Modern poetry's experiments with abstraction is the focus of this chapter. An application of postmodern theories to modern poetics is an attempt to understand the convoluted ambiguity in the poetry of Eliot and Stevens by foregrounding the manner in which the poems theorize the notions to be found in the theories of postmodern thinkers, such as, Jameson and Lyotard. Such a reading also points to the obfuscation in modern poetry which arises from the fact that the old paradigms are layered within the new, and may be considered as a means of organizing the past in the present. Past in general, is an abstract entity. We know of the past only through its texts in the form of music, paintings and literature. A poetic perspective is more suitable in understanding the multi-faceted aspect of past events.

The intention of this chapter is to show that the convoluted ambiguities are not natural facts of life but social constructions. In other words, the endeavor in making poetic language "new", necessitated a convoluted ambiguity which is also characteristic of cultural postmodernism. It was this which made the poems of Eliot and Stevens obscure. I use the term 'abstraction' in this chapter to draw analogies between postmodern critical theories and poetry. By concentrating on abstraction as a process in theory
and poetry, I intend to illustrate the skeptical impulse currently dominating contemporary literary criticism, by which the force of modernist poetics becomes fully clear.

Abstraction as a term from the visual arts also serves as a useful reference point to draw relationships between poetry and painting - a subject which was of abiding interests with the modern artists. Abstraction in painting and sculpture makes no identifiable reference to the visible world. Such works, which must have some claim to exist in their own right if they are to be distinguished from ornament or decoration, are often analogous to works of music. They have become increasingly common in Western art. . . since c.1910, when a number of scattered experimenters influenced by symbolism and/ or cubism began producing art with no recognizable 'subject' in the traditional sense.¹

The central argument in this chapter revolves around the fact that it was the apparent formlessness or strangeness characteristic of the poetry of the twenties that allied it to the visual arts. It was also part of the "denaturing process" which is what cultural postmodernism implies. As Katherine Hayles explicates:

To denature something is to deprive it of its natural qualities. . . . The denaturing process ... is one of the technical developments that helped to constitute cultural postmodernism. It is also a metaphor for postmodernism's deeper implications. When the essential components of human experience are denatured, they are not merely revealed as constructions. The human subject who stands as the putative source of experience is also deconstructed and then reconstructed in ways that fundamentally alter what it
means to be human. The postmodern anticipates and implies the posthuman.²

According to Hayle language, context and time all get denatured as “three waves of related events.”³ The denaturing process enables us to conceptualize concepts in different ways as constructs. By applying the denaturing process to the poetry of Eliot and Stevens, it is possible to view the similarity in their works as the various concepts get denatured, and the manner in which familiar concepts are wrested out of their absolutist placements. This is also one of the several causes of the obscurity of modern poetry. I shall begin with a series of concrete examples demonstrating the impact of the denaturing process on the poets, which became a necessary strategy indicating a self-conscious attitude toward language in order to support the deconstructive view that all utterance is ungrounded and indeterminate. Hayle’s denaturing of language, context and time is well suited to analyze the poetry of Eliot and Stevens from a postmodernist perspective. I intend to take up this concept of denaturing and apply it to the poetry of these two modern poets, the idea being that the poetic practice of the modernist poets anticipated the critical concerns of much of the postmodernist thinkers and theorists, especially concerned with the indeterminacy of language. About the denaturing of language Hayle explains:

By saying language was denatured, I mean to indicate a self-conscious attitude toward language in which signification is regarded as always already problematic. The sense that language is constantly unraveling, even as one weaves it into a design; that any utterance can be deconstructed to show that
it already presupposes what it would say and hence has no prior ground on
which to rest; that all texts are penetrated by infinite number of intertexts so
that contextual horizons are always constructions rather than givens; in short,
that signification is a construction rather than a natural result of speaking or
writing - all this was implied by the denaturing process as it applies to
language. Denatured language is language regarded as ground painted under
our feet while we hang suspended in a void. We cannot dispense with the
illusion of ground, because we need a place from which to speak. But it is
bracketed by our knowledge that it is only a painting, not natural ground.4

The manner in which Eliot and Stevens make use of language in their poems
draws attention to itself, so that language is not something given, but a social
construct. Stevens deals with the abstract nature of language in one of his
long poems 'The Comedian as the Letter C' (which I discuss at length later in
the chapter). The language used, especially in Eliot's early poems, indicates
the social status of the speakers. The affected language of the women which
the poet refers to in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' is a direct contrast
to the language of Lil's companion in 'A Game of Chess'. While the talk of the
ladies in the former poem revolves around "Michelangelo", Lil's companion
talks of artificial teeth, pills and hot gammon. Certain words are blatantly
used by the poet which are signifiers of texts as they are "constructed" within
the language of the speakers in the poem and are deconstructed in its
interpretation. This is part of the process in which the language of the poem
gets denatured. For example, the lines:
In the room the women come and go

Talking of Michelangelo. (C P & P, 13)

suggests the easy familiarity of the women with a 'sublime text'. "Michelangelo", is carefully constructed in the language of the women and it is the Prufrockian consciousness which deconstructs the language of the women within the context of the poem. For Prufrock, it is the language of the women which gets denatured if he were to regard women “talking of Michelangelo” as incongruous. The word Michelangelo suggests the Renaissance, the sublime world of flowing, whole, harmonious forms and also the past. It is the room which forms the canvas of Prufrock’s observations and an analysis of just these two lines unravels the ‘language’ of the women to reveal the ‘text’ used by the women to indicate their social status as “Michelangelo” is carefully woven into the conversation. The transposition of the past and the manner of its interaction with the present is also suggested by these lines. There seems to be a harmonious blending of the past with the present as the women of the present talk about Michelangelo of the past. However, interpreting these two lines within the larger canvas of Prufrockian observation which encompasses the world of allusion drawn from various texts - Biblical, mythical, literary, psycho-analytical - distorts the harmonious relationship between the women and the famous painter from the past, and the irony of the scene is exposed. The presence of Michelangelo in the conversation of the women now appears to be incongruous as the later
observations of Prufrock views the scene from a fragmented perspective. Prufrock’s observations make a fetish of the feminine form.

Thus, Michelangelo as an indicator of a sublime text is denatured in the present twentieth century social context when the name loses its prior significance, acquiring new significance as it is used in the language of the ladies; an essential ingredient of the language of high society. The ironical attitude of the poet towards women, and a particular class of society in general, is reflected in the manner in which the protagonist of the poem interacts with his immediate surroundings. The poet by weaving a past text into the present, records his response to a past according to his personal requirements; to fit the past in the present context.

When the poem is subjected to a deconstructive analysis it would further reveal Prufrock's discomfort in the situation he finds himself in. Such a reading is also part of the denaturing process, whereby the human protagonist finds himself becoming another ‘text’ as he attempts to penetrate the inner circle of society and the parenthetical references point toward his self-consciousness as he wonders:

'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair -
(They will say: ‘How his hair is growing thin!’)
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin -

(They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!')

\[(C\ P\ &\ P,\ 14)\]

As Prufrock finds himself denatured in his surroundings, he denatures the human form through his language by recording his experience in imagistic terms (through the medium of words). The kaleidoscopic images are curiously presented as incomplete and dehumanized so that there are: "voices dying with a dying fall", but no sign of people; "the eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase", but no face; "Arms that are braceleted, white and bare", but no body. The process reaches a climax when Prufrock wishes to be "a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas" \((C\ P\ &\ P,\ 14-15)\).

Biblical and literary references are deconstructed as signifiers of the past within the text. The past interacts with the present, so that, not only our perception to the signifiers of the past undergo a change but their meaning also becomes indeterminate. Prufrock is the modern twentieth century version of both Hamlet and Lazarus as he finds himself dissolving and becoming an abstraction in the present. Prufrock's experience is not so much alienating him from society as much as it is leading him to enter the crepuscular zone of "virtual reality", a familiar space in the postmodernist context of the television and the print media. In such a context we find ourselves becoming just another copy of the reality as we are increasingly removed from experience and overdependent on representations of reality that come to us through the
media. There is a sense of loss of individuality as we seem more and more willing to put our trust in intermediaries who represent the world to us. Prufrock's dilemma stems from the fact that he is displaced from his context to fit into the exalted society, which for him represents the reality of the world. He is more than willing to entrust himself to these representations.

Prufrock's next dilemma is that he cannot completely obliterate his past which insists on interacting with the present. The past interacts with the present, but as the present accommodates the past, it also alters it, and this only poses new problematics to which an aesthetically attuned person such as Prufrock has no solutions. This becomes a cause for his disturbance, self-consciousness and agitation. In a world of flux he attempts to look for certainties, and, identifying himself with the legendary, mythological and even primitive figures from the past tries to accommodate himself in the present. However, he finds himself dissolving into abstractions when he hears the virtually real mermaids singing, even though he "think [s] that they will not sing to me" (C & P, 16). By the end of the poem he has entered the world of virtual reality and "drowned" in it to the accompaniment of "human voices".

Prufrock's experience should not be considered, in any way alien or obscure, in an age familiar with computers, the internet and cable television - an age of rapidly advancing information technology - which seduces us into the world of virtual reality. In fact, reading the poem from this perspective anticipates the current scenario of amazing technological advancements, and
strikes an ominous note as it warns us of the dangers of living more in the virtual world than in the real one. From the postmodernist perspective which encompasses a variety of experiences simultaneously, Prufrock’s experience anticipates the postmodernist experience of dealing with obscurity by becoming one with it. Yet the ‘Prufrockian’ experience becomes a thing of the past as towards the end of this century, the alienating and obscure experiences are readily accepted and even canonized in the present context and nothing appears to have that sense of making it “new”. Yet, the endeavor for the “new” continues as the past is readily accommodated in the present, albeit in an altered state, so that there are no final interpretations to the past, and the past actively interacts with the present and thus retains its vibrancy.

An interpretation from the postmodernist perspective regarding the seductive tone adopted by the speaker in the beginning of the poem may be interpreted to be that of a glib salesman marketing the latest gizmo. As the gender of “you” is not specified, it could be either a male or female novice attempting to acquaint herself/ himself with the language of the new device. The impact created on the mind of the viewer/ reader by the images which flash past, is quite like ‘surfing the net’, or rapidly switching channels on the cable television, whereby information is obtained at the press of a button. The self consciousness comes through when one is put in an alien situation, for instance, when one is making the first few attempts to learn the language of the machines. And finally, when we have mastered it all, we “drown” ourselves
in the surroundings which were once alien to us and become one with the machines - a product of humankind's ingenuity and imagination.

The relationship between the human imagination and the reality of increasing scientific technology may also be read into Stevens's concern with the relationship between Reality and Imagination. Poetic language is necessarily made abstract in the poems of Wallace Stevens in order to create legitimate space for the paradoxical and random, thereby resisting the models of conventional reality. The interaction between the paradoxical ideas of Reality and Imagination is a theme underlying most of Stevens's major works. Charles Altieri in his essay "Why Stevens Must Be Abstract" observes that the idea is not in their truth claims per se but in the life they create within the scene that displays them." This play of paradoxical ideas becomes a part of the denaturing process whereby all of the "essential components" involved are "deprived" of their natural qualities and are reconstructed, and, it is finally the Imagination which gives us the freedom to perceive the reality of a given scene from various perspectives. In other words, there is no one way to view the reality and the style of most modern poems invites multiple perspectives to the reality presented in a given scene.

In his short poems - 'The Emperor of the Ice Cream' and 'Anecdote of the Jar', - the interaction between the paradoxical ideas clearly illustrates the manner in which the reality of a given scene reflects a certain kind of skeptical attitude toward the nostalgic affirmation of the past. For example, in 'The
Emperor of the Ice Cream', the dead past is made to interact with the living present without a sense of loss.

A carnivalesque ambiance is created in the first stanza which sets off the mood and the attitude of the poet toward death. Though the scene presented is presumably that a wake or a funeral, we are not introduced to the idea of death till the second and the concluding stanza of the poem. The ice cream is an apt symbol to convey both the idea of the living and the dead. The ice cream with its transient quality becomes a symbol of life which is to be enjoyed before it melts away; it also conveys the sense of the lifeless, cold and benumbing death.

"That Sheet / On which she embroidered fantails once" (CPWS, 64) is in no way a symbol of nostalgia when it is used to cover the face of the dead woman with "horny feet". The sheet rather than being a nostalgic symbol of the past interacts with the context of the living present to reveal its practical purpose rather than it's aesthetic quality. Death is also robbed of its nostalgic quality in this poem when it is made part of the living, vital, pulsating present. The reality of death is juxtaposed with the imaginative manner in which death is made to interact with life, the past with the present and the final with the transient.

Similarly, the "Emperor" in the title of the poem seems to suggest the Imagination which rules over the ice cream which becomes a symbol of the living and the dead, the past and the present, the transient and the final. The
poem, thus, goes beyond one level of interpretation keeping in mind the interaction between these paradoxical ideas. The poem in its totality brings us to the cross roads yielding no final suggestions about flux and stability.

The other striking feature about the poem is the “carnival” view that offers “a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world and a second life outside officialdom . . .” Bakhtin’s concept of “carnival” forms emerging from folk humor is pertinent to the understanding of many of Stevens’s poems. In ‘The Emperor of the Ice Cream’, the representation of death as a tragic event has been turned upside down, thereby, inverting the official, hierarchic representation of the world. In the process, the poem is decentered by placing celebration of life in general, and not death at its center.

‘Anecdote of the Jar’, similarly establishes the value of Imagination and Reality when an artifact is imposed on natural surroundings. The paradoxical ideas of the real and the artificial, the fecund and the barren, chaos and order, nature and art interact with each other and this interaction leads to the denaturing of both Reality and Imagination. If we were to take the jar to stand for Imagination and order; the wilderness for Reality and chaos; the jar, a product of Imagination imposes upon the Reality of the wild scene and orders it, so that: “The wilderness rose up to it, / And sprawled around no longer wild” (CPWS, 76). The jar, too, in its turn acquired a new
dimension by being placed on the surroundings; it looked “tall and of a port in air” having dominated the wilderness and establishing a kingdom everywhere.

Reality (represented by wilderness) gets denatured when it is ordered by the imposition of the Imagination on the scene. The interaction between nature and art denatures Imagination when the jar is consciously and deliberately placed in the wilderness. It is not there by accident or chance. The poet’s action draws attention to itself, and, seems to consciously strike a ‘jarring’ note leading the reader to wonder about this ‘imaginative act’ on the part of the poet. The jar precisely because of its interaction with the wild scene gains prominence in the poem and its otherwise dull and sterile appearance is subordinated to its tall and imposing presence, so that it was “Like nothing else in Tennessee”.

Yvor Winter’s view about the “jar-ness” of the poem is that it may be fully accounted for if we see it as a transposition in both time and space of the “noblest” of poetic images, Keat’s Grecian Urn, as if Stevens were quite deliberately recalling the most familiar of Romantic echoes. Winters sees a
strain of decadent romanticism in ‘Anecdote of the Jar’ which according to him exhibits the romantic symbol of “the corrupting effect of the intellect on natural beauty.” The jar, according to Winter’s interpretation is forcibly equated with the intellect and made to appear in the role of nature’s corrupter. The artifact that Stevens is bringing into question is the admittedly ambivalent way that permits these contradictory interpretation of the jar’s value, is on one level the jar an urn and on another, the moods and images of Romantic poetry itself. A record of the responses to Stevens’ poetry ranging from ambivalence to censure has been noted in the more recent criticism on Stevens which reflects the changing attitudes in critical interpretation. It also, more interestingly, brings out the transformation of the ‘essential component’ of the poem as it interacts with various critics (and sometimes with the same critic during different phases of his life as is the case with Winters). The same jar may be viewed as a modern Grecian urn, a worthy symbol of creative imagination, bringing order out of the chaos of the “slovenly wilderness” (CPWS, 76), or its role is to corrupt nature by its alien presence. It is this implied duality and the paradoxical implication of the leading motif of this poem, which involves us, once again, in Stevens’ quest for what will suffice: the alternatives offered are Nature and Art. The poem once again merely records the scene without offering any final resolutions to the impact of nature on art and vice-versa. So in the end, all interpretations to the poem remain inconclusive and non-committal much like the neutral appearance of the jar. Though the jar “took
It is the reading motif in most poems of Eliot and Stevens, which invites the reader to interact with the written language of the poem which is a common feature of modern poetics. As the imagination of the reader interacts with the real written word of the poem it leads to various permutations and combinations of interpretations where there is no final, absolute interpretation.
In other words, the poems of Eliot and Stevens seem to encourage a deconstructionist interpretation where the interpretation undertakes a double reading, describing the ways in which lines of argument in the texts it is analysing call their premises into question, and using the system of concepts within which a text works to produce constructs, such as difference and supplement, which challenge the consistency of that system.¹¹

Such an analysis of the poems may lead to despair for the loss of meaning as the language of critical interpretation itself gets robbed of its natural absolutist qualities.

However, the reading of modernist poetics makes us realize that there is meaning in meaninglessness and order in chaos. There is also no one absolute way of viewing reality or a series of events. Language, too, is subject to change and recognizes and accepts flux as its governing principle. The poems of Eliot and Stevens are necessarily abstract as meaning is decentered in their poetry and language becomes suspect. One of Stevens's longer poem 'The Comedian as the Letter C', is an instance of the deliberate gaudiness of language and the constantly shifting point of view. The title itself suggests the "fun" aspects of language as there is an obvious pun on C as "see" or "sea". The title also points to the metaphorical construction of Crispin as "the letter C". In 1953, Stevens told Renato Poggioli, his Italian translator:

It may be a little difficult to translate The Comedian as the Letter C. The sounds of the letter C, both hard and soft, include other letters like X, K, etc. How would it be possible to translate a line like
The protagonist in the poem appears to be Language as it seeks the perfect form in its journey from a letter C to a word. Language as such is an abstraction, so it is metaphorically identified with the shape of a clownish, restless figure of Crispin. Language, like Crispin, changes its identity with the change in its context. The Classics are evoked through the "intelligence of his soil." Thus, begins the growth of a language in a bit of Latinate fancy dress, appropriately inappropriate. It is perceived "As such the Socrates/ Of snails, musician of pears, principium / And lex. Sed quaeritur (CPWS. 27). It is language that gives significance to the character of Crispin, and the poem seems to be practicing deconstruction itself. The poem would attract a deconstructionist because it appears to anticipate many of the postmodernist concerns regarding the "supposed certitude and fixity" of a text. Language in the poem, appears to an act of self-deconstruction as an operation "in which the text unmasks its own construction, reveals it as a rhetorical operation rather than a solid foundation." Language metaphorically presented as 'The Comedian as the Letter C', certainly does not have a foundational status in the poem. Not only does language emerge from the "mythology of self" (CPWS, 28), it also appears to "theorize from the site of practice." In one sense, the poem is about the introspection of the self that is made significant with the deployment of language on itself. In other words, it is language as a
system of signs that identifies the self. Thus, Crispin is identified as the letter 
C. According to Rajeev Patke:

The kind of realisation that both poet and critic are driving at is expressed by 

Stevens elsewhere in his work as the sense that ‘It is a world of words to the 

end of it’, in which ‘words of the world are the life in the world.’

The Comedian as the Letter C’ appears to anticipate in poetic terms the 
critical vocabulary of the deconstructionist, in the manner that it examines 
itself, and in doing so deconstructs itself. Language like Crispin, was, “too 
destitute to find / In any common-place the sought for aid” (CPWS, 30). 

Giving a male-gender to Language points to its patriarchal construction which 
also limits the possibilities of communication as words have their own 
hackneyed connotations and interpretations. Language as Crispin, has to be 
renewed and “made vivid by the sea” (CPWS, 30). The “sea” as the letter C, 
or, as in “see”, all imply the self-examination of the poetic logos that is “Much 
trumped, made desperately clear, / Fresh from discoveries of tidal skies, 
/ To whom oracular rockings gave no rest.” The “self” of Language or Crispin 
has no fixed identity. It takes on the identity of whichever context it is placed 
in. Thus, it is

The lutanist of fleas, the knave, the thane, 
The ribboned stick, the bellowing breeches, cloak 
Of China, cap of Spain, imperative haw 
Of hum, inquisitorial botanist, 
And general lexicographer of mute. (CPWS, 28)
When it further takes on the identity of "A skinny sailor peering in the seaglass," Language seems to be bereft of words to give significance to this phenomenon:

What word split up in clickering syllables
And storming under multitudinous tones
Was name for this short-shanks in all that brunt?

(\textit{CPWS, 28})

The themes in the poem point to the close resemblance between the language of the poet and that of a deconstructionist critic. The "group of themes", absence of a fixed center to Language, the word's desire to encompass the world (the poetic logos made flesh), the belatedness secondariness of language, the nostalgia for a firstness at a source which can only be reacquired by a new beginning, are roughly adumbrated in the fourth stanza of the first section of the poem \textit{The World without Imagination}:

Just so an ancient Crispin was dissolved.
The valet in the tempest was annulled.
Bordeaux to Yucatan, Havana next,
And then to Carolina. Simple jaunt.
Crispin, merest minuscule in the gales,
Dejected his manner to the turbulence.
The salt hung on his spirit like a frost,
The dead brine melted in him like a dew
Of winter, until nothing of himself
Remained, except some starker, barer self
In a starker, barer world, in which the sun
Was not the sun because it never shone
With bland complaisance on pale parasols,
Beetled, in chapels, on the chaste bouquets.
Against his pipping sounds a trumpet cried
Celestial sneering boisterously. Crispin
Became an introspective voyager. (CPWS, 29)

The fourth section of the poem 'The Idea of a Colony' deals with an additional theme: the power of Language to colonize the mind by turning upon itself. We are told to observe that "his soil is man's intelligence" (CPWS, 36). The soil could be a reference to the "new continent" (CPWS, 37) that Crispin attempts to appropriate through his "intelligence". If Crispin is a metaphor for Language, then the manner of appropriating "new continent" is through the intelligent use of Language that brings with it "prose / More exquisite than any tumbling verse" (CPWS, 37). Within the questions lie the answers to Crispin's sense of purpose, and a suggestion of the manner of appropriating the "new continent":

What was the purpose of his pilgrimage,
Whatever shape it took in Crispin's mind,
If not, when all is said, to drive away
The shadow of his fellows from the skies,
And, from their stale intelligence released,
To make a new intelligence prevail? (CPWS, 37)

There is the implication that Language not only assimilates within an alien space but also imposes a "new intelligence". It is the sense of a conquest that gives "purpose" to the "pilgrimage". The "pilgrimage" in 'The Idea of a Colony', is also suggestive of the journey of the Pilgrim fathers, the English Puritans.
who went to America in 1620 and founded the colony of Plymouth, Massachusetts. Crispin in the “new continent” identifies himself with the Pilgrim fathers:

Hence the reverberations in the words
Of his first central hymns, the celebrants
Of rankest trivia, tests of the strength
Of his aesthetic, his philosophy,
The more invidious, the more desired. (CPWS, 37)

The word “invidious” operates on two levels. At one level, Crispin as a colonizer bears a certain amount of ill-will to the natives of the colony on account of their strange life which is incomprehensible to his ordered sensibility. On the other hand, it is this philosophy of ill-will which sets him apart from the natives. Implicit in the invidious distinction is also envy for the hedonistic life of the natives, alien to the Puritan, ordered sensibility of Crispin:

The natives of the rain are rainy men.
Although they paint effulgent, azure lakes,
And April hillsides wooded white and pink,
Their azure has a cloudy edge, their white
And pink, the water bright that dogwood bears.
And in their music showering sounds intone.
On what strange froth does the gross Indian dote,
What Eden sapling gum, what honeyed gore,
What pulpy dram distilled of innocence,
That streaking gold should speak in him
Or bask within his images and words? (CPWS, 37-8)

The sensual quality of life appeals to Crispin. He desires to distance himself from the "natives of the rain" and yet be part of the fraternity. He would like to share their dreams: "If he dreamed / Their dreams, he did it in a gingerly way. / All dreams are vexing" (CPWS, 39).

The next two sections of the poem, 'A Nice Shady Home', and 'Daughters with Curls' deals with the assimilation of Crispin into an alien colony. Crispin as a metaphor is transported "Beyond Bordeaux, beyond Havana, far / Beyond carded Yucatan, he might have come / To colonize his polar planterdom / And jig his chits upon a cloudy knee (CPWS, 40). A prosaic Crispin seems to have ensconced himself comfortably in the colony:

- His trees were planted, his duenna brought
- Her prismy blonde and clapped her in his hands,
- The curtains flittered and the door was closed. (CPWS, 42)

With the birth of four daughters in the final section is suggested the growth of Language in an alien colony, and, the manner of its assimilation. Crispin can only experience the things as they are and cannot transcend them. Crispin's task like the language that gives him significance, is self-limiting. Thus, in order to grow one learns to assimilate the influences of one's context while retaining a semblance of peerless individuality. It is this awareness that is a common feature to both the clownish Crispin and the self-conscious Prufrock.
both are aware of their status as aesthetic constructs removed from the natural world.

A deconstructive analysis explores the multiple layers of meanings in a text. Stevens's and Eliot's poems are necessarily made abstract as several themes are woven into the main text and a deconstructive approach makes it possible to read the sub-text of a poem. There can be no one central theme to such poems which was the conscious intention of most modernist works. The last stanza of one of Stevens's poem 'The Ultimate Poem is Abstract' sums up the relation of the modern poet to his verse where the poet is positioned

Helplessly at the edge, enough to be

Complete, because at the middle, if only in sense.

And in that enormous sense, merely enjoy.       (CPWS, 430)

Eliot like Stevens also positions himself “helplessly at the edge” to maintain an objective relation with his verses. However, unlike Stevens he cannot “merely enjoy” and translates enjoyment into anguish for the loss of a central meaning. Stevens opts for the world of imagination and poetry to replace the abstraction of heaven and the idea of god. In Adagia he declares that “After one has abandoned a belief in god, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life’s redemption.”18 Similarly, in ‘The Man with the Blue Guitar’ the poet actuates the notion that “Poetry / Exceeding music must take the place / Of empty heaven and its hymns” (CPWS, 167). For Stevens, god and religion are mere abstractions that are the constructs of the human imagination. In the real world they are structured as metaphors for the Imagination; this is
well amplified in Stevens's verses. In his poetry, Stevens seems to celebrate
the diverse abilities of the Imagination to give signification to abstractions.
Reality for Stevens, is structured by the poetic Imagination that gives
significance to words. The titles of some of his poems suggest this: 'Men
Made out of Words', 'Metaphor as Magnifico', 'Metaphor as Degeneration',
'The Motive for Metaphor'.

Stevens, by giving primary importance to Imagination appears to have
resolved the problematics of abstraction as it co-exists with actuality.
However, in Eliot's early poems the idea of abstraction strikes a "hollow" note
and men in general are perceived as:

Shape without form, shade without colour
Paralysed force, gesture without motion. (C P & P, 81)

Despair gives way to a certain kind of harmony between will and psychic
pressure, in Eliot's later poems like 'Ash Wednesday' and Four Quartets,
written after Eliot was received into the Church of England in 1927. Eliot turns
to the Anglo-Catholic religion to solve the problem of duality which seemed to
split the poet from his early poetry. Religion itself is yet another abstraction
made significant by the collective belief of a mass of individuals. Eliot draws
on such a belief and uses it to restore the self in the later poetry. It is why all
poetry from 'Ash Wednesday' onwards till 'Four Quartets' seems to be
intensely personal "Leaving one still with the intolerable / With words and
meaning" (C P & P, 179). If Eliot had used the framework of culture in his
early poems, he uses a heady cocktail of religion and spirituality for the expression of his emotional state, in the poems from 'The Hollow Men' onwards.

Eliot seems to have finally reconstructed “unified sensibilities” through his personal sense of religion which intensified into a sense of communion with an “immanent reality” outside himself and towards which his soul may be said to be reaching out. However Eliot, as well as, some critics on Eliot seem to have realized that Language is inadequate to express a “unified sensibility”. Language on its own is handicapped by its verbal structures. Thus, in order to approach the later poems of Eliot, the exegesis must follow a rhythm-oriented reading where the reader has no framework to consult, and the easiest way to approach it is to surrender to one’s imagination; to the tone of the poem, and let the emotions of the poem guide us to its signification.
NOTES


3 Ibid., 266.

4 Ibid., 268-69.


8 Melita Schaum in her essay “Not Doctrinal in Form” records the manner in which Chase’s analysis of the “Anecdote of the Jar” is severely indicted by Stevens. Later Winters saw the “cultivation as an end in itself” in Stevens early verse and he believed that the limited theme of hedonism had led to ennui and finally the decay of Stevens’s craft and career. See Wallace Stevens and the Critical Schools (Tuscaloosa and London: The Univ. of Alabama Press, 1988) 61, 90.

9 Altieri 111

10 Ibid., 111-12.


14 Culler 170-1.

15 Ibid., 174.

16 Patke 173-4.

17 Ibid., 174.
