

"Revival of Poetic Drama: T. S. Eliot's Contribution to the Genre"

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I am a Yemeni national. I joined Jamia Millia Islamia in the academic year 2001 – 2002 as a PhD scholar. I worked in the Department of English and Modern European Languages on the English poetic drama, especially Eliot's contribution to its revival in the modern age. I have carried out this study under the supervision of Prof. Anisur Rahman who is always been a source of support and encouragement.

T. S. Eliot is a major twentieth century poet-playwright, and critic. He has significantly influenced the English literature in the twentieth century. Eliot appeared as the chief supporter of poetic plays for which he made sufficient ground in his criticism. With the publication of the first two plays – *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion* – the case for poetic drama was strengthened, and it attracted the attention of other modern writers.

Many critics have said that poetry and drama are two separate modes of literary expression whereas Eliot considers that poetry and drama are unified. Poetry and drama comprise parts of a unity and they are fundamentally unified modes of literary expression. This study is an attempt to trace the growth and development of poetic drama and to explore the principal contribution of T. S. Eliot in its revival in the twentieth century.

All the way through his critical essays on poetic drama, Eliot has realized that poetic drama is both possible and appropriate for the modern theatre. This has been demonstrated during the course of the study. The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is about the definition of poetic drama, its emergence and development. It also discusses some verse-dramatists before T. S. Eliot in the twentieth century. It defines and explains the meaning of poetic drama among other literary genres. It also sheds light on the development of poetic drama since its very beginning to the nineteenth century.

The second chapter concentrates on Eliot's theory on poetic drama presenting his argument and preference of poetic drama over prose drama. An analytical and comparative method is also adopted to examine succinctly the contribution of some contemporaries of Eliot who experimented in the field of poetic drama. The third chapter deals with a concise study of his two early dramatic works, *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932) and *The Rock* (1934), as experimental plays. The chapter also deals with Eliot's use of poetry in his plays. An independent assessment is given to his plays starting from *Murder in the Cathedral* to *The Elder Statesman* as complete verse plays.

The fourth chapter deals with Eliot's first verse play, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). The play is about the martyrdom of Archbishop Thomas Becket of Canterbury who was murdered by four knights sent by King Henry II. The play does not only present the story of murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket but it also shows, in a contemporary setting, the victory of Thomas Becket over the evil temptations to meet his end as a martyr. The play also demonstrates Eliot's ability in retrieving the use of the chorus, as an old Greek means, in modern-day language.

The fifth chapter traces analytically the two plays, *The Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party* as contemporary plays with regard to theme, setting, and characters. *The Family Reunion* (1939) is about the sin of parents and expiation by their successors. *The Cocktail Party* (1949) also takes up a modern problem and deals with the question of mutual understanding of husband-wife.

The last chapter studies the last two plays, *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958). *The Confidential Clerk* deals with the story of a financier Sir Claude who tries to fabricate an arrangement to seduce his childless wife, Lady Elizabeth to adopt Colby, an illegitimate son of him. And *The Elder Statesman* tells the story of the newly retired Lord Claverton who encounters two characters of his past. He prevails upon them through his confession to his daughter about his past. All of Eliot's plays are important landmarks in the development of poetic drama in the twentieth century. I have to re-locate Eliot in this context.