

"The Family Reunion" by T.S. Eliot, with special reference to the use of the Chorus, ritual, and myth.

T.S. Eliot's dramatic works generally have been received with less enthusiasm than their quality would appear to merit. It is the writer's premise that critics have failed to come to terms with the nature of Eliot's drama and that they have not grasped the fact that it is poetic drama; nor have they understood the implications of such a form.

In order to clarify the implications of poetic drama, I propose to study the language and use of the Chorus in The Family Reunion, and the contribution of ritual and myth to the poetic form.

As background, an outline will be given of Eliot's dramatic development up to The Family Reunion, and critical opinion of this play will be surveyed.

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For Master of Arts Degree

SHORT TITLE:

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CHAPTER I

ELIOT'S DEVELOPMENT AS DRAMATIST

Indications of T. S. Eliot's early and developing interest in dramatic forms can be traced as far back as 1915, when The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Portrait of a Lady were first published in the magazines Poetry, and Others, respectively. These dramatic monologues were a result of his lasting interest in Robert Browning, for whom he expressed great admiration years later in The Three Voices of Poetry. Prufrock especially is dramatic, with the direct address in the opening lines "Let us go then, you and I . . .,"¹ the bits of conversation overheard or reported, the vacillating anguished confessions of its middle-aged hero, the feeling of movement as we accompany the speaker, the sense of scene, tension, and conflict so immanent throughout the poem. The Waste Land too, has many of the characteristics of the dramatic poem.

The next stage of Eliot's development as a poetic dramatist took place in 1927, when Fragments of an Agon appeared in The Criterion under the title "Wanna Go Home Baby?", and was later published in 1932 as Sweeney Agonistes. Although unfinished, these Fragments of an Aris-tophanic Melodrama, as it was subtitled, mark the trans-

sition from monologue to poetic dialogue and from the private world of Eliot's poetry to the public world of the stage.²

In 1934 Eliot was commissioned to compose the Choric accompaniment for a religious pageant, The Rock. The choruses, which he wrote, provided him with his first actual contact with live theatre. The experience of writing verse for multiple voices was an invaluable proving-ground for Murder in the Cathedral. Here for the first time, he combines the chorus and poetry in a full length dramatic production.

Apart from his poetic works, Eliot's interest in the theatre and poetic drama is evident in his critical writings on Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. This can be traced through the following essays. In 1919, he published an essay on Christopher Marlowe, in which he considers this playwright's blank verse. In the same year, he wrote an article on Ben Jonson containing some penetrating remarks concerning Jonsonian characterization, which are even more interesting in the light of his own treatment of character in The Family Reunion. In the winter 1919-1920, "The Duchess of Malfi" at the Lyric: and Poetic Drama" appeared in Arts and Letters.³ In his essay, "Four Elizabethan Dramatists" (Criterion, 1924), he criticizes the dichotomy between poetry and drama which critics have set up when discussing the works of Webster, Tourneur, Middleton, and

Chapman. His references to Greek drama, and Aeschylus in particular, his remarks on the use of conventions, and his attitude toward realism, are especially relevant to the development of his theories on poetic drama. A series of articles on John Dryden appeared in The Listener in 1931, the second of which was entitled "John Dryden, the Dramatist." An earlier article written in 1921 speaks of Dryden as the key to an enjoyment and appreciation of a number of Dryden's contemporaries, both poets and dramatists. It is therefore not surprising that Eliot should develop this theme at a later date. Numerous other references can be gleaned from his many essays dealing with subjects quite apart from drama but which are rich in reflections, critical comments, and conclusions on the subject of poetry and drama, their qualities, and their relationship to one another.

Much can be learned indirectly about his attitudes and theories concerning poetic drama from his experiments with poetic dialogue and choric verse, his own poetry, and his critical considerations of other artists. However he also wrote a number of articles specifically on this topic. As early as "The Possibility of Poetic Drama," first published in Dial seven years before Sweeney Agonistes, he was wrestling with the problem of why "there is no poetic drama today, how the stage has lost all hold on literary art, why so many poetic plays are written which can only

be read, and read, if at all, without pleasure."⁴ While not providing an answer to these rather thorny questions he does speculate on the qualities necessary for a vital poetic drama -- form, philosophy and control. Although this essay remains rather abstract and general, being more concerned with drawing conclusions from his scholarly evaluations of the accomplishments of past dramatists, it is the germ of a more specific confrontation with a theory of poetic drama. The same holds true for his "Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry" (Criterion, 1928), ostensibly among six people.⁵ It is probable that no one of the six represents Eliot's point of view, but it is an interesting exploration of the subject. It is not until November of 1936, a year after he wrote Murder in the Cathedral, and three years before The Family Reunion, that we get, in "The Need for Poetic Drama," a fairly complete presentation of those points on which Eliot was to concentrate in the future, that is, the suitability of poetry as a medium for drama, and the qualities the poetry should exhibit. He also briefly comments on the revival of the chorus, and the use of realism in the theatre. His subsequent essays and remarks on this subject are mostly either a recapitulation or an elaboration of the material which appears in this article.⁶

In conclusion, then, the interest reflected in his writing The Family Reunion can be seen as having developed

naturally from (a) the strong dramatic elements in his early poetry, especially the dramatic monologues, (b) his long-standing interest in the theatre in general and especially in the possibilities of poetic drama which he had begun to explore in Sweeney Agonistes, the choruses from The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral, and his numerous critical writings, and (c) his conviction that the poet had a social duty to contribute to people's understanding and appreciation of poetry. Through the theatre he felt that he could reach the greatest number of people at one time; and since he was convinced that "the prose play is a kind of abstraction capable of giving you only a part of what the theatre can give; and that the verse play is capable of something much more intense and exciting,"⁷ it was logical that these two convictions should combine to prompt him to continue writing for the stage. The Family Reunion was his first effort to write a play in a contemporary setting for the commercial theatre.

The reception of The Family Reunion in theatrical and critical circles has been varied and contradictory. When it was first presented in London in 1939, it was not a success. E. Martin Browne, the producer, explained that "March, 1939, was not the best moment for a work which pulls off blinkers: England was still trying too hard to keep them on. When I revived it at the Mercury in 1946,

its purpose was instantly appreciated and even though its faults were not glossed over, it was recognized as a major play."⁸ E. Martin Browne's enthusiasm for this particular play which he admired most of Eliot's works⁹ might be suspect either because he was so closely involved with it or because of his long standing friendship with Eliot. Yet Robert Speaight, the actor, wrote an article praising the merits of The Family Reunion which was included in T.S. Eliot, A Symposium. In his opinion this, the second of Eliot's plays, was the best. He does make a few suggestions concerning the main protagonist's characterization but concludes with some highly favourable comments on the qualities of the verse -- its style, colloquial ease and poetic incandescence.¹⁰ M.C. Bradbrooke's consideration of the play, in her book entitled T.S. Eliot, is conducted very much from the point of view of the theatre, and is valuable for its suggestions regarding characterization. She speaks of the play as being very 'actable'.¹¹ Nevertheless it would seem that the play has been regarded with reservations by those professionally involved in theatre. This is in part owing to its luke-warm reception by the public, which, as some critics suggest, results from its being plagued by misunderstanding and misinterpretation. The theatrical profession is rather pragmatic in its approach to drama, in that a play will stand or fall on the basis

of 'does it work'. This standard is by no means unimportant but is too often limited to the practice of the theatre at the time, and to the understanding of its practitioners. A play is still a work of literature, and Eliot wrote that a play must be as good when read as when acted.¹² Among those whose interests are primarily literary rather than theatrical, there is a great range of critical opinion regarding this play's value. F.O. Matthiessen, in The Achievement of T.S. Eliot, criticizes, among other things, Eliot's use of the Eumenides in The Family Reunion. They are, he feels, a failed 'objective correlative'.¹³ C.L. Barber accepts them theoretically as pre-Christian symbols appropriate to the basic Greek myth but then goes on to condemn them on the grounds that the play finds no basis in social reality, and therefore their meaning remains impractically abstract, vague, or obscure.¹⁴ Ashley Dukes on the other hand, admires the plot and speaks of The Family Reunion as an inspiration to the theatre of the mind.¹⁵ While F.O. Matthiessen finds the setting and characters so inert and lifeless as to render the play hardly interesting, Helen Gardner finds it full of dramatic clash and excitement.¹⁶ In The Plays of T.S. Eliot, D.E. Jones suggests that one of the flaws of the play is that the early stages of Harry's spiritual development are left vague.¹⁷ Martin Jarett-Kern, on the other hand, says,

"I think that it is worth observing that the characters in The Family Reunion have a solid past: and this is one reason why this play is so immensely superior to the two which followed it, in which the characters have no past worth being interested in."¹⁸ Grover Smith goes so far as to attack the poetry which is the medium of communication in the play. He holds that the meaning is obscured by lines overloaded with cryptically associative images, that the poetry is too symbolically concrete, and imagistic. He goes on to charge that the poetry is not closely relevant to the play and that an audience wants to see the images, 'objective correlatives' for emotion, justified in the plot.¹⁹ Matthiessen judges that "most of the verse that they speak has a deliberate flatness, and seems, indeed, to have been designed to sound on the stage hardly distinguishable from prose Eliot seems to have forgotten his earlier and wiser principle that verse should always be used for a heightening, that whatever can now be said just as well in prose is better said in prose."²⁰ To balance this we have Sean Lucy's statement in T.S. Eliot And The Idea of Tradition, that the play is very impressive on the stage chiefly because of its verse. "This is possible because of the verse, which often succeeds in creating an astonishingly strong atmosphere -- and which in the individual exchanges, especially between Harry and Agatha ... makes

an almost imperceptible transition from ordinary commonplace conversation to powerful dramatic statement."²¹ W. K. Wimsatt, commenting on poetic drama in general in his book Hateful Contraries, speaks of the poetic qualities of chasteness, restraint, terseness and precision as "the presiding virtues of Eliot's comedy."²² In discussing the devices of the chorus and the peculiar quality of some of the dialogue which develops more into an internal communion than a dialogue, D.E.S. Maxwell says, "These devices have their fascination and their effectiveness, but most important of all is the use of verse, for it is the verse which, by increasing the emotional tension, makes us accept the devices."²³

These conflicting assessments of the play would perhaps indicate that a new approach is needed to Eliot's dramatic works, or at the very least, a re-examination is in order. Conditions in the theatre have changed greatly since Eliot first began writing his plays, increasing the tolerance of the audience for innovations.²⁴ Recently critical revaluations of Eliot's dramatic works were undertaken by David E. Jones (1960) and Carol H. Smith (1963). Both very ably indicate the depth, complexity, and coherence present in his plays, qualities which have mostly passed unrecognized. The former's discussion of the mythic elements in The Family Reunion and its relationship to the use of myth in The Wasteland is particularly interesting.

The Family Reunion opens with a family gathered at a country home to await the arrival of Harry, Lord Monchensey, the black sheep, who eight years ago had married and run away with a woman of whom the family had not approved. Recently he had lost this wife under mysterious circumstances. She had apparently fallen overboard during a boat trip, but the body had never been recovered. The group consisting of his mother, Amy, his aunts and uncles -- Ivy, Violet, Charles and Gerald -- elect to act as if nothing had happened. Only Agatha, Amy's sister, suggests that Harry's homecoming will not be easy for him:

Yes. I mean that at Wishwood he will find another Harry.
 The man who returns will have to meet
 The boy who left.
 ... he will have to face him --
 And it will not be a very jolly corner.²⁵

Harry enters much earlier than expected and, behaving in a very distraught manner, draws the curtains. He talks feverishly of "eyes" which have been watching him wherever he goes, and which are now lurking in the darkness outside the window.²⁶ The others quickly try to establish an air of normality, informing him about numerous small details which have to do with the estate. Although the gathering has supposedly been planned to celebrate Amy's birthday, she is in fact using it as an excuse to mobilize her long-interrupted plans to have Harry assume the responsibilities at Wishwood and "to contrive his future happiness." Harry

bluntly rejects their pretences:

You all of you try to talk as if nothing had
happened,
And yet you are talking of nothing else. Why not
get to the point
Of if you want to pretend that I am another person --
A person you have conspired to invent, please do so
In my absence. I shall be less embarrassing to you.
(p. 233-4)

Agatha gently asks him for patience with their efforts to understand him. As if relieved by Agatha's show of sympathy, Harry pours out his frustrations and sufferings in an agonized and futile effort to communicate the experience of the last few years. He shocks the family by speaking of having pushed his wife overboard.²⁷ Amy insists that he is tired and overwrought and sends him to have a hot bath.

In scene II, Mary, the cousin whom Amy had intended for Harry and who had remained on at Wishwood after his departure, vainly pleads with Agatha to help her leave in order to avoid having to face Harry. It is, however, too late, and in their subsequent encounter a fragile and fleeting rapport is established between them. Hesitantly and then with greater freedom they discuss their childhood at Wishwood. Eagerly, Harry grasps at this tenuous bond of communication, but their lyric duet celebrating this moment is interrupted by the sudden return of Harry's former mood, for which he relinquishes this "one moment that I stood in the sunlight and thought I might stay there." (p.253).

The Furies, which have been haunting him, show themselves for the first time, and because Mary does not see them he turns on her:

... If I had realized
That you were so obtuse, I would not have listened
To your nonsense. Can't you help me?
You're of no use to me. I must face them. (p.253)

In scene I, Act II, Warburton, the family doctor, warns Harry that his mother's health is not what it appears to be and that she has been surviving by sheer strength of will. Any sudden shock might prove fatal. Harry brusquely passes over this and asks about his father. Warburton is reluctant to discuss him at all and tries to end the conversation. But Harry has already begun to remember the atmosphere of secrecy and intrigue that had existed in the house. As a little boy he had realized that he was being kept from his father, "and when we would have grasped for him, there was only a vacuum surrounded by whispering aunts" (p.260). Then he recalls the day his father died, remembering it because of the hushed excitement that was in the air and the low-pitched conversations of the relatives. With a sudden flash of insight he realized that it was on that same night when his mother kissed him that he "felt the trap close" (p.261). He now resolves to ask Agatha for more details. John and Arthur, his two brothers, are expected that evening, but news is received that John has had an accident and is suffering from a slight con-

cussion. Harry takes his mother to lie down, and when he returns it is to learn that Arthur has been similarly delayed. The next scene with Agatha parallels the earlier one with Mary.. Harry speaks to Agatha of his feelings and disintegrating personality, and then asks her about his father. She begins with the man that his father might have been, but Harry insists on the truth. She then tells of his parents' unhappy marriage and her visit to their home one summer day during her undergraduate years at Oxford. She and his father fell in love, and he planned to murder his pregnant wife. Agatha stopped him because:

... I knew I should have carried
 Death in life, death through lifetime,
 death in my womb.
 I felt that you were in some way mine!
 And that in any case I should have no
 other child. (p.275)

With this revelation Harry begins to comprehend the forces that have shaped his past and are responsible in part for his present. The unreal quality of the years between the time he left home and this moment of truth appear as a dream "Dreamt through me by the minds of others. Perhaps I only dreamt I pushed her" (p.275). Harry's guilt at having desired his wife's death reaches back into his past to his father's guilty wish and perhaps by implication even further, to a shared guilt with the human race. Agatha with great perception says:

What we have written is not a story of detection,
 Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.
 It is possible that you have not known what sin
 You shall expiate, or whose, or why. It is certain
 That the knowledge of it must precede the expiation.
 It is possible that sin may strain and struggle
 In its dark instinctive birth, to come to
 consciousness
 And so find expurgation....

 You may learn hereafter,
 Moving alone through flames of ice, chosen
 To resolve the enchantment under which
 we suffer. (p.275)

When the Eumenides appear this time, Harry is ready and welcomes them as agents of his redemption, recognizing that they have not been following him but leading him to this moment. With this understanding he realizes that he must follow them from Wishwood and his past, to work out his future in the light of this spiritual transformation. The shock of his decision results in Amy's death, but also in the freeing of the other persons whose past has kept them prisoner. Mary finally faces herself, and the truth of her relationship to Harry:

 ...Of course it was much too late
 Then, for anything to come for me: I should have
 known it;
 It was all over, I believe, before it began;
 But I deceived myself. It takes so many years
 To learn that one is dead! So you must help me.
 I will go. (p.285)

Agatha too has been waiting for Harry:

 ...thirty years of solitude,
 Alone, among women, in a women's college,
 Trying not to dislike women. Thirty years
 in which to think. (p.282)

With sensitivity and perception she has helped him to spiritual understanding and in so doing has freed herself from some of the burden of guilt she had been carrying.

This ambitious attempt to deal with such complex themes as guilt, sin and expiation, spiritual education and transformation, is not unusual in Eliot's writings. Certainly they are present in The Wasteland, the Four Quartets, and Murder in the Cathedral, and continue to be present in his later plays. D.E. Jones puts it very succinctly when he says, "As a profound exploration of a complex spiritual state, and an attempt to communicate with the audience on the level of spiritual experience, The Family Reunion is unique in our drama."²⁸

We have already seen the diversity of critical opinion regarding this play. The controversy centres around four issues: (a) the nature of the theme, (b) the use of the Eumenides and the Orestes myth in general, (c) the convention of the chorus and indirectly the characterization of the aunts and uncles, who form it, and (d) the use of poetry.

The first point at issue concerns the split between the natural and supernatural planes of experience in the play. Some critics feel that the two are not closely enough integrated and that the move from one to the other strains credibility. Closely related is the objection to

the mixture of ritual and realism. Lucy, in T. S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition, speaks of an uneasy juxtaposition of these elements.²⁹ The ambiguity of Harry's experience and of the play as a whole has left audiences bewildered as to the meaning of what they have witnessed and, as one critic remarked, a feeling that they have been "had". This might be due in part to the treatment of the chorus as shallow, imperceptive individuals, unwilling or unable to recognize the issues. It is not surprising then, that when the audience is forced, through their own confusion, into identifying with the chorus they will resent it.³⁰ Helen Gardner feels that the theme of the play is essentially undramatic since the experience of the protagonist is a spiritual one.³¹ Certainly the climax of the play is not externalized in any way, apart from what Harry and Agatha say. Harry's departure and Amy's subsequent death are anti-climactic. It has been said that Eliot contrived the latter to give the play an illusion of completion, since the exact nature of Harry's future is left undefined.³² Another source of criticism is the way in which the issue of the wife's death is dropped, seemingly as unimportant. This same "callous" attitude is carried through in Harry's decision to leave despite the knowledge that the shock might result in his mother's death.

As has already been mentioned, Eliot draws on

Aeschylus' The Oresteia as the source of his Furies. The parallels at first were considered to be slight or non-existent as critics concentrated on the differences between the two plays. In The Oresteia, the husband is murdered by his wife. In The Family Reunion, the reverse is true but in desire only since Harry's father was stopped by Agatha. It is never clear whether Harry was responsible for his wife's drowning. He is only guilty indirectly for his mother's death, while Orestes literally executed his mother. Eliot himself, disturbed by the unfavourable view taken of his use of the myth said "I should either have stuck closer to Aeschylus or else taken a great deal more liberty with his myth."³³ Subsequently a fuller treatment by Maud Bodkin, of the relationship between the two plays, indicates a very close parallel thematically. While this may be conceded now, the objection to Eliot's reaching back three thousand years to a play with which the majority of theatre goers are unfamiliar, still stands. Grover Smith doubts that the tradition associated with Eumenides is inclusive enough to make an audience realize what Harry is headed for.³⁴ Similarly, the significance of the Furies is lost.

Another convention associated with Greek drama, which Eliot uses, is that of the chorus. In The Family Reunion the aunts and uncles double as a chorus. They are sup-

posed to represent the conventional imperception of the spiritually unawakened. At various points in the play, they drop their individual identities to merge into an expression of collective distress, confusion or incomprehension. The objection which is commonly raised is that the transition from individual roles to that of the chorus is too difficult and that such "breaks" interrupt the action of the play. Allied to this is the "flatness" of characterization of the chorus.³⁵ The cast is divided into two kinds of characters, the conscious ones (Harry, Agatha, and to a lesser degree Mary and Amy) and the stock figures. The aunts and uncles are considered either to be caricatures or lifeless. C. L. Barber says that Eliot takes unfair advantage of the characters, dismissing them as unreal without ever having created them.³⁶

Finally, the issue of poetry and drama is raised. Few critics have directly attacked poetic drama on theoretical grounds, but they often betray their inimical attitude to and misunderstanding of it in the tone of their writings. For example, Carol H. Smith, in a footnote, quotes Denis Donoghue as saying that Eliot "yielded to the temptation to be 'poetical' and thus became undramatic."³⁷ The remaining criticisms are confined to the poetry in Eliot's plays alone. For those who find the subject matter too ambiguous, the form of communication only serves

to increase the problems of comprehension. Instead of clarifying the meaning, the strongly allusive often ambiguous poetry obscures it, eluding attempts at translation into a concrete statement. Others find that the bulk of the poetry is either not poetry at all, or only so slightly poetic as to have been better rendered in prose. The most intrepid critics criticize the worth of the poetry itself. Such phrases as "flat", "too symbolically concrete", "too imagistic", have been used.

The wide variety of opinion would seem to indicate that the critics have not grasped the true character of Eliot's play. The poetic form of The Family Reunion consists of the interpenetration of

- (a) dramatic structure
- (b) thematic structure
- (c) language
- (d) ritual and myth

The writer proposes to focus on the chorus and the elements of ritual and myth in order to reveal the interdependence of these elements, and to answer many of the criticisms which have been outlined above.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER I

¹The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, p.3. The text is The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950 (New York, 1952).

²What is significant about this play is the strong music hall elements such as the two songs "Under the Bamboo Tree" and "My Little Island Girl," and the references to The Coephoroie by Aeschylus notably in the epigram at the beginning of the play. Parts of The Hollow Men are somewhat reminiscent of this play, especially the nursery rhyme lyrics "Here we go round the prickley pear" and its satiric counterpart "This is the way the world ends."

³Evidently he had a long standing interest in this play. Years before, he used a quotation from it as an epigram for Portrait of a Lady.

⁴T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood (New York, 1928), p.60.

⁵It is interesting to note that John Dryden wrote a dialogue on this same subject entitled An Essay on Dramatic Poetry.

⁶Cf. Sean Lucy's discussion on the development of Eliot's dramatic theories, including a ten point summary of the same in T.S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition (London, 1960), p.170.

⁷T.S. Eliot, "The Need for Poetic Drama," The Listener, XVI 411 (Nov. 25, 1935), pp.994-5.

⁸E. Martin Browne, "T.S. Eliot in the Theatre: The Director's Memoirs," T.S. Eliot The Man and His Work, ed. Allen Tate (N.Y., 1966), pp.126-7.

⁹"Many, perhaps most, of those who love his drama, find this the most satisfying of his creations."k

E. Martin Brown, "From The Rock to The Confidential Clerk," T.S. Eliot A Symposium For His Seventieth Birthday, ed. Neville Braybrooke (London, 1958), p.62.

¹⁰Robert Speaight, "Interpreting Beckett and Other Parts," from T.S. Eliot a Symposium, p.76.

¹¹M.C. Bradbrooke, T.S. Eliot (London, 1963), pp.35 ff.

¹²In "Four Elizabethan Dramatists," Selected Essays

(London, 1951), p.110, he attacks the distinction between drama as drama and drama as literature -- that a play can be good drama and bad literature, or good literature and bad drama. Aristotle, (Poetics, VI, 19), gives spectacle the position of least importance artistically.

¹³F.O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T.S. Eliot, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1958), p.166.

¹⁴C.L. Barber, "Strange Gods at T.S. Eliot's The Family Reunion" from the Southern Review, Vol. VI, No.2, pp. 387-416.

¹⁵Ashley Dukes, "T.S. Eliot in the Theatre," T.S. Eliot A Symposium, ed. Tambimuttu and Richard March (N.Y., 1965), pp.117-118.

¹⁶Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S. Eliot (London, 1949), pp.139-40.

¹⁷D.E. Jones, The Plays of T.S. Eliot (Toronto, 1960), p.99

¹⁸Martin Jarrett-Kerr, " 'Not Much About Gods' ", T.S. Eliot, A Symposium For His Seventieth Birthday, p.179.

¹⁹Grover Smith, T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays, (Chicago, 1956), p.213.

²⁰F.O. Matthiessen, p.166.

²¹Sean Lucy, T.S. Eliot and the Idea of Tradition (London, 1960), p.195.

²²W.K. Wimsatt, "Eliot's Comedy: The Cocktail Party," Hateful Contraries (Kentucky, 1965), p.186.

²³D.E.S. Maxwell, The Poetry of T.S. Eliot (London, 1954), p.201.

²⁴Certainly the Theatre of the Absurd and the 'Happening' have provided the playwright with great freedom of exploration and have had a major impact on the kind of preconceptions an audience take to a play.

²⁵The Family Reunion, p.229. The text is The Complete Poems and Plays (New York, 1952). Subsequent references will be to this edition.

It is interesting to note that the phrase she uses

("And it will not be a very jolly corner") is a reference to a short story, The Jolly Corner, by Henry James. The protagonist, Spencer Brydon, returning to America after many years abroad, becomes obsessed with the alternatives that existed in his past. In the old deserted house of his youth, he stalks the spectre of his alterego, the self who might have been had he remained behind in America. The climax of the story occurs when the hunter becomes the hunted, a parallel which occurs in reverse in The Family Reunion. Harry is driven back to Wishwood in an attempt to escape himself and in the resolution of the play, a resolution too often oversimplified, becomes himself the hunter, of his past and future. The ring of ghosts, externalized elements of Harry's disintegrating personality, recurs throughout the play and makes this reference more than an accidental link with James.

²⁶ These beings are the Erinyes or Furies of Aeschylus's The Oresteia, on which Eliot said he based The Family Reunion. Cf. Maud Bodkin's discussion of the parallels between the two plays in The Quest for Salvation in an Ancient and a Modern Play (London, 1941).

²⁷ Later in the play, it becomes evident that he is confused on this point, and may in fact have only wished her dead. His ensuing guilt feelings and disturbed emotional state after her death may have blurred any differences in his mind between the actual and desired deed. Grover Smith's interpretation of The Family Reunion is interesting from a psychoanalytic point of view.

²⁸ Jones, p.122

²⁹ Lucy, p.193

³⁰ How close the identification between audience and chorus actually is, is debatable. Possibly an audience's familiarity with the play or at least with themes which are now much more commonplace than in 1939 would mitigate the struggle for comprehension.

³¹ "Both plot and persons fail to reveal to us as drama must, a spectacle for our contemplation. Because there is no real action, there are no real persons." Helen Gardner, p.157.

³² When pressed by Michael Redgrave on the subject, Eliot is supposed to have said that Harry and his chauffeur "go off and get jobs in the East End." Jones, p.101.

³³T.S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama," Selected Prose, ed. John Hayward (Middlesex, 1965), pp.77-8.

³⁴Smith, p.210.

³⁵Cf. M.C. Bradbrooke's discussion in T.S. Eliot, p.35 ff., where she advances the hypothesis that the minor characters of the play are Jonsonian in conception. Like Jonson's Drama, The Family Reunion is a two-dimensional play; the characters only exist in relation to each other, and as constituent parts of the main theme.

³⁶C.L. Barber, p.422.

³⁷Carol H. Smith, T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice (Princeton, 1963), p.112.

CHAPTER II

THE CHORUS

Traditionally, the use of the chorus as found in Greek drama, has been cited as the precedent for Eliot's use of this convention in The Family Reunion. Originally the chorus consisted of fifty persons and at times constituted the entire cast of the drama. Gilbert Murray, in his discussion of the origins of the chorus, notes that in The Suppliants, one of the earliest Greek plays, "we have no actors, no stage, but at least a hundred and fifty-three persons engaged in a complex of dances on the old dancing-floor of Dionysus."¹ Later the fifty were reduced to twelve for each play of the tetralogy of Aeschylus with two left over as actors. Besides their office of dancing and singing, the chorus was used to comment upon and interpret the action. The deploying of the chorus in stylized movements in Murder in the Cathedral and The Rock, and the songs in Sweeney Agonistes are based on this use of the chorus. Herman Voaden and E. Martin Browne in their edition of Murder in the Cathedral continue the parallels:

The Choruses suggest the formal odes which separate the scenes in Greek drama. Like the Greek Chorus, the Women of Canterbury have intuitive foreknowledge of the tragedy to come. Like the Greek Chorus, they are powerless to change events. This gives another dimension to them; their 'passionate immobilities of appeal' are moving and dramatic.²

Eliot says, in "The Need for Poetic Drama", that "the chorus mediates between the action and the audience; it intensifies the action by projecting its emotional consequences, so that we as the audience see it doubly, by seeing its effects on other people."³

The problem of using this ancient tradition is that the playwright may be considered to be dealing with an anachronism in reaching back three thousand years for this convention. It may be held that the elements and structure of Greek drama are completely different from those of modern drama. If this is so, then the use of the chorus becomes irrelevant or superfluous dramatically. If it is considered relevant, there still might remain the feeling that the tradition connected with the convention is not vital or even familiar to an audience, and therefore it is 'lost' on them.

The tradition of the chorus is not as dead as it might first appear. Opera and the ballet have preserved this tradition long after other kinds of drama developed. Both are still dramatic in the sense that they have some kind of plot which is enacted in song or in the mime of dance. Modern ballet has shown a particular interest in very stylized movement. In both art forms, group singing and dancing is in a very real way a communal expression. One thinks of the ball in Romeo and Juliet which is a family social occasion, or the forest scenes in Swan Lake where

the enchanted swan maidens gather to dance together.

The group singing and dancing which are an integral part of the plot of the better musical comedies such as West Side Story are certainly a modern enough continuation of the Greek tradition. Eliot exhibited a great interest in and fondness for music hall comedy. There are many references to this 'art form' in his writings,⁴ and he devoted a whole essay to Marie Lloyd, one of England's great music hall artists, on the occasion of her death. His awareness of the vitality and relevance of the chorus is clear in the following passage taken from this essay:

The working man who went to the music-hall and saw Marie Lloyd and joined in the chorus was himself performing part of the act; he was engaged in that collaboration of the audience with the artist which is necessary in all art and most obviously in dramatic art.⁵

The chorus has also been used in certain modern playwrights' works. Brecht uses a water carrier in The Good Woman of Setzuan as a traditional choric figure. In Thornton Wilder's Our Town, the stage director is the narrator, and at times assumes different roles in the play. In A View from the Bridge, Arthur Miller has the lawyer, Alfieri, assume this role. Therefore, the use of the chorus in contemporary times is not unique with Eliot.

The chorus in The Family Reunion is a significant feature of this play, but it is not the first time Eliot

has used this convention. Sweeney Agonistes ends with Wauchope, Horsfall, Klipstein and Krumpacker speaking in chorus. The Rock, written in aid of a church building fund and appropriately enough produced in a church, was, according to Eliot, an exercise in exploring the possibilities of the choric convention. He focused particularly upon the poetic mode of the chorus's expression. An interest in the rhythms of natural speech patterns continued to develop over a span of seven years and finally resulted in his first full length dramatic production, Murder in the Cathedral. It is important to note his earlier uses of the chorus since it contributes to the refinement of this technique in The Family Reunion. In "Poetry and Drama," Eliot explains the reasons for his conspicuous use of the chorus in Murder in the Cathedral:

The first was that the essential action of the play --both the historical facts and 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 Tennyson did (in introducing Fair Rosamund, and in suggesting that Beckett 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 emotions the significance of the action, helped wonderfully.⁶

He recognized that another of his reasons for using the chorus was to compensate for possible dramatic weak-

nesses, and because he felt himself to be on firmer ground writing choral verse than dramatic dialogue. The verse of this drama had, as Eliot puts it, only a negative merit. He did not want to write verse in twelfth century idiom, nor did he want the incongruity of modern dialogue in an historical situation. There was also the problem of avoiding anything that sounded like Shakespearean or nineteenth-century poetic drama. The end result, Eliot says, was a neutral verse that approximated the verse of Everyman.⁷ The play was extremely successful. It was transferred from Canterbury to the Duchess Theatre in London in the fall for a year's run, followed by six months in the west end at the Old Vic and two big provincial tours. But Eliot was far from satisfied. He felt that Murder in the Cathedral was a special case and was accepted by audiences for reasons which had nothing to do with the kind of poetic drama he wished to have accepted in the contemporary theatre. It was an historical drama, beginning with Beckett's return to England after his exile and concentrating on his consciousness in the face of death and martyrdom. This sort of theme was remote enough to distance the characters and plot from the audience and thus make this sort of play acceptable. With a certain amount of wry humour, Eliot writes:

Verse plays, it has been generally held, should either take their subject-matter from some mythology, or else should be about some remote historical period, far enough away from the present for the characters not to need to be recognizable as human beings, and therefore for them to be licensed to talk in verse. Picturesque period costume renders verse much more acceptable. Furthermore, my play was to be produced for a rather special kind of audience -- an audience of those serious people who go to 'festivals' and expect to have to put up with poetry....And finally it was a religious play, and people who go deliberately to a religious play at a religious festival expect to be patiently bored and to satisfy themselves with the feeling that they have done something meritorious. So the path was made easy.⁸

Out of his general dissatisfaction with the achievements of this play grew The Family Reunion.

The thematic relationship of the Chorus to The Family Reunion arises from Eliot's use of certain characters in a double capacity. Charles and Gerald, Ivy and Violet, the uncles and aunts of Harry, have individual roles which then merge into a Chorus, expressing their collective and subconscious feelings as the play progresses. Their first choric utterances come in the middle of scene one just before Harry's arrival. It is evident that Amy has plans for Harry and that the others have been called in to take part in them, although just what part they have not been told. The atmosphere is uneasy. Agatha has just spoken of the problems for Harry in coming home, and Amy has delivered an impassioned condemnation of Harry's former wife. The aunts and uncles feel the

tension and are disturbed but have no idea why they feel "embarrassed, impatient, fretful, ill at ease ..."

(p.231). They sense that something is about to happen, and so dwell on where they might have been had they not come "at Amy's command to play an unread part in some monstrous farce, ridiculous in some nightmare pantomime" (p.231). It is not until the end of scene one that their resentment finds full expression. Harry has come home and upset the family by his strange behaviour and even stranger conversations. Now they are not merely uneasy, they know they are being made to wait for something. They do not want to be jolted out of their comfortable routines, and ask, "Why should we be implicated, brought in and brought together?" (p.242). They want no hidden secrets exposed, as if ignorance will make these non-existent. They do not wish to be troubled with questions. Any explanation will satisfy. All they ask is

... to be reassured
About the noises in the cellar
And the window that should not have
been open. (p.243)

It is important for them to maintain a sense of normality, to believe "that the world is what we have always taken it to be" (p.243). At the end of act one they have begun to formulate what it is that they "fear." Significantly this is the first time this word has been used. It

indicates that they are now examining their reactions and that there is no longer any question of refusing to recognize that something is happening. The Eumenides have appeared for the first time to Harry to prevent him from seeking refuge in Mary's love for him. Warburton, the family doctor, has arrived, and the conversation turns to murder, evoking the unpleasant memory of Harry's earlier admission of guilt for his wife's death.⁹ This evocation of the past is recognized as the centre of tension in their lives. It recalls those 'facts' which they have refused to admit. The image of their 'family' history has been shaken and with it their image of themselves. Thus they are being forced to the same conclusions that Harry has already drawn, that is, the significance of the past and its influence on the future. In their fourth appearance they are no longer onlookers but have been unavoidably drawn into the action of the play. Harry has begun to inquire about his father and to recall certain events which disturb his memory. The Chorus describes the voices of the past which wait "for the future to hear" (p.270), voices which have finally intruded themselves upon their consciousness. When the play is over, with Amy dead and Harry gone away, the Chorus is left to try to sort out what has happened. They do not as yet understand the meaning of Harry's decision or of the events that have

transpired that evening. But they have been made aware of things which they have tried to suppress. Their anguish is expressed in the closing lines of their final speech.

... what is being done to us?
 And what are we, and what are we doing?
 To each and all of these questions
 There is no conceivable answer.
 We have suffered far more than a personal loss --
 We have lost our way in the dark. (p.291)

They realize at last that there are questions to be asked and not having the answers is the first step toward looking for them. In the light of this, Charles' statement -- "I fear that my mind is not what it was - or was it? - and yet I think I might understand." (p.291) -- is significant. What has happened subconsciously to him has risen to the surface of his awareness. Although the Chorus's experience is not as profound nor as extensive as Harry's, it is relevant thematically to the play. They too have suffered an education.

Dramatically, the use of the Chorus is an economical way of giving The Family Reunion a deeper dimension by externalizing the psychological experience of the play. The characters fall into two groups -- those actively involved in searching for their identity, motives, and future and those whose world is disturbed but who are as yet unready to be profoundly transformed. Harry, Agatha,

and to some extent Mary, and Amy, belong to this former group, while the aunts and uncles and sometimes the audience itself belong to the latter. The Chorus are the on-lookers, the observers whose psyches are buffeted by the forces released in the central characters.

The Chorus also forms the link between the two levels of action in the play. They have individual lives, rather static and lifeless, but can be counted upon to say the conventional things, and maintain the play's contact with the banalities of the world outside. It is this association with the normal routines of life which provide the necessary background for Harry's 'abnormal' perceptions. The plot is to carry us from the world of superficial thoughts and actions to the underlying world of the spirit. When these characters are caught up in the drama of Harry's spiritual experience, the repercussions are traced in their subconscious psychic reactions. It is at these times that they lose their individual identities, and merge in a collective expression of their emotional and spiritual responses. In such a role they participate in this other world of the play; a world of which they must be unconscious, by the very definition of their individual characters. Without their part in the conventional drawing room setting, this dimension of the play would be lost.

Their choric utterances voice the questions which are

bound to trouble the audience. As Jones points out, "At a level of apprehension near that of the average member of the audience, the Chorus expresses the fear of spiritual reality which Harry comes to accept. By implication, therefore, they help to interpret the action, even though they do not understand it."¹⁰ Thus they fulfill the traditional purpose of this role in Greek drama, that is, of interpreting the action and forming a link between the audience and the play. The kind of bond which exists between the Chorus and audience, which Eliot spoke of in his essay on Marie Lloyd, is particularly relevant here.

The thematic relationship of the Chorus to the play is paralleled on the poetic, linguistic level in the language the Chorus uses. Rhythm, syntax, and images all co-operate to support the Chorus in the expression of their reactions. Before considering some of the rhythmic patterns it is well to keep in mind that Eliot was trying to approximate colloquial rhythms, which place the stress where it would come naturally when talking. In "Poetry and Drama;" Eliot says that what he worked out and continued to use was:

...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 of the caesura and two on the other.¹¹

He also talks in Reflections on Vers Libre about manipulating pattern for effect, that is, by taking a very simple form and constantly withdrawing from it, or taking no form at all and continually approximating to a very simple one.¹² The pattern develops out of stressing certain words or syllables. This stress system does not necessarily imply that all the stressed syllables are equally stressed. It merely means that when spoken, these words or syllables would naturally be emphasized.¹³ For example, the regular rhythm established in these two lines of the Chorus -

We all of us make the pretension
To be the uncommon exception

is not continued in the third line

To the universal bondage.

"It is this contrast between fixity and flux, this unperceived evasion of monotony, which is the very life of verse."¹⁴

The struggle of the Chorus to comprehend the central experience of the play is reflected in some of the rhythms of their speeches. Lines one to four of the Chorus's first speech of the play consist of long spill-over lines which work in a predominantly six stress pattern:

Why do we feel embarrassed, impatient, fretful,
ill at ease,
Assembled like amateur actors who have not been
assigned their parts? (p.231)

which becomes a seven stress pattern with a caesura divid-

ing the line into two parts.

Charles: I might have been in St. James's Street, / in
a comfortable chair rather nearer the fire.

Ivy: I might have been visiting Cousin Lily at
Sidmouth, / if I had not had to come to this
party.

Gerald: I might have been staying with Compton-
Smith, / down at his place in Dorset.

Violet: I should have been helping Lady Bumpus, /
at the Vicar's American Tea. (p.231)

Rhythm is also influenced by the way the lines in dialogue
are broken up, altering the quantities:

And the wings of the future darken the past, the
beak and claws have desecrated
History. Shamed
The first cry in the bedroom, the noise in the
nursery ... (p.256)

In this way Eliot has insured that the two words "History"
and "shamed" receive the emphasis that the meaning requires.
Besides being pleasing to the ear, rhythm, then, can be a
good indication of the state of mind of the characters --
long difficult rhythms, short quick rhythms, overflowing
lines, clipped lines, -- all are involved in an underlying
logic of meaning.

Grammatical structure can be very important, for it
is often responsible for contributing to meaning through
the 'subliminal' exploitation of the potential of parts
of speech and their effect when arranged together. One
of the very obvious devices of syntax which Eliot uses

is parallel structures. The accumulation of phrases, clauses, or sentences is a method of elaborating on meaning, of emphasizing and driving a point home, of building up atmosphere. The last speech of the Chorus works through a series of parallel sentences, defining their dilemma:

We do not like to look out of the same window, and
see quite a different landscape.
We do not like to climb a stair, and find that it
takes us down.
We do not like to walk out of a door, and find
ourselves back in the same room. (p.290)

The members of the Chorus move from the unpredictable quantities of life to those which they know, facts which they grasp at in the face of the inexplicable. This movement is underlined by dropping the negative parallel structure "we do not like" for "we understand we know." Other grammatical constructions can invest a sentence with certain qualities. For example consider the following passage:

Why should we stand here like guilty conspirators,
waiting for some revelation
When the hidden shall be exposed, and the newsboy
shall shout in the street?
When the private shall be made public, the common
photographer
Flashlight for the picture papers: why do we
huddle together
In a horrid amity of misfortune? why should we be
implicated, brought in and brought together? (p.242)

Note the dominance of the verb constructions:

Why + verb (should stand), adverb (here) modifying
verb, adverb phrase (like guilty conspirators)
modifying verb, adverb phrase (waiting for
some revelation) modifying verb, adverb clause
(when the hidden shall be exposed) modifying

verb, adverb clause (and the newsboy shall shout in the street) modifying verb, adverb clause (when the private shall be made public) modifying verb, adverb clause ([and] the common photographer flashlight for the picture papers) modifying verb.

Why + verb (do huddle), adverb (together) modifying verb, adverb phrase (in a horrid amity of misfortune) modifying verb.

Why + verb (should be implicated), verb (brought), adverb (in) and adverb (together) modifying verb.

By using verbs and adverbs, which are 'action' constructions the qualities implicit grammatically are utilized to make these questions forceful. The cumulative heaviness of the clausal build-up contributes to the feeling of stress and strain which the Chorus is under at this point in the play.

The development of the imagery which the Chorus uses throughout the play is very significant in terms of understanding their experience. The first speech of the Chorus centres around images of the stage and acting. Their main concern in life, as individuals, has been to maintain appearances, to play a role, and in so doing, create that illusion of reality which they desired. The whole play is concerned very much with the tension between illusion and reality, the mask of external behaviour and the persons behind the mask. Here in the role of the Chorus, the aunts and uncles are stripped of their masks and their underlying consciousnesses revealed. Other images of a similar nature

appear throughout the play. Agatha talks of Harry wandering "against the painted scene of the Mediterranean" (p.228). Amy describes Harry's wife as a "painted shadow" (p.230). Thus the opening images reflect one of the problems of the play, that is, of cutting through illusion to reality. But it also provides some of the logic for the Chorus's having both individual roles and a communal subconscious one. The imagery in the Chorus's second speech conveys the horror they have of public exposure:

Why should we stand here ... waiting for some
revelation
When the hidden shall be exposed, and the newsboy
shall shout in the street?
When the private shall be made public, the common
photographer
Flashlight for the picture papers: (p.242)

Later in the play Violet talks of being very upset when driving in an open car because of being exposed to the stares of passers by. There is much talk of newspapers. Charles quotes a headline during the family's conversation about the death of Harry's wife, and Gerald uses the journalistic-sounding phrase "Permanently missing" (p.229). The details of Arthur's accident are first learned from the newspaper, and Charles declares, "In my time, these affairs were kept out of the papers; but nowadays, there's no such thing as privacy" (p.270). If things can be kept out of the papers they no longer exist, and Charles' contemporaries are very much involved in denying the existence

of unpleasant facts. When Harry confesses to having pushed his wife overboard, Charles overrides him by saying definitely "Of course we know what really happened, we read it in the papers" (p.235). Reality for these people is what is reported. The first introduction of house imagery appears at this time and becomes the substance of the Chorus's third utterance. Discoveries lie down corridors of the mind and around corners behind doors which must be opened. The Chorus first expresses the process of disturbance which their consciousnesses are being subjected to as "noises in the cellar"; "the window which should not have been opened," "the things which come and sit at the door." They all fear that "the door might suddenly open," "the curtains be drawn," "the cellar make some dreadful disclosure," "the roof disappear" (p.243), and they be confronted with what they have been suppressing. Houses are the home of life and human activity. Life is "the agony in the curtained bedroom, whether of birth or of dying" (p.270), two related processes which the main characters are to undergo. The existence of evil or sin within the structure of the house is present in copulation, birth and death and involves a hereditary, generic sense of guilt which has "mutilated the family album" (p.257). As the play progresses, the foundation of the illusory life of the characters begins to crumble--

"The bird sits on the broken chimney". (p.257). What the Chorus has done is to pick up the image of the house used by Harry, and in so doing generalize his personal statement:

...I am the old house
 With the noxious smell and the sorrow before
 morning,
 In which all past is present, all degradation
 Is unredeemable. (p.234)¹⁵

The movement from the particular to the general is central to this play: the fear of the individual becomes the collective fear; the experience of the individual becomes the collective experience, the individual's guilt becomes the guilt of the group and finally the individual's understanding becomes the understanding of the group. The Chorus who desired to avoid reality, (and reality for them is what exists in newspapers) are moving towards a realization that the crux of the matter is within and not without, that reality lies in rooms and cellars, not in newspapers.

The incantatory and intensely imagistic quality of the speeches, and the stylized form of their role as Chorus are strongly suggestive of ritual and myth, elements which, in the next chapter, will be seen to form the substructure of this play. Furthermore, this role in a contemporary drama provides the audience with the immediate

frame of reference for Greek drama and the mythology so intimately connected with it. The myths associated with seasonal changes, with fertility, birth and death, have a natural affinity for the environment wherein the Chorus first developed. The questions which these myths dealt with intrigued the Greek imagination and formed the subject matter for such dramatists as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER II

¹Gilbert Murray, Aeschylus (Oxford, 1964), p.50.

²T.S. Eliot, Murder in the Cathedral, ed. Herman Voaden and E. Martin Browne (Toronto, 1959), pp.X-XI.

³T.S. Eliot, "The Need for Poetic Drama," The Listener, (November 25, 1936), p. 995.

⁴Immediately a few lines from The Wasteland come to mind:

OOO that Shakespeherian Rag--

It's so elegant

So intelligent...(Complete Poems and Plays, p.41)

In "The Need for Poetic Drama," he mentions the rapport between the audience and actor in music-hall comedy, as a model for drama in general.

⁵T.S. Eliot, "Marie Lloyd," Selected Essays, p.458.

⁶T.S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama," p.74.

⁷W.K. Wimsatt suggests that far from getting away from nineteenth century verse patterns, Eliot was greatly influenced by Tennyson. "Prufrock and Maud: From Plot to Symbol," pp.201-212.

⁸Eliot, "Poetry and Drama", p.72.

⁹Eliot's interest in melodrama and detective fiction (another pop genre apart from music-hall comedy), can be seen in writings such as Sweeney Agonistes and his essay, "Wilkie Collins and Dickens."

¹⁰Jones, p. 107.

¹¹Eliot, "Poetry and Drama," pp.75-6.

¹²Eliot, "Reflection on Vers Libre," Selected Prose, p.84.

¹³The normal stress indications (/) have not been used in order to avoid any associations with normal methods of scansion.

¹⁴Eliot, "Vers Libre," p. 84.

¹⁵These images were a favorite "objective correlative" of Henry James for the kind of interior life which exists within the individual's psyche.

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING REALISM, RITUAL AND MYTH

One of the elements of the play which has been accepted at face value and consequently has raised a number of problems for critics and directors alike is Eliot's use of the so-called realistic convention. The opening scene of The Family Reunion is the living room of a country home, a setting which evokes associations with the traditional drawing-room drama. This tradition is a vital part of the theatre's increasingly serious attempt at realism on the stage. Characters appear to converse as any one of the audience might and settings are similar to those in the audience's experience of the world outside the theatre. However, a play is not realistic in the way a documentary film is realistic. It is the ordering of events in an artificial manner, a concept which along with that of the artist as 'maker', goes back to Aristotle and Plato. While there are elements which we recognize as elements in our world as well as that of the play, we are always aware of device. An audience never confuses their own world with that of the play, although they may suspend their disbelief for the duration of the presentation.¹ Eliot himself dismisses the goals of the realistic theatre as belonging essentially to the sphere of the cinema.² So-called realistic dialogue, he points out, actually

involves the characters being more articulate than in real life. The appearance of naturalness is produced through the use of very elaborate artifice.

Yet because he also said that he wished to compete with the contemporary theatre on its own terms, it has been assumed that he accepted the realistic convention as part of the terms of competition. It is true, he did use the conventional drawing-room setting. In The Family Reunion many of the exchanges between the aunts and uncles, the interview of Charles with Downing, or the scene in which Winchell reports John's accident to Harry and Warburton, might well be regarded as realistic dialogue. Some of the events of the play such as the accidents of John and Arthur would qualify as contributing to a realistic atmosphere. However, there is much evidence which might indicate that Eliot was not using any of these 'realistic' elements seriously. For example, the opening scene which is very important in setting the mood of a play and shaping the expectations of the audience, is far from being an example of realistic dialogue. Amy's invocation to the sun and light are an immediate indication that there is a departure from the realistic convention. The contrast between this speech and the next is great enough to underline the difference if the audience requires something more to make it aware of the play's

unconventional qualities. The puckish introduction of some of the more obvious poetic devices of rhyme and rhythm to the understated lines of some of the characters also serve to undercut prose expectations.³ Similarly, the predominance of acting and stage imagery as before noted in the speeches of the Chorus, and throughout the rest of the play, is a way of constantly reminding the audience of illusion.

Why then did Eliot give the impression of using a realistic convention and then undercut it at every turn?

Carol Smith suggest that:

... every device at the dramatist's disposal was to be used as the play progressed to shake the audience's confidence in the validity of that world of surface reality as a total representation of existence. This, I believe, was the rationale behind the many "violations" of the theatre of realism which disturbed both audiences and critics of this play.⁴

The audience and the characters are constantly reminded that there is a deeper dimension to life. The movement of the play, as the plot, images, and convention would indicate, is from one dimension of reality to a deeper one. The reunion is not simply a meeting of people on an occasion. It becomes a reunion with the past and the meaning of the past. Reality is not the superficial events which are reported in newspapers, but the spiritual events which shape lives and consciousnesses.

Characters are represented not only by what they say to one another in conversation, but also by what they think and feel on a subconscious level -- as in the "beyond character" speeches of the Chorus. Since the play is profoundly concerned with two levels of existence, dislocation is very important. Eliot's movement, from realism to ritual and myth, is central to the action of the play.

Ritual and myth are interdependent as one proceeds from the other. Whereas myth arises out of the timeless nature of events which can be used and re-used, ritual develops from the religious implications of the former. In ritual we have an explicit acknowledgment, through action, of a religious relationship between man and the unknown, or between man and his deity or deities. Thus ritual could be viewed as an allegorical representation of the bases of myth.

In T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice, Carol H. Smith discusses Eliot's use of ritual and myth in The Family Reunion. She suggests that one of the underlying patterns of the play is the myth surrounding the cyclic nature of the seasons. The conflict between Amy and Harry is explained in terms of the resistance of the old year to the rebirth of the new. Amy is a corrupt mother earth figure.⁵ She is old, near death, and refuses to accept change or recognize her son's independence. Harry's

decision, resulting from a spiritual rebirth, means his mother's death, which symbolizes the destruction of the old by the principle of the new year.⁶ Warburton, Smith suggests, is the cook-doctor, who purifies the old sin-laden god and helps him to rebirth.⁷ This hypothesis is further supported by many of the ritualistic elements of the play which will be discussed later.

One of the most important sources for the theme of The Family Reunion is the Orestes myth, especially as interpreted by Aeschylus.⁸ Maud Bodkin, in her comparison of The Family Reunion and The Eumenides, notes that both plays concern "pursuit by the Furies of an individual sinner, his quest for salvation and final deliverance involving transformation of his pursuers."⁹ The sin of Orestes, the murder of his mother, is the culmination of a family curse resulting from a series of crimes committed within the family. This violation of family ties, dooms him to be pursued by the Furies, the avengers of kindred murder. This is paralleled in The Family Reunion. There is a distinct sense that the guilt of the protagonist goes far beyond his involvement with his wife's death. Harry has relived his father's wish to do away with a wife whom he could not love. Both are guilty of murder in thought, if not in deed, and so Harry is doomed to expiate the family guilt. The Greek concept of a family

curse parallels the concept of original sin in Christianity which would expand the individual guilt to a universal one in keeping with the concept of man's fall through his first parents.

Purgation, in the Oresteia, was achieved through years of wandering and suffering while being hunted by the Furies. In Eliot's play, Harry, too, talks of the sufferings experienced during his wanderings and of the torment of being followed.

In the Java Straits, in the Sunda Sea,
In the sweet sickly tropical night, I knew they
were coming.
In Italy, from behind the nightingale's thicket,
The eyes stared at me, and corrupted that song.
Behind the palm trees in the Grand Hotel
They were always there. (p.232)

When Orestes is finally delivered from the Furies, they are transformed from "hellish spirits of torment, lusting for blood and pain, into beneficent spirits, protecting Athens, averting civil strife, giving peace to the household and fruitfulness to the soil and the flocks."¹⁰ In The Family Reunion, a similar transformation takes place. The Furies, who haunt Harry at the beginning of the play, represent the traditional law of retribution which operates blindly, or alternatively, their pursuit of the sinner symbolizes his guilt, and through his consequent sufferings, the process of expiation which leads to salvation. In the course of the play,

Harry achieves an understanding of himself, of his guilt individually as a person, and collectively as a member of the human race. His acceptance of this and his decision to seek "love beyond human desire," brings him into harmony with himself and God. This is the climax of the play and is marked by the transformation of the Furies into the Eumenides, now symbols of salvation.

The resonance of myth gives greater depth and universality to the work. In this instance, echoes of myth connected with death and rebirth, of change from an old to a new order, are an integral part of the meaning of the play. It is also consistent with the method of the play: the movement from the particular to the universal, from one level of existence to a deeper one. D.E. Jones quotes Ronald Peacock as saying that "what he [Eliot] attempts to do is to portray a realistic scene ... to which an underlying mythical pattern diffuses its meaning to the surface; so that the 'real' becomes, without being negated or displaced, transparent, and through it the myth appears as the immanent meaning."¹¹

The ritualistic elements of the play support the underlying mythical pattern. Suggestions, through language, of sacrificial rites of rebirth are very strong as in the poetic exchanges between Harry and Mary in Act 1, Scene II:

Mary: The cold spring now is the time
 For the ache in the moving root
 The agony in the dark
 The slow flow throbbing the trunk
 The pain of the breaking bud.

Harry: Spring is an issue of blood
 A season of sacrifice
 And the wail of the new full tide
 Returning the ghosts of the dead
 Those whom the winter drowned
 Do not the ghosts of the drowned
 Return to land in the spring?
 Do the dead want to return? (p.251)

The opening speech of Amy, in its invocation to the sun and light, is suggestive of fertility rites. The repetition of images of spring and winter, of birth and death, strengthen these allusions. Carol Smith cites the opening scene of the play as providing "abundant examples of the correspondences the playwright wished to establish. The time of the action is late March, the time of the spring fertility ceremonies and, in corresponding Christian terms, of Easter. In the first speech of the play Amy complains of her old age and winter confinement and of her fears of approaching death in words which suggest the terminology of the fertility rituals."¹² The ritual cooking or cleansing of the sin-laden god is, according to Smith, implied in the making up of the fire, in the dinner party, in the suggested hot bath, and the introduction of Warburton, the family physician. The substance of her argument is

that while admitting that on the plane of surface events such an interpretation may seem ludicrous, she does insist that on the symbolic level, the characters are "unwittingly¹³ acting in accord with the ritual sequence of purgation."

She goes on to interpret the lyrical duet between Harry and Mary as a reenactment of the ritual battle between human will or self, and the spirit. Whether this interpretation is accepted or not, their speeches, and the later ones between Harry and Agatha, have a strong ritualistic element of incantation, uttered in the unconscious, mesmerized manner of the transfixed religious devotee.

Act I closes with Agatha alone on the stage delivering a speech whose language and rhythm suggest a spell designed to undo a curse:

The eye is on this house
The eye covers it
There are three together
May the three be separated
May the knot that was tied
Become unknotted...(p.257)

After the Eumenides appear to Harry in the scene with Agatha, the stage directions read: "Agatha goes to the window, in a somnambular fashion, and opens the curtains, disclosing the empty embrasure. She steps into the place which the Eumenides had occupied" (p.278). There then follows her oracular speech which ends with:

Oh my child, my curse,
 You shall be fulfilled:
 The knot shall be unknotted
 And the crooked made straight. (p.279)

These incantations or runes support the mythic substructure of the play and are particularly appropriate to Agatha's role as seer, as set up from the opening of the play. It is Agatha, who with intuitive foresight, predicts that Harry's home coming will be of a different order than the family expects. She also is not surprised by Harry's conduct and is the one who immediately understands the situation. It is her council which first gives comfort to Harry:

... I am also convinced
 That you only hold a fragment of the explanation.
 It is only because of what you do not understand
 That you feel the need to declare what you do.
 There is more to understand: hold fast to that
 As the way to freedom. (p.236)

The play ends with the combination of two rituals -- the ritual chant neutralizing the curse, and the birthday rite. Agatha and Mary walk slowly about the lighted birthday cake, alternately reciting the verses of the charm which undo the curse. With each rotation a few candles are extinguished until the last words are spoken in complete darkness. F.O. Mattheissen suggests the church ritual of Tenebrae as the source for this scene, and then condemns it as a parody of ritual rather than a reinvigoration from it. This reaction can be explained

by the contemporary dichotomy between the social, and the traditional or ritualistic elements of the birthday, so that when someone like Eliot tries to transform everyday experience back into ritual, the relevance and the depth of the tradition are not appreciated.¹⁵ The implications of the birthday ritual can be seen in such myths as The Sleeping Beauty: (a) the notion of it being a crucial moment - hence the kingdom-wide celebrations; (b) the notion of crossing the threshold of the future blessed with gifts - hence the twelve fairies who come with twelve wishes; (c) the notion of the curse - uttered by the thirteenth fairy and (d) the association of death and rebirth in the princess's one hundred year sleep followed by her reawakening. In The Family Reunion these aspects are particularly relevant to the theme. The action of the play takes place on Amy's birthday and concerns the 'moment of truth' in the lives of Amy and Harry. The latter is reborn spiritually and leaves to begin a new life transformed by his experience. While for Harry it means rebirth out of spiritual death or unconsciousness, for Amy it means death as her hopes for the future are blighted. This is an ironic comment on the wish fulfillment motif associated with birthdays. It becomes clear in terms of the play's action that it is actually Harry's birthday. This is further supported by the scene with

Sergeant Winchell who keeps confusing the occasion:

Good evening, my Lord, Good evening, Doctor,
Many happy ... Oh, I'm sorry my Lord,
I was thinking it was your birthday, not her
Ladyship's (p.263).

And again later:

I understand, Sir.
It'd be the same if it was my birthday --
I beg pardon, I'm forgetting.
If it was my mother's. (p.263).

Therefore the birthday ritual is perfectly relevant thematically and ties in with the other ritualistic elements of The Family Reunion. Dramatically it is more than simply a 'jazzy' ending for the play. It provides the rationale for the return of Harry. In terms of convention, it is an instance of a perfect fusion of ritual and realism. In the very formalized world of the play, we are lead to accept the intensification of this ritual. From the superficial celebration we are drawn to a realization of the deeper implications, a dynamic which is typical of this play.

We have already seen certain specific examples of Eliot's broad use of language ritualistically and mythically. On a much more subtle level, the poetry of the play contributes to the thematic and mythic structure of The Family Reunion. Configurations of vowels and consonants are used to support, on an auditory level, the meaning

of words. When Ivy says, "The younger generation/ are undoubtedly decadent," the grouping of the consonants (y-ng...g-n...nd-t-d...d-c-d-nt) communicates disdainful condemnation. This attitude is also very much part of the mythic division between youth and old age. The boredom in Amy's opening speech, the sense of suspension, is reinforced by the elongated vowels which slow down the rhythm of the last half of the following line:

I have nothing to do/ but watch the days draw out.
Behind her sense of uselessness one can see the old year waiting to be displaced. Eliot makes other uses of word textures and pattern. In the following passage note the complex use of sounds and words.

Not yet!/ I will ring for you./ It is still quite 1
light.
I have nothing to do/ but watch the days draw out, 2
Now that I sit in the house/ from October to June, 3
And the swallow comes too soon/ and the spring will 4
be over
And the cuckoo will be gone/ before I am out again. 5
O Sun, that was once so warm,/ O Light that was
taken for granted 6
When I was young and strong,/ and sun and light
unsought for 7
And the night unfear'd/ and the day expected 8
And clocks could be trusted,/ tomorrow assured 9
And time would not stop in the dark! 10
Put on the lights./ But leave the curtains undrawn. 11
Make up the fire./ Will the spring never come?
I am cold. 12

There is a disjointed mournful quality to this speech, chiefly produced by the caesura in each line. The repetition of "and" (lines 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10) and the listless

abbreviated phrasing communicates, in its abruptness, a certain despair and tiredness. Through the dialectic two-part structuring of lines 7-9, certain phrases receive emphasis: "young and strong...sun and light unsought for ...night unfeared...day expected...clocks could be trusted ...tomorrow assured." This is the language of security, a security which is threatened by death - thus setting up the age old mythic conflict. By breaking the pattern of the two-part structure, a kind of climax is achieved, which emphasizes the meaning of "And time would not stop in the dark," and gives the imperative "Put on the lights" great power. The consonance of spring, gone, again, granted, strong (which rhymes with gone, and undrawn) relate one line of poetry to the next.

Light (line 1) is associated naturally with day (line 2). Day suggests sun (line 6) which in turn generates light (line 6 again). The repetitions of sun and light (line 7) are followed by their opposite and equivalent meanings, night and day (line 8). Dark (line 10) gives rise to its antithesis light (line 11) which becomes fire (line 12). Spring and cold (line 12) refer back to line 4. In this way light and dark, cold and warmth, spring and winter are related through the structure of this speech. We are told repeatedly throughout the play that Wishwood is cold, that spring is slow and difficult,

that darkness and death lie just without the brightly lit rooms. (Amy fears that the clock will stop in the dark). The key words of the above passage are metaphors. Love associated with sunlight and warmth, has been absent in these characters' lives. The country is cold and so are the people. The promise of birth represented by spring "excites us with lying voices," for they are dead, spiritually and emotionally, and to be awakened, reborn from their kind of consciousness is difficult. For Amy it means death -- the clock stops in the dark. The role that these words play with respect to myth has already been discussed. Thus the foregrounding of key words which has taken place in this opening speech becomes significant not only in terms of structural unity, but also in terms of thematic and mythic unity.

Surprising combinations of words repeat on the verbal level the paradoxical propositions of the play. Agatha explains that Harry's wife wanted to fight the family "with the weapons of the weak/ which are too violent." Here we can see an ironic play on the Orestes myth, in the inevitable associations between Clytemnestra and Harry's wife. Harry speaks of the family being "withered and young"; again evoking, through suggestions of decay and regeneration, the seasonal myths, and their inherent notions of conflict. Agatha talks of :

... a necessary move
 In an unnecessary action,
 Not for the good that it will do
 But that nothing may be left undone
 On the margin of the impossible. (p.237-8)

Behind this lies the necessity and futility connected with the Greek blood feud; the never ending circle of crime and vengeance which was necessitated by the old law. Playing with words can result in humour. Following upon a very serious discussion about change and arrested change, Mary takes leave of Harry with "Well, I must go and change for dinner./ We do change - to that extent." This also refers to the mythic motif of change. Rhyming words in a frivolous manner can comically undercut the seriousness of a statement. Gerald says "Yes, it's odd to think of her as permanently missing." whereupon Violet sweetly inquires "Had she been drinking?". Ivy proposes that "She may have done it in a fit of temper," to which Gerald irrelevantly states "I never met her." Since there is a constant interplay between the theme of this play, and the Oresteia, the deflating quality of this conversation achieves a further irony through its juxtaposition with the gravity of the mythic murder.

On a larger scale than diction, Eliot repeats grammatical structures in order to build up audience expectations. He then may frustrate them (a favorite device of the play) or fulfil their expectations, concluding a satisfactory

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symmetry. The manipulation of symmetry and assymetry gives the poetry "texture?"

The parallel clauses and phrases of Amy's opening speeches are a good example.

And the swallow comes
And the cuckoo will be gone.

(antithetic verbs follow noun swallow and cuckoo - traditionally these birds are regarded as the first heralds of spring. The cuckoo is one of the first birds to migrate south in the fall.)

Put on the lights
Make up the fire

(imperative verbs, tension between light and fire. In view of what we have seen of these words mythically, the emphasis on light and fire, through the imperative voice, is important.)

And clocks/ could be trusted
And time/ would not stop

(words rather like a Popeian couplet which implies the interchangeable quality of the terms. The clock would not stop, and time could be trusted, and security is not threatened by death. This is the heart of conflict within the death-rebirth myths.)

The two negative verbs in the phrases "and the light unsought for/ And the night unfear'd" are played off against

the subsequent positive verb "expected." Ivy moves through a series of brainless repetitions which establish her character:

I have always told Amy she should go south in the winter.
 Were I in Amy's position, I would go south in the winter.
 I would follow the sun, not wait for the sun to come here.
 I would go south in the winter, if I could afford it,
 Not freeze, as I do, in Bayswater, by a gas-fire counting shillings. (p.225)

Again the myth of the struggle of the old order against the threat to its security, and the rejuvenating quality of the sun is suggested. Here, insecurity is wondering if there are enough shillings to maintain warmth.

Rhythm is a device which can be used in many ways. It can be humorous as in the singing, refrain-like quality of Violet's first speech:

To the chilly deck-chair and the strong cold tea -
 The strong cold stewed bad Indian tea. (p.225)

It can be the key to character, and is capable of a great variety of musical effects, as in the opening lines of Amy's first speech:

Not yet! I will ring for you. It is still quite light.
 I have nothing to do but watch the days draw out.
 (p.225)

The explosive first words reflect Amy's fight against the sentence of death. Behind the despairing rhythms can be

seen the fate of old age, a fate which has repeated itself incessantly throughout the centuries.

The use of images becomes the key to the meaning of the play. The problem of communicating a spiritual experience is emphasized over and over again by Harry. The inappropriateness of language, the misleading quality of words which can be barriers to understanding, the need for explanation, are all motifs of the play. The corridor, the little door, the rose garden are integrated into the moment of illumination, of love attained beyond human desire. Images of ghosts, of the desert and the wheel, of disease, contagion, smells and sores are all woven into a story of sin, guilt, and expiation, and find their parallel in the Oresteia. The ghost motif is particularly interesting because it implies not only the manifestations of a disintegrating personality --

The things I thought were real are shadows, and
the real
Are what I thought were private shadows. Oh that
awful privacy
Of the insane mind! Now I can live in public. (p.276)

or the haunting effects of guilt projected externally --

I have been wounded in a war of phantoms. (p.276)
but also the process of separation from the self which the sinner undergoes in separating from God.

The degradation of being parted from myself,
From the self which persisted only as an eye, seeing.
All this last year, I could not fit myself together:
(p.272)

Imagery has a cohesive quality relating one character to another. When an image like that of the summer day of unusual heat, used by Harry, is later picked up by Agatha, a bond of mutual experience is established. As the play progresses, more and more images are concentrated in their speeches, linking the various themes of the play together.

Thus it can be seen that the use of diction, syntax, rhythm and imagery is related to the matter of the play. Poetry and meaning are inseparable -- one 'is' the other. Without an understanding of the poetry and particularly the Chorus, an understanding of the play is difficult. We have seen the centrality of the Chorus both thematically, poetically and dramatically. It is difficult to imagine this play without the Chorus. The link between the natural and spiritual planes formed through their heightened use of poetry, in their 'beyond' character speeches, would be lost and with it much of the conflict which is the drama of the play.

This marks the last time that Eliot uses the Chorus in his works. But the forsaking of this particular form of the convention is not to be construed as a forsaking of the tradition. In his next play, The Cocktail Party, Eliot introduced a psychiatrist as one of the central figures, drawing upon the archetypal cook-doctor of mythology, the leach of medieval drama, and the "healer"

figure of Christianity. His song "one-eyed Riley" is one of the few remaining vestiges of the traditional choric role.

The relationship of myth and ritual (and the chorus, which, as we have already seen, partakes of these two elements) to language is clearly summed up by Elizabeth Sewall, in her book The Orphic Voice, Poetry and Natural History:

In its beginnings, language is acknowledged by scholars to have been essentially figurative, imaginative, synthesizing, and mythological.... Myth and metaphor, living instruments of a lively speech, are not ornaments and artifices tacked on to language but something in the stuff of language and hence of the mind itself. Language is poetry, and a poem is only the resources of language used to the full.¹⁷

She goes on to talk of a second universe of discourse being created through language where:

....for the first time, formal relations can be established between this and the universe of experience. By reason of the distinction between the two universes, the establishment of relations between them becomes possible.

There seem to be five such types of formal system: (Of which three will be quoted)

- (1) Dance and ritual, where the body as a whole is employed formally;
- (2) Music and rhythm, where the forms come to the mind-body through the ear;
- (3) Word-language.¹⁸

Poetry arises out of the same impulses which gave birth to ritual and myth, that is, rhythm and pattern.

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The qualities of rhythm in poetry reach far back into our primitive history to the savage who expressed his inarticulate impulses through rhythmic chants, dances, ritual.

Eliot spoke of these origins in The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism. "Poetry begins, I dare say, with a savage beating a drum in a jungle and it retains that essential of percussion and rhythm."¹⁹ Primitive man perceived his environment poetically in terms of myth and ritual.²⁰ This mode of perception ordered reality and reduced it to graspable terms, though not of necessity understandable terms. Mystery still remained in his environment, but this environment operated coherently in a recognizable pattern. Thus, out of the relationship of poetry to our primitive psychological history, we can see that poetry draws upon our 'racial memory' which lies just below the surface of our awareness, in the primordial stream which flows to the roots of our existence.

Eliot's ideas about rhythm, meaning and pattern are all calculated to exploit the subconscious in man. The same process is true for the use of imagery. We all have a store of images whose meanings are not simply factual but individual. Evoking these images, with their multiplicity of significations governed by the context, the history of use within the work, by the history of use in general, and finally by the associations personal to the

listener or reader, is a way of exploring the sub-recognitions available. Communication beyond the frontiers of consciousness: understanding before meaning has been arrived at: a meaning which gradually reveals itself: these are all attempts at explaining the subconscious integrating drive in which our senses are involved. Play upon the sensory system, upon the individual's memory unit, upon the human passion for pattern,-- these all belong to the poet's craft. Such complex and rich potential for experience should not be neglected by the theatre. In a period when we are experimenting in so many different ways to communicate an experience, not just view it, to arrive at a reality which can not be realized in one to one relationships, poetry would seem to offer a legitimate channel.

A play such as The Family Reunion, which is so vitally concerned with man's subconscious life and impulses, which seeks to communicate a spiritual and emotional experience, which finds the use of ritual, myth, and the chorus convention so compatible with its aims, would find poetry a natural and excellent means of communication. Herbert Read's suggestion that "the future may have in store for us a form of poetic drama that imitates not so much modes of action as states of sensibility"²¹ is realized in this play.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER III

¹In his Preface to Shakespeare, Johnson expresses great contempt for critics who insist on the unities on the grounds that it makes the drama credible. "It is false, that any representation is mistaken for reality; that any dramatic fable in its materiality was ever credible, or, for a single moment, was ever credited...The truth is, that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players." Johnson, "From the Preface to Shakespeare," Criticism: the Major Texts, ed. "Walter Jackson Bate (New York, 1952), p.214.

²"The film is the vehicle of illusion, and it makes all the illusion of the stage seem crude." "The Need for Poetic Drama," p.994.

³Carol H. Smith discusses similar disruptions of prose expectations: "Characters such as the aunts and uncles, who begin by speaking the most ordinary prose, sentiments, break into choral chants." p.117.

⁴Smith, p.116.

⁵Smith acknowledges Gilbert Murray's discussion of The Oresteia as the source for this interpretation of Amy's role. p.134.

⁶Critics have been disturbed by Harry's apparent callousness in the faces of the possible consequences of his decision. This arises out of a too literal involvement with the play. If the allegorical quality of the play is appreciated, the problem disappears.

⁷This observation is much more applicable to the psychiatrist in The Cocktail Party. Here the doctor-figure is central to the play and is responsible for helping the main characters to spiritual rejuvenation. But in The Family Reunion, Warburton's role is so minor as to be practically expendable. He is simply a means

of communicating the seriousness of Amy's illness, and to spark Harry's interest in his father. Although he is supposed to ascertain for the family, the state of Harry's mental health, he never does get to this point.

⁸There is always the model of a classical myth in Eliot's imagination. The sources for his later plays, The Cocktail Party and The Confidential Clerk, are Alcestes, and the Ion of Euripides. The Elder Statesman is based on Oedipus at Colonus.

⁹Maud Bodkin, p.5.

¹⁰Gilbert Murray, p.202.

This conversion represents the change in Athenian society from the old order of blood feuds to a new order of justice. There is a parallel development in the Christian tradition. The coming of Christ represents a change from the law of an eye for an eye, to the new law of love. Gilbert Murray explains that "The Eumenides are the Law seen from the inside by those to whom it is not alien but a thing of their own, an ideal to keep human society at peace with itself and with God." Murray, p.203.

¹¹Jones, p.7.

¹²Smith, p.135.

¹³Smith, p.114.

¹⁴Mathiessen, p.170.

¹⁵Traditional interest in the implications and importance of birthdays can be seen in such writings as Religio Medici by Thomas Browne, and the occasional poems and masques of Ben Jonson. More recently Pinter used this tradition with great effect in The Birthday Party. Stanley Kubrick's latest movie, 2001, can be viewed as a metaphor of man's birthday - his venture into the unknown, which culminates in a transition from death to life again.

¹⁶"The degree of control that the verse gives over characterization and dramatic tension can be illustrated from the scene in which the uncles and aunts discuss 'the younger generation' (pp. 14-15). Here, the stiff, pompous, insensitive rhythm which characterizes Charles, especially in his more obtuse mood, gives way to an ampler, more relaxed, but still circumscribed movement as Gerald makes his kindly gesture. Mary's pent-up emotion reveals itself in a very jerky movement (the repetitions in 'information ... generation' and 'I don't deserve....I don't belong' are the more obvious means of achieving a kind of stumbling bitterness). The awkward silence which covers her ~~exit~~ is broken by Violet's sharp decisiveness. Gerald's reaction does not go deeper than bemusement; the rhythm has only a slight hesitancy. With his stolid complacency, Charles moves firmly in to put Mary's outburst into perspective, as he would think. And, finally, Amy with her characteristically domineering rhythm closes the incident. The tenacious rhythm of her monosyllabic half-line 'but life may still go right' prevents us from interpreting it as mere wish; she clearly intends to do what she can to make it go right. The scene demonstrates that poetic drama can have something of the precision of a musical score. Character and dramatic structure are here integrated in the verse rhythm, through which the tension of the awkward moment is built up and resolved." Jones, p.86.

¹⁷Elizabeth Sewell, The Orphic Voice (Yale, 1960), p.6.

¹⁸Sewell, p.28-9.

¹⁹Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (London, 1964), p.155.

²⁰Today, the hippie with his costume and ceremonies seems to be trying to transform everyday actions back into ritual in order to give birth to a new myth.

²¹D.E. Jones, p.122.

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