Multiple Perspectives to Reality and the Spirit of Postmodernism

In this chapter I propose that the two qualities which are to be found in modernist works - structured reality and poetic imagination - are of significance as they synthesise to penetrate more deeply, to analyze more thoroughly, to enlarge, isolate and make more familiar certain aspects of life that earlier we were apt to neglect. Structured reality implies a break-up of reality before it is put together to draw attention to our own ambiguous world. Most modernists implied double meanings with the images presented in their works. They delighted in using unfamiliar images in unfamiliar ways, thereby, challenging the conventional notions of reality and illusion in ever more complex and sophisticated ways. It is to a large extent modern science and technology that is responsible for the innovations in the artistic sphere as they open new avenues to perceive the reality around us, so that art like never before is given the liberty to smash traditional means of merely representing reality to structuring reality and exploring new forms of hitherto unexplored territories. In the manner of scientists smashing the atom bomb,
artists break-up traditional forms and discover a wealth of new materials and innovative methods to make use of the fragments of material.

The presence of corresponding innovation of method in different media and having different philosophies suggest that there is a relationship between them - a relationship based on general and elusive similarities rather than on content. While "content expresses thought and feeling, style reflects the unconscious attitudes from which thoughts and feelings emerge, and those in turn are conditioned by subtle and pervasive influence originating outside the arts."¹

I would like to highlight the techniques used by modern artists and parallel the innovations in poetry and painting in order to link the creative consciousness at work behind the works of art, and its relation to reflective work. Modern poetry and paintings use archetypal symbols which emerge automatically from the unconscious and are never wholly free from ambiguity. Through this manner modern artists are able to 'transmute' their personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal and personal. Picasso's Guernica and the poems of Eliot and Stevens are similar in their style as the ambiguous symbols invite multi-pluralistic interpretations which always remain open-ended. In Guernica for instance the bull and the disemboweled horse are ambiguous symbols: the former representing both the concept of violence, and the dictator Franco and his military caste; and the latter representing the suffering humanity.
Judith Weissman in her essay, "Stevens' War Poems: 'And is their logic to outweigh MacDonagh's bony thumb?'" draws comparisons between this painting and Stevens's poems, and observes that the painting offers a multi-dimensional view of reality, much in the same way as Stevens in *Parts of a World* expresses sorrow and anger at the way war has affected his perceptions and ability to write poetry, rather than at the suffering of the people actually involved in or victimized by war. They [the War poems] are a poetic version of Picasso's *Guernica*; there is a peculiar similarity between Stevens's brown waves of birds and soldiers and Picasso's grotesque, inhuman creatures; the horrible thing in both the picture and the poems is not human suffering but reduction to non-humanity. They are not about individuals in history, but about history in general, as a nightmare from which it is impossible to awake. They are about the death of artistic tradition of both realism and romanticism in both poetry and painting.2

A “Guernica-like” sensibility is to be found in T. S. Eliot’s early poems like *The Waste Land*, ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, ‘Gerontion’ or ‘The Hollow Men’, where we witness the recurring nightmarish vision of death of the artistic tradition and of existence in a spiritual vacuum. The stylistic innovations in *The Waste Land* also resemble those which animated the technical experiments of the Cubists, Futurists, Dadaists and Surrealists. The incorporation of such experimental techniques in the poetry of Eliot and Stevens are significant in pointing to the fact that the poets participated fully in the broad revolution of sensibility, represented by experimental paintings; the technical innovations were not an isolated affair but more of a reflection of the cultural ethos of that time. Devices such as the collage technique operate equally aptly in both poetry and painting. In both poetry and painting, the real and imagined are made to support each other, the real bringing into the work a powerful and unexpected authenticity and the imagined serving to control the significance of the real by interpreting them.*

For the purpose of discussing the dialogues among styles within each poem of Eliot’s and Stevens’s, I find Bakhtin’s concept of hetroglossia to be of particular relevance. Bakhtin notes that:

> [L]anguages do not exclude each other but rather intersect with each other

> . . . . [A]ll languages of hetroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them

and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings, and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. As such they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of real people first and foremost in the creative consciousness of people who write novels. As such, these languages live a real life; they struggle and evolve in an environment of social hetroglossia. Therefore they are all able to enter into the unitary plane of the novel, which can unite in itself parodic stylizations of generic languages, various forms of stylizations and illustrations of periodic-bound languages, the language of particular generations, of social dialects and others . . . They may all be drawn in by the novelist for the orchestration of his themes and for the refracted (indirect) expression of his intention and values.\(^3\)

I mainly concentrate on the 'Notes' to Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Stevens’s 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' to analyse the working of the hetroglossia in these poems; a dialogue in the poem, among multiple voices reflecting different systems of language and, hence different perspectives of reality. I argue that the 'Notes' to *The Waste Land* are as much the hetroglossic voices of diverse poetic theories as is the dialogic debate between diverse possibilities of American poetry implicit in 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird'.

Daniel Schwarz enumerates the following "positions" that are "implicitly enacted" in 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird':
1. American poetry should follow symbolic modes, such as Pound proposed;
2. it should follow the even more non-mimetic example of abstract modern painting;
3. it should follow the native tradition of Emerson and Whitman;
4. it should find the note of high romanticism in the tradition of Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley.

This heteroglossic voices of diverse theories, is, according to Schwarz essential to understanding of Stevens’s entire canon. The very title of the poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird", in fact, invites multiple perspectives in the perception of a visual, material reality - namely the blackbird. The poem also incorporates the stylistic techniques of the visual arts, especially the Cubist technique of collage, introduced by Braque and Picasso, that demonstrated the view that art and actuality have the same degree of reality and can meet at one point of perception. Schwarz in the analysis of the poem observes that:

Stevens followed Braque and Picasso in taking art outside the mimetic system of representation with which we are familiar and making a new system based upon new juxtapositions, odd assemblies of objects, and discontinuous relations that barely held together - a system that each perceiver had to resolve into his own hypothesis of unity, an hypothesis always challenged by the anarchy of disunity. . . . Stevens, like the Cubists, depended upon the visible world of immediate experience for his donnée, but created a teasing balance between abstraction and representation.
Thus it becomes quite obvious that both the creative arts, poetry and painting, incorporated innovative stylistic techniques where the poet's or the painter's work not only depends on the involvement of the artist with their subject matter, but also on the involvement of the perceiver. Such works render acts of perception rather than record prior reality, and the spectator is rhetorically urged to act upon the poem in the act of reading, and thereby experience the creative process as they come to terms with a complex, abstract, seemingly arcane, and resistant works.

The first two stanzas of the poem suggest that the blackbird seems to be a metaphor for the poet's mind giving material significance to the imaginative mind:

I
Among twenty snowy mountains.
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II
I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds. (CPWS, 92)

There is a play on the "eye" and "I" introduced in the last line of Stanza I and the first line of Stanza II. Both the "eye" and the "I" seem to present different perspectives to the imaginative capability of the poet's "mind". The mind
cannot be seen visually, but the 'real' presence of the blackbirds in all the 
stanzas of the poem makes authentic the state of the mind of the poet by 
comparing it, as in the second stanza to "a tree / In which there are three 
blackbirds." The comparison intensifying the ambivalence of being of two 
minds while the whole poem is about the multiplicity of perspectives. The 
poet seems to structure reality around the blackbird which becomes the 
metaphor for the imaginative mind. It is only through the operation of the 
imaginative mind that the speaker in the first stanza may see the "eye of the 
blackbird" at such a distance, as implied by "twenty snowy mountains." In 
other words the stanza may also be a reference to the mobility of the 
imagination, as the poem self-reflexively points to the controlling power of 
the imagination as there is an interaction between the mind in the action of 
the speaker, and, the resources of the language that he seeks to describe 
the visual scene. The visual reality of the presented scene is also 
structured around the blackbird. If the blackbird is taken as the metaphor for 
the poet's mind, then the entire poem also becomes a theory of poetry 
whereby the stanzas are the hetroglossic voices of diverse theories.

The imaginative mind is supported by the real presence of the 
blackbird in all the stanzas, as each stanza brings the blackbird into relation 
with the mind. There is a suggestion that the imagination must act on the 
reality of a given scene to achieve a completeness of vision. Stevens in 
*Necessary Angel* writes that "the imagination gives to everything that it
touches a peculiarity, and it seems to me that the peculiarity is nobility, of which there are many degrees.\textsuperscript{6} And the same idea is poetically expressed in the third and the fourth stanza of the poem:

III
The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV
A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one. \hfill (CPWS, 93)

The above stanzas point to the harmonious relationship of the blackbird with its environment. There is a blending of the blackbird as a metaphor for the poet's imagination, with the immediate reality of the visual scene. There is no sense of incongruity in juxtaposing a man and a woman with a blackbird which suggests the congenial relationship of reality with imagination, so much so, that in the next stanza the speaker is perplexed at the choice he would have to make as the distinction between the actual and imaginative recall is blurred:

I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.  

The blackbird also seems to represent the flights of the imaginative mind as in stanza IX:

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

In the above lines the poet also seems to give us an insight into the creative process at work. The blackbird may not be perceived visually as it “flew out of sight”, and when it does that, the poet’s insight of memory and fantasy is evoked as the blackbird “marked the edge / Of one of many circles.” The last line implying that the sixth sense associated with intuitive and imaginative capabilities, and considered to be marginal to the other five senses marks the imaginative recall of the blackbird as it is mysteriously still there, in stanzas X, XI, XII, XIII as “an object of contemplation and as a catalyst for meditation and creativity.”

X
At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.
XI
He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII
The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII
It was evening all afternoon
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar limbs. (CPWS, 94-5)

The poem ends the way it begins as the speaker imports unconventional assumptions in the last stanza, as he did in the first when he implied that he could see the “eye” of the blackbird at such a distance, as implied by “twenty snowy mountains; in the last stanza he assumes it to be “evening all afternoon” and that it was “going to snow” when it was already snowing. However this impossible assumption is made possible with the intervention
of the blackbird as a metaphor for the poet’s mind on the visual scene, which mark the poet’s ambiguous perceptions.

There is no one way of responding to or interpreting such a poem. Schwarz has written of the various ways of responding to ‘Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird’; the stress on the visual element that invites the reader to see a poem as if it were a visual performance, a kind of modern dance or a series of paintings; a Cubist painting where disparate elements are combined into one flat surface. Schwarz also suggests that the stanzas are a sequence of scenes from a Noh play owing to their highly stylized presentation, and the use of folk and religious references; the poem is also indebted to Japanese prints in which a single setting is rendered from different viewpoints and at different seasons of the weather or of the mind. Each stanza may also be seen as a cinematic scene “progressing to greater if tentative revelation.”

The metaphors in Stevens’s poems are linked not only to the cinema “but mime the condition of modern perception in which man has far more impressions and far more variety to deal with than his predecessors.” Drawing parallels between the perception of a collage in visual art and responding to Stevens’s ‘Thirteen ways of Looking at a Blackbird’, Schwarz feels that the poem can be perceived as a non-linear collage:
Indeed, that poem may owe something to Duchamp's Large Glass, the full title of which is *The Bride stripped bare by her bachelors*; the donee is a
Feydeau farce in which the nine bachelors pursue the same pretty girl. No more than when we perceive a collage should we limit our reading of a Stevens poem to our linear reading experience. The reader of Stevens needs to respond to odd juxtapositions, free associations and seemingly free associations, undoubtedly by the liberation of chance from the logical gridlocks of Western epistemology by Dadaism, Freud and Surrealism . . . 9

A similar perception is evoked in Eliot's poems as *The Waste Land* where reality and fiction, past and present are fused to project the many sides of the present context leading to pluralistic and often inconclusive interpretations of the poem. The collage technique is cleverly employed by Eliot to paste a plethora of images together in the poem which are then supported by the very "real" 'Notes' on *The Waste Land*, the material for which is drawn from various texts all over the world. The images in the present context of the poem thus gain a certain amount of credibility, as also, structure the past when Eliot through the quoted material draws our attention to the texts referring to the past. It must be stressed that the images in the poem first make an appeal to our imagination on their own strength, and the 'Notes' to the poem invite the reader to participate in the creative process, when certain events in the present recall the past. *The Waste Land* remains a complete poem even without the quotations.

Regarding Eliot's method of using quoted material in *The Waste Land*, Jay Martin has noted that:
the quotations have no syntactical function, and only an oblique relation to
their content. . . . These quotations communicate, not by carefully
controlled meaning, as the other words in the poem do, but by their
associations which are at once more immediate and less exact than the
meaning of the words . . . . They exemplify or embody meaning. They are
realistic exhibits which illustrate directly instead of discussing . . .
communicating on a different level from that of Eliot’s own words, and
illuminating his meaning from a different direction. In short, they function as
objects rather than words, intruding like nonsymbolic foreign matter into the
texture of the poem.10

The ‘Notes’ function in a manner similar to Stevens’s blackbird; where
the blackbird is a metaphor of the poet’s mind and invites the reader to
participate in the creative process. While with Stevens, the working of the
imagination on the “real” writing of poetry is expressed through the metaphor
of the blackbird, Eliot’s ‘Notes’ perform the same function more blatantly with
their prosaic references to the title, the lines in the poem, and the source
from which they have been drawn; the poet delves into his experiences and
structures a poem out of it.

There is a whole new collage formed as the images from various texts
in the ‘Notes’ that bring authenticity to Eliot’s imaginary poetics, are
brought together in a referential context - referring to the images in the poem
as well as their own referential reality supported by the poem itself. Thus in
_The Waste Land_, we not only contend with the immediate apprehension of
Eliot’s images but we have an entire body of world texts acting on our
imagination which structures the real with the imaginary, the present with the past, painting with poetry, and other allied streams of creative arts. At the very outset the reader is informed in the 'Notes' by the poet that:

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance*. . . . To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean *The Golden Bough*; I have used especially the two volumes Adonis, Attis, Osiris.

(CP&P, 76)

Like Stevens's blackbird the 'Notes' "marked the edge / Of one of many circles", of the poet's mind. The quotes refer to the "reality" of the images in the poem which the poet intuitively draws from his personal experience, and objectifies and "universalises" the experience through poetic diction. The 'Notes' seem to be a rather personal list of the poet's experience with Tarot cards, readings of the works of poets such as Baudelaire, Dante, Milton, Spenser, Marvel, Verlaine; religious and anthropological texts, music, drama, et al. I feel that the 'Notes' provide us information not only about the poem but also about the poet, and in that sense the poem also becomes a theory about the writing of poetry where the poet seems to advocate an objective approach in the writing of a poem, even though the material for the poem is personal. The reader is first presented with fragmented images where the poet appears to have abstracted himself from a personal confrontation with reality and tried to discover the universal
meaning of that experience. Yet, the 'Notes' paradoxically point to the poet's personal confrontation with reality and the manner in which he utilizes that experience, to aestheticise it and structure poetic works out of it. This in my view, is the underlying theme of most of Eliot's poems, and the cause of his uneasiness in a poems like 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', or 'Portrait of a Lady' where the protagonists of both the poems are ill at ease in their highly aestheticised surroundings.

In fact, the entire range of Eliot's early poems may be considered as a huge collage of aestheticised urban contemporary images where the subject matter is first smashed and broken up and then put together within a framework of different poems which lend themselves to multiple interpretations. The poems do not claim to be complete in themselves, each of these contain passages which at times may appear to be unrelated to their immediate context, but are connected with passages from other poems not in a conventional way, but by complicated system of echoes, contrasts, parallels and allusions. There are several instance of this in the early poems. The cinematic-type images are alluded to in 'Prufrock' and 'Prelude'. Consider these lines from 'Prufrock':

It is impossible to say just what I mean!

But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves

in patterns on a screen. . . .

(C P & P, 16)

The third 'Prelude' contains a similar allusion:
You dozed, and watched the night revealing
The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul was constituted;
They flickered against the ceiling.  \(\text{(C P & P, 23)}\)

The image of the street also appears in several of the early poems. As we examine this image of the street in different poems, not only does the theme of the poem get reflected, but we also get a fuller sense of the theme in the manner similar to analytic Cubism that examines and presents the object from many different points of view.

The perception towards the “streets” that appear in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, ‘Preludes’, ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’, and ‘The Waste Land’ is reiterated in all the poems, and yet the interpretation of the street within the context of the title of each poem varies. Thus the streets, a reflection of the urban ethos, are structured as fragmented according to the imagination of both the poet and the reader of the poem. The Prufrockian streets are “half-deserted”, and the protagonist invites the reader to accompany him through

The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
The images of the street in the 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' that appear in a rapid sequence owe something to the concept of chronophotography, "the recording", to cite Russell, "of human being or animals in motion by means of successive photographic exposures."¹¹ This is not an unreasonable view when we consider that when Eliot formed his poetic and aesthetic principles, silent cinema, as well as modern painting and sculpture, were demanding intense attention. These poems also illustrate the technique of photomontage which was devised by the Berlin Dada group and practiced mainly by Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Hoch, and John Heartfield. Photomontage was an application of collage to photographic and other illustrative material. The term was used in the cinema in the ordinary sense, for editing. More loosely, montage is a term used for almost any type of compilation made up of disparate elements, particularly when there is a mechanical quality about the work.¹²

The images of the street are cinematically presented in 'Preludes', and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' where disparate elements are combined together that provide multiple visual perspectives to a city street. For instance the structure of 'Preludes' may be viewed keeping in mind the cinema-type images since the poet makes allusion to the cinema in third...
Prelude. The woman is seen, lying on her back, "watching" the thousand sordid images of her soul as they flicker in cinematic-type images on the ceiling overhead. There is a certain mechanical quality about the presentation in the absence of any speaker as the poet subsumes his voice into that of the street. The cinematic technique provides an impersonal view of the woman who "[h]ad such a vision of the street / As the street hardly understands" (C P & P, 23). Thus it appears that the images that are presented are not the perceptions of the poet but the way the street perceives itself to be. There appears to be an impersonal camera capturing a variety of images in and around the street, and applied to the first Prelude we can see how the camera moves with the observer through the dirty, littered streets at evening, picking out "grimy scraps", bits of newspaper, showers beating on chimney-pots, broken blinds and a solitary cab horse, steaming and stamping. Einstein spoke of working up a montage from a series of varying shots; the juxtaposition by cutting of seemingly disparate shots to produce a shock or 'attraction'. The images of the street are sensuously appealing, and both fascinate and repulse the reader as the images are viewed from a multiple perspective, that of the woman from the "inside" and that of the masculine street from the outside that Prelude IV refers to:

His soul stretched tight across the skies

That fade behind a city block.
Or trampled by insistent feet
At four and five and six o'clock. (C P & P, 23)

Another perspective to the street is the one of the reader’s which may be formed after having read each poem individually, or the collage of images of the street gathered from various poems. In ‘Rhapsody on a Winter Night’, it is the same impersonal voice of the street that gives to the poem its clock-time structure, divided by the hours announced at the beginning of the strophes: “Twelve o’ clock”, “Half past one”, and the rest. Yet the musical title implies here the irregularity and diversity attendant on the principle of association. There is present the “rhapsody of consciousness” which in my view, is more the consciousness of the street than of any human speaker in the poem. Critics like Grover Smith have felt that “the ‘Rhapsody’ has for a speaker a man who experiencing a ‘vision of the street’, soliloquizes in response to visual images.” I argue that there is no human element present in the poem and that if at all there is a speaker present, it is the “lamp”, and the images in the street are from the street’s perspective. If this point of view appears to be irrational, it is only in accord with the recurrent motif of the poem which has been pointed out by Smith:

Among its [rhapsody of consciousness] motifs are irrationality (the dissolving of ‘divisions and precisions’, ‘the madman shaking the geranium, the lapping tongue of the cat, the automatic gesture of the child, the vacancy behind the child’s eye, the instinctive reflex of the crab, the moon’s loss of memory) and decay or inanimation (the dead geranium, the pin, the
twisted driftwood and the rusty spring, the mechanical toy, the paper rose, 
the reek of airless places, the bed waiting for its occupant).  

A similar depersonalized image of the street is presented in *The Waste Land* 
where the observations of the City are recorded from the point of view of its 
street:

Unreal City

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
I had not thought that death had undone so many.  
Sighs, short and infrequent were exhaled,  
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (C P & P, 62)

Thus, if we extract and concentrate on a single image in Eliot's poetry, out of 
a plethora of images, it is possible to observe that the stylistic technique of 
smashing the form is to be found as much in poetry as in painting as such 
was the social reality between the two Wars. Painterly abstractions in poetry 
lead to multiple interpretations and the adoption of such techniques enable 
the poet to come, as close to reality as possible, for just as there is no one 
perspective to reality so also there can be no single perspectives to reality 
as it is interpreted in poetry. That is why modern poetry is increasingly 
imagistic and it is this collage of images which plays on our imagination and 
enables us to structure reality within the referential context of the poem 
thereby leading on to a new poetics of imagination. Modern poetry like that
of Eliot and Stevens invites the readers to actively participate in the interpretation of reality along with the poet rather than just remain a passive reader.

Looking back over the last hundred years it becomes increasingly clear that the impact of modern scientific methods of destruction is to a large extent responsible in changing our perspective to the reality of the world around us. The impact of the last two devastating wars and the fact that wars today have become "simulcarized" all contribute to the increasing tendency toward fragmentation in art, as also bringing the world closer together. It is therefore important to understand the economic and social trends within which poets and artists interact, as it is these which give shape to broad movements and thoughts in every epoch.

Science in one form or another has always had an impact on the creative arts - painting, literature, sculpture. With the invention of photography and photographic methods of reproduction artists were relieved from the social functions of art which was that of visual aid. Modernist reality could now be interpreted rather than merely illustrated as artists use mechanical means to "structure reality". Inventions and discoveries in specific areas cannot remain confined to that particular sphere as their impact is felt on the social framework which is to a large extent responsible for creating a style of art form. As has been observed by Katherine Kuh:
From the beginning, it was science in one form or another that affected modern painting and sculpture. In nineteenth-century Europe the interest in atmospheric phenomena was not an isolated expression limited to the Impressionists. At that time, numerous scientists were experimenting with all manner of optical color laws, writing widely on the subject as they investigated the relationship of color to the human eye. Artists like Monet and Seurat were familiar with these findings and not unnaturally applied them to their paintings. It would be a great mistake to underestimate the influence of contemporary scientific research on the development of Impression. The wonders of natural light became a focus for nineteenth-century artists exactly as the magic of artificial light stimulated painters of the present century. . . . Other scientific investigations also exerted considerable influence on present-day painters and sculptors. Investigations like the microscope and telescope, with their capacity to enlarge, isolate and probe, offer the artist provocative new worlds to explore. These instruments, which break up structures only to examine them more fully, demonstrate how details can be magnified and separated from the whole and operate as new experiences. Repeatedly artists in recent years have exploited this idea, allowing one isolated symbol to represent an entire complex organism. Miro often needs merely part of a woman’s body to describe all women, or Leger one magnified letter of the alphabet to conjure up the numberless painted words that daily bombard us. . . . Even the invention of the X-ray machine has brought us closer to penetrating form. We no longer think of outer coverings as solid or final; we know they can be visually pierced by rendering them transparent. We have also learned from science that space penetrates everything.
It is thus clear then that works of science and art interact within the social matrix, and this interaction is to large extent responsible for creating a particular style of art form. Modernist literary exploration too did not take place in a vacuum: a variety of factors are involved in the phenomena most obviously, the general diffusion of social alienation, the rise of the psycho-analytical movement, the distortion brought about by the Great War, and the increasing experimentalism of almost all contemporary artistic movements. The claim to importance of literary Modernism is that it partly deals with the common interest in everyday selves in a radically new way and that it has developed its representations to a considerable degree, out of other relevant discourses. The 'style' of the modern artists was more suggestive than depictive, in order to capture the reality of not only the visible and the rational, but provide a canvas or a language to the mysterious unseen, and the irrational world of dreams: to "insert their mysterious logic into the most real experiences of daily life, to bestow upon them a resonance and added meaning." The passage in 'What the Thunder said' that begins

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings

(C P & P, 73)

has precisely the atmosphere of portentous, yet inexplicable dream episodes that Surrealists succeed in establishing as their characteristic effect. Schwarz observes that the titles of Stevens's poems owe much to the surrealistic painters:
In a sense, his titles are seductions that invite the readers to examine the treasures of his mind; but often the titles promise something other than they deliver: where and when is teatime at the Palaz of Hoon? 'Someone Puts a Pineapple Together' has little to do with the expectations aroused by the title.  

The psychoanalytical studies of Freud and his followers also infiltrated art, especially Surrealism. Dreams were the only hope of the Surrealists as they restored to the irrational world of their unconscious for material for their images in art. Such a world permitted them the liberty to banish all time barriers and moral judgments to combine disconnected dream experiences from the past, present and intervening psychological states. “The Surrealists were concerned with overlapping emotions more than with overlapping forms. Their paintings often became segmented capsules of associative experiences.” For them, obsessive and often unrelated images replaced the direct emotional messages of Expression. They did not need to smash pigment and texture; they went beyond this to smash the whole continuity of logical thought.”  

Stephen Spender calls Eliot “a poet of fragments” as far as his longer poems are concerned. Writing about *The Waste Land*, he says:

> Eliot makes a virtue of what might be seen as a defect: fragmentariness.
> The poem is about a fragmented culture, so that fragmentariness seems suited to it. Fragmentariness when projected into many scenes, with shifts

* A similar Surrealistic sensibility is to be found a number of poems by Eliot and Stevens which I have discussed at greater length in the next chapter.
of center of attention and mood, lends force to the obsession, gives the poem its apocalyptic visionary force. Lastly the fragments are organized in order to stress the contrast between prophetic and contemporary voices.20

Modern art was not divorced from reality but by its conscious refusal to project the accepted norms of reality and forcing the audience to structure reality out of their imagination, sought to “overcome the separation between art and life as part of a broader struggle to revolutionize society itself.”21 The coming to terms with a fragmented reality was a modernist concern common to both the poets - Stevens and Eliot. However they differ in the stylistic techniques which they use to come to terms with their contemporary reality as also the ‘attitude’ that they take up towards the inability to experience the world as a coherent and harmonious whole.

I find that Eliot’s attitude towards his contemporary reality is modernist in his early poems from ‘Prufrock’ (1912) onwards to ‘Hollow Men’ (1925) as he grumbles and moans about “the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history”22 and looks back nostalgically to a time before our sense of totality was lost. This is evident in one of the essays on where he claims that in the Metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century there was “a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling”, which disappeared after the “dissociation of sensibility” already evident in Milton and Dryden.23 Eliot constantly strives to cohere the incoherence of fragments of the reality around him, to seek order in chaos; though “his inspiration is fragmentary,
Eliot's themes are not. They are obsessive. His problem, which he resolves, is to bind together the fragmentary passages of poetry with the obsessive themes.\textsuperscript{24}

The phantasmagoric visions of his early poems chillingly portray a world where stability is lost to chaos and anarchy, and the response to such a scenario can only be one of horror and despair. In that respect, the poet uses the framework of established religion and the myths it offers, to objectify his own personal experiences. It is in the poems written after 'The Hollow Men' that the change in Eliot's attitude towards reality is strongly felt, as one of Eliot's closest friends, Herbert Read, wrote in 1965, soon after Eliot's death that 'The Hollow Men' is "the last example of what I would call his pure poetry. 'Ash Wednesday', which followed in 1930, is already a moralistic poem, especially in the last two sections. All the poetry that follows, including the \textit{Four Quartets}, is, in spite of flashes of the old fire, moralistic poetry.\textsuperscript{25} This is approximately the same opinion that Julian Symons has recently developed at some length in \textit{Makers of the New: The Revolution in Literature, 1912-1939}. He argues that Eliot, one of the creators of modernism in England, 'found his true poetic subject, the salvation of his soul', during the late 1920s, and henceforth he simply broke with modernism as he had practiced it in the company of Pound, Joyce and Wyndham Lewis. Otherwise, it has been apparent for years that younger poets - some of them
not very young - have followed Stevens, Williams', or even Pound rather than Eliot.25

It is not that Eliot's poetry is just moralistic in the verses after 'The Hollow Men'. The poet's attitude toward the perception of reality as being fragmented is now calmly accepted and even celebrated. In fact Spender disagrees with Read's view as he argues that:

The peculiar tension of the *Four Quartets* is the result of the poet's refusal to be moralistic while, at the same time, as a Christian recognizing that religion is more important than poetry 'which does not matter'. But to say it does not matter is also a kind of sublime joke. The inner drama of *Four Quartets* of a serious jocular confrontation between the autonomy of language in poetry and the divine word of religion, between the word and the Word. The two opposed attitudes fuse in the concept of (God's joke) of the Word made flesh.27

This is the peculiarly 'postmodernist' quality that I too find in Eliot's poems after 'The Hollow Men' where "opposing attitudes" co-exist and, may never be resolved, but through their fusion confront the authority of an ultimate reality - be it the Word of the religion, or the word of language. For instance, the opposing dualities are resolved as the surreal co-exists in the real when reality is stripped to the bones in 'Ash-Wednesday':

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree

In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety

On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained
In the hollow round of my skull. And God said

Shall these bones live? shall these

Bones live?

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

Under a juniper tree the bones sang, scattered and shining
We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each other
Under a tree in the cool of the day, with the blessing of sand
Forgetting themselves and each other, united

In the quiet of the desert. This is the land which ye

Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity

Matters. This is the land. We have our inheritance.

*(CP&P, 91)*

This change in Eliot's attitude may be termed as postmodernist in the sense that it
differs from Modernism in the attitude it takes up towards our inability to experience the world as a coherent and harmonious whole. . . . Postmodernism, by contrast, ceases to look back. It focuses instead 'on the power of the faculty to conceive, on its “inhumanity” so to speak (it was the quality Apollinaire demanded of modern artists)’ and ‘on the increase of being and jubilation which results from the invention of new rules of the game, be it pictorial, artistic, or any other.’*28*
Despite the fact that the bones in ‘Ash-Wednesday’ are fragmented and dehumanized, they can at least sing about it and be “glad to be scattered”.

Eliot also seems to question the notion of language in: “The world and for the world” as a metanarrative which can legitimate foundationalist claims as expressed in these lines the fifth section of ‘Ash Wednesday’:

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent
If the unheard, unspoken
Word is unspoken, unheard;
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
The word without a word, the Word within
The world and for the world;
And the light shone in the darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word. (C P & P, 96)

Similarly, Lyotard defines postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives” and finds it to be part of the modern sensibility. The theory of postmodernism has perhaps always inhabited the modern especially the debate concerning the use of language and words to get to an absolute meaning as

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
According to David Harvey, modernism took on multiple perspectivism as its epistemology for revealing what it still took to be the true nature of a unified, though complex, underlying reality. Postmodernism in contrast tends to retain the relativism while abandoning the belief in the unified underlying reality. Postmodernism is typically used in a wider sense than is modernism. It refers to a general human condition, or society at large, as much as art or culture. It is a reaction against the hegemonic narratives of high modernism which seeks unity and totality in artistic spheres. The postmodernist artifact appears to be playful and schizoid, and seems to readily, in fact even revel, in the disunity and chaos of the world. A view that I tend to agree with is that of Patricia Waugh and Lynne Pearce who feel that "poets and novelists, who have always dealt with the contingencies of 'style' and human particularity rather than universal absolutes of systematic 'truth' may be the philosophers of the future." They are also of the view (also shared by Alex Callicicos) that Postmodernism is a continuation of and not a break from the fin-de-siecle Modernist revolution.

The pessimistic philosophic beliefs most characteristic of cultural pessimists from Theodor Adorno to T. S. Eliot finds expressions even in the writings of the 18th century theologian and philosopher Johan Georg Haman. The vision of this philosopher has its counterparts in T. S. Eliot's...
‘Gerontion’ and ‘The Waste Land’ and in the works of Nietzsche, Foucault and Derrida. All these works give expression to the belief that though the universe may be single and knowable, it is knowable only in small pieces at once; that older philosophic and religious order they guaranteed have dissolved. Probably all these visions are, with differing emphasis, the result of various kinds of over exposure to too many civilizations which seem to make nonsense of one another, to too many observations of complexity in the mind and in the physical world.32

It is from the aesthetic point of view, then, that Wallace Stevens's poetry like Eliot's later works foreshadows postmodern concerns especially those that concern themselves with language. Roy Harvey Pearce finds that the differences between an Eliotic style and a Stevensian style are manifestations in two radically opposed ways of the basic style where the mythic Eliot and the Adamic Stevens are complements of each other and also that: "The basic style of both the adamic and the mythic poem has derived from the poet's concern that language, in spite of all that we may do to it is inherently meaningful - no matter what the ultimate source of meaning - because poems made out of it can manifest its capacity to mean."33 Yet again such textual readings invite the formation of another critical discourse as Beehler disagrees with Pearce on the point of opposition and difference resolving in a unifying solution. Beehler reading of Eliot and Stevens side by side and also Pearce's perspective to the reading of the poets in a similar
fashion finds that: "Where Pearce writes of the 'insistent opposition' that characterizes Eliot and Stevens, he can do so only within the homogenizing framework of the 'basic style', and thus his emphasis upon opposition and difference can only go so far before it is resolved in a unifying solution. But if such insistent opposition is conceived of radically and allowed to interfere with all resolving conceptions of unity, then immanence must be thought of as irreducibly multiple. From this perspective there can be no final solution to the question of difference, but only an endless redeployment of it."34

The various titles of Stevens's poems, for instance, 'Metaphors of a Magnifico', 'The Motive for Metaphor', 'Two Versions of the Same Poem', 'Men Made out of Words', 'Thinking of Relations between the Images of Metaphors', 'Metaphor as Degeneration', reflect this immanent quality of language which points towards the fact that there can be no one "basic style" but a re-presentation of difference in styles that are irreducible to a "central identity."35 Other than the concern with language it is Stevens's attitude to his contemporary reality which makes him more postmodernist than Eliot.

In my reading of the poems of the two poets I find a change in Eliot's attitude in his poems from 'Hollow Men' onwards. Stevens, however, does not externalize authority to God or a religious network, but begins with the premise that authority dwells in the human self and accepts that it is contradictory, chaotic and full of paradoxes and as changeable as the
reality it probes and attempts to understand. In ‘The Snow Man’, for example, it is the human imagination which structures the reality of a given situation as the poet declares:

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow . . .

(CPWS, 9)

The poem seems to stress that the insight of memory and fantasy is indispensable for the creative process: what is there and what is not there are both real:

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

(CPWS, 10)

Stevens attitude like the postmodernist attitude celebrates this sense of duality where reality co-exists with imagination, life with death, the past in the present. For example in ‘The Emperor of Ice-Cream’ though the scene depicted suggests a wake, yet the mood is one of celebration as the poem begins on a note of rejoicing, as also the fact, that nothing outside of the ordinary is taking place:

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
Let be finale of seem
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. (CPWS, 64)

In 'Dance of the Macabre Mice' the celebrations as suggested by the very title acquire a macabre turn as it is the living mice that rejoice in the presence of the dead past as represented by the bronze statue of "the Founder of the State". The presence of the past in such an ironical manner where it seems to be at the mercy of the present reflects once again the postmodernist attitude which parodies the past "using the conventions of realism against themselves in order to foreground the complexity of representation and its implied politics."36 The present reality of the scene is that it is the "mice" that challenge the survival of the past in the present by contesting its claim to authority and immortality as they dance around the statue in a "hungry dance":

The Founder of the State. Whoever founded
A state that was free, in the dead of winter from mice?
What a beautiful tableau tinted and towering,
The arm of bronze outstretched against all evil! (CPWS, 123)

Parody in this poem is at two levels. Not only is the past as symbolized by the bronze statue parodied in the present context but the poem is also in the
manner of an earlier poem by Shelley - ‘Ozymandias’ as both the poets writing in different periods of time share a concern of the survival of the past in the present. Stevens’ ironic recall of the past is postmodernist in that “there is repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity.”37 Thus there is no sense of a loss as the present accepts the past in its midst - it is as yet not removed to the desert.

In ‘Sunday Morning’, Stevens presents similar problematics of the relevance of the past in the present as he presents the poem in the form of an argument between the protagonist, the poet and the reader. He begins with writing about the lady relaxing on a ‘Sunday morning’ in a “peignoir”, who is enjoying her “late / Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair” (CPWS, 66). The enjoyment of the present moment in time, for a while, makes her forget that she might have to pay obeisance to “The holy hush of ancient sacrifice”. The past intrudes on her consciousness and mingles with the present as “She dreams a little, and feels the dark / Enroachment of that old catastrophe / . . . / The pungent oranges and bright, green wings / Seem things in some procession of the dead” (CPWS, 67). The poet urges her to enjoy the present moment and questions the reader who might think otherwise:

Why should she give her bounty to the dead?

What is divinity if it can come
Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
Shall she not find in the comforts of the sun,
In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
In any balm or beauty of the earth,
Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?  (CPWS, 67)

In the next section of the poem, the poet seems to argue that the past exists in the present as even the gods co-mingle with mere mortals and the implication is that paradise is a state of the mind when all boundaries are dissolved:

And shall the earth
Seem all of paradise that we shall know?
The sky will seem much friendlier then than now,
A part of labor and a part of pain,
And next in glory to enduring love,
Not this dividing and indifferent blue.  (CPWS, 68)

The fourth and the fifth section deal with the idea of paradise from the woman's point of view as a short-lived memory of reality "Like her remembrance of awakened birds, / Or her desire for June and evening, tipped / By the consummation of the swallow's wings" (CPWS, 68). The lady would like to make permanent this blissful state so she longs for death which would transport her to paradise:

She says, "But in contentment I still feel
The need of some imperishable bliss."
Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,

Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams

And our desires.  

In the sixth section the poet questions the validity of the authority of the myth of the paradise offering eternal bliss:

Is there no change of death in paradise?

Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,

Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth

With rivers like our own that seek for seas

They never find, the same receding shores

That never touch with inarticulate pang?

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

Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,

Within whose burning bosom we devise

Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.  

The seventh section of this poem is chauvinistically and hedonistically celebrates the present by a powerful evocation of an imagery of a tribal dance whereby paradise is the here and now rather than in the past or the future. The "reality" of paradise from this point of view becomes entirely a matter of personal perception and imagination.
Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
Not as a god, but as a god might be,
Naked among them like a savage source.  

(CPWS, 69-70)

In the above section it is Stevens who appears to be a misogynist as he fails to include women in the dance unlike Eliot's dance in *Four Quartets*:

On a summer midnight, you can hear the music

Of the weak pipe and the little drum

And see them dancing around the bonfire

The association of man and woman

In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie -

A dignified and commodious sacrament,

Two and two, necessarie conjunction,

Holding eche other by the hand or the arm

Whiche betokeneth concorde. Round and round the fire

Leaping through the flames, or joined in circles

Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter

Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes, Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth

Mirth of those long since under earth

Nourishing the corn. . . .  

(CP & P, 178)
It is quite obvious that paradise and reconciliation of opposites signifying harmony dignity and grace is to be found more in rural surroundings than urbane and sophisticated cities.

By the last section of 'Sunday Morning' the poet has satisfactorily reconciled the present with the past and the future where nothing is absolute, yet we are at liberty to structure reality from chaos and revel in our efforts.

We live in an old chaos of the sun,
Or old dependency of day and night,
Or island solitude, unsponsored,
Of that wide water, inescapable.
Deer walk upon our mountain, and the quail
Whistle about us their spontaneous cries;
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
And, in the isolation of the sky,
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
Downward to darkness on extended wings.  

An even more irreverent attitude is expressed in 'A High-Toned Old Christian Woman' where the profane meets with the sublime as the poet structures "the moral law" to "make a nave of it / And from the nave build haunted heaven. Thus / The conscience is converted into palms, / Like windy citherns hankering for hymns" (CPWS, 59). The poem again seems to
structure the sublime and through the poetics of the imagination gives it a form and shape. The sublime however should not remain confined to architecturally specific places such as temples or church,

But take

The opposing law and make a peristyle

And from the peristyle project a masque

Beyond the planets. \(\text{(CPWS, 59)}\)

A masque is drama in verse, often with music, fine costumes and pageantry, especially as given in castles and great mansions in England during the 16th and 17th century. So the poet seems to be implying that we need to celebrate in verse the meeting of the ideal with the material as the idea of a subliminal heaven is given form and shape by the poetic imagination. This is much in the manner of the postmodernist attitude that impudently embraces the language of commerce and commodity to adopt an irreverent stance and contrived depthlessness which offers greater freedom to expressions in the artistic sphere. The clubbing together of architectural language, and "moral" and "opposing law" through the poetics of imagination offers multiple perspectives to a given reality in the postmodernist context. Therefore, it is our imagination which brings together the profane with the sacred to structure a customized reality.

Thus, our bawdiness,

Unpurged by epitaph, indulged at last,
Is equally converted into palms,
Squiggling like saxophones. And palm for palm,
Madame, we are where we began. Allow,
Therefore, that in the planetary scene
Your disaffected flagellants, well-stuffed,
Smacking their muzzy bellies in parade,
Proud of such novelties of the sublime,
Such tink and tank and tunk-a-tunk-tunk,
May merely may, madame, whip from themselves
A jovial hullabaloo among the spheres,
This will make widows wince. But fictive things
Wink as they will. Wink most when widows wince. (CPWS, 59)

Eliot too in his later poems reconciles the “opposing laws” of the past and the future with an attitude of calm acceptance of an ambiguous reality and that is perhaps why his later poems seem so spiritual as there appears to be a resolution of dualities where

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable,
What might have been is an abstraction
'The Four Quartets' are fragments held by a mood of suffering which is transcended by joy beyond suffering. Out of suffering, intense gaiety emerges. In all the four poems of 'Quartets' the opposition between the internal and externals seems to have been resolved and there is a certain kind of harmony between will and psychic pressure, which strikes the reader with the double force of traditional and personal utterances. The 'Quartets' seem to be more personal, more reflective and meditative than Eliot's earlier poetry, and yet they are not a means of self-expression only. Eliot rises above the personal by means of his contemplation's, striving to attain certain unified wholes, attempting to find "the verbal equivalents for states of mind and feelings," in search for objects in the real world which would convey the "direct sensuous apprehension of thought" and "recreating thought into feeling."

In the stylistic techniques adopted by both Eliot and Stevens there is a realization that language on its own is handicapped by its verbal structures as they use idioms coined from scientific, philosophic or painterly contributions of the early twentieth century. Thus it is suggested that in order
to approach the poems of Eliot and Stevens 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 significance.

Ambiguity as a stylistic technique pervades modern poetry and seems to express the postmodernist irony toward tradition, form and canon, even while it takes those aspects seriously. Eliot and Stevens used myths and motifs and also adopted the stylistic techniques which resemble those that animated the technical experiments of the Cubists, the Dadaists and the Surrealists, their contemporaries in graphic arts. By doing so they manage a "leap forward into a new and original state of sensibility." The next chapter takes up specifically how the poets integrated innovations in paintings with their poetry.
NOTES


2 Judith Weissman, “Stevens's War Poems: 'And is their logic to outweigh McDonagh's bony thumb?'” Critical Quarterly 20.2 (Summer 1978) : 41.


4 Daniel R. Schwarz, Narrative and Representation in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens (Great Britain: Macmillan, 1993) 38.

5 Ibid., 45.


7 Schwarz 41.

8 Ibid., 42-3.

9 Ibid., 15.

10 Martin 91.


13 Ibid., 546.


Schwarz 17.

See Kuh 14.


Spender 106.


See Brown 31-2.

Spender 89.

Callinicos 17.


Patricia Waugh and Lynne Pearce, Practicing Postmodernism/ Reading Modernism (Great Britain: Routledge, 1992) 6.


35 Ibid.
Word-picture
(left) In the same way that Braque and Picasso introduced materials like rope and newspaper print into their paintings, so Apollinaire began to explore the visual possibilities of poetry. His calligrams, or word-pictures, are efforts to free language from the restrained academicism of contemporary poetry. This whimsical example translates simply as: 'Cubist member of the Autumn and Independent Salon on his way to drink his aperitif on a Tuesday at the Closerie des Lilas.'