



I could think

Even of my own life as an isolated ruin,  
A casual bit of waste in an orderly universe.  
But it begins to seem just part of some huge disaster,  
Some monstrous mistake and aberration  
Of all men, of the world, which I cannot put in order.

(p. 91)

In any age in history, there exist two tendencies: one to individualism, the other to collectivism. Both are right tendencies. Individualism is essential to man in the sense that he is a person, and as a person he has his own rights and the responsibility that goes with them. No other person is responsible for his deed if it is freely chosen. On the other hand, he is a social being. Society is imposed on him by nature. Man instinctively moves outward to his fellows, desires to be with them, and suffers from solitude if left alone too long. These two opposing tendencies seem to be at discord today. What we find is the overbalancing of one tendency to the complete neglect of the other. Martin Buber warns the danger when these conflicting tendencies are not harmonized:

.....if individualism understands only a part of man, collectivism understands man only as a part: neither advances to the wholeness of man, to man as a whole. Individualism sees man only in relation to himself, but collectivism does not see *man* at all, it sees only "society". With the former man's face is distorted, with the latter it is masked.<sup>2)</sup>

What is to be done about it? In *The Idea of a Christian Society* published in the same year as *The Family Reunion*, Eliot says:

.....the only possibility of control and balance is a religious control and balance; ..... the only hopeful course for a society which would thrive and continue its creative activity in the arts of civilization, is to become Christian.<sup>3)</sup>

As a Christian, he felt for the future of the culture he had inherited the responsibility of:

.....redeeming the time: so that the Faith may be pre-

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2) Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, transl. by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 200.

3) Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1939), p. 24.

served alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the world from suicide.<sup>4)</sup>

On the other hand, as a poet socially conscious as he was, he believed that:

.....it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order *in* reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation.....<sup>5)</sup>

As a Christian poet, his "perception of an order *in* reality" must be a Christian one. What Christian perception is he trying to elicit for the redemption of the time tormented by the sense of isolation and depersonalization? The purpose of this paper is to search for the answer in *The Family Reunion*, one of the early poetical dramas of T.S. Eliot.

The main plot of this play is as follows. After eight years' absence, Harry, Lord Monchensey comes back home to Wishwood on the evening of his mother's birthday. The Eumenides, whom he believes to be the Furies of his wife whom he pushed, or supposes that he pushed into the sea, follow him. Harry hoped he might get rid of them by beginning a new life at home, but the Furies still continue tormenting him. Then he is told by Aunt Agatha, his mother's younger sister, that they are the Furies who are calling for expiation of his father's sin. This sin, he learns, resulted from the fact that his father and Aunt Agatha fell in love of each other when she came to the house to spend one summer. Because of this illicit love his father plotted to get rid of his wife who was bearing a baby at the time, but Agatha stopped him. Realizing the real situation from Agatha's words, Harry seeks to find a way for expiation, and resolves to leave home the same evening. The blow is too much for the old mother whose health was already weakened, and she dies.

What is the meaning of these Furies? We can find out much

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4) Eliot, "Thoughts after Lambeth" (1931), *Selected Essays*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1951) p. 46.

5) Eliot, *Poetry and Drama* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1951), p. 35.

by thinking over their relationship with Harry. Believing the Furies are haunting him because of the murder he committed, or thinks he committed, he comes home with the hope:

to return to the point of departure  
And start again as if nothing had happened.....(p. 56)

But at the moment he enters the house he sees them through the window—these Furies whom he had never seen before even though he knew they were around him. He then finds that:

I shall get rid of nothing  
Of none of the shadows that I wanted to escape;  
.....  
.....I thought I might escape from one life to another,  
And it may be all one life, with no escape. (pp. 52-53)

He feels disgust because his hope has been taken away from him. Seeing his disgust, Mary his cousin tells him what is wrong with him:

you expected Wishwood  
To be your real self, to do something for you  
That you can only do for yourself.  
What you need to alter is something inside you.....(p. 57)

Moreover:

You attach yourself to loathing  
As others do to loving: an infatuation  
That's wrong, a good that's misdirected. (p. 58)

What must he do? Mary says:

Pain is the opposite of joy  
But joy is a kind of pain  
I believe the moment of birth  
Is when we have knowledge of death  
I believe the season of birth  
Is the season of sacrifice  
For the tree and the beast, and the fish  
Thrashing itself upstream.....(p. 60)

Here we find Eliot's Christian understanding of sin and suffering. People "go on trying to think of each thing separately" (p. 91) and

Of the past you can only see what is past,  
Not what is always present. (p. 29)

But the effect of sin is always present. For an ordinary person:

It is really harder to believe in murder

Than to believe in cancer. (p. 67)

Yet, the effect of sin is as real as cancer.

it is just the cancer

That eats away the self. (p. 31)

God made us his sons in Christ. Sin is to live in rejection of this ontological reality of a human person. Therefore sin is a cancer that eats away the self. Human personality comes to birth only when sin is acknowledged as such. That seems to be the meaning of:

I believe the moment of birth

Is when we have knowledge of death (p. 60)

A person grows as he lives his life in Christ which is not without pain as His was not.

The slow flow throbbing the trunk

The pain of the breaking bud. (p. 59)

Suffering is a pledge of the new life in Christ.<sup>6)</sup>

I believe the season of birth

Is the season of sacrifice

For the tree and the beast, and the fish

Thrashing itself upstream.....(p. 60)

As Christ's Death and Resurrection are the two phases of one saving event, pain and joy are inseparable in the life of Christians. Pain becomes the source of joy, when borne in union with Christ. The following lines echo John 16:20:

Pain is the opposite of joy

But joy is a kind of pain.....(p. 60)

In Christianity suffering is not understood as the bitter revenge of a god who has been insulted by the disobedience of the human being. God is Love at the same time that He is justice. It is God's plan to save man from the sense of sin by allowing him to suffer as a means of expiation and reparation rather than as a means of revenge. Man is made in such a way that he feels more guilty when he is not punished for his sin. Harry refers to this:

We misbehaved

Next day at school, in order to be punished,

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6) Rom. 8:17.

For punishment made us feel less guilty. Mother  
Never punished us, but made us feel guilty. (pp. 74-75)

Harry begins to see his way, and he says to Mary :

You bring me news  
Of a door that opens at the end of a corridor,  
Sunlight and singing; when I had felt sure  
That every corridor only led to another,  
Or to a blank wall; that I kept moving  
Only so as not to stay still. Singing and light. (pp. 60-61)

Just at that moment the Eumenides come up to him. This time they show themselves more clearly to him, as if to say that the way he has found is not enough. Now Harry knows that :

I can clean my skin,  
Purify my life, void my mind,  
But always the filthiness, that lies a little deeper. (p. 93)

At home he has been finding :

A misery long forgotten, and a new torture,  
The shadow of something behind our meagre childhood,  
Some origin of wretchedness. (p. 100)

He asks Aunt Agatha about her relations to his father in order "to learn exactly what their meaning is" (p. 99), because he feels the shadow on the house has something to do with both of them.

I hardly remember him, and I know very well  
That I was kept apart from him, till he went away.  
We never heard him mentioned, but in some way or another  
We felt that he was always here.  
But when we would have grasped for him, there was only  
a vacuum  
Surrounded by whispering aunts: Ivy and Violet—  
Agatha never came then. (p. 76)

From her, he learns that the Furies are connected with the sin of his father, and that he is called to make reparation for it.

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. It is possible  
You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,  
Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.

Indeed it is possible. You may learn hereafter,  
Moving alone through flames of ice, chosen

To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer. (pp. 104-105)

This idea of suffering for the expiation of the sins of others will probably seem ridiculous to non-Christians. Ibsen's play entitled the *Ghosts* has a theme outwardly similar to that of *The Family Reunion*: "The sins of the fathers are visited on the children." The play is based on the repugnant story of a man named Oswald who wants to be an artist but whom a stroke has deprived of the energy of finishing even one picture. Through fear of a second attack, which the doctor told him would make him a complete lunatic, he comes home to find help in his mother. But, like Harry in *The Family Reunion*, Oswald finds that he cannot stay home. "I must live a different sort of life, mother; so I shall have to go away from you. I don't want you watching it."<sup>7</sup> "The joy of life"<sup>8</sup> which is allowed in Paris is not permitted at home. He, therefore, decides to go back to Paris with Regina whom he thinks to be just a servant in the house but who is in truth his half-sister. Then his mother tells him that Regina is his father's illegitimate child, and that his illness, which he believes to be due to his own gay life in Paris, is actually due to his father's profligate life. The play ends with Oswald, whom the second stroke has attacked, childishly calling out, "Give me the sun."<sup>9</sup>

The proverb "The sins of the fathers are visited on the children" is understood by Ibsen as referring to blind fate, which "we can never be rid of."<sup>10</sup> To him it is an injustice that the result of one man's sins should visit his innocent children, and there is a despairing note in the play because for him it is just as useless to crave for justice as it is to crave for the sun.

Elliot in his verse drama seems to be trying to "enter into overt

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7) Henrik Ibsen, "Ghosts," *Ghosts, An Enemy of the People, The Warriors at Helgeland*, trans. R. Farquharson Sharp ("Everyman's Library"; London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1911), p. 121.

8) *Ibid.*, p. 124.

9) *Ibid.*, p. 141.

10) *Ibid.*, p. 105.

competition with prose drama"<sup>11</sup>) by dealing with the same theme that the prose drama has taken from contemporary life. Yet, despite this outward likeness, the way of dealing with the theme is quite different. In fact, *The Family Reunion* has more likeness in its content to *Hamlet* or *Eumenides* than to *Ghosts*, in the sense that the protagonist is called upon to put the wrong things right, since:

He sees the world as clearly as you or I see it,  
It is only that he has seen a great deal more than that.... (p. 129)

Yet, for Hamlet and Orestes the wrong things they are called upon to put right are outward crimes; for Harry the wrong thing is a sin of thought only, since his father's plot to murder his wife was prevented by Agatha.

As a Christian writer Eliot has a fuller grasp of reality than Ibsen had, and to him the phrase "The sins of the fathers are visited on the children" has quite a different meaning.

We all of us make the pretension  
To be the uncommon exception  
To the universal bondage. (p. 44)

But the truth is that there is a universal bondage. "We, being many, are one body in Christ,"<sup>12</sup>) as the apostle Paul says. We are members of this Divine Family, with God as the Father and Christ as Our Brother. Whether the members are in this world or in the next, they all belong to the Family, except those who have willingly cut themselves off from this life for all eternity.

Before he learnt the meaning of the *Eumenides*, Harry was puzzled by them.

I have a private puzzle. Were they simply outside,  
I might escape somewhere, perhaps. Were they simply inside  
I could cheat them perhaps with the aid of Dr. Warburton—

.....  
What matters is the filthiness. I can clean my skin,  
Purify my life, void my mind,  
But always filthiness, that lies a little deeper. (p. 93)

It is not simply inside, because it is not his own sin, but neither is it

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11) Eliot, *Poetry and Drama*, p. 26.

12) Rom: 12; 5.

simply outside, because it is the sin of a member who belongs, as he does, to the same Family where "if one member suffer any, all the members suffer with it."<sup>13)</sup> Therefore, to purify only one's own life is not enough. The play expresses this fact as the operation of curse :

in the night time  
And in the nether world  
Where the meshes we have woven  
Bind us to each other. (p. 135)

But also "if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it."<sup>14)</sup> So if there is a weak member, others can make up for him, make expiation for his sin by their own sufferings.

And the curse be ended  
By intercession  
By pilgrimage  
By those who depart  
In several directions  
For their own redemption  
And that of the departed..... (p. 136)

Now Harry knows that :

we cannot rest in being  
The impatient spectators of malice or stupidity.  
.....  
To rest in our ow suffering  
Is evasion of suffering. We must learn to suffer more.  
(p. 92)

Is Harry crushed with the idea of suffering for another's sin? On the contrary, he feels quite happy.

but now  
I feel quite happy, as if happiness  
Did not consist in getting what one wanted  
Or in getting rid of what (p.105) can't be got rid of  
But in a different vision.

For a long time he had been tormented by the sense of "the filthiness, that lies a little deeper" (p. 93), which was caused by a sense of sin that seemed as part of a huge disaster.

I could think  
Even of my own life as an isolated ruin,

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13) I Cor. 12:26.

14) I Cor. 12:16.

A casual bit of waste in an orderly universe,  
But it begins to seem just part of some huge disaster,  
Some monstrous mistake and aberration  
Of all men, of the world, which I cannot put in order. (p. 91)

Now he knows that what he must do is to make reparation which will save him from that sense. Furthermore, he had been suffering for years with the sense of isolation.

I felt, at first, that sense of separation,  
Of isolation unredeemable, irrevocable—  
It's eternal, or gives a knowledge of eternity,  
Because it feels eternal while it lasts. That is one hell.  
Then the numbness came to cover it—that is another—(p. 99)

But now the vision of human solidarity which makes expiation for the sins of others meaningful saves him from the sense of separation.

O that awful privacy  
Of the insane mind! Now I can live in public. (p. 107)

He decides to leave Wishwood, following the Eumenides, because :

now I know  
That my business is not to run away, but to pursue,  
Not to avoid being found, but to seek.  
I would not have chosen this way, had there been any other!  
It is at once the hardest thing, and the only thing possible.  
(p. 113)

It is "the hardest thing" for him, because he knows that it means a great blow to his mother. Yet "the only thing possible" for him to do now is to repair the sin of his father, the way being to leave his home and to follow the Eumenides. He chooses this way of expiation with love which surpasses natural vision. Harry's motive for leaving home is not a selfish one as was Oswald's in Ibsen's *Ghosts* when he wanted to leave home in search of "the joy of life". For Harry, to leave home, in other words to make reparation, is the only way for the "reunion" of the family of Wishwood, and of the Divine Family, the Body of Christ. His motive is indeed that of charity as he wishes to take away the shadow of sin from the family of Wishwood and from the whole family of humaity.

Love compels cruelty

To those who do not understand love. (p. 110)

His mother's death comes as an unavoidable consequence.

Yet the situation in which Harry tries to do expiation at the cost of his mother's life is not convincing enough, and it remains the great weakness of the play. Eliot himself admits that at least at the first reading it leaves the readers:

.....in a divided frame of mind, not knowing whether to consider the play the tragedy of the mother or the salvation of the son. The two situations are not reconciled. I find a confirmation of this in the fact that my sympathies now have come to be all with the mother and my hero now strikes me as insufferable prig.<sup>15)</sup>

He explains this defect and the fact that the appearance of the Furies do not seem to fit on the modern stage, as two evidences of "a failure of adjustment between the Greek story and the modern situation."<sup>16)</sup> I think the failure, if it is a failure, is more due to his effort to express by outer actions:

not a story of detection,

Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation. (p. 104)

Eliot had to show the inner meaning of sin by the outer symbolism of the Furies, and to make clear an interior expiation dependent on sacrifice, by the outer action of Harry's leaving his mother.

One of the tragedies of the modern man is that on the one hand his range of vision of the world widens more and more, and sees more misery in the world, but on the other, he sees no meaning in suffering. Eliot speaks more of the state of modern mind than that of the twelfth century when he makes the chorus speak as follows in *Murder in the Cathedral*:

We know of oppression and torture,

We know of extortion and violence,

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15) Eliot, *Poetry and Drama*, p. 31.

16) *Ibid.*, p. 30. However, some critics disagree with Eliot's own estimation of this play. Cf. Katharine Worth, "Eliot and the Living Theatre," *Eliot in Perspective*, ed. by Graham Martin (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 158; David E. Jones, *The Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 119.

Destitution, disease,  
.....

God gave us always some reason, some hope; but now a  
new terror has soiled us, which none can avert, none  
can avoid, flowing under our feet and over the sky;  
Under doors and down chimneys, flowing in at the ear  
and the mouth and the eye.  
God is leaving us, God is leaving us, more pang, more  
pain than birth or death.<sup>17)</sup>

Since *Murder in the Cathedral* is concerned with the story of martyrdom, it treats of the meaning of suffering, but it does not seem to be the first concern of the writer. In *The Family Reunion*, however, suffering is definitely the main problem. Eliot shows through Harry that the right attitude of the individual toward a Society full of misery is not loathing but acceptance with charity for the expiation of one's own sins and those of others. Such an attitude will save a man from that sense of depersonalization caused by the sense of guilt; while the vision of human solidarity in Christ which makes expiation meaningful will save him from solitude. And this gives happiness in this world.

happiness

Did not consist in getting what one wanted  
Or in getting rid of what can't be got rid of  
But in a different vision. (p. 105)

Whatever Utopia the optimists may plan, we will never get rid of suffering in this world.

The moment of sudden loathing  
And the season of stifled sorrow  
The whisper, the transparent deception  
The keeping up of appearances  
The making the best of a bad job  
All twined and tangled together, all are recorded.  
There is no avoiding these things  
And we know nothing of exorcism..... (p. 97)

Suffering is part of the plan of a God of love, though we cannot see His whole scheme now, since:

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17) Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1937), p. 43.

the circle of our understanding  
Is a very restricted area. (p. 113)

Suffering may seem cruel, but it is allowed through the love of God  
for the good of humanity.

Love compels cruelty  
To those who do not understand love. (p. 110)

And God wants us to place our trust in His love, just as Harry wanted  
his mother to trust.

I cannot explain that to you now. Only be sure  
That I know what I am doing, and what I must do,  
And that it is the best thing for everybody.

.....  
You must just believe me,  
Until I come again. (p. 112)

Though suffering at times may seem unbearable:

Strength demanded  
That seems too much, is just strength enough given. (p. 115)

And in the Hands of God:

Everything tends toward reconciliation  
As the stone falls, as the tree falls. And in the end  
That is the completion which at the beginning  
Would have seemed the ruin. (p. 104)

This Christian acceptance of suffering may seem negative to non-Christians, especially to the Communists who regard religion as an opiate forced upon men by a scheming church. They say that religion teaches people to accept the evils in the present Society just in order to preserve status quo. But history proves that the Church has been motivated by a higher aim. Christianity teaches a man to better his situation as much as it is in his power without doing violence to the rights of the others. Yet, as for sufferings that are not in his power to avoid or correct, it teaches him to accept and use them for the good of the whole human race.

In a world of fugitives  
The person taking the opposite direction  
Will appear to run away. (p. 114)

Whenever Eliot as a poet is unfavorably criticized, it is generally from the point of view that he is either too positive in his convictions

or unnecessarily obscure in the meaning of his poetry.

The first criticism against his too positive convictions refers especially to his later works—the poetic dramas included—which were written after his conversion. For example, Maxwell says, “The later poems, more positive in belief.....considerably irritate certain political mentalities.”<sup>18)</sup> Certainly his later works are based on a definite view of life, but the fact that a person does not share Eliot's belief should not prevent him from appreciating the aesthetic beauty of his poetry or from considering whether his poetry is true to reality or not. In appreciating a poetical work, aesthetic pleasure and pleasure in philosophy should be separated. (By the term “mixed response” in the quotation the writer means a response in which these two pleasures are mingled.)

The beauty of a poem is a value. A poem is worth contemplating in and for itself. And we are reading poetry most healthily and most holily when our *proximate* end is to read it simply for its own value, when our response to it is simply a response of complete joy in this complete and perfect thing. By that I do not mean to imply that the mixed response is an error, for we respond as we respond. What I wish to suggest is that to set up the mixed response as an ideal may, in the individual instance, be to set up a strong invitation to error.<sup>19)</sup>

Acknowledging the possibility of a mixed response, then, all of Eliot's plays, even those written for festivals—especially *Murder in the Cathedral*—can be appreciated by those who do not share his belief.

As to the obscurity of meaning in Eliot's poetry, it is largely due to the rich associations and connotations of the language which he uses, to the complex symbolism and profound thought. As a poet, he is entitled to expect hard work and deep thought on the part of the reader if he is to get the meaning, since poetry, as he considers

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18) D.E.S. Maxwell, *The Poetry of T.S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), p. 95.

19) William Joseph Rooney, *The Problem of "Poetry and Belief" in Contemporary Criticism* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, Inc., 1949), p. 124.

it, is an object of contemplation. But the situation is a bit different for a dramatist. Of course, he should never lower his idea in order to make his work appeal to the general public, as Eliot himself remarked:

.....the moment an idea has been transferred from its pure state in order that it may become comprehensible to the inferior intelligence it has lost contact with art.<sup>20)</sup>

On the other hand, however, it is the responsibility of the dramatist to make his idea understandable when it is spoken on the stage. He should never forget that the appreciation of a drama depends more on hearing rather on reading. Because of this fact, Eliot as a poetic dramatist cannot depend on lines too much overloaded with symbolism, nor on a symbolism of ideas which are outside the common background of thought.

Eliot seems, nevertheless, to have been unable to adapt his poetic genius to his early experiments in poetic drama, and *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* contain lines so overloaded with symbolism that the audience will find difficulty in following. In this sense Grover Smith's criticism of *The Family Reunion* is justified.

The actors have to speak lines often so overburdened with cryptically associative images that no audience can be expected to follow the meaning. The poetry is not abstract: that is its whole trouble. It is too symbolically concrete, too imagistic..... Eliot's old methods of symbolism are not public enough for drama.

The defects of *The Family Reunion* should have warned Eliot away from further writing for the stage. What is permanently most valuable in his poetic technique is precisely what shuts the public out—the symbolism of his imagery.<sup>21)</sup>

Another trouble with *The Family Reunion* is not so much with the "symbolism of his imagery" itself as the reality symbolized there is something not commonly perceived. C.L. Barber's remark on the

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20) Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, 7th ed. (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1950), p. 68.

21) Grover Smith, *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), p. 213.

symbolism in the same play has a point.

His failure is extremely interesting as an example of what can happen when, in the absence of support from society, an artist tries to do everything himself.<sup>22)</sup>

There is no trouble with the symbolism in *Murder in the Cathedral* from the point of view that it is based on the general knowledge of St. Thomas. Since *The Family Reunion*, on the other hand, is based on Eliot's understanding of the doctrine of the Body of Christ, the play loses its meaning with the people who have lost belief in the solidarity of humanity.

As a result many critics misread the meaning of the play. Even Grover Smith, a critic with some Christian understanding, says:

The play, as it issued from Eliot's hands, curiously asks the audience to sentimentalize Harry's own crime, for which he is not repentant, and to approve of Harry's expiating the curse in order to atone for his father's crime, for which he is not to blame.<sup>23)</sup>

None of this episode (Harry's relation with the Eumenides) finds dramatic justification, even though it involves Harry's learning the truth about his father and, more important, his learning for the first time what the Eumenides are—the bearers of a curse, something outside him, which he must endure and turn to spiritual use. Such a discovery, which might if differently contrived make Harry sympathize with the family.....simply strengthens his antipathy.<sup>24)</sup>

Another critic, Matthiesen, who for the most part is appreciative of Eliot's works shows the same misunderstanding when he gives a comparison between *The Family Reunion* and *Murder in the Cathedral*:

As Becket went on to denounce indifference, oppression, and exploitation, as he gave life "to the Law of God above the Law of Man," Eliot was writing also against the then rising menace of Fascism, when violent men comparable to Reginald FitzUrse took power into their hands. Eliot bore out again thereby what he asserted about Pound's translation, that in possessing the past a poet could suggest the

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22) Leonard Unger (ed.), *T.S. Eliot: A Selected Critique* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1948), 417.

23) Smith, *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays*, p. 202.

24) *Ibid.*, p. 208.

present. When he wrote *The Waste Land*, he had also proved the converse, but he could not do so in *The Family Reunion*. Perhaps his increasing sense of the degradation and decay of the modern world had gradually numbed him against any strong feeling for such immediate issues as Becket had faced.<sup>25)</sup>

Yet it seems to me that what Eliot is actually trying to do in *The Family Reunion* is to encourage people who are suffering from the "increasing sense of the degradation and decay of the modern world" by showing the strength and consolation they can gain from the idea of the Body of Christ.

It is interesting to note that recent critics of the play are more favorable to it. Katharine Worth says of the play as follows:

The embrace in which they met, sexless, yet touched with sexual tenderness, delicately suggested a real human communion at some deep level of being. Far from being undramatic, 'beyond character', as Eliot puts it, these 'duets', in which poetic rhythm and imagery are put to intensely theatrical use, take us deep into character, communicating below the level of conscious thought, offering, indeed, a means to the only kind of communication in which the modern theatre really believes.<sup>26)</sup>

Perhaps it takes the people today who are more keenly aware of the breakdown of real communication, communion and community to sense what the play is pointing to. Another critic acknowledges the spiritual depth of the play which is not fathomed yet:

.....I am far from pronouncing it an irretrievable failure theatrically. It may prove to be an important extension of drama that we have not yet fully understood. One has the example of the long neglect of Claudel; and I can think of no English play which comes nearer to his kind of drama. 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.<sup>27)</sup>

Were not the spiritual state and experience Eliot's vision of, and desire for, an organic communal life in Christ?

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25) F.O. Matthiesen, *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot* (2nd ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 172.

26) Worth, "Eliot and the Living Theatre," p. 161.

27) Jones, *The Plays of T.S. Eliot*, 122.