CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION
A spectator does not go to the theatre to receive any message communicated to him in the form of a learned discourse disguised in a package of dialogue. Nor does he go there to have the text interpreted or to listen to the subtext and shades of meaning which he might miss as a reader because drama is not merely literature and though it happens to be literary, it is bound up with dance, music, architecture, choreography and mime. Nor is it merely a collage of various arts pieced together to create a unified effect. More often than not, however, drama is treated as literature, and, during the last several hundred years, literary criticism has produced opinions which are a marvel of scholarship but which leave much scope for the understanding of drama in its inescapable medium of theatre, and now, in television and film. However, it is essential to distinguish dramatic art from literature. In the words of Susanne Langer:

"Literature projects the image of life in mode of virtual memory; language is its essential material; the sound and meaning of words, their familiar or unusual use and order, even their presentation on the printed page, create the illusion of life as a realm of events - completed,
lived as words formulate then — events that compose a past. But drama presents the poetic illusion in a different light: not finished realities or "events" but immediate visible responses of human beings, make its semblance of life. Its basic abstraction is the act, which springs from the past towards the future, and is always great with things to come,

the drama is a unique form of literary art.

In theatre it is always 'present', always 'now'.

It is this tension between the past actions and the imminent future which creates the liveliness of the present moment which constitutes the dramatic quality of the theatre.

"In drama this historical vision, sense of destiny is paramount," says Susanne Langer. And it is this vision to be fulfilled, this incompleteness to be completed, the shaping of the form which gives an enacted play its artistic unity.

In drama 'events' and 'action' have different connotations. "Event" embraces all space-time occurrences from the appearance of Banquo's ghost in Macbeth to the growing of a leaf on the tree in Waiting for Godot. Similarly any kind of human response, physical or mental, from Grusha's decision to adopt the child in Brecht's
Caucasian Chalk Circle to Maddy Rooney's reaction to the boy's information that a child was crushed under the train in Beckett's All That Fall, constitutes an act and the total structure of acts constitutes the mode of dramatic action which creates a semblance of the future as a highly tense "present" being enacted before our very eyes.

This constant illusion of an imminent future is sought to be created in the theatre by all dramatists regardless of the nature of the movement or the age they belong to, from Aeschylus in the Oresteia to Arden in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, from the Sanskrit Dramatist Kalidasa in Shakuntala to Eliot in Murder in the Cathedral, from Shakespearean Tragedy through the drama of Molière to today's drama of the mixed genre, so aptly called 'The Dark Comedy' by J.L. Styan. It is the creation of dramatic illusion in the theatre that unites the audience, the stage and the drama and makes the communication of the dramatic experience a possibility. Whether it is the vast arena theatre of the Greeks, the Elizabethan projecting stage, the proscenium stage of the naturalists or the modern theatre-in-the-round and other variations, dramatic art as enacted play elicits and controls the responsiveness of the audience through the dramatic illusion. Charles Morgan explains what happens in the enacted play:

With every development of dramatic technique and every departure from classical structure, the
need increases for new discussion which shall establish for the stage not indeed a formal rule but an aesthetic discipline, elastic, reasoned and acceptable to it in modern circumstances.

It is my purpose then, to discover the principle for which such a discipline might arise. This principle I call the principle of illusion.

Illusion, as I conceive it, is a form in suspense. In a play a form is not valuable in itself; only the suspense of form has value. In a play, form is not and cannot be valuable in itself, because until the play is over form does not exist.

A play’s performance occupies two or three hours. Until the end its form is latent in it.

This suspense of form, by which is meant the incompleteness of a known completion, is to be clearly distinguished from common suspense — the suspense of plot — the ignorance of what will happen, for suspense of plot is a structural accident, and suspense of form is as I understand it, essential to the dramatic form itself.

What form is chosen matters less than that while the drama moves a form is being fulfilled.

The audience in the theatre perceives a critical situation and apprehends that some serious consequence would arise out of it. This creates a tension between the present situation and the imminent consequences — form in suspense — which constitutes the dramatic illusion. Dramatic illusion is the illusion of a visible future which is the sine qua non of every enacted play in the theatre.
This concept of dramatic illusion does not depend upon the existence of plot, character, and spectacle, theme and style, and, therefore, could explain various kinds of dramatic experiences from those of the naturalists to those of the Absurdists. But, since it is the perceptiveness and responsiveness of the audience which completes that form in suspense or dramatic illusion, it is important to know what happens to the audience in the act of perception in the theatre. The test of dramatic communication is what happens to the spectators. What kind of expectation does a playgoer have when he sits in the theatre? Dramatic art as enacted play-in-theatre gives to the audience the exhilaration of a revelation, of a direct aesthetic experience. The aesthetic intuition helps the audience to grasp the contour of meaning of the play in a sudden leap of imagination and lures it to cooperate creatively in the act of creation of the dramatic illusion or complete the form in suspense. This anticipation generates that excitement which grips a theatre-goer as the curtain goes up. Let us take the opening of Strindberg's Miss Julie where we can discern the imminent future embryonic in the theatrical present:

**Jean:** Miss Julie's crazy again tonight, absolutely crazy.

**Kristin:** Oh, so you're back, are you?

**Jean:** When I'd taken the Count to the station, I came back and dropped in at the Barn
'And who did I see there but our young lady leading off with the game-keeper. But the moment she sets eyes on me, up she rushes and invites me to waltz with her. And she waltzed — I've never seen anything like it! She is crazy.

Kristin: Always has been, but never so bad as this last fortnight since the engagement was broken off.

Jean: Yes, that was pretty business, to be sure. He is a decent enough chap, too, even if he isn't rich. Oh, but they're choosy! (sits down at the end of the table). In any case, it is a bit odd that our young'er-lady would rather stay at home with yokels than go with her father to visit her relations.

Kristin: Perhaps she feels a bit awkward, after that bust-up with her fiance.

Jean: Maybe. That chap had some guts, though. Do you know the sort of thing that was going on, Kristin? I saw it with my own eyes, though I didn't let on I had.

Kristin: You saw them?

This brief conversation in the kitchen of a Swedish manor-house between the kitchen maid Kristin and the valet Jean about the young lady Julie strikes the beginning of that visible arc of imaginative experience which the audience would surely complete in the act of creation on the stage.

The interest of the opening scene is due to the consciousness which grips the audience. This class consciousness creates an incipient tension which gives a
subliminal glimpse of the theme. The possibility of upsetting the social order presented as a threat, as an imminent future, as a historical vision, makes the audience wait breathlessly. In a few minutes of the dialogue this vital import of the play is instantly grasped by the audience and the dramatic illusion begins to be formed in a naturalistic setting. It is this intuitive anticipation and excitement of the theatre-goer which builds bridges between him and the stage. As Charles Morgan says:

Every player has been made aware now and then of the existence in the theatre of a suspense, unity, a mysterious power, a transcendent and urgent illusion, which, so to speak, floats above the stage action and above the spectator, endowing him with a vision, a sense of translation and ecstasy, alien to his common knowledge of himself. The hope of this illusion is the excitement, and the experience of it the highest reward, of play-going.

Again and again we are disappointed. But now and then a persistent play-goer's hope, or a part of it is fulfilled. The order of his experience is always the same - a shock, and after the shock an inward stillness, and from that stillness an influence emerging, which transmutes him. Transmutes him - not his opinions. This great impact is neither a persuasion of the intellect nor a beguiling of the senses. It is the enveloping movement of the whole drama upon the soul of man. We surrender and are changed.

Continuing, he says:

Dramatic art has a double function - first to still the pre-occupied mind, to empty it of triviality, to make it receptive and meditative, then to impregnate it. Illusion is the
impregnating power. It is that spiritual force in dramatic art which impregnates the silences of the spectator, enabling him to imagine, to perceive, even to become, what he could not of himself become or perceive or imagine.

Dramatic art, at its greatest, heightens the consciousness of the audience and makes it look right into life's mystery and what was incomprehensible before seems to become suddenly comprehensible. One has a feeling of exultation because of the heightened sense of being. This is particularly true at the climax of a tragedy. In the case of comedy and other genres of dramatic art, too, the audience has a sense of exuberance, vivaciousness and a feeling of superiority, expansiveness and liberation. Even a nightmarish dramatic experience like Endgame gives the audience the strength of despair - the audience's sense of reality is made comparatively brighter by the threatening vision of Endgame and this contrast inflames the imagination of the audience.

As stated earlier, it is the emergent form, the dramatic illusion (not the illusion of reality or verisimilitude which we associate with Naturalism) which has the power to impregnate the audience's mind with the dramatist's vision. It is in this sense that the meaning of communication in drama has to be understood. This study concerns itself with how modern dramatists create the poetic illusion, the dramatic microcosm, which
communicates itself to the audience; what dramatic conventions including those of the language and stage techniques are used to create the emergent form; what dramatic signals are operated to create that perceptiveness in the audience to kindle their imagination to participate in the dramatist's act of creation.

Verbal and Non-Verbal Elements in Dramatic Communication

Speech, like an act in drama, is a response motivated by other acts forming a sequence to shape the future. Words are uttered only when a character wants to create the illusion of an inward activity. They are decisive and critical moments, shaping the flow of action. The purpose of an utterance is dramatic not rhetorical. Throughout its chequered history Western drama has been more or less verbal though the pressure of mime has always existed as it does in modern drama. Greek drama had its origin in a ritual dance timed to the chanting of choric words. Or there was narrative commentary on the dance action. It was in the introduction of dialogue between the Chorus and an actor that Greek drama took a progressive step. But it was only when Aeschylus introduced the second actor that dialogue as we understand it today, as an instrument of action and character, began. In course of time, from Aeschylus to Euripides, action and dialogue began to interact; the
action progressed through the dialogue, and the contrast in character was shown by choice of words and vividness of dialogue. Because of the costumes and the mask which the actors used, physical action was very limited especially for the tragic actor. The Chorus was virtually the play. However it must be remembered that it was the gestalt of the spoken word, gestures, music, the plastic rhythm in movement which created the dramatic illusion which enveloped the vast audience varying up to fifty thousand. Words created the controlling form but they alone did not constitute the Greek theatrical experience.

As stated earlier the tradition of mime has always existed in European drama. It was this tradition which gave rise to the Italian mime drama, Commedia dell' arte, opera and ballet, and today it is this European tradition of the wordless drama which has penetrated much of the modern drama as a substitute for the spoken word. While in Europe, drama was taking a different shape, poetry reached commanding heights in Elizabethan drama. Marlowe's discovery of the blank verse, the vehicle of dramatic speech perfected by Shakespeare, was the miracle and glory of drama. The Elizabethans never complained of "the intolerable wrestle with the word," or "that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to
express, together with the obligation to express. That may be because the wide spectrum of the Elizabethan audience loved to hear poetry in theatre, word was not severed from the word, the propagandists and the politicians had not yet reduced language to aphasia. In the Graeco-Elizabethan drama the word, the text, controls the enactment. The contours of an enacted play are established and controlled by the dramatist's word.

The classical naturalists like Ibsen and Chekhov created a limited language approximating to what would be actually spoken in natural circumstances. This they attempted to achieve not by precisely pointing out that this could be the language of drama but by excluding a range of dramatic languages like verse, rhetoric, incantatory chant, highly stylized language and other possibilities. Historically this tendency took a firm contour when Ibsen, after Peer Gynt and Brand decided to create "the very much more difficult art of writing the genuine language spoken in real life."

This desire to use dramatic speech that is photographic and life-like created the limited language of the naturalists. Pirandello took the idea of "language spoken in real life" to "spoken action" which he defined as "spoken action, living words that move, immediate expressions inseparable from action, unique
phrases that cannot be changed to any other and belong to
a definite character in a definite situation: in short,
words, expressions, phrases impossible to invent but born
when the author has identified himself with his creatures
to the point of seeing it only as it sees itself.\textsuperscript{11}

Of course, naturalist playwrights soon realised the
shackles of this limited language and adopted several
ways of transcending this language. Nonetheless they
opened the doors to further experimentation.

The post-naturalist dramatists are not only aware of
the decreasing usefulness of language as a symbol of
thought and feeling but are also conscious of the wide
variety of languages, mimetic, expressive and also from
the museum of the languages of the past, which they could
use in new combinations. This has made the modern
post-naturalist dramatists critically conscious about
their language and this has become a source of creativity
in certain cases. To escape from the tired and exhausted
language of naturalism, a dramatist either moves towards
verse, prose rhetoric, parodistic style, or by a process
of peeling off naturalistic language arrives at a minimal,
bare language though he continuously feels the pressure of
living language, day to day speech. This self-imposed
obligation to create a new language restricts the play to a
small audience which could learn the code in a short time,
playwright
Or the has to resort excessively or exclusively to non-verbal theatrical language as an escape from the problem of language. This leads to the expanded scope of wordless drama like mime, ballet, sound and light effects and other forms of expressiveness, sometimes called theatre language, language of movement, action language, the aesthetics of sight and sound. Of course one is familiar with Antonin Artaud's creed denouncing verbal drama and heralding the language of space and movement, "the visual language of objects, attitudes and gestures, but on condition that their meanings, their physiognomies, their combinations be carried to the point of becoming signs, making a kind of alphabet out of these signs."12

In our own time Martin Esslin expresses a similar opinion:

Theatre is always more than mere language. Language alone can be read, but true theatre can become manifest only in performance. The entry of the bullfighters into the arena, the procession of participants at the opening of the Olympic Games, the state drive of the sovereign through the streets of his capital, the meaningful actions of the priest in celebrating the Mass — all these contain powerful elements of pure, abstract theatrical effects. They have deep, often metaphysical meaning and express more than language could. These are the elements that distinguish any stage performance from the reading of a play, elements that exist independently of words, as in the performance of Indian jugglers that made Haslitt marvel at the possibilities of man and gave him an insight into his nature: 'Is it then a trifling power
we see at work, or is it not something next to miraculous. It is the utmost stretch of human ingenuity, which nothing but the bending of the faculties of body and mind to it from the tenderest infancy, with incessant, ever-anxious application unto manhood, can accomplish, or make even a slight approach to. Man thou art a wonderful animal, and thy ways past finding out. Thou cannot do strange things, but thou turnest, then to little account.' This is the strange metaphysical power of concreteness and skill in theatrical performance, which Nietzsche spoke of in The Birth of Tragedy: 'The myth by no means finds its adequate objectification in the spoken-word. The structure of the scenes and the visible imagery reveal a deeper wisdom than that which the poet himself is able to put into words and concepts.18

In such a situation the text becomes only an excuse and ceases to command the form of the enacted play. The word-less drama is in polar opposition to the Greek and Elizabethan mode of drama where the script controls the performance. Every crisis in Greek and Elizabethan drama finds its word which could never be mimed and expressed in any other theatrical language. For example, take the passage where Clytemnestra with her slaughtered husband's body at her feet exults over her terrible deed:

Here where I struck I stand and see my task achieved. 
Yes, this is my work, and I claim it. To prevent flight or resistance facing death, I cast on him, 
As one who catches fish, a vast voluminous net, 
That walled him round with endless wealth of woven folds; 
And then I struck him, twice. Twice he cried out and groaned; 
And then fell limp. And as he lay I gave a third 
And final blow, my thanks for prayers fulfilled, to Zeus, Lord of the lower region, Saviour - of dead men! 
So belching he belched forth his life, with cough and retch.
There spurted from him bloody foam in a fierce jet,  
And spreading, spattered me with drops of crimson rain;  
While I exulted as the corn cornfield exults  
Drenched with the dew of heaven when buds burst forth in  
Spring. **14**

This view of the indispensability of the word at critical moments in drama may seem to be contrary to what Arthur Miller says, "A very great play can be mined and still issue forth its essential actions and their rudiments of symbolic meaning; the word, in drama, is the transformation into speech of what is happening, and the fount for intense language is intensity of happening." **15** There is no gainsaying the fact that the modern dramatist has been persisting in his search for non-verbal communication. The reference is not only to Beckett's two mimes, Act Without Words I and Act Without Words II but also to the increasing use of mime elements as substitute for words in Pinter, Arden, Wesker and others. In Miss Julie (1888) Strindberg makes it clear in the preface to the play: "In places where monologue would be unnatural I have used mime, leaving here an even wider scope for the actor's imagination, and more chance for him to win independent laurels. But so as not to try the audience beyond endurance I have introduced music - fully justified by the Midsummer Eve dance - to exercise its powers of persuasion during the dumb show." **16** Dumb show is used here as a substitute for words - and this tendency towards the mime as a surrogate for the word symbolic of crisis has been increasing
as if the essential experience being unspeakable could be embodied forth in the plastic language of the theatre: the influence of Antonin Artaud seems inescapable. It would seem that the whole of the dramatic work of Samuel Beckett is plunged in the immensity of silence where language, compressed and implicit, finds its reluctant place though with poetic intensity. Ionesco's dialogues have a constant tendency to dry up and run to sand; as the material objects, chairs, furniture etc. proliferate, language shrinks, as if in fear. Genet would communicate through spectacles, and mock-rituals where words have meagre significance.

One may point out the drum scene of the dumb girl Katrin in Brecht's Mother Courage. But this drum scene on the roof top is not a substitute for words as if the crisis is unspeakable; it has its dramatic inevitability because Katrin is dumb and the town could be awakened and saved only by the sound of the drum. This dramatic inevitability of the non-verbal is not found in Wooster's nine-scene in the first act of Chips with Everything (1962), the dance in the third act of Arden's Sergeant Musgrave's Dance (1959), the drum scene at the end of the first Act of Pinter's The Birthday Party (1958). The non-verbal elements are used because the dramatists are philosophically persuaded about the inadequacy of the language and have to struggle to free
themselves from the nausea and paralysis created by mere words. This is clearly due to the influence of symbolist poets and dramatists who regard language not as a means of communication but as a barrier to be transcended with the help of music and silence—towards a language within a language which would be suggestive of the intimate, "the unutterable, unsayable things," a language "of the soul, for the soul containing everything, smells, sounds, colours." As George Lukács says:

What is said becomes ever more peripheral to what is not expressible ... the openly spoken is ever more submerged in the allusion, in silence, in effects achieved by pauses, change of tempo, etc. For the process which proceeds exclusively within, which will not even seek for words, which cannot, is better expressed by word groupings than by their sense, and better by their associative power than by their real meaning, by their painterly or musical energy. The more lonely men in drama become (and the development is ever more in this direction, or at least towards awareness of it) the more dialogue will become fragmented, allusive, impressionistic in form rather than specific and forthright.

Due to the combined heritage of naturalism with its tendency towards minimal speech and symbolism with its aspiration to transcend speech, the modern post-naturalist dramatist explores the inarticulate—suckles, mutters, broken phrases—on the one hand and compression and implicitness in speech on the other. This pull towards implicitness, suggestion and minimal speech as in Beckett's
Play, Pinter’s Landscape and Silence is the process of ‘infolding’ as explained by Arthur Koestler:

The intention is not to obscure the message, but to make it more luminous by compelling the recipient to work it out by himself - to recreate it. Hence the message must be handed to him in implied form - and implied means ‘folded in.’ To make it unfold, he must fill in the gaps, complete the hint, see through the symbolic disguise. 18

It may be seen from the above discussion that the post-war drama shows an exclusive tendency towards this compressed, implicit, infolding language or the anti-verbal theatre of Artaud’s ‘extension beyond word.’ But there is another unmistakable trend towards the highly verbal theatricality, towards the song, the ballad, the aside, the direct public address and non-illusionary expressiveness represented by Bertolt Brecht, John Arden and others who look towards a wide spectrum of audience. Even Eliot’s decision to write for the theatre was prompted by his desire to cut across the class stratification; and he wanted to achieve this through ‘open competition with prose drama’ by creating ‘verse for other voices’ having dramatic utility. Bernard Shaw’s vehemence that “it is drama that makes the theatre and not the theatre drama” finds its reverberations in John Osborne’s defence of words as against ‘Happenings’.
They may be dispensed with, but it seems to me that they are the last link with God. When millions of people seem unable to communicate with one another, it's vitally important that words are made to work. It may be very old-fashioned, but they're the only things we have left."20

At the risk of being too simplistic one could venture to say that the post-naturalist drama shows two polar tendencies: a muted theatre of silences, infolding, internalized, fragmentary utterances, uncertain gestures, and a theatre of the majestic movement, grandiloquent poetic phrase, a theatre where life seems larger than life, where the role-playing actor-character uses all sorts of public and private languages drawn from the imaginary museums of languages, to enrich and broaden drama.

The Social Context of Dramatic Communication

The ultimate test of a play, says J.L.Styan, is: does it work?21 We may approach the problem in a negative way: why doesn't a play work? The failure could be due to artistic reasons in the sense that a dramatist has failed to create that dramatic illusion, form in suspense, or the emergent vision which appeals to the aesthetic sensibilities and makes communication possible. This is clearly a failure of the individual talent and this could happen in any age. But if a play does not work inspite of accepted
artistic merit; the reason for failure could be sought in the disharmony between the play and the age. If the mode of consciousness of the age does not correspond with the emergent vision of the play, the audience would not be aroused and electrified to respond. A play is an historical and social event also, though, because of its universality, it may successfully communicate beyond its time.

To illustrate our point we shall take the remarkable case of a play of Shakespeare, **Troilus and Cressida** (1607). It is thought that this play was hardly performed in Shakespeare's time and when for the first time an attempt was made to stage it in 1907, it was a failure. Subsequently, attempts to reach the audience were met with little success. But after World War II, the play turned out to be a great success which was not due to the rare genius of a producer or a director, but another factor, that the mode of consciousness, awareness, what Raymond Williams calls "structure of feeling" had changed and the play's vision suddenly corresponded with the consciousness of the audience. Ultimately the audience perceives what it wants to perceive. A Renaissance play finds its true audience more than three hundred years after it was created! A brief consideration of the play would make it clear why *Troilus and Cressida* succeeded with the post-war audience but failed with the Elizabethans. The play is a mixed
sort of genre, a kind of comedy which breathes the atmosphere of tragedy, showing realism leaning on cynicism, love melting into lechery, military politics undermined by derisive laughter—where warring is the same as whoring. The play debunks romantic war as well as romantic love much as does Shaw's *Arms and the Man.* Could we call *Troilus* an anti-hero? He is in any case a non-hero who loses everything a warrior prizes, including his girl and his horse, to the Greek Diomedes who prizes his horse first and the girl afterward. Critics today regard *Cressida* as realistic, modern, much in the company of Brecht's *Mother Courage,* Tennessee Williams' *Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire* and Pinter's *Ruth in Homecoming*—not a whore, not a frailty but a person who struggles to survive. She knows that "men prize the thing ungained more than it is," and decides in her self-interest, in an amoral way, maybe—"yet hold I off." The lesson "yet hold I off" comes instinctively to all maidens of all climes and ages, from pensive flowers wearing chastity belts to modern bachelor girls. But what to decide about a girl who asks "In kissing do you render or receive?" and hops from one Greek General to another standing in a queue? Or is she snatched by them turn by turn? Heroism is debased, chivalry is trampled over and war turns out to be a-whoring. Helen is a whore, and perhaps the only way for a girl to survive in a man's world, is the way of *Cressida.* But are
the Helens and the Cressidas of the world worth a war?
The mood of the play is in harmony with the spirit of the
modern times, but not with the spirit of Renaissance where
men could hurl defiance against fate and could boldly
enter into compacts with Lucifer himself. Troilus and
Cressida shows that a dramatist could be out of tune with
his own times and wait for another age for his work to
find an audience.

Another instructive example is that of Waiting for
The Codet. Martin Esslin in Theatre of the Absurd has
reported how on 19 November 1957 the play was staged
before a very unusual audience consisting of fourteen
hundred convicts at the San Quentin Penitentiary. The
play enthralled the unsophisticated audience in
contradistinction to the bewilderment it had caused
earlier in London, Paris and New York. As San Quentin
News reported:

From this moment Robin Wagner's thoughtful
and limbo-like set was dressed with light, until
the last futile and expectant handclasp was
hesitantly activated between the two searching
vagrants, the San Francisco company had its
audience of capitives in its collective hand....
Those that had felt a less controversial
vehicle should be attempted as a first play
here had their fears allayed a short five
minutes after the Samuel Beckett piece began to
unfold.23

Martin Esslin asks a question which fits into our
argument about a play being a social and historical event and depending for its communicability on the mode of consciousness of the period:

Why did a play of the supposedly esoteric avant-garde make so immediate and so deep an impact on an audience of convicts? Because it confronted them with a situation in some ways analogous to their own? Perhaps. Or, perhaps because they were unsophisticated enough to come to the theatre without any preconceived notions and ready-made expectations, so that they avoided the mistake that trapped so many established critics who condemned the play for its lack of plot, development, characterization, suspense, or plain common sense. Certainly the prisoners of San Quentin could not be suspected of the sin of intellectual snobbery for which a sizable proportion of the audiences of Waiting for Godot have often been reproached; of pretending to like a play they did not even begin to understand, just to appear in the know.

It is quite possible that the perception of the convict audience was at a personal level while the sophisticated playgoers of Paris, London and New York, after the initial hostility, began to perceive metaphysical meaning in the play. Or the play drew to the surface the awareness which was only subliminal in the educated audience. The play at last chimed with the spirit of the age. "The social history which lies behind the play as a public event," says J.L. Styan, "can offer unpredictable insights into the source of its vitality. Drama is an expression of community, feeling the pulse of an age or of
a moment in time like no other art. A play is a social event or it is nothing."

Only when the tastes, interests, assumptions and attitudes constituting the mode of consciousness of that age are wedded to the artistic purpose and form in acceptable dramatic and stage conventions, does dramatic communication proper, as audience experience, begin to take place. A playwright may not be aware of or articulate about his age yet his very search for dramatic conventions would betray that spirit of the age which initiated his search. It is only when the "mode of imaginative beholding," of a dramatist finds suitable conventions that great drama arises — in the sense that it finds its true audience, for, the ultimate search of a dramatist, one must concede, is a search for an audience. It is the dramatist's search for an audience which obliges him to invent, adopt or rediscover conventions through which the communication of dramatic experience or dramatic perception takes place. This may sound like the tyranny of the audience but great artists have accepted it and turned it ... to creative purposes.

The massive audience varying from 17000 to 55000 of the giant arena theatre of the Greeks dictated and rose to meet the scale and stature of Greek Drama. The homogeneity of the audience and its religious profundity
gave rise to the ritualistic form of Aeschylean drama. The medieval audience too was united and homogeneous and that explains the unprecedented 300-year dramatic record of the Mystery Cycles. The wide propagation and proliferation of the Commedia Dell' Arte mode of dramatic communication which lasted for 200 years owed its prosperity to its widest appeal to the common denomination of disparate audiences throughout Europe. The same element of immeasurable importance is found in the Renaissance audience.

The playwrights of the twentieth century from Ibsen to the Absurdist have undertaken a desperate search for new forms and new conventions in the hope of reaching the fragmented modern audience. Later on we shall explain how this search for an audience or the attempt to reach the differentiated, fragmented and disparate audience of today has obliged the playwrights towards pre-verbal, non-rational or supra-rational modes of dramatic communication finding their source of strength not only in Artaud, Craig and Peter Brook but also in going back to the primitive origins of drama itself.

THE AUDIENCE AND DRAMATIC PERCEPTION

In the fabric of a successful dramatic enactment the signals from the text through the actor to the audience
and its feedback constitute complete dramatic communication of which the audience is not only an indispensable part but a decisive and critical factor. As Richard Southern says, "The essence of theatre does not lie in what is performed. It does not lie even in the way it is performed. The essence of theatre lies in the impression made on the audience by the manner in which you perform. Theatre is essentially a reactive art." 

If drama is a reactive art the responsiveness of the audience depends upon how the performance builds its emergent meaning through a gestalt of sense impressions which are controlled by rhythm and form, tempo and shape, that relocate story and plot to incidental functions. Through the controlled flow of stage signals, the playwright begins to penetrate into the collective psyche of his audience and churns up the slumbering experience to the surface which gives the audience at once a sense of release and aesthetic delight. Jerzy Grotowski, the Polish director, believes that "the theatre must attack what might be called the collective complexes of society, the core of the collective sub-conscious or perhaps superconscious (it does not matter what we call it), the myths which are not an invention of the mind but are, so to speak, inherited through one's blood, religion, culture and climate." He calls theatrical experience "a form of
The performance engages a sort of psychic conflict with the spectator. It is a challenge and an excess, but can only have an effect if based on human interest, and, more than that, on a feeling of sympathy, a feeling of acceptance.... If we really wish to delve deeply into the logic of our mind and behaviour and reach their hidden layers, their secret motor, then the whole system of signs built into the performance must appeal to our experience, to the reality which has surprised and shaped us, to this language of gestures, mumblings, sounds and intonations picked up in the street, at work, in cafes - in short, all human behaviour which has made an impression on us.

We are talking about profanation, what in fact, is this but a kind of tactlessness based on the brutal confrontation between our declarations and our daily actions, between the experience of our forefathers which lives within us and our search for a comfortable way of life or our conception of a struggle for survival, between our individual complexes and those of society as a whole?

This implies that every classical performance is like looking at oneself in a mirror, at our ideas and traditions, and not merely the description of that men of past ages thought and felt.

Every performance built on a contemporary theme is an encounter between the superficial traits of the present day and its deep roots and hidden motives. The performance is national because it is a sincere and absolute search into our historical ego; it is realistic because it is an excess of truth; it is social because it is a challenge to the social being, the spectator.

This assault on the audience's psyche, reaching their deep layers could be done through the stage signals which
influence audience perception. For instance, we find that in Ibsen’s *The Master Builder*, Hilda Wangel lifts the pall of gloom as she enters the scene. This change in audience perception is made not by any conceptual statement from Solness that his life has been changed but by the audience’s own judgement. She comes like a waft of fresh air: “She is of medium height, lithe, of slim build, slightly tanned by the sun. She wears walking clothes, with her skirt hitched up, a sailor’s collar open at the neck, and a small sailor hat on her head. She has a ruck-sack on her back, a plaid in a strap and a long alpenstock.”

This fresh contrast of a sprightly young girl is presented against Kaiya’s green eyeshade and Aline’s mourning habit. Hilde comes and opens the windows and doors of that stuffy room in which the characters had been trapped all along. Even the audience begins to breathe deeply in the fresh wind from the sea and the mountain. The drama from that moment begins to move with a faster tempo and the audience begins to feel the emergent meaning on its pulses.

Father Inquisitor in Brecht’s play *Galileo* meets the newly elected Pope as the latter is being dressed. As the man vanishes into the robes of Pope Urban VIII, his prevarication and uncertainty change into orthodox blindness. The audience sees the fate of Galileo in the process of the robing of Pope Urban VIII.
dialectical attitude towards Galileo too is determined as we perceive Galileo the sensuous glutton and Galileo the scientist.

By a continuous flow of sensory impressions the audience perceives the intrusion of the unfamiliar, Rhinoceros, into the familiar world of Berenger, and by slow but inevitable degrees the unfamiliar replacing the familiar altogether from consciousness. This change in the audience consciousness does not take place through any verbal process of argumentation because consciousness is not a product of cause and effect. Marshall McLuhan rightly says: 'Consciousness is regarded as the mark of a rational being, yet there is nothing lineal or sequential about the total field of awareness that exists in any moment of consciousness.'

The function of dramatic art is to heighten the audience consciousness, and consciousness is not a verbal or analytical process like language but an all-embracing 'gestalt.'

That explains why modern dramatists either regard language as a barrier or minimise its importance by resorting to pre-verbal and non-verbal modes of activating audience perception because according to psychologists, perception is complete when meaning emerges from the combined activity of memory and judgement working upon
the whole field of sensation and assumptions. The creative
imagination of the audience transmutes the perceptual field
by a poetic magic as it were. What the audience perceives
is much more than is put on the stage in the form of
sensory impressions of sound and music, visuals and the
spoken word; the audience perceives the form which is the
meaning — an act of imaginative exploration, discovery,
thrill and exhilaration, where $X$ plus $Y$ is beyond any
calculus.

Throughout this discussion of our theme of dramatic
communication we have been talking about dramatic illusion
as form in suspense, the emergent form which is built by a
dramatist with a gestalt of sensory impressions that
involve the audience in a creative experience. This arc
of imaginative experience as enacted play is mutually
traced by the tension, the reciprocity, by the reality of
the audience and the unreality of the stage. The leap of
the audience's imaginative involvement would depend upon
the degree of distortion, the unreality on the stage. The
illusion of reality or verisimilitude which the
Naturalists attempted reduced the aesthetic distance
between the audience and the stage, necessitating, in the
later phases, the introduction of symbols thus enlarging
the experience of the audience. The post-war dramatists
have been seeking means of enlarging this aesthetic
distance to an optimum level — not too short to reduce life
on stage to a photographic reality, nor too big as to make the stage a fantasy of incredibility. As T.S. Eliot says, "In genuine drama the form is determined by the point on the line at which a tension between liturgy and realism takes place."[32]

The statement is worth pondering over not only because it explains opposition to the Naturalist mode of drama but also because it explains the real process of artistic creation. Art is a distortion - that has an aesthetic appeal. When does distortion cease to be art? Tyrone Guthrie[33] says in his autobiography that theatre becomes interesting not because it approaches reality but because it retreats farther into its own sort of artifice. A great play is the one which strikes the right measure of distortion, facilitating the unique dramatic experience.

Theatrical experience liberates the audience from the shackles of too much reality and through its process of artistic distortion, or profanation as Grotowsky calls it, lifts the audience into a heightened consciousness. Ionesco and Beckett have adopted the mode of farce to disarm the audience. The exaggeration and distortion of the farcical mode mix sublimity with dung. The acrobatic juxtaposition creates an ambiguity of response and the audience sees itself anew. The use of Parody, burlesque, echo-mirror effect, Commedia technique, masks, cothurni, ritualistic stylization, declamatory language or infolding,
implicit, compressed language - all are used by modern dramatists to assault the reality of the audience to draw it to a heightened consciousness. The gestic communication by the giant stature of the Greek actors, cothurnated and accompanied by the stylized dancing and chanting of the Chorus, the non-illusory theatre of the Elizabethans where gesture and language merge, the ritualistic and participatory theatre of the medieval Mystery Cycles, the demonstrative style of acting of the Oriental theatre - all sought the imaginative leap of the audience into something beyond, adding another dimension to its sensibility - something which modern dramatists have been struggling to accomplish.

Just as serious drama liberates the audience from highly too much reality by a stylized acting and other like conventions, farce too by its methods of distortion, magnification, caricature, profanation sets the audience free. The dramatic value of unreality lies in its capacity to release the spirit. Farce, for instance, releases the routine tensions of the audience and causes laughter with abandon. It subverts seriousness, and if properly handled, a dramatist could accomplish much.

However, coming back to T.S. Eliot's idea of dramatic form arising as a consequence of interaction between reality and ritual, it may be pointed out that a play, to begin
with needs only a suggestion of probability but once the audience rapport is established, the play can zoom to a maddening world and surge into realms much farther from reality. That is how Mirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author takes us into a strange world and the audience remains enthralled in an illusion-reality see-saw. The opening of the play is quiet and naturalistic in manner. A rehearsal is in progress and we see actors and actresses in theatre as real as ourselves and thus the naturalistic illusion of reality or verisimilitude is carried on till we are suddenly plucked from this illusion by six persons, in masks, of a fiction-in-process who flock to the stage asking the manager to let them play out their half-finished fictional existence to the finish. The unreality of the six characters usurps the reality of the actors in course of time till the audience finds itself submerged in the world of make-believe, and wakes up to its own reality with the laughter of the Stop-Daughter at the end.

Similarly we find in Henry IV the real and the mad Henry acting and reacting till Henry IV kills his rival and seeks shelter in the mask of madness.

The audience's capacity to take an imaginative leap from the initial probability to the fantasia of dream has been a source of dramatic creativity beginning with Strindberg's post-naturalist developments like To Damascus, The Dream Play, and The Ghost Sonata. The Author's note
to The Dream Play says:

In this dream play, as in his former play To Damascus, the Author has sought to reproduce the disconnected but apparently logical form of a dream. Anything can happen; everything is possible and probable; time and space do not exist; on a slight groundwork of reality, imagination spins and weaves new patterns made out of memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations.

The characters are split, double and multiply; they evaporate, crystallize, scatter and converge. But a single consciousness holds away over them all - that of the dreamer.

The dramatist's problem is to induce the "single consciousness" in the audience also so that it could imaginatively piece together the medley of sensory impressions into an aesthetic experience. Sometimes the symbols and the flow of action in To Damascus are so bizarre that the audience feels staggered and the communication circuit begins to trip. If symbolism is subjective, unrelated to the universal audience experience, if the sequence of action in the expressionistic mode does not have its repeated point of reference in reality, then the audience soon folds its imagination and withdraws. T.S. Eliot once said, "Human kind cannot bear very much reality;" can they digest too much unreality? Nonetheless it is in the imaginative play between reality and expressiveness, actuality and distortion under the unifying artistic purpose that a dramatic form which communicates the meaning in totality arises.
The point which we have been trying to make in this essay is that the urgent, persistent meaning of the play which hangs like a threat on the stage is negotiated by the audience through an integrated and organized field of sensory impressions of spoken words, music, visuals, silences and other dramatic signals; the emergent form is controlled by the dramatist's text which the directors, from age to age, interpret and enact according to their own light and the needs of the media. In the following sections we shall study some of the seminal dramatists - T.S. Eliot, Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Jean Genet - who in their Janus-like faces gather the past unto themselves and prophecy into the future.
Notes


2. Thornton Wilder says in "Some Thoughts on Playwriting" that four fundamental conditions separate drama from other arts. They are: (1) The Theatre is an art which requires the work of many collaborators; (2) It is addressed to the group mind; (3) It is based upon a pretense and its very nature calls out a multiplication of pretenses; (4) Its action takes place in a perpetual present.


7. T.S. Eliot, "East Coker".


9. Of George Steiner: "But the kind of theatre in which language is supreme, accords precisely with political tragedy. We must learn to listen to those plays as we would to music; we must be audience rather than spectator."

Again, "Given the abuses of language by political terror and by the illiteracy of mass consumption, can we look to a return of that mystery in words which lies at the source of tragic poetry? Can the newspeak of George Orwell's 1984 (and that year is already upon us) serve the needs of tragic drama? I think not, and this is why T.S. Eliot is so right when he describes the ideal of modern dramatic verse as 'a mirage'."

The Death of Tragedy, London, 1961, pp 60, 312.


22. Ibid., p.103.


31. Gestalt (Ger) Form, pattern, structure, or configuration; an integrated whole, not a mere summation of units or parts; gives its name to the type of psychology which is known as Gestalt Psychology and which originated in Germany during the early decades of the present century, mainly as a psychology of perception; James Drever, *A Dictionary of Psychology*, Harmondsworth 1952, p.108.

