bright angels. (111)

Harry is aware that he has been chosen or 'elected' by the
providence of God for a special vocation. It is a puzzle to him as to why
God has singled him out. The future is not clear; but it has been preordained
for him and now he sees that it is what he most wanted. He has surrendered
his will to the will of God whole heartedly. He is sure that he will derive
strength from the great task set before him. It is the appearance of the
Eumenides that has made his life purposeful; they will no longer hound
him, but will lead him; they are no longer foul, but bright. He will find in
himself the strength to follow them. They have become his 'bright angels'.

Eliot sees the past and the future as postulates of the present
moment, expressing the deepest nature of the self. In moments of spiritual
crisis, one faces that the past and the future merge into a continuing process
that helps to evaluate the self's identity. A favourite theme with Eliot in his
plays is the burden of the past "If all time is eternally present all time is
unredeemable". (78) All the central figures in Eliot's plays Harry feel the
same way that the past cannot be disowned.

The unseeing aunts and uncles of Eliot's chorus refuse to know what
lies beyond their narrow circle, blindly insisting that the world is what they have always taken it to be. They have to seek knowledge of the sin - in themselves and in their world - that now is fulfilling itself in such monstrous shape. In conscious fellowship with others, enduring sin's consequences that cannot be averted, "They also may sustain hope hereafter to achieve expiation of the curse, resolution of the enchantment under which they suffer". (Grant 387)

The central conception of the play is the flight of a man from his furies or the Eumenides and his progress with the help of the wise counsel of the spiritual guide, Agatha - from knowledge to self knowledge. They have driven him home to obtain the sense that the curse is on his house and not on him alone and they will drive him to expiate the curse by going out into the world performing deeds of goodness and heroism. Harry realizes that he must not flee but face them and he sets out to work out his expiation by diligence and self discipline.

The Eumenides appear as Eumenides only in the stage directions. They do not appear on the stage. They are only referred to as ghosts and spectres. The Eumenides become the ‘objective correlative’ determining Harry’s part in the Monchensey curse, the curse itself. The whole story is the objective correlative intentionally fashioned by Eliot to correspond to the human situation as seen in the Christian doctrine of the fall of Man - that all men are sinners in a world of sin and this sin calls for expiation.
The Eumenides play an important part in the realization of Harry’s self. In Aeschylus it is the Eumenides who change, but in The Family Reunion it is Harry who changes. The story of the House of Atreus, the family of Orestes, apart from having the value of a myth can also stand for a symbol of the idea of a pervasive, inescapable, hereditary evil that corrupts all human society; in Christian parlance it can stand as a symbol for what is known as Original Sin. Harry Monchensey is one who is possessed with a sense of evil and is saved by the acceptance of sin.

Having had a great moment of revelation, when the Eumenides appear to him again, Harry who has changed in his attitude towards them decides to go with them. Amy demands to know where he is going he replies:

Where does one go from a world of insanity?

Somewhere on the other side of despair

To the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation,

A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar,

The heat of the son and the icy vigil,

A care over lives of humble people. (111)

The device of the Eumenides brings out the change in Harry. So long as Harry is unaware of the real significance of the past, he has been pursued by the Furies and has attempted in vain to get rid of them. Only when his
knowledge of the past is complete, his fear is gone and he is ready to take decisions on his own. He chooses to follow the Eumenides. Harry's sense of morality—his ability to bear the responsibilities of the task he has undertaken—is clear from his words to Amy:

It is interesting that though Amy is bitter about Harry's going away she is the one who gives the most plausible interpretation to it that he is going to become a missionary. The sense of guilt is changed into a positive feeling by accepting the supernatural character of the curse. He is able with Agatha's help to recognize the significance of the Eumenides in a moment of illumination when his own and his family past becomes realized in the present.

The most domineering and authoritative role is played by Amy who blinded by pride and selfish which brings about her own nemesis. Her character can be analyzed as a study in self deception. Her family members are not keen to partake of his family reunion. But since it is Amy's birthday and she has invited them it is difficult for them not to be present. "The domineering lady Amy thinks that she can rule over the future also. She has planned that Harry should take charge of Wishwood, marry Mary and settle down as Master of Wishwood - Helen Gardner has aptly said, "Amy having always lived a slave of the future finds the future taken from her; she is left at last alone with the present and 'the clock stops in the dark'." (Gardner 143)
Amy having always lived a slave of the future finds the future taken from her; she is left at last alone with the present and the clock stops in the dark. She has been living a life of pretence, doing things beyond her means and capacity to keep alive the institution of Wishwood. Now it is too late for her to change; so she has to follow the only path open to her and she goes out to die.

Harry feels that he is spiritually related to Agatha, as he learns about Agatha's spiritual love has opposed to Amy's possessive 'love' for his father and he finds that all is not barren in life, that he still has hope of spiritual rebirth as Agatha's spiritual heir, “Only be sure / That I know what I must do, / And that it is the best thing for everybody”. (110)

The same pattern of isolation on the part of the protagonist becomes once again apparent in *The Family Reunion* just as in the previous play, *Murder in the Cathedral*. Isolation is spotlighted against the background of ordinary living, the ineffable depths against the known surfaces. Becket pursues the way of the saint and Harry the way of spiritual reality.

“...The way of self-sacrifice of the spiritually elect fertilizes the lives of ordinary people and makes possible a fruitful communal life.” (Peace 45)

It is pointed out that through the play, *The Family Reunion* Eliot meant to vindicate the Orthodox Christian view of man's sinful condition and the necessity of adopting the Christian way of salvation — Yet the Christian
without stopping to debate whether it might be too far beyond the understanding of his audience; “The sudden solitude discolouring the bone.” (66)

The love that Agatha teaches Harry is of two kinds. The Love of attachment to the people and love of detachment from all created things that leads to divine union. The maxim of St. John of the cross that Becket has followed is once again advocated in this play. Agatha becomes his spiritual mother because even before birth she has been responsible in saving him when the father wanted to kill his mother before Harry was born. This truth about the father’s intended guilt liberates Harry from his sense of guilt. He remarks:

This is the way things happen.

Perhaps my life has only been a dream

Dreamt through me by the mind of others

Agatha replies:

What we have written is not a story of detection

Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.

.................................................... It is possible

You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,

It’s bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame. (105)

Agatha who had been carrying the burden of guilt on behalf of the
family because she alone had understanding of the truth, now relinquishes this burden to Harry, her spiritual child who has grown in his spiritual stature. She along with Harry's father had looked through the little door when the sun shone on the rose-garden. The moment in the rose-garden is a central symbol of Eliot representing the moment of illumination which can be achieved only by ascetic contemplation and denial of the self.

Harry's search for identity is mainly his search for the real past. The point on which the play converges is Harry's discovery of the real past and what it requires of him. In his urge to know the past of which is always present, he even identifies himself with the house:

I am the old house

With the noxious smell and the sorrow before morning,

In which all past is present, all degradation

Is unredeemable. As for what happens -

Of the past you can only see what is past,

Not what is always present (66)

His sense of sin arises out of his responsibility in the unnatural death of his wife—'I pushed her,' he says—and his suffering attached to this sense of sin is aggravated by his knowledge of the unnatural death of his father which is a past incident but remains 'present' in him. To break this chain and to win over suffering, Harry must try to acquire knowledge which is
different from what the common people call fact. It is Agatha, Amy's sister, who discloses the 'real' past to Harry and the deeper organization beneath the surface is exposed. "Agatha recalls a summer day of unusual heat which symbolizes her secret relationship with Harry's father". (Halder 33, 34)

There are hours when there seems to be no past or future,
Only a present moment of pointed light
When you want to burn. When you want to stretch your hand
To the flames. They only come once,
Thank God, that kind (104)

In the opinion of Maud Bodkin:

Harry learns that his sin against the wife he hated was foreshadowed in his father's sin of intention against his mother; that his suffering has its counterpart in that of the woman, his aunt, who loved his father, and had known and loved himself as though he had been her son. The revelation of the nature of the haunting sin, with fellowship in suffering, is found to liberate. The specters seen again by their victim, released from the 'awful privacy of the insane mind,' are seen without fear or wonder. (Grant 386, 387)

"Only when his knowledge of the past is complete. Harry realizes that the years of his passive suffering lead him nowhere and that only
through an act of free choice he will be able to accept the life of suffering that is no more passive”. (Haldar 134) Getting to know the family sin, however, things get clearer. In the case of Harry's father who was guilty of desiring his wife's death; the motive, was highlighted - he was in love with Agatha. It made him guilty of three sins, - murder, adultery, because he lusts after another woman, and fornication since there is no love between him and his wife.

This story releases Harry from his terrible sense of guilt. He now feels that his instinct when he had felt like murdering his wife is not something that surfaced from the depths of his own personality but by some hereditary characteristic to which he is not responsible. He has been tormented with the idea which seemed like a dream that he has pushed his wife into the sea. But now he has no difficulty in being convinced that it is not a reality. He says, “Perhaps my life has only been a dream / Dreamt through me by the mind of others. / Perhaps I only dreamt I pushed her”. (105)

This sense of release from guilt makes him understand so many puzzles. He is able to analyze how his unhappy childhood was due to the absence of love between his parents and the domination of his mother over himself; he is able to understand why his father deserted him in childhood.

It is a great thing for him to realize why his mother has always
wanted a docile daughter-in-law who wouldn’t deprive her of her son’s love and also why she has been bitter for thirty years towards Agatha who has deprived her of her husband’s affections. Harry realizes that he himself has transferred his animosity from his mother to the girl he has married against her wishes. His own loveless marriage has been a recapitulation of his father’s experience. He has been the true successor of his father. This feeling enables him to be released from inner guilt.

Eliot makes this expiation of guilt and freedom from guilt not only psychological but supernatural. Harry exclaims that he is quite happy and feels that things have come to an end to which Agatha adds that it is also a beginning. He is not able to understand himself but also others. His liberty from sin is not his own but others also partake of it.

Agatha plays the role of a spiritual guardian to Harry and further leads Harry to make a decision in favour of the following the spiritual quest and she prophesies that he has a long journey to make which he also realises is the “only one way out of defilement” (106), which can lead to reconciliation. Harry leaves home and his mother’s death is brought about by his abrupt departure.

Only after Harry leaves, Amy is able to recognize the real past and understand the truth of the ‘present’ she feels that she is “an old woman in a damned house” (115). She has been living a life of pretence, doing things
beyond her means and capacity to keep alive the institution of Wishwood.
Now it is too late for her to change; so she has to follow the only path open
to her and she goes out to die. And the play ends with Agatha’s words:

And the curse be ended
By intercession
By pilgrimage
By those who depart
In several directions
For their own redemption
And that of the departed -
May they rest in peace. (122)

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. When Amy asks him to stay with his family and
not go, he says his family members are fugitives from spiritual realities and
therefore he is not safe there. If he stays after having had a vision of the
ineffable he might become enmeshed in the death-in – life situation of
Wishwood. The furies who pursue him have now become his ‘bright
angels’ whom he will follow. The last speech of Harry is an affirmation of
the spiritual journey he is about to undertake, the way of the cross:

Why I have this election
I do not understand. It must have been in preparing always
And I see, it was what I always wanted. Strength demanded
That seems too much, is just strength enough given.
I must follow the bright angels. (111)

Harry is aware that he has been chosen or ‘elected’ by the
providence of God for a special vocation. It is a puzzle to him as to why
God has singled him out. The future is not clear; but it has been preordained
for him and now he sees that it is what he most wanted. He has surrendered
his will to the will of God whole heartedly. He is sure that he will derive
strength from the great task set before him. It is the appearance of the
Eumenides that has made his life purposeful; they will no longer hound
him, but will lead him; they are no longer foul, but bright. He will find in
himself the strength to follow them. They have become his ‘bright angels’.

Eliot sees the past and the future as postulates of the present
moment, expressing the deepest nature of the self. In moments of spiritual
crisis, one faces that the past and the future merge into a continuing process
that helps to evaluate the self’s identity. A favourite theme with Eliot in his
plays is the burden of the past “If all time is eternally present all time is
unredeemable”. (78) All the central figures in Eliot’s plays Harry feel the
same way that the past cannot be disowned.

The unseeing aunts and uncles of Eliot’s chorus refuse to know what
lies beyond their narrow circle, blindly insisting that the world is what they have always taken it to be. They have to seek knowledge of the sin - in themselves and in their world - that now is fulfilling itself in such monstrous shape. In conscious fellowship with others, enduring sin's consequences that cannot be averted, "They also may sustain hope hereafter to achieve expiation of the curse, resolution of the enchantment under which they suffer". (Grant 387)

The central conception of the play is the flight of a man from his furies or the Eumenides and his progress with the help of the wise counsel of the spiritual guide, Agatha – from knowledge to self knowledge. They have driven him home to obtain the sense that the curse is on his house and not on him alone and they will drive him to expiate the curse by going out into the world performing deeds of goodness and heroism. Harry realizes that he must not flee but face them and he sets out to work out his expiation by diligence and self discipline.

The Eumenides appear as Eumenides only in the stage directions. They do not appear on the stage. They are only referred to as ghosts and spectres. The Eumenides become the 'objective correlative' determining Harry's part in the Monchensey curse, the curse itself. The whole story is the objective correlative intentionally fashioned by Eliot to correspond to the human situation as seen in the Christian doctrine of the fall of Man - that all men are sinners in a world of sin and this sin calls for expiation.
The Eumenides play an important part in the realization of Harry’s self. In Aeschylus it is the Eumenides who change, but in The Family Reunion it is Harry who changes. The story of the House of Atreus, the family of Orestes, apart from having the value of a myth can also stand for a symbol of the idea of a pervasive, inescapable, hereditary evil that corrupts all human society; in Christian parlance it can stand as a symbol for what is known as Original Sin. Harry Monchensey is one who is possessed with a sense of evil and is saved by the acceptance of sin.

Having had a great moment of revelation, when the Eumenides appear to him again, Harry who has changed in his attitude towards them decides to go with them. Amy demands to know where he is going he replies:

Where does one go from a world of insanity?

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A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar,

The heat of the son and the icy vigil,

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“The way of self-sacrifice of the spiritually elect fertilizes the lives of ordinary people and makes possible a fruitful communal life.” (Peace 45) It is pointed out that through the play, The Family Reunion Eliot meant to vindicate the Orthodox Christian view of man’s sinful condition and the necessity of adopting the Christian way of salvation – Yet the Christian
terms are scrupulously avoided. Not only did Eliot suppress all verbal echoes to the Christian purpose of the play but he also suppressed clues to his Aeschylean original.

Disorder enters the soul of man when he becomes a victim of sin. In order to redeem man Christ has become the atonement which has been offered to all men who come to him. He realises that his broken relationship with God could be set right by Christ’s atonement. Harry makes a choice to yield his will to the will of God. Being an elect of God he soars above the others in his spirituality and the other characters of the play are seen in relation to Harry and in their degree of awareness to his calling and election. Harry attains self-knowledge and ultimate union with God.

The sense of isolation on the part of Harry, the need to face the past and strip oneself of false identities, accepting the past, coming to terms with the idea of sin and redemption are focused in the plays. The character of Harry proves that the kind of one’s self determines one’s life happiness or otherwise one’s life becomes hell. It is must aptly said that the most used words in hell is ‘I’. Harry is initially self-centered and self-preoccupied although, a religious person. His self-realization comes through self-surrender. He realises his self when he realises Him, and he realises his self when he surrenders to Him.

Thus Eliot portrays the Christian conception of human freedom. The
central character recognizes the divine necessity; 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 election of Harry. He attains self-knowledge and ultimate union with God. He reiterates that this world is a fallen world and man is a fallen creature. In the character of Harry he reveals that man is not only doomed to sin, but is also capable of salvation.

The plot of The Cocktail Party not only concerns domestic relationship but also brings out profound spiritual meaning. The play The Cocktail party eleven years after The Family Reunion, does not stop with the portrayal of negative path of detachment as seen in Harry and Becket; it also includes the Affirmative path of human relationships. Celia Coplestone takes the first path, and the Chamberlaynes the second. Celia the heroine chooses the way of the Saint like Harry and Becket. Tasting the cup of patience she has to seek atonement through suffering and action. She becomes a Christian mystic entering the realms of mystical union, giving up the love of created beings as explicated in St. John of the cross. The other two characters with whom Celia has been intimate Edward and Lavinia Chamberlayne cannot be partakers of her kind of mystical experience.

Eliot adopts for his play the mythical framework of Euripides play
Alcestis. **The Cocktail Party**, is “a versified drawing room comedy with its poetic symbols simultaneously of middle-class banter, a theme of spiritual quest.” (Smith 214) The play is concerned not only with the salvation of individuals but also of a group of people. The word salvation could be replaced by cure which is more appropriate because “The cure of the delusions and dishonesties of Edward and Lavinia is a cure within society”. (William, 192) Edward, Lavinia and Celia are all isolated. They are struggling to understand themselves and each other. Their alienation, unlike Harry’s is not from the world, but again from themselves and each other. It is the Guardians, Sir. Henry, Julia and Alex who initiate Celia and the Chamberlaynes into self-realization and help them to follow vocations according to their potentialities. Celia, who had an affair with Edward Chamberlayne breaks off, becomes a missionary and is finally crucified by the natives of a remote island.

In the play's centre are four people Edward, Lavinia, Peter and Celia whose lives have become entangled. Edward, a middle ageing barrister, has for some time been in love with Celia; His wife Lavinia has just left him. Peter, his friend, is also in love with Celia; Celia, loves Edward; Lavinia, loves Peter but knows herself to be unloved by him. Around this central group, Julia, Alex, and a third figure, unidentified at first, who is a well-known psychiatrist, Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, and his purpose is to set all the frustrated lives in order. In the first act the pattern of personal
relationships unfolds itself. In the second, Lavinia returns to a husband who surprisingly wants to take her back, although he has not yet learned to love her; and Celia says good-bye to a lover whom she had thought to marry but has now mysteriously outgrown. In the third act the scene shifts to Sir Henry's consulting-room. The psychiatrist, whom both Edward and Lavinia have been persuaded to see, neither of them knowing that he is their unidentified friend of the Cocktail Party, confronts husband and wife with each other and sends them back, to their world of lunacy, violence, stupidity, greed ... a good life.

Eliot has been always concerned with the conception of the saint. In this play along with the emergence of a new saint in Celia he has also brought in the story of marriage and raised the pattern of rebirth to a higher level. Eliot has skillfully tried to avoid religious terminology though the virtues that the Chamberlaynes ought to practice a spiritual discipline.

The play is a masterpiece of theatrical contrivance. Celia, already lives the experience of The Four Quartets. Celia's position is different, and unique. When compared with the other characters of the play. She has a sense of sin. To expiate the sin pointed out to her, she accepts the way that she is assigned to a 'sanatorium' of which no one can foresee. Celia, chooses the path of devotion and dedication, becomes a nurse and a nun, and perishes agonizingly amongst savages. Her tormenters gloat over her sufferings at the end.
Celia Coplestone is from a wealthy family, which has lost its wealth in misfortune. She shares a flat in London with her cousin. She establishes an illicit relationship with Edward Chamberlayne, a lawyer. He is a married man who has no issues. His married life with Lavinia of five years proves to be unsuccessful. At the beginning of the play, she is excited to be involved in this adulterous relationship with Edward. The first scene takes place in the drawing room of the Chamberlayne's London flat.

Edward Chamberlayne is baffled because Lavinia has left abruptly just before a cocktail Party is going to take place. All the guests have arrived - Peter Celia and three other people of whom Edward knows only two. For both Celia and Peter love does not mean marriage and settlement; it means, on the other hand, a life of personal emotion that has nothing to do with the outer life of material concern. For both of them, love implies certain moments of intensity which both the lover and the beloved share, unaware of themselves, some indefinable experience of communion.

Edward Chamberlayne, a progressive barrister is estranged from his wife Lavinia, a highly sociable person, very practical and interested in plays and play acting. She is in love with Peter Quilpe a young film-writer. Peter is in love with Celia who is interested in art and writes poetry; she is also Edward's mistress. Edward in truth does not love anybody and nobody seems to love Lavinia.
The guests who have turned up for the party are Julia, Celia, Peter, Alex and an Unidentified Guest. Edward makes the people believe that Lavinia has gone to visit her aunt who is ill. Leaving Edward and the Unidentified Guest to their discussion, the guests depart. Edward now confides his troubles about his wife’s sudden departure, sets Edward on the path of self-exploration under the guidance of the Unidentified Guest. In reality, the Unidentified Guest is Sir Harcourt Henry Reilly, a professional psychiatrist.

After the departure of the guests Edward and the Unidentified Guest are left alone. Edward confides to the Guest and reveals the truth about Lavinia suddenly disappearing without giving reasons for her going away. The Unidentified Guest, who is actually Sir Harcourt Reiley suggests he should welcome his wife’s departure and find life more comfortable without her. But Edward rejects it saying that her sudden disappearance would bring disgrace to his name in the society. Reiley remarks that such sudden shocks are necessary in people’s live to make them realize what they truly are.

Driven to despair, Edward is unable to give valid reason for wanting his wife back, he only knows that he needs her. He exclaims,

And yet wants her back
And I must get her back, to find out what has happened
During the five years that we’ve been married.

I must find out who she is, to find out who I am. (136)

In the words of D.E. Jones, “Edward begins to understand how much he has depended on her, not just in the superficial sense, but in the sense that his existence was bound up with hers. In a way, her presence has concealed him from himself and now he is brought hard against his own deficiency of being. Without her he is nothing.” (134) Thus he becomes aware that unless he knows his wife, he cannot understand himself.

After Sir Henry leaves, Peter Quilpe comes back and confesses to Edward his love for Celia which is not reciprocated, not knowing that she is Edward’s mistress. In the next scene Celia, who thinks that her relationship with Edward may become stronger with the desertion of Lavinia, is shocked at Edward’s reaction. When she asks him “Doesn’t that settle all our difficulties?”. (53) Celia does not realize that Edward is already changed. To her shock, Edward replies “It has only brought to light the real difficulties” (53) and adds that he wants his wife back. She discovers that his love was not genuine and he is not prepared to make any sacrifice. He wants Lavinia back since he cannot go through the humiliation of divorce, though he maintains that he still loves Celia.

All her dreams are shattered when Edward abandons her infavour of his wife. This drives her to utter humiliation. She wants the dream to be better as it seems like a reality. She continues,
And if this reality, it is very like a dream.

Perhaps it was I who betrayed my own dream

All the while; and to find I wanted

This world as well as that ... well, it's humiliating (151).

When Edward tells her that there is nothing for her to feel humiliated, Celia is frustrated and utters “Humiliation - it’s something I’ve done to myself. / I am not sure even that you seem real enough to humiliate me.” (152)

Celia is keen on knowing the truth how Edward has been persuaded to this state. He is not sure he was persuaded. He asserts he has made his own decision. To her great disappointment, she finds that Edward is determined to have Lavinia back. She complains that he has taken her only as a ‘passing diversion’.

I suppose that most women

Would feel degraded to find that a man

With whom they thought they had shared something wonderful

Had taken them only as a passing diversion. (152)

In turn, Edward retaliates and charges her for flirting with Peter Quilpe. Celia is enraged at this accusation. She frankly declares that she never had any love for Peter and it is only Edward whom she ardently
loves. Their quarrel then takes a serious turn. Edward begins to feel the presence of a stronger ‘self’. The fact is the since that morning he has achieved a truer understanding of his own self:

The one thing of which I am relatively certain
Is, that only since this morning
I have met myself as a middle-aged man
Beginning to know what it is to feel old. (66)

Celia feels humiliated to find that the man, with whom she thought she had shared something wonderful, had taken her only as a passing diversion. There on Edward confesses that he has never been in love with anyone but Celia, and that he cannot yet take it as permanent. He wants to get back Lavinia not because he loves her but because he is used to her, and is lacking in the courage to face public opinion. Owing to lack of courage he is unable to choose and finds himself in a predetermined groove. He has, yet, the torturing sense of self awareness which compels him to criticize himself ruthlessly. He reduces himself to a feeble creature, unable to make his own choice:

I see that my life was determined long ago
And that the struggle escape from it
Is only a make-believe, a pretence
That what is, is not, or could be changed (153)
Celia exclaims that the change in Edward has actually served to effect a change in her. Now she is beginning to search for something which will give meaning to her life. Edward tells her that she is the only person he has ever loved but it is only a past experience. He rather advises Celia to choose a partner nearer her own age. In his words,

If I have ever been in love – and I think that I have-
I have never been in love with anyone but you,
And perhaps I still am. But this can’t go on.
It never could have been a permanent thing:
You should have a man nearer your own age. (152)

D.E. Jones concludes, “The emergence of the new Edward makes her understand that the unreality of their love was partly due to her having made him a substitute for a very different sort of lover. In a sense, she has created a god in man’s image and the real man could never have lived up to it” (138), which is illustrated by Celia’s own words.

To cite her words,

I see you as a person whom I never saw before.
The man I saw before, he was only a projection -
I see that now – of something that I wanted –
No, not wanted – something I aspired to –
Something that I desperately wanted to exist. (154)
Edward and Celia experience a sense of *same isolation* and the realization of this gives them a certain amount of shared consciousness so that they can also enter into a spiritual existence which they discover through the knowledge of what they are and what they want. Edward perceives a continuity of self through participation in the social whirl and by recognizing his own mediocrity. To quote,

The self that can say 'I want this – or want that' –

The self that wills – he is a feeble creature;

He has to come to terms in the end

With the obstinate, the tougher self; who does not speak,

Who never talks, who cannot argue;

And who in some men may be the guardian-

But in men like me, the dull, the implacable,

The indomitable spirit of mediocrity.

The willing self can contrive the disaster

Of this unwilling partnership – but can only flourish

In submission to the rule of the stronger partner. (153, 154)

These words enable Celia to understand him better than before.

Edward’s confession that he must submit himself to the dull and dominating mediocrity of his nature makes Celia have a new vision of him in which she sees him as a mummy being unwrapped whose voice becomes a noise of an insect.
I looked at your face: and I thought that I knew
And looked every contour; and as I looked
It withered, as if I had unwrapped a mummy.
I listened to your voice, that had always thrilled me,
And it became another voice - no, not a voice:
What I heard was only the noise of an insect,
Dry, endless, meaningless, inhuman -
You might have made it by scraping your legs together -
Or however grasshoppers do it. (154)

The following words of Celia highlight her traumatic feelings of agony, frustration and disappointment.

[...] I looked,
And listened for your heart, your blood;
And saw only a beetle the size of a man
With nothing more inside it than what comes out
When you tread on a beetle. (154)

In reply to her, Edward asks her to tread on him, if she likes. Celia says,

No I won't tread on you
That is not what you are. It is only what was left.
Of what I had thought you were. I see another person,
I see you as a person whom I never saw before.
The man I saw before, he was only a projection –
I see that now – of something I aspired to –
Something that I desperately wanted to exist.

It must happen somewhere – but what, and where is it? (154)

Celia realizes that it has been her fault to have idealized him and thought of him as a paragon she has been in search of. The dehumanized image of Edward is not what he is. The man she has been before is the projection of her desire for transcendent love. In seeing him again as a “person”, Celia sees him as he is in himself, as “another person”. And she begins to understand herself and blames herself for making use of him, for her selfishness. She asks for his forgiveness and she leaves having achieved a measure of spiritual enlightenment and understanding. “We presently realize that here is a soul capable of subsisting on the glaciers of the spiritual life. Though she does not yet know it herself, she is a contemplative. At a loss to explain her own reaction at his desire to have Lavinia back - she is humiliated but surprised at her capacity to survive humiliation - she is aware of a state of mind for which Edward was not mainly responsible.” (Kenner 163) Suddenly the mistake and immorality of the whole affair dawns on Celia and she decides to break her emotional ties with him.

The next afternoon Sir Henry visits Edward, without letting out his
identity, only to assure him of Lavinia’s return. He informs that Lavinia would come back later in the day and he must be prepared to receive her as a stranger to try to begin their married life afresh. Several weeks later the Chamberlaynes visit Sir Henry Harcourt Reilly who diagnoses their problem and asks them “to make the best of a bad job”. (182). Celia also visits Sir Henry and wants to atone for her sin and he helps her to take the difficult path of atonement. Sir Henry, Julia and Alex are the guardian angels who help the main characters to stir clear of greater problems. Edward and Lavinia make adjustments and live together;

Peter Quilpe goes to America and Celia goes as a missionary to a remote place. In the last scene the play ends with a second cocktail party when the characters are shocked that Celia has died a martyr in Kinkanja. Reilly assures Edward and Lavinia who feel guilty that it was not their fault and that Celia was destined for a greater calling. Peter is shattered to hear of Celia’s death but he is encouraged and the guardians take him to attend another party.

Just as Celia discovered that Edward is only human and she herself had to change her course of life to understand herself, Edward also diagnoses his own sickness as a spiritual death. He sees his problem in isolation. Reilly’s task is to make him see that it is part of a total situation:

But before I treat a patient like yourself
I need to know a great deal more about him,
Than the patient himself can always tell me.
Indeed, it is often the case that my patients
Are only pieces of a total situation
Which I have to explore. (115)

Reilly brings him face to face with Lavinia to the consternation of
the husband and wife, strips them of their last pretences, and proceeds to
show them how much they have in common, “The same isolation. / A man
who finds himself incapable of loving / And a women who finds that no
man can love her”. (124)

He adds,

You could accuse each other of your own faults,
And so could avoid understanding each other.
Now, you have only to reverse the propositions
And put them together. (125)

Sir Henry, Julia and Alex are not only guardian angels but are
similar. The Guardians are not only guardian-angels in the Christian
parlance but are similar to the Guardians in Plato’s Republic. They are
especially so in the way they play their social role in the community of
Christians as expounded in Eliots’ The Idea of a Christian Society. The
Guardians help the characters straighten up their mixed-up lives. Sir, Henry
is the captain of the three. He plays the dual role of fool and doctor. He who has a serious role to play later is presented, in Act I, full of nonsense and frivolity, singing the song of the ‘One Eyed Riley’. Sir. Henry tells Edward:

Most of the time we take ourselves for granted,
As we have to, and live on a little knowledge
About ourselves as we were. Who are you now?
You don’t know any more than I do,
But rather less. (135)

Sir Henry makes Edward realize that he is in need of Lavinia. But Lavinia having met Sir Henry earlier and having been advised to go away appears to be a different person on her return. She tells Edward he should have told the truth to the guests at the party that she had gone away and then she says, “I shall always tell the truth now / We have wasted such a lot of time in lying”. (164)

Edward though has not started looking at things with a different outlook, he is still the same. He had married Lavinia because others had told him that he was in love with Lavinia and that they were well-suited. Now again after her return he gets into a kind of cocoon. He feels that he is alone. He says “One is always alone”. (169) and Lavinia persuades him to meet a doctor and he agrees on condition that he will go to a doctor of his
own choice.

In Sir Henry's consulting room Edward confesses to him that inspite of their incompatibility Lavnia's presence is indispensable for him:

Without her, it was vacancy
When I thought she had left me, I began to dissolve
To cease to exist. That was what she had done to me:
I cannot live with her—that is now intolerable;
I cannot live with her, for she had made me incapable of having any existence of my own. (175)

Lavinia also comes to meet Sir Henry and both husband and wife begin to enumerate the faults of each other. Sir Henry further encourages them to explore their selves and realize the truth of their very existence and understand in what kind of self deception they were. He says that they are not the type of people whom he will send to the sanatorium for treatment. There after Sir Henry dismisses them with his final diagnosis and prescription:

And now you begin to see, I hope
How much you have in common. The same isolation.
A man who finds himself incapable of loving
And a woman who finds that no man can love her. (182)

Sir Henry points out they have been busy accusing each other and
hence the opportunity for mutual understanding had been diminished. But now he suggests that they both could reverse the order; they can look at their own faults which will result in understanding the problem of the partner. While Lavinia wonders how they could continue together Edward is quick to catch the point what Sir. Henry is driving at. He says ‘Lavinia, we must make the best of a bad job’. He reiterates that in life most people have to make the best of a bad job and it is only the saints who don’t do it, but rather go to the Sanatorium. He asks the couple to start a fresh and try to learn to bear the burden of one’s conscience rather than try to justify one’s conscience. He wants them to go in peace. He utters the words, “work out your salvation with diligence”, (182) St. Paul has also said that one should work out one’s own Salvation with fear and trembling.

Edward and Lavinia choose to ‘make the best of a bad job’ – to accept their inadequacies, which counterbalance one another. Sir Henry sends them away with the admonition “Go in peace. And work your salvation with diligence.” (128) Reilly, the psychiatrist, the modern counterpart of the Father Confessor, offers Chamberlaynes, a choice. They choose ordinary humdrum life which alone is possible in the world. They make the best of a bad bargain. It is a world of “lunacy, violence, stupidity, greed” (140), and in such a world, the life of Chamberlaynes has chosen is a good life.

On the other hand Celia who has been living in self-deception is
rudely shocked into reality when Edward does not want to sacrifice his reputation for her sake. But she is not bitter though she has been humiliated. She realizes that there is something special which is going to happen to her. She feels guilty that she has been living in sin and it is once again Sir Henry who enables her to choose her destiny.

Celia Coplestone's hopes have been shattered, when she hears that Edward is interested in having his wife back. She is also confronted with the necessity of making a choice. Her encounter with the doctor is the turning point in her life. In The Cocktail Party, the most notable thing is the increased flexibility of the verse, which can move easily from the small-talk of the opening of the play to the impassioned insight of Celia in the scene in the consulting room. As C.L. Barber analyses, the expression of Celia's plight in Act II opens up possibilities of definition and as Reilly offers a redefinition of it, "there is turning of the tables which makes way for fulfillment." (238)

Reilly's greatest success in this play is Celia. He questions her about two things which affect her. Celia confides in him that she suffers from a sense of loneliness and says "No. I mean that what has happened has made me aware. That I've always been alone. That one always is alone." (133) and adds that it is no longer worthwhile for her to speak to anyone. According to Michael Grant "The scene in which she bares her spiritual misgivings and strivings in the Harley Street consulting room is superbly
charged with energy” (605). Celia’s meeting with Reilly leads her to a state of revelation. Truths of life are unraveled. To her, the whole world appears to be a delusion - something unreal torments her. As D.E. Jones mentions:

The first symptom of her illness in this ‘awareness of solitude’.
The second symptom is ‘a sense of sin’ which is strong in her, despite the fact that she has ‘always been taught to disbelieve in sin’. But the sense of sin that oppresses her is not ‘sin in the ordinary sense […] being immoral’; it goes further than the sense of personal wrong doing. (188)

Celia articulates her sense of sin in the consulting-room which is also confessional, a conventional consciousness of immorality, it is a sense, of emptiness, of failure. She realizes the need to atone.

Celia’s destiny is a painful fulfillment of the statement of Harry in The Family Reunion that the recognition of reality of sin is a new life. Through disillusionment with human love, discovery of solitude, and a recognition of sin, Celia attains the knowledge of the void at the heart of all human relations and understands the need for atonement. She feels that it is wicked to hurt others.

Having been brought up in a conventional family, Celia has been taught to disbelieve in sin. From their point of view, wrong has been considered to be a bad conduct or psychological deficiency. But now her
views begin to change. Thinking about her past life, she realizes that it is all a mistake on her part”.

I can see, it was all a mistake.

But I don’t see why mistakes should make one feel sinful!

And yet I can’t find any other word for it.

It must be some kind of hallucination;

Yet at the same time, I’m frightened by the fear

That it is more real than anything I believed in (188)

Celia tells Sir Henry that she cannot get rid of the emptiness and failure towards someone or something outside herself. She feels that the only way to make compensation for the sin is ‘atonement’. In her words,

It’s not the feeling of anything I’ve ever done,

Which I might get away from, or of anything in me

I could grid rid of – but of emptiness, of failure

Towards someone, or something, outside of myself;

And I feel must [...] atone – is that the world?” (188)

Delving deep into her relationship with Edward, Celia discovers that in reality they have been only strangers and have made use of each for selfish purposes. She continues:

That’s horrible. Can we only love

Something created by our own imagination?
Are we all in fact unloving and unlovable?

Then one is alone, and if one is alone

Then lover and beloved are equally unreal

And the dreamer is no more real than his dreams. (188)

She confesses her disappointment with Edward in a very metaphorical language:

Like a child who has wandered into a forest

Playing with an imaginary playmate

And suddenly discovers he is only a child

Lost in a forest, wanting to go home. (188)

Reilly suggests that she can escape from the forest of insecurity with the help of compassion. Celia replies that if she tries to find a way out of the forest, she will be left with the "inconsolable memory of the treasure" (138) for which she goes into the forest to find "And never found, and which was not there / and perhaps is not anywhere? But if not anywhere" (138). She feels that she will be haunted by the past memories of her relationship with Edward. Her 'illness' can be cured, but the choice lies on her part.

In response to her question, "Why do I feel guilty at not having found it?" (138) Reilly convinces her that if she remains long in the state of frustration it will turn to be a mere deception. The following lines reveal
the desperate and pathetic state of Celia.

It’s not that I’m afraid of being hurt again:
Nothing again can either hurt or heal.
I have thought at moments that the ecstasy is real.
Although those who experience it may have no reality. (189)

To Celia, everything that happened is like a dream. It is a dream in
which one is exalted by ‘intensity of loving in the spirit’. It is indeed a
‘vibration of delight’ without desire that is fulfilled in the delight of love.
Further she emphasizes that:

A state one does not know
When awake. But what, or whom I love,
Or what in me was loving, I do now know,
And if that is all meaningless, I want to be cured
Of a craving for something I cannot find
And of the shame of never finding it. (189)

The above lines recapture the frustration, dejection and the yearning
of Celia. Her failure of love, unfulfilled desires, her sense of defeat and
hopelessness, her fear of her future gradually lead her into spiritual
enlightenment.

Reilly points out that the cure for her feeling of loss and failure lie in
her own decision. He offers two ways toward a cure. One is simply to teach
her to accept ‘the human condition’, to which some have gone as far as she has succeeded in returning. Such people may continue to cherish the memory of the dream they have had, but they will not feel sorry for having lost that vision. They go on living strictly according to the common routine and do not expect anything. They become tolerant to themselves and others by ‘giving and taking’:

Maintain themselves by the common routine,
Learn to avoid excessive expectation,
Become tolerant of themselves and others,
Giving and taking, in the usual actions
What there is to give and take? They do not repine;
Are content with the morning that separates
And with the evening that brings together
For casual talk before the fire
Two people who know they do not understand each other,
Breeding children whom they do not understand
And who will never understand them. (189)

According to Reilly, this life may appear to be good but one will not know how good it is, till one reaches the end. One may be contended with such a life. This life will be like a book once read and lost. It is a good life in a world full of madness, violence, stupidity and greed. To cite:
It is a good life. Though you will not know how good
Till you come to the end. But you will want nothing else,
And the other life will be only like a book
You have read once, and lost. In a world of lunacy,
Violence, stupidity, greed […] it is a good life (190)

Celia rejects the idea of getting married and breeding children
without any understanding with the partner. She adds that she cannot give
her love to anyone and considers it as dishonest if she were to do so:

In fact, I think it would really be dishonest
For me, now, to try to make a life with anybody!
I couldn’t give anyone the kind of love –
I wish I could – which belongs to that life.
Oh, I’m afraid this sounds like raving!
Or just cantankerous […] still,
If there’s no other way […] then I feel just hopeless (190)

The second way that Sir Harcourt offers is noteworthy. The path of
life which he prescribes appears familiar because she and everybody has
seen it and illustrated in their lives. Further, he adds the other way is more
heroic for it entails a continuing struggle with the self. This is totally
unfamiliar and it can be accepted only by those who have faith. But it
requires great courage. The journey will be terrifying. But the way leads to
the possession of that dream which she has been looking for in the wrong place.

There is another way, if you have the courage,

The first I could describe in familiar terms

Because you have seen it, as we all have seen it,

Illustrated, more or less, in lives of those about us.

The second is unknown, and so requires faith –

The kind of faith that issues from despair.

The destination cannot be described;

You will know very little until you get there;

You will journey blind. But the way leads towards possession

Of what you have sought for in the wrong place. (190)

Having distinguished as far as possible between the ways, the ordinary man’s way and saint’s way, Reilly offers her choice, and in order not to influence the choice he insists that “Neither way is better. Both ways are necessary”. (191) Between them, society is renewed physically and spiritually. Both ways are valid spiritually in that they

[... ] avoid the final desolation

Of solitude in the phantasmal world

Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires. (191)

Sir Henry replies that compassion is a clue to find one’s way out of
the forest. Celia desires to be cured and Sir Henry tells her that she can choose either of the two ways open before her to be cured. One is a good life which is mundane. Most people have had a vision or an encounter with reality but they return to the humdrum of life and they do not regret their decision. They are tolerant and content like people entering the state of marriage, one of convenience without mutual understanding and bringing children into the world who do not understand their parents either.

Two people who know they do not understand each other,
Breeding children who they do not understand
And who will never understand them. (190)

So Celia chooses the other way, and her choice is important, because it indicates a higher spiritual level, and it has the power to influence the lives of others. For this reason, her choice is irrevocable and her decision irreversible. Ultimately Celia dies a martyr. Her death brings peace, harmony and unity in the life of the Chamberlaynes and their friends.

Sir Henry sends her to the sanatorium. He is very particular about those he sends there, because those who go there do not come back. Celia is prepared to go willingly. He thus motivates Celia to pursue the path she has chosen with faith, courage and determination. “Go in peace, my daughter / Workout your salvation with diligence.” (192) The journey of Celia is similar to the pilgrimage that Harry Monchensey has undertaken in The
Elder Statesman. Celia’s choice constitutes a life of potential sainthood though she does not comprehend it entirely. “The path chosen by Celia and the Chamberlaynes seem to be diverging widely, but in the Third Act their choices are seen to be different parts of a single pattern. Celia’s choice has led to crucifixion: the Chamberlayne’s choice has led to party at which the news of her death reaches them”. (Jones 57)

The ordinary way is no longer possible for Celia. So she chooses the second way, which leads to painful death. Being caught between physical desire and spiritual awakening, Celia struggles and ultimately emerges victorious. She says that she does not know why she has chosen it but realizes the important factor: it is her decision. Reilly assures her that she has done it for “the best reason”. (190) In the words of Rao, “What is the absorbing interest in The Cocktail Party is Reilly’s insistence upon the two ways: the common routine and the way of illumination. This opens a new possibility relating to the ‘transvaluation and transformation’ of the ordinary, in thematic and dramatic terms. Celia clings to her vision, rejects the ‘good life’, and chooses a pilgrimage not varied from Harry’s”. (58)

Sir Henry sends her to the Special Sanatorium, which is reserved for those who, by suffering greatly themselves, can teach others that without suffering there is neither salvation nor significance. Celia is on the threshold of the intolerable discovery - that only sanctity makes sense. She does not even know where she is going but supported by:
The faith that issues from despair:

The destination cannot be described;

You will know very little until you get there;

You will journey blind. But the way leads towards possession

Of what you have sought for in the wrong place.

For Celia, who is pre-eminently a lover, there can be no

turning back.

I couldn't give anyone the kind of love -

I wish I could! - which belongs to that life. (190)

She boldly ventures out. Celia joins a nursing organization and is
directed to go to Kinkanja, where there are various epidemics. The island is
inhabited by the so called ‘heathen’ and christian natives whose different
cultures have led to friction and civil war. The hostilities have resulted in
murder and cannibalism, and amongst the christian victims is Celia
Coplestone. In the words of F.O. Matthiessen, “The two movements in the
play have crossed: Edward and Lavinia have found their way to humanity;
Celia has found her way to divinity”. (209) Both Lavinia and Edward feel
guilty and consider themselves responsible for her untimely death.

However, Sir Harcourt assures Chamberlaynes that no one is responsible
for her death. It was her ‘choice’ which led to this gruesome death:

Because it was for her to choose the way of the

To lead to death, and, without knowing the end
Yet choose the form of death. We know the death she chose.
I did not know that she would die in this way;
She did not know. So all that I could do
Was to direct her in the way of preparation.
That way, which she accepted, led to this death.
And if that is not happy death, what death is happy? (209)

Alex and Julia are able to foresee the difficulties and exhibit fears of the dangers which she may encounter in her path. Julia’s anxiety is revealed in the following words:

She is too humble. She will pass between the scolding hills.
Through the valley of derision, like a child sent on a errand
In eagerness and patience. Yet she must suffer.
Alex. Pray for Celia’s protection.
Alex. The words for those who go upon a journey.

Reilly. Protector of travelers

Bless the road

Alex. Watch over her in the desert.
Watch over her in the mountain.
Watch over her in the labyrinth.
Watch over her in the quicksand.

Julia. Protect her from the Voices.

Protect her from the Visions.
Protect her in the tumult

Protect her in the silence. (193)

The Guardians have helped both the parties as D.E. Jones observes that the departure and return of Lavinia seems to have been the part of a conspiracy launched by Sir. Henry, Julia and Alex to bring about reconciliation between Edward and Lavinia. Sir. Henry had been counseling Lavinina for a short period before her going away. Now Alex persuades and tricks Edward into meeting Sir. Henry, whom Edward recognizes as the unidentified guest. Sir. Henry allows Edward and Lavinia to confront each other in his presence and persuades them to come to a compromise.

Two years have lapsed when another cocktail party is about to commence at the Chamberlaynes who are living together amicably. The same group of people drop in though uninvited. But Celia is missing. Alex informs the group that Celia had enrolled herself in an auster e nursing order and had taken up an assignment in a remote country called Kinkanja. She has been stationed at a christianized village. In a time of pestilence and during an insurrection by the heathens, who were angry with the christian natives for eating their sacred monkeys Celia was supposed to have been crucified near an ant-hill and only traces of her body were found. After a short while of astounded silence, Sir. Henry says that he did foresee that Celia would die a violent death. The play ends with the visitors leaving and Edward and Lavinia are left behind alone, waiting for the party to begin.
To Peter who has arrived from Hollywood, where he has made good as a script writer, and eager to claim Celia as the film actress whom he believes her to be. Alex explains that he cannot have Celia – because Celia is dead. She has joined a nursing order of nuns and has been crucified by natives in a village which Alex had visited. He had seen her body decomposed and devoured by ants. Sir Henry explains why Celia's death has been a happy one.

The play ends with a second party balancing the one with which it opens. Alex launches into a ludicrous account of the heathen natives. In the course of conversation. Peter expresses his concern for Celia.

But there’s someone I wanted to ask about,
Who did really want to get into films,
And I always thought she could make a success of it
If she only got the chance. It’s Celia Coplestone. (204)
The suspense about the death of Celia is brought out dramatically.

Julia. You can tell them now, Alex

Lavinia What does Julia mean?
Alex I was about to speak of her
When you came in, Peter, I’m afraid you can’t have Celia.

Peter Oh! Is she married?
Alex Not married, but dead.
Lavinia Celia?

Alex Dead

Peter Dead, that knocks the bottom out of it.

Edward. Celia dead. (205)

The revelation about Celia's death shatters Peter completely. He realizes that the two years he spent away from Celia and lost in his world of film as a waste. Lavinia consoles by telling him to regard Celia's death not as an end but as a beginning, as echoed by Edward. Peter, who is in love with Celia, changes his life, on hearing about Celia's sacrifice. "That I've only been interested in myself: And that isn't good enough for Celia". (206)

Lavinia notices that Reilly's face 'showed no surprise or horror', when he heard of Celia's death. Reilly replies that at the time of the first cocktail party he had a vision of the death that awaited Celia. "The revelation by Reilly that Celia's death came to him as no surprise, once more proves that he is not merely presiding over the play, but playing a role in other people's lives". (Walter Stein 175) Reilly together with Alex and Julia, is dedicated to the regeneration of the lives of men.

Lavinia and Edward express their feelings of guilt about Celia's death, and Reilly comforts them by saying:

You blame yourselves, and because you blame yourselves

You think her life was wasted. It was triumphant.
But I am no more responsible for the triumph –
And Just as responsible for her death as you are. (210)

In reporting her death, Reilly calls it ‘a happy death’. “She paid the highest price in suffering. That is part of the design”. (210)

Commenting on Celia’s death, D.E. Jones remarks. “Celia has set a standard by which others will try to live. She has also borne witness to a deeper reality than that of ordinary life. The witness of her suffering is necessary because of the sin of the world, just as Becket was, and in their way the Chamberlaynes acknowledge that the blood of the martyrs and the agony of the saints is upon their heads echoing the women of Canterbury.

Edward suggests, “if this was right - if this was right for Celia / There must be something else that is terribly wrong. / And the rest of us are somehow involved in the wrong”. (210)

Lavinia recalls her own spitefulness towards Celia and her failure to understand her. The psychiatrist tells them “You will have to live with these memories and make them / into something new. Only by acceptance / of the past will you alter its meaning.” (211) Celia’s death has brought the Chamberlaynes closer together. In the end, Reilly explains how Celia’s martyrdom is triumph of self-realization. The views of Rao are as follows.

That Celia’s death could be foreseen suggests the presence of the ‘eternal design’ that Thomas Becket in Murder in the Cathedral
speaks of. Through Reilly’s vision of the triumph of Celia’s death, Edward and Lavinia gain a new insight into their lives, and in due course, they are to effect a chastening in Peter. The fertilizing power of the saint’s sacrifice is once again shown. (131)

Eliot uses the third act to moralize the crises which have been resolved and also to deepen the shadows of a world behind the world which have flickered disturbingly through the comedy. The Chamberlaynes are shown in process of working out salvation according to their limited means, and Celia’s death is represented by the doctor who has helped her to make the choice which led to it as the happiest of deaths, that of a saint. “She did not suffer as ordinary people suffer?” (209) asks Edward Chamberlayne, clutching at easy comfort. Sir Henry replies “She suffered all that we should suffer in fear and pain and loathing”. (210) she paid the highest price in suffering because it is the part of the design.

Celia has set a standard by which others will try to live. She has borne witness to a deeper reality than that of ordinary life. An actress, Alison Legatt, who appeared in The Cocktail Party writes: “I remember one eminent clergyman telling me that the second Act of The Cocktail Party was the finest sermon on Repentance he has ever encountered” (Braybrooke 80)

“According to Thomas Becket ‘a martyrdom is never the design of
man', and that a Christian martyrdom is neither an accident nor 'the effect of a man's will to become a saint. True Martyrdom requires the fulfillment of the two halves of a pattern. The first half must be fulfilled by the martyr himself; he must learn to accept the martyrdom is the right sp r it. But as martyrdom requires the right attitude to God on the part of the martyr, so also it requires the right attitude on the part of the great mass of men". (Jones 72)

Celia's martyrdom will be futile if it is fails to remind ordinary men and women of God's love. It is by the shedding of blood that the spiritual fertility is restored to the spiritual waste land. The exceptiona individual is no longer in the foreground or in the centre of the design. He, or in this case she, is still a part of the design and a very important part, but the poet's attention has shifted to the mass of unexceptional people. Cel a's death, the gruesome details of which momentarily cloud the domestic atmosphere of the Third Act, is remote from that setting, but relevant to it. The emphasis is upon the salvation of a group and not an individual – upon the salvation of the group centered on Edward and Lavinia Chamberlayne, who give the cocktail party.

Celia chooses suffering and death. Her Martyrdom is not an act of conscious will, but the results of her complete submission to the Will of God. She moves from apathy and evasion to lively faith and aemble acceptance. So, Celia becomes a true martyr, an instrument o God, since
She does not desire anything for herself. Indeed, she is a unique creation of Eliot. Celia’s death may be a tragedy in the sense that she is murdered, but by her death she achieves the glory of martyrdom. As Butcher puts it, “the death of a martyr presents to us not the defeat, but the victory of the individual, the issue of a conflict in which the individual is ranged on the same side as the higher powers and the sense of suffering consequently is lost in that of moral triumph”. (47)

Sainthood assumes different forms and in the case of Celia, it takes the shape of joining the nursing organization and finally meeting a horrible death. The path chosen by Celia offers her a penitential remedy. Through action and suffering – by being crucified ‘very near an ant-hill’ – Celia is to find her atonement. Celia chooses not the first way of reconciliation, but the second way of atonement which leads her to loneliness and finally to terrible death. She, rejecting the human illusion, selects the way that leads to crucifixion. Thus Celia is a highly successful character, the typical Eliot figure who is moved by an awareness of sin to seek redemption in divine love. She proves to be a martyr, who is a Sinner turned Saint.

Celia rejects a world of corruption and compromise. Like Harry she has also found that something is wrong with the world in which she lives. So she also decides to leave her country and people in order to devote herself to religious cause. Her choice is like “the awful daring of a moment’s surrender” (Eliot, 78) mentioned in The Wasteland. She
immolates herself on the ant-hill in Kinkanja. This has been possible because on recognition of her true-self she was prepared to realize the tougher self in her and make the right decision.

Having learnt the art of patience Celia is willing to abnegate her will. This helps her to embrace a nobler calling. She is mistaken in the object of her love. But in the perusal of holy service she is willing like Becket to yield herself into the hands of God and perfect her will. When the individual capable of spiritual enlightenment makes the tougher choice or resolves to go the way of the cross - analogous to Christ who went out of the camp to suffer for the sins of mankind, things fall into their proper perspective. Carol Smith says, “the proper view of Christian love necessitates both the recognition of the spark of divinity in every other creature and the act of love as a reflection of love for the creator.” (Smith. 166)

Celia chooses agape, divine love in preference to eros, human love. Her death is an imitation of the supreme act of Atonement of Christ. She dies as a missionary nurse in a heathen country. Her death is not just a horrible death; it is a spiritual triumph. Her death does not provoke despair; it is a spiritual triumph according to Sir, Henry

Celia as a self-centered person is a disintegrating person. When she loses herself in the will of God by self-surrender she finds herself again. For
Celia, however, 'the self that wills' is the guardian who determines her way of life. As Reilly remarks, her journey is blind, but the way leads towards the acquisition of what she had sought for in the wrong place.

Celia is a unique creation by Eliot. It is for the first time that Eliot created a lady who is no more a foil to a man's self realization, but a genuine individual, capable of making her decision. Gordon says:

Celia is not a statue, a bodiless Virgin, or a Lady of silences. She states her surprise at Edward's defection with brave distinctness, and is the focus for sympathy in the play. Edward is a self confessed mediocrity beside her. It is his destiny to recognize that his mediocrity lies in his inability to love, and Celia's to discover in her slighted depth of feeling the altruism of a potential saint. (172)

The failure of love relationships in the play raises questions in regard to Eliot's attitude to human love. Sartre's dealings with human relationships may be recalled in this context. Sartre thinks that "there are only three possible patterns of behaviour in love: indifference; masochism, i.e. becoming 'objects' used by others; and sadism, which implies possession of the other person by violence". (Barnes 377) These are all unsatisfying; and therefore conflict is the determining principle of love relationship, according to Sartre. Edward's attitude to Celia may be the case of 'indifference' in the Sartrian sense. Celia and Peter, as they are unaware of themselves and lose control over their individual thoughts, betray masochistic tendencies.
The difference between the approaches of Eliot and Sartre is that unlike Sartre, Eliot believes that man's loneliness may be removed only through his or her union with God. Thus Celia's disappointment with Edward leads her to a sense of sin and she feels a need to atone. And yet, she retains her capacity for enjoying high moments of love which leads her to her new life:

For what happened is remembered like a dream
In which one is exalted by intensity of loving
In the spirit, a vibration of delight
Without desire, for desire is fulfilled
In the delight of loving. (189)

Eliot's main aim is self-realization and salvation. All immature characters in the beginning of the play undergo these various levels of purgation according to their mental and spiritual maturity as led by the psychiatrist. The Guardians act as tools in restoring peace and paving a clear way through the confused minds of the suffering characters towards a better choice. Edward and Lavinia find a peaceful reconciliation to their broken wedded life and through Celia, Eliot shows a supreme result of self-realization by which she attains salvation. According to Rao, "The Cocktail Party" is a significant landmark in respect not only of finding a poetic analogy for treating the sacred and the profane, but of exploring and exploiting the resource and the distancing devices of a popular dramatic
In subject, *The Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party* are closely related. Helen Gardner, opines *The Cocktail Party* is the story of a marriage that breaks down and then comes right, as *The Family Reunion* is the story of a marriage with a tragic issue. Harry discovers, in the wreck of his human relationships that he should never have married at all. His is a different calling. That calling - to solitude and suffering - is present also in *The Cocktail Party*, in the story of Celia. At the heart of both plays lies the doctrine of atonement, of vicarious suffering, the idea that there is a bill which someone has to pay. It is treated differently in the two plays. Harry is guilty: it is his own account as well as his family’s that he is called upon to settle. Celia does not suffer from a sense of guilt; she has no feeling that she has wronged Edward or Lavinia. Her story is, therefore, not tragic. She is conscious of sin; she becomes aware of a burden which has to be picked up and carried. But with all their differences, Thomas, the murdered Archbishop, Harry, the destroyer-saviour of his family, Celia, the self-offered, stand in a line. Each is apart from the rest of the characters, called to a favoured lot, an ‘exaltation to afflictions high.” (Grant 697)

Becket, Harry and Celia by surrendering *self* are fulfilling the very purpose for which Christ died, “His purpose in dying for all was that men, while still in life, should cease to live for themselves, and should live for him who for their sake died and was raised to life.” (II Cor-5:15). By
surrendering to God they are fulfilling the central purpose of the Atonement. There are many stages in their act of surrender to God. First the characters draw near the explorative, which is a tentative stage. It is a big thing to turn over the one thing they own: their very self, to another. They want to and they don’t want to. They are afraid that it is a leap in the dark, and if they leap it may land them in an abyss of doubt and fear. So they hesitate. God upsets them on one level to set them up on a higher level.

Everything seems to be settled and they realize that, that is beginning of the way and not the goal. In the last stage of continuous mutual adjustment, the stage of growth, they surrender “All” to Him. By a continual surrender, they do not fight or suppress the challenges; they turn it over to Him. Problems and issues keep piling up and making them tense and burdened. But there is continual catharsis. They are saved from the tension that comes from suppressing things and driving them into the subconscious sphere where they fester, and also from evading the issues in which case they disturb them from the margin of consciousness. They fulfill the verse, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Becket, Harry and Celia have a continuous fellowship with Christ and a continuous cleansing of their problems and sins. Their hourly continual surrender saves them from the psychiatrist’s couch where they
have to unburden themselves through torturous months and years of piled-up problems, resentments, fears, self-preoccupation, and guilt buried in the subconscious.

It also takes the place of the confessional where they unburden themselves and gain a doubtful absolution by penances. They are in unbroken contact with their Redeemer. They experience peace through surrender. They are free-in Him! For a moment, with their present resources and their past experiences, surrender seems impossible. But with a complete self-surrender they are not with the old resources based on self-centred and self-reliant life are but turned new, with new resources, new direction, a new attitude, a new faith, not in them but in Him, they are anew in everything.

Self-surrender not only takes away loneliness, it takes away fear of death. It takes away fear of death because they are already dead. Their self has been crucified with Christ: "I am crucified with Christ." (Gal 2:20) In his surrender Harry aligns his will to an Almighty will, and he begins to do things he cannot do, to accomplish the unaccomplishable, a surprise to himself and others. The difference between the emphasis on self realization or on self-surrender is that in self-realization one tries to realize one's self, for all the answers are oneself. In self-surrender one surrender one's self to Jesus Christ, for all the answers are in Him. Harry is a self-centred and self-preoccupied, ultimately he loses his self and finds it. Becket's self-
realization comes through self-surrender. Celia realises herself when she realises Him, and she realises herself when she surrenders to Him.

In Murder in the Cathedral and in The Family Reunion there is a tragic sense of human solitude. The former is a heroic study in martyrdom of the latter deals with extreme and intense isolation of Harry Monchensey. This theme also focuses on divine love being more important than human love.

The ‘self’ at the Crossroads has to make choices regarding the path to follow: 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 away 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.

The Cocktail Party is not a comedy of laughter, but it projects a happy view of the universe where the tragic falls into its place in a higher conciliation of opposites. Eliot’s concern for his use of Christian element is the dichotomy between human love and divine love which is highlighted in The Cocktail party. “The general theme is atonement for sin, the aim of his play being a religious message”, says R.D.Trivedi (57). Eliot demonstrates
that contemporary setting and themes can be subjects of poetic drama, and in this way he enlarges the scope of verse play.