CHAPTER THREE: Stylistics and Speech-Act

Let my speech be situated in my mind
Let my mind be situated in my speech
Let them cohere.

Prayer in Aitareya Upanishad

The study of stylistic strategies and devices had long been part of intensive textual study of poetry; its application to drama gained ground mostly in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Application of this to Eliot's plays still constitutes a limited range; the ethical-philosophical-spiritual enquiry in Eliot's work is inevitably foregrounded and stylistic investigation easily takes a backseat. Yet, the major channel of communication, even on stage, is verbal interaction and stylistic modalities do weave patterns in the carpet. Analysis of the verbal texture from diverse angles proposed in stylistic studies – at least some of them – unfold a complex communicative function of the spoken word which carries the action forward.

Murder in the Cathedral is a play which primarily pivots on a conflict within a mind – politico-religious conflicts constituting the outer framework; and all the strength here is concentrated in the spoken word itself. Nevill Coghill explains the situation introducing the play in its college text edition (1965):

…this is not a Shakespearean chronicle-play that tells an intricate, proliferating story full of incident, but a sparer drama, more in the manner of Aeschylus, about a great cause in which incident and idiosyncrasy lose their importance. Unlike Shakespeare’s plays, … Eliot’s plays are about situations, not stories, like Everyman before them, and Waiting for Godot after. Murder in the Cathedral is about a situation and a quality of life;¹
Beckett’s fourth temptation and his crucial, complex, metaphysical choice of the right reason to die is conveyed to the audience by the character’s gait, tone and words

I know that history at all times draws
The strangest consequence from remotest cause.
But for every evil, every sacrilege,
Crime, wrong, oppression and the axe's edge,
Indifference, exploitation, you, and you,
And you, must all be punished. So must you
I shall no longer act or suffer, to the sword's end. (Part I : 699-705)

Words effect gestured communication and tonal shifts present translocation of emphases and attention, reflecting the course of inner action and progress toward determinational clarity.

*The Family Reunion* gives shape to an abstract and rarefied experience that defies not only action but at times even speech. Eliot’s intent to spur religious intuition and spiritual sensitivity amongst an audience desensitised in moribund existence manifests itself through the double-effect discourse – spontaneous and normal at one level, empowered and heightened on the other. Drawing-room conversation is poetically strengthened to meet the demands of an elevated reality and language is geared up to suit the metaphysical frame of a sense of sin and guilt.

In *Sweeney Agonistes*, much closer to the earthy level of existence as it is, the experience of action remains tenuous. It is a study in the latent savagery in man and the sense of guilt gnawing at Sweeney’s heart generated by his desire to decimate a woman. Bernard Bergonzi (1972) notes the non-action stature of the play:

In *Sweeney* he developed a mode of dramatic speech that triumphantly met his demands, but he could not project an appropriate action to accompany it, which was, no doubt, why the play remained incomplete, for *Sweeney* is as essentially static as ‘Prufrock’ or ‘Gerontion’².

Words miserably fail in communicating the deep and central vision of the play. Sweeney’s self-awareness, sarcastic and bitter, in contrast with the metaphysical spiritual dilemmas faced by Beckett and Harry, however, alienates him from others around and his perception of the horror and boredom underlying sham glitter and mindless routine makes him suffer in isolation:

*Sweeney:*  
Birth, and copulation, and death.  
That’s all, that’s all, that’s all, that’s all  
Birth, and copulation, and death.

Eliot’s plays project his perception of the spiritual degradation of a society swamped by materialism and commercialism, unable to respond to a higher reality, given the sterility of the soul. The only remedy lies in redemption through purification by surrendering one’s will to the will of God. Whatever action there is in these plays, stems from the conviction of the Fall of Man and the Original Sin³; the rest is merely a façade of West End theatre and that by itself poses a big challenge.

Eliot knows that drama is in action; in ‘Poetry and Drama’ (1951) he tells us,

…I tried to keep in mind that in a play, from time to time, something should happen; that the audience should be kept in the constant expectation that something is going to happen.⁵

What happens in his plays, however, is an inner experience; action in these plays is essentially of the metaphorical kind. The plot or storyline does not actually matter.

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² We would remember Eliot’s comment, in the *Criterion* of July 1931: ‘I was brought up outside the Christian fold, in Unitarianism; and in the form of Unitarianism in which I was instructed, things were either black or white, the Son and the Holy Ghost were not believed in.’
What matters is the change in the course of hidden life—the life of inner solitude—the passage through sin, guilt and expiation—redemption being achieved, sometimes through ‘via negativa’—the dark night of the soul, and sometimes by settling down to the ways of life but with a surer self-knowledge of one’s moral failings.

II

Again, if the journey through the dark night of the soul in Eliot’s plays of the first phase seeks and finds a signifier in poetry and the metaphorical mythical manner, graded phases of the journey presented in the later plays beginning with Cocktail Party reverse the track. Drawing nearer to the true meaning of existence and progressively although cautiously and with halting steps, preparing to receive the message of love, forgiveness and acceptance, these plays, interestingly enough, move away from the overtly metaphorical / poetical and reach into a transparency of speech-modality which obviously is less poetical, yet not prosaic in any sense. Eliot maps the route taken by other twentieth century dramatists in trying to be non-naturalistic but finally ends up by hovering between stylisation and verisimilitude. Beckett and Pinter succeed probably by using a deceptively simple prose; in Eliot stylisation remained overt through poetic cadence and ritual gestures.

From Murder in the Cathedral to the later plays, Eliot’s stylistic involution manifests a gradual reduction in poetry, followed by a proliferation in prosaic features: ‘philosophy, wit and epigram’.* In Sweeney Agonistes demotic speech had been heightened to fashion a stage-language through repetition, rhythm and chorus

whereas in *The Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral* Christian phraseology, biblical imagery and liturgical hymn lend special quality to the texture. In *The Family Reunion* the poetry is subtle and evocative in a heavily metaphoric style. Versification and dramaturgy join hands in this play to provide a workable medium aimed at finding, as Eliot puts it, ‘a rhythm close to contemporary speech, in which the stresses could be made to come wherever we should naturally put them…’

The verse of *The Cocktail Party* (1949) is lucid statement with imagery and evocation reduced to the minimum. Scholars take *Cocktail Party* as marking a decisive turn in Eliot’s playwriting career. Hugh Kenner in *The Invisible Poet* (1960) defines *The Cocktail Party* as ‘the first Eliot work (except ‘Ash-Wednesday’) in which anything happens … In *The Cocktail Party* something happens at last. The ‘‘dead’’ woman is restored’. Raymond Williams also brings to the fore, the element of action in the play:

> What Eliot does, in *The Cocktail Party*, is to bring to the level of recognisable action the structure of feeling by which he had always been determined, but which had been mainly expressed, elsewhere, as a rhythm or as an image.

Poetry here exists in an unobtrusive and inaudible cadence complemented by four-stress irregular metre and a slightly elevated diction that might push ‘the limits of conversation speech’. The poetry is so slight that Eliot himself wondered ‘whether there is any poetry in the play at all’. There is no chorus, no lyric, no recitative or aria expression, yet the strategy of double-pattern subsists even through the prosaic verse. We are reminded of the banal surface language hiding profound poetic depth in the plays of Chekhov, Beckett and Pinter. The banal social pattern in the first scene of *Cocktail Party* is deceptive because it hides a core of deeper concern. By Act II the audience is convinced that Alex and Julia are not the typical affluent types but
characters with deep mystical assignment just as Alex’s eggs and Julia’s specs emerge as objects of special symbolic value. Katherine E. Kelly in ‘An Unnatural Eloquence: Eliot’s Plays in the Course on Modern Drama’ draws our attention to the innocent surface language and the deeper level of communication in this play: ‘the guardians’ apparently banal party talk is code for a nearly inexpressible spiritual communication among them. Eliot manages these levels more delicately, less overtly than he had before, largely through his increased control of dramatic irony. The reconciliation between Edward and Lavinia may be viewed as ‘a metaphor for the unifying of the entire Christian community’ and the end of the play, as a promise towards true communion and reciprocal love.

In The Confidential Clerk (1953), the verse rhythm is so slight as to suggest no poetry at all; even more than Cocktail Party, it emulates the stylistics of near prose. Grover Smith (we noted in the earlier chapter), describes it as ‘verse in typography but prose in cadence’. Not only is there less poetic mumbling but also there are no symbolic objects except for the one verbal symbol of the ‘garden’. With The Elder Statesman (1958), the ideal integration of poetry and drama, as some critics note, is reached, and Carol H. Smith believes, poetic interlude, earlier thought to be ‘beyond character’, ‘now serves to forward the main love theme of the play’.

Commenting on the ease of Eliot’s use of the verbal medium as a vehicle for the social comedies, Helen Gardner noted in 1965,

…I have left without comment one most striking merit: their ‘speakability’. The unobtrusive vigour of their language modulates from chatter, gossip or prattle to reflection and serious self-probing without its ever losing rhythmic vitality. Eliot’s desire to create a ‘transpicuous language’ as a vehicle for drama was fulfilled in what is

best described as the ‘heightened speech’ of these plays. Their language would be a subject for an essay in itself.\textsuperscript{11}

Eliot develops literary techniques to suit the thematic tenor of his plays; stylistic variations emerge out of the larger need of adequate communication of a perception profile. Russell Kirk, in \textit{T.S. Eliot’s Moral Imagination in the Twentieth Century} (1979), points out that during the 40s Eliot was more interested in ‘certain truths perceived’ than in metre and style –

> How are we to live this imperfect life of ours and transcend the body of this death? How do we escape from the prison of ego, and from our old servitude to time? How do we redeem, at once, the self and the time? \textsuperscript{12}

Probings into these deeper questions lead to varied, innovative experimentation with the poetic form, speech modalities and stylistic devices.

\section*{III}

Language in \textit{Murder in the Cathedral} is heavily laden with ellipsis, anaphora and paradox. So is \textit{Family Reunion}. Both plays pivot on a system of paradox and the Heraclitean chiasmus. Christ and St. Paul used paradox to deliver mystical messages through ‘a flash of contraries’.\textsuperscript{*} Heracleitus employed paradox to elicit meaning from the incessant flux and indeterminacy of a changing world, balancing the constant interplay of opposites.

Paradox in fact is the rhetoric of all mystical religions, specially the Chinese Taoism and Japanese Zen. Considering Eliot’s long involvement in Indic religion, glancing back at this area might provide new insight into his aesthetic strategy. Unlike Hinduism which delivers mystical experience mostly in the garb of mythology,

Taoism and Buddhism tend to capture it in terms of factual language but through a paradoxically structured statement: through the carefully wrought apparently nonsensical riddles of the Zen ‘Koans’, or the extremely concise 17 syllabic spiritual aura of the Japanese ‘Haiku’. Modern physics takes recourse to the paradoxical style; sub-atomic reality defies all sensory experience and perhaps the capacity of language. In both religion and science the narrow binary of polar opposites is transcended to acknowledge a unifying essence. Linear thinking, logical reasoning or intellectual concept fail to capture this non-verbal reality which assimilates yet affirms all paradoxical and contradictory experiences. When Oppenheimer speaks on the nature of atoms in *Science and the Common Understanding* he explains—

> If we ask, for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say ‘no’; if we ask whether the electron’s position changes with time, we must say ‘no’; if we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say ‘no’; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say ‘no’.13

This comes close to the tone and tenor of the voice in the *Upanishads* explaining the Brahma* or the Eternal Unity:

> It moves. It moves not.  
> It is far, and it is near  
> It is within all this,  
> And it is outside of all this. (Isha Upanishad)

Buddha, Confucius and Heracleitus lived in the same era and there seems to be a lot of common points in their thinking. Unlike the Eleatics who dismissed the world of flux altogether, Heracleitus conceived of the Being and non-Being as co-existent and simultaneous in an incessant cycle of Becoming. To capture this duality of experience his language, we know, acquires the celebrated labyrinthine and

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* Brahma → ब्रह्म (to grow), suggests a reality that is dynamic and alive.
double-edged character: ‘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 flows out.’\textsuperscript{14} Not only are all objects in a constant flux 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 harmony of opposites. Eliot, skipping over the mere word-jugglery of the sophists, rerelates to the Heracleitian maze-like structure through multiple repetition and antithesis as in a chiasmus. In the closing lines of ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ repetitions precipitate an apparent coherent pattern of harmony whereas the contrasting propositions lend an effect of incompatibility and discordance:

And he (the poet) is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.\textsuperscript{15}

Eliot also shares in many ways the subtle and mute poetic nuances of Chekhovian drama. Chekov provides example of how individual words can be made to cohere and their meanings dissolved and merged in order to reach for a new whole. Chekov’s dramas were 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 speeches that built up his deepest themes through an architectural design of repetition, parallels and balances.

The Heracleitian flux of thought and the consequent indeterminacy of language is contrary to Western logic and science and its stable concept of the logos with its ‘notions of unity, identity and coherence’. Heracleitus’s fragments not only project a structure of equated opposites that can be filled in different ways but also direct towards a plethora of alternative referents. The Heraclitean fragments cited in
the opening of ‘Burnt Norton’, ‘The way up and the way down are one and the same’,
defy a definitive interpretation and promote instead a web of questioning,
contradiction and indeterminate values.

‘The way up and the way down’, as John Paul Riquelme* explains, may refer
to a way up and down the hill, or from or to a shore, or the journey of a soul from
beginning to end. ‘Up and down’, ‘to and fro’, and ‘from and to’ in fact, are
interchangeable relational phrases that may also create varying suggestiveness. In the
lyric duet between Agatha and Harry in *Family Reunion* (Act II, ii) one takes up the
other’s form of speech by repeating the same verbal and syntactical pattern:

Harry : In and out, in an endless drift
… In and out, the movement
Until the chain broke,

Agatha : Up and down, through the stone passages
… … … …
Up and down. Until the chain breaks.

Harry : To and fro, dragging my feet
Among inner shadows in the smoky wilderness,
… To and fro.
Until the chain breaks.

The conjunctions have spiritual connotations indicating the omniscience or
omnipresence of God, both within the soul and without. Harry’s state is of one
‘chained to the wheel’; ‘until the chain broke’ is a refrain that both Harry and Agatha
keep on mumbling; both refer to images that add to the concept of the burning wheel
of suffering to which the individual is tied. In describing the godless and barren

*Harmony of Dissonances : T.S. Eliot, Romanticism and Imagination, (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins
civilization both Agatha and Harry use quotidian details. Agatha, in Part II, Scene ii, lines 202-03, speaks of ‘...an immense and empty hospital/Pervaded by a smell of disinfectant’, while Harry, as in I, ii, imagines evil as the branches of a tree in the shape of a ‘giant lizard’.

Oxymorons like ‘instant eternity’ or ‘painful joy’, or ‘flames of ice’ represent extreme forms of the paradox, the precarious balancing of antinomies on which the early plays rest. Paradox operates through imagery and symbols. The most pervasive of them all is the wheel image. Human beings are either liberated from or chained to it. Harry speaks in terms of the wheel to describe a soul attached to worldly life and torn by doubts and cares. In desiring to kill his wife Harry made a futile attempt to break the chain – ‘It was only reversing the senseless direction / For a momentary rest on the burning wheel’ (Part I, sc. i, l 336); The still point of the wheel holds the will of God to which one hardly turns. The idea is almost analogous to a Taoist Text:

The stillness in stillness is not the real stillness. Only
when there is a stillness in movement can the spiritual
rhythm appear which pervades heaven and earth.16

In Murder in the Cathedral, the third priest invokes the image of the wheel by drawing directly on the Bible; (Ecc. XII lines 3-4):

For good or ill, let the wheel turn.
The wheel has been still, these seven years, and no good.
For ill or good, let the wheel turn. (I, ll 137 – 139)

It is foolish to try to reverse the motion of the wheel and it is a grave failing to forget the still centre that makes the wheel turn. The centre is God’s love – his allowance of redemption and the promise of forgiveness that Harry fails to recognize.
Closely allied to the turning of the wheel is the cyclic motion of the seasonal imagery. The referent in both cases in certain contexts is the same – meaningless repetition in a dull routine. In the seasonal imagery used by the chorus in *Murder in the Cathedral* for example, the decline of a luscious golden October into a sombre November, conveys the haunting messages of a meaningless end to a meaningless life:

Since golden October declined into sombre November
And the apples were gathered and stored, and the land became brown sharp points of death in a waste of water and mud,
The New Year waits, breathes, waits, whispers in darkness.
While the labourer kicks off a muddy boot and stretches his hand to the fire,
The New Year waits, destiny waits for the coming. (Part I, ll 9-13)

Comparable to this is the sidereal time in the opening of *The Rock*:

O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,
O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!
The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment, …

Seasonal cycle in the opening of *The Family Reunion* acts both as a reminder of a guilt-free joyful past and a present heavily laden with fear, anxiety and mistrust:

Amy: Now that I sit in the house from October to June,
And the swallow comes too soon and the spring will be over
And the cuckoo will be gone before I am out again.
O Sun, that was once so warm, O Light that was taken for granted
When I was young and strong, and sun and light unsought
for
And the night unfeared and the day expected
And the clocks could be trusted, tomorrow assured
And time would not stop in the dark!

(I, i, ll 3 – 10)

The only way out of this meaningless repetitive cycle and cramping routine is
to grasp the ‘moment not out of time but in time’— the momentous event of
Incarnation, eternity unfolding in its temporal form! On a more worldly level it is that
moment of fleeting joy, that sudden ‘shaft of sunlight/Even while the dust moves’
(‘Burnt Norton’), that alone can give one the taste of instant eternity – the experience
of being both in and out of time – like Agatha’s experience at the threshold of the
unentered rose garden; a satisfying fulfilment to fall back on for the whole of a life-
time:

There are hours when there seems to be no past or future,
Only a present moment of pointed light
When you want to burn. When you stretch out your hand
To the flames. They only come once,
Thank God, that kind. (II, ii, ll 92 – 96)

Set against this is the common man’s perception of time, as the Tempter in Murder in the Cathedral says – ‘Time past is time forgotten’, or as Harry says to his bewildered kins, ‘Of the past you can only see what is past, / Not what is always present. That is what matters’ (I, i, ll 315 – 16).

The higher concept of Time had been encapsulated with incantatory enchantment in ‘Burnt Norton’ written four years before The Family Reunion:
Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.

Paradox on Time and its many dimensions harks back to the fifth Book of Boethius’ (AD 470-525) *Consolation of Philosophy*, distinguishing human-time of past, present and future from God’s time or Eternity – all time contained in one instant. Human beings thrive in the flux of time, hence the concept of Whole Time remains beyond comprehension. But seen from a mystical point of elevation, the understanding of the workings of time assumes metaphysical implications. *The Family Reunion* recalls the idea in varying phraseology:

Harry: And the past is about to happen, and the future was long
since settled (I, iii, l 95)

O God, man, the things that are going to happen
Have already happened. (II, i, ll 13-14)

Harry comes to discern through detachment and dispossession the path to true realization, reconcilement and attachment to God much as the course is charted in ‘East Coker’:

In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.

In order to possess what you do not possess
You must go by the way of dispossession.

In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not. (‘East Coker’ III)
It is Harry’s knowledge of the true nature of his predicament in the labyrinth of family curse, that grants him release and purgation:

…the desert is cleared, under the judicial sun
Of the final eye, and the awful evacuation
Cleanses. (Part II, Sc ii, ll 213-15)

The positioning of the women of Canterbury in the spiritual scheme of martyrdom has also been paradoxically explained:

They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.
They know and do not know, that action is suffering
And suffering is action. Neither does the agent suffer
Nor the patient act. But both are fixed
In an eternal action, an eternal patience
To which all must consent that it may be willed
And which all must suffer that they may will it, (Part I, ll 208-14)

Martyrdom, truly, is the supreme paradox inviting both mourning and joy. Beckett imbibes and percolates its essence; but to Julia, the 'wise fool' or the 'blind seer' (as Ann P. Brady terms her in 'The Alchemy of Humour in the The Cocktail Party' in Jewel Spears Brooker (ed.), Approaches to Teaching T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays), spiritual vision is still restricted till Celia treads the martyr's course. In fact, without Celia's martyrdom, like Alcestis being consigned to the underworld, no difference would have been made – no life restored – to the crushing marital world of the Chamberlaynes.
If ‘Paradox’ is the way to the essence of mysticism then ‘Parallelism’ may be held as the key to its effect. Leech defines parallelism as ‘exact verbal repetitions in equivalent positions’. It normally occurs at the beginning of a sentence; in other positions it is designated otherwise: for example, Anaphora – is initial repetition, Epistrophone – is final repetition, Symploce – anaphora and epistrophe taken together, Anadiplosis – comes when last part of one unit is repeated at the beginning of the next, Epanalepsis – comes when final part of each unit of the pattern repeats the initial part, Antistrophe – implies the repetition of items in a reverse order.

The *Rock* chorus in the typical Biblical style of supplication and praise is patterned in terms of the Hebrew prosody of parallelism whereby, as Tydeman explains, ‘one statement is offset or echoed by another’ through the device of a patterned repetition - a basic attribute of ritual-worship all over the world.

The Word of Lord came unto me, saying:

I have given you hands which you turn from worship,
I have given you speech, for endless palaver,
I have given you my Law, and you set up commissions,
I have given you lips, to express friendly sentiments,
I have given you hearts, for reciprocal distrust.
I have given you power of choice, and you only alternate
Between futile speculation and unconsidered action    (*Rock* III)

The ritual character in the second chorus of *Murder in the Cathedral* evolves out of a constant repetition of certain words – ‘late, late, late’, and ‘grey, grey, grey’–

out of a resonating refrain of certain phrases like ‘Living and partly living’, and also
out of cumulative phrasing as in, lines like ‘A doom in the house, a doom on yourself,
a doom on the world’.

The Temptation scene in *Murder in the Cathedral* enacted by the Women, Tempters and Priests is considered to be the most ritualised scene in the play. Here not only do the three groups speak alternate lines but also bind their utterance in a pattern by threefold images and identical rhetorical structure; stichomythic apprehensions expressed in terms of rustic superstition and pragmatic anxiety:

Chorus : Is it the owl that calls, or a signal between the trees ?
Priest : Is the window-bar made fast, is the door under lock and bolt ?
Tempter : Is it rain that taps at the window, is it wind that pokes at the door ?
Chorus : Does the torch flame in the hall, the candle in the room ?
Priest : Does the watchman walk by the wall ?
Tempter : Does the mastiff prowl by the gate ? (Part I, ll 624-29)

The Knights speak and sing in a chorus but this is no deterrent to the build-up of the dramatic excitement as their phrases take on a cumulative force:

The Three Knights : You are the Archbishop in revolt against the King; in rebellion to the king and the law of the land;

You are the Archbishop who was made by the King; whom he set in your place to carry out his command.

You are his servant, his tool, and his jack,

You wore his favours in your back, (II, ll 94 – 97)

The cross-rhyme lends a kind of thumping finality to the lines. So does the rhyme in the single line declamation of each individual knight in Part II (ll 194-197). The
pattern of speech projects a blind, brutal, egotistic assertion – a refusal to share space with others’ thoughts, as it were!

First Knight : Priest, you have spoken in peril of your life.
Second Knight: Priest, you have spoken in danger of the knife.
Third Knight : Priest, you have spoken treachery and treason.
Fourth Knight : Priest ! traitor, confirmed in malfeasance.

Cross rhyme, internal rhyme, and above all sound parallelism through alliteration, assonance, and consonance is used in the tight question answer series in Part I, ll 357-364, of the play. The effect obviously is of chant and chiming in tune with the overall speech pattern:

Thomas : Who shall have it?
Tempter : He who will come.
Thomas : What shall be the month?
Tempter : The last from the first.
Thomas : What shall we give for it?
Tempter : Pretence of priestly power.
Thomas : Why should we give it?
Tempter : For the power and the glory.

If suspense is the mood of the piece created through the embedded mystery of a compact exchange, then a lurking premonition coupled with a commoner’s confusion is the mark of the unobtrusive verbal design in the repetitive arrangement of the first chorus:

Chorus : Here let us stand, close by the cathedral. Here let us wait.
Are we drawn by danger? Is it the knowledge of safety, that draws our feet
Towards the Cathedral? What dangers can be
For us, the poor, the poor women of Canterbury? What tribulation
With which we are not already familiar? There is no danger
For us, and there is no safety in the cathedral.

Emphasis is added through the repetition of the phrase ‘Here let us stand’ while further urgency is generated by the hammer blow of the single word ‘what’. This is followed by a pictorial description and a consequent change in tone and tenor of language moving across simple natural preoccupation of labourers kicking off muddy boots and spreading hands on to the fire, the common man’s apprehension at the Archbishop’s return. But throughout the lengthy opening with varied treats, there resonates one word of profound merit that steadily but stealthily introduces the theme:

For us, the poor, there is no action,
But only to wait, and to witness (Part I, ll 49 - 50)

(Italics mine)

Uttered over seven times in about thirty five lines the apparently colourless word ‘wait’ assumes the Christian connotation of ‘patience’ to be noted and practised by the prospective witnesses of a martyr / murder.

Verbal parallelism, as we have noted, is basically a style of church service – of Beatitudes, Psalms, and Hymns. Not only does it create an incantatory effect but also generates the gravity, weight and prolongation required of an empowered communal feeling or of a ceremonial act – an act, which even in the secular world – bears the force and stamp of authority and sanction.
As Eliot shifts from the Cathedral precincts to modern drawing rooms or low life habitats, the general ambience changes; and incantation is then used for satirical, ironical or comical effects. In such cases, parallelism, supposed to be based on simultaneous identity and contrast*, is often reduced to mere mechanical duplication of words. But then in the specific context even that acquires a character and meaning of its own.

_The Cocktail Party_ is much less dependent on ‘poetry’ and ritual; yet, in the Libation Scene, Act II, as Alex and Julia raise a toast to the Chamberlaynes and Celia, it is in a deliberately incantatory language:

Alex : Watch over her in the desert  
Watch over her in the mountain  
Watch over her in the labyrinth  
Watch over her by the quicksand.  

Julia : Protect her from the Voices  
Protect her from the Visions  
Protect her in the tumult  
Protect her in the silence.**  

(Act II)

The rituals of social behaviour – trite exchanges among the affluent stereotypes – have also an important part to play in the scheme of _The Cocktail Party_:

Celia : And Julia’s the only person to tell it. She’s such a good mimic.  
Julia : Am I a good mimic?  
Peter : You are a good mimic. You never miss anything. (Act I, Sc i)

Also for comic effect are the vapid lines

Peter : … I like that story.  

Celia : I love that story.  

Alex : I’m never tired of hearing that story. (Act I, Sc i)

* Roman Jacobson notes, ‘any form of parallelism is an apportionment of invariants and variables’.

** The implicit choric element in the speech is analysed earlier in the argument in Chapter Two.
The amusement arises from the purely mechanical nature of the phatic communion. Malinowski (1923), John Lyons (1968) or John Lever (1974)* consider phatic communion as a mode of speech which may not have a referential content but plays a big role in strengthening social solidarity or ties of union and in imparting a sense of well-being. This applies to Cocktail Party, with ironical intent.

Verbal repetition in the speech of Amy, however, served a different purpose. As Amy speaks of Harry’s late wife, she seethes with anguish and anger, considering the marital incompatibility that Harry had to endure:

I am very glad you did not.
I am very glad that none of you ever met her.

... ... ...
She never would have been one of the family,
She never wished to be one of the family,
She only wanted to keep him to herself
To satisfy her vanity. (I, i, ll 163-170)

Repetition here works as a mode of intense emotional expression – a very natural, spontaneous, involuntary response where sorrow, exaltation or excitement seeks to gush forth for release, and baffled by the inadequacy of language, revolves around the same linguistic units. In Act II, Sc iii, ll 55-60, again, in a quarrellous mood she expresses intolerable frustration with Agatha’s role in her life, through a barrage of questions falling headlong one over the other:

Who set you up to judge? what, if you please,
Gives you the power to know what is best for Harry?
What gave you this influence to persuade him
To abandon his duty, his family and his happiness?

Who has planned his good? is it you or I?

... ... ... ...

When I felt assured of his settlement and happiness,
You who took my husband, now you take my son.
You take him from Wishwood, you take him from me.
You take him … (Part II, Sc iii, ll 55-59, 65-68)

Verbal repetition in *Sweeney Agonistes* with its staccato beats and sound of words take us to a different plane altogether – this time, to the extremely low life of lechery and violence. The name ‘Pereira’ keeps banging into our head like the clang of a kettledrum:

Dusty : How about Pereira?
Doris : What about Pereira?
I don’t care.
Dusty : You don’t care!
Who pays the rent?
Doris : Yes he pays the rent
Dusty : Well some men don’t and some men do
Some men don’t and you know who
Doris : You can have Pereira
Dusty : What about Pereira?
Doris : He’s no gentleman, Pereira:
You can’t trust him!
Dusty : Well that’s true.

Sound and rhythm, in fact, combine throughout *Sweeney* to impart shades to a character. Repetitions of ‘I think’, ‘I hope’, ‘she says’, ‘she hopes’, ‘mustard and water’ keep reverberating to create the semblance of real speech. Not only does it
reveal a ‘flapdoodle mind’ but the lengthy ‘Gooooood-bye’ also exposes the over
enthusiasm of a blatantly thoughtless brain.

Dusty: Well I hope we shan’t have to call a doctor
Doris just hates having a doctor
She says will you ring up on Monday
She hopes to be all right on Monday
I say do you mind if I ring off now
She’s got her feet in mustard and water
I said I’m giving her mustard and water
All right, Monday you’ll phone through.
Yes I’ll tell her. Good bye. Gooooood bye.
I’m sure, that’s very kind of you.

Even Klipstein and Krumpacker, the American Jews, are given the real-life diction
and intonation to establish their identity – for example, ‘swell’, ‘fine’, ‘Do we like
London?’, or the iterative Americanized ‘er’.

Klipstein: You said it, Krum.
London’s a slick place, London’s a swell place,
London’s a fine place to come on a visit –

The two names in fact, exemplify, ‘what scholars in stylistics call name symbolism’.

Thomas R. Rees notes,

The name ‘Krumpacker’ suggests a nouvelle riche American
manufacturer of dried cereals who is newly arrived in Europe.
Klipstein might be a Jewish-American sharper, one who ‘clips’ his
gullible victims in a shrewd, dishonest manner… All of the characters,
at any rate, are cynical, immoral, and rootless products of the jazz age,
and their presence in the play dramatizes and enforces the sterility
theme."17
Semantic and sonic values do cohere to lend connotative dimension to another name—that of the place, ‘Dedham’. Coghill points out that this place-name in *The Cocktail Party*, Act I, Sc iii, uttered five times in four lines, is half a pun and half a symbol.

Alex : Welcome back, Lavinia!  
      When I got your telegram…
Lavinia : Where from ?
Alex : Dedham.
Lavinia : Dedham is in Essex. So it was from Dedham.
Edward, have you any friends in Dedham?
Edward : No, I have no connections in Dedham.

The name has sonic similarities to Dead-home or Home of the Dead from which Lavinia like Alcestis in the Greek source of the play has returned. By her effort to segregate herself from Edward’s life in order that he may remake himself she resembles Alcestis who sacrificed herself as her husband’s saviour. Similar in effect is the name Wishwood – the family country seat of the Monchensey’s in the North of England, perpetuating Amy’s wish to capture the cycle of time through the family dynasty.

‘Wish’ and ‘would’, as David Ward notes, are indicative of the hopes, desires, memories and worldly allurements that motivate an ordinary being in his journey through life. This is in close consonance with the name ’Amy’, French ‘amée’ or 'the loved' – standing for all the worldly possessions that an individual clings on to for illusory wishfulfilment. Proper names in Eliot are both denotative and connotative signifying both the particular and its associated extended attributes. The hidden or abbreviated descriptive element in the proper nouns justifies Eliot's double-edged linguistic stance and its implicit existentialist critique. The names may not contribute
directly to the dramatic momentum of the plays but the loaded etymological layer does create the intended meaningful resonance for the more perceptive among the audience.

V

Not only ‘names’ but also ‘la parole’ or individual speech habit of characters / groups of characters plays an important role in Eliot’s plays. The ‘morally sensitive’ and ‘morally inert’ characters in *Family Reunion*, for example, set up two different modes of speech. Agatha, Mary and Harry – the more mystically oriented – speak in a dense, imagistic language, at times with paradoxical overtones. In Act I, Sc ii, Mary explains to Harry the concept of the ‘Twice-born’, and the pangs of birth associated with it:

Pain is the opposite of joy
But joy is a kind of pain
I believe the moment of birth
Is when we have knowledge of death
I believe the season of birth
Is the season of sacrifice
For the tree and the beast, and the fish
Thrashing itself upstream:
And what of that terrified spirit
Compelled to be reborn …  (ll 268-275)

Agatha teaches Harry that his end is also the birth of a ‘beginning’ and this recalls the opening and concluding lines of ‘East Coker’: ‘In my beginning is my end’ or ‘In my end is my beginning’. With Harry, paradox seems to be a normal order of speech as in
(I, iii, 46 – 47), in his conversation with Dr. Warburton: ‘...what you call restoration to health / Is only incubation of another malady’; or else in (I, i, 254) as he suddenly wakes up to the demands of social etiquette and notices his aunts and uncles – ‘You all look so withered and young’. On a much lower key, Ivy is essentially ‘I’-centric (seven times in five lines, I, i, 14 – 18), Charles, amicable and considerate, Downing-stolid, efficient and committed as is evident not only from the diction each uses, but also from the tone and tempo it exudes. Certain key term like ‘change’ ‘understand’, ‘know’ ‘wait’, and ‘watch’, keep ringing through the play, giving it the quality of abstrusion.

We need to remember perhaps that in order to reach out to a wider audience *Family Reunion* onwards, Eliot restrained the use of explicit Christian references and familiar Christian symbols. The framework of Greek drama – in this case, the second book of the Oresteia Trilogy – offered him the requisite space for treating ancient themes of sin and guilt and expiation along with supernatural intervention, allowing hidden Christian associations to blend into it. When Agatha explains to Harry the nature of the path to be taken by him she comes closest to what may be called a Christian symbol:

… It is possible
You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,
Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.
Indeed it is possible. (II, ii, ll 136-139)

The cleansing process of burning in the purgatorial fire of suffering is so eroding that Harry conceives it as nothing less than cancerous—
It goes a good deal deeper
Than what people call their conscience; it is just cancer
That eats away the self. (I, i, ll 359-360)

The innermost meaning is to be reached through the Christian vision of Original Sin trapped in Harry’s speech as images of Terror; Harry is haunted both by a sense of his personal sin and by the general sinfulness of the world –

…You have gone through life in sleep,
Never woken to the nightmare. I tell you, life would be unendurable
If you were wide awake. You do not know
The noxious smell untraceable in the drains,
Inaccessible to the plumbers, that has its hour of the night; you do not know
The unspoken voice of sorrow in the ancient bedroom

… I am the old house

With the noxious smell and the sorrow before morning,
In which all past is present, all degradation
Is unredeemable. (I, i, ll 301-314)

Both Agatha and Harry speak in a spate of negative prefixes – irredeemable, irrevocable, irrecoverable, impossible, unspeakable, untranslatable, unkillable,– suggesting perhaps the total inability of human action or human speech to control the course of life; suggesting also perhaps the experience of the ‘un-familiar’. Loathsome images – Harry as an old house, noxious smell in drains, sorrow in ancient bedrooms (italics mine) – all connote an incessant passage of gloom and guilt running from the past to the present. As discussed earlier, the ancient burden of family curse merges
with the Christian concept of original sin to lend Harry a vision of the world shadowed by darkness a Twice-Born soul.

…the slow stain sinks deeper through the skin
Tainting the flesh and discolouring the bone—
This is what matters, but it is unspeakable,
Untranslatable: (Part I, Sc. i, ll 228 - 331)

The ‘stain of sin’ is like a ‘cancer’ to Harry (I, iii). ‘Murder is there’ – an act outside the self hence almost unreal, but ‘cancer is here’ deep inside the soul – the sense of guilt, searing and scathing, hence inescapable and unredeemed. Harry’s nightmare vision of sin evokes the image of a desert teeming with creatures, drifting and directionless; the act of murder is a futile attempt at trying to reverse the ‘senseless direction’, ‘For a momentary rest on the burning wheel’ – another metaphor for spiritual waste.

That Harry is destined for a life on another plane, that there exists another world beyond this, is rendered here and there throughout the play in subtle shades, double meanings, innuendoes, or creepy images. Agatha refers to

… the world around the corner
The wind’s talk in the dry holly-tree
The inclination of the moon
The attraction of the dark passage
The paw under the door. (I, i, ll 198-202)

Earlier in the speech the profusion of affixation with ‘-tion’, in devotion, attention, preparation, confusion, observation, admonition, resound with irony round the circle of man’s futile attempts to disregard the indications of a higher power. The end-
stopped lines with conscious end-rhymes create a pattern of order (false reality) as it were, soon to be ruffled by the irregularity of the last five lines. The feeling created in these lines is one of mystery and terror, of something coming to us from beyond the normal world, ‘a feeling’ as Nevill Coghill puts it, ‘of being haunted, or visited, or in the presence of some different order of being, that makes the hair rise or the skin creep.’

The aunt-uncle chorus operate on a much lower level of subtlety; theirs is a blurred vision, yet they too are disturbed by an uneasy eeriness: ‘Why do we feel embarrassed, impatient, fretful, ill at ease,’ (I, i, l 203) or ‘Why should we stand here like guilty conspirators, waiting for some revelation / When the hidden shall be exposed…’ (I, i ll 569-70). The intertwining of incomprehension and the invasive intrusion of a sinister foreboding broadens the thematic dimension. Again, apart from Lord Claverton in Elder Statesman they are the ones who speak in metatheatrical language involving ‘stage’, ‘action’, ‘role’, or ‘exit’, and conveying unconsciously a philosophical perception of an ordinary man’s inability to determine his position in this world or give it a stable finality:

Assembled like amateur actors who have not been assigned their parts?

Like amateur actors in a dream when the curtain rises, to find themselves dressed for a different play, or having rehearsed the wrong parts,

Waiting for the rustling in the stalls, the titter in the dress circle, the laughter and catcalls in the gallery? (I, i, 204-206)

The element of unpreparedness even for the stage-role, adds to a perception of futility – always on the verge of the ridiculous.
Fearful and traumatized they unknowingly resort to the paradox of Time, to the past that ‘is about to happen, and the future’... ‘long since settled.’, to the ‘wings of the future’ that ‘darken the past’ (I, iii, 95-96); the image of evil in the form of ‘beak and claws’ disrupt and threaten all appearances of vitality and order, from the moment of birth. The natural jollity associated with family albums, family picnics, or family dinner are shown to be shams and pretences. As eyes of inspection dislocate roofs to gaze into our private rooms, our inner world of pervading depravity is revealed ‘And the bird sits on the broken chimney: I am afraid’ (I, iii, l 102); evil, imagined as a predatory bird sits tightly perched on the ruins of family life as past guilts accumulate, gather momentum to desecrate further all acts of future – an act of conspiracy which engulfs both audience and the personae.

To confirm and dispel this sense of an overriding evil, Agatha recites the mystical images in a ritualistic rhetoric:

The eye of the daytime
And the eye of the night time
Be diverted from this house
Till the knot is unknotted
The crossed is uncrossed
And the crooked is made straight. (I, iii, 118-123)

‘tied knots’ and ‘crossed bones’ – images of evil again – threaten to disrupt the natural order of ‘the weasel and the otter’– elevating it to the higher level of supernatural potency.

Between the repressing darkness of Sc i and Sc iii in Part I Family Reunion, Sc ii presents a moment, a memory of spring, garden, garden flowers, innocent memories and tiny hints of human love : ‘one’s only memory of freedom / … a
hollow tree in a wood by the river’ (ll 133-134). But spring is delayed and the image
of freedom turns into a bondage as the tree is felled to give place to a ‘summer house’
neatly contrived, by Amy ‘to please the children’. Memories of the garden still infuse
Harry with momentary ‘sunlight and singing’ but ‘distended claws’ and threatening
‘necrophily’ will not let him relax.

The group of poor women of Canterbury in Murder in the Cathedral draw
images from the immediate homely surrounding, speaking in concrete visual and
other sensory terms, very different from the abstract lexis in Family Reunion. Over-
powered by a sense of an all-embracing defilement they speak in horror, disgust and
abomination identifying evil in all things beautiful and innocent:

I have smelt them, the death-bringers, senses are quickened
By subtle forebodings; I have heard
Fluting in the night-time, fluting and owls, have seen at noon
Scaly wings slanting over, huge and ridiculous. I have tasted
The savour of putrid flesh in the spoon. I have felt
The heaving of earth at nightfall, restless, absurd. I have heard
Laughter in the noises of beasts that make strange noises: (Part II, ll 206-212).

Evil is not just concentrated in the killing of the Bishop by the king’s men but is a
much larger cosmic force engaged in eternal struggle with the Good. Apparently
harmless creatures are made to wield a spirit of disgust – lobster, crab, prawn, whelk,
sea-anemone; the elements of nature are not spared either – ‘Death in the rose, death
in the hollyhock, sweet pea, hyacinth, primrose and cowslip’. In ‘Clear the air, clean
the sky!’ chorus (II, ll 395 – 426) for example, the image evoked is that of a barren
land where broken boughs yield blood, much like the boughs in Dante’s Inferno.
In the tranquil litany of the last Te Deum however the chorus is purged of its horror by a calm understanding of the ways of God. ‘The lonely dark night of God’ refers to the solitary journey of the faithful – along a path that is dark in its origination and cessation because inaccessible to common human intellect.

Thomas undertakes this journey and accomplishes it in a verbal texture wrought with paradox and abstract imagery:

They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.
They know and do not know, that action is suffering
And suffering is action. Neither does the agent suffer
Nor the patient act.  (Part I, ll 208-211)

Throughout his encounter with the Tempters Thomas speaks of two orders – the worldly and the divine. His mode of speech is crisp and astringent until the last lengthy one before the Interlude, where he picks up the whole of his life’s journey in a spate of rhymes expressing perhaps the harmony he has attained within by winning over the bait offered by the fourth tempter.

Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain;
Temptation shall not come in this kind again.
The last temptation is the greatest treason :
To do the right deed for the wrong reason.
The natural vigour in the venial sin
Is the way in which our lives begin.  (Part I, ll 665 – 670)

Owing to the irregular line length and varying number of syllables, the rhymes do not impinge on us as a monotonous drool. Sometimes in this long speech akin to a soliloquy Eliot brings further variation by setting aside rhyme in favour of rhythm; the rhythm replicating in the context the superficiality of a past life;
The purple bullfinch in the lilac tree,
The tilt-yard skill, the strategy of chess,
Love in the garden, singing to the instrument,

Were all things equally desirable

(Part I, ll 676-679)

The tempters are a group, yet each is individuated. Rhyme contributes to character-effect in the First Tempter’s speech:

You see, my Lord, I do not wait upon ceremony:
Here I have come, forgetting all acrimony,
Hoping that your present gravity
Will find excuse for my humble levity
Remembering all the good time past. (Part I, ll 255 – 259)

The weak feminine rhyme in this case, creates a falling note marking him as a non-formidable foe and underpinning his shyness as a false argumentator whereas abundance of masculine rhyme in Becket’s speech highlights the rising note of confidence. True, as Linda Wyman in ‘On Teaching Murder in the Cathedral’ discerns, Becket and the tempters share similar metaphors (season, shadow, substance) and also similar rhymes. The interlocking rhymes indicate a kind of snare to which Thomas was drawn – even more than his words betray. The shared and the divergent bring out as it were, the pull-counterpull syndrome.

The prosodic style acts as yet another indicator of the perceptual level. In Sweeney Agonistes the rhythmic dimension of forceful syncopated jazz beat added to contemporary speech, delivers a low life of savage primitivism.

Yés I’d eát you!
Iň ă niće lîttlé, wîhte lîttlé, sóft lîttlé, téndër lîttlé
Júicŷ lîttlé, rîght lîttlé, mîssînâry stéw.
Similarly, the meaningless cycle of life in which Sweeney is trapped is brought out through the repetitive syncopation of a ragtime line:

Birth and copulatio and death.

The burden of Sweeney’s crime, the realization that he is incapable of remorse forces him to drunkenness leading to a series of incoherent, blurred speech:

We all gotta do what we gotta do
We’re gonna sit here and drink this booze.

The jingle of ‘knocking’ by the chorus brings him back to reality. He is damned not for inaction like the hollow men but for violent grotesque action of atavistic urge, that goes against all standards of civilized virtue:

KNÖCK KNOCK KNÖCK / KNÖCK KNOCK KNÖCK / KNÖCK /
KNÖCK / KNÖCK

The metronomic rhythm suits the satirical comical significatory field in Sweeney. Rhythm in the Rock is basically accentual, resembling the speaking voice and matching upto the gravity of the moral concern. The opening chorus consists of long four-stress lines commensurate with the large cosmic ideas that Eliot projects:

The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit.
O perpetual revolution of configured stars,
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons., …

Still longer lines, combining accentual rhythm with the anapaestic-dactylic beat of the Bible is prominent in –

Remémbering the wórds of Nehemiáh the Próphet : “The trówèl
iñ hánd, añd thè gun råthèlr loóse in thè hólster”.         (Rock V)
In the shorter two stress lines voiced by the workmen in semi-darkness, phrasal repetitions instil deep spiritual resonance and metrical unity:

We will build with new stone
Where the beams are rotten
We will build with new timbers
Where the word is unspoken
We will build with new speech
There is work together (Rock I)

The metrical rigour in Eliot’s early plays was reduced to a minimum in the plays of the fifties. From the rhythmic stylisation in Sweeney, through the liturgical formalities of the Murder and the ‘three stress with a caesura’ pattern of Family Reunion, Eliot, we know, moved towards a quasi-naturalistic speech in the manner of the realistic ‘well made play’. The poetic element was reduced to a flexible and lucid blank verse that faithfully represented the cadences of the speaking voice and avoided metaphorical concentration. Verse in Cocktail Party is made of lucid statements unadorned with imagery and overt evocative designs. Brooks Atkins, in New York Times, Jan 29, 1950, commented on the language with a slight disparaging note:

… to me it is insufficiently poetic. It needs more eloquence, passion and imaginative courage – Mr. Eliot is writing about things that cannot be adequately expressed in the earth-bound, cerebral style he has deliberately chosen for his experiment.19

Other critics too complained that it is primarily a doctrinal play with the characters acting as its puppet. But, in fact, the verse here is both speakable and expressive of fine precise feeling; the meaning works at the surface level but it is not superficial; the flexibility of language to glide from the light to the serious and vice versa, as in Family Reunion, is maintained here too.
The diction and the discourse in the drawing-room plays, starting with the *Family Reunion*, change from the oblique and mystically opaque to a direct transparent lucid speech-mode, in a way better amenable to some of the tenets in what emerges as ‘discourse analysis’ and ‘speech act theory’ in recent drama criticism.

VI

‘Speech-act’ as a stylistic technique refers to the varied and complex art of projecting action through speech, and an illustrative instance of perfect skill for all time is William Shakespeare. Eliot appreciates how Shakespeare never uses a line of verse without its dramatic or illuminating effect. When Lear disclaims his paternal care for Cordelia in Act I, Sc i, l12 (‘Here I disclaim all paternal care’), modern stylisticians would note, he performs an ‘illocutionary’ act (act performed in saying something) but the ‘perlocutionary’ effect produced (effects produced on the hearer by saying it), is the banishment of Cordelia.

In ‘How To Do Things With Words’ (1962), J.L. Austin distinguishes three acts of utterance – locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary; locutionary act refers to the literal meaning of words spoken. Valerie Lowe in her essay in *Exploring the Language of Drama: Texts and Context* (1998) quotes Austin’s definition of the ‘locutionary’ while applying the speech-act tool to Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*:

in saying something we perform a locutionary act which is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, which again is roughly equivalent to ‘meaning’ in the traditional sense.20
This is distinct from the illocutionary act which serves as an underlying force of the locutionary act. The words ‘drive the car’ for example mean the act of driving at the locutionary level but the illocutionary implication is one of ‘urging’, ‘advising’ or ‘ordering’. The two levels act simultaneously but are considered effective only after their execution at the ‘perlocutionary’ level. In this case the action to follow would be to drive the car for a particular purpose – to check the engine perhaps or to display his driving skill.

In the same book, *(Exploring the Language of Drama: Text and Context)* Robert Burton (1980) and Vimala Herman (1991) analyse dramatic dialogue in terms of linguistic structure, Paul Simpson (1989) and Geoffrey Leech (1992) study the social dynamics of interaction by the application of ‘politeness theory’, Mick Short (1989) draws upon pragmatism and discourse analysis to shed light on characterization and absurdity. In ‘From Dramatic Text to Dramatic Performance’, Mick Short argues that production and performance of a play are regulated by inferences drawn from the text just as a sensitive understanding of the text is impossible without some knowledge of theatrical convention. He urges us to read between the lines to make sense of ‘what is said’ and ‘what is meant’. Vimala Herman in ‘Turn Management in Drama’ considers the patterns of ‘turn-takings’ in understanding situations and characters in the play; ‘Turn grabbing’, ‘Turn order’, ‘Turn lapse’ or ‘Turn length’ can manifest a speaker’s desire for self-aggrandisement or alternatively his diminished speech-status. Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger* takes lengthy multi-clause turns to explain his personal point whereas Helena’s turns are one-clause and brief, suggesting the directness and sharpness of her statements. Alison on the other hand actively resists Jimmy’s taunts by refusing to accept her turn to speak. In ‘(Im)politeness in Dramatic Dialogue’ in the same collection, Jonathan
Culpeper considers the strategies of impoliteness in generating disharmony and disruption. He does this against the ‘politeness theory’ which promotes mitigation of impoliteness and retention of conscious politeness in the interest of social cohesion and harmonious relationship. Studies in impoliteness or disruptive dialogue or verbal violence unveil levels of social criticism, protest and rejection in twentieth century drama and films. Neil Bennison in ‘Assessing Character through Conversation’ develops the art of studying characters through interpretive apparatus or stylistic tools. Bennison believes that multiple linguistic frameworks are necessary in order to capture the richness of a character. He helps us judge characters by weighing the meaning of words (both implied and articulated) and also by considering the change in the number of words used by the same character across various sections of the drama, which signals his change in attitude or agenda; sudden verbosity on a particular topic may suggest ‘topic preference’ of the interlocutor whereas hesitation or incomplete turns may indicate a character’s discomfort, uneasiness, powerlessness or embarrassed state of mind. On a different level, the hyperdominant speaker may serve as an important dramatic device offering interesting psychological studies in ‘hubris’. The compatibility of speakers in a dialogue may vary enormously from being politely co-operative to threateningly disruptive.

The ‘texture’, ‘logic’ or ‘flow’ of the dialogue can also offer interesting variations in the study of action and character. In a play like Ibsen’s *Ghosts* the dialogue is too tightly organised whereas in Chekov’s *Cherry Orchard* attempt is made to capture the extreme fluidity of real conversation with its unpredictable responses, interruptions and fade-outs. The pre-modern plays were mostly coherent and co-operative with sudden and occasional incoherent and dislocated dialogue interspersed in between, like the incomprehensible utterance of Cassandra in *Agamemnon* or the riddling speech of Hamlet in Shakespeare. Non-coherent dialogues
feature strongly in modern impressionistic plays, in Pinter for example. Not only sections, but the entire cumulative dialogue is deliberately deranged. Such large scale non-coherence or failure of language automatically generate questions on social and psychological disintegration.

Approaching Eliot’s plays from the critical positions proposed in recent drama criticism we have to keep in mind two things: (a) Most of these tools in stylistic analysis came into use in the post-Eliot decades; (b) Eliot’s plays, even the ‘drawing room comedies’, retain a classical composure, moral austerity, a quest for self-discovery and the discovery of the meaning of existence, and, with it all, a poetic aura. Naturally many critical tools mentioned above do not apply to these plays or apply only marginally. The evolving of these approaches and the meticulous shaping of the tools record increasing awareness of the verbal modalities in drama and intenser attention paid to idioms of verbal communication on stage. This itself in a way is a landmark in textual study; and some of the major analytical approaches proposed at the present time definitely yield newer insights into Eliot’s dexterous use of communicative strategies.

A close analysis of one of the scenes, Act I, Sc ii, in Cocktail Party for example, might reveal how exactly the characters shape up and the situations develop through the speech behaviour of two of its central figures. The analytical tool in this case could be the ‘turn-taking’ device and its corollaries like ‘turn-grabbing’, ‘turn-rejection’, ‘topic change’ etc. as defined by modern scholars.

As the scene begins, we are able to imagine the longing and expectation with which Celia utters – ‘Are you alone’? Edward’s answer is dampening and even humiliating in the situation—
Celia! Why have you come back?
I said I would telephone as soon as I could:
And I tried to get you a short while ago.

Edward’s reluctance to meet Celia at this moment and his irritation at her sight come out in the high rise intonation of his speech-contour. With her sharp perceptiveness and easy understanding, Celia reads through his mood:

Edward, I understand what has happened
But I could not understand your manner on the telephone.
It did not seem like you. So I felt I must see you.
Tell me it’s all right, and then I’ll go.

Rest of the section develops at a fast pace leading the play forward making it clear that Edward’s secret could not be hidden from the guests and his invention of an imaginary aunt had failed. Celia brightens up to the prospect of their union but the news of Lavinia’s return and Edward’s willingness to have her back comes as a blow and an enigma.

It is at this juncture that conversation is fractured by a telephone call from Alex. Edward’s one-sided telephonic conversation holds several clues to his state of mind. Initially, forcing himself to be polite with ‘it was marvellous./I’ve never tasted anything like it…/ Yes, that’s very interesting. But I just wondered’, he finally gives up to depression ending the conversation with a quick series of ‘no’s’ and ‘don’ts’. The incomplete sentences and pauses might imply a whole lot of things in speech dynamics but in this case it is only a polite gap generated by the need to listen to the speaker on the other side of the phone. It is this ‘politeness’ (in terms of the ‘politeness theory’) perhaps that underpins the fact that ‘social cohesiveness’ (arising
out of congruous speech-habit) – in spite of the elements of genuine impatience and irritability in the situation, is an important factor in this play.

Julia’s intrusion does add comic relief at a moment of high tension but Celia’s immediate ‘topic grabbing’ – picking up the thread of thought after about a 100 lines or so – about Lavinia’s return, shows how impatiently she had been waiting for Julia’s exit. Finally, the unexpected revelation comes from Edward himself. We realize it is not a familiar love story and the feelings are not specific and straight. The situation is deeply ambiguous as the unknown guest had congratulated him on his new found freedom yet had also made him feel that it was Lavinia he wanted back. The series of questions indicate that he is confused and clouded – the questions being directed to his own mind:

How did he persuade me? Did he persuade me?
I have a very clear impression
That he tried to persuade me it was all for the best
That Lavinia had gone; that I ought to be thankful.
And yet, the effect of all his argument
Was to make me see that I wanted her back.

Celia identifies the syndrome as ‘fatigue’, ‘panic’ or ‘nervous breakdown’ but Edward’s predicament is a whirlpool of inner ambiguity in emotional response: ‘But for Lavinia leaving, this would never have arisen’. Lavinia makes herself indispensable by her absence. Why so, is still left for Edward to contemplate and work out. For now, it is Celia* who wakes up to her role and rises to full speakerhood. She resents having lived a restricted present, ‘where time was meaningless, a private world of ours/where the word ‘happiness’ had a different meaning/Or so it seemed’.

* half-blind as yet, till ‘guardians’ have offered her a distinct path.
"Dream" and "Reality" shift places to thicken the moment of enlightenment and also to mark the ascendancy from ordinary surface conversation to deep probing:

A dream. I was happy in it till today,
And then, when Julia asked about Lavinia
And it came to me that Lavinia had left you
And that you would be free—then I suddenly discovered
That the dream was not enough; that I wanted something more
And I waited, and I wanted to run to tell you.
Perhaps the dream was better. It seemed the real reality,
And if this is reality, it is very like a dream.

The conversation moves fast, furthering the plot, as one speaker promptly takes up the cue provided by the other, without 'turn-rejection' or 'topic-change'. From 'Lavinia', through 'real reality', to 'Peter Quilpe' to the 'passing of years' – mutual inputs keep on feeding the speech-performance, unfolding and unravelling the characters which, in the process, goes to determine the course of action. People must wake up and realize before starting on newer paths.

The characters in the play may be categorized in two ways – the sufferers and non-sufferers or the blind, purblind and visionary, and the language varies accordingly. Celia, more sure of herself, speaks in sharp, clear, full-length sentences. From 'wanted' to 'aspire' to 'desperately wanted', she gropes for the exact shade; Edward is weaker in articulation as he is slower in perception. The realization that has already dawned upon Celia, eludes him. His utterance is hesitant, broken, incomplete, expressed mostly in the negative—

* "Celia : I see you as a person whom I never saw before. / The man I saw before, he was only a projection—/I see that now—of something that I wanted— / No, not wanted—something I aspired to— /Something that I desperately wanted to exist."
It’s not like that.
It is not that I am in love with Lavinia.
I don’t think I was ever really in love with her.
If I have ever been in love – and I think that I have –
I have never been in love with anyone but you,
And perhaps I still am. But this can’t go on.
It never could have been … a permanent thing:
You should have a man … nearer your own age.

The nearing of old age makes him feel insecure and baffled. He is like a lost child in search of refuge. Lavinia’s domination and the bond of marriage gives him a strong mooring. Dried of all the sap of life he fears life’s challenges and would rather remain tied to the meaningless wheel:

That is the worst moment, when you feel that you have lost
The desire for all that was most desirable,
And before you are contented with what you can desire;
Before you know what is left to be desired;
And you go on wishing that you could desire
What desire has left behind. But you cannot understand.

More than confession the speeches are in the form of self-scrutiny and soul-searching. Before the scene ends, the characters have unravelled themselves and this they do under stimulation of each other’s speech. The overall sense is one of homophony or in speech-terms ‘harmony’.

From ambiguity to clarity – this is the journey traversed – as Celia understands Edward in a new light and sees herself with probing insight.
I am not sure, Edward, that I understand you;
And yet I understand as I never did before.
I think—I believe—you are being yourself
As you never were before, with me.

She continues analysing in speech after speech, the exact nature of their relationship:

I see you as a person whom I never saw before.
The man I saw before, he was only a projection—
I see that now—of something that I wanted—
No, not wanted—something I aspired to—
Something that I desperately wanted to exist.

Self-discovery, or moving toward that is the action in the play. The second telephone call in the scene is more a revelation than an intervention and Edward’s response to it calls for comparison with the earlier one.

1st call : Hello … Oh, hello! … No I mean yes, Alex;
[Speaker : disturbed, absent-minded, self-absorbed]

2nd call : Hello! … Oh, Julia … What is it now?
[Speaker : light-hearted, exuberant]

The exclamation after ‘Hello’, the capital in ‘Oh’ and the address to ‘Julia’ early in the syntax speak volumes. It is as if return to the party ambience – after all the strain in the attempt of self-revelation talking to Celia, – assures a load has been shed off and there is a tremendous surge of release.

After the high-pitch strain in the early section of the scene, the end indeed comes as a calm speech-closure. The scene promises to be a two-party speech mainly, in which all the possibilities of a dialogue have been realized. ‘Turn taking’ and ‘topic
control’ take place in a perfectly orderly* manner unvitiated by interruption, overlapping, turn-grabbing or turn-lapse. The speakers speak in mutual respect supplementing and corroborating each other with honest, truthful revelations, even at the cost of tarnishing self-image – confessing love yet unable to accept each other as the love-object.

Personal assault or impolite discourse is just not possible in Eliot’s scheme of things. Apart from the stylised Sweeney, characters in Eliot’s plays are sensitive, refined; the scene of Lucasta’s first appearance in The Confidential Clerk is probably the only bit where the frontiers of politeness have been crossed. But that, too, in a mood of innocuous, light-hearted irreverence without causing any serious social disharmony. Arousing disharmony and conflict between characters, the discourse of Impoliteness, scholars believe, generates great dramatic interest and pushes the plot forward.

On the verse of Confidential Clerk, Martin Browne writes – ‘the speech hardly ever rose to the intensity of poetry but it supplied rhythm that unified height with depth, farce with feeling’. In the short section within Act I where Colby meets Lucasta for the first time, we experience some sparkle of this happy unison between farce and feeling.

Lucasta is absolutely featherbrained – a non-cerebral loud and material person (though streaks of sensitiveness flicker out at a later stage) taking life as it comes. Of the three orphans (or supposed orphans) she is the most unstable and flitting type – insecure because unloved and floating. Psychologically, the penchant for eating out and the need ‘to be fed between meals’ is actually a projection of deep frustration, her

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* in the A-B-A-B symmetrical pattern in ‘discourse analysis’.
irreverent speech-performance – a product of neglect and resultant recognition-
hunger. People around her are wary of the shocking ways and non-routine idiolect.

Kaghan says of her ‘she’s come to pry some cash from the money-box/
Bankrupt again’. From the ensuing conversation she emerges as a person –
unpunctual, inefficient, extravagant, nonchalant.

Lucasta’s terms of address to elderly persons – as Eggie, Lizzy and Claude are
expressive of impoliteness but symptomatic of a deep-rooted malaise. She thrusts
herself upon others from a deep urgency to be taken into account,* it seems :

And does he know that I’m one of his duties?
Have you prepared him for taking me over?
Did you know that, Colby? I am Lucasta.
It's only Eggy calls me Miss Angel,
Just to annoy me. Don’t you agree
That Lucasta suits me better? (Act I)

‘Miss Angel’ is a symbol of propriety and honour which Lucasta sarcastically rejects.
Her self-appraisal is saved from sentimentalism and seriousness, as the play is a farce.
Her repeated demands that ‘I’m one of your responsibilities’ is a kind of assault on (in
Politeness theory parlance) Colby’s ‘negative face’– his freedom of will to do as he
wants without condescending to the demands of others. Asking Colby, Eggerson and
Kaghan in turn for lunch, dinner and tea is again a height of impropriety, and would
have raised the eyebrows of critical aunts and uncles in Family Reunion, but for the
framework of high-comedy.

* Lucasta : Oh, that’s wonderful, to be accepted !
   No one ever ‘just accepted’ me before. (Act. II)
In *The Elder Statesman* ‘drama’ is so thin and the language transparent at such a level as hardly inviting discourse analysis. With Eliot’s set category of characters – dominant father, loving daughter, wayward son, and the path of action tightly stretched between guilt (moral failure) and forgiveness, clash of intentions appears to be minimal. The action, as always, is centred more in the mind of a character than in the clash of values or characters themselves. In fact, in the plays of Eliot figures posing potential dangers of conflict with the protagonist are projections of his own mind – Tempters in *Murder*, Eumenides in *Family Runion*, Ghosts from the past in *The Elder Statesman*. The gap therefore between meaning, intention and effect seem to yield greater dramatic interest when approached from a spiritual / psychological angle than from a social or ideological one. However, the three modes of speech-act proposed with linguistic philosophers J.L. Austin and Searle would provide an interesting interactive zone by the clash of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, i.e., by what is said, what is meant and the response evoked to the intended meaning.

An explosive moment occurs in *The Elder Statesman* as father encounters son in Act II, right after the blackmailing scenes. Michael represents Claverton’s youth susceptible to crimes he had once committed – debt, driving, womanising. In a daring act of tearing off the respectable public mask, Michael charges directly at his father:

> What is my inheritance? As for your title,  
> I know why you took it. And Mother knew.  
> First, because it gave you the opportunity  
> Of retiring from politics, not without dignity,  
> Being no longer wanted…  
> … Oh, I’ve no doubt
That the thought of passing on your name and title
To a son, was gratifying. But it wasn’t for my sake!
I was just your son – that is to say,
A kind of prolongation of your existence,
A representative carrying on business in your absence.
Why should I thank you for imposing this upon me? (Act II)

Earlier in the play, Michael’s robust and audacious future plans – a locutionary
defiance and disregard of everything associated with his father had been prompted by
the illocutionary force of hurling pain and torture as a punishment for all the parental
lapses the children have suffered.

...if you like, call me a coward.

I wonder whether you would play the hero

If you were in my place. I don't believe you would.

You didn't suffer from the handicap that I've had.

Your father was rich, but was no one in particular,

So you'd nothing to live up to. Those standards of conduct

You've always make so much of, for my benefit:

I wonder whether you have always lived up to them. (Act II)

The perlocutionary effect however is not as simple as it seems. At this age, at
this stage of superannuation, with the growing loneliness hovering over, Claverton’s
bloated egotism seems to have vanished. Threatened and cowered by the guilts of the
past, he is ridden with a new wave of care and concern. Michael perhaps had intended
to silence and demolish him with his harsh blows of speech but instead, Claverton
rises to a show of fatherly attributes; the reserved, formal, laconic statements giving
way to an effusive display of pleading and persuasion:
… Believe me, Michael:

Those who flee from their past will always lose the race.
I know this from experience. When you reach your goal,
Your imagined paradise of success and grandeur,
You will find your past failures waiting there to greet you.
You’re all I have to live for, Michael –
You and Monica. If I lived for twenty years
Knowing that my son had played the coward –
I should merely be another twenty years in dying.       (Act II)

Apparently, Michael’s speech and that of Lord Claverton are opposing forces, each speaking in his own terms; Michael, in terms of his desire to flout the family name and do something on his own, Lord Claverton, in terms of his own moral failings and a father’s protective instinct – the gap between illocutionary and perlocutionary, the intention and effect – arise out of years of gaping misunderstanding between the two*. Though aimed at Michael, Claverton’s speech is also the beginning of an unconscious self-examination. Locutionary and illocutionary levels seem to merge as the self re-relates to others in an emerging act of love and authentic communication: Monica explains:

…there’s no vocabulary
For love within a family, love that’s lived in
But not looked at, love within the light of which
All else is seen, the love within which
All other love finds speech.
This love is silent.
… … …
You must forgive each other, you must love each other.          (Act II)

* Michael : I want to leave England, and make my own career :
And Father simply calls me a coward.       (Act II)
The perlocutionary effect of this speech begins to be felt as Michael is subdued into an unexpected display of a love-lorn heart:

I could have loved Father, if he’d wanted love,
But he never did, Monica, not from me.
You know I’ve always been very fond of you –
I’ve a very affectionate nature, really,

But… (Act II)

It is exciting to discover that beneath the threatening illocutionary impact of Michael’s earlier speech there lurks a still deeper illocutionary force of ‘love’ waiting to accept and be accepted by a grace of mutual commitment. This is what all Eliot’s later plays are about.

The re-entry of the ghosts from the past wake up Lord Claverton to the fact that in admonishing and warning Michael he has actually confronted his own guilts which were suppressed for long. The speech is worth quoting for its lyrical surrender to Truth:

What I want to escape from

Is myself, is the past. But what a coward I am,
To talk of escaping! And what a hypocrite!
A few minutes ago I was pleading with Michael
Not to try to escape from his own past failures:
I said I knew from experience. Do I understand the meaning
Of the lesson I would teach? Come I’ll start to learn again
Michael and I shall go to school together.
We’ll sit side by side, at little desks
And suffer the same humiliations
At the hands of the same master. (Act II)

In this flux of ‘teaching’, ‘learning’, ‘schooling’ and ‘meaning’ where souls are assimilated into each other, the demarcation of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary does not operate at a formal strategic level; in fact the deeper strategy, the sub-surface one, is to allow the illocutionary signification to expand and outgrow the overt meaning; paving the way for a total coalescence of ‘meaning’, ‘intention’ and ‘effect’ – blending into a much deeper communion.