PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROBLEMS IN MODERN DRAMA

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It has become common to view drama in the post-Ibsen period as falling into two broad categories. On the one hand there was a strong and persistent tradition of the *Doll's House* type of play, called for convenience "social problem plays", and on the other a number of diverse styles of drama that represent counter-realism; plays in verse, expressionism, formalistic styles as in Yeats's plays, revivals of myths, fantastic drama, surrealism, plays of Freudian psychology, Cocteau-ish *poésie de théâtre*, and so on, all of which, however different from each other, have in common that they turn away both from social problems and from the dramatic style associated with them. They do not necessarily, however, renounce realism for "romance", or for something "poetic" in the escapist sense. Neither are the themes they treat always without relevance to the social situation. The point is that the social situation changed radically in the decade of World War I, making social problem drama of the older kind and its particular mould of realism out of date. But the antiquated forms had no monopoly of all realism or all social problems. The new forms, superficially judged to be anti-realistic, often represent in fact an artistic adjustment to a new social situation. In Georg Kaiser, in Cocteau, in Giraudoux, in Eliot, there can be no question of evasion of reality, or of the contemporary world, or of society. Their works depict these things and express their feelings about them. They were strange at first only because the realities shown had not yet been perceived by others. The world of *A Doll's House* and plays like it was real to Ibsen; it was the world he experienced. But it was no longer real in 1918 to Kaiser, for whom the middle-class

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home, with a certain set of private beliefs and social attitudes, had been pushed out of the centre of the picture to give place to the new reality of highly technical and industrial social organization. In order to show this he devised his expressionistic form which presents not private lives and homes but the skeletal structure of a whole society which in that contemporary situation was more real than the surfaces of bourgeois life. In a similar way Eliot's plays contain a view and a criticism of a given society. They are determined by a religious interpretation, which means that the judgement is one of several possible ones. But the interpretation is neither fanciful nor wilful; it does refer to a social reality. The argument applies also to the work of Giraudoux which to a superficial glance seems to seek refuge in "myths" in order to say something "universal" about life, transcending the localized contemporary situation, but it is in fact profoundly rooted in that situation.

There are some plays that deal, in the strictest sense, with "social problems". Examples are better found in Shaw, perhaps, than anywhere else. *Widowers' Houses* is one. It deals with a problem arising directly from the economic organization of society. Many more plays, whilst not exactly formulating a social problem, treat a social theme in the sense that a comment on society is implicit in their picture. *The Cherry Orchard* comes under this head. The plays of Ibsen that most influenced the social problem type may themselves in fact be grouped more comfortably under this general head than as examples of purely social problems. It is more accurate to say of them that they focus moral problems having social implications. For the crux of the matter nearly always is not so much a specific "social problem" as the situation of the individual in relation to the society he lives in. Ibsen attacks beliefs and the people—persons, human beings—who hold them. If institutions or social customs crack under his criticism it is because the antecedent beliefs on which they rest show up as hollow. This subtlety of moral relationships between individual beliefs and social practices is the very fibre of Ibsen's drama.

It is this relationship between an individual's world and a social world that I want to analyse in connection with a few plays
of this century. To isolate a body of plays as social problem drama is not enough in view of the omnipresence of the social theme in various forms. For the larger perspective shows a continuous process of social change and a continuing preoccupation with it in the drama. In that process the emphasis is sometimes on the person and sometimes on society, but always both are involved. The plays I shall use to illustrate the argument are Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Kaiser's *Gas*, Giraudoux' *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu*, and Eliot's *The Family Reunion*.

*A Doll's House* and plays close to it, like *Ghosts, Pillars of Society, The Wild Duck*, and others, present a cumulative picture of society and it is one illumined by angry lights. Ibsen's imagination is always haunted by a great ideal of what man might be if he could realize his humanity to perfection. This ideal, dominated to a large extent by the romantic spirit inherited from the late eighteenth century, implied a number of qualities such as freedom, integrity, joyous creativeness, natural innocence and dignity, the sense of right, that are in fact rarely or never found together but have nevertheless great power and suggestiveness as a composite ideal. Ibsen knew too much about human nature to make the mistake of trying to portray his ideal directly in idealized characters; but he most certainly and ruthlessly measured people against his nostalgic moral aspiration and only late in his life and work did he soften his judgements and begin to inculcate a doctrine of charity. His feelings about the ideal are focused in characters who, although portrayed convincingly as real people, that is, human beings both frail and strong, reflect his own aspiration and undergo an illumination; such are Nora and Mrs. Alving. His feelings of moral despair, on the other hand, are reflected in his picture of a corrupt society; and indeed in these plays the insistence on corruption is so emphatic that one feels Ibsen wanted to give physical reality to the moral stench and assail his audience—the society he attacked—with it. In *A Doll's House* Dr. Rank, embittered by his disease, fulminates against the rottenness lying just beneath the surface in nearly every family, whilst physical horror is exploited to the utmost in *Ghosts*. 
Ibsen’s dramatic pattern combines incisive moral analysis with an expressive unburdening of the feelings. To achieve the former he uses his principal character as a pivot. Nora Helmer has been, before the beginnings of her crisis, part of the milieu which arouses Ibsen’s indignation; she then emerges from it through a subtle development of her self-hood and awareness of herself in relation to others, particularly her husband; until finally Ibsen has focused in her protestations his own analysis of what society calls “marriage” and “love”.

The particulars of Nora’s situation may have lost most of their power to move us, since the relations between men and women both in and outside marriage have changed so much. To appreciate the sheer dramatic effect of her decision to leave home, which rested on the horror of the audience at the mere thought of such a step, we have to recall the social ostracism incurred by a woman who took it in an age when the professions were not open to women. This effect has been lost. On the other hand we can still hear, and possibly with keener ears, the lapidary note in the great discussion scene with which the play reaches its climax and in which Nora discloses herself as the type of the protestant rebel.

Nora. . . . I can no longer content myself with what most people say, or with what is found in books. I must think things over for myself and get to understand them.

Helmer. Can you not understand your place in your own home? Have you not a reliable guide in such matters as that?—have you no religion?

Nora. I am afraid, Torvald, I do not exactly know what religion is.

Helmer. What are you saying?

Nora. I know nothing but what the clergyman said, when I went to be confirmed. He told us that religion was this, and that, and the other. When I am away from all this, and am alone, I will look into that matter too. I will see if what the clergyman said is true, or at all events if it is true for me.

When Helmer accuses her further of having no moral sense she answers in the same vein of simple honesty, admitting ignorance but expressing willingness to work the problem out for herself. She admits Helmer’s charge that she doesn’t understand the conditions of the world in which she lives:

Nora. No, I don’t. But now I am going to try. I am going to see if I can make out who is right, the world or I.

Helmer’s answer to this: “You are ill, Nora; you are delirious;
I almost think you are out of your mind", is the comment of those who live in darkness. The history of prophets and poets can show more exalted examples of spiritual birth or re-birth. Yet however modest the person and circumstances of Ibsen's obscure middle-class young wife, she assumes heroic stature in this scene. Step by step, with simplicity and logic, she strips every pretence from her life, her marriage, and her love. But this she does in the spirit of affirmation, not of destruction; and so a great dramatic and moral exhilaration radiates from her discovery of her self and her responsibility. To her age she appeared as the representative of all womanhood about to engage in a struggle for emancipation. But Ibsen has put himself into her actions and words. Through the local particulars of dress and period in his play we see that Nora's case is that of man altogether, liberating himself from falsehood in order to start afresh and work out his salvation with gods and men.

It is fatally easy to assimilate Ibsen to the sociological thought of the later nineteenth century. Since his plays do contain a criticism of "society" they seem to fall pat into a broad picture of social change. But Ibsen as far as beliefs are concerned is situated before the age of "economic and social" man. Society to Ibsen is not a sociological conception but a moral one. It is the herd with its system of subterfuges for protecting its weaknesses and selfishness. His rebels are made to hold out against this herd and judge it. There is in his picture certainly a sense of social pressures, including economic ones. Nora's crisis is precipitated partly by her economic dependence which led her to dishonest ways of procuring money. But Ibsen's world is innocent of the play of "social", i.e. extra-individual, forces as that idea has since his time been understood. His people are not the products of such forces. They are weak, cowardly, selfish, gregarious, but they are individuals with a potential will of their own. Ibsen's indignation is not aroused by the faulty organization of society—for that we have to look to Shaw—but by men defacing their own nature with those grimaces of beasts that Rubek, in When We Dead Awaken, portrayed in his sculpture. Man is here still conceived in the traditional image.
of a person with a moral sense, with free will, with the knowledge of good and evil—even though he makes mistakes—and with complete responsibility. In Ibsen’s world the individual, the private person, makes the decisions that matter, social customs and institutions flowing from them. Ibsen’s idea of man is that he stands alone and makes his decision. Because of this his drama, although it embraces criticism of “society”, is primarily a critique of morality pivoted on faith in the realization of a human ideal in the free individual.

For a drama that provides a criticism of society, in a stricter sense of the term, we may turn to Georg Kaiser’s Gas. The people of this play, with one exception, exist only in functional relation to an organized mass, their salient characteristic being that they have lost their individual independence, both in character and actions.

Gas is not a great play; it suffers from stridency and over-emphatic style, and the feeling about “humanity” that makes it a violent rhetorical protest against certain tendencies in modern society remains crude and sentimental. Yet it is a very remarkable play because, using a bold and incisive method for the theatre, it projected an original vision of the society that was fast developing within the liberal bourgeois framework which was still what the surface showed. In the general development of this century the date of the play—1918—has significance as marking the end of World War I and therewith of the first stage of the transition from the liberal capitalist society of the nineteenth century to the socialized states and planned centralized societies of the following era. Kaiser’s theme is the de-humanizing influence of technocratic social organization. His method is to portray such a society, bring catastrophe upon it from one of its own elements, and use a main character as a foil to point his moral. His picture shows a factory community, producing the most up-to-date form of energy, not only run with maximum scientific efficiency but also completely socialized, since its head, the Billionaire’s Son, has renounced his wealth for the sake of the new ideal, by which the profits are shared. In this perfectly, even idyllically, arranged life an explosion occurs which by all the laws of science should not. Kaiser makes great play
with the symbolic "formula" that represents the limit of scientific exactitude and yet still leaves something to the unexplainable and uncontrollable; so that there is a dangerous flaw not only in the formula but in the nature of the society which is built on the idea behind it. The Billionaire's Son learns his lesson from the destruction and suffering and turns away from a society and a philosophy that are at the mercy of such a catastrophe. If the factory with its formulae and machines is liable to such breakdown why be enslaved to it? He recovers for himself the human sense of values of the pre-technological life and, finding a new ideal for his philanthropy, imagines a farming community in which men can be natural and human again. This vapid return-to-nature or agrarian philosophy is as weak as the picture of the futuristic worker-technician-factory culture is incisive.

This gospel he tries to preach to his factory-workers, technicians, his chief Engineer, and industrialists; the play is a sequence of scenes in which he implores them to see the light. But no one does. The workers want their work back; they demand only the dismissal of the Engineer responsible for the breakdown to appease their sense of oppression and loss. The Engineer is also in opposition, deriving his particular form of stubbornness from professional pride. The industrialists have only one idea, which is to get the "gas" factory re-started so that their own concerns have power again. All these classes of men are united in their opposition to the Billionaire's Son because they are no longer conscious of any meaning in themselves except as parts of a machine and in their world all society has become a machine. Its denizens live wholly under the technocratic compulsion that enslaves every class of its servants. Their obtuseness and inflexibility are the signs of servitude. They have lost the conception of their own nature as something they might still have; they cannot think themselves out of their situation; they are all engaged in a constrained misdirection of their natural feelings, ignorant of how their humanity has already slipped beyond their reach.

Toller was to say in connection with his own technique that you can see men as "realistic human beings" but you
can also see the same men, in a flash of vision, as puppets, which move mechanically in response to external direction. The people in Kaiser's picture of society are puppets in this sense, with their meaning withdrawn from their human-ness and concentrated in their function, for which one part of them may be alone of significance, their hand, or eye, for instance. In a sullen way these people are indeed aware that they are distortions; but great pathos (in spite of the over-emphasis) derives from their inability to revolt and liberate themselves; so long as someone is "punished" for the explosion they are satisfied to let the process start again:


One realizes at this point that Kaiser has taken several steps beyond the simple protests at the misery of underpaid workers, uninteresting factory jobs, and slums, consequent on the industrial revolution. These were familiar to the later nineteenth century, both in literature and sociological writing. In drama the humanitarian protest at social misery is well seen in Hauptmann's _Die Weber_. Kaiser's protest is not against misery of that kind, held in abhorrence as an affront to human beings. His socialized world has removed those things. He protests against the loss of human status. The shrill nostalgia of the Billionaire's Son for "den Menschen" would not be so excessive if it were a case simply of suffering, for that brings human qualities and virtues into play. He fights his battle against men who have lost the knowledge of what man is. They are morally destitute
because the private world is gone. A wholly public world engulfs the human one. Every person is chained to a function in a closely articulated mechanism; and when human creatures exist as no more than a function within a whole, the whole itself is not human.

The nature of Kaiser's vision of society in this play has not to my knowledge been explicitly related to the conditions of 1917-18 in Germany, when, under the stress of a war no longer offensive but desperately defensive, the country was converted into a military machine. Here one might seek an embryonic model of what we have since called the totalitarian society, and we remember too that World War II made "total war" and "total mobilization" the rule everywhere. If Gas is based on German society of 1917-18, as I think it is, it gives, however "expressionistic" in method, a vision of reality. Clearly a process of generalization is involved; but the play presents an image of the skeletal structure of a certain kind of society. Although simplified, it is logical and analytically true. And on this truth to something real rests its power, because that provides some justification for an emotional atmosphere so intense as to border on hysteria. The pessimism is strong; and with reason, when the end of the individual and his moral independence is involved.

At the side of this, Ibsen looks very nineteenth century. Great changes have occurred. If, as we said, "society" for Ibsen was the herd with its fears and stupidities, but still a human herd, here in Kaiser it is the product of economic and industrial forces which transcend the individual will. His drama is in consequence a critique of society, or social structure, in the twentieth century sociological meaning of the words. His picture, with its un-named persons representing classes or functions, its elimination of the private man and his private life (the daughter and her officer husband who runs into debt and commits suicide are the faintest echoes of "bourgeois" life), its sharp stylizations streamlining the features of the technocratic culture, and its clipped, pounding verbal style, shows an adjustment of dramatic form not only to some extraneous principle of style or subjective expression but to the new social realities.
It is a noticeable feature of *Gas* that the nature and quality of *Menschentum* remain obscure. Kaiser's feeling is all concentrated in his protest, in the name of something referred to as humanity, against its elimination. Hence on the one hand we have a stark, metallic, glinting picture of the system criticized, and on the other an explosion of rebellious sentiment. The former we see to be analytically correct; the indignation and pity we take as a sign of good faith. But we are not given to feel in our minds or senses some quality of living, or thought, or sensibility, or character, recognizable as belonging to what we mean in an ideal sense by "humanity". In short, the play, although a strained expression of human resentment and nostalgia, contains no person, or situation, or words that vibrate, if only for a moment, with the ideal so constantly evoked in name.

Giraudoux' dramatic work, which belongs to the years 1928 to 1945, possesses the quality absent in Kaiser. It is saturated with the indefinable essence of humanity, understood as a delicate sense of the situation of human beings, living under the shadow of Fate, of gods and devils, amidst men and women of incredible complexity of character and given particularly to bellicosity, but also aspiring to happiness and goodness in a way that touches even those who do not know very much about such things. In one sense the dramatic pattern of a central focus-character in opposition to others, seen in both Ibsen and Kaiser, repeats itself in Giraudoux; it is by now conventional to discuss his "élu", as they are called. But such characters in Giraudoux do not incorporate in themselves a single idea of "the human person", as so many of Ibsen's, different as they are, represent the struggle for the true self. They are drawn, it is true, with psychological art and are real enough with their motives and emotions to fit into a story. But they are above all the vehicles of certain qualities admired by the ethical sensitiveness of humanity whose spokesman Giraudoux makes himself. Judith, with her great love, Électre with her uncompromising sense of justice, Alcènè, innocent, chaste, and faithful, Hector with his sense of brotherhood, La Folle with her unerring instinct for simple and good people—all of them are very human, and yet a little more
than human, endowed by the abstracting imagination with an eloquence of person and function that derives not from themselves but from the human faith of their creator.

The use of a myth provides the perfect opportunity for setting such quasi-real persons in motion and making them the meeting-point for generalized ideals and the personal forms in which everything human has to appear. Hector in *La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* is such a person. In him and his attempt to prevent a further outbreak of war, struggling first with the established habits and beliefs of his family and fellow Trojans, then with the wilful bellicosity of Demokos and the war-mongers, and finally with Destiny, there is concentrated the immense nostalgia for peace which flooded the hearts of Europeans in the 'thirties of this century. At that time the success of Fascism and National socialism represented a counter-blow to all the post-1918 endeavours to organize an international society. The outstanding event of the 'twenties was the Treaty of Locarno; the symbolic act of hope was the institution of the League of Nations. It was in the late 'twenties that the "war books", mostly of pacifist intentions and headed by Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, burst on to the literary scene, focusing general feelings on the subject in a generation that had lived through the horrors of modern warfare from 1914 to 1918. The outstanding events of the 'thirties, on the other hand, were the victory of the National socialists in 1933, the Abyssinian War, the Spanish Civil War, and the various unilateral acts of Hitler's foreign policy. It was the age of the "threat of war" and of paralysed attempts to evade it. But the threat of war was simply the symptom of the problem as to how international relations should be organized, by federation of free peoples or centralization under a predominant power. The national problem of socialization here reached its international form, and the difference, both in time and theme, between Kaiser and Giraudoux reflects this logical development of the modern situation. For the vital theme now concerns the relations between the different branches of human society. What does man, within the brotherhood and unity of the human race, owe to man and to himself? The force of Giraudoux' play lies in the simplicity of feeling over the central issue; its delicacy,
however, in the way the public theme is treated in connection with the complex passions of men and the play of fatality.

It would be profitable to examine in detail Giraudoux' adroitness of method in touching, through his persons and their discussions, on virtually all the factors that agitated people's feelings on this problem at the time. The brilliant satire on the procedures of international jurists in the Busiris passage may be adduced as an example. But we must be content to define briefly Giraudoux' method in contrast to that of Ibsen and Kaiser. The new pattern shows a public theme—in this play, peace and brotherhood in all their reasonableness—joined to a generalized ethical sensitiveness as to what constitutes "humanity". The problem is not in any sense a private one, as Nora Helmer's was; it concerns nations and humanity as a whole. The peculiar fictitiousness of Hector as a mythical character emphasizes this by contrast with the contemporary substantiality of Nora. Yet on the other hand it is not only a social question, as in Gas; for the distinguishing feature of Giraudoux' plays is a refinement of ethical feeling that only flourishes in persons as part of their essential individual character and human form, and can never inhere in impersonal "social" actions. And this is expressed in the fact that Hector, like other Giraudoux characters, in spite of being so obvious a device, assumes nevertheless the form of a person.

We perceive now that Giraudoux, using a framework taken from classical mythology, achieved a brilliant invention of method. His subject and emotions were absolutely contemporary, but of a kind that could not possibly have been treated realistically—you can only put modern politics and diplomacy into a play as caricature, as Shaw did in Geneva. Giraudoux extracts the myth from its own historico-religious context, fills the persons with contemporary public meanings, and thus, creating a new form that is half myth, half allegory, makes it do service again, giving an aristocratic aesthetic quality to what might otherwise not have risen above propaganda or dull moralizing. Such is the character not only of La Guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu but of other plays of this author. They avoid the particular reality of historical or contemporary events, substituting a
quasi-real world, but only in order to clarify issues of contemporary urgency.

The drama of Giraudoux thus appears as a critique of humanity; that is, of the human kind. In a succession of plays he meditates, amidst all the fantasy, caprice, and wit of his theatrical style, on general ideals such as pity, charity, justice, loyalty, faith, and so on, which together constitute humanity understood as the characteristic form of existence separating man from the rest of creation. Ibsen's characters seek self in order to be real. The people in Gas are emasculated of both self and humanity. Giraudoux explores in his mythical fictions the nature of human quality and its place in the modern world. He is sensitive, not laboured; sceptical and bewildered, but not without hope, and in no way a clamant castigator of morals. At the same time as his ethical idealism is diffused through his plays, so also is a sense of man's precarious situation, since he lives subject to chance and fatality. From these two things—the humanity expressed in ideals, and that witnessed in helplessness—emanates the tragic pathos of his work.

If a play like Gas leaves one with a feeling of something lost or abandoned, the work of Giraudoux gives the impression of embarrassment. Kaiser protests against a world in which humanity is eliminated; Giraudoux, gentle and civilized, is saddened by one in which humanity cannot make its values effective. Kaiser's persons are marionettes, those of Giraudoux fictions of the moral conscience battling against powers they cannot cope with or do not understand, like Judith with God and the priests, Alcmène with Jupiter, or Hector with the spirit of war. As individuals they find themselves involved in a public situation without being able to establish a harmonious relationship with it. The decisions their own virtues require for themselves are contravened by incalculable factors operating apart from individuals and their values, but not apart from human life. Thus the world of private values is not adjusted to the public situation, yet the latter is all-important. Giraudoux reflects with great accuracy what is a dominant feature of the modern situation as experienced by many people: the sense of good and noble qualities lives on in natural and perhaps philosophically ungrounded forms, whilst the dog-
matic moral legislation that alone secures an adjustment of public and private forms is lacking.

One of the main impressions left by his work is of an aristocrat of mind and sensibility commenting on life. His mythical fictions give the semblance of drama, but they also express a withdrawal from true drama into that kind of dialogue which springs not from separate persons but from a divided self, or one that habitually ruminates on moral intricacies whilst others live by cutting the Gordian knot. The sense of the real in Giraudoux comes entirely from the author’s personal voice. It is him, not “life”, that we feel everywhere. His persons, like his fantasy and wit ceaselessly at work, are valid not as poetic intuitions but as vehicles of his sensitive meditation. Giraudoux ponders real situations, contemporary and public ones; he himself is real, uttering his thoughts; but his dramatic characters are shadows whose unreality reflects the unreality of the individual’s situation in contemporary life—his being encased in a private world of values and victimized by a public world of events. Giraudoux’ myths are in one sense a positive assertion of artistic form, in another a symptom of a maladjusted society.

The three authors considered up to this point work without orthodox religion. In that they differ little from most other dramatists of the period. The great exceptions are Hofmannsthal, Claudel, and Eliot, whose work might be expected to throw further light on the problem of private and social worlds. The two former yield less in this respect than Eliot, since their plays are devoted to more exclusively religious feelings and events. It is true that a play like Das Grosse Welttheater has a social meaning within its religious imagery; and one like Le Soulier de Satin has persons with very real human passions. Yet their action moves towards a moment when the merely human is transfigured with a divine meaning and at such a moment what we call the “social” has little relevance. Eliot, by contrast, observes constantly the social world, the plays extending an analysis begun in the earlier poems. He has himself emphasized that he wanted to portray in his plays people in contemporary circumstances. This no doubt constituted a problem for drama in verse but it was not an accidental or merely ambitious
aim. Eliot has the modern situation deliberately under view, his analysis of it springing from a mind sensitive to the complexity of civilized issues in any modern society and interested in them all. The poet of *The Waste Land* and the *Four Quartets* wrote also *After Strange Gods*, the commentaries of *The Criterion*, and the *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*.

His plays have met with much hostile criticism and yet they have shown an astonishing vigour and power to move audiences, one reason being doubtless that they do succeed in touching modern life at so many points, not only by presenting contemporary people but in the manner of doing so, which shows the characteristic modern awareness of intricacy in psychology, sociology, manners, morals, religion, and culture. Sin, expiation, and martyrdom are in the centre of his picture, ideas disagreeable to a sceptical and scientifically-minded, or merely light-hearted, public. But they are not there as pure religion flung in the face of life. They fascinate and disturb because meaning falls from them on to aspects of modern life on which one might not think religion directly impinged, and in respect of which other current philosophies have notably failed to find meaning. A passage in the *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* provides an illuminating gloss on the characters of *The Family Reunion* (and *The Cocktail Party*):

The reflection that what we believe is not merely what we formulate and subscribe to, but that behaviour is also belief, and that even the most conscious and developed of us live also at the level on which belief and behaviour cannot be distinguished, is one that may, once we allow our imagination to play upon it, be very disconcerting. It gives an importance to our most trivial pursuits, to the occupation of our every minute, which we cannot contemplate long without the horror of nightmare. When we consider the quality of the integration required for the full cultivation of the spiritual life, we must keep in mind the possibility of grace and the exemplars of sanctity in order not to sink into despair. And when we consider the problem of evangelization, of the development of a Christian society, we have reason to quail. To believe that we are religious people and that other people are without religion is a simplification which approaches distortion. To reflect that from one point of view religion is culture, and from another point of view culture is religion, can be very disturbing (p. 32).

Here we see promulgated a criterion for the quality, not of "humanity", but of the spiritual life, which may be taken to
mean human life irradiated by a transcendent power, every feature of behaviour coming finally under its influence. Against this criterion Eliot measures modern forms of culture. All the persons in *The Family Reunion* represent these forms, according to their character, tastes, gifts, possessions, and education, from the uncles and aunts to Amy and Mary, and then Agatha; and they are judged against the elected person at the centre, a pattern repeated with variations in *The Cocktail Party*.

We may note in Eliot's work a degree of loathing of life that quite exceeds a realistic acknowledgement of corruption or native wickedness in man, and this no doubt gives rise to a despair that needs redemption and also to nostalgia for sainthood and the scarcely curbed contempt for anything lower than that. Yet such extremes of feeling cannot really impair the main structure of Christian belief nor the criticism of man and society deriving from it. This faith restores decisively to the individual both meaning and responsibility, and removes from the conception of "society" and the "social" the materialistic and secular meanings that have come to predominate. The terms we have used—private and public, even individual and society—cease to be strictly relevant, except as secondary distinctions, since a theological conception is primary. Ibsen's rebellious individual, Giraudoux' aristocratic and sensitive humanity, Kaiser's articulated society, all of which show what can only be a partial view of life and civilization, are here displaced by a conception of greater comprehensiveness. Extending our classification of these plays as critiques of man and society it is easy now to borrow from Eliot's own terms the word that describes his drama in relation to the others we have considered. It is a critique of culture.

It does not follow that because culture, in this context, comprehends more and deeper meanings Eliot's dramatic art is superior to that of the other authors here considered, for dramatic power does not depend on a well-ordered philosophy. But the kind of integration of dramatic forms attempted by Eliot in his plays corresponds to the degree of integration envisaged in his idea of true culture. For what he attempts to do is to portray a realistic scene—the family in the country house, the
barrister with wife, mistress, and social circle—through which an underlying mythical pattern diffuses its meanings to the surface; so that the "real" becomes, without being negated or displaced, transparent, and through it the myth appears as the immanent meaning. In a drama based on such a view both realistic and mythical forms are authentic; the one is more than a preoccupation with limited aspects of social reality, and the other more than a modern aesthetic device. The symbolism of Eliot's characters is implicit because the personal form contains the meaning. Similarly, the mythical power inheres in the real human situation, since people like Harry and Celia, unlike figures from past myths, begin as ordinary persons leading ordinary lives and remain human even after the assumption of their distinctive functions. The incorporation of elements from primitive or ancient ritual, though not uniformly successful, is at least relevant, since it fortifies the endowment of the whole situation (especially in The Family Reunion) with its complex meaning. Eliot's considered technique of verse also makes an appropriate and organic contribution, pendulating between the realistic surface and the underlying myth, the verse that is very close to the prosaic, and that which draws on all the expressive sources, ancient and modern, of poetry.

It may be that the unifying of many strands of feeling and experience in the picture of life presented in Eliot's plays admits of approval in theory without being unchallengeably successful in dramatic practice. But the attempt to express this in drama by a combination of realistic modern setting and emergent myth is unique and, because of the range of experience and thought involved, infinitely interesting.

The examination of these four plays throws a vivid light on the relation of drama to contemporary life as expressed both in its themes and forms. For each springs from a distinct phase in the conditions of life in the past fifty or sixty years, and the originality of form is in each case seen to depend on an acute visionary assessment of the essential reality of the situation in both its individual and social aspects. Drama, like other literary forms, is always created by a particular imagination, but it is never simply a personal statement. It is always about men-in-
society, and a dramatist must be interested in that in the same way as the general run of men, however much greater his insight or stronger his emotions. The four cases here examined show four dramatists with their finger on the pulse of events and social change. Ibsen’s analytic realism, Kaiser’s expressionistic imagery, Giraudoux’ myth-fantasies, Eliot’s ritualistic realism, are distinct dramatic forms for distinct visions of man in society and amidst historical change. They each contain a critique of the human situation at given moments, shaped by acuteness of feeling and perception working together; and it is to signalize their particular contributions within this general function that we have described them severally as critiques of morality, society, humanity, and culture.

The comparative method is especially fruitful, indeed essential, for this topic. The changes involved have been broadly similar in all European societies but they have not all been expressed, or not equally well, in any one literature; not in the Norwegian, nor the German, nor the French, nor the English, nor any other. National genius plays its part in these high points of expression; for the Protestant austerity of Ibsen, the strained emotionalism of Kaiser, the civilized intelligence of Giraudoux, the resort to verse drama in Eliot, to mention only a few features, all appear with peculiar appropriateness against the respective national backgrounds. The four plays to which interest has been directed were not chosen to make an argument; on the contrary the latter emerged from seeing the pattern into which they naturally fall. They are plays that have attained an uncommon fame throughout Europe, which seems to confirm that situations evolving everywhere were expressed best now in one country, now in another.