

CHAPTER XIV

The Concept of the Poet in the aesthetics of T.S. Eliot

Dissatisfied with the vagueness of impressionistic criticism, Eliot institutes a scientific inquiry into the process by which a work is produced to account for its effect. In spite of sharing the usual Modernist elitism, he most often files an apology for traditional hierarchical values. Though a classicist, yet he did not intend to arrange and systematise his ideas into a coherent theory of poetry. He was not interested in formal definitions of poetry. What he sincerely attempted is to push the cause of his own new kind of writing – ‘But I believe that the critical writings of poets, of which in the past there have been some very distinguished examples, owe a great deal of their interest to the fact that the poet, at the back of his mind, if not as his ostensible purpose, is always trying to defend the kind of poetry he is writing, or to formulate the kind that he wants to write’.(Eliot 1957: 26) And for this some important concepts need to be critically appraised for Eliot’s concept of the poet owes a lot to such individualistic interpretations.

We can begin with Eliot’s concept of Tradition:

It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not *only of the pastness of the past but of its presence*; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a *simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order*. The historical sense which is the sense of the timeless and of the temporal, and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer

traditional. And it is at the same time what makes the writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity. (Eliot 1960:49))
(italics are mine)

The poet is gifted with historical sense that brings about a fusion of the past and the present in his sensibility. This stems the muddle of materials – chaotic, shifting, fluid – and renders an order. He has the sense of the ‘living past’ – the entire pattern of emotion, feeling, moral, forms, rhythms and words is modified by the existing or contemporary pattern. Eliot’s tradition ‘is a labile, self-transformative organism extended in space and time, constantly reorganised by the present.’ (Eagleton 1976:147) The poet, for Eliot, incarnates the past and the present and he is conceptualised as the ‘link’ in the development in time. This extraordinary awareness and assimilation of the past is the ‘creative eye’.

We need an eye which can see the past in its place with its definite differences from the present, and yet so lively that it shall be as present to us as the present. This is the creative eye. (Eliot 1960:77)

So the poet is the individual whose importance is in the way he carries forward and continues, through change and development. It is he who taps the latent resources in the past; the creative process has the sense of continuity that leads to a significant structure where the total complex of sensibility, form and language of the past impinge on the present to create an ‘ideal order’. Maud Ellmann writes:

‘Tradition has no outside. Patiently digesting differences, the old incorporates the new. In fact, the search for novelty strikes Eliot as a perilous pursuit, more likely to ‘discover the perverse’ than the ‘really new’....The presence of the past has now become authoritarian, though Eliot conceals its iron hand by sentimentalising its paternalism. If he suggests that literary history is a play of differences with no fixed terms, no stable legislature, he now submerges his suspicion in the rhetoric of organicism. He speaks as if

tradition had emerged according to the laws of nature, rather than through the social, economic and political exclusions which institute the canon by expelling any works that challenge its hegemony. Spongy and capacious, tradition absorbs all friction into the serenity of its organic form. (Clarke 1990: 206)

The poet has the subtle sense to create a conformity between the old and the new work of art where the supervision of novelty need not impair the delicate configuration but only slightly alters the existing order; with auditory imagination the poet's mind draws the principles whereby the 'relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted'. (Eliot 1960:50)

Therefore, the poet

can neither take the past as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus, nor can he form himself wholly on one and two private admirations, nor can he wholly form himself upon one preferred period.... The poet must be conscious of the main current; which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations He must be aware that the mind of Europe – the mind of his own country – a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind – is a mind which changes and this change is a development which abandons nothing *en route*, which does not superannate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of Magdalenian draughtsmen. (51)

Eliot, it may be noted, is not conceptualising the poet's possession of the 'historical sense' to historical knowledge or erudition. The poet is conceived to develop and procure 'the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career' (52), So a good deal of the poet belongs to the dim aura of unconscious or semiconscious feelings around the clear centre of the conscious mind. It is this consciousness that makes a poet at once contemporaneous and a representative of the past, and his poetry at once more civilised and most primitive.

So in Eliot's concept of the poet, the true originality is merely a development. J. Hillis Miller, himself a Geneva critic, has given a perceptive account of Eliot's concept of tradition in phenomenological terms. Miller has used the term 'collective mind' for what Eliot has called 'the mind of Europe'. In order to write poetry, the poet's mind has to become a part of the collective mind which is possible only through the obliteration of his historical personality. 'The poet can procure the consciousness of the past', writes Miller, 'only by self-effacement, and must make a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable'. (1965:157) This is almost like the mystic draining himself dry of mundane associations to enable him to forge a relation with the Immanent. This process of emptying oneself is the process of depersonalisation. The poet cannot have his complete meaning alone.

His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism. (Eliot 1960:49)

So the poet universalises his identity at the very moment that he seems to be negated. 'The poet is most himself when he is least himself; most individual when he is most bespoken; most intimate when he is taking his dictation from the dead....In Eliot the literary past is undead, too, and just as irrepressible. ...At any rate, the dead in Eliot would not be dead enough for Lewis. And it is the loop in time which reawakens them in all their undiminished personality.' (Clarke 1990:208) However, this enthusiasm does not generate the affinity for the 'freedom' that 'ruled' the nineteenth century. Absolute freedom means absolute chaos and the poet's art has limitations within which he is to work – limits which does not just confine but also sustain and preserve.

Eliot conceives of the poet as a delicate transforming machine and tries to analyse the function of the machine so that he can safely advance his theory of impersonality of art. However, Eliot, like Coleridge, brings in the value of mind in the creation of poetry. But the mind that Eliot speaks is of a very different nature. It has none of the aura of a philosophical and theological association. It is neutral and 'inert'. To Eliot the creative

mind is entirely separate from the man. It is the task of the poet to create poetry out of 'emotions' and 'feelings' and transmute them into 'art emotion' which is distinct from emotion as it exists in life.

' Not only is art a 'transmutation' of suffering and passion, Eliot suggests, but the better the art, the more complete the transmutation. This is an artist's catharsis to match Aristotle's audience-catharsis and is actually, although Eliot seems never to have noticed it, the very quintessence of romantic individualism and Protestantism, a utilitarianism that finds the value of art in its services to one superior individual, the artist, and thus the farthest extreme from the tradition and from Catholic criteria of 'communion.(Clarke 1990: 124)

The mind of the poet is 'a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a *new compound* are present together.' (Eliot 1960:55 emphases mine) It is the rhythm that is the germ, that is the seed, the primeval shape of the new wholes of disparate experience at the hour of their coming into existence. This rhythm is thus basic to the birth of poetry and as a corollary, the relationship between music and poetry is vital. The idea and the image come only after the birth of this rhythm; the ultimate product becomes a structure of feelings and emotions. The poem which has been made becomes distinct, impersonal, an object which exists in its own right without any reference to the private life of the creator. Where Coleridge has tried to bring in the whole soul of man in creating poetry, Eliot has succeeded in denying even the existence of the soul and making the matter of creative activity a form of delicate instrumentation.

Valery was acutely conscious of the creative process or what he calls 'the drama of creation'. In an answer to a question at the end of his lecture 'The Creation of Art', Valery was more explicit and gave an idea of the type of poetry he wanted to write. The process of writing, according to him, involves a sheer amount of calculation, of prearranged details. He says: 'I have sometimes imagined constructing a literary work

in a completely theoretical way; a work manufactured out of the whole cloth, planned in its most minute details like a highly complex machine.' (Mathews 1964:137) We have already found Eliot comparing the artistic creation with chemical combination. Valery has recourse to the image of the dark room where a film is developed with infinite care. The mind of the poet will concentrate on 'developing' the original germ supplied to him by 'chance' in order to produce the desired effect. The object created must include a long intellectual exercise. Valery, in fact, stresses the role of the intellect in creating poetry and sees the vision of something absolutely ordered. In talking about different types of original impulses leading to the birth of poems, he observes:

In another case a line came to me, obviously engendered by its sound, its timbre. The meaning suggested by this unexpected element of a poem, the image is evoked, the syntactical figure it presented (an apposition), acted like a little crystal in a supersaturated solution and led me as though by symmetry to expect and to construct according to my expectation a beginning before my line to prepare the way for it and justify its existence, and after it a continuation to round out its effect. Thus from a single line there developed, little by little, all the elements of a poem, the subject, the tone, the type of prosody, etc.' (131)

This shows the extraordinary working of the poet's mind which can be qualified as 'theoretical meditation'. This is in some way analogous to the role of the mind in Eliot. Coleridge, though a votary of imagination, was fully conscious of poetry being a deliberate art. Valery, on the other hand, was aware of the 'sensational' basis of poetry and Eliot could not ignore the 'unconscious' element in poetry. Herbert Read points out that 'Valery was always aware of the dialectical nature of the creative process, the drama of creation, as he called it'. (Mathews 1964:ix) The creative process of Eliot also involves the duality.

Coleridge in defining the function of the secondary imagination says that this faculty 'dissolves', 'dissipates', in order to 'recreate'. By stressing the words, 'dissolves' and 'recreate' we may tentatively say that Coleridge is hinting at the way the poet handles his perceptions, *donnees* and experiences. The experiences are not transferred directly to the poem, but undergo a sort of processing. Perhaps this exposition is not wholly implausible, because we find another poet (Baudelaire) emphasising the process of destruction in order to recreate. Eliot comes closer to this when he says that the mind of the poet will digest and transmute the passions which are its material. In fact the mind of Eliot's Poet is typically modern. Here it would be worthwhile to refer to McFarlane's brilliant interpretation of the 'modernist mind'.

A sense of the total *relatedness of things*, altogether different from those tightly drawn causal links by which the positivist world had together, stimulated a search for that mystic 'world of relationships' – Hofmannathal's Welt der Bezüge – in which the role of the poet was that of 'silent brother of all things', who saw the world ... as an infinitely complex lattice of relationships, personal to him, of which his mind was the centre and *coordinator*... the poet was able to *coordinate, in patterns appropriate to the new thinking, those disparate elements* which, following the fragmentation of the positivistic world, would otherwise have remained merely chaotic and unrelated. (1976:83) (italics mine)

So, a poet's mind is 'constantly *amalgamating disparate experience*; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the *mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes*.' (Enright, Chickera 1962:307-8) (italics are mine) The mind of the poet, says Eliot,

would be magnetised in its own way, to select automatically in his reading (from picture papers and cheap novels, indeed, as well as serious books, and least likely from works of an abstract nature, though even

these are ailment for some poetic minds) – an image, a phrase, a word – which may be of use to him later. And this selection probably runs through the whole of his conscious life. There might be the experience of a child of ten, a small boy peering through sea-water in a rock-pool, and finding a sea-anemone for the first time: the simple experience (not so simple experience for an exceptional child as it looks) might lie dormant in his mind, for twenty years, and reappear transformed in some verse-context charged with great imaginative pressure. (1959:78-9)

The mind of the poet works in its own free way, automatically, on anything and everything that comes its way and fixes itself eternally on its screen. The poet is not an ordinary man who shall remain perennially ungrafted with any striking experience and who, forgetting it for ever, passes on to all that next comes his way.

Ezra Pound was of the opinion that poetry is 'a sort of inspired mathematics which gives us equations, not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres and the like, but equations for the human emotions.'(1910:5) To Pound the method of the Chinese ideogram was quite fascinating. While reading the Chinese language he noted that it was not a mere juggling of mental counters that he experienced, but it ^{was} an experience of watching things ^{WORKING} work out their fate. The appreciation of Pound for the Chinese ideographic method goes a long way to explain the way his mind was working and how he expected language to objectify the emotion sought to be communicated by the poet. Naturally, the poet is supposed to communicate not through any abstractions; on the contrary his medium is to be provided only by clear visual images, concrete and not at all abstract. The Chinese method of ideogram allows no room for any vagueness: the "objective correlative" provided by the character is precise and exact like a mathematical equation and one can have no feeling of vagueness or haziness about the emotion or the idea which it seeks to express. This is the very thing the poet seeks to attain. Indeed, what Eliot meant by "objective correlative" is almost precisely, what Pound meant by his mathematical equations. Eliot does not set about giving theoretical conclusions on the psychology of poetry, which is the business of the psychologist, but he only points out certain mental

states which result in artistic creation. What Eliot stresses is the special ability of the mind which will enable us to maintain the autonomy of every field of activity and at the same time perceive it in relation to every other. This ability is the product of a systematic intellectual discipline which the poet possesses. So deliberating on the need of discipline in the aesthetic faculty of the poet, Eliot writes,

In the common mind all interests are confused, and each degraded by the confusion. And where they are confused, they cannot be related; in the common mind any specialized activity is conceived as something isolated from life....To maintain the autonomy, a disinterestedness, of every activity, and to perceive it in relation to every other, require a considerable discipline. (1923: 421)

The discussion now invariably veers around the creative process in the poet's mind contrary to any chance of *spontaneity*. It is triggered off by an 'obscure impulse', an inert embryo or 'creative germ' which possesses no face or name. The poet is ordained to fix the process by the resources of the words at his disposal. So the process is the dialectic between the nameless impulse and the defining and decisive power of language. The material cannot be spoken as having created or imposed its own form.

What happens is a simultaneous development of form and material; for the form affects the material at every stage; and perhaps, all the material does is, to repeat 'not that! not that!' in the face of each unsuccessful attempt at formal organization; and finally the material is identified with its form. (Eliot 1957:101)

Here the poet's voice is unobtrusively directing the process to its successful end (Cf Ch. XIV *Biographia Literaria*). There is no question of psychic automation as obscure impulses cannot lead to a definite creation. The process has the control of reason and subtle ability for selection that coordinates and discriminates between alternative possibilities and resources of language, form and technique for the purpose of finding

the appropriate verbal shape for the impulse. Here, under creation, the poet is in labour which Spender points out as 'the hard race, the sweat and toil'. (1955:52) For Eliot the true poet is one who develops *technique* as originality for him is merely development. (Shakespeare and Dante are major instances in this regard) So the poet's progress is dual as there is a gradual accumulation of experience. This accretion of experience forms a new whole and finds its appropriate expression. The poet is the man who needs to develop the apposite technique – the 'technique of feeling'- and the discovery and development of form through the right verse pattern and speech. He incorporates, remodels, adapts or invents as occasion suggests.

Deliberating upon the essential attributes of a classic poet, Eliot emphasises maturity. His 'The Metaphysical Poets' throws a great deal of light upon this point of maturity. Eliot tells us that the poet who tries to find "verbal equivalents for his states of mind and feelings" is heading towards maturity and is likely to last. (1951: 289) In other words a progress towards the acquisition of finding objective correlative for his emotions is a progress towards what he calls maturity. Thus viewed, it is a stage, howsoever advanced, in the development of the poet's ability of communication. Now if we turn to the essay 'The Tradition and the Individual Talent' we find that it is not only to expression but also to content that the term 'Maturity' refers. There he remarks that the difference between a mature and an immature poet is measured by their respective capacity to accept and transmute a variety of feeling and emotion. Again, in 'Philip Massinger', he provides us even with one of the surest ways of differentiating between a mature and an immature poet:

One of the surest of tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate, mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually

borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest. (1928: 125)

The last sentence, indeed, reveals Eliot's practical grasp as a poet. Obviously the poet will not borrow from his contemporaries because then he will be dull and uninteresting and more liable to be easily deflated as a borrower. Thus, an Eliot could freely glean from a Baudelaire, a Dante, the Hindu Upanishads, the French and Latin Poets, the Buddha and St. Augustine. An enrichment of his own tradition will, of course, bolster his effort. And, if he goes to the themes of diverse interests then also the poet can produce something non dull, something interesting and striking and not a mere copy but something strikingly original, a result of a well-digested assimilation.

A classic poet, Eliot holds, exhausts the language through which he expresses himself. It is not every language that can produce a classic. It is a sheer matter of luck; it is also the fusion of various elements of a language that helps it to qualify for this particular transformation. One such language, according to Eliot, was Latin. It could produce a Virgil who exhausted the language and after him Latin in that form could never again serve as a vehicle to another equally great a poet. English language has failed to qualify for this purpose. On the contrary, English has so much variety in it; though it has failed to produce a classic which could have exhausted the whole language, it has produced poets who exhausted its various forms of expression. The concern of the classic poet is not with a narrow range of sensibility of thought and feeling. On the other hand the classic poet,

must within its formal limitations, express the maximum possible of the whole range of feeling which represents the character of the people who speak the language. It will represent this at its best, and it will also have the widest appeal: among the people to which it belongs, it will find its response among all classes and conditions of men. (Eliot 1957: 69)

Besides, the classic poet, being universal, sets the standard and serves as a yardstick to measure the attainments and deficiencies of the other poets. Virgil, the classic poet in Eliot's concept, is not provincial and insular. He is a poet who possesses the highly essential attribute of Universality. 'It is the importance of that civilisation and of that language, as well as the *comprehensiveness* of the *mind* of the poet, which gives the universality.' (Eliot 1957:55 italics mine) To Eliot the whole of European literature is one whole, and its blood-stream is Greco-Roman. He claims Virgil as the standard of the whole of Europe - irrespective of all its diversity of languages, literatures, national cultures and traditions. He is "the classic of all Europe" (73), declares Eliot, without any reservations. It is not necessary that the production of a classic should be repeated, as a classic is a permanent touchstone. This standard set by the classic poet frees the European literatures from 'chaos' and helps ^{it to} establish 'order.'

However, the Eliotian poet is not simply a man possessed with a greater degree of consciousness than the other people. He differs from them as an individual also and, in this respect, each poet is different even from the other poets. What distinguishes *him* essentially is the possession of a faculty by which he can make his readers share consciously in the new feelings which they had never experienced before. The poet to Eliot is not the social reformer. His duty to his people is, at best, only indirect. His first and foremost duty, rather his direct duty is to language. This he is to perform in a dual manner: first, he is to preserve his language, and second, he is to extend and improve it. But lest we should misunderstand his point, he makes it clear that the poet does act as an agent of social change though he never seeks to do so directly or consciously. While seeking to express what other people feel he is also changing the feeling by making it more conscious. He is making the people more aware of what they feel already, and, therefore, is teaching them something about themselves. (1957:9) Thus the poet works by touching the hidden chords of human personality. He shapes and moulds any conscious effort and never dons the robes of a moralist reformer-preacher. Integrity of style or speech is supposed to be his highest concern.

So here I am, in the middle of the way, having had twenty years -

Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entredoux guerres
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
In a wholly new start, ... ("East Coker", V, 172-75)

So the poet wrestles with the ambiguity of the language and the more he is successful with his tryst with language the better is the form.

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place
Will not stay still ("Burnt Norton" V 149-53)

That makes the poet's endeavours,

...a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotions. ("East Coker" V 179-82)

The poet's tussle with language decrees a sensibility towards the 'dialect of the tribe' ("Little Gidding" II 129). He is envisioned to purify it which goes to show a healthy correlation between sensibility and language. The poet's duty lies in infusing vitality and order over the encrustation of stale and stilted stylistic conventions. He must purge language of the encroachment of abstractions, inject suppleness and variety and with rhythmic modulation align the principles of stability and order. This closely resembles Hulme's poet who is engaged in 'a terrific struggle with language'. (Hulme 1936:132) The highest form of poetic activity is 'the avoidance of conventional language in order to get the exact curve of the thing'. (137) Language, for the poet, then becomes the 'well oiled fire-engine',

... (where every word is at home),
Taking its place to support the others
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together. ("Little Gidding" V 217-223)

Eliot's poet is the dislocator of language. He is like Hulme's poet who can jolt the reader out of his stale linguistic habits – 'every word in the language originate[d] as a *live* metaphor'.(Hulme 1936:152) Vitality is the predominant feature in his poetic expression. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. The poet needs to release the innate potentialities of language and harmonise 'vitality' and 'order', sensibility with language. He is the individual whose concern with language is wider and deeper where the awareness of language leads him to use it as *creative*.

And a language is always changing; its developments in vocabulary, in syntax, pronunciation and intonation – even, in the long run, its deterioration – must be accepted by the poet and be made the best of. He in turn has the privilege of contributing to the development and maintaining the quality, the capacity of the language to express a wide range, and subtle gradation, of feeling and emotion; his task is both to respond to change and make it conscious, and to battle against degradation below the standards which he has learnt from the past. The liberties that he may take are for the sake of order (Eliot 1957:37-8)

It is this order that the true poet is capable of maintaining – striking the balance between the fixity and flux in language. It is the maintenance of strength, subtlety and the presentation of the quality of feeling. Eliot's poet knows the purity he has to maintain,

combining in a fine balance vigour, sensitivity, resilience with clarity, stability and order.

Out of the meaningless practical shapes of all that is
living or lifeless

Joined with the artist's eye, new life, new form, new
colour.

Out of the sea of sound the life of music,

Out of the slimy mud of words, out of the sleet and hail
of verbal imprecisions,

Approximate thoughts and feelings, words that have
taken the place of thoughts and feelings,

There spring the perfect order of speech, and the beauty
of incantation. (The Rock, Chorus IX 19-24)

This beauty and order are composed by the real poet's strength and submission. The poet needs to continue the struggle for the maintenance of a living language. He must strive for the proper upkeep of its subtlety and the quality of feeling in every generation. In his absence he should leave behind 'standards' for his acolytes to take up the struggle.

Eliot maintained that some standard of correct poetic diction is essential for the poet to communicate his emotion. But while doing so, unlike Wordsworth, he refuses to go to the extremes. He cautions us by pointing out that: 'Poetry must not stray too far from the ordinary everyday language that we use and hear.' (Eliot 1957:21)

And, lest we should make the mistake of reaching too close to the spoken language around us, in his essay 'Charles Whibley', we have his severe warning:

An identical spoken and written language would be practically intolerable. If we spoke as we write we should find no one to listen: and if we wrote as we

spoke we should find no one to read. The spoken and the written language must not be too near together, as they must not be too far apart. (1951:497)

Eliot as is his wont, very rarely overshoots in his general, theoretical utterances and very skilfully keeps the middle path even in the present case also. He does not mean that the poet is to make the actual language, the actual speech of the people, his medium. On the other hand, what is entirely different from this, he is not to move so far from their language that may have no scope to reach down to the level of the masses and thus, fail to influence the nation as a whole. The actual speech of the people is at best a source of the material out of which he must make his poetry. Eliot lays down that:

He [the poet] must, like the sculptor, be faithful to the material in which he works ; it is out of sounds that he has heard that he must make his melody and harmony. (Eliot 1957:24)

The poetic diction of the Eliotian poet is not something fixed, static or dead. On the contrary, it is dynamic, undergoing a constant change, and is neither identical with, nor too remote from current speech. A remark of Dr. Johnson made in his essay on Dryden finds some favour with Eliot.

Words too familiar, or too remote, defeat the purpose of the poet. From those sounds which we hear on small or on coarse occasions, we do not easily receive strong impressions, or delightful images; and words to which we are nearly strangers, whenever they occur, draw that attention to themselves which they should transmit to things. (185)

He adds to this view his own that such words are allowed to be used if the writer's aim is to focus on the word itself or if it is the only word suitable for expression. The aesthetics of creation advocates the necessity of a common style because without it the task of communication for the poet becomes a very difficult one. According to him much of the so called 'wilful obscurity' of the modern writer is the product of this lack

of a common style. The presence of a common style demands of the writer a great deal of talent and labour; there is an exacting pressure on the fount of the poet's originality while he works within the limits of that common style. For this purpose he has to concentrate on the attainment of the finer shades of distinction, rather than to become whimsical and wilful in an effort to be different from the others. He has, indeed, to strive for precision and clarity.

The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association. Not all words, obviously, are equally rich and well-connected: it is a part of the business of the poet to dispose the richer among the poorer, at the right points, and we cannot afford to load a poem too heavily with the former - for it is only at certain moments that a word can be made to insinuate the whole history of a language and a civilization. (32-3)

This elaboration offered by Eliot makes us see how seriously he looks at the functions that a word can perform: its potential extends to the horizons of the infinite so much so that it can revive in a flash the whole history of a language and a civilisation. So the poet has to be extra meticulous while handling his words: and this also naturally speaks of the way Eliot uses his words. The wealth of association evoked by a word is just fundamental to all the poetry (as that of Eliot himself) that relies so heavily upon the technique of allusion and cross reference.

It is the context that determines the music, the tone and also the meaning conveyed by a word: not the immediate context but the whole context offered by the 'dialect of the tribe', the language of the people. The fullest communication made by a word is found in every phrase and the sentence that is right. For the poet the word must fit in its proper place. It evokes all the connotations generated by its previous use in the language and

seeks further to establish a flow or current of perception with all its fresh connotations. It has to be the exact word for the purpose of the poet's art but all vulgarity (which here, naturally, is the opposite of over-refinement) is to be kept out. Thus the poet is supposed to walk on the razor's edge because he has to maintain a very delicate balance: the common as well as the formal word that is precise to his purpose is also to be devoid of both vulgarity and pedantry. Only thus can he succeed in tiding over the problem of communication.

The poet needs to draw a circle beyond which he does not trespass; his aesthetics works under the dialectic of two hemispheres – one is the actual life which is always his 'material', and the other is the abstraction from actual life which is a necessary condition to the creation of the work of art. His circumference is symptomatic of his range, the extent of the area of experience he has explored and the formal technical and linguistic resources he has exploited. The poet, for Eliot, has to have genuineness but also abundance, variety and complete competence. He is the man with a 'scrupulous attention' to and responsibility for language of which he is the servant rather than the master without being oblivious of the width of emotional range. Also

the great poet should not only perceive and distinguish more clearly than other men, the colours or sounds within the range of ordinary vision or hearing; he should perceive vibrations beyond the range of ordinary men, and be able to make men see and hear more at each end than they could ever see or hear without his help.

(Hayward 1955:100-1)

This clearly ordains the poet with extraordinary felicity and power – Wordsworth's comprehensive soul, Coleridge's "genius" in the true poet or the *pratibha* in the seer in Sanskrit aesthetics. He is the one who has the comprehensive vision and breadth of perception that restore a tradition and retwine as many straying strands of tradition as possible in his creation. It is with this ability that he produces 'some new experience, or some fresh understanding of the familiar or the expression of something we have

experienced but have no words for, which enlarges our consciousness or refines our sensibility (Eliot 1957:18) The poet is the man who imposes, through his art a credible order upon ordinary reality which hands down a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation to us. In fact Eliot conceptualises the poet as a man who has an extraordinary sense of organisation and inspiration. The control and poetic automation press upon each other to evolve the delicate point of creation. It is the real poet who is never unconscious where he ought to be conscious and conscious where he ought to be unconscious.

There is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate. In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious when he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him *personal*. (Eliot 1960:58) (italics mine)

Here Eliot is close to Coleridge for whom the poet's art need to involve an interpenetration of passion and will, spontaneous impulse and voluntary purpose.

Having discussed language what one should be curious about is the relationship it has with thought, with the poet as the mediator. Eliot distinguishes between the poet who 'thinks' and the poet who does not. The former is capable of expressing the emotional equivalent of thought. In the felt experience of the poet 'ideas' exist as ideas at the disposal of the poet for him to excavate the intrinsic value. It is he who could make the truth more fully real to us. Here is an obvious analogy with Susanne Langer where we find the poem or artistic phenomenon as nondiscursive – the product exists as a totality. (1942: 212) One can argue that it is the presentation that matters for the poet does not allow 'thought' to remain as it is in the product; he transmutes it into a complex experience suitably in housed in a verbal structure. The true poet, for Eliot, develops a mechanism of sensibility (infusion of intellect and emotion) that can devour any kind of experience. Donne is the representative poet here for whom thought was an experience; his sensibility was modified by it. Eliot is not wholly correct when he points out that in the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which

we have never recovered. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Yeats in many instances repudiate such claims. However, our thesis does not demand any involvement in the controversy.

However, should the poet believe his thoughts? For Eliot, he need not. As metaphysicians make metaphysics, the bee makes honey, the spider secretes filament, the poet makes poetry. The poet does not have the mandate on him to believe. His job is to *do*. Donne did not have to believe. Like a magpie he culled various shining fragments of ideas that caught his eye and *laid them* in the various rooms and spaces of his verse. The Eliotian poet does it by an inner equilibrium which Eliot calls the 'wit' – the capacity to harmonise disparate tones and attitudes. By 'wit' Eliot means what Remy de Gourmont meant by irony in his analysis of Laforgue's techniques. So belief and unbelief do not figure significantly in the poesis for, in the final analysis one focusses on the crystallisation of 'ideas' leading to a coherence. Eliot would prefer the poet who can illustrate a sane attitude towards the mystery of life. There exists a moral awareness linking the poet to his own time and to other times. It is a moral insight into the facts of life which intensify the significance of the end product. Eliot, echoing Gourmont, believes that the great poet while he writes himself writes his time as well. He is the most sensitive point, the spiritual barometer; the intensity of his work is not merely aesthetic but also moral. His aesthetic integrity comprehends and implies moral integrity.

The essential is to get upon the stage this precise statement of life which is at the same time a point of view, a world – a world which the author's mind has subjected to a complete process of simplification (Eliot 1960:68)

It is for this that Baudelaire finds praise, as his poetic concern is not with demons or black masses or romantic blasphemy but with the real problem of good and evil. However, the moral reality should not be propagandist; the poet's art enlarges our consciousness and refines our sensibility, communicating a new experience and fresh understanding of the familiar. This moral reality is no where close to the simple pietism

of Ruskin or Tolstoy but close to Henry James who believed that the more a work of art feels at its source, the richer it is.

So, within the complexity of modern poetics, Eliot's poet needs to be intelligent for the more intelligent he is the more varied will be his interest. Eliot is suspicious of poetry that attracts or appeals to a crowd of people. His poet can straightaway communicate to a small but chosen people – elite and advanced. It is to this small elite that the poet first communicates his emotion. It is through this upper strata of society that the influence of the poet seeps down to the people through the popular poets. This only means that poetry of a high order remains in advance of the popular ken and takes its hold upon the people only slowly. The spirit of modernism made poetry

become an 'intolerable wrestle with words and meanings', a hauling and straining, a racking of the mind's power of comprehension. Older and more traditional definitions of poetry – the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, the best words in the best order – were impatiently dismissed. Obsessive attempts to say 'the unsayable' made extreme demands on the mind's elasticity. Not only literature but all art of the period seemed to be intent on stretching the mind beyond the very limits of human understanding.
(McFarlane 1976:72)

Anti-Wordsworthian in nature, the aesthetics of Eliot's poet clearly exhibits the poet as a man with remarkable 'elasticity' to endure the strain of comprehension. It is a wholly new kind of stress which Eliot's poet is well equipped to encounter. So the concept of the poet thoroughly alters its focus, character and impact. The hermetic character of poetry, its complexity of thought and language, experiments in expression and the gradual extinction of the dominance of the personality of the poet were enough indicators for another upheaval that seemed to loom in the lurch.