

Tribhuvan University

Irony in T.S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English

By

Sushma Adhikari

Dillibazar Kanya Multiple Campus

Dillibazar, Kathmandu

January 2014

Tribhuvan University  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Dillibazar Kanya Multiple Campus  
Department of English

**Letter of Approval**

The thesis entitled "Irony in T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*" by Sushma Adhikari has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_

.....

Prakash Subedi

Internal Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

.....

External Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

.....

Saroj Ghimire

Director, M.A. English Program

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my heartiest gratitude and sincere thanks to my supervisor, Mr. Prakash Subedi for the existence of my present thesis. It is his scholarly guidance and valuable suggestions that have made this project a reality. I am deeply indebted to him. Any attempt to express my gratitude to him in words is bound to be inadequate. I am also obliged to the Head of Department Saroj Ghimire for the approval of this thesis in its present form.

My special gratitude goes to my respected teachers of the department, my friend Nisha Timilsina and my family, specially my husband Ashok Sharma Paudyal and brother Santa Bikram Adhikari for their continuous support and encouragement who help me in the collection of necessary materials from which my dream to be a research student would have remain unrealized. Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere to my beloved parents who had inspired me during the entire period of my study.

Finally, I am indebted to my husband Mr. Ashok Sharma Paudyal for typing and other technical supports.

Sushma Adhikari

January, 2014.

## **Abstract**

On the surface T.S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion* looks like an ancient Greek drama; there is a story of a disintegrated family which is going to be reunited after many years. But close analysis of the play reveals that, by using the mode of irony, Eliot has aimed to portray the life and life style of the modern wastelanders of the twentieth century living between two destroying World Wars. Most of the characters of the play symbolized modern wastelanders and by presenting such characters and plot by the means of irony, Eliot has attempted to show the situation of modern life and society: spiritual barrenness and disintegrated family value among modern wastelanders.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

I: T. S. Eliot's <i>The Family Reunion</i> : A Modern Man's Tale	1 - 10
II: Irony in <i>The Family Reunion</i>	11 - 31
III: Eliot's Writing on the Modern Man's Dilemma	32 - 34
Works Cited	35-36

## **I. T. S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion*; A Modern Mans Tale**

This project highlights Thomas Stearns Eliot's *The Family Reunion* (1939), a story about family reunion planned by Amy, Dowager lady Monchensey, on the special occasion of her birthday but at the same time her inner effort is to establish her elder son Harry in her place as master of Wishwood and head of the family also. But most of the family members fail to understand his feelings. Finally, unlike his mother's wish, Harry leaves Wishwood at the cost of his mother's life.

Here, Eliot through ironic representation attempts to present modern life and society and focus on breakup of the old authoritarian patterns in family relationship and also tries to show the roles of sex which seems to be in disorder as well as the old and young has resulted in a re-orientation of parent child relations in that period. It incorporates elements from Greek drama and mid-twentieth century detective plays to portray the hero's journey from guilt to redemption.

The very title of the play *The Family Reunion* is also highly ironic, by looking at the title; one may easily guess the play is all about re-unification of a disintegrated modern family (life) but our expectation turns quite opposite. It's Amy's birthday. Her three spinster sister ivy, violet and Agatha, and the brother of her deceased husband, Gerald and Charles, have also been gathered and Amy's three sons, Harry, Arthur and John are expected to be there in due time.

Most of the gathered family members are waiting for Amy's three sons but they are not in time and finally only Harry joins the celebration. Later on it is heard that other sons met an accident on the way to Wishwood. So none of the family members get united

at the party at last. Her eldest son, Harry, wants to live in Wishwood. Actually, eight years ago, not at accepting the marriage planned by Amy he has left the wish wood, marrying a girl he wished. After the mysterious death of his wife, haunting by the sense of guilt, he comes at Wishwood. It seems the sense of spiritual awareness has begun to make some space in his mind though we cannot fully depend upon that. Most of the gathered family members have been slathered there; it seems only for the sake of Amy not really they wish to be there.

An Anglo-American poet, critics, dramatist and editor, T. S. Eliot was born in Sep.1888 as the seventh and youngest child of Henry Ware Eliot and Charlotte Chauncey Sterns Eliot in St.Louise, Missouri. He was an American by birth and an Englishman by descent, and subsequently he settled down in England, becoming a naturalized English citizen.

Eliot's poems and plays interpret modern society as being in the infertile part of cycle. Some significant poems *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Man*, *Ash Wednesday*, *Four Quartets*, and *A Cooking Egg* etc reveal deepening of poet's distress at the corruption and decay of contemporary European civilization. His last major poetic sequence, *Four Quartets* (1943) which was written in four sections from 1935-1942 and which believe to be his finest achievement, is religious in a very broad sense. After long contribution in poetry, Eliot is today recognized as a great dramatic genius as well. He is a poet turned dramatist. His plays are modern and convey the sense of the dilemma of the modern man without moral values. He used the drama as an instrument of socio-religious communication. He has brought back the poetic drama to in English literature.

*Murder in the Cathedral* brought him much fame and it is considered being his best play though Eliot himself thought it had only a "negative value" and was a "dead end". The great success of *Murder in the Cathedral* induced him to write another play '*The Family Reunion*' with contemporary language and contemporary setting. *The Confidential Clerk*, published in 1953, is another pessimistic play. It deals with choice of one's career. This is the most autobiographical of Eliot's plays. *The Elder Statesman* describes a statesman in his retired life. In his poetry and plays, by the use of irony he attempts to make the modern people realize the rottenness, corruption, immorality of contemporary society, lack of family value, lack of spiritual value and faith. Not only irony alone, symbols and images are also found in his works.

F.O. Matthiessen, in his book *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot*, has said, "T.S. Eliot has been described as the first one holding the key of modern poetry and drama in his open hand and then unlocking its door" (27). He means to say that Eliot is the one who has firstly established himself as a poet and later on dramatist with the ability of a successful writer who reflects the modern contemporary society and human life in a real picture.

Furthermore, many critics believe that Eliot, the ironist is to be first recognized than Eliot, the playwright. On the model of subtle meditation on the nature of time and its relation to eternity he wrote three poems *East Coker* (1940), *The Dry Salvages* (1941), and *Little Gidding* (1942) into which he integrated his experience in world war II as a watchman checking for fires during bombing raids. This work led Eliot to the Nobel Prize for literature in 1948.



This play *The Family Reunion* is divided in two parts, each divided in three scenes. The first part takes place in the drawing room, after tea, an afternoon in late March. The first scene is used as an introduction of the persons Amy, Ivy, Violet, Agatha, Gerald, Charles, Mary and Denman. They are talking about tonight, when a dinner is being held with the entire family. They are also talking about Harry, whom they haven't seen for eight years.

Before those years, something terrible had happened to Harry's wife and he thinks he is to blame. His wife was swept off the deck of a boat. Because Harry thinks he has thrown her overboard, his family thinks he is not sane. But now, eight years later, Harry is the only one who acts sane about it, his aunts Ivy, Violet and Agatha are the ones who are making a fuss out of it and that upsets Harry. When the others notice Harry sees 'persons' that they don't see, they really begin to think Harry's gone crazy. It appears that these ghosts are from his deceased wife, and he is haunted by them, at least he thinks he is. Scene two describes a conversation between Harry and Mary, they talk about their youth and Harry sees the ghosts again. Mary doesn't see them and she feels sorry for him. Scene three tells that everyone is preparing for dinner and that the guests are worried about John and Arthur, who haven't arrived yet. Part two takes place in the library, after dinner.

In scene I, Dr. Warburton has a conversation with Harry, at advice of Harry's uncle and aunt. It's about Harry's mother, Warburton explains that Harry's mother gets her strength to live from her determination of keeping the family together, and that she is very feeble at the moment. Then Sergeant Winchell appears with the message that John

has had an accident, but that it is nothing serious, just a concussion. Later on, it appears that Arthur has also had an accident.

In scene II, Harry asks Agatha for the truth behind his parents and she is strong enough to tell him. She tells Harry that his father was going to kill his mother while she was pregnant of him. Agatha stopped Harry's father just in time. When she has finished telling she sighs with relief and says that Harry is now the one who has to carry the burden. Scene III describes an argument between Amy and Agatha, Amy is very angry with Agatha for taking away her son, saying she first took her husband and now her son. Agatha explains that it was inevitable and that they have to start their lives over again and leave the past behind them. Harry realizes he has to follow the ghosts and that they will lead him.

I think Amy dies at the end because she can take no more. That is when Ivy says: "I shall have to stay till after the funeral: will my ticket to London still be valid?" The play ends with Agatha, saying that the knot is unknotted, the cross is uncrossed and the crooked is made straight as a conclusion of what she said before.

*The Family Reunion* deals with habit and "the suffering of being", it also conveys the pointlessness of existence. From the time of its first publication, numbers of critics have commented on it from different perspectives. Commenting on the play, the critic, D.E. Johns tried to link it with the theme of Christianity where the intention is as evil as the deed. Neither Harry nor his father actually kills their wives but they go for salvation because they have that sort of intention. For him, "there is no actual murder, it would seem, in Harry's case; there was certainly no murder in his father's case, although there

was a plan. In both cases, however, the sinful wish has been felt, and in the Christian view the intention is as evil as the deed"(91). D.E. Johns here says that: although they are not the murderer but still they feel they are the cause of their wives death and goes for salvation so without any guilt they punished themselves for whole life. Thus, according to the Christianity both of their thought seems to be evil rather than their works.

Carol H. smith too, interprets the play with religious theme. He thinks human love is not totally denied here rather "It is accepted only in so far as it provides a means to achieving reunion with god "(96). Critic Nevil coghill comments, "there is a purposeless torpor in the world of wishwood. Its life – if it can be called –has no meaning beyond itself; it lives on in order to live on, under the simple and indomitable will of Amy"(29). Here too, Nevil Coghill says that in Wishwood there is meaningless life of people as people of there are hopeless, aimless and also lack of humanity and social life is seen over there. Only showing habits are seen among people which refers the lack of sincerity among each other.

Commenting on the play, reviewer Roger Kojecky comments, "Like the Eumenides of *The Family Reunion* and the more tangible ghosts from the past in *The Elder statesman*', they have an important role in showing how the central character's consciousness is modified by his past"(106). Here, kojecky views that the central character, Harry's consciousness is modified by his past especially the thinking of pushing his wife into the sea. B. N. Chaturvedi, interprets the play in terms of its technique, especially Eliot's focuses upon verse to suit the contemporary theme. He says, "Eliot's main concern in the family reunion was the development of a dramatic verse that would suit a contemporary theme but would still be capable of poetic intensity" (76).

Furthermore, critic Helen Gardner observes it as a continuation of his subject matter. He says that as *Ash Wednesday* presents the idea presented in the waste land, *T* continuation of his subject matter. *The Family Reunion* also attempts to present the idea talk in *Ash Wednesday*. He observes "the play attempts to present directly what *Ash Wednesday* took for granted. The discovery in experience of a meaning which re-integrates the whole personality, and changes the direction of the will " (140). A full-blown study of Eliot's tragic-comic vision in relation to his ironic technique remains in the periphery of the critical writing. Eliot has aimed to portrait the life and life style of the modern wastelanders of 20th century living between two devastating world wars. The study also aims to plug the critical gap by proposing to give comprehensive treatment to the theme of ironic reversal in the family re-union.

Upon observing the tendencies of the writer, I decided to do a study on Eliot's play *The Family Reunion* with the ironical perspective of irony. Among the characters, I took Harry as the major character because he is the centric as well as victim character of drama. Harry is caught on the wheel of fact entangled in the net of moira (fate). Harry is initially defined more than both a tragic and romantic figure as both a man more perceptive and intelligent than those around him, as one who experiences contemporaries. Moreover by adding yet another layer of literary allusion to Harry's characterization, Eliot makes his protagonist aware of himself as a player in a drama. He recreates in Harry the dilemma of Hamlet. Nature of Harry's character and experience which keeps us interested in the action of the play, he becomes more comprehensible and sympathetic character because he becomes the object of a ritual moreover the ritualization of his personal experience allows Eliot to unify the plays rather disparate aesthetic elements.

The term irony basically refers to an expression or utterance marked by a careful contrast between apparent and intended meaning. Irony is a contract between the statement of ' what is said ' and ' what actually it means'. The term 'irony' is derived from the Greek word 'eiron' which means a dissembler (false appearance) in speech. 'Ironia' is first record in Plato's *Republic*. A great number of authors and critics have been provoked, since it is used as one of literary devices. The term irony has been defined and re-defined from its original meaning till today, and according to its nature, irony is categorized differently. There are many kinds of ironies; among them the most important categories of irony the following three are prominent and easily distinguishable: verbal, dramatic and situational.

Verbal irony is a figure of speech in the form of an expression in which the use of words is the opposite of the thought in the speaker's mind, thus conveying a meaning that contradicts the literal definition. Verbal irony comes from the ostensible use of language intending a sharp contrast between the expressed meaning and the implied ironic meaning. Dramatic or situational irony is a literary or theatrical device of making a character utter word which the read or audience understands to have a different meaning, but of which the character himself is unaware. Dramatic irony appears whenever the audience sees a character confidently unaware of his ignorance. So, there can be no dramatic irony, unless the author and audience (reader) can somehow share knowledge which the characters do not hold. According to Soren, Kierkegaard, "Situational irony is not present in nature for one who is too nature and too native, but only exhibits itself for one who himself ironically developed " (271). A sense of irony involves not only the ability to see ironic contract but also the power to shape them in one's mind.

The term irony is used in a number of specialized senses also, qualifying it by certain objective or prepositional phrases. Thus we come across expressions such as cosmic irony, structural irony, and romantic irony and so on. Cosmic irony is also known as the irony of fate which works in which a character's fate seems perversely manipulated by forces beyond human control. Irony of fate is when a situation occurs which is quite the reverse of what one might have expected. Structural irony, though looks similar to verbal irony, is different than that. As verbal irony, it is also a widely used rhetorical weapon of enforcement but the basic distinction between verbal irony and structural irony is that structural irony depends on knowledge of the author's ironic intention, which is shared by the readers but is not intended by the fictional speaker whereas verbal irony depends on the knowledge of the fictional speaker's ironic intention, which is shared both by the speaker and the reader.

In a nutshell, the writer uses irony to say more in little. It makes the weaker argument stronger. But one should not have belief that it is always the reversal of what is said. Rather irony can be seen in mode of behavior, gesture and setting as well.

Using irony as a rhetorical tool I want to analyze this text with the theme of 'ironic reversal '. Besides that, I want to provide existential choice and disintegration of the family values and also foreground the moral aspect of modern life raising the issue of ontology. So in the first Part (introduction) of my thesis. I have introduced the text, in which I have shortly introduced the story of drama and its theme. Then after, I have given brief description of T.S Eliot with critical biography. Likewise, I then have mentioned the history of text i.e. summing up the three scenes of drama with literature review. After that, I move on point of departure that means, I write about what I have done actually and

the tool, I used in my thesis. Finally, I have described about the irony and its types in this first part.

I will to textual analysis in the second chapter and I will write the conclusion in the third chapter.

## II. Irony in *The Family Reunion*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the influential writer, critic and thinker of 20th century, T.S Eliot, in his play *The Family Reunion* has attempted to unearth the complacent modern life and society through ironic representation. It a play with the theme of contemporary life with characters of our own time. The play is very ironic from its very start to its end. The title *The Family Reunion* suggests that the play would depict the coming together of a family, the happy reunion of its members, after years of separation. But contrary to expectation, the play depicts the disintegration of a family, whose member's come together only to separate during the course of the same evening. Even those who are present are not emotionally united. If there is any 'union' at all, it's between Agatha and Harry, and it is this union which ironically enough leads to the disintegration of the family. Eliot's play *The Family Reunion* has got universal significance though his play deals with social life. He is able to convey the sense of the dilemma of the modern man without moral values. His historical sense makes him realize that any art including drama is social at its grass roots.

By using drama as an instrument of socio-religious communication Eliot's plays have restored the lost link between religions of drama. In fact, he has made the drama an integral part of the contemporary tradition art and literature. He believes that the literary symptoms of decline are the result of a deeper demoralization of the society. Hence he tries to re-create the drama to on hold moral and spiritual values.

"Alienation" is particularly relevant to an important problem in this drama. Spiritual barrenness, ironic existent, disintegrated family value among modern



wastelanders; Eliot has aimed to portray the life and life style of the modern wastelanders of the 20th century living give comprehensive treatment to the theme of ironic reversal in *The Family Reunion*.

'Irony' stands as the best medium for the success of the drama *The Family Reunion* by T. S. Eliot. There are various kinds of irony among them there are the major which are: Verbal, Dramatic, and Structural. Likewise, there are some other irony which are in practices such as, Cosmic and Romantic irony. Cosmic irony is also known as the irony of fate which works under the characters fate and which seems to be control by the forces beyond human power. In this a situation occurs which is quite opposite of what one have expected.

M. H. Abrams defines it as, "Cosmic irony or 'the irony of fate' is attributed to literary works in which a deity or else fate is represented as though deliberately manipulating events so as to lead the protagonist to false hopes, only to frustrate and mock them".(137)

From this we can be clearer from the text event as well. In *The Family Reunion* also the heroic character Harry falls under the net of moira. He rejects his mother's choice to marry and choose himself another. But later on his wife died with an accident from which his whole life was ruined. He psychologically blames himself and things as a murder of his own wife. Finally, he ran from his place or we can say that he ran from his reality life. Romantic irony occurs when speakers or writers mocks on their own seriousness. In this way, there are several uses of irony in the whole dram.

Eliot's poetry and plays are defective as a criticism of life because he is too deeply occupied with horror and boredom. But his greatness as a poet and a dramatist lies in his striving to grasp a metaphysical reality-to maintain a detachment resembling that of the mystic against the pressure of his own skepticism. Here, more completely than where else in his writing, the resolution of tension the experience of achieving detachment, takes place within the plays and poetry itself.

Moral values are devastated by the pursuit of happiness. In a society where people adhere to religious values, then conduct themselves responsibly toward each other since they go in fear of god. They never design to be dishonest or insincere, and certainly never push things to such extremes as to make life difficult for others. These values are shown from the point of ironic reversal by Eliot. Raymong M. Olderman, in his book *Beyond the Wasteland. New Haven and London*, writes modern people:

Are characterized by enervating and neurotic pettiness, physical and spiritual sterility and debilitation, an inability to love, yearling and fear-ridden desires. They are sexually inadequate, divided by guilt, alienated, aimless bored and rootless; they long for escape and for death. They are immersed in mercantilism and materialism; their lives are vain, artificial and pointless. Close to being inert, they are helpless in the face of total disintegration of values. Life constantly leads to reduction of all human dignity; the wastelanders become idealess and hopeless as he falls prey to false prophets. (11-12)

This picture includes the characteristics of the modern world which have entered into our consciousness and manifested themselves in our daily thinking and discussion.

The wildness of modern people has been shown through the above extract. As modern people are mentally maladjusted that means they are not physically active. So, they are physically and spiritually barren and weak. There is lack of love among each other they are rather-selfish and involve in unlimited desires. They are feeling sexual in sufficient and involve in wild activities. People are aimless: bored as well as rootless. They want to escape from reality and practical life. Human life is being commercialized and materialistic. Their life is being artificial and aimless. There is no any destination in their works and future. There is lack of unity among people. Raymond M. Older man believes that wastelanders (Modern People) are idealess and hopeless. He too thinks that modern people are being indifferent due to the false knowledge of religion or guardians. They are unwilling to be creative, active, fertile and upright.

Thus we are introduced by the moral degeneration all around in the modern wasteland. The modern man is unhappy so long as he does not succeed in his attempt at reaching on organic wholeness of life. There is always mental and moral foremen in him (modern man), a tension between what he is and what he wishes to becomes, between the matter which offers the possibility of existence and the spirit which moulds it into significant being. Therefore, the present crisis in human situation is due to profound crisis in human consciousness, a lapse from the organic wholeness in life.

Modern people live on the surface and are afraid of thinking because it is all so confused and disordered; they suffer from conflicts. Through technology, men have

created the possibility for external happiness, but that is not enough. Millions of hearts are broken daily as man and women grope desperately for lasting inner joy. It should be observed, first of all, that the choice of total ends although total free is not necessarily or even frequently made in joy. In the dialogue of Mary, joy and pain is described as:

Pain is the opposite of joy

But joy is a kind of pain

I believe the moment of birth

Is when we have knowledge of death?

I believe the season of birth

Is the season of sacrifice? (109)

Here, she says pain and joys are similar as birth and sacrifice. We must not confuse our necessity of choosing with the will to power. The choice can be affected in resignation or uneasiness; it can be realized in bad faith. We can chose ourselves as feeling. We can even choose not to choose ourselves. In these various instances ends are posited beyond a factual situation, and the responsibility for these ends fall upon us. Whatever our being may be, it is a choice; and it depends on us to choose ourselves as 'great' or 'noble' or 'base' and 'humiliated'.

From the drama, same kinds of expression can be observed in which the lack of family values can also been seen when Amy dies in the very day, Ivy comments as:

I shall have to stay till after the funeral: will my ticket to London still be valid?

GERALD: I do not look forward with pleasure to dealing with Arthur and John in the morning.

VIOLET: We must wait for the will to be read. I shall send a wire I in the morning. (173)

Although, being sisters of Amy who have died in sudden but still they are worried about their journey or destination. Death of a sister becomes valueless for them. There is no any sympathy word towards their sister's death. So it refers to the characteristic of self-centeredness in modern people.

Similarly, in the drama after the return of Harry in Wishwood after eight years most of the family members believe that he is suffering from delusions, that is his mental disorder and in this context Gerald says: " God preserve us! I never thought it would be as bad as this". (85)

Here, Gerald being a family member she tries to dominate in Harry's problem. Instead of showing sympathy or understanding his real problem she simply laughs on it. These all shows the spiritual bareness among wastelanders.

But, unlike others, Charles understands it as the result of loneliness and difficulty in communication. It's the problem of modern wastelanders that you can't get even of good friend to shares feelings, pleasures and sufferings. As he says you may have lot of

friends but do not have a single one to shares your feelings as if ' water water everywhere not a single drop to drink.' In that case, Charles says:

Living with strangers and with no one to talk to.

I suspect it is simply that the wish to get rid of her

Makes him believe he did. He cannot trust his good fortune.

I believe that all he needs is someone to talk to,

To get it off his mind. I'll have a talk to him tomorrow. (86)

Actually, Charles is the only character who understands the real feeling of Harry. He realizes Harry's actual problem that is his loneliness. Living far from family and relatives there was no one to talk and share his feelings. Charles wants to spilt out the inner reality of Harry from which he want to go out of reality thinks that Harry need someone for his help as no one ask him about his problem. So he plan to talk with him and wants to free from mental tension since eight years ago.

Being unaware with the spiritual barrenness among themselves, they regard other spiritually aware people also as a mental disease and go for doctors. It also sounds ironical as how much conscious the modern people are.

Modern Wastelanders are existing for no reason. They have been suffering the state of 'aimlessness', 'hopelessness' and 'directionlessness'. To this ironic point, Paul Murray, in his book '*T.S. Eliot and Mysticism*', writes:

As we grow older

The world becomes stranger

The pattern more complicated of dead and living

Not the intense moment

Isolated a life time burning in every moment

And a life of man only. (113)

Man is the placed between two poles of time and eternity. Although man is being happy with the technology world but still there is a truth that he/she has to be old and die one day. Death is the ultimate reality. When people grow older day by day the world becomes Stanger to him. He fails to update himself with the current time so becomes behind of others. He will be physically as well as mentally weak. We all human beings are roaming in a valley of dying stars. Therefore we are the hollow men. A man become alone in his old time and suffers from 'aimlessness', 'hopeless' as well as 'directionlessness'. He neither has any aim in further days, nor any direction to go on. So he feels himself hopelessness and roam here and there waiting a death which is the ultimate reality.

Same sorts of expression can found in Amy's saying; "I always wanted too much for my Children. More than life can give. And now I am punished for it" (167).

Here, Amy seems to be very helpless as well as hopeless because her dream of re-establishing Harry in Wishwood went in vain when Harry suddenly leave the home without informing anyone. So, Amy is compelled to realize that she has done the wrong deeds in her life that she loves her children very much and now she is being punished.

From this act, Eliot wants to show the disintegrated family value in modern wasteland. But some critics have said that he simply leaves his home in order to get redemption. But there is no reliability upon the character like Harry.

Though he knows the fact that Amy is a heart disease and any wrong deed may harm her and can take her life. But intentionally neglecting the fact, he decides to leave. Again it is quite ironic that the person who has decided to leave these materials comfortably in order to get 'spirituality' needs cigarette-case. After some time of his hasty departure, Downing enters into the house to bring that cigarette-case. Downing says:

Oh, excuse me, Miss, excuse me, Mr. Charles:

His lord ship sends me back because he remembered

He thinks he left his cigarette-case on the table.

Oh, there it is. Thank you. Good night, Miss; good night,

Miss Mary; good night, Sir. (168)

Is it necessary to have cigarette-case to get spirituality? Or can we rely upon the character like Harry? He remembers to bring that left unnecessary thing at the cost of intentionally forgetting his mother's health. It all shows nothing but the rotten mind of modern of wastelanders who never tried to fulfill their duty and responsibility properly

Noticing the entire situation, Nevil Coghill has said we should as an image for the death-in-life. As he says:



Wishwood is another image for the death-in-life of western civilization

That we see also in the 'Bloomsbury' back ground of *prufrock*, the nameless

London sub-demi-monde back ground of *Sweeney* agonists, the

Cosmopolite back ground of *The Wasteland*. (185)

Here, Nevil Coghill has shown wish wood as an image for the death in life.

Although wishwood is a place where we can see the clear picture of wastelanders (modern people) where though the people are physically attached but emotionally detached with each other. There is a spiritual coldness, lack of faith and cold relationship among the family members.

The modern world is entirely desolate and the people are all spiritually dead and sterile. It is like a rocky barren land in which no tree can grow. Man is mortal, a mere handful of dust, and he lives in constant fear of death. The modern humanity lives entirely on the physical plane and his entirely forgetful of family values. People of the modern world have been degenerate; as a result, regeneration is not possible in the modern age. Modern people have been drowned in self-centered activities.

There was minimum of activities, and spiritually they were as dry and dead as dry tubers. The life of the contemporary world is life-in-death. It is a living death, for man has lost faith in family values, not only family values but all the moral codes of conducts. There is general decay and decomposition in all type of relationship. Love has degenerated into hate and disintegration. Family values have lost its proper function and

is no longer a support of life and vitality. Due to many more things, people are not giving there valuable time to their family. People have begun to forget the strong bond between family members. Because of their self-centeredness, they do not think it necessary to fulfill their duty and responsibilities responsibly.

Furthermore in the same sense, Nevil Coghill comments, "there is a purposeless torpor in the world of wishwood. Its life-has no meaning beyond itself; it lives on in order to live on, under the simple and indomitable will of Amy" (29).

As Amy's main aim of life was to re-establish Harry in wishwood for ever. So she planned her birthday party to reunited with her all sons and relatives and declare about her will of life. Here is a sort of saying of Amy before the arrival of Harry to Wishwood;

'Harry is to take command at Wishwood

And I hope we can contrive his future happiness

Do not discuss his absence. Please behave only

As if nothing had happened in the last eight years.'

From above saying we can also see the conflict between the world's irrationality and man's hopeless desire for unity throughout the drama. Amy wants to pretend as if nothing has been changed in these eight years so she tries to create the same environment for Harry so that he may forget his past events. As Amy again says; "Nothing is changed, Agatha, at Wishwood Everything is kept as it was when he left it" (73). It also suggests the lack of creativity among modern wastelanders. Though in vain she try to stop the time.

The life of modern wastelanders is a life without action, and his entire attempt to pass the time peter out. In our world today million of people have begun increasingly to feel that they do not act but are acted upon. The people today do not give up living even when their lives become pointless. Under these conditions in which we live most of us have subconsciously thought of hanging ourselves even though we may not confuse this thought. The mood of despair is not limited only to a small minority of people in the modern world; it is more or lesser general attitude. These types of *pointlessness* can be reflected in the dialogue of Harry:

The sudden solitude in a crowded desert

In a thick smoke, many creatures moving

Without direction, for no direction

Leads anywhere but round and round in that vapor

Without purpose, and without principle of conduct

In flickering intervals of light and darkness;

The partial anesthesia of suffering without feeling...

It was only the reversing the senseless direction

For a momentary rest on the burning wheel. (82-83)

Similar kind of expression is also expressed by Mary when she says: Waiting, waiting, always waiting / I think this house means to keep us waiting (100).

It clearly suggest that the world is "...a suffering flux"... the result of ratiocination....or rational argument, suffering is and inherent characteristic of nature both animate and inanimate. Eliot with his implicit ironic tool shows suffering as well as the desire of which is the cause of suffering is a cosmic trait of the total process of nature. It is the chief fact of materials existence and is a noble truth. Man is bound to the wheel of birth and date, but man can free himself from the wheel and thus find deliverance from suffering, and find freedom from desire and compulsive action and the peace which passes understanding. Man has to find of resting place in the midst of flux, peace in the midst of suffering and confusion.

The sincere reflection of reality is considered only one of the modes of representation of reality in modern art and literature. Modern drama and there study generally do not present any plain mirror-image of the world. Beside that the realization of crisis in the identity of human beings has largely been emphasized and intensified by the great existentialist thinker Jean Paul Sartre, Sartre said, "Man is condemned to be free...condemned because he has not create himself and is nevertheless free. Because having once been hurled into the world, his responsible for everything he does" (73).

The modern drama have ironically emphasized much on essential condition of modern man. And since these plays present the world in which we find, as we experience, human beings are struggling with the irrationality of experience.

Furthermore, the lack of responsibility and family value can easily be noticed as Amy says, "It will be the first time for eight years that we have all been together" (72).

Amy's three sons Harry Arthur and John are not in their home for long time. We are not even informed more about Arthur and John. But so far as Harry is concerned, he has left his home eight years ago, not accepting the marriage planned by Amy, marrying a girl to visit Europe. It is the crystal clear that she does not support their marriage and when she hears the death of her daughter in law, she comments it as 'god's blessing', we suggests deteriorating family values in the modern Westland.

Similarly, most of the modern people tend to be helpful and friendly but actually they are not. In Amy's home, Harry's uncles and aunts seem very helpful but Amy understands their hidden intention and ironically says, " You see your aunts and uncles are very helpful, Harry. I have always found them forthcoming with advice which I have never taken" (80). Self –centeredness is another characteristic of modern wastelanders. They are busy in their own business yet not avoid pretending to be helpful towards others.

Martin Browne, who directed the first production of *The Family Reunion* and reviewed several drafts of the play, indicates that Eliot conceived the pattern of the play before he developed the specific personalities that inhabit Wishwood, that he thought first of "family relationships and the irruption into them of the force represented by the Furies". I Browne's reproduction of Eliot's scenario does show that this "irruption" was to form the central action of the play; but the scenario also includes Eliot's central thematic concern-the notion of "purgation."

Eliot meant to introduce the notion of "purgation" that lies at the moral center of the play. Helen Gardner voices what is probably the most common criticism of Eliot's

treatment of Agatha when she notes that Agatha has very little "reality" of her own, that her character remains so mysterious throughout the play that she is ultimately inaccessible to us.

But to argue, as Gardner does, that Agatha is "featureless" because Eliot presents her, as he does Harry and Mary, in almost exclusively psychological or spiritual terms is to miss entirely Eliot's point in writing *The Family Reunion*. He wanted to show the soul in the process of liberating itself from the flesh that holds it. He needed to show us souls in motion in order to convince us that an escape could be effected from the mire of life at Wishwood. He needed, in short, just such a character as Agatha, one who had freed herself from the family curse.

Most of the character seems to be in the notion of purgation because all of them present themselves as honest and sincere to each other but in reality they are not. Harry leave his mother and her dreams alone which led her finally death. That indicates that he could not maintain the smoothness in his relationship with his mother and also with other family members so he ran away from reality. Likewise other characters are too in the notion of purgation as there is no one to feel sympathy for Amy in her death. All are busy on their own business.

The ritualistic final scene of *The Family Reunion*, which has been criticized as "an unintentional parody of liturgy rather than a reinvigoration from it," represents Eliot's successful integration of the play's aesthetic elements. From a purely dramatic point of view, the spectacle of blowing out Amy's birthday candles while announcing the end of the Monchensey curse is visually powerful: the mortal world ends in darkness before our

eyes, and we are left with Agatha's promise that this ritual foreshadows the success of the "pilgrimage of expiation" (293).

Critics who see *The Family Reunion* as Harry's story routinely consider most of the other characters (except for Agatha and, to a lesser extent, Mary) as dullards—foils to Harry and his higher consciousness—and assume that the author's sympathies are entirely with his protagonist; Grover Smith, for example, speaks of the uncritical tolerance the play accords this character in whom there is much to criticize (197). In the only book-length analysis of the play, however, Giles Evans makes a compelling case for seeing *The Family Reunion* as another kind of “poetic” drama in the tradition of Ibsen and Chekhov, both of whom Eliot acknowledged as influences. This approach takes account of Eliot's desire to move beyond the theatre of superficial realism while demonstrating that he was concerned not only with spiritual issues but with ordinary human life: “The experience at the centre of the play ceases to be Harry's inner illumination (so difficult in fact to dramatize) and is rather the human consequences on those who are not Harry. There is a tragedy for those who go on living” (23). Evans shows that each of the characters has a more complex inner life than is usually recognized; he also draws attention to the ways in which the dramatic situation undermines our acceptance of any one character's point of view as correct. This orchestration of conflicting centers of consciousness, like the overlapping circles of a Venn diagram, is one of the staples of good drama; it is also, as Eliot realized a technique which Henry James had perfected in fiction.

This becomes clearer if we look at one of the crucial speeches in the play—Mary’s analysis of Harry’s state of mind: Even if, as you say, Wishwood is a cheat, Your family a delusion—then it’s *all* a delusion, Everything you feel—I don’t mean what you think, But what you feel. You attach yourself to loathing as others do to loving: an infatuation’s David Moody says, “*The Family Reunion* is far and away the most interesting of Eliot’s plays” (172); it is also his most successful extended analysis of the human resistance to reality and of the ability of some individuals to grow and change. More importantly, for my purposes, the play illustrates Eliot’s preoccupation with “the road not taken.” In returning to his childhood home, Harry Monchensey is forced to confront the reality of his childhood and the genuine self he has evaded for decades.

As David Moody said that this drama *The Family Re-union* is most the interesting drama among others because it seems to be our own time that is current period. Human beings are being very self-fish and mind their own work rather involving in social activities. Love, care, respect and family relationship is in lack now days as same in the drama so the entire story of drama matches with present context. Most of the critics also believe that the life of Eliot matches to the major character 'Harry' as their childhood seems to be same.

For this, Ronald Bush, Another critic on *The Family Reunion* views that this drama is somehow interrelated with Eliot's one family life. As he observes:

Eliot, who was as snobbish as he was self conscious, and as fixate on his mother as he was eager to escape her, understood the character all to well. And when he under took to continue his 'Cyril' sequence in 1931,



the passing of his own mother (she had die in 1929) inevitably intruded. the result is of full-scale treatment of personal problems he had often rehearsed and to which he would soon give theatrical life in *The Family Reunion*. (155)

From the above we came to know that this drama symbolize this own life and problems. So it seems to be his own biography. Here the life of his mother is similar to the story of Harry's mother. Therefore, we can notice that he has presented his whole life events through the medium of literature and moralized himself. Hence, all the problems seen in the drama refers his own problem of real life.

Eliot accomplishes this by removing Harry from the stage as quickly as possible and shifting the audience's attention to the family, each member of which responds to Harry according to the degree of his or her spiritual sensitivity. Amy is a director of other people's lives, and she ignores Harry's consternation. Ivy, Violet, Gerald, and Charles are "afraid of all that has happened" and express four different ways to cope with that fear: Ivy "struggles" against it; Gerald fails to understand it; Violet is unnerved by attempts to explain it; Charles wants to "manage the situation" that it creates. Only Agatha and Mary try to understand the spiritual implications of Harry's speeches. They, as Agatha says, "Are only watchers and waiters".

Like Eliot's auditors, then, the family members fall into distinct strata of spiritual awareness. By placing directly onstage such a variety of personalities and such a range of reactions to Harry's words, Eliot actually dramatizes his audience's response to his poetic material even as the action unfolds.

Such a technique allows Eliot to direct audience response by degrees: we begin perhaps as baffled as Gerald, with some of Charles' desire to discover the facts of Harry's case, but we agree to watch and to wait with Agatha and Mary. And this reaction seems to be exactly what Eliot desired from theatre-goers and what he praised in Shakespeare:

For the simplest auditors there is the plot, for the more thoughtful the character and the conflict of character, or the more literary his words and phrasing, for the more musically sensitive the rhythm, and for the auditors of greater sensitiveness and understanding a meaning which reveals itself gradually. The sensitiveness of every auditor is acted upon by all these elements at once, though in different degrees of consciousness. At none of these levels is the auditor bothered by the presence of that which he does not understand, or by the presence of that in which he is not interested.

This last comment seems disingenuous on Eliot's part, for in *The Family Reunion* it is precisely the presence of something which we do not understand- the nature of Harry's character and experience-which keeps us interested in the action of the play. Eliot's brief introduction and subsequent removal of his hero allow his auditors to meet the man and then to reflect upon his Situation as they weigh the various responses given to Harry onstage.

Theoretically, the device is a simple one: what could be easier for a playwright than to juxtapose a superior individual and a dull crowd in order to create sympathy for the hero? Yet, admitting the variation in potential audience response that Eliot faced, how could this playwright bring each member of that audience to the point of understanding "a meaning which reveals itself gradually"? To raise the spiritual awareness of his

audience was Eliot's definition of the goal of the dramatist, of the successful "popular entertainer." Eliot avoids even the mention of the word, however, until halfway through both the scenario and the play; he withholds the announcement of his "meaning" until after he has traced his hero's situation for the audience, Eliot was obviously concerned with the order in which his audience discovers the events that shaped Harry's life. We hear first his confession to the murder of his wife. Then Mary and Agatha tell us that he avoided an arranged marriage with Mary and eventually eloped with a "weak" woman who "was frightened of the family" (245). Near the end of Part I, we discover that his childhood was "not happy"; his mother destroyed even the hollow tree which was his "only memory of freedom" (247-48).

These conversations reveal in reverse chronological order the events that shaped Harry's character. We first see how he behaves toward his family, and then we begin to understand the pattern of a life that produced this behavior. Actors and auditors alike Here they are much more worried by their own business not by the sudden death of Amy. Rather they always prefer for escaping from the problem. Their life has become meaningless that they even do not know what they are doing and why.

Furthermore, use of irony can also be seen in Eliot's technique as well. As a strong advocate of "Tradition and Individual Talent" he has also tried to bring chorus in modern stage as in Greek plays. But his chorus are different than the Greek one. In Greek plays, normally the chorus does not have active participation in the play rather they only comment on event but here the chorus is the same characters who have a significant role in the play. Here, Harry's uncles, Charles, Gerald, and his Aunts Ivy, and violet are the chorus. But unlike Greek chorus, they comment on the situation quite individually. But

one should understand that it is not only the interest of bringing Greek drama in modern stage but the distraction of contemporary drama. Obviously modern man's existence is terribly dreadful, society is non-existent; brotherhood is meaningless; and religion brings no fulfillment. The problem is fundamental as well as universal. The problem of man's relationship to both, time and eternity, within the context of fact of human bondage. Man simply happens to pass the time. He hopes for something new, though the hope is dispirited and lifeless. He simply waits. What it is he waits, he is not sure. He feels compelled to wait.

Finally, in *The Family Reunion* from Eliot's ironic craftsmanship he dramatizes the life of the modern people is life without action, and all their attempts to pass the time peter out. In our world today millions of people have begun increasingly to feel that they live in a world in which they do not act but are acted upon. If they act also they act for void or for the sterile relationship. The millions of people do not after all give up living even when their lives become pointless. Therefore modern world is swept away by barrenness which has neither dignity nor purpose and wretchedly inhabits a materialistic world that demands the individual and makes the mockery of the relational values of modern life and love can be nothing more than the selfish and miserable conquest.

The play ends with a blessing, a promise of redemption, not with a view of life at Wish wood. Eliot, in other words, moves our attention once again into the realm of the spiritual because he intends for us to see, as does Harry, the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life. Furthermore, Agatha's rune gives the play its structural symmetry; both acts close this way, and the last chant fulfills the hope expressed in the first.

### III. Eliot's Writing on the Modern Man's Dilemma

Eliot, in the play *The Family Reunion*, tries to show the real picture of human beings of 20th century where modern people seem to be unsocial and lacks the humanity, through the ironic tool. The text is based on moral fragmentation, degeneration and loss of values in the West. Amy, one of the major characters of this drama tries to reunite her family members with the plan of birthday celebration. Especially, she wants her son Harry to take the power in family and re-establish in Wishwood after eight years. But her wish remains unsuccessful when Harry leaves the house forever. This event ultimately led to the death of Amy. This drama is full of irony, First of all, the very title *The Family Reunion* refers to the togetherness of family members but in reality, it shows the disintegration of family members, that is the irony of drama. Similarly, there are several uses of irony in drama. Furthermore, in the conversation Agatha and Amy talk about the coldness and hope to return of summer. Here Agatha, Amy's sister is not simply answering the question of Amy rather her reply is quite ironic. She is not talking about the physical coldness felt by most of the family members but the spiritual coldness, lack of faith and the cold relationship as well. For her Wishwood is the place where though the people are physically attached but emotionally detached with each other. Likewise with the reversal of expectation, Harry who is supposed to arrive at last arrives first at Wishwood. Amy has kept all the things unchanged so that he can feel the same environment as before and other family members are also ordered to behave as if nothing has happened in these eight years. It also suggests the lack of creativity among modern wastelanders, though in vain she tries to stop the time.

Next, most of the modern people tend to be helpful and friendly but actually they are not. In Amy's home, Harry's uncle and aunt seem very helpful but Amy understands their hidden intention and ironically says, "You see your aunts and uncle very helpful, Harry. I have always seen them forth coming with advice which I have never taken"(80). *The Family Reunion* deals with habit, boredom and "the suffering" of the 20th century.

Irony is a rhetorical tool which is used by creative writers to fill the gap between what is expressed and what is intended. The drama that I have analyzed in this study which deals with the theme of 'ironic reversal' uses irony as a rhetorical tool, not only as a mere technique to provide a contrast between appearance and reality, existential choice and disintegration of the family values but also to foreground the moral aspects of modern life raising the issue of ontology. Ironic reversal in *The Family Reunion* brings the drama to achieve its full significances. If Eliot had not used irony, the drama would have definitely lacked to carry the message equally powerfully and effectively. Thus, the very credit of it goes to this rhetorical tool for its amazing dramatization of the pathetic and tragic conditions of the modern people.

The drama attains its full significance in the purpose of making the modern people as ironical characters. Modern people's lives today in spite of their material possession and intellectual acquisitions, in spite of their moral codes and religious doctrines, have not given them happiness. If we know the deepest thought of men-to-day, we should find that their millions were dissatisfied with themselves and pursuits that absorb their energies. They have lost the radiance and gladness of life, they have no hope to inspire, no ambition to realize, no happiness to which they can look forward, no faith to live by. Their minds are distracted and so their actions are fragmentary and futile.

By the rhetorical tool, T.S. Eliot shows the life of modern man in war.

Everywhere in the world we see strife, tussle and conflict, and a suicidal alternation of victory and defeat. With reference to the characters of *The Family Reunion* people are unhappy when alone, and unhappy in society: it is all funny. When they get more intelligent than before they get more pain. From this sense, the life of every individual is really a perpetual tragedy. Everything lingers for the movement and ends with death. It is obvious that the walking is admittedly nothing but a constantly –prevented falling, so the life of the modern man is nothing but a constantly prevented dying, an ever-postponed death. Therefore there has always been evil nature in human being which means not good morally, wicked and harmful due to which they lose their ultimate goal in life. Eliot from his poetic craftsmanship shows the actual evil which a person commits of his own free will and for which he is personally responsible. What man keeps himself busy with all his life, his actions, his ideas, his friends and families, everything is clear.

Thus, the drama in nutshell is ironical. Eliot's ironic vision is clarified as he ironically victimizes modern people. Modern people have been ironic but in different respects. They could not carry out their life happily and fail to produce the miracle of rain and finally get the supreme penalty of death rather pathetically without doing anything meaningful. The use of irony has made the situation more poignant and it has intensified the agony even more in *The Family Reunion*. Therefore all these different instances of irony help the plot move forward to bring the ironic reversal in the lives of modern people which T. S. Eliot aims to achieve.

## Works Cited

Abrams, M. H. A. *Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th ed. New Delhi: Harcourt Asia Private Limited, 2000.

Chaturvedi, B. N. *T. S. Eliot*. Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1992.

Coghil, Nevil. *The Family Reunion: T. S. Eliot*. Madras: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Grandner, Helen. *The Art of T. S. Eliot*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1965.

Jones, D. E. *The Plays of T. S. Eliot*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960.

Kojecky, Roger. *T. S. Eliot: A Study in Character and Style*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*.  
Trans. Lee M. Capel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968.

Mathessian, F. O. *The Achievements of T. S. Eliot: An Essay on the Nature of Poetry*. 3rd Ed. New York: A Galaxy Book, 1959.

Murray, Paul. *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*. London: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd. 1991.

Olderman, Raymond M. *Beyond the Wasteland*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976.

Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1992.



Smith, Carol H. "The Family Reunion Critics on T. S. Eliot". *Reading in Literary*

*Criticism*. Ed. Seila Sulliman. Delhi: George Allen and Union Ltd., 1990. 99-

105.