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THE HIDDEN DYNAMISMS IN ELIOT'S EARLY DRAMA

Eliot's early plays have received a great deal of critical attention. Nevertheless, the author has rarely been granted many claims to dramatic success. Perhaps this is because the commentators often tend to look for drama in the palpable layer of dramatic action, plot and events, rather than elsewhere. And even if they do realize that Eliot's drama goes on in two dimensions, they usually narrow the realm of the invisible in his plays to the inner worlds of the protagonists. Except for a few brilliant points made by Helen Gardner<sup>1</sup> and an interesting essay by David Ward<sup>2</sup>, the commentators seem to have overlooked certain aspects of the function of the community, the whole realm of the invisible, dynamic interrelations between the protagonists and the rest of the characters. This is so in the case of "Murder in the Cathedral"<sup>3</sup>. It is even more so in the case of "The Family Reunion" - one of Eliot's most interesting works invariably and unjustly dismissed by some just as an unsuccessful comedy of manners<sup>4</sup>. Only a profound, extensive study could hope to fill

<sup>1</sup> H. Gardner is the author of a very brilliant analysis of the choric parts of "Murder in the Cathedral" (H. Gardner, *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, London 1949, chapt. 2).

<sup>2</sup> D. Ward gives an interesting account of the role of the dramatized community in his comparison between the structure of "Murder in the Cathedral" and that of the earliest Greek drama (D. Ward, *T. S. Eliot. Between Two Worlds*, London 1974, chapt. 8).

<sup>3</sup> See the analyses of the play provided by H. Kenner, *The Invisible Poet, T. S. Eliot*, London 1965, and by F. O. Matthiessen, *The Achievement of T. S. Eliot*, Oxford 1958.

<sup>4</sup> Especially critical of the play are F. O. Matthiessen (*Matthiessen*, op. cit.), and R. Williams (*R. Williams, Modern Tragedy*, London 1966).

that gap. The present essay, which is of much less scope, aims but to introduce the world of invisible actions, bonds and interrelations presented in "Murder in the Cathedral" and "The Family Reunion". Emphasizing certain generally overlooked dramatic phenomena it points to the basic similarity of the two plays.

## 1

In both "Murder in the Cathedral" and "The Family Reunion" the thin, barely dramatic<sup>5</sup> threads of the individual dramas of the protagonists appear to be merely juxtaposed with the backgrounds provided by their communities. On one side we have Becket or Harry Lord Monchensey and their inner realities, on the other, those who only wait and watch: the two isolated worlds governed by different laws, values and desires, are apparently only drawn to contrast with each other. Yet, with the progress of the protagonist's inner metamorphosis it becomes clear in each play, that the two worlds: the hero's and that of his community are inseparably bound together. The inner purification of Harry and Becket and their personal attainment of life are inseparably bound with the purification of the women of Canterbury and of the guests at Wishwood, respectively. The great spiritual thirst of the lonely heroes being quenched, means fulfillment not only of their personal callings, but also of their social, spiritual missions. The moment they make their inner decisions they become the spiritual envoys of the characters who accompany them. Submitting themselves to God they overcome their isolation. United with the only source of eternal values, God, they become capable of contact with people given to entirely different visions and values. This contact which is, Eliot seems to suggest, the only possible real contact, means human common participation in good and evil, in damnation and redemption, and in God's grace. But for this, the most important and the most palpable phenomenon dramatized in the plays - the communal change of the characters - could not have taken place.

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<sup>5</sup> The Plays have been criticized first of all for lack of vital, dramatic action. See: K e n n e r, op. cit., and W i l l i a m s, op. cit., also i d e m, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, London 1968.

Communal change, communal participation in sin and redemption, is much more obvious in "Murder in the Cathedral" than in "The Family Reunion". Consequently, it has been acknowledged in the former play<sup>6</sup>. Thus Helen Gardner gives attention to the fact that Becket's death is fully meaningful only in the context of his community<sup>7</sup>. She also appreciates the role of the Chorus. The poetic voice of the unindividualized representatives of common, unsanctified humanity, draws us into the action.

The dramatic change which the women undergo is the extension of Becket's drama. From the beginning, the women have forebodings of his death. They are aware of its supernatural quality and they fear it as they fear any proximity of God's reality. They go with Becket through his agony, feeling every vacillation of his faith. Uttering their feelings they lead the audience into the understanding of the mystery. At moments, after they have succeeded at breaking through to Thomas, they unconsciously help even him to understand. They "speak better than they know" (p. 182)<sup>8</sup>. Sensing the hellish forces which cling round the Archbishop they pray that he leaves them to their drab but safe routines; and their clearly ambiguous words carry the reverse meaning:

O Thomas Archbishop, save us, save us, save yourself that  
we may be saved;  
Destroy yourself and we are destroyed.  
(p. 196)

Only after Becket's death do they accept their participation in it. In the ecstasy of awe and horror at the bloody deed, they realize that it is an expression of the universal malice and corruption which defile the whole world. They behold evil in their households:

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<sup>6</sup> To my knowledge, no one has acknowledged a parallel phenomenon of common change in "The Family Reunion".

<sup>7</sup> See H. Gardner's study of the role of the Chorus in "Murder in the Cathedral" (Gardner, op. cit.)

<sup>8</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, [in:] *The Complete poems and Plays*. 1909-1950, New York 1962. All the references will be to the same edition.



...in the kitchen, in the passage,  
 In the mews, in the barn, in the byre, in the market place  
 In our veins our bowels our skulls as well  
 As well in the plottings of potentates  
 As well as in the consultations of powers.

(p. 208)

They confess the "uttermost death of spirit" (p. 208). At the very bottom of separation from God they unite in contrition:

Clear the air! clean the house! wash the wind! take  
 stone from stone and wash them. The land is foul, the  
 water is foul, our beasts and ourselves defiled with  
 blood.

(p. 213)

Thus brought closer to God's dimension they participate in, and benefit from the Archbishop's sacrifice, and are brought closer to the recognition of God's glory.

Only when we begin to analyse the dramatic impact of "Murder in the Cathedral" do we realize how intricately the events, the characters, and the meaning of the play are connected with each other. They simply cannot be discussed separately. Eliot puts his characters in a large and only partly visible supernatural reality and shifts the emphasis from human to divine matters. The perspective which he thus obtains is responsible for the dramatic effect, but the usually adopted dramatic principles cease to apply. Unless the realm of the invisible is taken into consideration hardly any causal links between the succeeding and the parallel events are visible, and the inner logic of the development of action according to God's design is missed. The growth of tension which is consistent with the pattern of the play can never be noticed unless the audience adopt the notions that are inherent in the play and that do not apply in secular life - the notions of what is one's fall and what is one's victory. The Christian, or indeed any religious conception of community, sufficiently accounts for the relationship between Becket and the Chorus. The notion of God's grace throws enough light on the elusive moment in which Becket submits his consciousness to the eternal design to give it the deserved prominence in the play.

It seems that the best standards by which "Murder in the Cathedral" may be judged are those set by anthropologists for the most primitive, while still religious, form of drama. And so, what Gilbert Murray says about Greek tragedy may be of interest in the context of Eliot's play. "Normally", he says, "the play portrayed some traditional story which was treated as the »Aition« or origin of some existing religious practice"<sup>9</sup>. And further: "the ritual on which the tragedy was based embodies the most fundamental Greek conceptions of life and fate, of law and sin and punishment"<sup>10</sup>.

The veneration payed to Becket's shrine is, if anything, a religious practice and, as has been argued, the fundamental Christian conceptions of life and fate stand behind the whole story of Becket's martyrdom. What a famous medievalist, Gaston Paris, said about the earliest christian drama also holds true in the case of Eliot's play: "its end is foreseen, its changes of fortune are directed by the hand of God, yet its every scene is rich and thrilling"<sup>11</sup>. Like early drama, ancient or medieval, "Murder in the Cathedral" does not thrill us with superfluous unexpected events. As in Aeschylus' "Prometheus", or in the enactment of Christ's Passion, the essential situation of the play is invariably present throughout it. Becket's martyrdom is there long before he dies:

Some prestage of an act  
Which our eyes are compelled to witness, has forced our  
feet  
Towards the Cathedral.  
[...]  
We wait, we wait,  
And the saints and the martyrs wait, for those who shall  
be martyrs and saints.  
Destiny waits in the hand of God shaping the still un-  
happen.

(p. 176)

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<sup>9</sup> G. Murray, Euripides and His Age, London 1919, p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 19.



After Becket's death his martyrdom is as real as it was before. The reader or audience has time to get to the very core of it. First simply waiting for it, then trying to understand, and finally, surrendering to its purifying power the audience stops being mere spectators. Eliot wrote "Murder in the Cathedral" for a particular, Christian audience, which was to see the play performed in Canterbury Hall, only a few steps from where Becket's real death took place. Therefore he could have well hoped to have it very deeply involved in the drama; he could have well imagined it as a common participant sharing in a mystery. Again Murray's description of Greek tragedy may be applied to "Murder in the Cathedral": "there is one great situation in which the poet steepers our minds with at most one or two sudden flashes of action passing over it"<sup>12</sup>.

Dramatically, as seems to become more and more clear, "Murder in the Cathedral" works very much like a Greek tragedy. Becket's inner conflict, like those of Greek protagonists, is only the line along which the drama of his community builds. And the vision of the community of Becket's congregation also reminds us of ancient drama. Eliot's vision of human community is religious because the inner links in his as in ancient Greek community are very strong. For Greeks one man's sin could bring God's anger and calamity on many, and one man's act sufficed to expiate a common offence. Eliot declares a similar though profoundly Christian responsibility of every one of us in a community of guilt: "the sin of the world is upon our heads" (p. 221), and, conversely, his whole community has a share in the sanctification of one of them:

For the blood of Thy martyrs and saints  
shall enrich the earth, shall create the holy places.  
[...]  
From such ground springs that which renews the earth  
[...]  
and sanctity shall not depart from it.

(p. 221)

The progress of "Murder in the Cathedral" lies in the development of the Chorus - Becket relationship which evolves from

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

that of an archbishop and his congregation to that of a martyr and his community, elevated by the grace of his martyrdom. The play opens with the Archbishop's return to his people who have lived in sombre yet comfortable quiet for seven years, and the very first accent is that of disturbance. Before he has arrived the women recognize in Becket the cause of the frightening experience which awaits them, and, in vain, they try to renounce their relationship: "But now a great fear is upon us" (p. 181). The worried priests expect to see great events sensing in Becket the weighty agent on the wheel of man's spiritual history:

For good or ill, let the wheel turn.  
The wheel has been still these seven years, and no good.  
(p. 179)

The audience begin to realize that Becket has come to his community as its God-chosen member to shatter the cosiness of their every day routines by forcing on them a glimpse of God's light. His vocation is fulfilled in the moment of his death, when time and eternity meet at a "still point", and the women, (the audience partaking of their experience), are put in a frightening yet purifying proximity to the divine reality. In the face of the terrifying mystery they get a glimpse of their lives in a perspective of which they have always been ignorant; they are given the understanding of the misery of their sinful existence:

Forgive us, O Lord, we acknowledge ourselves as the type  
of the common man,  
Of the men and women who shut the door and sit by the  
fire;  
Who fear the blessing of God, the loneliness of the  
night of God, the surrender required, the deprivation  
inflicted;  
Who fear the injustice of men less than the justice of  
God;  
Who fear the hand at the window, the fire at the thatch,  
the first in the tavern, the push into the canal,  
Less than we fear the love of God.  
We acknowledge our trespass, our weakness, our fault;  
(p. 221)

and of God's glory above them:



We praise Thee, O God, for Thy glory displayed in all the  
creatures of the earth,  
In the snow, in the rain, in the wind, in the storm, in  
all Thy creatures...

(p. 220)

For a moment they undergo a metamorphosis: from grey, only partly living folk, they are elevated to the dignity of witnesses of divine mysteries, and have a notion of what, being far from spiritually orientated people, they could have never experienced by themselves. Their change, resulting from their relationship with Becket, involves a great overflow of poetry, an enormous influx of words, experience and knowledge, and is the only palpable change, the only really dramatic change in the drama.

The only weakness of their positive change is that it is far from being permanent. The blessed moment of understanding which Becket so dearly earned for his people is but a moment. They will never stop fearing God and his blessing, because they are not the God's chosen kind of people. Even reminded how miserable and sinful their lives are, they will not be able to change. Human kind is bound close to the earth, ("cannot bear very much reality" (p. 209)), and the ideal vocation for sanctity, in all but a few rare cases, has nothing to do with them. At most, their "saints" secure for them a glimpse of the divine reality. According to the play's vision, only as a whole, sinners and saints together, can humanity face God, seek elevation, rebirth or redemption. This idea, infinitely sad and yet tinged with optimism is profoundly religious. Both Christian Mass as an enactment of Christ's Passion offered to God for the sinful humanity and ancient rites of sacrifice and rebirth are based on it. In "Murder in the Cathedral" as in a religious ritual Becket is a sacrificed or a self-sacrificing hero, a scapegoat surrendered to God for the sake of the others. His death, as a ritual sacrifice results in the change - redemption and purification of the whole community, and only the circle of participants in the dramatized sacrifice is extended to the whole creation.

As seen by the Chorus, every creature is part of the sacrifice - rebirth pattern. The Whole play is permeated with the



sacrifice - rebirth imagery. For example, the sombre imagery of barren November and the apprehensive prognostics for the next spring suggest the sacrificial death of vegetation necessary to insure good harvests for the following year:

And the world must be cleaned in the winter, or we shall  
have only  
A sour spring, a parched summer, an empty harvest.

(p. 201)

When Becket's death is at hand beasts and creatures of the earth and streets and corners of Canterbury seem to breathe it. The whole town seems desperately to cry out for purification in the chant of the Chorus. The later rapture of the women, when they have recognized God's grace in Becket's martyrdom, is again projected on the whole creation. Thus God's glory is displayed in:

...the bird in the air, both the hawk and the finch;  
the beast on the earth, both the wolf and the lamb; the  
worm in the soil and the worm in the belly,  
[...]  
in the voices of seasons, the snuffle of winter, the  
song of spring, the drone of summer, the voices of beasts  
and of birds...

(p. 220)

It remains to note that the choric parts are not only Eliot's poetic but also his dramatic achievement. The above told transition comes so naturally, cadences of poetry follow so smoothly, as if it were the poetry itself that governed the development of action, as if it dictated the agony and the rapture, never trimmed by preconceived ideas and assumptions. Eliot's poetry in "Murder in the Cathedral" so enchants, so much involves, that we are ready to grant everything before we are able to name the dramatized processes and to recognize the underlying philosophy.

### 3

So far, to my knowledge, only superficial links have been drawn between "Murder in the Cathedral" and "The Family Reunion". An analogous conception of drama, however, is to be found at the basis of the two plays written for two different stages. Eliot's

vision of human community as well as his underlying ideas dramatized in "The Family Reunion" bear close similarity to those which were first dramatized in his play about Thomas Becket. That it is not immediately obvious seems to be due to the fact that, writing for the West-End theatre audience, the playwright used the convention of comedy of manners, which is very different from the conventions on which he drew in his first play.

The layers of action on which the central drama of the protagonist of "The Family Reunion" unfolds, are rather loosely bound: They have more autonomy than those dramatized in "Murder in the Cathedral". Actions and words are said and performed, now to comply with Amy's human plans, now to reveal the hidden relationships, now to fulfill God's design, before they merge into one common drama, unfortunately never as integrated as that of Becket and his community. Thus they belong not only to different levels of human consciousness but also to different dramatic conventions.

As in "Murder in the Cathedral", the characters are rather representatives of humanity than individuals. Simultaneously, though differently - sometimes in spite of themselves - they participate in the realization of God's designs. We feel that they are to be one in terms of the inseparability of their fates, their common share in the family sin and redemption - but again it is never as convincing as in the case of the women of Canterbury.

Eliot's generally acknowledged indebtedness to Aeschylus' "Oresteia" is usually believed to account for the shape of "The Family Reunion"<sup>13</sup>. But although "Oresteia" may be responsible for the basic outline of events, it only remotely throws light on the protagonist's suffering and inner change in "The Family Reunion". Harry's agony and then his departure can only partly be explained in terms of the drama that is inseparable from ritual.

On the other hand, the undercurrent of similarity between the structure of the most ancient Greek drama and "The Family

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<sup>13</sup> See Mathiessen, op. cit., also B. Bergonzi. T. S. Eliot, London 1972, and Gardner, op. cit.



Reunion" is generally neglected<sup>14</sup>. And this is the link which seems to be so close that it dictates the general direction of the play rather than particular events. Helen Gardner, otherwise brilliantly claiming Eliot's originality in constructing the play out of three simultaneously enacted dramas - Amy's projected drama of a future not built upon the past, the Chorus's attempted drama of detection and the true drama of sin and expiation<sup>15</sup> - overlooks the fact that the latter, being in the spirit Christian, is also analogous to the Greek pattern. Prototypical elements of Greek tragedy as described by Murray, are easily recognizable in "Murder in the Cathedral" and can be found just as well in Harry's drama. Only their internal nature must be recognized. It is only necessary to recognize that what Harry undergoes is an internal self-sacrifice, without which the family cannot be redeemed.

Internally, Harry goes through all the stages which the Greek scapegoat hero undergoes in the act of sacrifice. In his person the eternal conflict between the earthly and the spiritual becomes present and real in the middle of ordinary life. It is painfully resolved in the middle of a futile "comedy of manners". The eternal strife in the course of which we find the protagonist, illuminated by his seasonal parallels, is formed by the contest between the old Harry, who has found the previous life wanting in every respect, and the Harry who is to be born anew. This results in the death of the old Harry and in the birth of the new one. And it bears close similarity to the first stage in the pattern of the earliest Greek tragedy - to an Agon, the ritual contest between two opposing powers: life and death, light and darkness and so on: "in which Deamon fights against his enemy who - since it is really this year fighting last year - is apt to be almost identical with himself"<sup>16</sup>. What happens next in "The Family Reunion" - Harry's renunciation of all that

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<sup>14</sup> Whenever "Oresteia" is mentioned in the context of "The Family Reunion", the stress is put on the shape of the dramatized events. See notes 13.

<sup>15</sup> Gardner, op. cit., chapt. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Murray, op. cit., p. 54.

which bound him with the past, which could nourish in him the old Harry, the title and masterhood at Wishwood, his mother and Wishwood itself - can again, if not so obviously as Becket's death, be related to the second stage in Murray's pattern of tragedy, the sacrificial death taking place in Pathos<sup>17</sup>. And further, Lamentation which in the Greek drama follows the protagonist's death, can be found in Amy's despair over the loss of the son and in the choric parts of bewildered aunts and uncles. Their short-sighted, sticking-to-facts accounts interweave with their illuminating, poetic utterances, and also, with the occasionally choric voices of Agatha and Mary. These come also in accordance with the pattern of Greek Lamentation. According to Murray, Lamentation is often "mixed with a song of Rejoicing, since the death of the Old King is also the accession of the new"<sup>18</sup>. At some final point we hear from Denman, Harry's spiritual guardian, that what happens to Harry is but a preparation for something else, which, in a sense, is already present. Then we realize that at the point of the protagonist's departure we are face to face with his spiritual rebirth, analogous to that which very early tragedy reserved for the Satyr play that followed the trilogy, and that later was dramatized by some dramatists in Epiphany or Resurrection<sup>19</sup>.

It is not by accident that Eliot's commentators point to the Christian dimension of the play. Murray's doctrine, so readily used here because once studied by Eliot himself, and then frequently referred to by the poet, is an attempt to confirm the parallels between the phenomena presented in ancient tragedy and the Christian mystery enacted in the Mass. It is an attempt to suggest the existence of pre-Christian parallels for Christian ritual in pagan sacrificial rites, in the Daimon dance and seasonal myths<sup>20</sup>. In both, it seems, the personal drama - the protagonist's death, suffering and spiritual victory - have a ritual form and a communal purpose, and thus are insepa-

<sup>17</sup> All the stages are named after Murray. Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 5-9.



nable. So, there is more meaning in Harry's renunciation of the self, of his earthly ties, than can be found in the parallel Daimon's victory. As the sacrifice of "Daimon" pays the necessary retribution for the "Hubris" or "Adikia" (pride or injustice), to restore the balance and secure good harvests<sup>21</sup>, so Harry's acceptance of his calling brings an end to the curse lying on the family. A more obvious parallel, however, can be established between Harry's and Christ's sacrifice, although unfortunately, it does not illuminate the entire play.

Without the Greek parallel in mind it is impossible to understand the Furies, for these divine agents, which are instrumental to the development of action, have no Christian parallel. Their invisible chase of Harry, and then, their appearance is incomprehensible unless we bear in mind Heraclitus': "the sun shall not transgress his measures - if he does, he shall be pursued by Furies till justice be refulfilled"<sup>22</sup>. This law, though quite natural for the Greeks is alien to contemporary audience who cannot be expected to see the ghosts otherwise than as projections of human mind. No wonder then, that the dramatic enforcement of the dead, no longer cherished notions, received severe criticism.

In "Murder in the Cathedral" the Christian and pagan rituals overlap and mutually extend. Thus they render really universal meanings. The conflation of the pagan and the Christian in "The Family Reunion" amounts to very much the same effect. Yet, in the final outcome we feel that in spite of the structure modeled on the pagan drama the play is Christian in spirit. Unlike in "Murder in the Cathedral" Christianity unnoticeably permeates the play in the pattern of light and darkness, without the help of a simple, overtly Christian word. In this invisible light (perhaps the light coming from "the rose garden"), Harry's despair disappears. Led by Agatha into the history of his spiritual heritage, into the heart of his mystery he realizes that he is one of those called to "leave and Follow". Telling her story Agatha helps Harry in this recognition as an agent of Christian love.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted after Murray. Ibid., p. 30.

If we want to see her in the light of the Greek tradition, she is a prophet-like figure, the watcher and the waiter, carrying the burden of secret knowledge for the sake of her community. She is a Tiresias who, alone conscious of sins to be expiated, is destined to "foresuffer all" - others being the chosen sacrificial vessels. But first of all she is the only character really capable of love. Loving Harry, and helping him to discover that he is loved Agatha sustains him. In the place of cold, indifferent divine eyes she invokes the loving "single eye above the desert" (p. 277)<sup>23</sup>. And thus transforms Harry's vision of the divine power. Owing to Agatha Harry's decision, his act of will born

...in love and terror  
Of what waits and wants me and will not let me fall,  
(p. 281)

is entirely different from any, apparently identical, sacrificial decision which he could have made submitting his will to the divine pattern with an attitude different from love. Choosing what has been designed for him as if to "fill up that which is behing the afflictions of Christ" to use St. Paul's words, he is Becket's - the Christian martyr's - spiritual brother.

The final sense of Harry's drama is that of atonement, of the mysterious exchange of sin and suffering in the spiritual world through which mankind partakes in the mystery of the Cross. It underlies the drama of the sinful dead and those involved with their unhappy lives, those destined to live in the shadow of sin once committed. It lies at the heart of reconciliation of the dead man and his wife, his lover and his son, that son's dead wife and the woman who could have become yet another unloved wife of his. It is also in the spirit of atonement that the family reunion attempted in this world is achieved in the course of the play,

...in the nether world  
Where the meshes we have woven  
Bind us to each other.  
(p. 292)

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<sup>23</sup> T. S. Eliot, The Family Reunion, [in:] The Complete



But that nether world - the eternal dimension of human existence which is not subjected to time and sustains human relationships throughout generations, across death - has two faces in Eliot's drama of human community. Dramatizing Harry's life as inseparable from his father's life and the lives of those once directly involved with him, and placing that drama in the timeless, religious dimension, Eliot reveals one of them. The other face of the invisible drama, less conspicuous though more palpable, reveals itself as the drama of the upper-class community actually present on the stage. Though it bears much in common with the drama of the women of Canterbury it seems never to have been noticed by critics.

As in "Murder in the Cathedral" the protagonist's conflict, his inner struggle and change, are dramatized without the concrete shape, without palpable details. Like Becket's inner change of will they have no grip on our imagination. We can hardly believe them, then hardly remember. If Harry's drama is, nevertheless, invariably present, it is the Chorus who make us feel so. As the women of Canterbury change and imaginatively follow Becket in his change, so Harry's stirred aunts and uncles grope for the understanding of Harry's predicament and look for the right language to name it. At moments, stricken by greater awareness and apprehension, these ever sober people: Ivy, Violet, Gerald and Charles, as if pushed by Harry, undergo a metamorphosis. They utter their most irrational notions of the world which they have never known, and break out from the convention of the drawing-room superficial politeness. Thus, as if, subconsciously participating in the real drama, they cease to be the characters of the comedy of manners. Their mysterious spiritual progress, their way towards that world which, had it not been for Harry, they would have never noticed, completes his drama, is itself a fundamental though not permanent, dramatic change.

The process of "seeing through" which obviously does not go very far, begins with mere recognition that their carefully arranged, comfortable world,

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Poems and Plays... All the references will be to the same edition.

...insured against fire,  
 Against larceny and illness,  
 Against defective plumbing,  
 But not against the act of God,  
 (p. 291)

is only the kept up pretence, the appearance, the reassuring facade of the frightening, uncomfortable, incomprehensible reality which imposes "the universal bondage". It begins with their realisation that

any explanation will satisfy,  
 (p. 243)

that they only ask to

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

The process begins with an unexpected lack of confidence and panic:

Why do we all behave as if the door might suddenly be open, the curtains be drawn,  
 The cellar make some dreadful disclosure, the roof disappear,  
 And we should cease to be sure of what is real or unreal?  
 (p. 243)

Thus prepared, the speakers tentatively penetrate into the sense of events which in the meantime they so grossly misapprehend. Providing the most familiar images they illuminate the elusive, invisible drama of all that has happened and all that is to come. They make it clear that

the past is about to happen and the future was long since settled,  
 (p. 256)

in the most palpable sense. They understand that what is going on has to do with

"The first cry in the bedroom, the noise in the nursery,  
 (p. 257)



with the "deseccrated history". Half conscious of what they say, Ivy, Violet, Gerald and Charles are then mysteriously united with Harry. They illustrate his new knowledge, which he fails to express himself. As the women of Canterbury project Becket's, drama, so the family chorus projects Harry's. And they also enlarge the circle of participants: have the household and the garden, and the secret, irrevocable, ever present deeds involved in the agony and sacrifice which was prepared for a long time:

In an old house there is always listening, and more is  
heard than is spoken.  
And what is spoken remains in the room, waiting for the  
future to hear it.  
And whatever happens began in the past, and presses  
hard on the future.  
The agony in the curtained bedroom, whether of birth or  
of dying,  
Gathers in to itself all the voices of the past, and  
projects them on the future.  
[...]  
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.

(p. 272)

The entire drama is, as if, echoed in these words. All the invisible phenomena are real and concrete here. The existence of the invisible world in which the core of the drama goes on is implied in every sentence. The final, quite conscious recognition of this world comes after Harry's departure, and only then the speakers realize that they do not know their places and their roles in it:

And what is being done to us?  
And what are we, and what are we doing?

(p. 291)

Their new self-knowledge is just as painful if much poorer than the momentary, positive knowledge of the women of Canterbury. The final cry of their positive despair:

We have lost our way in the dark!

(p. 291)

is a distant echo of the experience the protagonist had at the

beginning, and so, it is a great step forward on the part of the ever blind and ignorant speakers.

It is a pity that Eliot has his characters immediately lapse into the comedy of manners. Their metamorphosis is not half as powerful as the change of the women of Canterbury, first of all, because of the drawing-room comedy context.

## 4

Much has been said about Eliot's mystical conceptions<sup>24</sup>, but never in the context of his drama of human community. In the light of what has been said here, it is tempting to see the hidden dynamisms of Eliot's vision of human community as yet one more aspect of the mystic character of his plays.

Naczelna Organizacja Techniczna  
w Łodzi

Aleksandra Chwedorowicz

UKRYTY DYNAMIZM WCZESNYCH SZTUK ELIOTA

Esej jest próbą wydobywania zasadniczych, choć ukrytych i często nie dostrzeganych podobieństw pomiędzy dwoma wczesnymi sztukami Eliota: "Morderstwem w katedrze" i "Zjazdem rodzinnym". Wydaje się, że obie sztuki nawiązują w swej istocie do najwcześniejszych, jeszcze religijnych, rytualnych dramatów, które obejmowały całą społeczność. Dramatycznie łącząc duchową przemianę głównych bohaterów z taką przemianą towarzyszącą im społeczności, tak "Morderstwo w katedrze" jak i "Zjazd rodzinny" ukazują to samo zjawisko: mistyczne obcowanie ludzkości w świecie dobra i zła, grzechu i łaski.

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<sup>24</sup> See F. M. I s h a k, The Mystical Philosophy of T. S. Eliot, New Heaven 1970.