CHAPTER TWO

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For a poet-dramatist who tries to unfold as it were the whole of the European cultural tradition in the palm of his hand as a living moment, with the past and the present in symbiotic, creative relationship, determining and being re-determined by the future, the question of heritage assumes a new critical significance. And it is Eliot's quest for significance in life which recurs thematically throughout his critical prose, poetical works and drama that makes him a segment of the great Graeco-Roman-Christian arc through Homer, Virgil, Dante and Shakespeare. Again, it is the search for meaning in life, his daring experimentation, his critical acceptance and compromise, which puts him in the company of the avant-garde, Absurdist, Symbolists, Imagists, Expressionists and their ilk, thus giving him a unique position of a colossus with one foot among the ancients and the other among the moderns. To appreciate his dramatic achievement, we must have a comprehensive view of Eliot's own perception of the meaning of tradition and culture, more so when we understand that a work of art does not communicate its meaning in isolation but as an integral part of the whole culture of a society. "It is culture of the society that is fundamental," says Eliot in Notes Towards the Definition of Culture. Since culture is "the way of life of a society"
it is functional at all levels, and like religion, defines the pattern of living which does not mean that it is identical with religion - rather its various manifestations, manners, learning, philosophy, arts and letters, are a product of that living religion; to wit: European Culture would have been impossible but for the growth and spread of Christianity albeit in Graeco-Roman vessels. European Culture, its unity in diversity giving it creative tension and hence its tensile strength, is "a shared tradition" from Greece, Rome and Christianity that determines the present.

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future.
And time future contained in time past
('Burnt Norton')

This notion of continuity and mutuality of past and present, of tradition and modernity was explicitly stated in *After Strange Gods*:

"Tradition is not solely or even primarily the maintenance of certain dogmatic beliefs; these beliefs have come to take their living form in the course of the formation of a tradition. What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rites to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of the same people living in the same place."

By neglecting tradition we lose our grip on the
present and therefore, should be conscious of the livingness of tradition which, as he says in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," "cannot be inherited and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and compasses a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity."

The problem of tradition is, in essence, the problem of communication of the contemporary writer who finds himself in the tower of Babel due to a virtual rejection of living tradition. Even when a writer accepts and embraces the tradition and culture of his country, the struggle for meaning is never over.
That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory:
A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
With words and meanings

('East Coker')

Without the acceptance of the common tradition "the intolerable wrestle" with meaning continues, communication becomes an impossibility and men of letters become incommunicable islands, with their private undeciphered code systems. A dramatist finally loses significance and hence his justification.

Acceptance of tradition does not, however, imply the negation of revolt or experimentation, without which tradition would not develop, because Eliot's whole idea of that it is tradition is something which grows and changes through complexification. Revolt against tradition takes cognizance of that tradition, and by revolting against it alters it and becomes a part of it.

Nonetheless, what is this literary tradition to be accepted and to be lived which would make communication possible? In *What is a Classic?* Eliot says:

The blood stream of European literature is Latin and Greek - not as two systems of circulation, but one, for it is through Rome that our parentage in Greece must be traced. What common measure of excellence have we in literature, among our several languages,
which is not the classical measure? What mutual intelligibility can we hope to preserve except in our common heritage of thought and feeling in those two languages, for the understanding of which no European people is in any position of advantage over any other?

If the Greek and Roman cultures form the blood stream, Christianity is the soul of European culture, and as he says in 'Religion and Literature,' Religion as a system of belief, thought, morality and feelings, has a definite effect on literature at every level and it is not possible to separate religion from literature completely.

The question is whether it is enough for a dramatist to write within the received Greco-Roman-Christian framework to be able to communicate his vision of life or experience. We shall study the dramatic conventions including those of language which T.S. Eliot adopts to communicate not with a national audience or "the fit audience, though few," but with a larger public, the unconscious majority as he calls it, and times beyond his own.

(II)

In an attempt to "cut across the present stratification of public taste," Eliot thought that "the ideal medium for poetry, to my mind, and the most direct means of social
usefulness for poetry, is the theatre." But when a poet comes to the theatre he is obliged to accept the theatrical tradition of his times or invent his own acceptable conventions to effect communication with the audience. T.S. Eliot, however, made a valiant attempt to combine the ritualistic form of verse drama with the prevalent naturalist theatre of the Priestley-Galsworthy-Shaw variety, especially after *Murder in the Cathedral*, with far-reaching consequences which would continue to rake up controversies for a long time to come.

It would be instructive to recall the modern tradition to which Eliot was heir. The movement known as Naturalism, which according to Raymond Williams is a great revolution still running its course, had its origins, in the 19th century's passion for truth and men's changed perception of the universe and his own position in it. The nominal ideas emanated from Darwin-Descartes rationalism but in literature Zola with his "slice of life" concept initiated tendencies which snowballed into the Naturalism of Henrik Ibsen. When Ibsen was introduced to England in the 1880s and the 1890s by William Archer, English drama, which had long been moribund, flowered into a new life and leap-frogged into modernity skipping the romantic phase of the European drama. The English dramatists took to naturalistic-realism like a duck takes to water escaping the pangs of continental controversies about
Naturalism. It may be that the development of realistic drama in Britain was due to a misunderstanding of the true spirit of Naturalism which in Europe turned inward leading to a further development in Symbolism, Expressionism and Absurdism. In England, in any case, Naturalism took the form of social-realistic and psycho-realistic drama in prose which fitted amply into the proscenium stage of the time. However, new stirrings, as a result of new socio-political forces, were being felt everywhere. World War I caused an agonising self-introspection and this increased the passion for truth within man himself. Across the border W.B. Yeats was recommending a new dramatic convention:

... Our unimaginative arts are content to set a piece of the world as we know it in a place by itself, to put their photographs, as it were, in a plush or plain frame, but the arts which interest me while seeming to separate from the world and us a group of figures, images, symbols, enable us to pass a few moments into a deep of the mind that had hitherto been too subtle for our habitation.

It is into "a deep of the mind" that dramatists wanted to explore in order to expose the truth about man and his inner universe. This 'expose' led the Naturalists to proclaim: since this is the truth about society, it is impossible to live; Expressionists: this is my inner reality, therefore it is impossible to live; Absurdists: Not only this society, but any society, not only this
situation, but any situation in which man is placed is absurd. Bertolt Brecht made a dialectical-Marxist approach to man's absurdity and tried to solve man's predicament in a historical context; T. S. Eliot no less anguished by the alienation and separation of the modern man suggested his salvation in a religious context.

Being conscious of the ancient Greek tradition and modern European heritage in drama, reinforced by his impassioned faith in the re-discovered Anglo-Catholic Christianity, Eliot made a critical choice of verse drama arguing in "Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry" that: "The human soul in intense emotion strives to express itself in verse. It is not for me, but for the neurologist, to discover why and how feeling and rhythm are related. The tendency, at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasize the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get to the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse." Eliot's concern and that of the ancient Greeks, Elizabethans and the modern Absurdists is identical: "to get to the permanent and universal."

The conventions which Eliot recommends correspond to those of the Graeco-Elizabethans, encompassing the vision of a Christian. The choice of verse in drama was dictated by a dramatic impulse, purely on the consideration of art. Continuing, in the "Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry," he says:
If drama tends to be poetic drama, not by adding an embellishment and still less by limiting its scale, we should expect a dramatic poet like Shakespeare to write his finest poetry in his most dramatic scenes. And this is just what we do find: what makes it most dramatic is what makes it most poetic. No one ever points to certain plays of Shakespeare’s as being the most poetic and to other plays as being the most dramatic. The same plays are the most poetic and the most dramatic and this is not by a concurrence of two activities, but by the full expression of one and the same activity. I agree that the dramatist who is not a poet is so much the less a dramatist.

But a poet who is not conscious of the problem of communication in theatre might end in writing a closet or coterie drama. Eliot was not only aware of the problem in his critical observations but also showed this awareness in practice from *The Family Reunion* to *The Elder Statesman*. As he observes in "Poetry and Drama":

But in the theatre, the problem of communication presents itself immediately. You are deliberately writing verse for other voices, not for your own, and you do not know whose voices they will be. You are aiming to write lines which will have an immediate effect upon an unknown and unprepared audience, to be interpreted to that audience by unknown actors rehearsed by an unknown producer. And the unknown audience cannot be expected to show any indulgence towards the poet. The poet cannot afford to write his play merely for his admirers, those who know his non-dramatic work and are prepared to receive favourably anything he puts his name to. He must write with an audience in view which knows nothing and cares nothing, about any previous success he may have had before he ventured into theatre.
Hence one finds out that many of the things one likes to do, and knows how to do, are out of place; and that every line must be judged by a new law, that of dramatic relevance.  

This dramatic relevance and sense of theatre could well be equally achieved by prose drama too, as Ibsen and Chekhov did, but Eliot believes that art, including drama, should, before the audience, lift the curtain on eternity, so it were, by heightening their sensibilities.

It seems to me that beyond the nameable, classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed towards action - the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express - there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; of feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action... This peculiar range of sensibility can be expressed by dramatic poetry, at its moments of greatest intensity. At such moments, we touch the border of those feelings which only music can express.

The type of verse suitable to dramatic communication could not be 'poetic' all the time; it would rise to intensity when the dramatic action demanded it while at other times the verse would approximate to colloquial speech, to a poetry so invisible that the audience should not be aware that they were listening to verse. This would enable a dramatist to make transitions smoothly to enable the audience to have a glimpse of something beyond the "nameable and classifiable." Eliot's emphasis is not
only upon the flexibility of dramatic verse, but also upon its "transparency," because obscurity (due to concentration, juxtaposition and sudden transitions as we find in his poetry) would reduce communication in theatre. Again, in 'Poetry and Drama,' he says:

It is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed towards a region where that guide can avail us no further.12

It is our attempt to study Eliot's travails in communication through poetic drama to reach not only the conscious minority but also the wide masses in theatre.

(III)

The two dramatic pieces Sweeney Agonistes - Fragments of an Aristophanic Melodrama, and The Rock, a pageant play, constitute Eliot's earliest attempt at theatre communication, forming, as it were, a slender bridge carrying on the theme of his early poetry as well as experiment with the dramatic dialogue and choric verse which he was to use in Murder in the Cathedral and elsewhere, later.

The Sweeney fragments are full of dramatic contrast presented through jazzy rhythms. The fragment opens with a
dialogue between two prostitutes about one Pereira who pays the rent and is no gentleman and another one, Sam, who could make the girls laugh, and is tolerable. The inane meaningless talk expressive of boredom is interrupted by "Ting a ling ling" of the telephone ... from Pereira who must be avoided through some suitable excuse - thus turning the telephone into an instrument of non-communication. The girls cut cards for luck but they got an ill-omen of "Coffin" which worries Doris who "dreamt of weeding all last night." The card game is, however, interrupted by the arrival of a party consisting of Sam Wauchope, Horsfall, Klopstein, and Krumpecker and the usual introductions, male bragging and mutual solicitations, saying too much, meaning too little. The prologue is a very promising experiment in verse dialogue but raises no expectations of dramatic action or happening in the critical reader or an audience.

In the second part called "Fragment of an Agon" Sweeney the protagonist presaging those isolated conscious individuals like Harry, Celia, Coleby and Lord Claverton, of the later plays, indulges in a cannibalistic conversation with Doris till he comes to that intense moment for which Eliot pleaded and justified - verse in drama.
Birth, and copulation, and death,
That's all, that's all, that's all, that's all,
Birth, and copulation, and death.

This is the boredom and horror which Eliot earlier had
given poetic expression to in The Waste Land and Hollow Men
on a much wider canvas with a universal sweep.

This intense poetic moment is followed by Aristophanic
songs by Wauchope and Hoefall, Klipstein and Krumppacker
again bringing the feelings to a comic low, till Sweeney
lets out the horror:

I knew a man once did a girl in
Any man might do a girl in
Any man has to, needs to, wants to
Once in a life time, do a girl in
Well he kept her there in a bath
With a gallon of lysol in a bath.

The story of the man who "did the girl in" is beyond
crime and punishment and the man enters a state of
consciousness which is beyond "the nameable and
classifiable."

When you're alone like he was alone
You're either or neither
I tell you again it don't apply
Death or life or life or death
dQath ia Ilfs and life is death.

Death is life and life is death.

I gotta use words when I talk to you.
But if you understand or if you don't.
That's nothing to me and nothing to you.

Sweeney apparently anticipates Harry and others of that ilk who feel separated, isolated and who sacrifice themselves to realize their own destiny corresponding to the second epigraph of the Sweeney Agonistes: "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union until it has divested itself of the love of created beings" - St. John of the Cross.

The theme of isolation and sacrifice runs through all the plays of T.S. Eliot but the important point is whether this theme has been conceived in terms of drama, not only as literature for critical readers, but also for the theatre and the other media where the possibility of communication with the masses, the majority cutting all class stratifications, exists - the aim which Eliot explicitly stated more than once. In the subsequent section we shall examine this point.

The Choruses of The Rock, didactic and propagandistic, bear the same theme of finding a meaning in life though they make poor drama. Their great importance lay in the opportunity which the choric verse gave to Eliot in
perfecting the Choruses of Murder in the Cathedral. One can observe several correspondences between the Rock Choruses and the Choruses in Murder in the Cathedral, as well as the advance Eliot made in the quality of Choric verse in the play. For instance the Chorus beginning with "I have smelt them the death bringers..." shows remarkable closeness to and improvement on the last Chorus of The Rock, which based upon the Gloria of the Mass, anticipates much of the success of Murder in the Cathedral.

The great snake lies half awake, at the bottom of the pit of the world,
curled
In folds of himself until he awakens in hunger and moving his head to Right and to left prepares for his hour to devour.

The dramatic language, jazzy, inane, with spurts of intensity developed in Sweeney Agonistes and the deep sonorous choric verse of The Rock, as well as the two different themes of spiritual sickness (Sweeney) and the salvation through dedication to higher purpose (The Rock), are blended and used by T.S. Eliot in all his future plays.

(TV)

T.S. Eliot's problem in Murder in the Cathedral
was how to get across to his materialistic audience the idea of sacrifice and renewal of life through martyrdom as a convincing reality in dramatic terms, as a lived theatrical experience. Mankind had already undergone the World ravages of War I and stood precipitously (1935) on the edge of another abyss. The word had become totally severed from the WORD and human life seemed as accidental and futile as the death itself - fodder for war machine or an input for the industrial automaton. It was to this spiritually benumbed sensibility that T.S. Eliot wanted to communicate the vital import of a different kind of death, not accidental or futile, but purposeful - a consequence of total surrender to and acceptance of the will of God.

The choice of the title of the play Murder in the Cathedral, though inspired by Mrs. E. Martin Browne, itself indicates Eliot's strong desire to reach as wide an audience as possible, though the play was specially commissioned for the Canterbury audience. We have the evidence of E. Martin Browne, Eliot's friend and director of his plays:

He (T.S. Eliot) had always wanted the ritual aspect of the play to be balanced by the homicidal; he was a devotee of Sherlock Holmes, and this title, with its sardonic implications, had a contemporary quality which would induce in an audience an attitude favourable to the acceptance of the ironies particularly in the Knights' apology, as a natural part of the play. After that due consideration which was always given to any suggestion this one was gratefully accepted. The title was a "selling" one, and if it
proved deceptive to some who came to see, as they expected a thriller, the great reputation which the play gained soon made its true nature known. I am sure that its author never regretted the choice. 15

Murder in the Cathedral, which Raymond Williams calls Eliot's "most assured dramatic success," does not depend for its success on any thriller or Sherlock Holmes qualities. Its greatness as drama is due to the beautiful pattern (which is its action) woven out of the correspondence between the conventions of the Greek Drama on the one hand and the liturgical rituals of the Church on the other.

Eliot chose the model of Aeschylean tragedy in which there is only one great situation, which grips our minds, with at the most one or two sudden suggestions of action crossing it. In "Poetry and Drama," Eliot himself has commented upon the action of his play:

...the essential action of the play – both the historical facts and the matter which I invented – was somewhat limited. A man comes home, foreseeing that he will be killed, and he is killed. I did not want to increase the number of characters, I did not want to write a chronicle of twelfth-century politics, nor did I want to tamper unscrupulously with the meagre records as Tennison did (in introducing Fair Rosamund, and in suggesting that Becket had been crossed in love in early youth). I wanted to concentrate on death and martyrdom. The introduction of a chorus of excited and sometimes hysterical women, reflecting in their emotion the significance of the action, helped wonderfully. 16

But the Chorus is more than a group of hysterical women; they are the worshippers, the pilgrims to Canterbury
who ask for help from their saint and ultimately represent humanity pondering over the greater mystery - of iniquity and holiness. It is the Chorus that communicates to us the total dramatic experience because what we expect in drama, that is change, something happening to the characters on the stage and to the audience, is reflected in the Chorus. It performs a dual function: that of exposition (in the Greek sense) as well as that of communal participation of the Church ritual.

Seven years and the summer is over
Seven years since the Archbishop left us,
He who was always kind to his people.
But it would not be well if he should return.

The poor women of Canterbury who have waited and suffered the rotation of the year from sombre November to decaying October, are still waiting, as the New Year waits, as "Destiny waits in the hand of God, shaping the still unshapen." The Chorus, and the rolling pattern of the seasons, show common humanity suffering neglect or oppression under a situation where, "the king rules or the barons rule" while the wheel of action turns around the silent centre of God.

With the entry of the priests and Herald the theatrical expectations become alive, especially when the third priest says, "What peace can be found to grow between
Although it is only "peace but not the kiss of peace" between the King and the Archbishop, "yet let the wheel turn for ill or good," as the more perceptive third priest says. The Chorus in a shrill cry of anguish presages, "Ill the wind, ill the time, uncertain the profit, certain the danger" and once again, like a musical composition, picks up the refrain of the cycle of seasons against which it predicts "a doom on the house, a doom on yourself, a doom on the world." The women of Canterbury relapse into a common shapeless humanity that is afraid of anything happening, "living and partly living" carrying out the mundane affairs or routine life, gathering apples and waiting for the corn to ripen, listening to gossips and scandals — 'living and partly living.'

In a verse line changing from short to a long overflowing one, the Chorus expresses fear of the cataclysmic happening — something which the small folk cannot stand and do not want to be "drawn into the pattern of fate," and therefore solicit the Archbishop to return to France.

But now a great fear is upon us, a fear not of one but of many,
A fear like birth and death, when we see birth and death alone
In a void: apart.

When the second priest scolds the 'immodest and
babbling women of Canterbury 'for croaking like frogs on tree tops,' Thomas Becket expounds the mystery 'that action is suffering and suffering is action' which E. Martin Browne explains as: "The 'pattern' which is to subsist through action and suffering, in Becket's thinking is the pattern of God's purpose, which is imaged by the wheel turning in a symmetrical order around the still centre where God rests." Becket has only to perfect his will and surrender himself to this pattern of action and suffering.

End will be simple, sudden, god-given
Meanwhile the substance of our first act
Will be shadows, and the strife with shadows.

The dramatic purpose of the Tempters' 'voices under sleep, waking a dead world' is to prepare Becket for the final act of submission to the will of God so that through martyrdom the Church may be strengthened and life may be renewed through sacrifice - corresponding to the image of the turning wheel of action and suffering around the silent centre: God. The first three Tempters dramatize the past of the protagonist and the impossibility of Becket going back to his gay youth, to real power that grows to glory or "to become a wolf among the wolves."

It is the fourth temptation which plunges Becket's soul in agony and even after he says that temptation shall not come in this form / one is not certain either as a critical
reader or as a spectator in the theatre whether Becket follows the right reason for the right purpose. May be the final victory is never attained till the struggle ends in martyrdom.

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?

The fourth Tempter throws back ironically the earlier words of Becket: "You know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer."

Becket relapses into a meditative silence while the stage is alive once again with the Chorus, Priests and Tempters speaking alternatively a dithyrambic dialogue. The Chorus once again, like a symphony, takes up the theme of "living and partly living" and conjures up images of violence and death:

Puss-purr of leopard, footfall of padding bear,
Palm-pat of nodding ape, square hyaena waiting
For laughter, laughter, laughter!

and pleading before him to save them and save himself, as in
the earlier choric verses.

Becket's inner struggle with the shadows, echoed and re-echoed by the Chorus in some of the sublimest poetry, culminates in his reaching a calm understanding that a "servant of God has a chance of greater sin" and the last temptation 'to do the right deed for the wrong reason' is the greatest treason.

Though thematically the Cæmon may not be essential because it only speaks explicitly in cadenced prose what has been said in dramatic poetry in the first part, it, however, functions as a bridge between two pronouncements of high intensities. It recapitulates and gathers in itself the dramatic struggle which Becket undergoes in order to prepare the audience for their own trial and temptation (a la David Jones) when the knights address them directly and try to sway the modern audience by drawing a correspondence with contemporary situations:

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. It is never the design of man; for 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.

This explicit statement about the meaning of martyrdom not only strengthens the dramatic probability of Becket's
injunction to the priests: "Unbar the doors! throw open the 
doors!" but also strengthens the audience against the Fourth 
Knight's exhortation to the audience to give the verdict of 
"suicide while of unsound mind." Therefore the Sermon 
the serves a very important dramatic purpose of bringing the 
audience back to the concept of martyrdom as a witness to 
the Glory of God in Heaven, as God's law above man's law, as 
God's Peace against the King's Peace.

The Sermon in prose reinforces the audience's emotions 
to enable them to participate in the ritual of Part II which 
begins with a lyrical choric verse about the renewal of life 
through sacrifice and death, parallel to the cycle of the 
seasons and the unfolding tension:

Does the bird sing in the South?

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

The peace of this world is always uncertain unless 
men keep the 

Peace of God.

And war among men defiles this world, but death in 
the Lord 
renews it.

After the Chorus, there is a ritualistic chanting of 
the three priests celebrating the martyrdom of St. Stephen, 
the first martyr, St. John the Evangelist and the author of 
the Revelation, and the Holy Innocents massacred at Bethlehem.
on Herod's order, coinciding with the three days after Christmas and thus bringing the event to 29th December, the day of Becket's martyrdom.

The priests ask each other "What is today?" and it is the third priest with a prophetic insight who brings back his fellows to the significance of the day:

Every day is the day we should fear from or hope from...

The critical moment
That is always now, and here.

With "now and here" the murderers make their entry and the scene becomes alive with hyper-tension:

First Knight: Business before dinner. We will roast your pork first, and dine upon it after.

This highly charged theatrical clash is dramatically closed with Becket's exit with the words "...I shall rise from my tomb/to submit my cause before God's throne" and is followed by the knights' threat to come back with swords.

With the Chorus left alone, the preceding action curls itself up in recollection and meditation upon the perpetual phenomenon of life and death, growth and decay, of creatures living in the sea and on the earth, flying in the air and crawling in the intestines of humanity, of nature clawing
with bloody claws against nature. The Chorus, one of the most sublime poetic pieces in modern literature, conjures before the imagination the awesome spectacle of the universe in the jaws of a gory struggle for survival — a backdrop against which the murder of Becket takes place as the will of God.

Beckett reminds the priests that death would come only when he is worthy, that is when his will is perfect, when he surrenders his will to the Will of God. As the frightened priests take him to Vespers, the Chorus, against a Dies Irae sung in the distance, recites a passage from St. John of the Cross revealing the path of utter loneliness, of nothingness before the final union in Godhead:

Emptyness, absence, separation from God;
The horror of the effortless journey, to the empty land Which is no land, only emptiness, absence, the Void, Where those who were men can no longer turn the mind To distraction, delusion, escape into dream, pretence, Where the soul is no longer deceived, for there are no objects, no tones, No colours, no forms, to distract, to divert the soul From seeing itself, foully united for ever, nothing with nothing
Not what we call death, but what beyond death's not death.
The Chorus like the hymn Dies Irae finally ends with a prayer to Jesus Christ to save us.

The scene is alive again with Sockey's ordering the priests to open the door because "we have only to conquer / Now by suffering" - suffering which is action in a perpetual motion of the wheel around a silent centre that is God. As he commands his cause to God and is killed, the Chorus bursts into the intense poetry of a universe bathed in blood, rhetorically asking:

Clear the air, clear the sky; wash the wind!
take the stone from the stone, take the skin from the arm, take the muscle from the bone, and wash them. Wash the stone, wash the bone, wash the brain, wash the soul, wash them wash them.

After this spiritually agonising exhortation of the Chorus, the Knights step forward and a sudden shock passes through the audience as if in a contemporary world a dictator in Coturni with a wave of his hand, dismisses the noise and chaos of democracy and with a subtle insinuating logic tries to capture their minds for the new order he has thrust upon the world. The speeches of the Knights attempt to 'alienate' the audience from the concept of martyrdom explicitly stated in the prose sermon and dramatically realized in the preceding action and in Thomas's struggle with the four Tempters. The speeches of
the Knights are a dramatic outcome of the fight with the shadows and Becket's victory over them and his final surrender into the will of God. Dramatically, they have an inevitability and constitute good theatre especially when the Knights' speeches are followed by the explanation of the third priest that "the Church is stronger for their action/ Triumphant in adversity."

The final Chorus, a hallelujah, is chanted in the mood of calm of mind, all passion spent. Humanity has been brought back to the path of God by an act of martyrdom, the martyrdom of Thomas Becket. Life has been renewed and made holy by the sacrifice of the chosen one, in the line of all the martyrs who have strengthened the Church; man's faith in God.

Murder in the Cathedral, has a universal theme and as a dramatic poem would continue beyond its time. It has some of the noblest passages of poetry which have a dramatic inevitability. The whole play is like a musical composition where the Chorus not only exposes and anticipates action but gathers the movement into a still point of meditation - thus making the play a pulsating movement of dramatic poetry which is also brilliant theatre.

Murder in the Cathedral impregnates the consciousness of the audience with the dramatic illusion of a different kind of life - a life of sacrificial death which renews not
only the life of a saint through his martyrdom but also attempts to reshape the unregenerate humanity. This poetic illusion is communicated by dramatising different levels of consciousness as perceived in different characters: Thomas Becket, the Knights and the Tempters, and the Chorus (as audience). In his critical writings T.S. Eliot had proposed:

...One character whose sensibility and intelligence should be on the plane of the most sensitive and intelligent members of the audience; his speeches should be addressed to them as much as to the other personages in the play—or rather, should be addressed to the latter, who were to be material, literal-minded, and visionless, with the consciousness of being overheard by the former. 18

The dramatic action in Murder in the Cathedral consists in transforming this consciousness of the audience from the early passivity of “For us, the poor, there is no action, / But only to wait and to witness” through “In our veins our bowels our skulls as well” to the final awakening: “...the blood of the martyr and the agony of the saints / Is upon our heads”. This translation of the audience’s consciousness culminating in the final participation and acceptance of martyrdom is negotiated through the dramatic device of the Tempters who are the projection of Becket’s own doubts presented expressionistically, and his non-resistance to the violence and outrage of the Knights as a consequence of his earlier victory over himself. The
theme of Martyrdom as an act of divine radiance which no mechanism of state power or subterfuge of intellect could eclipse is presented as a dramatic movement from the final temptation to the total surrender finally - the whole pattern being unfolded on the backdrop of ritualistic correspondences of the Church, from the rhythms of the holy hymns to responses. When the Knights step out of this pattern and address the audience directly, the jolt to another level of awareness is traumatic and the contrast between the peace of the king/dictator and the Peace of God is communicated in a flash. The fact of martyrdom of a saint whose sacrifice is the cause of, as well as a perpetual necessity for the renewal of life is, thus, successfully communicated in dramatic terms. Eliot seems to transfer miraculously even the audience into a new climate of faith, where martyrdom, otherwise outmoded, becomes a real possibility. Here is an exemplar of that emergent form, an idiom of communication, where the audience is imperceptibly absorbed into the dramatic experience and the total outcome is a unity of communication realised by the reciprocation of the reality of the theatre and the reality of a knowing audience.

T.S. Eliot relinquished the gains of Murder in the Cathedral considering the play to be a "dead-end" because
it was a religious play written for a special audience in a particular verse on the model of *Everyman*. He had created a neutral style, neither archaic nor contemporary by avoiding the blank verse proper bearing in his mind the performance of the nineteenth century dramatists whose failure was primarily due to the exhausted dramatic language. Therefore the choice of the verse rhythm of *Everyman* solved the problem of this particular play, *Murder in the Cathedral* only. It did not solve the problem for his subsequent plays because he wanted "to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre." He was in search of rhythms for "colloquial speech and was willing "to discipline his poetry" and put it on a very thin diet in order to adapt it to the needs of the stage. He wanted to liberate his verse from the high-strung stance of his first play.

He states in *Poetry and Drama*: "What I worked out is subsequently what I have continued to employ: a line of varying length and varying number of syllables, with a caesura and three stresses. The caesura and the stresses may come at different places, almost anywhere in the line; the stresses may be close together or well separated by light syllables; the only rule being that there must be one stress on (one side) the caesura and two on the other."
The Family Reunion is Eliot's first step away from the formal grandeur and nobility of Murder in the Cathedral, wherein the Greek form and liturgical elements are blended in an intense ritual which uplifts the audience. This loss is the price he paid for writing in a contemporary idiom.

The Family Reunion is a drama of "contemporary people speaking contemporary language" where the language, in the words of Andrew Kennedy "undergoes a gradual intensification, a layer-by-layer movement from the periphery to the centre, colloquial speech converted into dramatic poetry." But all this is done in a naturalistic framework and Naturalism and the demands of the commercial theatre tend to lessen the poetry resulting in a disharmony between the conventions of poetic drama and those of naturalistic drama.

The Family Reunion is based — as the title sufficiently indicates — on family relationships which are controlled by the Furies, in accordance with Aeschylus's plot in the Oresteia though the latter's Chorus is of a totally different kind.

The dramatic conflict arises because, Amy, the widow of Lord Monchenssey, a strong-willed woman who suffered a loveless marriage in spite of her three sons, is determined that her eldest son (conceived in the pseudo Greek mould), should accept the charge of the family estate at Wishwood for which she arranges a party on her birthday where her
three sisters Agatha, Violet, and Ivy, her two brothers-in-law Charles and Gerald, and a niece, Mary are invited. Harry, who would be returning to Wishwood after eight years, too, like his father, had a lukeless marriage because his wife died accidentally, in mysterious circumstances, making him feel guilty - and a victim of the Furies. He comes to Wishwood to escape his past, the Furies. The uncle who live at a different level of consciousness think it to be a case of crime and detection. Thematically it is Harry's sin and expiation, his conversion which is a triumph though in dramatic terms it has been alleged not to have been realized fully: the climax, Harry's conversion is a dramatic anti-climax according to Helen Gardner. T.S. Eliot himself was aware of this weakness and wanted to correct the flaw as his letter to E. Martin Browne shows:

I am sure that if the moment of 'conversion,' so to call it, could be made clear and become the unmistakable climax of the play, it would gain immeasurably. The question is, how to do this?

The first problem is, how far does Agatha know the experience through which Harry passes? because the scene as it is now is dramatically difficult through lack of contrast. If she goes the whole way with Harry, it is difficult to take the development in their scene further than the present: "I feel happy for a moment, as if I had come home." But if, as I suspect, she knows about but has never known, his ultimate experience, you might be able to get the scene to a point, just before the Furies' entrance, at which he attains to a knowledge she cannot share or even understand - for I think you want his experience to be more than a resolution of the old problem, an unnoting, a lifting of the curse: he comes into a new country in which
everything looks different. Can he best explain the experience to her in these terms? by looking at the wife's death, the family, his mother, and seeing something in each case startlingly different - surprising to himself? This would serve to dramatise the experience. Take for instance the passage in which he thinks he could now get on with his mother - at present dramatically flat, this could be heightened by surprise. And Agatha's point of view regarding the mother-son relationship could be developed in contrast.

T.S. Eliot never had the time to correct this flaw at the heart of the play as his correspondence with E.Martin Browne shows.

But the real point is whether conversion which is but another form of martyrdom could ever be convincingly displayed without destroying the mystery of it. If T.S. Eliot had followed E.Martin Browne's suggestion he might have added some clarity and explanation to the 'unnamable and unclassifiable' matter but at the same time, he would have deprived the audience of the scope for the leap of its imagination by diminishing the aesthetic distance between the stage and the audience. The fact of conversion better left to the audience's imagination.

Like Ibsen's drama, The Family Reunion opens the naturally in a drawing room of a northern country-house. Amy's opening dialogue moves towards poetic intensity when she says "And time would not stop in the dark," but when she says she is cold, her sister Agatha
lets out a taunt "Wickwood was always a cold place, Amy," thus exposing the hidden tension between the two sisters. The conversation meanders through different generations when Gerald the stupidest in the group asks Mary about her opinion of the generation conflict; Mary is stung/quick and walks out with a pathetic statement, "I don't belong to any generation." In her absence we are informed that Mary could have married Harry if things had proceeded according to Mary's plans. She is still hopeful, because she refuses to see any change: "Nothing has been changed. I have seen to that." It is Agatha who lifts the audience to a different level of consciousness through her poetic intensity.

...because everything is irrevocable because the past is irremediable Because the future can only be built Upon the real past.

This quiet sliding between one level of consciousness and another, distinguishing different characters, is one way of building the meaning of the play. As Agatha says, again, When the loop in the time comes - and it does not come for everybody -
The hidden is revealed, and the spectres show themselves.
Agatha's dark hints are pooh-poohed though the group explicitly talks about the disappearance of Harry's wife for which "There can be no grief / And no regret and no remedies," according to Amy who in order to contrive Harry's happiness asks the party to behave as if nothing has happened. Agatha says in a passage of poetic flight that it would not be possible to ignore "The paw under the door" and any attempt to do so would "tighten the knot of confusion into the perfect misunderstanding." The Chorus consisting of Ivy, Violet, Gerald and Charles breaks into a chant about its awkwardness: "Like amateur actors in a dream when the curtain rises, to find themselves, dressed for a different play, or having rehearsed the wrong parts."

The exposé of Amy's pantomime, consuming such a long stage-time comes to an end with the sudden appearance of Harry, unhinged and distracted:

Can't you see them? You don't see them,

but I see them ...

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

Why here? Why here?

The group tries to smother him with things mundane assuring him nothing has changed and he must take command at Wickwood. Goaded by Agatha, Harry says:
You have gone through life in sleep
Never woken to the nightmare.

I am the old house
With the noxious smell and the sorrow before morning,
In which all past is present, all degradation
Is unredeemable.

The dramatic conflict, is conceived as a clash at various
planes of awareness. Harry's problem is viewed through these
different levels of consciousness: of Agatha, Mary, Amy and
the Chorus.

He says he cannot explain his experience because it
is "unspeakable, untranslatable." The particular has no
language. After this long poetic passage communicated well
to the readers but difficult for the audience who do not have
the benefit of a re-reading, Harry lets out the information
about his wife:

When I pushed her over.

Violet: Pushed her?

This is an electric shock to the audience and the
theatre is alive with expectation. Through the familiar has
suddenly erupted the mysterious, a common mode of communica-
tion among the modern playwrights.
Harry: That night I slept heavily, alone.
Again,
... I lay two days in contented drowsiness;
Then I recovered. I am afraid of sleep:

And they are always near.

Harry's speech raises the expectation of a momentous universal drama about to open up in a tremendous sweep. But it does not take that direction because the drama of conversion should not seem propagandistic or overtly religious. By making God's ways spectacular, he would plunge the situation into an unconvincing melodrama.

Harry is advised a rest-cure to bring him back to his normal behaviour - that is the way his uncles and aunts view the problem. In his absence the group indulge in speculation about the possible causes of his malady. Amy goes out to call Dr. Warburton, which Agatha regards as "a necessary move / In an unnecessary direction."

Now, the play folds its poetic wings and slides down to the naturalistic level of a drama concerned with crime and detection. This alternation between the liturgical mode and the naturalistic mode is a distinguished feature where the latter acts as a comic relief. The stupidity of the uncles and aunts isolates Harry still further and heightens the audience's awareness of Harry's plight.
In the meantime, Charles - "There is a lot in my own past life that presses on my chest" - decides to question Harry's chauffeur Denman to find out, like a detective, what happened. Interrogation takes place in a very naturalistic atmosphere, the chauffeur speaking the language of the servant with exactitude.

Denman: But you know, it is just my opinion, sir, that his Lordship is rather psychic, as they say.

When the realistic investigation, where verse is as natural as idealized daily speech, leads to nothing, the Chorus feels "like guilty conspirators, waiting for some revelation" and being unnecessarily implicated.

The audience dare not identify itself with the Chorus which neither exposes the past nor prophesies the future as in Greek drama. It acts only as a back-drop of a dull colour to communicate the spiritual struggle of Harry.

The second scene which opens with Agatha and Mary is exploratory and brings out the nature understanding of Mary who was kept at Dishwood by Amy as a prospective wife to Harry, as "a tame daughter-in-law with very little money, a housekeeper companion for her and Harry." Now she wants to leave the house but she is advised by Agatha not to take such a decision because:
The decision will be made by powers beyond us which now and then emerge, you and I, Mary, are only watchers and waiters: not the easiest role.

With this ominous statement, while Agatha exits and Harry enters, we encounter the Mary-Harry duologue which is the first step in Harry's understanding of his past and himself—a decisive step in Harry's conversion, the climax.

Harry tells her that he returned to Wishwood because "I thought it was a place where life was substantial and simplified." It does not seem so. He cannot get rid of the shadows—may be there is no escape from one life to another because life is one continuous process, past and present are the same, interacting and changing, and unchanged.

The recovery of the past as a process of conversion begins with the recall of the hollow tree in the wilderness where the children felt their freedom, the tree was felled in their absence from home, when they were at school. Harry talks of a total extinction of hope, the state of hopelessness and when reminded that he must have come to Wishwood hoping something, he says:

Whatever I hoped for ...
Now that I am here I know I shall not find it.
The instinct to return to the point of departure
And start again as if nothing had happened,
Isn't that all folly? It's like the hollow tree
Not there.

The experience Mary had cannot be explained and Mary
cannot be admitted into "Our world"—that plane of
consciousness which is beyond her ken. She cannot take him
further on the road to conversion. She seems to be a distant
voice, inaccessible. "Is the spring not an evil time, that
excite us with lying voices?" he asks. What follows are
some of the finest poetic passages, while the stage-time
stands still.

I believe the moment of birth
Is when we have knowledge of death

says Mary, which could have been easily said by Harry.
It is a poetic duet which has no dramatic relevance except
that it brings Harry closer to Mary:

You bring me news
Of a door that opens at the end of a corridor,
Sunlight and singing.

The moment the thought of withdrawing into this "sunlight
and singing" occurs to him, the "sleepless hunters" are aroused
again:

That apprehension deeper than all sense,
Deeper than the sense of smell, but like a smell
In that it is undoscribable, a sweet and bitter smell
From another world.

Then Mary tells him to depend upon her, to hold on to her, the Furies with their "confidential looks incriminate" remind him of something beyond which he must face and fight.

The temporary rapport which he established with Mary is over. A different destiny awaits him. Mary cannot take him further.

With the third scene of Part I we enter another plane of consciousness, of drawing-room reality, where uncles and aunts and Mr. Farburton try to create an environment of normalcy so that Harry may succumb to the atmosphere of Wishwood and take charge of the family estate — to play Amy’s drama to the climax. But Harry who has seen the Furies remains aloof and lifts the topic of conversation into another plane of reality. For instance:

For what you call restoration to health
Is only incubation of another malady

Or again:

It is really harder to believe in murder
Than to believe in cancer; cancer is here;
The lump, the dull pain, the occasional sickness:
Murder a reversal of sleep and waking,

... ... ... ... ... ...
The past unredeemable.

The group pulls down the conversation to the drawing room level. Dr. Warburton and Amy leave for the dining room, the Chorus burst into an unknown terror:

I am afraid of all that has happened, and of all that is to come;
Of the things to come that sit at the door, as if they had been there always.
And the past is about to happen, and the future was long since settled.
And the wings of the future darken the past, the beak and claws have desecrated History, shamed.

According to Andrew K. Kennedy in *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language*,

the first four lines, ending with "the beak and claws have desecrated History" present sympathetic Chorus and we are to participate in their heightened awareness, respond to the awful dimension of time and history. But in the lines that follow not only is their particular experience "rendered ludicrous" - "the family picnic on the moors" sub specie aternitatis - but the speakers are beginning to exhibit their own feebleness, parody themselves. Within a few lines the Chorus splits up, and the parody becomes broad: each aunt and uncle is given a line, generalizing
some form of moral obtuseness in Eliot's idiom; they hardly have a speech of their own. The rhythms and the syntax of the verse are strained unnaturally by this transition from participation to parody.24

From the theatre point of view the splitting of the Chorus is essential because after this follows Agatha's rune-like speech. If this had followed the Chorus immediately the strain upon the audience would have been unbearable - after all, Eliot was writing for the stage to reach a cross-sectional, heterogeneous audience. Incidentally the chanting of the rune by Agatha who plays a critical role in Harry's conversion, adds to the mystery on the stage and gives to the naturalistic surrounding a different dimension. Throughout the play we have different levels of consciousness, various planes of reality criss-crossing.

Scene I of Part II takes place after dinner in the library where Dr. Warbuton's plane of reality - of bringing home to Harry the condition of his mother and thereby persuading him to take charge of Wishwood - crisscrosses with that of the spiritual plane on which Harry moves. Harry and Warbuton talk of something "to happen" but give different dimensions to the meaning of the word "to happen." Warbuton refers to a probable event, an occurrence, like Harry's mother's ill-health or death which might "happen" while to Harry "to happen" is something different.
O God, man, the things that are going to happen
Have already happened.

Harry makes this confrontation with Warburton on another occasion for delving into the past - how everything in his childhood, was referred to the mother - the ultimate standard - and how they felt guilty, wanted to be punished so that they might feel virtuous. Probing his past is not a mania but a deliberate search for the significance of the present. That is why Harry does not want to talk about his mother's future happiness; he wants to know about his father. He is informed that his parents separated by mutual consent, and his father went to live abroad where he died - and that triggers off the chain of association in Harry's mind:

I remember the silence, and the hushed excitement
And the low conversation of triumphant aunts.
It is the conversation not overheard,
Not intended to be heard, with the sidewise looks,
That brings death into the heart of a child.

Warburton assures him that there was no scandal, which makes Harry suspicious and he resolves to ask Agatha. Warburton tries to steer the conversation back to the birthday party and his mother's health which is like a run-down machine and how his mother's hopes are centred upon him. But Harry persists in talking about his father till Denman enters to
announce

that Sergeant Winchell was there. Harry for a
moment thinks that the Sergeant has come to inquire about
his dead wife. But Winchell has come to inform him about
the accident in which John his brother has been involved.
Harry's spiritual drama is suspended for a moment while
the group talks about how to take care of John, the task
which ultimately is assigned to Warburton. Harry's
indifference to John's accident draws diverse comments.
Amy is reminded of Harry's father: "You looked like your
father when you said that." Harry takes his mother to
another room to let her rest and in their absence, Ivy
suggests that "We must carry on as if nothing had happened."
But when Harry comes back he talks again of something which
has happened to him and his sufferings. Agatha reminds him:

To rest in our suffering

Is evasion of suffering, we must learn to suffer more.

Harry talks of filthiness, cleaning his skin, purifying his
life when Ivy breaks the news about Arthur, another brother,
being involved in an accident - the naturalistic drama
cropping up when the poetry and abstract thought become too
much in the theatre. Eliot does not forget his audience.
It is a juxtaposition of different planes of realities, the
spiritual and the mundane which disconcerts several critics.
It is the drawing-room realistic comedy invading Harry's
spiritual drama. May be it is much more than that. What
happens to Harry is dramatically highlighted by giving a different import to the word 'happen' when John and Arthur, Harry's two brothers, get into misadventures. The two absent brothers, by their contrast with Harry, communicate the spiritual plight of the protagonist. Harry, we are discovering by slow degrees of revelation, is an eternal pilgrim who while being in search of enlightenment comes across several distractions and temptations.

Gerald: This is what communists make capital out of.

The contemporary world is always knocking at the door but the readers or spectators are again lifted to a higher plane of consciousness by the Chorus:

In an old house there is always listening, and more is heard than is spoken
And what is spoken remains in the room, waiting for the future to hear it
And whatever happens began in the past, and presses hard on the future.

But the Chorus ends with a triviality of "we must listen to the weather report / And the international catastrophe," where the uncles and aunts feel at home. However, the second scene of Part II opens not with the weather report or international catastrophe but with a crucial dialogue.
between Agatha and Harry where his aunt as his confessor leads him on to discover where the sin lies and thereby understand the meaning of the appearance of the Furies. The encounter with Agatha is the final stage of the pilgrim's progress.

He talks of his sense of separation from the family eight years ago, of "isolation irredeemable, irrecoverable" which was like hell, to escape which he entered another hell after the disappearance of his wife - a world of "only contaminating presences." By coming to Wishwood he thought of escaping from this hell, but the Furies prevent it. This much he had already told Mary. Agatha leads him further - about his father who was a solitary man.

A man and a woman
Married, alone in a lonely country house together,
For three years childless, learning the meaning of loneliness.

His father fell in love with his aunt Agatha.

There are hours when there seems to be no past or future
Only a present moment of pointed light
When you want to burn.

And then his father wanted to murder his mother: he was only three months away. She did not want Harry to be killed
because, in a sense, he was her child.

This is the moment of realization for Harry because he feels that he was only completing the uncommitted sin of his father.

Perhaps

I only dreamt I pushed her

Agatha reminds him that his is a story of not crime and punishment but of 'sin and expiation' which needs a different course of action. Harry is the consciousness of the unhappy family, "chosen to resolve the enchantment under which we suffer."

Harry feels happy having seen a different vision and Agatha feels relief from the burden she carried - the burden which would be Harry's to carry now. But Harry is mistaken about his liberation. The burden of sin is still there. He has only understood it. He is not free from the shadows.

What follows is a duet between Agatha and Harry about the rose-garden, a symbol of eternal happiness which we find in Eliot's poetry too. And the stage time stands still again:

O my dear, and you walked through the little door
And I ran to meet you in the rose garden.
But the moment Harry feels that he is free from the ghosts and wants to rest in his mother-confessor, Agatha, the Furies appear again, but he is not frightened because they are angels of heaven and he decides to follow them.

Agatha addresses the audience with a rune "A curse comes to being as a child is formed," and then tells Harry, echoing his own decision:

You must go.

Amy enters and is flabbergasted:

Where are you going?

Harry says he does not know yet but somewhere:

To the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation,
A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar
The heat of the sun and the icy vigil,
A care over lives of humble people,
The lesson of ignorance, of incurable diseases.

The process of Harry's conversion is complete dramatically. What remains is how the actor on the stage should enact the character of Harry so that his conversion is perceived in a flash. It cannot be demonstrated on the stage as an enacted moment histrionically. It has to be felt by the audience, may be in a glance, through the corner
of -isesyes. It should be possible since the preceding
dramatic events - of Harry's journey beginning with his
encounter with Mary through Dr. Warburton to Agatha - has
heightened the consciousness of the audience.

The last scene opens between Amy and Agatha, once
sisters now strangers accusing each other of snatching
neither
something which/none of them had.

Thirtyfive years ago
You took my husband from me. Now you take my son.

She accuses Agatha of some spell "that works from
generation to generation," When Mary pleads with Agatha to
stop the departure because she has seen him unhinged and
there is a greater danger for him if he leaves Wishwood,
Agatha says that "Harry has crossed the frontier / Beyond
which safety and danger have different meaning." The
Furies have shown him that he has to cross the frontier to
'the beyond.'

Each must go in his or her way - Harry, Agatha and
Mary. The uncles and aunts who gather to hear the strange
news understand only when they are told that Harry wants
to be a missionary - who would need some medical training,
the local language, various inoculations: something very
very concrete, a kind of profession which their obtuse
minds could follow. Harry leaves amidst good-byes in the
tradition of naturalistic drama where a son goes abroad or something.

Amy does not struggle much to keep him there. Her agony is not dramatised. However, a change does come over Amy and she accepts her lot with calm resignation.

I always wanted too much for my children
More than life can give, And now I am punished for it.

Charles too seems to have a glimpse of the other side, something beyond. His senses have become acute and he begins to understand things

I felt safe enough;
And now I don't feel safe, As if the earth should open
Right to the centre, as I was about to cross Pall Mall.

Amy's "clock has stopped in the dark." The Chorus of uncles and aunts, some malicious, some stupid finds no conceivable answer to all the questions and it feels that "we have lost our way in the dark." When it splits into individual voices each one talks about the left-over problems of attending the funeral, reading the will - all the right things. The Chorus, as usual, in *The Family Reunion* has been static, as pointed out by Helen Gardner, while the hero experiences the change. Besides, the members of the Chorus are:
Conspicuous for their lack of comprehension. They are not interpreters to the audience of a story which without them might seem too remote from common experience. They seem partly to warn us against certain misunderstandings by presenting them in an obviously absurd form and partly as comic relief.

The Family Reunion takes place in the departure of the son to pursue his own spiritual course, in the death of Amy the who understands too late that future cannot be built but on the past, in the absence of Arthur and John due to circumstances involving law and order and in the uncles and aunts parting after reducing the events to their own level of understanding. The title of the play is profoundly ironical. Throughout the play there is ironical contrast of characters who are shuffled on different planes of reality making the reunion of the family an impossibility. Amy, uncles and aunts could not rise to the level of consciousness of Agatha and Harry. Nor could Harry live in the family with his guilt, tormented by the Furies. The only way the family reunion could take place was to lift the curse, to expiate the guilt. Harry's departure was the condition of that reunion at a higher plane of understanding where such unions matter.

The Family Reunion is a difficult play — in the sense that the climax of the play — the conversion which comes to Harry as a sudden illumination — cannot be communicated except by an integrated, unified field of
stage impressions, aural and visual, what we have called in the Introduction as a gestalt. The conversion could not have been described the way the act of King Oedipus' blinding was described by the messenger:

He struck at his eyes - not once but many times;
And the blood spattered his beard,
Bursting from his ruined sockets like red hail.

Conversion is not like a moment of physical agony. It could not have been shown by wearing a mask. The modern audience may not be satisfied with the classical sort of reporting. It could be communicated only as a creative moment on the stage, in a flash, in a turn, in a look.... probably only in silence. That is where medium becomes the message, and the director assumes his god-like role. The whole rhetoric of conversion is refined to a mere suggestion and that moment of fertile concentration could only be managed either by a surpassing gesture by the actor or by the creative manipulation of light and music by an enlightened director. Words would hardly deliver the goods.

It is well-known that Eliot was immensely grateful to the actor who played the role of Harry, a haunted man. The actor had rightly perceived the spiritual-dramatic need of Harry and turned the whole situation convincingly drawing out the exact intention of Eliot. A similar stroke of theatrical genius should be able to make the moment of
Harry's conversion a lucid fact, without the use of any overt speech.\textsuperscript{26}

\begin{center}
\textbf{(VI)}
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Between \textit{The Family Reunion} and \textit{The Cocktail Party}, the Second World War had more fully shattered the values on which the West had been living since the advent of the Renaissance. \textit{The Cocktail Party}, says Frederick Lumley: "is a spiritual investigation into the malaise of society and post-war futility, as depicted by the set who are to be seen at the right parties."\textsuperscript{27}

Though Eliot breaks with formal ritual in \textit{The Cocktail Party}, his theological vision is very much present in the way the play "attempts to interpret it in the most secular and sophisticated circumstances possible."

The verse is minimised and is functional but has the capacity to change its level from trite conversation to poetic statement. We have several occasions in the play when Eliot makes sustained attempts in changing the verse from the colloquial speech of appearance to the verse of mystical illumination. Particularly the confessional dialogue between Celia and Emily in the latter's consulting room shows the way to intensification of speech. Celia makes her entry with apologetic words:
However,

I don't want to waste your time,
And I'm awfully afraid
That you'll think that I was wasting it anyway.

The apologetic words change towards confession, "I just came in desperation," to further intensification of the language which shows her feeling of isolation:

Do you know -
It no longer seems worthwhile to speak to any one!

May be everyone is alone and talking is only a pretence:

They make noise, and think they are talking to each other;
They make faces, and think they understand each other.

She finds it difficult to express her experience and her hesitant utterance finds a very illuminating poetic outlet.

It is not the feeling of anything I've ever done which I might get away from, or anything in me I could get rid of - but of emptiness, of failure towards some one, or something, outside of myself; And I feel I must ... alone ... is that the word?
This mode of verse expression from meaningless chatter to intense poetry is used throughout the play.

The play opens in the manner of *Sweeney Agonistes* or music hall palaver where there is conversation without then communication, words are used to hide rather than reveal anything.

Alex: I said there were no tigers.
Celia: Oh do stop wrangling.
Both of you, it's your turn, Julia.
Do tell us that story you told the other day, about Lady Klotsz and the wedding cake.

Peter: And how the butler found her in the pantry, rinsing her mouth with champagne. I like that story.
Celia: I love that story.
Alex: I'm never tired of hearing that story.

One can recognize naturalistic convention in this conversation of the usual cocktail party in which nothing is being said. The hostess Lavinia has run away and the guests know the sad plight of her husband Edward, encumbered with the role of the host.

And behind this Sweeney music-hall type of chatter appears the serious purport of the play when Edward is left
alone with the unidentified guest, Heilly, the psychiatrist-confessor, a la priests-teasers in *Murder in the Cathedral* and Agatha in *The Family Reunion*. During this dialogue, Edward begins to feel that he wants his wife back to "find out who she is, to find out who I am". The unidentified guest promises to bring her back provided Edward promises "to ask her no questions."

This fresh thinking on his part causes introspection in other characters: Celia, who had an affair with Edward and thought that a break up of Edward-Lavinia relationship would help her to make her relations with Edward permanent. But after a hopeless duet with him, says:

> That 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 grass-hoppers do it. 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.

This final estrangement takes her to Heilly's psychiatric couch. This is the first step towards her isolation and sacrifice - the pattern found in the earlier two plays.
The play again changes into humorous nonsense when all the characters gather together at Lavinia's house due to some "mysterious" telegram which is a part of the process. As Lavinia says,

But it seems to me that yesterday
I started some machine, that goes on working.
And I cannot stop it; no, it's not like a machine —
Or if it is a machine, some one else is running it.

Thus the first act shifts from rollicking fun to sudden seriousness in which the characters strip themselves to their true image which they begin to understand. At the end of the Act I Scene III Edward and Lavinia enter into a bitter feud when Lavinia asserts "We are not to relapse into the kind of life we led until yesterday morning."

Edward responds in the Eliotian fashion — maybe as a rejoinder to Sartre who says "Hell is the other person"

Edward: There was a door

And I could not open it. I could not touch the handle.
Why could I not walk out of my prison?
What is hell? Hell is oneself,
Hell is alone, the other figures in it
Merely projection. There is nothing to escape from
And nothing to escape to. One is always alone.
In *The Cocktail Party* we come across such moments of poetic intensity but the trend is towards clarity and explicitness. All the three characters Edward, Levinia and Celia realize their unique position and the guardians Alex and Julia led by Reilly work with them to show them the way to 'salvation.' In the case of Edward and Levinia it has to be reconciliation within the framework of the cocktail society. Celia has a different destiny; she is of the elect.

In psychiatrist Reilly's consulting room, Edward tries to impose his own diagnosis and treatment upon Reilly who, layer by layer, exposes his patient's true self - by bringing him face to face with his own wife, Levinia. Levinia had an unsuccessful affair with a young film-maker Peter Quilpe who defected and fell in love with Celia and that caused Levinia's breakdown. Celia became infatuated with Edward who realized his incapacity to love Celia when Levinia left him. In fact he discovered that he was incapable of loving any one. Similarly, Levinia's failure with Peter Quilpe made her realize that no one could love her. Reilly reminds them that they are in the same position:

The same isolation.

A man who finds himself incapable of loving
And a woman who finds that no man can love her.
If they reversed their positions, as suggested by Reilly, they could live with each other, "the best of a bad job is all any of us can make of it." And the guardian angel tells them "Go in peace. And work out your salvation with diligence." The moment of self-realization is the beginning of reconciliation.

It is during the meeting between Celia and Reilly in his consulting room that the play reaches the climax. The verse of the ordinary speech becomes deeply mystical. She talks of "an awareness of solitude," her lack of desire to talk to any one; Apart from this isolation, she suffers from a sense of sin:

It is not that the feeling of anything I've ever done, Which I might get away from, or of anything in me, I could get rid of - but of emptiness, of failure Towards some one, or something, outside of myself; And I feel I must ... stone ... is that the word?

Reilly tells her that the cure is possible but this cure would be of two persons who maintain themselves by give and take and mutual tolerance.

Two people who know they do not understand each other, Breeding children whom they do not understand And who will never understand them.
But Celia has already rejected this kind of life and Bailly tells her another way which requires faith: "The kind of faith that issues from despair." Neither way is better but choice must be made between them. Celia chooses the second way:

Each way means loneliness - and communion
Both ways avoid the final desolation
Of solitude - in the phantasmal world
Of imagination, shuffling memories and desires.

the kind of hell through which Celia has recently passed. Celia like the other 'elect' characters of Eliot's plays, has made her choice. Of course the guardians do not know the terrors of the journey. As Julia says:

You and I don't know the process by which the human in Transhumanized: what do we know
Of the kind of suffering they must undergo
On the way of illumination?

The act ends with a formal libation that reminds us of the rune-like speeches of Agatha in The Family Reunion:

Reilly: Protector of travellers
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 by the quicksand.

Julia: Protect her from the Voices
Protect her from the Visions
Protect her in the tumult
Protect her in the silence

The recitation of the libation communicates a sense of mystery that what is happening is due to powers beyond us.

The third act has disappointed several critics because Eliot could have chosen to dramatise how Celia worked out her salvation with diligence, how she was transhumanized, what kind of suffering she underwent on the way to her salvation. This is the expectation raised in Act II when Celia enters into a confessional dialogue with Reilly. It seemed that against the facade of a social comedy Eliot was presenting another soul on the way of illumination, another pilgrim on the road to salvation. Instead, the third act dramatizes how Edward and Levinia have worked out their salvation: salvation has become reconciliation within the parameters of their own society. The passage of two years shows how amiable have the Chamberlaynes become with their appropriate compliments before the cocktail party, their spotless smooth behaviour as expected of such people. It is through the profane ritual of the cocktail party that Alex lets out, bit by bit, the story of Kinkanja - how Celia was crucified - by the heathens of that island. Through the
chatter and the banters of the drawing room, the music-hall jokes, Eliot, allows the tragedy of Celia to seep up to the surface — in a bare report. The horror is snuffed by the roar of the laughter. The sublime is mixed with the dung in the true modern theatrical style. The message of Celia, the recurrent pattern: "The soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has directed itself of the love of created beings," encapsulated as a reported event is delivered at a social event:

The shift in perspective — to make Edward-Lavinia the central experience — communicates a sense of terrible wastage about the life of Colic Copeland — something which is at variance with the audience's perception of the meaning of martyrdom, conversion or salvation. It seems that Edward-Lavinia's psychiatric cure is the better way, the only way. It is this sudden jolt to audience's perception built up dramatically through the first two acts that the totality of the dramatic communication of Celia's crucifixion is blurred. One is just left wondering whether Eliot progressively fades out the great dazzling effect of conversion which is nothing short of transhumanisation. Perhaps Eliot is not straining the imagination of the audience too far. He pushes Celia's 'martyrdom' to the background and allows it to hover there like an echo, a halo which belongs to another realm of experience. It is there, though it faintly glimmers. The subconscious of the
audience would absorb it. The more communicable experience of conversion by psychiatry is allowed a concrete validity. Perhaps people might start understanding each other, albeit through psychiatry, and in the frozen modern world even this thaw is a great spiritual gain. It almost amounts to conversion. Eliot seems to employ a double-technique of ‘distancing’ and ‘close-up’; the religious crucifixion of Celia is on the distant spiritual horizon, the immediate awareness is occupied with the reconciliation of Edward and Lavinia. The two at once set off and resemble each other. But the final impression is unified; souls are ripening.

(VII)

After the successful performance of The Cocktail Party at the Edinburgh Festival, T.S. Eliot gave an interview to the drama critic of the Glasgow Herald, which shows the distance he had travelled in his understanding of the needs of the audience and the compromises which it had entailed.

All that one can aim at in a play of this type, which endeavours to combine the dramatic and the poetic in a somewhat new way, he said, is to provide a plot and character and action which are on the immediate theatrical level intelligible. That is, the immediate situation and the troubles and conflicts which agitate people should be obvious, the characters should not be on the surface unusual or different from ordinary human nature, and there should be
perfectly intelligible things going on with a reasonably intelligent conclusion.

The first and perhaps the only law of the drama is to get the attention of the audience and to keep it. If the interest is kept up to the end, that is the great thing.

The interview is tantamount to the acceptance of the supremacy of audience in drama as enacted play; that drama as a performing art has to accept the tastes of the audience. A poet may talk to himself first and wait for his readers to accept him, in course of time. But in the theatre, where poetic language is one element in a larger totality, the communication has to be spontaneous. Therefore a poet-dramatist has to begin with the obvious, with the real, with something palpable and probable, though from this inklings of the naturalistic details, "plot and character which are on immediate theatrical level intelligible," the dramatist could then lift his audience to a liturgical and ritualistic level. If T.S. Eliot does not choose to do so in The Confidential Clerk, it is because he wants to present the recurrent theme—of martyrdom in Murder in the Cathedral, Conversion in The Family Reunion, Vocation in The Cocktail Party—at the level of mannered comedy of the 19th century. The Christian way of life need not be lived only at the heroic level of Becket, Harry or Celia. Lesser mortals like Colby Simpkins too should have their choice and freedom to work their salvation at a mundane level.
The Confidential Clerk is a light comedy, based upon the Ion of Hecale but superficially reminiscent of Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors with the identity of the abandoned boys getting mixed up. Of course poetry has been consistently on the retreat, there is here no passionate intensity of Eliot's early plays though verse rhythm and an occasional heightened phrase thrill: the ear. There is less of the esoteric and there is more of entertainment. The element of mystery, "something beyond" which one observed at the corner of one's eye, something elusive which only the poetic word instead of a theatrical gesture could reveal on the stage is almost missing now.

No doubt there is a serious confessional dialogue between Sir Claude and Colby at the end of first act, or between Colby and Lucasta in Act II but this does not seem to constitute the structural core of the play. It is a naturalistic play written in verse which rises to an occasional poetic intensity. The imaginative way of beholding the theme of The Confidential Clerk is in the naturalistic convention.

The play opens with a matter-of-fact dialogue between Sir Claude Bulhammer and his former clerk, Eggerson about the proper manner in which the new confidential clerk, Colby Simpkins, the supposed illegitimate son of Sir Claude ought to be introduced to Lady Elizabeth Bulhammer who herself
lost an illegitimate son from a former lover killed by a rhinoceros in Africa. The scene becomes lively in theatre with the coming of Lucasta, a protege of Sir Claude, who is always losing her job and is always hungry for lunch. Of course she is putting on a mask through a speech-of-appearance and mannerism which she casts off when she enters into a serious dialogue with Colby.

The excitement of the theatre is heightened when Lady Elizabeth changing her return programme from Europe, bursts upon the company unannounced with a suddenness which sends Sir Claude and Aggordon helter skelter into a proper social-theatrical attitude. Lady Elizabeth is a flotsam on the post-war cultural seam of the European scene. She takes a fancy to Colby and quickly makes up her mind about his likes and dislikes. All this constitutes good theatre and engages the attention of the audience, and prepares it for a serious dialogue when the long light comic scene ends in a heart-to-heart confessional conversation between Sir Claude and his new clerk Colby as soon as they are left alone. Sir Claude wanted to be a potter but became a financier instead, due to family pressure; similarly Colby aspired to become an organist but looked for a job instead. They had similar experiences: Sir Claude found that he did not have the creative talent to become a first-rate potter; Colby too had a similar disillusionment. They could not impose their terms upon
life and accepted whatever had been offered to them. This is the drama of a set of mediocre people who could redeem their mediocrity only by understanding their own selves and pursuing their own calling.

Colby: The person I used to be, returns to take possession: And I am again the disappointed organist.

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

Sir Claude: But nothing I made ever gave me that contentment. The state of utter exhaustion and peace which comes in dying to give something life...

The second act begins as if a meaningful relationship at the level of human love would emerge but it only continues the seriousness of the last scene which turns out to be a duologue between Colby and Lucesla who sheds her theatrically mimed speech and false manners to remind him of his secret garden where he could retire to hear "a music that no one else could hear" while her garden is a dirty public square.

No, my only garden is ... a dirty public square
In a shabby part of London ... like the one where I lived.
For a time, with my mother, I've no garden.
I hardly feel that I'm even a person:
Nothing but a bit of living matter
Floating on the surface of the Regent's Canal
Floating, that's it.
She arouses pity and one feels that Colby would molt but he remains significantly cold and aloof.

Colby says that his garden is unreal because it is not related to the outside world; he is alone there and if some one entered there he would be afraid of desolation afterwards.

Lucasta, in an effort to establish a rapport with him, persists that she would like to understand him, but, how could they understand anyone when every moment people are changing. The only thing one can do is:

To understand them better;
To keep up with them; so that as the other changes
You can understand the change as soon as it happens,
Though you couldn’t have predicted it.

The conversation brings Lucasta to the point where she becomes confident to disclose her parentage - which uproots Colby: "I am only Claude’s daughter" born of a mistress who made her ends meet by entertaining extra clients till she died of an accidental over-dose.

The shock in the theatre would correspond to the shock of Colby who is dumb. This loss of speech by Colby is misunderstood by Lucasta as an expression of contempt, and she is like a broken reed and gives an agonized cry:
Lucasta: ... Why don't you shut yourself up in that garden where you like to be alone with yourself?

Sarcastically telling him that he might become Sir Claude's son-heir, she says:

But in that event, Colby, you'll have to accept me as your sister! Even if I am a gutter snipe ...

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

I shall never never forget that look on your face.

The play threatens to take another direction, but with the entrance of B.Kaghan, and Lady Bliaabath later on, the drama slides to another level of consciousness. It is a drama of appearance, again. Colby the emergent 'elect' stands isolated, though not free, yet.

Left alone with Colby Lady Elizabeth looks at a photograph and that triggers off a conversation about his early upbringing, and his aunt Mrs. Gussard - the name which means something to Lady Elizabeth - she feels that Colby is her lost illegitimate child. Sir Claude, appearing on the scene, is flabbergasted and is forced to disclose that Colby is his son born of Mrs. Gussard's sister who died after the child was born. The dispute as to whose son Colby is (vide the Ion of Euripides, in which Xuthus and Creusa dispute Ion's parentage; neither of them knowing the truth) continues till Colby insists on knowing the truth and they decide to call and examine Mrs. Gussard to learn the truth about his parentage.
The play now dwindles to something like the 19th Century drama of intrigue where the various blocks of a puzzle fall into their proper places, as soon as Mrs. Guzzard takes over the act of disclosure into her own hands.

Theatrically the dramatic suspense is engaging. Lady Elisabeth's illegitimate son was entrusted to Mrs. Guzzard for caretaking but after the sudden death of the father, she gave the boy to the Kaghan family for adoption. The boy who was named Barnabas is B. Kaghan engaged to be married to Lucasta, Sir Claude's illegitimate daughter. Colby, it is disclosed, is not the son of Sir Claude but that of Mrs. Guzzard herself who having lost her husband passed her own son off as Sir Claude's for the sake of the boy's future. It is a bitter disappointment to Sir Claude but Colby makes up his mind to pursue his vocation — that of an organist which, as Mrs. Guzzard disclosed was the profession of Herbert Guzzard, Colby's father. Colby's wish is fulfilled because he wanted to be the son of a dead obscure man — and he discovers that he is the son of a disappointed musician. In course of time he would find another vocation — may be he would "be thinking of reading for orders."

Colby like the other heroes of Eliot's plays accepts his past and would be redeemed. In his own way, like Harry and Celia he is of "the elect," the conscious minority, illustrating once again the theme of St. John of the Cross: "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union,
until it has divested itself of the love of created beings," but Colby is not the centre of the drama. It is not his confessional dialogue with Lucreta which transforms him. The disclosure of the past only relieves him of his sense of obligation to Sir Claude. Colby Simpkins is apparently at a level which the audience could understand him easily. But he is released from his worldly chains - from Lucreta, Lady Elizabeth, Sir Claude - not owing to any special effort of his own, nor does he find his release as a consequence of a spiritual struggle - a struggle with shadows, with the bright angels, or a desire for atonement. Colby is just accidentally, released from bondage because Sir Claude and Lady Elizabeth could not make up their minds about him, and they had to call Mrs. Guzzard (videfallae Athenae). The vision of the protagonist as it emerges from the play is not that of a strong character who overcomes temptation to cross over to the other side. Nor is it of a man of the world who having recognized his inner call severs all ties to realize himself. The meaning of the play almost suffers in communication because the trappings of the 19th Century Comedy of Manners cloud the vision in spite of the fact that theatrically the play holds the attention of the audience - something which an ordinary plot suspense could also do. T.S. Eliot "invokes the comic spirit, with its attendant mechanism of coincidence and absurdity, to disguise a hard core of somber theorizing," says Kenneth
But one is tempted to speculate whether Eliot has put a step ahead by lowering Colby’s profile so much. In an unheroic age, any phenomenon of conversion or pursuit of vocation may look like another hoax. But even the unheroic man cannot be absolved of his responsibility to know himself as far as self-knowledge is possible to him. By resorting to the fullest use of the comedy of manners while Eliot seems to be giving up on the one hand an opportunity to heroicise Colby, he seems to be succeeding in portraying the quiet liberation of an undazzling individual into a world of authenticity. This was perhaps the most he could do to such an unaccommodated man. And theatre seems to come to Eliot’s aid here.

The Confidential Clerk is, however not a case of conversion dramatised, but it is an ordinary drama of confessions and disclosures in full conformity with the traditions of naturalistic theatre where poetry is not heard as such, though verse rhythm is felt throughout, to remind us that once the author did write *Murder in the Cathedral*. The poet had come to the theatre with the avowed purpose of “delivering the theatre” from the pressure of aimed gesture, histrionic pyrotechnics, significant silences of the unspoken word and replace them by “the articulacy and intensity” of the poetic word so that the word could glimpse the WORD. The poet has been on the retreat, may be, because the poetic word could not correspond to the desired action on the stage.
to keep the interest of the audience engaged at all cost.

Eliot's dilemma has been discussed at length by Raymond Williams:

His decisive innovation had been the remaking of a fully expressive dramatic speech, but this was a writer's reform, and the problem of performance had still to be solved. The speech was dramatic verse, in a contemporary rhythm and idiom, but it is clear that this can only be performed as written if the dramatic movement has been conceived in the same dimension. Such movement, however, depends on conventions of action which are wholly different from the imitation of behaviour, and from the styles of gesture and pose which belong to another kind of theatrical speech. Eliot had developed a verse line which was intended to allow variations of emphasis, from the relaxed to the intense, according to the progress of the real action. But it was the intensity, increasingly, that could not be performed, and its elements were then steadily cut out: first the Chorus and other formal devices; then the extended dramatic imagery; finally the central rhythm and precision. There are moments of emphasis - of an isolated thematic seriousness - in The Confidential Clerk; but they are little more than pauses in the swirl of another rhythm, that of theatrical mannerism. When the more deliberate verse had to be played, one noticed that the actors sat down; indeed they had, in some way, to stay still, for there was no movement, no dramatic action, to which these saving clauses could correspond. When such an episode was over, they got up again and went on with the conventional business of a theatrical drawing room, and of course this is what had been written for them; not only in the action, but now finally in the verse, which had been adapted to that kind of mannered slackness. At the end of The Confidential Clerk there is an important question, to which there is no spoken answer, but the stage directions indicate a nod. It was from just that world, of wished significance, that the articulacy and intensity of verse drama had been intended to deliver the theatre. In that sense, the confidential nod marked not only the end of a play but the end of a period.
The theme of guilt and explanation, and is reflected on the Greek play Oedipus at Colonus. Charles and Metaxa, twittering like bored lovers, make the most naturalistic appearance on the play stage when Metaxa explains her devotion to her father Lord Cleverton; first, because of his terror of being alone, secondly, due to his fear of being exposed to strangers and thirdly because of his serious illness.

Lord Cleverton who led a successful public life, now retired into seclusion, is 'Mio's "Hollow man" who fingers the empty pages of his diary and anticipates "only fear of the emptiness before me."

Despite of his electiveness to his daughter and her devotion to him, he is not able to establish any authentic communication with her as he couldn't do with his wife. Something in his past withholds him and he sticks to the public mask which he were too long, and successfully.

It is only when two ghosts from his indistinct past, Frederico Cane and Mr. Sarghill appear at the seclusion, that his public persona begins to tear off bit by bit.

Gentle: The worst kind of failure, in my opinion,

In the man who has to keep on pretending to himself.
That he's a success - the man who in the morning
Has to make up his face before he looks in the mirror.

This is the beginning of the realization in Lord
Claverton which brings him face to face with his own past.
Some deep dissatisfaction within himself, some guilt, has
impelled him to justify everything to himself:

Lord Claverton: That is this self inside us, this silent observer
Severe and speechless critic, who can terrify us
And urge us on to futile activity,
And in the end, judge us still more severely,
From the errors into which his own reproaches
drove us?

This serious introspection is interrupted by the chatter of the
matron Mrs. Piggot who does not forget to remind the inmates:

When you want to be very quiet
There is the Silent Room. With a television set.

This alternation between "authentic speech" and "dramatized
distraction" continues throughout the play till Lord Claverton
the "broken-down-actor" casts off his mask to establish
communion with his daughter and bless her as Oedipus blessed
Antigone before his death. As a step towards this direction
another ghost from his playful past, Mrs. Carmill, appears to
remind him of his guilt - which may last:
Mrs. Carghill: It is frightening to think that we are still together.
And more frightening to think that we may always be together.

There is a phrase I seem to remember reading somewhere;

"Where their fires are not quenched."

She not only brings his love letters but suggests to Monica that she just escaped being her mother—referring to her father's earlier infatuation with her.

The scene comes to life again when Michael confronts his father and tells him how his big public name has been a handicap in his own personal life. He wants to go away somewhere. Claverton warns him that "those who flee from their past will always lose the race," as if he were telling himself—because that's exactly what he has been doing all along.

But what a coward I am

To talk of escaping! And what a hypocrite!

At last, having undergone the torments of confrontation with the shadows of the past, Lord Claverton, overhearing the anxious concern of Charles and Monica about his guilty secrets says that true love before which one is ready to confess every thing however trifling, could save a man. He has spent his life in trying to forget himself and identify
himself with the public role, an actor who has now broken down. But now he is ready to accept his past, first, his relationship with Gomez whom in his Oxford days he led to expensive tastes, forgery and jail. And when Claverton ran over an old man on the road he did not stop.

Similarly he did not respect the love of Mrs. Garghill, however self-centred and selfish it was; rather, he made a settlement and got out of the trap. On both occasions he ran away. Since then the voices of the past have been haunting him. Having made his confession to his daughter he decides not to escape now and that is the step towards his freedom. When Charles suggests that they might leave the place, in order to escape the shadows, he speaks like Thomas Becket:

The place and time of liberation
Are, I think, determined.

His trial continues when his son Michael decides to leave for the Central American Republic along with Gomez and he fails to stop him. But he accepts it with calm resignation which is his final triumph:

Lord Claverton: It is the peace that ensues upon contrition
When contrition ensues upon the knowledge of the truth,
Why did I want to dominate my children?
Why did I mark out a narrow path for Michael?

Because I wanted to perpetuate myself in him.

Similarly he wanted to keep Monica to himself so that she could continue adoring the pretence of Lord Claverton. This realization gives him enough courage to face the reality of "dying, to find out what life is."

By shedding the public mask, he succeeds in entering into communion with his daughter whose love he was always afraid of losing.

The dedicatory poem shows that the play has many personal references. The last scene of the play is an epiphany of love where Charles says, "I love you to the limit of speech, and beyond."

Yet, like the asthmatic struggling for breath
So the lover must struggle for words!

The play ends with a sense of total acceptance and reconciliation reminding one of the atmosphere of the last scenes of Shakespeare's last plays.

Lord Claverton's drama of self-deception had perhaps found its early poetic utterance in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.' Prufrock is locked in conflict between his inner self and the public mask he has to wear but at the same time is aware of the absurdity of escaping from
one's real life. Prufrock's dramatic tension, self against self, seems to find its objective correlative in the dramatic experience of Lord Claverton. Like the protagonists of Eliot's other plays, Lord Claverton is lonely but does not have the spiritual propensity or a zeal for the quest of truth of a Colby; nor does he have any sense of failure towards anyone, for which he would like to atone as Celia wanted to do. The Elder Statesman moves on a limited plane of personal experience and it is through confession of sin and acceptance of the past that the past is transformed and in turn gives a different meaning to his present life. The ghosts of the past become his 'right angels'; those who threatened his present are transmuted into agents of expiation.

The dramatic experience of Lord Claverton's transformation from a sinner to a human being at peace with himself is communicated through his struggle with the shadows - Gomez and Mrs. Carghill - each stage being illuminated with the intensity of poetic articulacy though most of the time the audience feels that the verse is flat and matter-of-fact. Here is one of his ghosts confronting him when the utterance spreads its poetic wings:

Gomes: ... You'll be afraid of whispers,
The reflection in the mirror of the face behind you,
The ambiguous smile, the distant salutation,
The sudden silence when you enter the smoking room,
Or again,

Mrs. Carmill: It's simply that I feel that we belong together
How don't get alarmed. But you touched my soul -
PWwed it, perhaps, and the touch still lingers.
And I've touched yours.
It's frightening to think that we're still
Together
And more frightened to think that we may always
be together.

Such moments of poetic intensity are very few but they are
crucial in his conversion - the acceptance of the true self, of
self-knowledge.

One cannot miss a close resemblance between Becket's
confrontation with tempters and Lord Claverton's encounter with
the phantoms of his past. In both the plays the past lives of
the protagonists are unfolded before the audience through these
phantoms.

The vital import of the play The Elder Statesman is
communicated through the conflict between the past and the
present dramatised finally as the departure of his son to
South America under the influence of Gomez and Mrs. Carmill,
and his calm acceptance of it.

Lord Claverton: They are merely
Spectres from my past. They've always been
with me
Though it was not till lately that I found the living person
whose ghost tormented me, to be only human beings, malicious, petty, and I see myself emerging
from my spectral existence into something like reality.

Lord Claverton, like Harry, decides to meet his 'ghosts' and attains self-knowledge. Their utterances are so close to each other.

Harry: Now I know that all my life has been a flight
And phantoms fed upon me while I fled. Now I know
That the last apparent refuge, the safe shelter,
That is where one meets them.

Lord Claverton: Each of them remembers an occasion
On which I ran away. Very well
I shan't run away now - run away from them.
It is through this meeting that I shall at last escape them.

This is perhaps his victory, his self-knowledge. In the case of Harry it has been complained that his conversion was not presented as a dramatic experience. However, Lord Claverton's conversion is communicated dramatically. He blesses his son; he blesses his daughter's marriage with Charles. "It is worthwhile dying, to find out what life is," says he and goes to die under the beach wood.
Beginning with Murder in the Cathedral in which he creates the purity of classical form to his last play The Elder Statesman which has a close resemblance to the naturalistic play, T.S. Eliot has made a heroic effort in his experiments in poetic communication in theatre where the Christian view of life is presented as a dramatic experience. The theme of martyrdom in Murder in the Cathedral has been refined in his successive dramas: it is the recognition of guilt and then its expiation in The Family Reunion; a sense of failure towards others and a desire for atonement in The Cocktail Party; the pursuit of one's gift of spiritual calling or vocation as in The Confidential Clerk; and acceptance of one's past, and self-knowledge in The Elder Statesman. Along with this progressive refinement of the theme, two other changes have occurred: first of all, the poetic "articulacy and intensity" has become more and more functional and limited though at crucial points in any play the action gathers itself to a still point of meditation and one's imagination is set ablaze and the consciousness is heightened - the purpose for which the poet had decided to venture into theatre communication. As a parallel development, rather as a consequence of his critical decision to put poetry on a thin diet to discipline it and make it more transparent, in order to reach a wider cross section of audience in the age of a diminishing and diminished faith, he resolve resorts to some
popular dramatic modes like music hall chatter, mannered comedy; plot suspense — in order to communicate his vision which in *Murder in the Cathedral* he did through the stark grandeur of his poetry. As poetry obbo in successive plays, plot-character suspense and inarticulate gestures of the naturalistic mode take over to create that gestalt of impression, that totality of the emergent dramatic illusion which communicates the experience in the theatre. What T.S. Eliot perhaps wanted to achieve was a mode of communication where gestures should blend with poetic intensity — a kind of gestic language which the Elizabethans had succeeded in creating, and which Bertolt Brecht aspired to create. He leaves the plays, progressively releasing them from the grip of high poetry, open-ended, perhaps out of a spiritual necessity to make his characters convincing. But this deliberate suspension of meaning need not denote a failure on the part of Eliot since he was increasingly growing conscious of the potentiality of the theatre and the spoken word on the one hand, and the psychology of the audience on the other. He seems to hand his plays over to the theatre and the audience, not because he had run out of poetry but because that was perhaps the most legitimate act of a practicing dramatist.
Notes

5. T.S. Eliot, "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism" (1933), Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, p.94.
9. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p.145.
12. Ibid., p.146.
14. Raymond Williams: Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, p.179.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., p. 141.


26. "My hero now strikes me" said Eliot in his Harvard Lecture 'as an insufferable prig,' that was in 1950. He was able a few years later, however, to soften this judgement after seeing Mr. Paul Scofield in the part:

I am writing to thank you for what you have done to redeem the part of Harry from the obloquy with which I myself (and, alas, many other people) have covered it. You are, in fact, the first to succeed in giving the impression of a haunted man - and if Harry isn't haunted then he is in sufferable! (1956).


30. Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, p. 196-197.