

T. S. ELIOT'S *THE ELDER STATESMAN* AS A REALISTIC PLAY

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The play, *The Elder Statesman* (1958) is simpler in conception and more human in treatment. It was written after Eliot's second marriage and is rightly dedicated to his new wife, who gave him the taste of real love, and of the blessings that love is in life of a man, especially of a man who was doomed to a sterile married life through his most strenuous years. The dedication is replete with tender sentiment and throws an interesting light on the role of love as a regenerating power in the play. Another element which is prevalent in the play is the theme of a life of 'make believe' or of pretences from which one must emerge into that of reality in order to peace one's relationship with others on the sound foundation of true understanding. In this way, *The Elder Statesman* is the realistic play.

With the exception of the Murder in the Cathedral, the humanizing of Eliot's drama began with a gesture in *The Family Reunion*, Downing, the faithful servant the ordinary man, is able to see the benevolence of the Eumenides long before Harry. In *The Cocktail Party*

Celia's history is not central to the play, which is much more concerned with the adaptation of the mediocre Edward and Lavinia to the problems of life. *The Confidential Clerk* goes a stage further, and is concerned with problems of self deceit and illusion, with understanding and love, much more than spiritual heroism. *The Elder Statesman* is the conclusion of the proceeding to an extraordinary spiritual destiny, the end of the play is quiet and peaceful atonement for a life or error. It is a drama of confession and absolution in extremis, of love through human understanding rather than love through self-destruction, at the last Eliot gives human love its proper place in the scheme of things without any undue fuss or strain and a reconciliation of the poet with present, about the life led in pretence and in the make believe world.

The Elder Statesman is a play that centres on Lord Claverton who held an important position in public life and now his job, and never cared for his inner life. Now he is confronted with his inner hollowness which till now he somehow managed with to suppress. He is honest enough to reveal his feelings of emptiness to Monica, his daughter. Lord Claverton's deeply poignant confession of the emptiness that grip his mind so relentlessly at once reminds us of a passage from *East Coker* which describes memorably the inner hollowness of those busy and prestigious professionals. Lord Claverton also lived like these people when he was active in public life. He always lived with an illusion that he was an epitome of success which was his biggest folly. True, Lord Claverton led a life with vanities, being oblivious of the profound fact that he was losing the real and enduring things of life.

This is the face of modern life. People are leading a life of pretensions and they get so engrossed in the make believe world that they forgot their true self. And when the past starts its counting on the present, it leaves a shattered present. Then it becomes very difficult to come to terms with the life it is faced by Lord Claverton. The words by Gomez rightly summarises the face for the modern man.

The play begins with a love duet between Monica and Charles. The conversation between the lovers seems to introduce the play's more serious dilemma of love, the relationship between Monica and her father. At first the young lovers discuss their love lightly but the discussion suddenly takes on a serious tone as Monica first recognizes and acknowledges her love for Charles. The awareness of love, newly discovered, electrifies Monica's senses. As a vine, love slowly and quietly began to intervene itself into Monica's emotional life, till she became conscious of its pervading presence. Charles is fully aware of love's alchemy, of the power of love to transform the human personality.

The lovers have an inner life a private world of their own which provides a shelter to them from the tension of the public world. And yet they come into the public world. Monica rightly says after Lambert has brought tea that they are going to have with Lord. These young people know how to divide their public and private life. Charles and Monica express their love for each other, but Monica is vacillating to marry him immediately for three reasons: First, in that case, her father, Lord Claverton, will feel lonely; secondly, "it's Lord Claverton's fear of being exposed to strangers", and thirdly, her father is much ill. But Charles cannot understand why Lord Claverton should be afraid of strangers.

Lord Claverton is afraid; his private self may be exposed to strangers. The people so long have seen him only in his garb of authority; they never seen him without this garb his real self. Lord Claverton is apprehensive what the people will think of him if he appears before them without his former garb of authority. He, being shorn of all his former plumes, is now also envious of the buoyant younger generation. No, says Monica, not only Lord Claverton, but everybody is envious. Lord Claverton who is now whiling away time by fingering the pages of his old "engagement book" has still a reserve of some energy, but he has nothing to do. What a pitiful thing for him! Monica reminds him that doctor has advised

him to take rest, but LordClaverton finds no meaning in a listless life, in a life of all vacuum. Monica asks him to take life easily, but he cannot do it.

Monica deprecates his gloomy mood and reminds him of the fact that he retired in a blaze of glory and was gratified with the tribute paid to him by the press, part of which is repeated by Charles. But LordClaverton brushes it aside ‘an established liturgy of the press on any conspicuous retirement. The fact of the matter, however is that his successors in office are secretly delighted. They won’t want any ghost of his walking in the city ore sitting in the lords. The hollowness inside a Modern man is largely visible. Lord Claverton has always led a conspicuous life, because he has also bogged down by the past which he has always tried to escape and tried live the life in pretence.

In fact, the role of the politician as a public figure, cut out, like an actor, to play an authoritative part, is radically different from the role of the same individual as the private man. And it is part of Monica’s responsibility to shield him from strangers during his retirement. His malady is much more serious than what appears on the surface. As Carol Smith states, “Monica’sdiagnosis is of course a description of man’s universal dilemma: Man, because he continually faces the possibility of imminent death, yet at the same time he fears ‘encountering’ other people without his customary roles and masks, thereby cutting himself off from the affirmative way, one valid path to eternal life”. (Carol Smith’s T.S.Eliot’s Dramatic Theory and Practice)

Monica likens the body to a machine. Lord Claverton is fully convinced that the source of his power has dried up. This helps us gain an insight into the character of Lord Claverton and also into the central situation of the play. His self analysis produces the impression of an extreme sense of boredom from which he suffers. He has an acute sense of loneliness.

Symbols used in the play strengthen the realistic dimension of the play. Lord Claverton has communicated the immense sense of void and panic in his life, before death, through the symbol of train and the deserted railway station. In *The Elder Statesman*, Lord Claverton employs the train imagery in objectifying his Malady which is that of a materialist who fears the vacuum in his life. Eliot used the extended simile of the passing of a tube train to convey the sense of the deepening of mental emptiness or intellectual vacancy. Lord Claverton himself comments on his own predicament reflecting his harrow of loneliness “what I am waiting for in a cold and empty room before an empty gate”/ for no one. For nothing”.(Ibid, p.530)

The image of the cold and empty room reflects the speaker’s despair, misery and confusion. Lord Claverton’s cure begins with his recognition of the meaninglessness of his public triumphs. Lord Claverton himself is a ghost of his former self and is played by two ghosts of his past. He is frightened by his visions. The old man has now been frightened with his public life, but life has not quite finished with him. Behind the person he has build up, as a top person, and on which alone he has lived for these many years, looms the private man, the real man, from whom all this time he has been running away and whom in the last days he still has to face.

Lord Claverton is brought face to face with his real self by the eruption of two revenants from the days before he became a public figure. He is visited by the ghosts of his past in the persons of Fred Culverwel and Maisie Mantjoynow Gomez and Mrs. Carghill. There is a kind of back unfolding, leading to a hideous reminder of a past which is humiliating and painful to Claverton.

Fred Culverwel has changed his name to Fredirico Gomez Lord Claverton also has changed his name at least twice Gomez tells Lord Calverton.Like Lord Claverton, Gomez is a

widower. Gomez is a highly respected person in San Marco in a Central American republic. Both Claverton and Gomez are around sixty. Gomez is coming home to England after thirty years, because he had been feeling home sick. Once he did brisk illegal business in America under the name Fredirico Gomez and underwent jail terms in England. He has amassed a great wealth by illegal means and now is an influential person in San Marco. Gomez tells Lord Claverton that though both of them have changed names as he rose higher and higher up the social ladder, but Gomez changed his name to evade legal implications. Lord Claverton changed his names, but remained quite the same person, but Gomez changed his name and became an altogether different person.

Gomez is now feeling extremely lonely, because he is feeling separated from his relations, and much more importantly, from his own self, as, he thinks, he has lost his selfhood in the course of his changing names and adopting different vocations, which earning cheap money and evading legal measures. He thinks that for his misdeeds none of his relations would like to have him amongst themselves. Lord Claverton is also feeling lonely because he has now no official authority. But, when Lord says that he is lonely, Gomez tells him that his (Gomez's) loneliness is far more unbearable than Lord Claverton's.

Lord Claverton and Gomez were once friends at the Oxford University, when taught Gomez "expensive tastes". After that, Gomez had been a mere school teacher somewhere in the midlands, under the name of Fred Culverwel, before becoming a rich man with the advice of Lord. Now, it is Gomez's turn. He is now very affluent and can spend much for Lord Claverton. While at Oxford, both committed an act of criminality. They took two girls for enjoyment, drove fast, and killed an old man by running the car against him. After thirty five years, they recall all these things and feel the changes wrought by time. They both now feel lonely and, perhaps tired, though they took to different courses of life from time to time. And now they want to make friends again of each other.

His peerage is a symbol of his acceptance of outward show instead of inner truth. His Change of name is prompted by Selfish considerations. He has adopted the strategy of changing names to promote his ambition to rise higher and higher in the social ladder. He has also corrupted his friends Gomez and Mrs. Carghill. So he has made a new life in another country and has taken another name, though change of name being the outward symbol of an attempt to create a new self. But this new self of Gomez is not real because it has no connection with his earlier self. It is built on no foundation. Hence, "to become a real person again he (Gomez) needs to establish contact with someone who can serve as a link between the two selves".

In a Hamlet like soliloquy, he speaks of the savagely unforgiving judge within him and of the enacting nature of the inner self which sits as a judge over one's own action. Lord Claverton tells his daughter that he has felt the same sense of well being which is often with us in youth, though we do not notice it, and its euphoria, by the time one, has grown to consciousness of it, comes less often. He confesses to his daughter that he has never enjoyed living with all his power and pelf.

The second ghost of his shady past appears in the person of Mrs. Carghill. This second tormentor is a rich lady, whom long seduced and paid off in order to avoid a breach of promise. Lord Claverton recognizes in the stranger Miss Maisie Montjay the once beautiful actress and a youthful flame of his at Oxford where has sowing his wild oats she reminds him old story, how she loved him passionately despite the warning of her female friends against him ; how he brought her to compromising position and then deserted her, and how she had to go to the court for remedy but in the end agreed to the terms of compromise because she did not want to ruin the career which eventually made him Lord Claverton . He may have forgotten her, but she still remembers him, for she is a woman.

She has been cheated by him. She accuses him of posing in one role or another, as a lover or as a friend, without any genuine concerns for others. When LordClaverton is informed by Monica that Michael is getting into trouble, he immediately reminded of his own misdeeds. In Michael he finds a ghost of his former self. The two harpies from the past. Gomez – Culverwell and Maisie – Mrs Carghill force upon an examination of his life, particularly with regard to his responsibility for his son, who is weak and feckless. Both of LordClaverton’s ghosts have perverted the saving power of love into the destructiveness of hate. Together they choose to enact their revenge upon him through his son Michael. LordClaverton wonders whether Michael is going to throw his inheritance away.

Michael is determined to flee England, but why he does not know. LordClaverton surmises that Michael wants to flee England to escape from his past, and so tells him that no one can actually escape from his past. Monica asks her father to leave the company of such people as Mrs. Carghill to whom LordClaverton was once attracted, and Gomez who once had been his friend: “I want you to escape from them”. LordClaverton tells her that he actually wants to escape from his past, he is tired of the make believe life, but he cannot, and so he feels like a coward and asked him not to escape, he himself is a coward and wants to escape his past.

All the father’s follies, the youthful charm and also his sense of irresponsibility are projected on to him. LordClaverton unconsciously recognizes that fact. He is always concerned that Michael run over some or become involved with the wrong type of girls. Michael, the son gone bad, is a creation of LordClaverton, an extension of his own fears, almost embarrassingly explicit in the scene which he wants to know if Michael is in trouble with a girl or has run over someone on the road (as he had done years before with Fred Culverwell) Michael comments ironically.

He is rebellious. He wants to renounce his father's title and name and start all over again as someone else. His comments are very bitter in exposing his father's life of pretences. Michael finds his inheritance a burden. Sick of living in his father's shadow, he intends to go abroad where he can be somebody on his account. For him as for his father, this would symbolize an attempt to cut a drift from the former self, to escape, in effect from one's essential identity. LordClaverton warns his son that his desire to escape will make him fugitive from reality.

The problem of communication between individuals is a major concern of the play and Monica finds out a way out of the difficulties of communication through the most significant of human emotions – love. LordClaverton is reminded of his earlier failure. He has a bitter realization of what he has done to his son. Seeing the re-enactment of his own false course in the actions of his son. He is aware of his own responsibility for his son's nature and his deeds. Now he himself needs to face the past.

He learns the lessons of his past. He passionately wishes to re-educate himself if it is not too late for him. Life will be the school master for the father and so both. Now he is ready to confess his guilt's and explains the nature of his guilty secrets. These are the events in one's private life, which one tries to conceal from public life. He is relieved to find that Charles has nothing to hide from Monica or from the world. Hence, Charles's "soul is safe" and he is not plagued by ghosts from the past. He has learnt an important lesson from his experience.

Now he understands the sovereign power of love to cure his spiritual wounds. His world has been loveless and barren. He is grieved to find himself as an actor playing many roles. As D.W. Harding remarks, the denied parts of himself are symbolized by Gomez and Mrs. Carghill, who demand to be taken up again as part of his life. They demand it with

menaces, the insistent pressure of hidden features of him being represented by their blackmail (Harding, D.W. Experience into words London p..

In this respect, Gomez and Mrs. Carghill are the Tempters in the Murder in the Cathedral who bring Becket glimpses of his past phases and his present potentialities. The Tempters have something of the same tone, sinister in its assumed geniality, and something of same perkiness of rhythm in their speech, as Gomez and Mrs. Carghill. LordClaverton acknowledges his failures and makes contact with reality again to revive his real self: "I see myself emerging /from my spectral existence into something like reality" (T.S.Eliot Complete Poems and Plays.p.569)

Humanity is sick with original sin. The sickness "must grow worse" before it can be cured. Complete healing demands intensity of purgatorial suffering. LordClaverton affirms "The place and time of liberation/Are, I think, determined" He is hopeful of attaining his glorious spiritual destiny. After confessing all his past sins to Monica and Charles, he feels at peace" "This may surprise you: I feel at peace now. It is the peace that ensues upon contrition/ when contrition ensues upon knowledge of truth" (Ibid, p.573).

The play is in one sense Eliot's most personal play, in another sense his most impersonal. Here it appears that the life of the poet in his old age has been transfused to a certain extent, in LordClaverton's meditations on old age and the experience of his new found happiness in his second marriage is reflected in the experience of young lovers. Eliot himself confessed in an interview with Henry. He said that before his marriage he was getting older. Now he feels younger at seventy than he did at sixty.

The Elder Statesman is the history of the hollowness and that of pretence in the life of LordClaverton about whom Peter Milward says "He is a man who is always playing a part in the eyes of the world, posing as someone he really is not, while all the time he is as it were

locked out of his inner, private self, and in consequence, when he is left alone, he has nothing to contemplate within himself” (Sheila Sullivan. Critics on T.S. Eliot, 1990.)LordClaverton, is a veritable pretends as any common in the society. He always lived in a make believe world.

The theme of a life of “make believe” or pretences from which one must emerge into that of reality in order to place one’s relationship with others on the sound foundation of true understanding is the story of *The Elder Statesman*. This is the most realistic of all the plays of T.S. Eliot.

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