Preface

In his celebrated essay, 'The Work of Art in the Era of its Technical Reproducibility', Walter Benjamin has held that in the twentieth century there is no genre that can illuminate human life and express human consciousness simultaneously in all their wholeness. This observation is unassailable indeed, but there are genres which have the potentiality to do so with a very large measure of success. Only when they do so, do they become original—as much in the metaphorical sense of being different, as in the etymological sense of going to the origins of human life and human consciousness. The most potent of these genres are the novel and the poetic drama for the vitalisation of which ceaseless efforts have been made in the twentieth century.

W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot have exerted themselves to the utmost to revive poetic drama in English in the twentieth century. Metaphorically speaking, they have combined into themselves Aristotle and the Greek Dramatist, i.e., they not only have written poetic plays but also have propounded their respective theories of poetic drama. Multitudinous though their work is, they have been able to make their poetic plays original in the metaphorical rather than the etymological sense of the word. As against them, Lorca and Brecht have tried to make their poetic plays original in the etymological sense, in the process imbuing them with originality of the metaphorical sort.

This is because Yeats and Eliot make their poetic plays the vehicles for their world-visions which in their cases are magical and religious, respectively. No wonder they root their plays in the life of
the country and the city which, treated exclusively, become the super-
country and the super-city. The exclusive treatment of the super-country
and the super-city leads them to envision space, myth and being as the
basic determinants of life though to establish them as such they have to
preoccupy themselves with time, history and becoming, as well. Evidently
Yeats is archetypal for all his concern with the dynamic norms (self and
swordman), and Eliot is historicist for all absorption into temporal modes
(time present, time past and time future). To be historicist rather than
historical, as Benjamin perspicaciously asserts, is to give "the eternal
image of the past" rather than its unique experience.

Such a study of Yeats and Eliot is possible if human life in all
its moments is kept in focus vis-à-vis their world-visions and poetic
plays. It is possible to do so if human life is taken as praxis or nexus
of thought and action as it is taken to be idealistically by the Graeco-
Christian and concretely by the immanent/historical vision. The achievement
of the historical/immanent vision is far more potent because it regards
human life as a concrete complex of all its aspects, the general and the
particular, the individual and the universal, etc. In this respect, of
particular importance are the philosophical reflections of Antonio Gramsci
and aesthetic reflections of Walter Benjamin which mediate with Marxism
but which in no way get reduced to its schematic arrangement.

By trying to study Yeats and Eliot from the immanent/historical
point of view, I do not mean to impose my own perspective upon them. Rather
my effort is to bring their perspectives into focus which it is possible
to do only if the immanent/historical perspective is kept in view vis-à-vis

their perspectives. Thereby Yeats and Eliot are studied together because in the field of poetic drama in English, they stand for perspectives which have not been superseded by later dramatic poets. With all the distinction professed by W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender and Christopher Fry for their points of view, they have not been able to supersede the closed perspectives of Yeats and Eliot. No wonder poetic drama, subsequent to that of Yeats and Eliot, is lost in a blind alley because it relates itself to technique in a heteronomous way rather than to human life in an immanent/historical way. The open perspectives of Lorca and Brecht suggest a way for it emerge out of this blind alley because they take the country and the city as a historical nexus, Lorca grasping it from the perspective of the country and Brecht from that of the city.

Sometime back, this Thesis was submitted but the examiners sent it back for revision on the basis of its inordinate length, obscurity of style, excess of theorising and doctrinaire approach. Alongwith, some theoretical objections were also raised about praxis and importance of time and history for Yeats and Eliot. I have answered the theoretical objections at the appropriate places in their relevant contexts. By re-writing it, I have decreased its length by more than one hundred pages. Balance now seems to prevail between the theoretical and the textual portions. I have made language lucid, removed indirect references and done documentation in a standard way.

I have revised this Thesis under the guidance of Dr M.L. Raina, Reader in the Department of English in the Panjab University. I am grateful to him for the warmth and amicability which he gave me in abundance but which perhaps are not so prevalent in the academic world of today.

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15-1-74