Chapter-7

The Confidential Clerk and The Elder Statesman: Integration of the Religious and the Social Planes of Existence
Chapter-7
The Confidential Clerk and The Elder Statesman: Integration of
the Religious and the Social Planes of Existence

T.S. Eliot's later plays – The Confidential Clerk and The Elder Statesman –
evince a progressive broadening of his social vision and therefore a greater and more
satisfying integration of the social and the religious, the temporal and the timeless
planes of reality. They are the fruits of Eliot's endeavour to write plays which
 dramatize life in purely human terms and avoid all overt and obtrusive elements of
Christian experience. They deal with the theme of human relationships, particularly
family relationships, in a way that has a unique relevance to the contemporary society
and human condition. Eliot offers in these plays an existential diagnosis of the
problems of the modern man. The problems such as facing and accepting one's past,
understanding others as they really are and not as one takes them to be, discarding
social masks and coming to terms with one's own real self, and freeing oneself from
the prison of isolation receive such a treatment and emphasis that Eliot appears to be
very nearly a humanist dealing with everyday secular actions in the fashion of the
writers of naturalistic plays. But upon a closer examination, it becomes clear that
these plays of Eliot cannot be passed off as merely humanistic, for they contain
images and hints which unmistakably point to the existence of another plane of reality.
In fact, the playwright strives to establish a close and inseparable link between the
world of everyday reality and the higher world with a view to achieving a wholesome
reconciliation of man's material and spiritual needs. Though Eliot has been
progressing towards realizing this dramatic ideal right from the start, it is only in his
last plays that he succeeds in integrating the mythical and spiritual underpattern into
the surface pattern of secular human action, showing thereby a close and
indispensable interrelationship of society and religion.

Eliot's efforts of highlighting temporality in his dramas are clearly perceptible
in more than one aspect of these plays, particularly in the conception of the agents of
the action who are almost completely mundane and therefore more closely integrated
into the action. As such, what characterizes these agents is their ordinariness and their lack of any special wisdom or mystery. Their function is still the same as in the earlier plays, but it is now more successfully woven into the thematic structure of the plays. Thus, even while representing the Christian way of life, Eggerson and Mrs. Guzgard in *The Confidential Clerk* and Gomez and Mrs. Carghill in *The Elder Statesman* do so in the forms of normal social behaviour. In *The Elder Statesman*, in particular, the agents of the action, are completely integrated into ordinary human action. As a consequence, they appear to be real people seeking revenge against Lord Claverton, the protagonist of the play. Yet because they evoke from him a sense of guilt which leads to his spiritual rebirth, they also symbolize the spiritual principle operating in the world. In this way, Eliot is finally able to achieve in his last play the much-sought-after unification of the secular and the spiritual, reality and value, religious belief and social vision.

Eliot’s plays under discussion register an advance upon the earlier plays in yet another notable aspect. In them, Eliot decides to do without a saint and martyr. The several characters who are engaged in understanding themselves as well as others, have all to find their real identities and relationships in the actual world. Even the spiritually perceptive characters are less heroic figures, and as a result their progress ends not in saintly pilgrimage or crucifixion, but in discovery of God and the divine love. In addition to it, human relationships are given a positive value in these plays, and man’s relation to God is seen and understood in terms of man’s relation to man. Eliot actually comes to discover the divine principle within the human, thus reconciling the realms of the flesh and the spirit. On the one hand, he asserts that man continues to suffer in the hell of make-believe and isolation until he recognizes his relationship with God, and on the other, he also comes to affirm the efficacy of human love to redeem the life of temporal existence. In this way, he seeks to harmonize the two levels of human existence – the secular and the spiritual. A detailed Analysis of these plays would help us see how far he has succeeded in his endeavour.

I

*The Confidential Clerk* is apparently a comic farce of mistaken identity in the tradition of Euripides, Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde. But the chief point and interest
of the play lie in the way Eliot has used the comic form to suit his own ends. In fact, he has fused his deepest spiritual message with the portrayal of social mores. Eliot's own words explaining why he was writing comedies point towards this fact: "People take tragedy seriously on the surface. They take comedy lightly on the surface but seriously underneath."\(^1\) It is evident from the remark that Eliot desired to achieve an integration between the light comic surface and the serious spiritual meaning. He seems to have tried to bring the superficial lives we lead ordinarily into fusion with the deeper truths ordinarily overlooked. As a matter of fact, he wanted to exploit the amusingly refined and flat world of the farce to communicate both the secular and the spiritual levels of meaning simultaneously, yet without allowing either to contradict the other. In addition to it, he also aimed at avoiding direct use of religious terminology, and making the action and the events themselves suggestive of the religious meanings. Eggerson's "garden" and Colby's "musical" nature along with the latter's search for true parentage are glaring examples of this device. In this connection, Denis Donoghue has made a very pertinent observation. He says that instead of naming the two worlds as 'secular' and 'spiritual', Eliot presents them in the play as 'commerce' and 'art', and thus manages to avoid any doctrinal tone. The learned critic comments that, "The world of Art, unlike the world of Martyrdom and Beatitude, is at one and the same time 'special' enough to embody the higher reaches of aspiration and yet within the imaginative range of a secular audience."\(^2\)

*The Confidential Clerk* is Eliot's modern Christian adaptation of Euripides' *Ion*, and the intention of the playwright is to express Christian implications of the search for identity and fatherhood. The playwright suggests that discovering one's

---

identity depends on discovering one's self to be a child of the heavenly Father. Whereas in Euripides, Ion, the protagonist, discovers that he is the son of a god, Colby in The Confidential Clerk discovers that he is a son of God. D.E. Jones rightly observes that, "Behind the casual and almost callous interchange of parents and children lies the profound intuition that all earthly relationships are swallowed up in our relation to the heavenly Father, that, as Lady Elizabeth puts it, 'we are nearer to God than to anyone'."³

The meaning of that ultimate relationship is suggested through the pattern of human relationships in the play. The focal point is Colby's search for a way of integrating the two worlds - the outer world of action and the inner world of spiritual self. One can hardly fail to notice that Colby's search typifies that of Eliot himself who too has been trying to integrate the two planes of reality - the material and the spiritual.

In the course of the play, Colby discovers that the way of integration leads through fulfillment of relationship to others, in his personal case to his dead father, and, by implication, to God. Thus, ultimately it results in the discovery of a religious vocation. But, as mentioned earlier, this fact is merely hinted at. And this is the notable advance that the play makes upon the earlier plays. The underpattern of redemption is less schematized and more completely integrated into the surface of actions in The Confidential Clerk.

As in The Cocktail Party, the characters at the beginning of the action in The Confidential Clerk suffer from the peculiarly modern disease of alienation. Each wears a social mask that hides the essential self, and thus isolates him from his fallows and from his authentic self. Sir Claude, under the pressure of his father's desire and an awareness of his own artistic limitations, has assumed the character of a man of

commerce who believes in "facts." He has hidden his inner love of art, his earlier desire to be a potter, from Lady Elizabeth, his wife. This is evident from the following words of Lady Elizabeth: "How strange to have lived with you, all these years,/And now you tell me, you'd have liked to be a potter!" She herself, under the pressure of Sir Claude's misunderstanding, has assumed the eccentric character of a "cultivated" hostess, and has concealed her earlier desire to inspire an artist. Similar is the case with Lucasta and B. Kaghan. They too, under the pressure of Lady Elizabeth's snobbery and their own security, play roles in public: "you gave us our parts. And we've shown that we can play them." Though both are capable of a greater sensitivity and seriousness, they conceal these merits and wear public masks - the one that of the hard, cynical woman of the world, and the other, of the hearty successful businessman. As a result, each is divided against, and alienated, from himself, for eventually the assumed secular mask becomes as real as the inner or spiritual self, and the worlds of both become a kind of make-believe.

Another notable trait of the characters in *The Confidential Clerk* is their tendency to manage the lives of others. Carol H. Smith believes that the meaning of the play's events is centred in the "attempts of the other characters to change Colby into an image of what they want him to be without regard for his own nature." Sir Claude thinks Colby is his son and wishes to have him follow in his footsteps; Lady Elizabeth persuades herself that Colby must be her long-lost son; whereas the fact is that Colby belongs to neither of them. Their children are, respectively, Lucasta Angel - whom Sir Claude would like to be rid of, and of whom Lady Elizabeth does not approve - and B. Kaghan, whom she does not approve of either. Lucasta and B.

4. CPP, p. 494.
5. Ibid., p. 495.
Kaghan, in their turn, try to mould Colby to suit their own ends, Lucasta wishes to find her own identity by becoming a part of Colby’s existence, whereas B. Kaghan wants to make him his business partner. Only Eggerson, with his deeper awareness, is able to understand Colby’s true identity and inclination.

The central theme of the need for unification of the material and spiritual planes of reality is stated in the scene between Sir Claude and Colby in the first Act. In fact, the unsatisfactory division between the outer and inner, the material and the spiritual worlds of the characters in the play is epitomized in Sir Claude. Perceiving Colby’s abandonment of a musical career as a repetition of his own experience, he recalls his past, his early desire to become a potter, and his submission to his father’s insistence that he should become a financier. At first, he “loathed this occupation”; but he eventually came to see that despite his passion for the art, he “should never have become a first-rate potter”. Thus he began to cultivate a double life, the public life of a man of “commerce” and the private life of a man of “art”. On the one hand, he came to feel his “power” in the activity of business and, on the other, to discover a “private door/into the real world” in the contemplation of his collection of pottery. He has had to harbour a secret life for himself, a life divorced from the ordinary business of living. But this, as he himself dimly realizes, has been an unsatisfactory compromise; for each world is separate from the other and consequently each is not real but make-believe. As a substitute for his lack of creativity, he has assembled a collection of porcelain which he keeps in a private room: “when I am alone, and look at one thing long enough/I sometimes have that sense of identification/With the maker, of which I spoke – an agonizing ecstasy/which makes life bearable. It’s all I have.” Though he feels that it is a kind of substitute for religion, he is unable to achieve an integration of his two lives which truly religious people are able to achieve:

8. CPP, p. 465.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 466.
I dare say truly religious people –
I’ve never known any – can find some unity.
Then there are also the men of genius.
There are others, it seems to me, who have at best to live
In two worlds – each a kind of make-believe.
That’s you and me.¹¹

Sir Claude attempts to help Colby by suggesting that his new confidential clerk should accept, as he himself had done, “the terms life imposes upon you/Even to the point of accepting….make – believe”.¹² He hopes that Colby as his son will follow his course and find in his private experience of music an escape into reality, just as the former found his “porcelain” an escape from a sordid world to a pure one, Colby, however, has been from the beginning uneasy about the new role of identity that the older man is imposing on him;

I’m not at all sure that I like the other person
That I feel myself becoming – though he fascinates me.
And yet from time to time, when I least expect it,
When my mind is clear and empty, walking in the street
Or waking in the night, then the former person,
The person I used to be, returns to take possession:
And I am again the disappointed organist,
And for a moment the thing I cannot do,
The art that I could never excel in,
Seems the one thing worth doing, the one thing
That I want to do. I have to fight that person.¹³

This is the reason that when Sir Claude offers him a way out, he says that

¹¹. Ibid.
¹². Ibid.
¹³. Ibid., p. 463.
something in him “rebels” against accepting the conditions that life imposes upon him. As William V. Spanos observes, it is Colby’s unwillingness to accept an imposed identity, to live a divided life in two separate worlds of time and eternity, of matter and spirit, that sets the search for his identity in motion and thus transfigures the understanding of the less perceptive characters.”

Colby is, in fact, not ready to accept the fragmentation of his spiritual life which Sir Claude’s advice would necessitate; he “needs a musical order in his life which can be supplied only by God” And, of course, by the end of the play, it become evident that Colby cannot rest content in the unreality of a divided life; There must be an interrelationship between the inner and outer life, between the private and public worlds, even if it means being a second-rate musician, In fact, the play seeks to suggest that there are no substitutes for religion, and those who lack faith or who try to replace it by something else can only lead fragmented existences, without a centre. Colby and Mulhammers have their private gardens which they enter every now and then, but only Eggerson, who is a religious man, lives in an integrated world in which his garden is fruitful and is truly part of his life. Colby’s retiring towards the end of the play into Eggerson’s garden clearly indicates that he would attain an integrated and therefore wholesome existence.

The significance of the inner and outer worlds and the implied third world which reconciles the other two becomes clearer in Act II, particularly in the scene between Colby and Lucasta. The insight which comes to Lucasta through her love for Colby illuminates his predicament:

It’s awful for a man to have to give up,
A career that he’s set his heart on, I’m sure:
But it’s only the outer world that you’ve lost:
You’ve still got your inner world – a world that is more real.
That’s why you’re different from the rest of us:

You have your secret garden; to which you can retire
And lock the gate behind you.\(^{16}\)

It is obvious from the lines quoted above that Lucasta envies and wishes to
share Colby’s ability to retire into a world of private meaning. But Colby is in search
of a more integral vision than a private garden can afford him. He knows that his
secret garden, referred to by Lucasta, is the same unreal “real world” behind the
private door that Sir Claude distinguishes from the public world on the other side.
This secret garden, Colby tells Lucasta, is

\[
\text{not quite real to me-}
\]

Although it’s as real to me as…this world.
But that’s just the trouble. They seem so unrelated.
I turn the key, and walk through the gate,
And there I am….alone, in my ‘garden’.

Alone, that’s the thing. That’s why it’s not real.\(^{17}\)

Eggerson’s garden, he tells Lucasta, is more real than his own because he
retires to it physically as well as spiritually. What is more, he does not feel alone
there, presumably because God walks in his garden. In addition to it, when he comes
out he brings “marrows, or beetroot, or peas….for Mrs. Eggerson”.\(^{18}\)

\[
\text{What I mean is, my garden’s no less unreal to me}
\]
\[
\text{Than the world outside it. If you have two lives}
\]
\[
\text{Which have nothing whatever to do with each other-}
\]
\[
\text{Well, they’re both unreal. But for Eggerson}
\]
\[
\text{His garden is a part of one single world.}\(^{19}\)
\]

And when Lucasta asks, “But what do you want?” Colby replies:

\[
16. \text{CPP, pp. } 472-473.
\]
\[
17. \text{Ibid., p. } 473.
\]
\[
18. \text{Ibid.}
\]
\[
19. \text{Ibid., pp. } 473-474.
\]
Not to be alone there.
If I were religious, God would walk in my garden
And that would make the world outside it real
And acceptable, I think.  

The garden that Lucasta perceives is, according to William V. Spanos, “the solipsistic “spirituality” of art that compensates for its opposite, the sordidness of life in time, devoid of spirit—Sir Clande’s life of commerce, Lucasta’s “dirty public square /In a shabby part of London”. The two represent the division between eternity and time, spirit and matter. Eggerson’s garden ...is a single world redeemed by the Incarnation, the truly real world in which the various levels of antinomies in existence are reconciled into the “unity” that, as Sir Claude had suggested earlier, truly religious people are able to discover.  

This remark of Spanos points towards Eliot’s endeavour to achieve in his plays an integration of religious belief and social vision. Eliot’s sacramental vision, grounded in the incarnation, perceives the unity and reality of the two worlds of spirit and matter. Colby’s referring to God’s presence in his garden suggests that he is seeking to achieve that vision through the Negative Way, in which the denial of the created world, of parent and lover, leads to the discovery of the Father and Divine Love that redeems time. But there is also the Way of Affirmation to sacramental vision, the way of human love between man and woman, parent and child, that finds its ground in the created world. In fact, as D.E. Jones observes, “the gap between he two worlds, the public and the private, can only be bridged by love”.  

The learned critic further comments:

The love may originate in the ordinary world and extend into the other world, or it may originate in the other world, the world of creative love...and extend into the ordinary world. Without the bond of love,

19a. Ibid., p.474.
neither aspect of life is fruitful, neither world is truly real.\textsuperscript{22}

What is particularly emphasized in this comment is the fact that it is the interrelationship between the outer and the inner, the material and the spiritual, worlds of man which alone is conducive to a wholesome human existence. And this interrelationship stems from the bond of love whether human or divine.

The predicament of Colby in the play is an illustration of the relationship between man’s duty to his earthly father and his duty to his heavenly Father. Eliot seeks to suggest that man’s bond of love and obedience to his earthly parents derives its meaning primarily from his duty to God. Without the sense of filial piety, one’s feeling towards one’s father will be reduced to a sentiment of gratitude for care and consideration.

Lucasta’s intuition that Colby does not need anybody, any \textit{human} person, seems to be right; for to him, the “garden” and the outside world are to be made real by the presence of God. He is, however, brought to that realization through a painful process. First, he has to undergo the desolation that comes from losing Lucasta and, with her, the hope that the garden will be made real by the presence of a loved human person’s spirit there. One is reminded of the Harry and Mary relationship and its end in \textit{The Family Reunion}. Then, Colby has also to renounce Sir Claude and Lady Elizabeth – his supposed parents. The best possible solution in his case is obliquely suggested in the following words of Lady Elizabeth:

\begin{quote}
Of course, there’s something in us,
In all of us, which isn’t just heredity,
But something unique. Something we have been
From eternity. Something ….straight from God.
That means that we are nearer to God than to any one.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

It is to be remembered that the circumstances of Colby’s upbringing have left

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{23} CPP, p.485.
\end{itemize}

155
him considerably detached from normal parental relationship. This is the reason that he can be "simply indifferent" to the claims made on him by Sir Claude and Lady Elizabeth. He would like a father, "Whom I had never known and couldn’t know now.../Whose image I could create in my own mind./To live with that image".24 When towards the end of the play, Mrs. Guzzard reveals that he is the son of "a disappointed musician", he feels completely free. Sir Claude wants and asks him to stay with him, but after having come to know the truth about his father, he feels the pressing need of trying to know him more fully. So he says, "I must follow my father",25 by which he means that he wants to become an organist, Perceiving the Christian implications of the words of Colby, D.E. Jones observes: "In effect his answer is that of Christ – ‘I must be about my father’s business’ – and the father he will follow is God as revealed in Christ".26 Jones concludes therefore that, "Behind the worldly quest of fathers for sons and sons for father lies the movement of the Divine Love, seeking response in the heart of man and revealing the way of reconciliation in Christ".27

Apparently, The Confidential Clerk repeats the pattern found in The Family Reunion and The Cocktail Party, as a choice is made between a normal family life and a dedicated life leading away from the family. But, as pointed out earlier in this analysis, in The Confidential Clerk, the exceptional person is much more integrated in the pattern of ordinary life. Colby is only just beginning to discover his true vocation. Though B. Kaghan perceives that Colby is "the sort of fellow who might chuck it all/And go to live on a desert island", the action of the play does not suggest any such future for him, nor is there any hint that Colby’s destiny is to be as unusual as that of Harry or Celia. Colby’s search for his real identity culminates in

24. Ibid., p.513.
25. Ibid., p. 516.
27. Ibid.
his retiring into Eggerson’s garden which represents the reconciliation of the two worlds—the world of everyday reality and the world of higher reality. In this connection the following observation of Carol H. Smith seems very pertinent:

It is indicative of a significant change in Eliot’s view of religious experience that, whereas earlier the garden of remembered bliss was opposed to the experience of everyday living, in *The Confidential Clerk* the earlier secret rose garden is rejected by Colby in favor of the totality of Eggerson’s garden, where God walks among the vegetables. The rose has become “marrows, or beetroot, or peas” and, while less exotic, the products of the new garden are more useful in satisfying the needs of everyday existence.  

In fact, there is much more intercommunication among the characters in *The Confidential Clerk* than in the earlier plays. As such, Colby’s discovery of his real identity and fatherhood leads to a secular renewal that is all-embracing and effective. Colby’s presence in the play and his achievement of understanding help others to understand themselves, particularly their own limitations, and to understand others by accepting their different limitations. This finally leads to the emergence of a more fruitful communal life. It is further significant to note that the domestic circle is fuller in *The Confidential Clerk* than in *The Cocktail Party* because the dramatist has added the relationship of parents and children to his earlier treatment of Christian marriage as a way to redemption. Eliot’s social and humanistic concerns have perceptively acquired a broader dimension. This is particularly evident in the way Eliot deals with the crucial problem of understanding others. As D.E Jones observes, “a new emphasis is given to the need for trying to understand, which means recognizing the limits of understanding on both sides and making allowances for them”. Though, as Lucasta says, it is very difficult to “recognize the limits of one’s understanding”, the effort to

understand must be constantly made, for “There’s no end to understanding a person./All one can do is to understand them better,/To keep up with them.”\textsuperscript{30} The process of trying to understand others induces change in oneself, and helps one adjust oneself with others. One can easily perceive the advance that Eliot has made in this regard upon the impossibility of communication between the spiritually aware characters and the spiritually blind ones.

Colby’s search for and discovery of his real identity distinctly fructifies the lives of the less aware characters. “It leads”, in the words of William V. Spanos, “to the removal of their public masks, the acknowledgement of their real identities and need for mutual understanding and finally to the birth of a new love between husband and wife and children and parents that promises to unify their two worlds of make-believe into a single real world.”\textsuperscript{31} The truth of Spanos’ remark is evident at a number of places in the play. It is particularly clear in the beginning of Act III, when Sir Claude discovers with a shock how very little he really understands Colby, and how he has misunderstood his father. This makes him discard his public mask and reveal to his wife his secret life, his early desire to become a potter. Lady Elizabeth, in turn, reveals to her husband her early ambition to inspire an artist. The lesson they both learn from their experience in the play is that, “It’s a great mistake..../For married people to take anything for granted”\textsuperscript{32}. As each unlocks the gates of his private garden to the other, it becomes evident that their double lives in two worlds of unreality will become one and real. The culmination of the process comes at the moving close of the play, when the members of the family, free from their former “roles” and the obsession to impose identities on others, are united by the bond of love in truly authentic human community. As D.E. Jones points out, because of “the attempt at understanding which his presence has stimulated, Colby’s going does not split the

\textsuperscript{30} CPP, p. 475.


\textsuperscript{32} CPP, p. 495.
family as Harry’s does; on the contrary, it reinforces the family solidarity.”  

In the closing lines of the play, Kaghan acknowledges the mistake that most of the characters made—the mistake of wanting Colby “to be something he wasn’t.” Lady Elizabeth agrees with Kaghan and says:

Between not knowing what other people want of one,
And not knowing what one should ask of other people,
One does make mistakes! But I mean to do better.
Claude, we’ve got to try to understand our children.

And upon this, Kaghan says:

And we should like to understand you....

You know, Claude, both Lucasta and I
Would like to mean something to you...if you’d let us;
And we’d take the responsibility of meaning it.  

It is evident from the speeches quoted above that the fructifying influence of Colby is illustrated in the play itself, and with much greater immediacy than in the earlier plays. Eliot has been able to achieve a closer integration of religious belief and social vision, myth and contemporary action in the play, and has been successful in conveying the implied religious meaning without disrupting the surface naturalistic meaning. The agents of the redemptive action—Eggerson and Mrs. Guzzard, are considerably humanized and integrated into the dramatic action, rendering thereby the unification of religious belief and social vision more complete and satisfying. It must be admitted, however, that the function of Mrs. Guzzard as dea ex machina who unravels the entanglement, keeps the play from achieving complete integration of meaning and action. It was in his last play that Eliot was to overcome this limitation.

34. CPP, p. 519.
II

*The Elder Statesman* represents "the culmination of the thematic and formal development of Eliot's plays".35 In it, Eliot returns to the problem of *The Family Reunion*, and seeks to express the final resolution of his theme of spiritual quest. He had remarked in 1958 that "Harry's career needs to be completed by an *Orestes* or an *Oedipus at Colonus*",36 and *The Elder Statesman* fulfills that function. It has to be noted, however, that by the time Eliot came to write his last play, his view of life had undergone a significant alteration. His new – found happiness consequent upon his falling in love with and marrying his secretary, Valerie Fletcher, in 1957 brought about a remarkable change in his outlook. In the case of *The Family Reunion*, Harry had not been able to fully understand and work out the implication of the words of the Furies, that "the only way out is the way of purgation and holiness". Therefore his career appeared incomplete. But when Eliot took to completing that career in *The Elder Statesman* by presenting the process of Lord Claverton's purgation leading to peaceful death, he came to do so in terms of the efficacy of human love rather than saintly sacrifice. Like Harry, Lord Claverton, pursued by the "ghosts" of his past, is driven into the "precincts of his last evasions", where he discovers his authentic, his sinful, self and is faced with the necessity of choosing between damnation and salvation. But, unlike Harry, Claverton ultimately finds his peace in human love, and not by the way of purgation and holiness. And that is an important difference between *The Elder Statesman* and earlier plays. In fact, the celebration of the actual human love which unites Claverton's daughter and her lover is superimposed on the pattern of the protagonist's purgation through realization of his past mistakes and guilts. As such, the play turns out to be an affirmation of human relationships and of the importance of love in the process of self-knowledge. It is love through human understanding rather than love through self-destruction that receives special emphasis.


It is to be noted that Eliot’s religio-social vision finds most perfect and satisfying embodiment in *The Elder Statesman*, for the redemptive figure, which involves both hero and community, is completed within the immediate action of the play, rather than from a distance. In addition to it, the distinction between the spiritually perceptive protagonist and the spiritually blind community has almost disappeared. The hero, true to the direction that Eliot’s synthesis of religious belief and social vision has been taking, has become genuinely Everyman. The way of redemption has become the human way of the love of created things. This obviously marks the culmination of Eliot’s endeavours to humanize his drama so as to make it more convincing on the secular social plane. David Ward rightly regards *The Elder Statesman* as the “most human play”\(^{37}\) written by Eliot, in which human love is accorded its proper place in the scheme of things. While in the earlier plays, particularly in *The Family Reunion* human love is rejected in favour of the divine, in *The Elder Statesman*, human love is recognized and accepted as an image of divine love. In fact, as Carol H. Smith points out, the very theme of the play is “the relationship between human and divine love”.\(^{38}\) As the play is structured on Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus*, we witness in it a crisscrossing of the religious vision of Sophocles and the Christian vision of Everyman, through which Eliot’s religio-social vision is brought forth in a sharp dramatic focus.

The human relationships at the beginning of *The Elder Statesman* are almost similar to those of earlier plays, with the only difference that the hero is less and the community more perceptive. Lord Claverton has retired from his active and successful public life. First as a statesman and then as chairman of public companies, he has tried to make his public role his real identity. But now, when he has retired, he is confronted with the private self from which he has tried to escape. Stripped of

---


“authority’s costume”\textsuperscript{39} which had protected him from his private life, he finds himself for the first time since he was plain Dick Ferry with a blank engagement book, “contemplating nothingness”\textsuperscript{40} and terrified of solitude. The irony with him is that “he’s most alone when he is among people/Managing, manoeuvring, cajoling or bullying ./At all of which he is a master”,\textsuperscript{41} and yet he is afraid of being exposed to strangers. In fact, he is possessed by the spiritual chill, as is suggested by the words of Dr. Selby, that he is “much iller than he is aware of”.\textsuperscript{42} This is the reason that the Doctor has decided to send him to a “convalescent home” at Badgley Court. The emptiness and loneliness which Lord Claverton is undergoing find expression in the following words spoken by him:

\begin{quote}
...waiting, simply waiting,

With no desire to act, yet a loathing of inaction.

A fear of the vacuum, and no desire to fill it.

It’s just like sitting in an empty waiting room.

In a railway station on a branch line,

After the last train, after all the other passengers

Have left, and the booking office is closed

And the porters have gone.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

“Claverton epitomizes”, in the words of E.K. Hay, “all the empty elders, waiting for rain in a dry season, characterized in Eliot’s earlier works: Gerontion, the Sibyl and Tiresias, Simeon, the Magi, and Amy in The Family Reunion”.\textsuperscript{44} It is significant to note, however, that among these “empty” elders, Lord Claverton is the only one for whom the healing rain actually falls. He sees both birth of the promise and its completion. But it is for the audience to discover for itself the implicit Word

\textsuperscript{39} CPP, p.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid. p. 529.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid. p. 528.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 530.
\textsuperscript{44} Op. cit., pp. 145-146.
within the words. He has to attain the understanding that it is their being cut off from their spiritual selves that has rendered these elders hollow from within, and that they can get rid of their ailment only by restoring links with their inner, spiritual being.

The only things that can give Lord Claverton some semblance of identity which will protect him from his emptiness, from his being an unreal “ghost”, 45 are his children Monica and Michael. But, he has transformed them into objects and images of himself without identities of their own. The harmful effect of his selfish imposition of his will on others is revealed in the opening moments of the play by the suggestion of futility in the love of Charles and Monica, who represent the community. Because of her father’s possessiveness, Monica is not free to marry Charles, to complete the unity which in The Confidential Clerk makes the private and public worlds one reality. Though she affirms her love for Charles, it is incomplete. The reason is that it exists only in their private world. Its reality cannot extend into the public world because her father’s possessiveness has split her personality. She has to exist in two worlds—private and public. This is evident from her first conversation with Charles:

Charles: What do the words mean now— I and you?

Monica: In our private world ....../The meanings are different. Look! We’re back in the room/That we entered only a few minutes ago. 46

In the meantime, Lambert enters with the tea and Monica says: “Now we’re in the public world”, upon which Charles elaborates: “And your father will come. With his calm possessive air/And his kindly welcome, which is always a reminder/That I mustn’t stay too long, for you belong to him”. 47

Lord Claverton has to learn by the end of the play that it was a grave mistake on his part to have imposed his will on his children and never allow them to develop their own identity. For this, he has to undergo a redemptive pattern, which is initiated

45. CPP, p. 531.
46. Ibid., p. 526.
47. Ibid.
by the appearance of two old acquaintances from his past. Like Harry in *The Family Reunion*, Lord Claverton confronts his particular furies where he least expects to see them. First Mr. Gomez, the former Fred Culverwell, whose “gift for friendship”\(^\text{48}\) Dick Ferry had corrupted while at Oxford by fostering in him “expensive tastes”\(^\text{49}\) and then Mrs. Carghill, the former Massie Batterson, whose love Dick Ferry had betrayed, return to confront him with his early misdeeds. Together, they drive him into his sinful past and force him to painfully recognize his sins. They bring him to the edge of despair, where it is no longer possible for him to evade his guilt by assuming new identities. As William V. Spanos observes, both “Gomez and Mrs. Carghill, in their effort to blackmail him spiritually, dwell on lord Claverton’s pretences, his assumption of successive new identities to negate his guilt, and give impetus to the growing awareness of his unreality and spiritual alienation”.\(^\text{50}\)

Gomez needs one trustworthy old friend who can accept him both as Culverwell and as Gomez, because he suffers from the isolation of his self—imposed exile in San Francisco and from his loss of personal identity. When he says, “I need you, Dick, to give me reality”\(^\text{51}\) he means that he hopes to be restored to reality by having his old friend accept both the man he used to be and the one he has become. He has an awareness of isolation, which is still lacking in Lord Claverton. Pointing the distinction between their senses of loneliness, he observes:

```
You’ve changed your name twice – by easy stages,
And each step was merely a step up the ladder,
So you weren’t aware of becoming a different person:
But where I changed my name, there was no social ladder.
It was jumping a gap – and you can’t jump back again.
```

\(^48\text{Ibid.}, p. 538.}\)
\(^49\text{Ibid.}, p. 537.}\)
\(^50\text{Op. cit., p. 233.}\)
\(^51\text{CPP, p. 537.}\)
I parted from myself by a sudden effort,
You, so slowly and sweetly, that you've never woken up
To the fact that Dick Ferry died long ago.\textsuperscript{52}

Gomez suggests that Lord Claverton has become a hollow man, a mere façade, a mask without a face, though he has not been fully aware of it. His mask has deprived him of genuine communication even with his wife and children. Now when he has retired from his public life, he is left to himself and the terrible isolation of his private world. Gomez, one of his victims in the past, returns to make Lord Claverton realize his guilt. At first, Claverton is not ready to admit any responsibility, "you were a free moral agent…",\textsuperscript{53} but gradually he realizes that this is not the way to escape his ghosts, Gomez reminds of his past sinful deeds, particularly the occasion when Dick Ferry ran over a body on the road and didn't stop. He thus revives the shameful, sordid memory of a moment of truth when Lord Claverton had thought only of saving himself. Claverton, however, is still not ready to sympathize with Gomez. He fails to understand that he needs exactly what he is denying Gomez: to be recognized as the small soul he really is, and to be loved as that.

His second visitant, Mrs. Carghill, cuts nearer to the heart. Lord Claverton had betrayed her in love; had thought to buy her off and bury the affair; whereas she makes no secret of having been Massie Batterson, and later Massie Montjoy the musical comedy star, and of her having been her first lover. She has to remind him:

\begin{quote}
There were three of us- Effie, Maudie and me.
That day we spent on the river – I’ve never forgotten it,
The turning point of all my life!
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
I said ‘there’s a man I could follow round the world’!
But Effie it was-you know, Effie was very shrewd
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 536.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., p. 542
Effie it was said, 'you'd be throwing yourself away.
Mark my words' Effie said, 'if you choose to follow that man
He'd give you the slip: he's not to be trusted.
That man is hollow'...
You do remember now, don't you, Richard? 54

But Claverton is prepared to remember only "a brief infatuation" 55 and "a lucky escape". 56 He is sure that his conscience was clear after his betrayal of her. But Mrs. Carghill replies:

At bottom, I believe you're still the same silly Richard
You always were. You wanted to pose
As a man of the world. And now you're posing
As what? I presume, as an elder statesman;
And the difference between being an elder statesman
And posing successfully as an elder statesman
Is practically negligible. And you look the part.
Whatever part you've played, I must say you've always looked it. 57

In fact, for Mrs. Carghill, the love relationship, though brief, was intense and remains a permanent reality:

...you touched my soul—
Pawed it, perhaps, and the touch still lingers.
And I've touched yours.
It's frightening to think that we may always be together.

I read your letters every night. 58

54. Ibid., p. 549.
55. Ibid., p. 552.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., p. 553.
It is, however, evident from the words and behaviour of Lord Claverton that in refusing to admit any relation with her, he is preferring to keep up appearances. “Yet Mrs. Carghill touches more deeply than Gomez his terror of being irredeemably unreal because hollow at heart – incapable of loving, and justly unloved. This, his most deeply repressed anxiety, is his worst shame and original sin”.

But it is not until his encounter with his son Michael that Lord Claverton comes to realize fully the destructive nature of his evasions, of his self-imposed identity. His meeting with Michael makes him clearly see how the imposition of his will over his children has transformed them, particularly Michael, into counters. Initially, he is not aware of the irony of Gomez’s hints that he is making Michael into his own image – “As for your son.../He’s followed your undergraduate career.” But later when Michael, tired of being just a “kind of prolongation of [his father’s] existence”, expresses his intention to “go far away/To some country” where he could take “a different name” and lead a life of his own by becoming a different person, Lord Claverton begins to see that his son is repeating his own experience. As Carol H. Smith observes Michael “rebellion has led him not to a discovery of himself through mastery of the past, but, ironically, to the same form of escape taken years before by his father, a course which will lead not to release but to the duplication of his father’s failures”. Lord Claverton realizes this thing and therefore gives him a timely warning:

Those who flee from their past will always lose the race.
I know this from experience. When you reach your goal,
Your imagined paradise of success and grandeur,

60. CPP, p. 539.
61. Ibid., p. 559.
62. Ibid.
You will find your past failures waiting there to greet you. A little later, when Mrs. Carghill repeats the hint given earlier by Gomez — “He’s the picture of you, Richard. As you were once” — Lord Claverton suddenly realizes his responsibility for the transformation of his son and that he is lost. The mask that he has prepared to avoid his real self has been completely torn away and he is left to confront his “hollow” private self. But Lord Claverton’s acknowledgement of his lostness is “paradoxically the beginning of discovery”. This makes him aware of his responsibility for his son’s nature and his need to face the past himself. Thus, when Monica urges him to escape from Gomez and Mrs. Carghill, he replies:

What I want to escape from
Is myself, is the past. But what a coward I am,
To talk of escaping! And what a hypocrite!
A few minutes ago I was pleading with Michael
Not to try to escape from his own past failures:
I said I know from experience. Do I understand the meaning of the lesson I would teach? Come, I’ll start to learn again.

He must have been moved to this realization also by Monica’s declaration that there must be “love within a family, love that’s lived in/But not looked at, love within the light of which/All else is seen, the love within which/All other love finds speech”. Monica’s saying that she would give her life for her father must also have made a deep impression on his heart. A.D. Moody rightly believes that this short speech of Monica constitutes a “crucial moment for Claverton and for the play”.

64. CPP, p. 561.
65. Ibid., p. 562.
67. CPP, p. 565.
68. Ibid., pp. 561-562.
sudden discovery that he is loved after all brings about a surprising change in Claverton and enables him, in the words of A.D. Moody, “to get scot free of his unreal and shameful selves, and to enter directly into the “illumination/Of knowing what love is”.”

The first thing love means to Claverton is confession – showing one’s real self to another person, and being really known by that person. This gives one release from one’s shame and failures, and this also means that one truly loves the person to whom one confesses:

If a man has one person, just one in his life,
To whom he is willing to confess everything-

Then he loves that person, and his love will save him.

The problem with Lord Claverton, however, is that even if he confessed everything to his daughter, she might not love him, as she worshipped the “part” he played and knew nothing about his real self. But as he is tired of keeping pretences, he decides to disclose everything before her and her fiancé Charles who are ready to share his “ghosts”. He would no longer flee from his pursuers but would turn and face them: “It is through this meeting that I shall escape them”. He acknowledges his responsibility for having corrupted Fred Culverwell, Massie Batterson, and Dick Ferry, “people with good in them”, and in so doing sees himself “emerging/From (his) spectral existence into something like reality”.

The acknowledgement of responsibility has been associated in all of Eliot’s plays with acknowledgement of one’s sinful identity, which finally leads to

71. Ibid., p. 568.
72. Ibid., p. 572.
73. Ibid., p. 571.
74. Ibid., p. 569.
redemption. It is noteworthy, however, that in the case of *The Elder Statesman*,
redemption is effected not through the silent and lonely way of negation, but through
the way of human love. Lord Claverton’s admission of guilt takes the form of a
confession to Monica. This assumes the form of “an act of love which releases him
from the prison of his moral isolation to breathe the free air of community.” 75 This is
evident from Monica’s sympathetic response to his father’s revelation of guilt: “Poor
father! All your life! And no one to share it with; I never knew how lonely you were/
Or why you were lonely.” 76 Claverton’s choice of human love is brought into final
focus a little later when he says to Monica and Charles:

> I’ve been freed from the self that pretends to be someone;
> And in becoming no one, I begin to live.
> It is worth while dying, to find out what life is. 77

Claverton’s progression from the admission of guilt to the discovery of
redemptive love indicates that he has achieved the wholesome integral vision, which
not only saves him, reintegrates his divided life and brings him peace, but also
redeems the lives of others. His vision has broadened and he has learnt to see others,
including his children and Charles, as whole human beings, and not as mere counters:

> It is the peace that ensues upon contrition
> When contrition ensues upon knowledge of the truth.
> Why did I always want to dominate my children?
> I’ve only just now had the illumination
> Of knowing what love is. 78

The change that has occurred in Claverton because of having developed a real

---

77. Ibid., p. 582.
78. Ibid., p. 581.
understanding of love, is evident in his declaration of his love not only for his daughter Monica, but also for Charles, and even for Michael. He can appreciate the fact that Monica loves and is loved, and this is the reason that she can love her father. His saying that he is “only a beginner in the practice of loving”79 expresses his humility. His first act of love for his daughter and prospective son-in-law is to leave them alone rather than to demand their attention. He walks offstage to die in the manner of Oedipus, having achieved peace. Monica and Charles achieve the union which in the first scene of the play was incomplete. Grounded in Monica’s vision of an eternal love, their private and public worlds become, in the terms of The Confidential Clerk, a single reality. This is clear from the following conversation of the lovers:

Monica.  Yes, he wanted to leave us alone together.
          And yet, Charles, though we’ve been alone to-day
          Only a few minutes, I’ve felt all the time...

Charles.  I know what you are going to say!
          We were alone together, in some mysterious fashion.
          Even with Michael, and despite those people,
          Because somehow we’d begun to belong together,
          And that awareness...

Monica.  Was a shield protecting both of us...

Charles.  So that now we are conscious of a new person
          Who is you and me together.

Monica.  I’ve loved you from the beginning of the world.
          Before you and I were born, the love was always there.
          That brought us together.80

79. Ibid., p. 582.
80. Ibid., pp. 82-583.
Realizing intuitively that her father lies dead under the beach tree, Monica feels not sorrow but happiness. Charles explains this strange experience and says: The dead has poured out a blessing on the living".\(^{81}\) "The play ends, as Denis Donoghue observes, in an "image of communal order" which encompasses "not merely individual felicity but an idea of social harmony".\(^{82}\) The ending of the play with Monica's affirmation of love's powerfulness even in the face of misery and death explains Eliot's faith in human love:

> Age and decrepitude can have no terrors for me,
> Loss and vicissitude cannot appal me,
> Not even death can dismay or amaze me,
> Fixed in the certainty of love unchanging. I feel utterly secure
> In you; I am a part of you.\(^{83}\)

The thematic pattern of *The Elder Statesman* is thus different from the earlier plays of Eliot in a number of aspects, most of which have already been pointed out in the above analysis. The important thing to note is that while the earlier plays depend largely on unresolved tensions, the resolution of tensions is a distinguishing feature of *The Elder Statesman*. Even Michael, who seems to have come under the corruptive influence of Gomez and Mrs. Carghill, retains the possibility of coming to terms with his destiny as his father had. Monica's insists that no matter what new identity her brother assumes, she will "always pretend that it is the same Michael".\(^{84}\) It suggests that Michael's repetition of his father's experience will be total, will include the final redemption. Eliot also wants to suggest through the case of Michael that sacrifice of the exceptional person creates "significant soil", but the degree of its efficacy depends on the moral decision of the individual.

---

81. Ibid., p. 583.
83. CPP, p. 583.
84. Ibid., p. 579.
Apart from the complicated case of Michael, the resolution effected in the play is explicit and very satisfying. This includes understanding between generations, the ardency of Monica’s relation with Charles, and the promise that although escape from isolation is a continuing human concern, one can achieve that escape within the limits of normal human relationships. In this connection Carol H. Smith has made a very pertinent remark:

It is indicative of Eliot’s most recent analysis of man’s spiritual disease that he presents in *The Elder statesman* only the Affirmative way to salvation, with no alternative representation of the Negative Way. Even in *The Confidential Clerk*, Colby, although choosing Eggerson’s garden of integration between the natural and the spiritual worlds, gave up human love for his divine mission. In *The Elder Statesman* the only complete means of salvation presented is through the recognition of human love as an earthly image of the divine love of God.  

While admitting the truth inherent in Smith’s remark, we have also to remember that *The Elder Statesman* is “the most confessional of Eliot’s works”, and part of the interest of the play lies in its relation to its author. Lyndall Gordon observes that *The Elder Statesman* is “a clearly autobiographical play about a great public figure who has become hollow at heart, and is ‘saved’, at the very end of his life, by the steadfast love of his daughter”. Whatever be the reasons, Eliot has included most of the themes of his earlier plays in his last play, and given positive treatment to them. These themes receive their best expression in the lines accorded to Lord Claverton. Edward of *The Cocktail Party* could have learned from Claverton’s comment on facades: “I’ve spent my life in trying to forget myself./In trying to identify myself with the part/I had chosen to play. And the longer we pretend/The

harder it becomes to drop the pretence."\textsuperscript{88} Harry of \textit{The Family Reunion} would agree with Claverton that "It's harder to confess the sin that no one believes in/Than the crime that everyone can appreciate./For the crime is in relation to the law/And the sin is in relation to the sinner."\textsuperscript{89} Amy of \textit{The Family Reunion} might profit from Claverton's recognition of parents' tyranny of children: "Why did I always want to dominate my children?.../So that I could believe in my own pretences".\textsuperscript{90}

As pointed out in the very beginning of the analysis of the play, \textit{The Elder Statesman} represents the maturing of Eliot's dramatic technique. In it, we find a very natural use of images, successful objectification of symbols, and, a conspicuous avoidance of prosiness in the verse. The handling of the agents of the redemptive action is particularly remarkable in this regard. Gomez and Mrs. Carghill, the ghosts of Claverton's past are real people, not just objectifications of elements in his conscience. They exist in their own right, but they are also reminders for him of the wrongs he has committed. "The naturalistic surface is not broken; it merely takes on more-than-natural significance. And this is much truer to general experience than the discontinuity between the natural and the supernatural that we find in \textit{The Family Reunion}".\textsuperscript{91}

The central character of the play, Lord Claverton, has been most intelligently conceived and skilfully developed. He is no prig like his distant relation Harry: he does not try to be a saint or to blame anyone for his failings; he only blames himself and appears therefore to be very human. In his progression from sin to love, "we move from the terror of loneliness and hopelessness through the anguish involved in recovery of contact with other human beings to the release from the prison of self at

\textsuperscript{88} CPP, pp. 568-569.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., p. 573.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p. 581.

\textsuperscript{91} D.E. Jones, op. cit., p. 204.
the point where the human is taken up into the divine”. 92

On the whole, *The Elder Statesman* affirms human values of understanding, trust, and love. It should be noted, however, that human love is shown to be complementary to, and the reflection of, the divine love, rather than its substitute. Thus, the statement of Monica- “I’ve loved you from the beginning of the world./Before you and I were born, the love was always there/That brought us together” – is made intelligible in the light of the creative Love. As it is, the central concern of Eliot remains to be the relation of the human and the divine, the social and the religious, though there are variations in the emphasis. We tend to agree with William V. Spanos that in *The Elder Statesman*, “Eliot comes closest to achieving his dramatic ideal: that unity of inner and outer action, of value and reality, that renders the drama a single yet multivocal image, or in his own terms, “an analogy of the Incarnation whereby the human is taken up into the divine””. 93 Living merely at the secular social level, Lord Claverton was lonely and anxiety-ridden; but his attainment of love for his children and for others brings him closer to divine love. Eliot, thus, achieves a dramatic synthesis of the social humanistic vision and his religious belief in representing the process of redemption through divine love.

92. Ibid., p. 203.