INTRODUCTION:

*To name is to destroy, to suggest is to create*

Mallarmé

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years –

Twenty years largely wasted…

Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt

Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure

................................each venture

Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate

With shabby equipment always deteriorating

From ‘Prufrock’ (1910) to ‘Ash Wednesday’ (1930), spiritual quest and aesthetic inquiry merged in Eliot to produce an unending flow of experimentation both at the temporal and the transcendental levels of perception. The inclusive vision of the two worlds, as captured in *Four Quartets*, enriched his philosophical enquiry but seemed to frustrate his mission as a writer. Words seemed slippery and nebulous whereas experiences were real and felt. Eliot’s entire oeuvre was committed to the art of moulding language as an expressive and communicative medium capable of exploring every facet of the social/moral/spiritual fibre.

This concern and anxiety with language had been an obsession with the Romantics too. They were no less disquieted by the inadequacy and insufficiency of the verbal equivalent for the ontological status of an object and the idea issuing thereof. In 1800, in a letter to Godwin, Coleridge wrote:
I wish you to write a book on the power of words, and the processes by which human feelings form affinities with them – … ‘Is Logic the Essence of Thinking?’ in other words – Is thinking impossible without arbitrary signs? and how far is the word arbitrary a misnomer?…I would endeavour to destroy the old antithesis of Words & Things, elevating as it were, words into things and Living Things too.¹

Preoccupation with the nature of words motivated Coleridge to enquire into the functioning correspondence between words and things – images and objects – and kept him groping for some kind of certainty in the virtual reality of a verbal construct. Paul de Man, in his celebrated essay ‘Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image,’∗ captured this intent when, referring to the Romantics, he declared:

Poetic language seems to originate in the desire to draw closer and closer to the ontological status of the object, and its growth and development are determined by this inclination. This movement is essentially paradoxical and condemned in advance to failure. Nineteenth century poetry reexperiences and represents the adventure of this failure in an infinite variety of forms and versions.²

In the post-Eliot, postmodern age, the sign-signifier- signified referent chain assumes a complexity as never before and stretches the representation/reproduction controversy around reality and expression to the Derridaian proposal of total demolition.

Reality is easier to define when the meaning is referential and the language-reality relation direct, conventional and verifiable. But subtle shades in the workings of the human psyche make temporal expression assume hermeneutic levels which perhaps elude the reach of intellect and can only be emotionally apprehended. Transcendental/ spiritual experience is difficult to register as it crosses ‘frontiers of consciousness’ and extends beyond human speech. At such moments the language of

∗ Originally in French, it was translated into English in 1968.
knowledge or intellect fails and reality recedes into the indecisiveness of the unformulated. Geoffrey B. Williams, tracing shared concerns in the preoccupation with language in the case of Wordsworth and Eliot, suggests that this is probably what Wordsworth meant when in *The Prelude* he was reflecting on ‘the sad incompetence of human speech.’ This might be one of the thought-strands in Eliot’s perception of a destined shadow falling ‘Between the idea /And the reality…’.

G.B. Williams believes that the poetic mode significantly comes to help. He notes the space between objective reality and our idea of the same – the space which accommodates poetic/rhetorical indirection:

> ...there is a gap which convention overlooks between the idea and the reality that the idea strives to reveal. Within the gap lies the possibility of ambiguity for different, and even contradictory, ideas can lay claim to the same reality.3

This is where poetry builds its network of suggestiveness, complex and expansive. In its dynamics of signification, in its ‘indirection’, in its unusual deployment and manipulation of ‘poetic’ features, poetry takes its position outside the axial specificities of language-reality relation, and, as Richard Bradford notes, it foregrounds ‘an unresolvable interplay of potential intentions and meaning’.4

Williams points out that Eliot’s effort at bringing poetry closer to common speech rhythm echoes Wordsworth’s ‘ideal of poetry as the language of common speech yet so purified as to reach into elementary and universal feelings’5; he believes that the entire process of development in ideas relating to the problematics of language projecting reality, from the Romantics to the Modernists, can be fruitfully reviewed as a continuous process. Placing Eliot in the historical movement, he argues

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* Book VI, ll 592-93.
that a study of this process, the evolution of what is designated ‘modernity’ and ‘post-modernity’,

allows for the reading of Eliot’s individual style in terms of an ambiguity associated with Romantic idealism since its rhetorical structures are engaged in a play of power which attempts to undermine a rational emphasis based on clarity in language.⁶

Eliot’s primary objective in the plays, which came after the major poems of the first phase, was to compose Drawing Room Comedies in verse in close resemblance to the conversational cadence used in modern urban settings. In ‘Poetry and Drama’ he made the point clear that the broad intention was ‘to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives and to which it returns when it leaves the theatre’⁷, so that their ‘sordid, dreary daily world would be suddenly illuminated and transfigured’.⁸

The primary challenge naturally was a friction between words and action. The question at this initial threshold was how far and in what way can words, the verbal form, effect this sudden illumination and transfiguration of the dreary and sordid in common life and signal these other/higher/deeper meanings to the more discerning among the audience, and induce charmed moments of perception in the life of the common viewers. Poetry, adopted as the medium in these plays, of course could introduce layers of perceptive awareness but the flow of action would slow down and get cluttered with poetic intrusions. Eliot, the ruthless critic of poeticism in late nineteenth-century literature, the reader who notes that language absorbed in a ‘singular life of its own’, language that ‘had adapted itself to the independent life of atmospheric nourishment’, produces in Swinburne’s poetry ‘merely the hallucination
of meaning∗, is adequately alert to the danger that drama with its distributive multeity of presentation offers a greater challenge. The levels of experience the personae stand for have to be presented honestly and truthfully; the dialogue has to be manipulated to allow language to operate as a socio-cultural-spiritual register of flexible dimension.

The strategies Eliot evolves along the path record his relentless wrestle with language dramatizing poetry into action – exploiting the linguistic, stylistic, philosophical, and dramatic possibilities of the chosen medium. The need is to ensure that life presented retains its palpable vitality, that the ‘daffodil’ and the ‘swallow’ remain as in Shakespeare or Wordsworth, and do not melt away as the ‘snowdrops’ in Swinburne.**

The present thesis proposes to trace the story of Eliot's strategic involvement in drama and note the variable accents in his experimentation with dramatic communication. Dialogue, stylistics, action communicated through speech, and extra-textual meaning evolving out of stage-presentation are some aspects of Eliot's dramatic art still awaiting adequate academic attention. I intend to examine Eliot's handling of these features and ascertain the nature of the communicative mode working through the varying thematic and structural patterns in the plays. Eliot's philosophical and aesthetic engagement with language and its range of communicative competence lies at the core of this study. Exploring Eliot's communicative strategies, and the effective manipulation thereof, I hope to discern new sites of Eliot's craftsmanship and new layers of meaning in the characters and content of the plays.

** Ibid., p.326.
Evolving at a comparatively later stage of Eliot's career, the plays embody the same aesthetic and spiritual journey recorded in the course of his development as a poet and critic.

A close inspection of the communicative graph in the plays reveals a developing pattern from poetry as rhythm conveying primitive elemental passion, through poetry as prayer in ritual chant, to poetry in its enigmatic emotional density and finally to poetry as transparent revealing speech. Initially in *Sweeney Agonistes*, within the framework of something like an Aristophanic melodrama, spiritual and emotional aridity is projected through mechanical mindless repetition and short bouncing lines in jazz beat. Similar to *Sweeney* in its association with the primitive fertility cult of the murdered God, and on another level in its constant analogy with Christ's Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection, *Murder in the Cathedral* projects the intersection of time with timelessness in a resonating, mystical incantation and bewildering paradox. Metaphorical obliqueness assumes an ascendency in *Family Reunion* (modelled on the second book of Aeschylus's Oresteian trilogy) as characters suffer pangs of spiritual vacuity in varying degrees of consciousness. With *The Cocktail Party* and *The Confidential Clerk*, germinating from Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Ion* respectively, speech attains a deliberate clarity of expression with only hints or suggestion of symbolic overtones, if any. Finally, in *The Elder Statesman*, expressions assume the guise of the quotidian and the facile, inwardly harbouring a depth of harmony and concord. Poetry of the exterior gives way to an inner poetry, as it were, leading towards a transcendence through faith and unconditional surrender.

The Greek, Christian and primitive sources allow Eliot not only the scope to develop cultural, social and religious archetypes as a frame of reference, but also offer formal expressive modalities to make sense of the spiritual anguish underlying informal pedestrian speech.
The present thesis begins by mapping out the range of scholarly attention devoted so far to Eliot's plays and points out that while much has been written on the Greek sources, the moral pattern and the Christian content in the plays, the action in its speech-contour still remains an area inadequately explored.

I

There the eye goes not,
Speech goes not, nor the mind.
We know not, we understand not
How one would teach it.

Kena Upanishad

Language is essentially a metaphorical exercise; it entails a journey from perception or experience to words/expression/communication, prompted by the interim phase of ‘intention’. Experience derives from the substance that generates it. Hence the question whether the act of experiencing the rose as a resinous construct on a plant is the same as calling it the ‘rose’, a word whose substance is but a cluster of letters or signs. Love, hatred or anger substantially are human emotions we live with; can these be captured in their native form with the help of words, in the names we assign to them? The difference between the two is a ‘substantial’ one in the Aristotelian sense. From the time of Hermogenes in Cratylus to Wittgenstein in The Tractatus we are reminded over and over again, that words are but verbal signs at a distance from actuality. The metaphysical question is: how far does language succeed in replicating the actual world? In the field of aesthetic enquiry the question is: In what ways do the wordsmiths succeed in reducing this gap? Does any amount of manipulation in the
forms of tropes, metaphors, symbols, images, irony and indirection bridge the gap between the word and the object, between experience and expression?

If metaphor suggests and seeks to present one thing in terms of another then all language, verbality itself, is in the nature of a metaphor. Eliot, long involved in metaphysical enquiries into the essence of things*, was deeply aware of the problems of verbal communication. The pedestrian and the poetical, he knew, constitute but levels of the basic dialectic between the object and the verbal form, the real and the ideal.

Language, as Eliot knew very well, could either work with apparent exactitude striving to capture the ‘exact curve’ of experience, or could scale up speechless heights. To transform demotic speech to literary art has been the writer’s concern and this the poet attempts through the conscious manipulation of figures, tropes and schemes. In their handbook on philology**, Greenough and Kittredge comment:

> The ordinary processes by which words change their meanings are, then, essentially the same as the devices of poetry; …the figurative language of poetry differs from the speech of common life mainly in employing fresher figures, or in revivifying those which have lost their freshness from age and constant use.

> Language is fossil poetry which is constantly being worked over for the uses of speech. Our commonest words are worn-out metaphors.9

The Russian linguist Roman Jacobson distinguishes between the prosaic and the poetic using the terms ‘metonymic’ and ‘metaphoric’ respectively. The metonymic function he assumes,

> Involves a less violent disturbance of the relation between language and perceived reality.10

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Whereas

Metaphor involves a more extreme shift from one level of meaning and context to another…¹¹

The metonymic function he asserts—

…involves a comparison between two conditions or elements that have a pre-established connection in the empirical world. We frequently refer to elements of monarchical government in terms of ‘the crown’…and we might refer to a person’s car as ‘her wheels’… Metaphor, conversely, uses the selective axis to variously disrupt and refocus the perceived relation between language and reality.¹²

In other words—

metonymy is more indicative of the logic of prose while metaphor embodies the fundamental illogic of poetry.¹³

In terms of syntax, Jacobson believes, metaphor favours the paradigmatic (connotation through association) whereas metonymy stresses the balance towards the syntagmatic i.e., attaining denotation through a logical correspondence between a tenor and a vehicle. If the syntagmatic chain followed the usual grammatical order of subject–verb-object, then the paradigmatic chain functioned by disrupting the order and replacing each grammatical unit with unusual and unprecedented alternatives. The struggle, Jakobson notes, is all about capturing truth. Seen in the assembly of the Saussurian concepts of sign (word) - signifier (visual or phonemic representation) - signified (concept or meaning) - referent (pre-linguistic concept) relationship, language in post-modernist discourse appears all the more nebulous and slippery.
II

All things in their fundamental nature are not nameable or explicable. They cannot be adequately expressed in any form of language.

Ashvaghosha *

We wish to speak in some way about the structure of the atoms .... But we cannot speak about atoms in ordinary language.

Heisenberg

The language-reality dialectic has indeed been one of the core anxiety points of cross-cultural expression. In Plato’s Cratylus, Cratylus considers ‘names’ as keys to objects in nature, encapsulating their meaningful essence. Hermogenes, on the other hand considers names as mere functional tags imposed upon men and things by convention and argument. Behind all this runs the Heraclitean doctrine of the continuous flux of all perceived things including word and meaning. This automatically leads us to the question – how reliable are words? To what extent does the correspondence between words and objects provide a stable floor? Do words readily define both the world of reason and of sense perception? What happens when human perception moves beyond the boundaries of reason to intuition and mystic thought?

Unlike the Eleatics who dismissed the world of flux altogether, Heracleitus conceived of being and non-being as co-existent and simultaneous in an incessant cycle of Becoming. To capture this duality of experience his language itself turns labyrinthine and double edged:

* A Buddhist Philosopher who lived during the latter half of 1st century A.D. to the first half of 2nd century A.D. Attended the court of Emperor Kanishka and authored the famous Budhcharita.
Into the same river, we go down and we do not go down; for into the same river, no man can enter twice; ever it flows in and out.\textsuperscript{14}

Not only are all objects in a constant flux (even the same sun is not the same everyday) but Being and not-Being, Life and Death, Origination and Cessation are ingrained in every object at one and the same time, thus creating a complex web of the inclusion of opposites, a coherence of antinomies.

In the early twentieth century a radical shift in philosophy was initiated by the work of Russell and Moore at Cambridge University. Philosophy was seen not as a study of thought and ideas but as a study of these through language. The work of Ludwig Wittgenstein could be perhaps best understood in this context. The basic assumption in Wittgenstein's \textit{Tractatus} (1921) founded on the idea that elementary propositions (names denoting simple objects) lead to complex propositions (thoughts and ideas), initially offered a logical, determinate sense of language – ‘A name means an object. The object is its meaning’\textsuperscript{15} – whether the word, at a distance from, and other than the object / thing, is equivalent to it, being a different question. Later on, around 1929, Wittgenstein moved away from this earlier position and significantly modified the ideas that ‘language has a unitary logical structure and is related to external reality in a fixed way.’\textsuperscript{16} He came to realize that language was not a matter of simple correspondence between an object and a word, the correspondence evolved and attained adequacy in the linguistic habits of a society, in the practice of convention and usage. A word acquires its meaning in its particular grammatical application and its placement in the sentence. Language is a system in itself. In order to use a sentence one must know not only the meanings of nouns, verbs and adjectives but also the significance of syntactical forms and the various connectives and auxiliaries – the lowest level of our language thus being constituted of sentence-units
not word-units. This is also the basis of Bertrand Russell’s ‘Philosophy of Logical Atomism’ where the ‘logical atoms’ are the sentences used to report a single observation. Meaning or significance then emerges out of the interrelativity and interdependence among the components.

This relational semantics and semiotics that grew into a mainstream in the post modernist era, are rooted mostly in the philosophy of indeterminacy and the concept of an ever expanding universe of interrelational flexibility that developed in the late decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. A student of philosophy, Eliot was attuned to the intellectual ambience of his time. Imbibing the ideational non-absolutism in the neo-Hegelian systems of F. H. Bradley and Josiah Royce, Eliot had developed the concept of ‘correlativity’ as the core point in the process of cognition. In his dissertation on F.H.Bradley completed by 1916, Eliot analyses the knower-known participation in perception:

We must maintain that in any cognition there is never more than a practical separation between the object and that which apprehends it… it is enough if we can make it clear that we have no immediate distinction between object and feeling… the real situation is an experience which can never be wholly defined as an object nor wholly enjoyed as a feeling, but in which any of the observed constituents may take on the one or the other aspect.  

Anne C Bolgan,∗ adopting Hugh Kenner’s phrase, had studied the formation of ‘a genetic Eliot character’ under the influence of these philosophical speculations on incertitude. Indeed, the basic assumption operative through the entire Eliot oeuvre is that our universe is multidimensional and polysemantic and no single explanation is

∗ Anne C. Bolgan brought out Eliot’s dissertation on F.H.Bradley in 1964; and although in the Preface Eliot notes that over the years his thoughts had moved away from the metaphysical preoccupation of the academic years, scholars including Anne C Bolgan, Hugh Kenner (1960) and J.H.Miller(1965) trace deep influence of these philosophical systems on Eliot’s thought. A.D.Moody (1979) mentions the Harvard dissertation as Eliot’s ‘covert ars poetica’ (p.73). S.Chatterjee’s study of the impact on Eliot of the Bradleyan skepticism and Royce’s philosophy of interrelativity came out in 1990.
adequate to define it. Eliot believes that every explanation is shown to be correct from the perspective of the perceiver and the context of perception and that perception-interpretation-comprehension constitute an inclusive and ever expansive range. Jeffrey M. Perl in 'The Language of Theory and the Language of Poetry: The Significance of T.S. Eliot's Philosophical Notebooks, Part Two', elucidates–

An explanation becomes increasingly adequate as it takes into account more points of view on its subject and includes more of its context and web of relations.\(^\text{18}\)

Eliot-studies in recent years focus on the metaphysical orientation reflected in his critical thinking and creative work and open up newer approaches to Eliot’s engagement with the problematic of verbal communication. Richard Sushterman studies Eliot’s theories of tradition in terms of his perception of the role of language. Linking Eliot with George Gadamer, disciple of Heidegger, Sushterman notes that for both, tradition is intrinsically bound with language which in turn is founded on community and communication. He quotes Gadamer's claim that

tradition is not simply a process that we learn to know and be in command of through experience; it is language.\(^\text{19}\)

Language, perhaps more evidently than tradition, as Gadamer believes, is ‘the medium in and through which we exist and perceive our world’.\(^\text{20}\) And this in a way relates back to Wittgenstein’s conviction that ‘to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.’\(^\text{21}\)
Language has also to move beyond the confines of words to reach into the ineffable and the incommunicable. One alternative perhaps is to allow language to turn musical not only in structure (contrapuntal arrangement of imagery or paradoxical interrelation of opposites, for example) but in mood and aspiration as well. On a musical level it could communicate not only an intense emotional state (as claimed by symbolists), or an aura of peace and harmony (as defined by the mystics), but also ‘the statement of vision’ (as Eliot, we know, conceived ‘meaning’ i.e. thought, and not just feeling as the essence of every experience, no matter how esoteric). A passage in ‘Burnt Norton’ elucidates the closeness of the abstract and the concrete, the emotional and the intellectual, the compressed and the elaborate, the mystically concise and poetically precise:

Time past and time future
Allow but a little consciousness.
To be conscious is not to be in time
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat
The moment in the draughty church at snowfall
Be remembered; involved with past and future
Only through time time is conquered.
In spite of the heightened sense of sublimation the poignancy of the mortal existence is never lost sight of; in the temporal and the mortal alone can the eternal and the everlasting be discerned; the here and the now, the blooming roses and the twittering birds and the dry pool, alone evoke and signal the beyond. In the structure of the poem a metaphorically compressed passage followed by a more discursive one creates, as Helen Gardner notes, the effect of ‘hearing the same melody played on a different group of instruments, or differently harmonized, or hearing it syncopated, or elaborated in variations’.22

The turning back to pre-Socratic beginnings of western thought in the epigraph to the Four-Quartets in a way is a going back to an alternative to the Platonic and post-Platonic perspectives that are logocentric and hence linear and non-contradictory. In contrast to the Platonic ‘logos’ which is the basis for western science and logic, the Heraclitean logos accommodating the essential and the actual, offers an indeterminate yet unconfined space for all differences and opposites relating to all aspects of human existence. The result is an inclusive and holistic vision that extends simultaneous validation to all antitheses and refuses to simplify the unfathomable mysteries of life.

The symbolists’ revolt against the gross materialism of the late nineteenth century predominance of science and its reliance on the literal denotative value of language had led to a re-exploration of a higher spiritual reality and an empowerment of language with the mystery of ambivalence. A symbol had been assumed to possess a double significance whereby, as M.A.R. Habib notes by drawing on Arthur Symons and Carlyle, in The Early T. S. Eliot and Western Philosophy, ‘The Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite...’.23 Symons had underscored the arbitrariness of words and promoted what Carlyle had defined as a ‘deeper subjectivity which negates or situates the literal subjectivity of the bourgeois self’.24 Eliot we know extended the
symbolist emphases on to newer levels of connotative potency. He drew on the symbolist image with its fusion of thought and feeling and amalgamation of disparate experiences as the new communicative device, the new trope, for a whole range of complex experiences. From Symons, Eliot also drew his awareness of the inner logic behind ‘actual emotions and contingent circumstances’, the deeper notions of coherence and relation beneath the fractured surface of contemporary reality. The poet could now assume an ironic double role perpetually negotiating between the objective world of convention and the subjective world of imagination. Habib adds that Laforguian irony emerged as an extreme form of symbolic ‘duality’ or multiplicity to view from more than one standpoint at once moving beyond the simple bifurcation into the material and the spiritual.∗

Eliot’s plays like most of his poems were primarily acts of probing beneath the surface to identify not the ‘socially real’ but the ‘fundamentally real’ persona of middle class individuals. This in a way is reminiscent of the Nietzschean principles of the Dionysian and Apollonian in aesthetics – unconscious depth-perception and conscious surface-perception, each speaking its own language – the one articulate, intelligible, cohesive, the other subliminal, inarticulate and intuitive. In ‘The Need for Poetic Drama’ ( Listener 1936 ), Eliot indicates his greater trust in the primal and universal complexities of human psyche – its repression, anxiety, fear, guilt and their subsequent purgation through expiation and atonement, than in the photographic realism of contemporary literature which he considers ‘greater illusion’. In his introduction to S. L. Bethell’s Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (1944), Eliot strongly claims that,

…it (poetic drama) should remove the surface of things, expose the underneath or the inside, of the natural surface appearance. It may allow the characters to behave inconsistently, but only with respect to a deeper consistency. It may use any device to show their real feelings and volitions, instead of just what, in actual life, they would normally profess or be conscious of; it must reveal, underneath the vacillating or infirm character, the indomitable unconscious will; and underneath the resolute purpose of the planning animal, the victim of circumstance and the doomed or sanctified being.25

The deliberate neglect of syntax, grammar, rhyme and rhythm in the poetry of Eliot and Pound had portrayed a world in disarray, the disjointed verse connoting that language itself is in a crisis unable to cope with a world broken and fragmented into half-or-quarter-lived lives. The piling of one image after another irrespective of the logical or narrative sequentiality and the dismantling of the syntax (accompanied by the shedding off of poeticism, literariness, didacticism or rhetoric) produced an open or unstructured form, the intention in which was to capture reality in the raw and present it uninterpreted.

The symbolist concept of syntax, Edmund Wilson explains, instead of disentangling disordered feelings into logical statements, distances and objectifies the feelings into ‘a few stenographic strokes’ – sometimes by juxtaposing images and sometimes by abandoning the look of a syntax altogether. Instead of diluting the complexity of his feeling through simple and lucid language, the poet creates a vocabulary and syntax as esoteric and confounding as the experience itself. Donald Davie mentions five forms of syntax – the subjective, objective, dramatic, musical and mathematical. Of these the musical syntax is one in which the thought or feeling is closely charted out but the nature of experience is left unexplained. Susanne Langer defines musical syntax as the ‘Morphology’ (structure) of feeling, as something ‘articulate’ but not ‘assertive’, ‘expressive’ but not ‘expression’ itself.
If syntax like music refers to something outside itself, then syntax as mathematics functions to please us 'in and for itself' – ‘the structure of expression’ then becomes more important for the reader than the structure of experience behind it. This is the pure poetry of Paul Valéry which Eliot rejected (in spite of his initial affinity with the symbolists) on the ground of its total dissociation from the ideational context – even as he recorded strong reaction to I.A. Richards’s defense of the ‘musical coherence’* (as distinct from the logical coherence) in *The Wasteland*. This in a sense and intriguingly enough, harks back to the Romantics’ revision of emphasis about a hundred years earlier and within other parameters. The Romantics in their own time had turned from the exterior to the interior essence and had come to acknowledge a deeper intellectual potency of the verbal mode. Language to them had ceased to be mere ‘Dress of Thought’ and promised to be thought / idea itself.**

Providing full articulation to disparate experiences, myriad sensations, perceptions and visions in life, is the burden of the word system; efficacy in its function has been the concern in stylistics from the classical rhetorical tradition through the Romantics, down to the Modernist and post-modernists. The Rhetorical figures of tropes and schemes do look forward to the Saussurian distinction between ‘langue’ or language as a system of rules and conventions and ‘parole’ as individual instances of linguistic usage. If New Criticism had aimed at interweaving and harmonizing all the disparate elements in the totality of a text, the deconstructionist approach offers an interesting reading of the ‘parole’ in a text showing that conflicting forces within the text itself

dissipates the seeming definitiveness of its structure and meaning into an indefinite array of indeterminate, even incompatible possibilities. If one cannot get beyond the sequence of verbal signs to anything that stands outside of the language system, if there is no field of ‘meaning’ beyond the word, then verbal discordance assumes disruptive finality and structures are on the verge of collapse.

IV

Nachiketas : Tell me what you see beyond right and wrong, beyond what is done or not done, beyond past and future.

Death : I will tell you the Word that all the Vedas glorify, all self-sacrifice express, all sacred studies and holy life seek. That Word is OM.

That Word is the everlasting Brahman: that Word is the highest End. When the great Word is known, one is great in the heaven of Brahman.

Katha Upanishad

To raise the cultural quality of British society, to refurbish the expressive capacity of language weakened by inane prose, to restore to West End theatre the deeper dimensions of experience beyond the materialistic issues of naturalistic plays – were perhaps the three imminent necessities behind twentieth century revival of English poetic drama. West End theatre thrived on a solitary plane of reality and revealed characters and events in their concrete, visible dimensions alone. To escape this tunnel vision, what Yeats, Eliot and others in the ‘poetic drama movement’ tried to capture was perhaps what Peter Brook later termed as the ‘Invisible’, ‘those “sacred” realms of experience’ beyond rational understanding. To this we may also add the
sub-text of the deep dark natural drives repressed and embodied for too long under urban sophistication or the primitive and simple impulses with their childlike imagination shackled by daily existence. The Belgian symbolist and forerunner of the ‘poetic drama movement’, Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949), in his famous essay ‘The Tragic in Daily Life’ (1896) noted the difference between ‘indispensable’ dialogue corresponding to surface reality and the unobtrusive dialogue engaged in generating the mystery of ‘beauty and loftier truth’:

…it is not in the actions but in the words that are found the beauty and greatness of tragedies that are truly beautiful and great; and this not solely in the words that accompany and explain the action, for there must perforce be another dialogue besides the one which is superficially necessary…examine it carefully, and it will be borne home to you that this is the only one that the soul can listen to profoundly, for here alone is it the soul that is being addressed. You will see, too, that it is the quality and the scope of this unnecessary dialogue that determine the quality and the immeasurable range of the work.27

Commenting on the truth of the ‘interior’ Yeats wrote (1904) –

After all, is not the greatest play, not the play that gives the sensation of an external reality, but the play in which there is the greatest abundance of life itself, of the reality that is in our minds?28

Eliot, in ‘Poetry and Drama’ (1951), spoke of an ‘inner reality’ –

It seems to me that beyond the nameable, classifiable emotions and motives of our conscious life when directed towards action – the part of life which prose drama is wholly adequate to express – there is a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye and can never completely focus; of feeling of which we are only aware in a kind of temporary detachment from action.29

To negotiate the interplay of the levels of reality, writers of poetic drama cultivated a non-naturalistic, non-commercial style of expression with three major domains of experimentation – structure, content and verse form. In the absence of a secure model or a set of conventions they developed their own individual strategies promoting verse
dramas of various shades and colour – social and political (as in Auden and Isherwood), religious (Eliot, Anne Ridler and Charles Williams), philosophical and spiritual (Yeats, Eliot & Fry). Yeats (1865-1939) employed all sorts of stylized devices: masked dance, choric music, dreamlike atmosphere, stage-tableau, still posing, or lyrical verse lines. Eliot followed suit with syncopated verse rhythm and colloquial style in the *Sweeney Fragments* (1927), ‘short rhyming exchanges’ and ‘occasional songs’ in the pageant play *The Rock* (1934) and the ritual pattern in *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). The play specially commissioned for a religious festival, perhaps upholds the Levi-Straussian doctrine that, ‘a ritual theatre …in celebrating the Invisible, offers its audience an experience of the *communitas*. …its ability to establish a sense of communality and so heal the "sick social body" of the West’. This is reminiscent also of the Yeatsian preference for ‘Emotion of the Multitude’– emotions generated through group identity as in the Greek chorus or through the sub-plots replicating the main plot in a Shakespearian play. In *Murder in the Cathedral* Eliot reinforced the ritual element by converting the liturgy into the lyric chorus of the women of Canterbury and the direct address to the audience– the group voice of the knights reaching across centuries and the iconic voice of the archbishop directed to audience of all times.

With his major drawing-room comedies however, he aimed at larger commercial success and for reaching out to a larger audience drifted from metrical or verse like prose to a semblance of realism through prose like verse. Christopher Fry, in fact, hinted at the verse-prose fluidity when in ‘Why Verse?’ (1955) he commented:

> What reason is there for limiting the theatre to one form of communication?... Indeed, prose and verse existing side by side counter each other’s dangers. If they pass altogether out of each
other’s reach they cease to be themselves, becoming on the one hand journalese, official cant, or any other string of sentences; and on the other, a vagueness, an abstraction, a preciousness. This interplay of difference, one touching the hand of the other as it separates, like men and women dancing the Grand Chain, is what keeps each in its own state of grace.31

Fry refused to accept the division of a person’s identity into the prosaic and the poetic:

I think we live always with a foot in each camp, or rather, that there is no moment when we can safely say that we belong entirely to one or the other.32

True to the ethos of poetic drama Fry insisted on the power of words to simulate action:

But we know that words and actions are not unrelated. One illuminates the other; and the full significance of action can be explored only by words…the experience is in the words. …The action is not the dagger in Duncan’s breast, or the blood on Macbeth’s hand, but rather the limitless experience of the words arising out of them: the experience of Macbeth does murder sleep?33

Eliot’s dependence on poetry however did not work at the same level throughout his dramatic career. It is true that his later plays were fed on a ‘thin diet’ of poetry (‘more explicit than prose’ as Hugh Kenner says), the dense imagery of the early ones missing, yet it cannot be denied that the basic vision of spiritual rejuvenation remained at the heart of all his plays. The later plays had indeed gained in speakability and precision of expression within the limits of drawing-room comedy but the shift in exterior, in no way interfered with his basic premise as a poet: namely, the poet’s task of extending and enhancing his medium by encompassing the realities and speech of modern life, by giving linguistic expression to the vaguely felt feelings of the commoners, and by extending the confines of human consciousness by reporting the unknown and the inexpressible.
Eliot’s plays, born in the realist mode of the inter-war years, were indeed conceived with a different intention. The realistic plays of Eliot’s time were ‘analytical’ and ‘narrative’ discussing and exploring ideas at great length at a conscious polemical level. The subtext of the Freudian unconscious or the Chekhovian silences of deep revelation were yet to open. Realist playwrights dealt with issues in an overt, conscious and explicit manner by talking out the whole thing. The importance of the ‘discussion element’ in realistic drama, as Katherine J. Worth notes, was motivated by the fact, that the leading playwrights of the age were also leading novelists in their own right.

What would in their novels presumably have been authorial exposition emerge in their plays as commentaries by the characters on themselves...The dialogue is explicit and unambiguous. Characters are always explaining themselves to each other.34

Much like his master mentor Chekhov, Eliot rose above realism to suggest new directions. In the plays of Chekhov individual words move beyond their periphery and work out towards a new whole. Chekhov’s dramas are marked by an extreme simplicity of vocabulary which baffled producers and translators alike. The mystery lay in the fact that it was not just one speech but a combination of many speeches that built up his deepest themes through an architectural design of repetitions and parallels. Chekhov’s plays were ‘mood’ pieces – subtle, soft, subdued with
shifting emotional states, yet they also featured as powerful social critiques of early twentieth century upper middle class Russia.

Before coming to handle full form poetic drama, Eliot had grappled with the problem of communicating with audience at the theatre. Drama for him was inherent in every poetic form and drama offered the widest range of communicative possibilities with people of all sections and all sensibilities. With verse as the framework and poetry as the medium, poetic drama, he felt, was meant to capture the widest range of emotions and the subtlest shades of perception that was normally likely to evade the common man:

…if we are to express ourselves, our variety of thoughts and feelings, on a variety of subjects with inevitable rightness, we must adapt our manner to the moment with infinite variations. Examination of the development of Elizabethan drama shows this progress in adaptation, a development from monotony to variety, a progressive refinement in the perception of the variations of feeling, and a progressive elaboration of the means of expressing these variations.35

All through his work Eliot emphasized the ‘modernist’ values of precision of thought, genuineness of emotion and exactitude of expression. In ‘Swinburne as Poet’ (1920) he privileges effective statement over vacuous musicality and towards the end of ‘ "Rhetoric" and Poetic Drama’ (1919) and also in ‘Poetry and Drama’ (1951) he dismisses vagueness altogether.

Some writers appear to believe that emotions gain in intensity through being inarticulate. Perhaps the emotions are not significant enough to endure full daylight.36

Inclusive range of emotion, intensity of feeling, musical patterning of form and content and the unfolding of the full dramatic and poetic possibilities of the verbal form, were some of the major concerns that engaged Eliot in his bid to revitalize the
communicative power of poetry and also to revive poetic drama and help it reach out
to the audience at large.

In the essays written during the first two decades of the century Eliot appears
engaged in the act of coordinating modern experience with modern poetic expression.
The task of the twentieth century poet, Eliot like most other ‘modernists’ felt, was
heavier than that of the poets of the earlier age – the accumulation of historical and
scientific knowledge constituting major chunks in the contemporary complex
spectrum of experience. In ‘Euripides and Prof. Murray’ (1920), he affirms –

If we are to digest the heavy food of historical and scientific
knowledge that we have eaten we must be prepared for much
greater exertions;\(^{37}\)

Out of this exertion, as he mentions in ‘Swinburne as Poet’ (1920), will emerge the
language, ‘struggling to digest and express new objects, new groups of objects, new
feelings, new aspects’.\(^{38}\) The same idea is further developed and defined in his more
frequently cited essay, ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ (1921), where Eliot points out how
the modern poet is expected to be

…more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in
order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his
meaning.\(^{39}\)

In ‘Andrew Marvell’ (1921) Eliot notes that the aim is to discern ‘in the expression of
every experience, ... other kinds of experience which are possible’\(^{40}\). The intensity of
emotional experience is preserved intact in this compression of expression and yet
impersonalized and universalized either by the imagist formula or by the objective
correlative of a ‘situation’ or a ‘chain of events’ as in drama. A proportionate
harmony between the tenor and the vehicle is obligatory. If the content is in excess of
the form it churns out melodrama, if the form supersedes the content, the product is
inane. External facts and the emotion evoked have to be in ‘exact equivalence’ to each other. What matters in literature, is not just any emotion but ‘significant emotion’ arising out of an amalgam of varied experiences working towards a new whole and differing widely and qualitatively from what the poet had originally to express.

The immense range of emotions in the poetry of Dante, including ‘depravity’s despair’ and ‘beatific vision’, and his ability to realize their embodiment in language proper appealed to Eliot. In the 1950 lecture he notes that Dante provides the gateway to the incomprehensible and the inexplicable by virtue of his mastery over language and serves as

a constant reminder to the poet, of the obligation to explore, to find words for the inarticulate, to capture those feelings which people can hardly even feel, because they have no words for them;41

Dante and Baudelaire appear to have presented two extremes of the poetic experience. From Baudelaire and Laforgue Eliot learnt

that the source of new poetry might be found in what had been regarded hitherto as the impossible, the sterile, the intractably unpoetic.42

Eliot’s chief concern was to promote co-extension of expression and experience; a commensuration of the two in which one without the other remains truncated; one without the other does not mature or leave room for experimentation or innovation.

During the 40s and the 50s decades Eliot was exploring the poet’s depth and range of assimilation, even as in the decades earlier he had been concerned with the poet’s manipulation of language to complex effect. In the 1929 essay ‘Dante’ he had insisted that in reinventing linguistic applications, the poet not only enriches meaning
of words and equips their implication but also redirects the reader’s attention to areas of fresher perception,

he gives them the speech in which more can be expressed.  

He thereby not only constructs the poet’s language, but introduces a new verbal mode now available to one and all:

…whether they are poets, philosophers, statesmen or railway porters.  

Eliot cited Dante as a reminder to the effect

that the explorer beyond the frontiers of ordinary consciousness will only be able to return and report to his fellow-citizens, if he has all the time a firm grasp upon the realities with which they are already acquainted.  

This in fact was also the position that Eliot strove for in his modern verse plays. His grip over reality, his firm hold on the meaning or significance of content, would be the authentic core that would lend credibility to his work – no matter how obscure, allusive, mystical or surrealist they were. Time and again Eliot emphasized that true poetry originated from honest emotion and permanent impulse. In ‘The Stoicism of Seneca’ (1927), as in ‘Poe to Valéry’ (1948) he values subject matter as the essence of all good poetry. In the latter essay he unflinchingly declares –

in even the most purely incantatory poem, the dictionary meaning of words cannot be disregarded with impunity.  

As a complement to this statement he further adds –

a complete unconsciousness of anything but style would mean that poetry has vanished.  

In ‘Dante’ he reaffirms the value of sense in words and their associative nature:

In English poetry words have a kind of opacity* which is part of their beauty. I do not mean that the beauty of English poetry is what is called mere ‘verbal beauty’. It is rather that words have associations, and the groups of words in association have associations, which is a kind of local self-consciousness, because they are the growth of a particular civilization.48

In ‘The Music of Poetry’ (1942) he declares in unambiguous terms that –

the music of poetry is not something which exists apart from the meaning.49

A musical poem ought to be an amalgam of music, image and idea working into a new whole while retaining their individual identities. On how the music is built up from an evolving network of verbal connotation Eliot wrote –

The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association.50

In the same essay he affirms that not only does music entail meaning, but poetry that is ‘occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail’51, is also impregnated with projectable though unparaphrasable substance. As a result

The poem means more, not less, than ordinary speech can communicate.52

However, the rhythm of ordinary speech, Eliot knew, is essential in resuscitating modern poetic plays. In ‘The Music of Poetry’ he warned us against distancing poetry

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* Swinburne’s poetry, he believes, lacks coherent, comprehensible meaning as –

he uses the most general word, because his emotion is never particular, never in direct line of vision, never focused; it is emotion reinforced not by intensification, but by expansion.

from the ‘the changing language of common intercourse’. Comparative analysis of successful Elizabethan blank verse and its subsequent decline in the hands of nineteenth century verse dramatists led him to infer that the only way of winning the audience was by capturing the diction and cadence of regular conversational speech, for

The dependence of verse upon speech is much more direct in dramatic poetry than in any other.53

Eliot was keenly aware of potential extremes; he reminded us that Milton had strayed far away from the ‘social idiom’ in trying to explore ‘the orchestral music of language’ whereas Wordsworth dwindled into pedestrianism in trying to be too close to the common speech pattern. It was Shakespeare who struck the balance–by the time he wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* he had devised a medium in which everything that any dramatic character might have to say, whether high or low, ‘poetical’ or ‘prosaic’ could be said with naturalness and beauty.54

In ‘Poetry and Drama’ (1951), offering reasons for reinstating verse-plays, he rejects the idea that quotidian reality should be offered in prose whereas moments of intense feeling alone should be presented in verse from. He wants the same medium to permeate the whole play so that the audience moves between the two worlds without a conscious jolt

What we have to do is to bring poetry into the world in which the audience lives ... not to transport the audience into some imaginary world totally unlike its own, an unreal world in which poetry is tolerated.55

Citing examples from *Macbeth* and *Othello* Eliot shows how poetry alone can instill layers of meaning to a single line. Dramatic poetry alone is capable of presenting
simultaneously the dramatic, the actional, and the musical order. Eliot here talks about
the ‘peculiar range of sensibility’ which

can be expressed by dramatic poetry, at its moments of greatest
intensity.\textsuperscript{56}

and adds,

At such moments, we touch the border of those feelings which only
music can express.\textsuperscript{57}

In the ‘Three Voices of Poetry’ (1953) differentiating the three modes of
projection –lyric poetry, dramatic monologues, and dialogues in drama – he notes that
the three are likely to resonate and connect with different levels of the audience’s
consciousness. The audience indeed is a vital factor; resonance of different levels of
sensibility opens up fields of response large and varied. In ‘The Music of Poetry’
(1942), long before the formulation of reader’s response as a definitive aesthetic
force, Eliot admits,

A poem may appear to mean very different things to different
readers, and all of these meanings may be different from what the
author thought he meant.\textsuperscript{58}

The playwright’s manipulation of the communicative strategies calls for an
understanding of the contemporary viewers and their response abilities.

Underneath their ritualistic and mythical pattern Eliot’s plays, we know, drew
heavily on popular entertainments like the jazz, the vaudeville, or the music hall
comedy. A Harvard intellectual, Eliot studied and trusted the source of vitality and
strength in forms of entertainment at the level of mass culture. Again, behind Eliot’s
repeated claim that poetry is latent in everyday speech, perhaps there was a conviction
that recovery of the poetic essence was the need of the time – even at the level of the
commoners; perhaps Eliot was asking us to reach down to the life of instinct and
sensitivity long lost under civilization and its discontent. Russell Kirk in \textit{Eliot and His}
Age: T.S. Eliot’s Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century, upholds Eliot’s moral propensity and his urge to redeem the life of his age. His was a progressive quest for the ultimate knowledge that would make human life meaningful – through ‘communication’ and ‘love’ and finally through a ‘community of souls.’

To reach out to an audience – large and miscellaneous – theatre was assumed to be the ideal medium, and poetry its conduit of nuanced expression. To generate a 'direct social utility' out of his aesthetic exploration, Eliot chiselled out a verse that would not only sound contemporary by its speech like cadence, but also cover a wide spectrum of experience from the superficial to the spiritual, and appeal to audiences of varied tastes and sensitivity. Heightened moments of poetry would be initiated in the process and a regenerative influence cast on the unconscious auditors leading them towards a refinement of soul. The poet's gain, the gain on the side of literary tradition itself, would be to accomplish, as Eliot suggests in his later poetry and elaborates in his essays, 'a purification of the dialect of the tribe'.