

## Research Stream

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### T. S. Eliot's "The Confidential Clerk": A Search for Self Identity

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#### Abstract

Thomas Stearns Eliot is a literary figure with a multifaceted personality revitalizing the Twentieth century aesthetic universe as a philosopher, religious leader and ofcourse as a writer. Eliot's plays are interwoven with various colorful threads of emptiness, disillusionment, loneliness of modern society and the most important one is religious consciousness. His "The Confidential clerk" depicts the innovative ways of cultivating spiritual consciousness-the way of art and music. The play is about the quest for a vocation. All the characters in the play come from a very common background. Mingled with the texture of irony and analogy, the theme of self identity wins the heart of readers. The play ends with a pleasant note and denotes that through art, love and music, the religious voyage achieves its destination i.e, Divinity.

**Keywords:** *spiritual, conflict, supernaturalism, interpretation, existence etc.*

#### Introduction

Thomas Stearns Eliot is a Literary gem with a multifaceted personality revitalizing the Twentieth century aesthetic universe as a philosopher, religious leader and ofcourse as a writer. He was the man who made tremendous efforts to revive the original form of Christianity and to make it recognisable to the modern mind having no faith in religious pursuits at all. He is essentially a religious soul. The revival of Catholic religion in a irreligious realm is one of his outstanding achievements. A wave of religious torrent can be seen in a number of plays of Eliot. He explored spiritual conflict and modern life of existing society, moving from religious drama.

"Murder in the Cathedral", "The family Reunion" "The Cocktail Party" "The Confidential Clerk" and "The Elder statesman" are the popular plays of Eliot where the theme of religious consciousness find expression although in different ways. His "The Confidential Clerk" celebrates the projection of Christian themes in seeuliar forms. In this play, Eliot depicts the emptiness, disillusionment and the loneliness of modern society.

Moreover, Eliot in "The Confidential clerk" portrays the innovative ways of nurturing religious consciousness-the ways of art and music. The play is about the quest for a vocation. In the play, he dispenses with not only the theological tinges of the religious themes but also leaves supernaturalism. In the play, all the characters are ordinary men and women in their temperament, attitude and moral nature. Grover Smith writes: "No body in The Confidential Clerk is a genius; nobody is saint. Only Colby has second rate talent; even the Christian Mrs. Gizzard and Eggerson himself are capable of compounding a lie." To express serious thoughts, Eliot uses the technique of high comedy. Through irony and analogy, he described beautifully both levels—the surface of dramatic events and the depths of spiritual meaning. Eliot achieved irony by contrasting "the worldly and religious interpretations of reality."

The plot of the play is a succession of farcical incidents to describe a series of comic reversals. The play opens with Sir Claude attempting to introduce to his wife Lady Elizabeth, his plans to adopt Colby. Before adoption, Colby is to replace Eggerson as the Confidential Clerk of Sir Claude. He wants to spend this news to Lady Elizabeth by Eggesson after her return from Switzerland where she has visited to master the art of

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controlling the mind. Lady Elizabeth disturbs the plan of Sir Claude as she arrives early and announces her decision of selecting Colby as Eggerson's Successor. Like them, Lucasta and B. kaghan also adopts Colby, but for different purposes. Lucasta visualizes her own identity by becoming a part of Colby's existence. But only Eggerson understands Colby's true nature. No one understands Colby's splitting personality.

“I'm not at all sure that I like the other person  
That I feel myself becoming—though he fascinates me.  
And yet, from time to time, when I least expect it,  
when my mind is clear and empty, walking in the street,  
or waking in the night, then the former person,  
the person I used to be, returns to take possession.”

Colby laments over the loss of his self identity. The theme of loss of identity is interconnected with religious thought. Claude explains Colby as how he surrendered or murdered his love for colour and joined his father's business. For such insistence, he began to harbour his secret reproach against his father but later on, he felt a sense of guilt and began to atone for it:

And all my life  
I have been atoning. To a dead father,  
who had always been right. I never understood him.  
I was too young. And when I was mature enough  
To understand him, he was not there.

Claude tells that he still nurtures his love of pottery with religiousness. Like Claude, Elizabeth finds this in her investigation for mind control. Claude describes two worlds, the one is the visible world of business, while the other world is the invisible world of art which paves his path to divinity. Claude, as a potter can reach to God and Colby as a musician, can achieve God. All the characters are pursuing their identities. They are torn between outer and inner universe. They are unable to reconcile the two worlds. However, Colby realizes that both the worlds can be altered into one if he sees the presence of God everywhere:

Not to be alone there.  
If I were religious, God would walk in my garden,  
And that would make the world outside it real  
And acceptable, I think.

Lady Elizabeth wants to establish a spiritual rapport with Colby. Each and every character is struggling for his/her identity. Colby is caught with an intense desire to know his true identity by the discovery of his real parents. This puzzle can be solved when man realizes that his real father is God.

However, as the play moves, the mysteries are solved. Sir Claude is waiting for Mrs. Guzzard's arrival. Lady Elizabeth and her husband are confident that Guzzard will unveil the identity of Colby. Lucasta announces her decision to marry Kaghan. She expresses her gratitude to Colby for having made her realize that Kaghan is the right choice for her. Meanwhile Mrs. Guzzard states that B. Kaghan is the lost son of Lady Elizabeth. She also tells that Colby is her own son and she cheated Sir Claude for the upliftment of her son. Sir Claude and Lady Elizabeth are disillusioned.

Furthermore, the characters realize their mistakes. Sir Claude realizes that he should not follow his father's profession. Had he followed his own passion, he might have come out a triumphant one as his father:

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What he wanted to transmit to me.  
Was the idea, that inspiration  
Which to him was life. To me, it was a burden.  
You can't communicate an inspiration  
Like that, by force of will. He was a great financier  
And I am merely a successful one.  
I might have been true to my father's inspiration  
If I had done what I wanted to do.

Lady Elizabeth also realizes that proper understanding definitely can resolve the existing issues:

.... can understand each other.  
No matter how late. And perhaps that will help us  
To understand other people.”

Finally, Colby is aware of his own real identity through Guzzard, his mother, that he is a son of a disappointed magician. He feels free to pursue his music. He accepts pleasantly Eggerson's offer as the “Vicar's Warden”, of the responsibility of the church organist at the Joshua Park. He finds in Eggerson, a new spiritual father. All the characters at the end of the play realize the real connotation of Christian marriage and a new way to salvation i.e., art. Mark the statement of Carol H. Smith: “The play thus ends with an endorsement of both the order of the Christian family and the more ‘musical’ pursuit of the “orders” of the church as valid paths to salvation.”

To sum up, it may be stated that Eliot's “The Confidential Clerk” embodies his efforts to modernize the central features of Christian religious consciousness. Mingled with the texture of irony and analogy, the theme of self identity wins the heart of readers. The artistic ways of music and sculpture paves the path to liberation and here lies the beauty of the play. The play ends with a joyful note where Lucasta announces her marriage with B. Kaghan, Sir Claude and Lady Elizabeth accept each other through mutual understanding and Colby greets the job of an organist. The play denotes that through art, love and music the religious voyage achieves its destination i.e., Divinity.

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