CHAPTER THREE

English poetic drama in the present century is a reaction against the realistic drama which was mainly concerned with social and economic problems. Realistic drama with its intellectual content appealed to the mind rather than to the heart. A. Hinchliffe asserts that even Ibsen, Shaw, Strindbeg, Chekhov and Schnitzel must ultimately be judged as great poets; poets of a new kind. They discovered the magic that lies beneath the surface of ordinary life.¹

During the Romantic Period and the Victorian Era, poets wrote plays in verse; but their works were not often intended for performance. Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, and Swinburne all wrote poetic plays, but they were meant to be read rather than staged, and though Hardy wrote The Dynasts in 1903, this drama was also in the tradition of the nineteenth century.

From the beginning of the twentieth century a number of British poet-dramatists attempted to revive poetic drama like Yeats, representing the Irish Dramatic Movement. Phillips,
Masefield, Abercrombie, and Bottomley. Apart from Yeats, others failed as dramatists because of their pale imitation of Elizabethan blank verse, and a lack of dramatic sense. A. Nicoll points out that the rich and flexible Elizabethan blank verse ceased to be creative in the hands of its twentieth century imitators. These playwrights did not recognise that the Elizabethan audience was able to absorb a great quantity of new thoughts and new images, while the modern audience has become used to a more diluted style.

A little later came T.S. Eliot who made a significant contribution to poetic drama. Auden and Isherwood also made a laudable contribution to its revival in the thirties with a leftist point of view.

The present chapter focusses on the individual achievements of these early twentieth century poet-dramatists; but special attention shall be given only to W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot.

**W.B. Yeat's Contribution to the Revival of Poetic Drama:**

The most important contribution to the poetic drama of the twentieth century had been by Yeats. The world that he creates in his plays is self contained and harmonious and suits the taste of poetry loving people.

From his practical experience as a dramatist, Yeats discovered that it was only as a poet that he was able to
express the full metaphysical and spiritual implications of his tragic vision of life. Yeats, who had already made his work as a poet, was the moving spirit of the Irish National Theatre. R. Peacock in his book, *The Poet in the Theatre*, defines the genuine characteristics of Yeat's poetic drama saying that in Yeats' spiritual, dramatic, and poetic values blend together, something which the creative writers for a long time had not been able to achieve.\(^2\) The antirealism of his poetic plays attempts to reveal the inner dimension and spiritual experience of man. The progression in his plays is from inward to outward, unseen to seen. Moreover, his drama aims at creating an Irish national spirit embodied in history, legends, and folklore. Yeats, in his book, *Plays and Controversies*, points out:

> We have no longer in any country a literature as great as the literature of the old world, and that is because the newspapers, all kinds of second rate books, the preoccupation of men with all kinds of practical changes, have driven the living imagination out of the world.\(^3\)

In the works of Yeats, the dramatist cannot be separated from the poet, and both draw strength from the society in which he lived and the theatre in which he first practised. In fact, through his involvement with the Abbey Theatre, Yeats developed not only dramatic skills and innovative theatrical ideas, but a much deeper awareness of himself as a man and
artist. J.W. Flannery in his book, *W.B. Yeats and the Idea of Theatre*, examines Yeats's relationship to Ireland in great depth. He asserts that four aspects of Irish life moved Yeats most: the physical beauty of the land; the Irish peasantry, traditional Irish music and poetry as well as its legends and folklore. And T.R. Henn confirms that:

> His plays (Yeats's) were to be popular, not in the middle-class sense; but as representing 'das Volk' and Gaelic culture, together with an epic national past.

Moreover, Yeats wrote his verse drama to be played, and not merely to be read. He cared for the theatre as an organ for the expression of the consciousness of his people. His nationalistic feelings were stirred by the stories associated with the popular patriotic heroes of Ireland, particularly those who had sacrificed their lives for the cause of Ireland's freedom. He followed Shakespeare in his adoption of the past; and dramatized stories from the Irish myths because he believed that Shakespeare's greatness lay in the tenaciousness of his hold on the old undivided human spirit in his contact with the past and the people. Yeats recalled that

> Every national dramatic movement or theatre in countries like Bohemia and Hungary, as in Elizabethan England, has arisen out of a study of the common people, who preserve
national characteristics more than any other class, and out of an imaginative re-creation of natural history or legend.6

Yeats's lyrical plays include: *Countess Cathleen* (1889), *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *The Shadowy Waters* (1900), and *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902), which is a vital presentation of nationalism and self denial. In this play he has dramatized the sufferings of his people during the famine of 1890s.

In his book, *Plays and Controversies*, Yeats wrote about the source of *Countess Cathleen*:

I found the story of Countess Cathleen in a collection of Irish folk-lore in an Irish newspaper. The only Christian variant I know of is Donegal tale, given by Mr. Larminie in his *West Irish Folk Tales* and *Romances of a Woman*, who goes to hell for ten years to save her husband, and stays there another ten, having been granted permission to carry away as many souls as could cling to her skirt.7

The play is about Countess Cathleen who sold her soul to the demon merchants in order to save her people from starvation.

*The Land of the Heart's Desire* is, in a sense, the call of the heart in pursuit of its own dream. It is the call of Ireland, "the soil where all great art is rooted." It embodies Yeats's dream of an Ireland in which all the people can thrive and live independently. In all his life, Yeats longed for such a country. In 1945 Yeats wrote:
To the greater poets, everything they see has its relation to the national life, and through them to the universal and divine life: nothing is an isolated artistic moment, there is a unity everywhere.8

The source of the play is revealed in a letter Yeats wrote to Mrs. Shakespeare from Rapallo on 9 March, 1929.

Last night I saw in a dream strange ragged excited people singing in a crowd. The most visible were a man and woman, who were I think dancing ..., and both had their eyes fixed on each other, and both sang their love for one another.9

It is the story of Forgael, a Sea-King of ancient Ireland who was promised love, supernatural power and happiness by some human headed birds. These birds were the souls of the dead, and he followed them overseas towards sunset where their final rest was. By means of a magic harp, he could call them about him and listen to their speech. Presently they captured a ship and found a beautiful woman, Dectora, upon it, and Forgael subdued her and his own rebellious sailors by the sound of his harp. The sailors fled to the other ship, and Forgael and Dectora sailed following the birds, awaiting death and what comes after.

Dectora stands for Ireland, the queen whose husband was killed by the wicked sailors, and Forgael represents the king of Ireland who plays national tunes on his harp.
Yeats's last verse play of the early period is Cathleen Ni Houlihan. It is a symbolic play. Yeats tells us of the origin of this play:

One night I had a dream almost as distinct as a vision of a cottage where there was talk of a marriage. There came an old woman in a long cloak. She was Ireland herself, that Cathleen Ni Houlihan for whom so many songs have been sung and about whom so many stories have been told and for whose sake so many have gone to their death.10

The play turns round Cathleen Ni Houlihan who symbolises Ireland. She visits a cottage where her marriage is to take place, but the groom betrays his bride, and all the hopes come to nothing. The play symbolizes the perpetual struggle of Ireland against tyranny and injustice.

Yeats glorifies the souls of those young heroes who strove to drive the "strangers" out of the "house". The old woman sings:

They shall be remembered forever,
They shall be alive forever,
They shall be speaking forever,
The people shall hear them forever.11

Yeats's other early plays too glorify the national heroes and heroines in the stories of ideal love. The crop of this period are the plays: The King's Threshold (1904), On Bail's Strand (1906), and Deirdre (1906). The first play is derived
from an amusing legend of the encounter between Seanchan, the celebrated chief poet of Ireland, and the King of all the Goths who dwelt in a cave near Clonmacnoise.¹²

The clash of wills in this play is between Seanchan, Chief poet of the civil disobedience, and King Guaire of the Goths who dismisses him from his place. Seanchan's last retort is a fast unto death on the King's threshold.

So, Yeats makes Seanchan's death romantic and heroic, glorified thus:

0 silver trumpets, be you lifted up
And cry to the great race that is to come.
Long-throated swans upon the waves of them,
Sing loudly, far beyond the wall of the world
That race may hear our music and awake.¹³

On Bail's Strand is Yeats's best play. It is a tragi-comedy and first of a serial of five plays about Cuchulain, the legendary national hero. It is also about two kings: Conchubar, High King of Uladh, and Cuchulain, King of Muirthemne.

The legend on which Deirdre is founded is the most famous of all Irish myths. The source probably is Lady Gregory's version in Cuchulain Muirthemne,¹⁴ where as Jeffares and Knowland say that "Deirdre was the Irish Helen, and Naisi her Paris, and Concobar her Menelaus."¹⁵

The play is about Deirdre's ideal love and its disastrous end. Conchubar, marries Deirdre by force. She runs away with
her lover Naoise, King of a sub-kingdom. After seven years, Conchubar arrests Naoise in a dishonourable way, and kills him ruthlessly. Before Deirdre can be brought back home as a queen, she commits suicide.

To sum up, the three plays share a common theme — the conflict between passion and virtue.

The second phase of Yeats's dramatic development (1915-1938) is his deviation to the Orient. In this phase, he no longer wrote for a popular stage; but turned inward and tried to evolve an art form that was close to pure music. He made his theatre an esoteric cult for the initiated few, "an audience like a secret society." In a letter to Lady Gregory, he wrote that he wanted to create

an unpopular theatre... where admission is by favour, and never to many... and half a dozen young men and women who can dance and speak verse or play drum and flute and zither.16

Yeats desired his stage to mimic the fourteenth century form which had clarity, order and symbolic structure. But it would be wrong to presume that his new stride was a departure from his earlier conception of poetic drama. It is rather an intensification of his views expressed earlier. His intention was to create a theatre for the elite. He composed a drama of great beauty which has practically nothing to say to modern theatre audience. The mainspring of Yeats's drama, here, is
the rhythmical harmonious action — dance. The basis of

drama, it can be asserted, is action; not language, for

language in the theatre is truly effective only when it clarifies the action. One cannot deny the ancient fact that drama had its origins in dance, both Greek drama and ancient Japanese plays. Denis Goacher emphasizes that there are traces of this powerful element even in the plays of Shakespeare. He points out:

Ideally, there is a time to dance the action, a time to sing it, and a time to chant or speak it. 17

Yeats showed a great fondness for a new kind of Japanese plays called Noh drama. He discovered this kind of poetic drama after an extended period of no-productivity. During this period, Yeats lived with Ezra Pound for three years; and Pound tried to convert him to the new poetry. Pound's influence was acknowledged by Yeats' in 1924 postscript to his essay on "William Blake and his Illustrations to the Divine Comedy". 18

The second event in this well-known literary relationship which enabled Yeats to create a new drama after 1916, was that Pound introduced him to Ernest Fenelosa's study of the Noh plays. In these plays, Yeats found meaningful coherence, not found anywhere in the European theatrical tradition. Yeats was particularly fascinated with the suggestive and powerful poetry and splendour of emotional intensity in Noh plays. In
these plays the words of the texts are fantastically fused with the music and with ceremonical dancing and colourful images. Yeats adopted the convention of the Noh which enriched his own particular type of drama. He composed *Four Plays For Dancers* which are marked by simplicity of action, costumes and scenery. They are: *At the Hawk’s Well* (1917), *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919), *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1919), and *Calvary* (1920). He found the formal stimulus he needed. They represent pure drama without action, concentrating on ritual and figurative language, and the whole Noh paraphernalia of masks, stylized gestures, musical commentary, and elevated language. Inspired by Noh plays, Yeats could solve some of the problems of the verse play. The dance play provided a more rewarding opportunity for the union of poetry and drama than was possible to him in the earlier works.

E. Bentley points out:

> The Noh plays gave him a sort of dramatic equivalent for his new verse style: something terse, refined, solid, cryptic, beautiful... They also showed Yeats how to simplify his staging by radical conventions and how to combine music and dance with words without letting the words get swamped.19

P. Thouless gives a full description of the Noh Theatre, saying that the players speak, act, and dance. The dresses worn by the actors are magnificent, the masks are beautifully carved and handed from one generation to another. The background is
fantastically decorated in the oriental style. There is a chorus of ten or twelve who sit in a side extension of the stage, and the players of drums and flutes sit behind the stage. It is the work of the players of the drum to maintain the ground rhythm for the voice, and for the stamping of the foot in the slow and solemn dance in every play. These elaborate techniques are powerful devices to give "musical depth", a field of reverberation to the action and to the language which in itself employs rhythm, sound, and image with the same intention. This influences the complex emotional life of the individual spectator. He is freed from his own limiting personality and becomes part of a richer life which is outside, and yet within him. As Yeats says in an article:

The arts which interest me, while seeming to separate from the world and us, a group of figures, symbols, enable us to pass for a few minutes into a deep of the mind, that had otherwise been too subtle for habitation ... They recede from us some more powerful life.

Further, the use of masks particularly enabled Yeats to achieve the distancing which he desired for his new drama. With masks, he could be more certain that the rhythm of the entire work with its intricate patterns of action would be stressed. Moreover, the masks, by suppressing the individuality of the actor, had the property of placing emphasis on the timeless patterns of action. In his introduction to Certain Noble Plays of Japan
Yeats says:

A mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player, or for that face repainted to suit his own vulgar fancy... and to bring the audience close enough to the play to bear every inflection of the voice.22

Yeats exploits the Japanese pattern for the background with the help of folding and unfolding screens. This is combined with singing short lyrics which both depict a scene and create an atmosphere.

At the Hawk's Well is the first of Yeats's plays based on his oriental theory of drama.23 It consists of three main characters gathering round a dry well and waiting for "the waters of Immortality".

The theme of the play is the symbolic water of the well which can be generalised as a universal spiritual quest. The point of the pattern is that failure is inevitable. The Old Man is defeated through his prudence, and Cuchulain through his courage. Yeats means that those who seek wisdom must suffer and live with frustration, for "Wisdom must live a bitter life".

The Only Jealousy of Emer is the most elaborate of the Four Plays for Dancers. It is also Yeats's most ample attempt at marrying the Noh devices with Irish mythology. The play, as is well known, is founded on an Irish saga called The Sickbed of
Cuchulain and the Only Jealousy of Emer. Jeffares and Knowland refer to other sources as well. According to them,

Yeats may have known Eugen O'Curry's
*The Sleeping Sickness of Cuchulain*;
*Atlantis* (1865); he knew Sigerson's
*Bards of the Gale and Gall* (1897),
pp. 391-395, which supply plots of the
legend; and he obviously drew upon
Lady Gregory's version in *Cuchulain*
of *Muirtheimne*, pp.296-293.24

The theme of the play combines the folk legend with Yeats's
own invention. He emphasizes here, the eternal beauty. The
first stanza of the opening song celebrates the attainment of
beauty by the mind, the second the attainment of beauty in
the blood; and the refrain reminds the audience that all
perfect things are rooted both in reason and violence.

Though the least famous of the *Four Plays For Dancers*,
*The Dreaming of the Bones*, is particularly interesting in the
context of the romantic tradition. Critics rightly regard
this play as his closest approach to the Noh form, in this case
to "the Noh of the Spirits".

The play is derived from the primitive belief that the
dead dream back for a certain time through the more personal
thoughts and deeds of life.

The dead who dream back, are Dervorgilla and King and
lover Diarmuid who
was overthrown in battle by her husband  
And for her sake and for his own, being blind  
And bitter and bitterly in love, he brought  
A foreign army from across the sea.25

For their betrayal of a nation, the two are trapped in  
the "labyrinth of conscience", and will never be forgiven.  
B. Rajan points out that Diarmuid and Dervorgilla are an  
Irish Paolo and Francesca, and Eliot agrees with him and adds  
that Yeats's tormented lovers have 'something of the universality  
of Dante's lovers'.26

Calvary relates the last stage of Christ's Crucifixion  
in Calvary or Golgotha, surrounded by Lazarus, who Christ  
revived after death; Judas who betrayed him "for the thirty  
pieces of silver" and the Roman soldiers making fun of him.  

Yeats says that he uses the bird symbolism of the heron  
in the songs to stress loneliness of Christ by contrasting it  
with a loneliness opposite in kind.27

The play is not necessarily an exposure of the failure of  
Christianity, but it is certainly a reminder that there will be  
many who require a different faith.

Yeats's denial of the role of character in drama, his  
lofty rejection of the "public theatre", and his insistence on  
the oriental references and fables received hesitant approval of  
the modern audience; but he justifies his practice saying:
I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect, and symbolic, and having no need of mob or press to pave its way.28

Yeats's Noh Plays were not safe from harsh criticism. For example, the element of dance, which gave Yeats's verse drama a new flavour and a touch of orientalism, was ironically ridiculed by C. Craig.29 On the other hand, G. Bottomley justified the existence of the dancers in the play as essential to its spirit and theme.

Like some other modern poet-dramatists, Yeats could not maintain his romantic attitude all the time. Abandoning the mystic world of the orient, he returned to the consideration of realistic life on the stage. It is quite possible that Yeats was influenced by his closest associate, J. M. Synge, who made a remarkable contribution to the revitalization of Irish drama. This change in Yeat's style and outlook can be seen as an attempt at reconciliation between poetry and life. As S. B. Bushrui points out, Yeats was using 'common syntax' and speaking with a stranger voice in simpler diction and with sharper rhythm. Consequently, he exchanges the occult symbolism for the realities of human existence, and he draws closer to his Ireland at the simple level of ordinary life, of politics and of social problems.30

To solve the problem of modern verse drama, he was in search of a style in which poetic rhythm, imagery and idealization
could be expressed in the language of the age. His experiments with prose plays began with a desire to bring a greater realism to his dramaturgy in order to win a popular audience again. In his realistic mood, he wrote a number of significant plays which cover a large range of themes and issues, e.g., his passionate defence of artistic freedom in the face of oppression is the theme of The King's Threshold; he paid homage to the traditional long image of revolutionary Ireland in Cathleen Ni Houlihan. He gave expression to his bitter disillusionment with the political factions dividing Ireland in The Green Helmet; to his sorrows in The Dreaming of the Bones; his quest for certitude was embodied in The Hour-Glass; to his mockery of religious causistry abstracted from the reality of the flesh in The Death of Cuchulain; and his unappeasable longing for Maud Gonne in The Shadowy Waters; and his all-too-human jealousy, loneliness and sexual frustration was projected in On Bail's Strand; Deirdre, and The Only Jealousy of Emer.

Yeats reflects his personal experience in Purgatory (1938). In this play, pain, worries and frustrations of an exhausted life are recalled. The Noh machinery of musicians, dance and masks are eliminated. The Celtic mythology is also stripped away, leaving only almost unbearably exposed terror which is the aim of the brief play. Purgatory alludes to the return of the Irish independence, folklore and morals.
The theme of the play recalls *The Dreaming of the Bones* and *The Words Upon the Window-pane*; which are dominated by the ghosts who speak, dance and blaze forth; in *Purgatory* the apparitions are silent and pose in the lighted window while the Old Man takes everything upon himself. The Old Man, even in his compassion for his mother, remains a victim of the bestiality in his blood; but he realises in despair, that the murder of his own son cannot assuage the pain and degradation of his mother's ghost any more than could the murder of his father.

Like other Yeatsian heroes, the Old Man is defeated by the rigid logic of the supernatural system. The play is, in fact, a study of his mixed nature — his ignorance and his truth, his criminality and his instinct. He is like Harry, "the consciousness of his unhappy family", who seeks God in an escape from the cruelty of the past.

Yeats insisted that the play expressed his own conviction about this world and the next. *Purgatory* has received much attention from eminent critics. Eliot remarks that it was not

a world of real Good and Evil, of holliness or sin; but a highly sophisti-
cated lower mythology.31

L.E. Nathan thinks that the success of the play could be attributed to Yeats's solution of the problem of how to make the supernatural a central element in his dramatic form.32
As a conclusion to this discussion on W.B. Yeats, it can be said that he has played a pivotal role in revitalising the English poetic drama. His dramatic development fluctuated between his nationalism and diversion to the Orient. He can be considered as a pioneer of the modern verse drama since he has repudiated both the traditional direction of the poetic play, and the direction of realistic drama of his day.

According to Yeats, the theatre should have an intellectual orientation with musical language, simplified acting and colourful décor. He also familiarised us with the techniques of Japanese Nō plays and much of the important avant garde theatre of Europe. Therefore, Yeats's techniques of various elements — philosophy, word-magic, legend, decorative arts, music and dance — into one dramatic synthesis was a most important landmark in the history of the modern theatre. But they have not solved many problems for the verse dramatist. His plays are basically poetic prose plays with important interludes in verse. It was only in his last play, Purgatory that he solved his problem of poetic dialogue. Katharine Worth points out that Yeats's theatre was not alive, but generated new life for the entire European theatre.

S. Phillips (1868-1915) on the other hand was hailed as the bright hope of poetic drama in England. Most of his verse plays were based on legends and historical events embodied in colourful verse.
Much as he tried to avoid the idolatory of Elizabethan themes and blank verse, it was not an easy task to keep a distance from them. For instance, his play, Pietro of Siene is reminiscent of Measure For Measure; The King resembles the later Elizabethan Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore. In Paolo and Francesca, the two lovers behave much like Romeo and Juliet confronting their mortal destiny. Phillips's verse plays based on legendary and historical themes are Herod (1900), Ulysses (1902), The Sin of David (1905), Nero (1906), Faust (1908), Armageddon (1915) and The Bride of Lammermoor (1916).

His success could also be ascribed to his flair for the themes of horror and terror which were met with enthusiasm. And in this respect too, he seems to have been inspired by other Elizabethan dramatists especially Marlowe. For instance, Faust takes the audience to a range of mountains between heaven and earth where angels converse with Mephistopheles, and also to the haunt of the witches in the midst of thunder and lightning, and shattered mountains. Or the scenes in Ulysses where Hades, Black Barges, Furies, Phantoms, terrifying Charons, and wailing cries create horror and suspense on the dark stage.

The vigour of his poetic plays lies mainly in the figurative verse and colourful language. The characters too are skilfully put together in the manner of the great seventeenth century
tragedies. But his divorce from the living theatre hampered his growth, and the rhetorical speeches of his poetic plays lacked convincingness. E. Reynolds says:

He was the last flicker of the dying Victorian candle of Elizabethan style drama, even though he himself knew that the school of Shakespearean pastiche was outmoded.35

The failure could also be ascribed to his restless nature which drove him into a state of obscurity and emotional conflicts. P. Thouless says:

Life became a dream for Phillips, and from a dream, literature can't obtain perpetual life. His poems and dramas faint for lack of fresh stores of life, and the mood of beauty, which in them is the mood of darkness, of melancholy, of the man perpetually cut off from the source of life and seeking it in a trance.36

His endeavours to revitalize poetic drama remain limited due to this fact; but his plays are likely to be read with interest for the beauty of their verse and the warmth of their emotions.

L. Abercrombie (1881-1931) is a playwright whose efforts played a laudable role in the process of the revival of modern verse drama. Like Yeats, he feared the tyranny of realism; but unlike Yeats, he distrusted the emphasis on imagination.
Abercrombie believed that realistic drama was "bizarre". And like G. Bottomley, his anti-realistic tendency led him to create plays depicting fundamental human motives and inner action. As A.S. Collins affirms:

Abercrombie and Bottomley did not seek to bring the common life back into poetic drama to examine morality through stories. They aimed to present good and evil and to give their presentation greater cogency than that of ordinary prose drama by the peculiar potency of poetic imagery.

Thus, his motives were well manifested in a series of poetic plays about psychic complexities with horror and macabre spectacle in the background. For instance, in The Adder (1913), he shows a man whose life is mastered by an overwhelming mortal sin and excessive sexuality, symbolized by a concealed adder. When the adder is locked up, his lust for sin is kept within bounds. Debora (1913) depicts how people in distress behave brutally to realize their egoistic aims, dispensing with all morals. A terrible episode is well illustrated in The End of the World (1919), in which a sudden rumour spreads in a village that a comet is going to destroy the world. In The Deserter (1922), a psychic fact is depicted in how a malicious wife hastens her husband's death in order to be alone with her sadist lover.

Phoenix (1923) marks Abercrombie's turning point in verse
plays in which the life of ancient Greece is depicted in an almost prosaic manner. The play dramatizes the deceitful behaviour of a royal father and his son for the love of a vulgar servant which produces a scandalous situation.

His last two verse plays, The Staircase (1920) and The Sale of St. Thomas (1931) reveal motives of the characters affected by their emotions and natural needs.

Summing up Abercrombie's contribution to the revival of poetic drama, it can be said that he made a remarkable attempt at vitalising the modern English poetic stage, but his defects lie in his dramatic techniques of disjointed episodes, lack of action and complicated plots which rendered his plays incapable of success on the boards. As A.Nicoll points out, he was better known as a poet and lecturer on the drama than as a playwright.

His experiments revealed his talent for one-act plays; but he was out of his depth in longer plays because he lets loose his imagination which is sometimes rambling and even embarassing. Nevertheless, Abercrombie insists on his objective saying:

I would labour for a movement to set
going once more the drama which can
most mightily intoxicate me to be
consciously and delightedly in love with
life itself, yes, even with the tragedy
of life.
G. Bottomley (1874-1948) is another significant figure in the development of verse drama before the First World War. His distinguished style of verse has been highly acclaimed. Like Yeats, most of Bottomley's verse plays are based on the Gaelic legends. This legendary world has its own insidious charm and appeal to the modern audience.

His first one-act play, The Crier By Night (1910) is based on a legend of a spirit haunting the northern marshes calling for more victims. His other poetic play with a mythical subject is The Riding to Lithend (1910) which revolves round the legend of a hero defending the homeland of his ancestors.

But on the other hand, Bottomley could not avoid the Elizabethan verse style and themes, especially those of Shakespeare. It was Shakespeare who furnished Bottomley with episodes of his poetic plays, King Lear's Wife (1915), and Gruach (1922). The first play is indicative of the tragic theme of Lear and the psychic whims of his family illustrated in picturesque blank verse. Gruach is based on Macbeth. Bottomley introduces Gruach who, like Lady Macbeth, ruthlessly follows her own whims and ambitions.

In his second phase, Bottomley fell under the spell of the orient. As mentioned earlier, a collection of English translations of old Japanese No drama was published in 1923. This provided a new inspiration for Bottomley. In World Drama A. Nicoll says:
Like Yeats, Bottomley... believed that a revival of the poetic theatre might be accomplished by the mixture of Nō plays adopted for the treatment of western world themes to win the applause of the contemporary audience.41

Bottomley's use of folding and unfolding curtains, masks, picturesque background and colourful costumes in his later plays such as Ardvorliche's Wife (1929), Marsail's Weeping (1932), The White Widow (1935), Fire At Callart (1939), and Kate Kenedy (1929), show some Japanese techniques mingled with Elizabethan dramaturgy.

In the last phase of his dramatic development, Bottomley yields to the influence of realistic drama exemplified in Deirdire (1949). In his book, A Stage For Poetry, he states:

> When I attempted the verse drama, I had no idea that poetry was no longer valid in the British Theatre — that it had played itself out of the theatre... fostered by the increasing predominance of prose plays of contemporary life.42

To conclude, G. Bottomley's new techniques which involved legends and oriental dramaturgy and historical elements did secure a place in the history of British theatre. But his poetic plays have certain shortcomings noted by critics. B.A. Khan points out that Bottomley was not quite a dramatic poet, and that he was more precisely a pictorial poet.43 His
failing health and continuous sufferings could be another reason for his seclusion from and slight connection with the theatre.

He depended chiefly on amateur organisations for the productions of his short plays. Bottomley's *Scenes and Lyric Plays* represent a certain stage in the development of his art, but the more extensive English form of drama revealed his real talent. Perhaps, G. Bottomley might have developed into a major verse dramatist if he had avoided the esoteric experiments in the Yeatsian manner.

J. Masefield (1878-1967) was one of the romantic poet-dramatists in the early twentieth century. His romantic style is ascribed to a fusion of feelings and action expressed in dramatic verse.

*The Tragedy of Nan* (1906) is his finest play. It is a play with realistic setting. The colloquial dialogue intermingled with couplets displays a poetic quality which stirs the emotions. Masefield is interested in Greek legend which is incorporated in his next poetic play, *The Faithful* (1915), but one may characterise this play as a variation on the Japanese model of *No* plays. It projects feudalism and the typical pastoral life of ancient Japan.

The legend of Tristram and Iseult is dramatized in his
poetic play *Tristan and Isolt* (1927). It is a version of the legend which has a freshness of its own. Thouless points out:

> He does not copy existing well-known mediaeval plays; but with ready adaptability of mind he creates his legend with a new freshness and vigour.44

But Masefield's more typical contribution to poetic drama consists in his religious plays. He wrote a series of plays on Christ's life such as *Good Friday* (1916), *The Coming of Christ* (1928), and *The Trial of Jesus* (1929). In these poetic plays, Masefield uses a skilful combination of prose and verse interwoven into choral interludes. His love of nature is clearly reflected in these plays — in the smell of the soil, plantations and fresh air of the countryside.

The general recognition of his poetic plays came after his appointment as poet laureate.45 But Masefield made little impact on the English theatre, and as J. Gassner points out, his dramatic work left the stream of British drama unaffected, for he did not succeed in bringing verse drama back into the theatre.46 Nevertheless, Masefield was of the opinion that the earlier poetic drama was dead, and that there must be a search for a new mould, and as such he helped to lay the foundations rather than build a mansion of modern poetic drama.
T.S. Eliot's Contribution to Poetic Drama

Although Eliot is esteemed chiefly as the main spirit behind the emergence of poetic drama, he must also be given the credit for bringing greater respectability and popularity to poetic drama. He had full understanding of the nature of poetic drama, the causes of the failure of the nineteenth century verse drama, and the problems which face the verse dramatist in the modern age.

Eliot's verse plays are not concerned with socio-economic problems but with the inner, emotional and psychic realities. The essence of his major plays, such as Murder in The Cathedral (1935) is the psychic struggle of the hero with temptations. In The Family Reunion (1939), the psychological guilt complex of Harry is of central importance; and The Cocktail Party (1950) deals with the problem of self-realization at several levels of moral and spiritual awareness.

From his earliest experimental plays up to his last poetic drama like The Confidential Clerk (1958), and The Elder Statesman (1958), Eliot represents a certain curve of the development of modern verse drama. These plays constitute a closely related group, for they deal with religious themes, and are built on a contrast between the man who sees and the rest who are blind in a spiritual sense.

Eliot's earliest attempts at poetic drama were two fragments
called *Sweeney Agonistes* (1928), and *The Rock* (1930) which employed the rhythm of the contemporary speech with the formal requirements of verse drama. Eliot's attempt was to create a new kind of drama with the rhythms of the music hall—the jazz songs, the simple caricatures, and the lurid story of murder combined with a tragic farce. The world of *Sweeney Agonistes* is rather like the world of Graham Greene's early novels of hidden fear. This fear is suggested by the ominous pounding rhythms, and the heavy repetitions and echoes. Eliot's aim is to emphasize that the people of the present day could speak verse in their conversation and this might create a new possibility for the revival of verse drama. This violent rhythm and diction could be said to be a complete break with the rhythm of blank verse.

*The Rock* is a pageant, not a drama, for its situation does not give rise to any intense struggle or conflict. The structure consists of a series of scenes of related tone, which celebrate the theme of the building of the church, and the hardships it has encountered in various crises of the past and present. In this play, Eliot achieved the greatest choral poetry yet written in English. The choruses were composed to provide links between the scene but there was nothing to justify a truly dramatic conception. It was, in fact, the second voice, that of himself addressing an audience. The members of the chorus were not individualised but they were
mouthpieces for the author's own views. J. Gassner states that there is no dramatic emotion in the choruses to fuse the parts. There are only different poetic moods: devotional mood, elegiac mood, and satiric mood indicating the superficiality of modern life. On the other hand, "each chorus of Murder in the Cathedral", as D. Gerstendberger points out, has an emotional shape ... whereas even the best choruses of The Rock have no more than an intellectual, self-determined shape.

Murder in the Cathedral is an important landmark in the history of modern drama not only because it convincingly revives the almost lost tradition of poetic drama but also because it attempts to establish that great drama can be based on religious ideas.

Temptation is a theme which has obvious religious significance. The tempters cannot lure Thomas because his spiritual struggle is genuine and intense. The fourth tempter is a more subtle one since he represents Thomas's own hidden ambition to achieve personal glory through martyrdom.

The chorus has multiple functions in this play. It is not only the dramatic realization of the Christian ritual but the choir represents a body of worshippers and also draws in the audience to take part in the liturgy. At the same time, the lyrics give excellent means both of enriching the speech of the
play and of arousing imaginative receptivity. The audience accepted the convention because the verse rhythms are based on Christian hymns chanted usually in churches.

The principal images in the chorus are drawn from two sources: from nature and from the life of the poor. The destructive features of nature are emphasized in speeches leading up to the murder of Becket, which affirms the glory of God. "All the created world", the chorus concludes

Affirm Thee in living, all things affirm
Thee in living, the bird in the air,
Both the hawk and the finch.49

Eliot skilfully uses the images of plants and seasons. Even the delicate flowers are threatened by death.

I have smelt
Death in the rose, death in the holyhock, sweetpea, Hyacinth, primrose and cowslip...50

For flowers, the seasons are "A sour spring, a parched summer, and empty harvest." The merry fluting of a summer afternoon is heard at night mingled with the owl's "hollow note of death", and bats with huge scaly wings, shout over the noon day. Again the chorus which mediates between the actions and the audience, conveys the image of restlessness in evil forebodings. It expresses the sense of anguish and horror. The air is heavy and thick, the earth is hard against the feet, and the sky is both thick and heavy. Members of the chorus
smell evil odour and sticky dew forming on the back of the hands.

To conclude, **Murder in the Cathedral** is a distinct milestone in the resuscitation of modern poetic drama. Eliot was consequently regarded by many of the younger generation as their chief master. As Nicoll affirms:

> The emotional power exhibited in this play gave assurance to those who had been pleading for the application of poetry to the stage.51

D. Gerstenberger too is highly appreciative of the play:

> Out of this difficult material of the spiritual triumph of twelfth century martyr, Eliot has created a drama which has meaning, coherence, unity and rhythm... The play succeeds on its own terms, and has about it a sense of permanence rare in twentieth century drama.52

R. Speaight believes that the success of the **Murder in the Cathedral** is ascribed to four striking reasons: the dramatist told a well-known story, he told a complicated story in an intelligible way; the language is direct and simple, and the verse is extremely varied including rhymed couplets, free verse, and the chorus.53 On the contrary, D. Donoghue who in the opinion of many scholars is a negativist, claims that the play is unsuccessful.
Murder in the Cathedral, to which a crucial influence on the development of modern verse drama has been frequently attributed, is an unsuccessful play. Its text evades rather than solves the problems of dramatic verse.  

The real reason for the extraordinary success of Murder in the Cathedral appears to be the integral fusion of elements of poetry with the exigencies of drama, the fusion of experience, form, content, and language — something which only a fully realized verse drama can offer to the English stage.

Eliot's later plays too involve religious themes; but the setting is contemporary since he felt a need to appeal to large audiences. These plays are basically upper-class drawing room comedies in the tradition of the Comedy of Manners, with a certain melodramatic element.

The Family Reunion is in some ways a more significant step in the development of modern poetic drama, for in this play Eliot has almost solved his problem of communication by a strong and flexible medium of verse and contemporary episode, for he believed that if poetic drama is to establish itself again, after three hundred years, it has got to show a contemporary plot with its peculiar perplexities, conflicts and misunderstandings. In The Family Reunion, a combination of realistic modern setting and the substructure of the ancient myth are infinitely interesting.
In fact, all his plays are structured round Greek myths which give a certain depth to the handling of their themes and characterization. So, he brooded on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* for *The Family Reunion*. Like Clytemnestra, Amy is responsible for the premature death of her husband. This crime of loveless life is repeated in Harry's marriage. As Orestes who killed his mother, Harry decides to leave Wishwood that causes Amy's death.

The play deals with the theme of sin and expiation. Agatha's summary at the play's climax underlines the theme and the symbolic meaning of this tragi-comedy:

> What we have written is not a story of detection
> Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation — the knowledge of it must precede the expiation.56

But on the other hand, crime, guilt and evil constitute the background against which the hero achieves the inner experience towards expiation. With the help of Agatha, Harry discovers his past and the intentional sins of his parents, projected into a belief that he himself had murdered his wife. The inherited guilt of his subconscious mind, comes to light with the death of his wife and assumes objective shape in the form of the Eumenides. One can say that the parental sin is transmuted to the son whose responsibility is to atone for it.
In other words, Harry had merely inherited the curse of his family. Nevil Coghill points out:

Eliot... took a family curse with a double murder as his central image, and an expiation at the end. The curse seems to arise from natural causes and yet leads towards a supernatural solution.57

Harry's attempt to dissociate himself from his past is in vain, for he realizes that he must accept the past and its consequences in the present to encounter his future. At this stage, Harry is still trying to fight the Euminides as "manifestation of Divine Wrath rather than the Divine Love".

The central experience of the hero is the isolation felt by a soul in the loneliness of sin. Harry's long sufferings of loneliness disable him to undertake crucial action, and his speech cannot illuminate his dilemma. Varshney compares Harry to Hamlet:

Like Hamlet, Harry too is conscious of the cursed spirit of destiny that brought him into the midst of time. 58

But despite this problem of personal communication, the play is miraculously articulate by virtue of its language since imagery is an essential element in the texture of poetic drama. It makes the dull action attractive and vivid. "Images are
like... magic mirrors", says C.D.Lewis, and "they do not merely reflect the theme, they give it life and form."59

The contrasting images of winter and spring, of life and death, ruins and the sea, of youth and old age, of the rose garden and the dark passage, of innocence and experience, of light and darkness, of heaven and hell embody the themes of the play in a concrete and lively way. Sometimes Eliot fuses images with symbols. For example, the image of the stair chanted by chorus of the relatives:

We do not like to climb a stair, and
find it takes us down...

We do not like what happens when we
are awake because it too closely resembles what happens when we
are asleep.60

The world of the play, devoid of spiritual realisation, is suggested by the symbol of the hospital. Eliot's hero is a patient, but he is in need of divine rather than physical care.

The spring season is a symbol suggesting sacrifice. Harry is conscious of a spiritual reality which brings him in conflict with his worldly mother:

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 spiring?61
In other words, the failure of Amy's plans and the success of Agatha's design with regard to Harry illustrate the spiritual triumph of the hero. Eliot wants to show the spiritual enlightenment of the hero by delving deep into the past as well as his own subconscious experiences.

To sum up, as Nevil Coghill points out in the introduction to The Family Reunion, the main ideas in the play are the death-in-life of Christendom between the two world wars; the meaningless of life without knowledge of God and of the Incarnation, the flight from a sense of pursuing guilt, and the true remedy in the love of God, by a purification of will.  

The Family Reunion is recognized by most of the critics as the best play of Eliot. As a critic comments, no verse written by any other modern poet approaches more nearly the condition of drama. Another critic, Archie de Bear states:

Eliot has made a new, important and profoundly interesting contribution to English drama... in The Family Reunion he strikes an entirely new note in the theatre today.

Yet, The Family Reunion was not more successful than Murder in the Cathedral which has a better organized and structured plot. According to some critics, it fails to distinguish between poetic sensitivity and theatrical sensibility. But H. Gardner supports its sense of dramaturgy saying:
Unlike most poetic plays in modern times, it is more effective when acted than when read. It is full of dramatic clash and excitement.65

There is yet another point of view, that Eliot has not been successful in creating a coherent tragic mood, for the play is not so much the spiritual triumph of Harry as the tragedy of his mother, as Eliot Himself says that his "sympathies have come to be all with the mother", who is a tragic figure suffering in silence.

Eliot has admitted that the deepest flaw of all in the play is the failure of adjustment between the Greek story and the modern situation. If the Euminides are to be considered as "the objective correlative" of the theme of Harry's guilt and expiation, one cannot help noting that Eliot has failed to establish this intimate relation between his hero and the Euminides. These Furies are incomprehensible without a previous knowledge of the Greek myth. The audience is baffled and bewildered. In a letter of 13 September, 1939, Eliot wrote to his cousin that

the Furies did not work out very well.
It would have been better to have had them invisible to the audience.66

Another peculiar characteristic of the play is that the murder and crimes are all internalized. Agamemnon is actually murdered, and so are Cassandra, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra;
but in Wishwood there are no corpses and no murders, only the
tenuous temptation to kill, creating complex psychic experiences.

Most of the characters in this play are patients suffering
from a spiritual disease, and they cannot be understood
properly without illumination from some supernatural source.

The deficiency in the chorus is another flaw of the play,
Eliot himself admits:

```
The device of using four of the minor
personages, representing the family,
sometimes as individual character-
parts and sometimes collectively as
chorus, does not seem to me satisfactory. 67
```

By and large, Eliot has not failed in his central purpose.
He has achieved through this play a sense of human involvement
with a supernatural order; he has created a language and a
kind of imagery sufficient for task, creating modern poetic drama
out of the stuff of everyday life and contemporary experiences.

The next poetic play with a contemporary theme, The
Cocktail Party was first performed in 1945. It was received
with extraordinary eagerness, for the audience of post-war
period appreciated the theme of the spiritual anguish and self
realization that the play embodies. In this play, Eliot came
closer to a total dramatic and poetic integration than in his
earlier plays. In this play, the Christian implications of the
theme as well as the mythical structure is submerged beneath the plot, and the contemporary significance is further heightened. He also moved towards greater realism by eliminating the chorus and the supernatural element which were stumbling blocks to the success of The Family Reunion. Eliot himself points out:

> Some of the errors... avoided in designing The Cocktail Party are: to begin with no chorus, and no ghost. I was still inclined to go to a Greek dramatist for my theme... and to conceal the origins so well that nobody would identify them until I pointed them out myself.68

The play is a blend of two traditions: the tradition of the comedy of manners, whose subject is the love-game; and the tradition of romantic comedy in which the fortunes of the characters are manipulated by supernatural powers. H. Gardner states that

> The Cocktail Party was born of a fusion between ancient myth and the assumption that underlies most modern social comedy.69

Eliot bases his play on the "Alcestis" of Euripides. The plot of The Cocktail Party revolves round the unsuccessful marriage of Edward and Lavina. Sir Henry, the consulting psychiatrist, brings back Lavina like Alcestis who was brought back from her grave by Hercules. This "resurrection" brings
about her emotional reconciliation with Edward, and a new life for both of them.

The play is a highly complex work of art with layer within layer of themes and ideas, which contribute to the richness of its texture. It is a study of spiritual isolation and loss of personality, a study of the failure of mutual relations, and a study in various kinds of self-deceptions in the modern age. Each character has come to realise that he or she is alone.

The basic theme is the significance of choice which illustrates how the choice of the exceptional individual or the saint enriches and vitalizes the lives of ordinary people. Celia's choice is martyrdom which has a great relevance to the contemporary world of the Chamberlaynes. Reilly points out to the Chamberlaynes the way in which they can resolve their difficulties and lead a good life in the wake of Celia's martyrdom. One can deduce that Eliot's sub-plot is the broad arch of Christianity with its paraphernalia of sin, expiation and salvation. The religious element is underlined in the "ritual of libation", "the scolding hills", and "the crucifixion near an ant hill". So, Celia is an example not only of the Christian notion of the original sin but she also has a profound sense of existentialist guilt and the spiritual isolation that accompanies it. She is like Christ, whose crucifixion brought peace, harmony and unity in the life of the community.
The contributions of Reilly and his adjutants Julia and Alex too play an important role in this respect. These three characters are called "Guardians", who symbolize the Divine element of providence watching over erring mortals and setting them on the right path. They also suggest the supernatural power influencing our lives in some mysterious manner. Grover Smith underlines the importance of the Guardian's role since they initiate Celia and the Chamberlaynes into vocations according to their potentialities. Julia, in fact, is the leader of this movement. She is endowed with strange powers which go further than Reilly, and can guide others towards their salvation.

On a few occasions, Julia and Alex also function as dramatic characters rather than as semi-chorus commenting on significant situations in the play. But their role as Guardians is of greater significance. The scene of libation brings out their joint efforts, and their concern for the spiritual welfare of the central characters.

Eliot has practised austerity in the use of images throughout the play. The only emphasis he puts is on the imagery of vision, closely related to the theme of spiritual progress. These images are introduced as sight and blindness, light and darkness. For instance, Julia says that "I must have left my eyeglasses here, I simply cannot see without them." She is, in fact, blind in one eye. Celia says: "I can see you
at least as a human being", while Edward says, "I am completely in the dark." So, Eliot uses three metaphorical conditions: blindness, half sight, and full vision of the characters.

To sum up, The Cocktail Party marks a great stride in Eliot's dramatic development towards modernization. Its popularity stems from the fact that Eliot introduced a really intriguing plot, well spiced with wit and sufficiently universal in its portraiture of real life of the playgoers. The disguised poetry is a triumph, for its subtle and powerful language. The modern audience reacts to the surface action of the play which involves almost all the features of a comedy of manners; but it fails to get at the dramatic representation of the inner meaning or the essence of the poetic vision implicit in the play.

The play has certain inexcusable faults and shortcomings. Eliot lacks theatrical sensibility — that knowledge of stagecraft which Shakespeare displays at every step. Thematicallly, Eliot uses Celia's martyrdom as a Christian symbol; but her death lacks dramatic conviction because this crucial action takes place off stage.

Last but not the least, The Cocktail Party is a psychological as much as a mystery play, with a touch of farce. But beneath the veil of humour, lies a tragi-comedy of the contemporary European society.
The Confidential Clerk, and The Elder Statesman are attempts at attracting a wider public. Eliot tries to achieve this objective with the help of a modern setting, unobtrusive verse and also by concealing their religious messages within a conventional framework.

The Confidential Clerk is one of the more satisfactory experiments in poetic drama. The principal source of the play which Eliot discloses as the "Ion" of Euripides, provides the germs of the story. It might also be associated in general with the myth of the foundling main character reared in ignorance of his exalted paternity. So, the central theme is a search for identity. And this is a theme of contemporary as well as universal significance.

The play is principally not about death and atonement, but rather about life and its abundance. It is not merely about a life of service, art or religion, but about a search for vocation to approach a deeper meaning and also to redeem the past. If one seeks happiness through his vocation, he will be doing God's will. But this also involves his relations with other people. Only by self-knowledge can man achieve it, and self-knowledge depends on communication with others and an understanding of them.

Another vital theme of the play is career choice. Sir Claud has inherited a business from his father; but at heart
is an artist manqué. Colby Simpkin is a younger dabbler in music who is engaged as confidential clerk in Eggerson's place. Colby who is of doubtful origins, can choose one of several fathers who offer themselves to guide his footsteps. But as J.G. Weightman asserts:

Evidently the father that we ought to follow is the intuitive conscience, the divine spark, however small, that we come to recognize through knowledge of ourselves.71

At the same time, Colby feels about his music just as Sir Claud does about pottery. "Sir Claud, in a burst of confidence", says Nicholas Brooks,

explains his own conflict of wills with his father, who forced him away from pottery to the city; a forcing for which he declares himself grateful because he would have been only a second-rate potter.72

Eliot's religious themes are less overt in this play. Sir Claud sometimes talks about loneliness and secret gardens which have religious connotations. He seeks shelter with God, "the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds", who would grant him serenity and tranquillity. Lucasta says to Colby:

But it's only the outer world you've lost
You've still got your inner world—a world that's more real...
You have your secret garden, to which you can retire
And lock the gate behind you.73
But for Lucasta, the garden is "a dirty public square in a shabby part of London." Lacking such a "secret garden", Lucasta seeks salvation in the person of B. Kaghan, the "guardian angel" who would grant her protection.

Summing up, _The Confidential Clerk_ is a unified structure of the theme and poetic language which marks Eliot's achievement of considerable merit and opens up bright prospects for the revival of modern verse drama.

Some critics claim that the play is a prose drama because Eliot has abandoned some of the essential elements of the poetic language. But a keen observation reveals that there is nothing in the whole structure of the play to suggest that it is not a verse play, particularly for critics who are familiar with Eliot's dramatic development.

_The Confidential Clerk_, even so, is an example of Eliot's efforts to give an impetus to the revival of poetic drama, both for its poetic force and for its technical achievement.

Eliot's last play, _The Elder Statesman_ catches the moral tones of "the polite society" in the post-war decade, though it is not related to "the comedy of manners". One can say that the play involves the "Divine Comedy" of modern life which Eliot's work as a whole also suggests. Nana Balakian points out:

> Although the religious implication in this new insight is muted, the play
unmistakably suggests the 'Paradiso' episode of the poet's 'Divine Comedy'.

The Elder Statesman bears some relation to Oedipus at Colonus. At the centre of both plays, there is the father-daughter relationship, expressed in terms of mutual love and understanding. The play reveals a man's dead past. Lord Claverton's spectres of the past are sinister forces which he has carried within himself for many years. When Claverton is approached by them he is jolted into self-judgement, as Harry in The Family Reunion is jolted by the Eumenides which makes him take a new attitude towards his suffering. Claverton's present visitors are not ghosts but messengers of redemption. He, unlike Harry, not only understands the ghosts of his past but also acknowledges his guilt in relation to them.

G. Smith says:

When he has exorcised his own uneasy ghosts, his past self, then the others cannot harass him, and he is free. This catharsis produces Eliot's equivalent to the epiphany in the Oedipus at Colonus, a partial source of this play.

It is surprising that his ghosts have nothing to do with spiritualism. They are familiar creatures viewed under an unfamiliar aspect veiled by time. Claverton divines that his two ghosts are harmless provided that he purifies his own soul. Claverton's ghosts, on the other hand, possess his son. He contracts a business alliance with Gomez. Whereas, Claverton
cannot avoid the other threatening ghost, Mrs. Carghill. She reminds him of their earlier relationship and points out that they are "still together", and "may always be together", so long as "their fires are not quenched". One cannot miss the religious undertone of these last words as pointed out also by G. Smith. 77

Eliot's concept of the moral choice, which is a distinct theme in his later poetic plays, is a penetrating experience in The Elder Statesman. Like Harry, Lord Claverton decides not to run away from his spectres; but Claverton's decision, unlike Harry's, stems unambiguously from his own resources as an individual moral being. D. Donoghue says:

The new play asserts... that man has the power of moral choice, that he holds this power by virtue of his existence and dignity as a human being, that the exercise of this power is a matter of incalculable moment. 78

When Monica urges her father to escape from those obnoxious people, viz., Gomes and Mrs. Carghill, Claverton tells her that what he wants to escape from is himself and his past. This act of moral choice leads not to the conventional "happy ending", but to the radical extension of the circumstances of insight within which Claverton interprets his world. Michael's flight to San Marco also represents the enormous risk involved in an act of moral choice.
Eliot skilfully unfolds the relationships among the main characters. The central character, Lord Claverton, experiences some secular and spiritual relations. N. Frye states that Eliot has written in *The Elder Statesman* an "ideal comedy", gently drawing forth an image of communal order based upon acknowledgement of responsibility, in the spirit of piety, love and social harmony of which the Claverton family represents a beautiful instance. Claverton is essentially a man of conscience and consciousness confronting himself. He feels at ease by confessing that Mrs. Carghill was once his beloved, but now she is "the ghost of a woman who was Maisie." Claverton's ex-friend Gomez is persistently blaming him for his accidental murder which haunts him. As a loving father, Claverton confesses all his secrets to his daughter saying

I am happy, Monica, that you have found a man
Whom you can love for the man he really is.

And she responds: "And I love you the more/Because I love Charles". Claverton has pinned all his hopes on his son, Michael; but the father's ghost, Gomez, is the bane of his life.

To conclude, *The Elder Statesman* is one of the few modern plays which is most perceptive. Ingram quite unfairly ascribes Eliot's success to his literary reputation. He points out:

The success of his last plays could be attributed to Eliot's reputation, for
he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948 and that must have influenced the reactions of many towards his plays.82

D. Donoghue maintains that Eliot, in fact, does not show the soul-stirring, the agonizing torment which Claverton suffers. He suggests:

We are shown little theatrical evidence: craggy, pained face; a few wise, sad words; nothing more... Lord Claverton and his daughter would be much more convincing if Lord Claverton were shown in agonized recognition of his own emptiness.83

To some extent, it may be said that the lack of intensity and suspense in Eliot's last plays is due to his flat and prosaic lines. But by and large, it would be unfair to deny that he has evolved a viable style for modern poetic drama.

It may be said that Eliot has not only contributed some valuable poetic plays to the modern theatre. He has also influenced the course of modern dramatic poetry more than any other poet. Both as a playwright and a critic, he has a full comprehension of the problems and nature of poetic drama. His analysis of the reasons of failure of the nineteenth century verse dramatists and of the technical problems of modern verse play is quite convincing.

In his poetic plays he created a form of "heightened speech" which is flexible and capable of dealing with themes
of modern life in terms of comedy as well as of tragedy. R. Peacock accounts for Eliot's success in the modern theatre, saying that Eliot's plays were met with zealous appraisal, for they exposed the social diseases and psychological complexes, social manners, morals, religious ideas and culture. His plays display astonishing vigor and power to move the audience so far as they touch the modern life at many points. Another reason for his success could be ascribed to the fact that Eliot refused to repeat his success or his failure. Manipulating the problems of his earlier plays, he endeavours to improve and develop his capacities in his later plays.

Through his personal efforts to popularise the verse in the theatre, he proved that craving for poetry was a permanent tendency in human nature. Hence, his verse drama shows that he not only made a genuine contribution towards reshaping the language of poetry in its narrower lyric aspect but towards an extension of modern poetry by an extension of the world it portrays on the boards of the stage. He also asserted that poetry and drama were not elements apart in the theatre; but at the highest moments they were fused together. Eliot was also keenly aware of the problem of communication which faces a poet-dramatist, and in his plays he has gone a long way towards solving it.

One may say that the history of the revival of verse drama
in England is, for the most part, a history of Eliot's own development as a poet-dramatist. No one can deny the influence of Eliot on the younger generation of the poet-dramatists of the present century. There is hardly a verse dramatist of remarkable talent, who is not indebted to Eliot's art of stagecraft. But as he himself emphasised, the creation of poetic drama was a social function, and without a powerful tradition, the dream of a modern verse drama could not be realised. E.M. Browne, in his appraisal of Eliot's poetic drama, says:

Its permanent value lies in its poetry. I mean poetry not only of language. I mean also the poetry of conception, the poetry of character...85

On the other hand, Eliot's plays have also been criticised on the following grounds:

1. Most of his main characters are not individualised; they lack reality.

2. The dialogues are sometimes esoteric. He gives too much attention to poetic techniques at the expense of theatrical elements of the play. Therefore, his style of verse drama is too personal to be a valuable guide to younger poetic dramatists.

3. Eliot moves sometimes suddenly from light social comedy to one of his intense philosophical themes and this very often affects the impact of his plays.

4. Another serious fault of his is the introduction of the supernatural elements which do not always blend with the modern themes and settings of his plays.

One may safely infer that in spite of the fact that Eliot tried to free his dramatic verse from Shakespearean
influence; his efforts to bring back poetry into the theatre moved in the opposite direction leading to a dead end. But one cannot ignore his gigantic efforts in the theatrical experiments. T.S. Pearce asserts:

Eliot was undertaking the most startling experiment of all his works. At no period had any previous writer attempted to do anything quite like this. In this respect, he extended the scope of poetic drama.86

Eliot remained steadfast to his ideal of poetic drama which is summed up here in his own words:

I have before my eyes, a kind of mirage of the perfection of verse drama... such as to present at once the two aspects of dramatic and musical order without losing that contact with the ordinary everyday world with which poetry must come to terms which seems to me the proper aim of dramatic poetry.87

But, by and large, Eliot is aware that the ideal of poetic drama is unattainable but provides an incentive towards further experiments to achieve greater approximation to this ideal. It is too early as yet, says D.E. Jones, to pass a final judgement on his individual stature as a poet-dramatist. But two things are certain: his plays are great literature, and Eliot's work is assured of a permanent place in dramatic literature and the repertory of the English stage. There can be no denying the fact that Eliot's plays are important steps towards the revival of poetic drama.
W.H. Auden and C. Isherwood; and other Dramatists of the Thirties.

The 1930s stand out in the whole history of the theatre as the decade of the political stage, especially of the extreme left. The propaganda theatre of the socialist minded in the thirties had been a part of the machinery of the communist parties directed against the fascist ideology.

No doubt, the Great Depression of 1929 was the main cause of bringing about this radical change. In this period the leftist and progressive writers, with a keen awareness of the atrocities, exploited the stage as a pulpit from which they exposed these problems and demanded civil rights. The radical concepts projected on the stage had a magical effect on the audience.

The theatrical activity of the decade was divided between the leftist and the rightist trends. T.S. Eliot, standing for the rightists; and Auden and Isherwood representing the leftists. The new political trend also appeared to be a hopeful signboard for the revival of poetic drama.

A few other poets and writers also contributed to the poetic stage of the thirties. Stephen Spender, the poet, made one contribution, Trial of a Judge (1938), depicting a "totalitarian regime", where a clash between "right and left" takes place. Dorothy Sayers, a fiction writer, wrote three

Although these poet-dramatists wrote a few relatively successful plays, they lacked the theatrical talents of Auden and Isherwood.

Auden, the poet, and Isherwood, the detective story writer, composed a series of poetic plays. But it was Auden who composed the songs and ballads in chanting couplets. In the introduction to his anthology, he writes that poetry written for performance is to be spoken or sung before an audience. For instance, in *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, the chorus comments in melancholic tone on the inhuman condition of the poor living in slums whereas the rich find no satisfaction for their lack of spiritual life. "He tosses at night who at noonday found no truth."

Auden's leftist trend is clearly shown in his plays, *Paid On Both Sides* (1932), and *Dance of Death* (1933). Both are satirical plays projecting capitalism and its exploitation of mankind. As A.S. Collins points out:

Auden's *Dance of Death* was gloomy in its theme of the death-will in modern civilization, for which Marxism was the cure.
As for Isherwood, some critics believe that he is more capable of manifesting the dramatic techniques than his colleague. "Isherwood", said Clerk and Freedley, had a sounder knowledge of the theatre than did Auden. His construction together with Auden's undoubted poetic merits produced three plays of considerable importance.90

They are *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1934), *The Ascent of F6* (1936); and *On the Frontier* (1937). In the first play the disappearance of the hero represents a search for a better society where justice and equality prevail. *The Ascent of F6* condemns imperialism of the capitalist countries.

*On the Frontier* is a political satire with a symbolic room located between two countries with different systems, waging war against each other. The play also reflects the antipathy to war in the recitation of the soldiers:

> We're sick of the noise of shot and shell  
> And the whole bloody war can go to hell.

Summing up, the collaboration of Auden and Isherwood produced successful plays including songs, ballads, music, colourful action projecting the concept of Marxism and indictment of imperialism. This colourful amalgam of brilliant ideas exposing colonialism and exploitation of the weaker nations naturally had an appeal for the audiences who were struggling for justice and the
rights of humanity. R. Williams claims that their political conflicts were appreciated by the audience of the thirties; but these ideas are now blunt in their satire and sarcasm of modern times. But it cannot be denied that in other contexts and other lands, they still have the validity and poignancy which they once had for their English audience.

As a conclusion to the advent of verse drama, it can be said that while the Romantic and the Victorian poet-dramatists wrote their poetic plays which were unsuitable for the stage, the verse-dramatists of the early twentieth century — Yeats, Phillips, Abercrombie, Masefield, and Bottomley tried to imitate the blank verse and other techniques of the Elizabethans, and achieved considerable success.

Yeats's use of exotic techniques of the Japanese No plays, mingled with philosophical elements, music and myths expressed in colourful language were his genuine contributions to the English poetic drama.

Phillips's vital verse drama of the seventeenth century manner clothed in figurative language and containing rhetorical speeches appealed to the modern audience.

Despite the shortcomings of the classical style of his verse drama, Abercrombie did not fail completely; but as Nicoll points out he was a poet and lecturer on the drama rather than a skilful playwright.
Though Bottomley exploited mythical and Shakespearean episodes and oriental techniques in Yeatsian manner, he could not stand long, for he did not appeal to the contemporary audiences.

Masefield, the poet-laureate, was a skilful dramatist, especially in the field of religious plays that arrested the attention of the modern playgoers; but he tried unsuccessfully to revitalize verse drama, which, according to him, was in a state of decay since the death of Shakespeare.

Later poet-dramatists Eliot, Auden and Isherwood, and Fry have greatly enriched the poetic drama of today. Eliot's historical, psychological and spiritual poetic plays created a vogue which has been a subject for analytical studies by critics. He explored great potentialities of verse drama, and was greatly instrumental in its revival.

The leftist attitude of Auden and Isherwood reflected in their verse dramas offered a contrast to Eliot's rightist tendency. The collaboration of Auden and Isherwood resulted in a series of plays which illustrated the tenets of Marxism against the Fascist ideology and the exploitation of mankind.

In short, all these poet-dramatists in their respective ways exhibited great possibilities of verse drama adapted to demands and tastes of the modern playgoer, and thus, laid a sound foundation for poetic drama in the twentieth century.
NOTES


See the details of the legend in Lady Wilde's *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland*, Dublin, 1887, p. 122.


See the other sources Yeats adopted for his play in Harold Bloom. *Yeats*, Oxford University Press, London, 1972, p. 158.


See Yeats's letter to Mrs. Dorothea telling her the background of the play, in W.B. Yeats, *Letters to the New Ireland*, p.172.


50 Ibid., p. 29.


56 The quotation is not included in a letter of 1939 written by Eliot to E.M. Browne, as Mr. A. Hinchliffe said in his book, Modern Verse Drama, Methuen, London, 1977, p. 45. But the piece of verse was said by Agatha to Harry in Family Reunion, Faber and Faber, London, 1960, p. 104.


60 T.S. Eliot. The Family Reunion, p. 128.


74 Eliot. *The Confidential Clerk*, p. 49.


87 *B.B.C. Magazine*, September 1960, p. 16.

