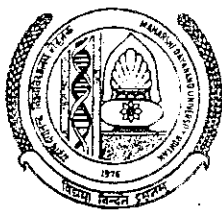


# American Literature

Section - A - B & C - D

M.A. English (Final)

Paper - VII



**Directorate of Distance Education  
Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak**



**AMERICAN LITERATURE**

**Paper-VII**

**Section A & B**

**M.A. English (Final)**

**Directorate of Distance Education  
Maharshi Dayanand University  
ROHTAK – 124 001**

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**M.A. English (Final)**  
**PAPER-VII**  
**Section A and B**  
**AMERICAN LITERATURE**

**Max. Marks : 100**  
**Time : 3 Hours**

**Note:** Candidate will be required to attempt FIVE questions in all. Question 1 will be compulsory. This question shall be framed to test candidates' comprehension of the texts prescribed. There will be one question on each of the Units in all the four sections. The candidate will be required to attempt four questions (in about 200 words each), one from each Section.

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**SECTION A**  
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## ROBERT FROST

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"Provide Provide", "Mending Wall", "The Road Not Taken," "Two Tramps in Mud time,"  
"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "Birches," "The Onset," "After Apple Picking"

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### Robert Frost - Unit I

#### (i) General Introduction About The Poet

Robert Frost was the most popular poet that America has ever produced. The extent of popularity that he enjoyed during his lifetime can be compared only to that of Tennyson during the Victorian period in England, W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot in the twentieth century. Like Tennyson, Robert Frost had become a national institution, and more honours were heaped on him by the government, the universities and the literary societies than on any modern writer in any country of the world. Robert Graves, the English poet, has written the challenging pronouncement: "The truth is that Frost was the first American who could be honestly reckoned a master-poet by world standards. Poe, Longfellow, Whittier, and many more of his American predecessors had written good provincial verse; and Whitman, a homespun eccentric, had fallen short of the master-poet title only through failing to realize how much more was required of him. Frost has won the title fairly, not by turning his back on ancient European tradition, nor by imitating its successes, but by developing it in a way that at last matches the American climate and the American language."

Frost has indeed been the most honored of the American poets, receiving the Pulitzer Prize four times (1924, 1931, 1937, 1943), honorary degrees more than a score, including degrees from both Cambridge and Oxford, and numerous other prizes, distinctions, fellowships, and special appointments. During the last forty years of his life he led a very active public life, reading his poems to audiences, lecturing on poetry, holding special appointments in universities and in the Library of Congress.

Frost crowned his public appearances at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961, by appearing before the world viewers of television and reading "The Gift Outright" in his clear, crisp New England tones, to the largest audience ever to hear a poet. The sonorous and inspiring voice, in which this poem describing the complete identification of the American people with their land was delivered, produced a nation-wide effect equivalent to the Inaugural speech of the youthful President Kennedy. Both stood together as the two symbols of the American nation—one the statesman, the other the poet. And as the reputation of President Kennedy, who on account of his deep humanity, and love for the freedom of the whole human race, had traveled all over the globe, the influence of Robert Frost as a poet was not only confined to America, but had spread in other English-speaking and English-knowing countries of the world.

Frost has won worldwide fame and recognition, and has already established himself as a 'classic'. One thing that strikes the eye is the extreme simplicity of his poetry. He writes on the simplest themes, and he says what he has to say in the most easy and simple manner. It is this simplicity of Frost that has endeared him to ordinary readers. They admire him and go to him again and again, for they can understand and appreciate him without any trouble. But this simplicity of Frost is deceptive. As a matter of fact, Frost is both for the masses and the classes—the learned few. A careful reading of his poems reveals that he is extraordinarily subtle, complex and intricate. His poems have a rich texture and there are layers within layers of meaning. He makes extensive use of symbols to convey profound truths, and in this respect he is one with such modern poets as Eliot, Yeats, Pound and Auden. A skillful combination of an outer lightness with an inner gravity is one of his major poetic achievements.

The central principle of Frost's poetry is the truthful presentation of material. The dramatic technique he adopts only intensifies the force of the facts by divesting them of the personal elements, for however objective may be the truth, if it is presented as a personal subjective experience, it loses much of its force, as its implications are more likely to be taken as having a bearing on a moral or philosophical lesson the writer may have in view. In the dramatic method the experience ceases to be personal in the sense that it is not a manifestation of the writer's own ideas, but the dramatic

character's reactions to a situation. Of course, it must be admitted that all art is, though not personal experience, a "felt" experience. Frost has always desired to go behind something, to hide his personality and make his characters speak. Even in his lyrics, which are personal utterance, it is not Frost, but the writer as a character speaking. The triumph of Frost is in discovering that he himself could be a persona. In his poems, both dramatic and lyrical, the action of experience is realized as of the character protagonist's and not the poet's. Thus the total effect of the poem is not moral or philosophical, it is dramatic. In his personal poems, he writes of rural people, occupations, events and situations. Country-scenes and sights provide the background to his poetry. He writes of rural people and rural occupations and pleasures like apple picking, gum gathering, birch swinging, mowing, hay collecting, and the language he uses is the simple colloquial language of country folk. In his poetry, we do not find the city scenery and city people to whom we are used in modern poetry. There are no shop-girls, truck-drivers, factories, trains and buses in his poetry. But the essentials of city life like the note of anxiety, the heartache, neurosis and emotional disturbance, are all there. Frost has succeeded in imparting universal validity and significance to pastoral art.

Frost is a regional poet and his region is New England and more particularly New Hampshire which he considered one of the two best states in the U.S.A., the other being Vermont. He never felt the slightest desire to include all America within the scope of his poetry. But, at the same time, he never tried to bring his characters into a regional unity and did not dream of a Utopia for them. The men and women in his poems are isolated, like their farms. His regionalism resembles that of Emily Dickinson. It gives him a place to stand where he can see what is closely in a field or in a collar-hole and, at the same time a clear view above the hills to the 'further range' beyond.

Life for Frost is a mystery, which poetry may partially reveal without discovering the whole truth. So his poems are partial revelations. But Frost is not an autobiographical or introspective writer. His first concern is outward things and objects, and he looks inward to examine how the human mind works and not because he is especially interested in his own mental process. Like all great poets he does possess a generalizing power, but he always starts from a particular case, a certain scene, a single man, or a group of people. Truth to experience was the cardinal principle of Frost as a poet and hated anything that seemed like trickery in poetry. Throughout his life he remained faithful to his own dictum that "poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom." Many of his poems certainly carry a moral. But the moral is usually presented either as an argument running through a descriptive, or sensuous lyric, or as an ingredient of a dramatic situation. Seldom does he make a moral lesson as explicit and obvious as Wordsworth sometimes did. As Cleanth Brooks remarks, "Frost's themes are frequently stated overtly, outside the symbolical method. At his best, of course, Frost does not philosophize. The anecdote is absorbed into symbol." His poems chart his own inner world. Although he is gazing constantly at the external world, he is also very much an inward poet. He never imposes himself on the external world. Instead he strikes extremely delicate balance in his poems between the world he sees and works in and the process of thought and emotion that he is always keenly aware of in himself. When this balance is disturbed his poems become either merely didactic, on the one hand, or else descriptive, on the other.

Frost is a great nature poet. He writes of the natural scenes and sights, flora and fauna, hills and dales, of the region that lies north of Boston. Like Wordsworth, his love of nature is limited to nature in a particular district. But unlike Wordsworth, he loves both her pleasant and unpleasant aspects. He enjoys her sensuous beauty, but he is also alive to much that is harsh, bleak and barren in her. He does not shut his eye to her harshness and cruelty. His approach is realistic. He was a working farmer and no working farmer can be romantic about nature. He does not find any 'holy plan' at work in nature, nor does he regard her as a kindly mother watching benevolently over man. In his view, Nature and man are two separate principles, and it is futile to search for friendship in the external world. He constantly emphasizes the difference, rather than the similarity between man and nature. Though Frost is a great nature poet, he is still greater as a poet of man. People in Frost's books are all rural New Englanders. He knew them intimately and his portrayal of them is realistic and vivid. Intellectuals and city dwellers are beyond his range, and he shows great artistic self-restraint in staying within his range. But while working within his range, he achieves great vividness, diversity and subtlety.

Besides the unsophisticated, simple and unpretentious attitude to life, another quality, which impressed the Americans, was Frost's transparent sincerity. They found in him a poet who had no anxiety for reforms but whose main passion was to report truthfully his personal experiences, even the most whimsical and fantastic. Frost never pretended to be



what he was not, and he never spoke to the reader in a grim, moral tone. He never took upon himself the role of a pompous philosopher or a zealous reformer. Nor did he shed tears over old glorious days, or criticized the modern wretchedness. He was simply a truthful, honest and sincere portrayer of life as he found it, and he never looked at life with any preconceived notions. In his approach to nature he would follow neither the Wordsworthian view of intimate kinship between nature and man, nor would he subscribe to the Darwinian struggle for existence. He would look at nature's phenomena with absolutely a fresh approach, and whatever he found there, he recorded in an absolutely sincere manner. The same was his approach to man. Whenever he found frustration, alienation and loneliness, he depicted them fearlessly, but in characters where he found courage, faith and the will to survive he was only too glad to portray them. Thus his view of life was not one-sided, determined by any pre-conceived notions, and he did not write poetry with the purpose of justifying any principle, however hoary or respectable it might be. Nor was he an iconoclast who would wrong-headedly break all time-honored images. He was he an ordinary man, looking at life with the eyes of an ordinary man, and recording his experiences truthfully and sincerely without fear or favor.

There is no doubt that Frost takes a rather bleak and gloomy view of man's earthly existence, but he cannot be condemned as a pessimist merely for this reason. In fact, he is a realist and an ameliorant. He is realistic enough to recognize the ills to which flesh is heir. He does not shut his eyes to the evil, sorrow and suffering, which beset man's life on this earth. Such recognition is necessary if human lot is to be bettered and improved. His approach is never cynical and nihilistic; he does never suggest that the life is not worth living or that it would have been better not to be born at all. Human lot may be hard but it can be made bearable by doing one's duty, sincerely and devotedly, by recognizing the otherness of other individuals, and by faith in divine Mercy. His approach to life and its problems is sane and healthy; his philosophy is ripe and mature.

Frost emphasizes the significance of an event to the mind. He takes up a single mood or situation and throws it about in a dramatic form. He exploits to the fullest an event, a mood, or an idea in his poetry. He examines the inner goings on in the mind of the protagonist. He studies a character's response to a situation. Frost actually makes poetry out of the dramatic, startling contest with the negative blackness that begins everywhere outside the hard-won human order. In brief, it is not the situation, the theme, that is of primary importance, but its dramatic possibilities. He lends the moment a glow of imagination. He often picks up ordinary common situations. As poetic themes, they are already beaten track. But he handles them in a peculiar fashion. After creating scenes, he creates 'persons' who start talking like sensible men and women. The poet moves his theme in the direction of action drama.

Being himself a lover of the world, enjoying his quarrels with it, because such quarrels provide spice to love, and keep it alive, Frost throughout his life studied the phenomena around him with that attitude. And being a lover himself, he was moved by everybody. The tone of his speech is always intimate. In fact he seems to be whispering into the ears of his readers like a lover talking about all sorts of things, which though apparently meaningless are of great importance to the lover. He knew that the story of human life has always been the same. There has always been something wrong somewhere, but there have also been some good points in every age. So Frost developed an attitude of tolerance and contentment depicting even the darkest aspects of life with the least sentimentality, and appreciating the encouraging aspects wherever he could find them.

But like the talk of a lover, the poetry of Frost always has a double meaning. Though outwardly frivolous and simple-minded, he in fact like an intelligent lover has always something highly meaningful to say. Being in love with all sorts of people, in his poetry also he addresses all of them on their level. To the simple-minded he speaks like a rustic, but to the more intelligent he unfolds a different meaning, and to those who are highly intellectual, he conveys a still deeper meaning. Thus like a universal lover, he meets all readers on their level, and each one of them discovers a meaning in his poems in accordance with his mental development. This is in fact Frost's unique quality, which is very rare among poets. Only Shakespeare had this quality, because from his plays the fool and the wise derive their own meanings. It was this quality which made Robert Frost popular with all types of American people—the masses, the intelligent readers as well as the University scholars. Frost had different levels of his own personality, which are reflected in his poetry that has many layers of meanings, which unfold themselves gradually.

Frost's poetry embodies rich wisdom. He teaches us to look at life sympathetically, intelligently and lovingly. There is no use running away from life. In spite of many distressing aspects, life on the whole is worth living. Frost

advocates devotion to work which, in his view, is necessary to make life bearable. Nature is imperfect and chaotic, and man must seek to perfect and order it through a constant process of gardening. The true purpose of life is to test the heroism of the human soul. Therefore, one must struggle and dare and suffer the uttermost on earth, for only in this way can man deserve the bliss of heaven, and the mercy of God. Frost believes that Man must have faith in God. Frost is temperamentally a poet of meditative sobriety. He is no philosopher with a formal system. The truths he seeks are innate in the heart of man and in common objects. But people forget and poetry, he says, "makes you remember what you didn't know you knew." A poem is not didactic, but provides an immediate experience, and it provides at least "a momentary stay against confusion." Like Thoreau and Emerson, Frost is willing to become a rebel in the cause of transcendentalism, of earlier New Englanders, and like them but so unlike the skeptical poets of his age, he had only "a lover's quarrel with the world."

### (ii) Robert Frost: Life and Works

Robert Frost was born on March 26, 1874, the first child of William Prescott Frost and Isabelle. The elder Frost was a rebel from a New England Puritan family, and he was always on the move in search of adventure and riches. Though he could have settled in New England practicing law, his venturesome spirit drove him to the far West where he wanted to make his fortune. San Francisco, the city of the yellow metal, arrested his westward moves, and he took up job as a journalist. Robert's early life was full of excitement and adventure. "His was a strange childhood," wrote Jean Gould in *Robert Frost: The Aim Was Song*, blessed with parental love, fraught with excitement and tragedy," exciting because the elder Frost put to test all his novel ideas about education and living on Robert, and tragic because he died of tuberculosis at the young age of thirty-five, leaving his wife and two children to their fate. The young widow put together all the cents she had to pay for the freight of the dead body and the family back to Massachusetts, for she was bent on burying the body of the rebel in the homeland of his father, and rearing up the children amid the New England situation. Thereafter spending a time with grandfather Frost, she took up a teaching job at a village near Salem, New Hampshire. Because of the one-room-schoolhouse situation there, Frost's mother taught both Robert and Jeanie in her class. She had always read to her children a lot, so they were quite knowledgeable without halving a formal education. However, Jeanie was the more obviously intelligent one, whereas Robert tended to be quite lazy. In fact, he never read a book by himself until he was fourteen years old. Nevertheless, when the time came he did qualify for entrance into the high school in Lawrence, where he chose the college preparatory course with special emphasis on the classics.

Frost received the special attention he needed "to catch up with the others of his age." But he also took up odd jobs during spare hours and vacations to supplement the meager earnings of his mother. This was the same school which his father had attended, and here Frost "burst into full flower both as scholar and leader." Even then he began composing poems, the lines coming to him in unrestricted flow, one after the other. So surprised was Frost at the Muse's coming to him with such ease that he put together the lines, and titled them "La Noche Triste" which was published in the April 1890 issue of Lawrence High School *Bulletin*.

The vaguely felt impulse for poetry made Frost restive about the academic career though his grandfather, who wanted him to be a lawyer, sent him to Dartmouth College. Robert was not really interested in college studies. As expected, Frost remained listless, took unusually long walks in the woods, read his favourite books and missed Elinor who had joined St. Lawrence for a higher degree. "I had decided that I was up to no good at Dartmouth, so I just went home," he said. Here begins Frost's quest "for our place among infinities" for which he needed a different kind of schooling—an inner and outer discipline—that comes from the close observation of life and the hard feel of the pebbles of the earth. When he was searching for pretence to liberate him from college, he received a letter from her mother that she had some discipline trouble with some big, brutal boys in her new school in Methuen. He immediately left the college without informing the Dean, and joined his mother's school. Later, he took up various jobs on the farm, and in the mill to meet the family expenses. For years he remained "an aimless intellectual" to borrow Jean Gould's phrase; everything that he did, every job that he tried, offered him material for his poetry. In the seemingly barren but inwardly rich soil of his experience, he put in the seeds of his poems and waited for their organic growth.

In 1894, the *Independent* magazine accepted his poem "My Butterfly". It is his first professionally published poem that appeared in a weekly literary magazine. In the same year, Frost arranged five of his poems to be printed

Robert Frost

privately in the form of booklet, entitled *Twilight*. The edition consisted of only two leather bound copies — one for his fiancé, Elinor White and the other for himself. Elinor who had joined St. Lawrence at University College in New York State, taking him to be drifter, thought of him poorly. Her momentary indifference left Frost despondent, and he destroyed his own copy of the book. Luckily within a year all the differences dissolved, and they got engaged in the old fashioned way to be married after a few months. In her book *The Trial by Existence*, Elizabeth S. Sergeant, gives a suggestive description of the life of the newly wedded couple: "All Rob had to give Elinor when they married was himself, the young lover and husband, and himself the poet, who had something like a cold crystal, and otherness at the center of his being. The two, poet and lover, were not separable. Elinor knew this when she married, accepted it with all the deprivation, sorrow, joy, as such an endowment offers a wife."

Frost's experience in husbandry and craftsmanship made an impact upon his poetry, both in subject matter and in style, for he demanded of his poems the honesty and simplicity of the scythe or the plow and he learned to recognize fact. When their first child, Elliott, was born the following September, Robert realized that his meager income was no longer going to be sufficient. He decided to return to school, this time to Harvard. However, the ensuing combination of events again prevented him from completing his education. At many times throughout his life, an extreme amount of tension or depression would bring on a mysterious ailment that baffled Frost's doctors but convinced him that he had tuberculosis. When he grew ill at school, the doctor recommended a change in environment, and Robert eagerly took his advice. He left Harvard in the spring of 1899 after not quite completing two years, and, by going into debt to his grandfather Frost, he managed to acquire a chicken farm in Massachusetts.

Robert's married life came off to a good start. He landed a job on a paper as a reporter, a vocation that gave him an occasion to study humans in a variety of situations. But, soon tragedy befell him in way of the death of his mother. A year earlier to the death of his mother, Frost had lost his first born, Elliott. Deep in sorrow at the setbacks, he quit his post as reporter, and settled on grandfather Frost's estate, farming and writing poetry.

Frost inherited from his parents two singular and definite personalities—tough individualism, intensity of feelings, keenness of vision and unyielding spirit. From his father, William Prescott Jr., who insisted on naming him Robert Lee after the Confederate General, he inherited an inquiring and active mind coupled with an adventurous, risk-taking spirit and enough rebelliousness to carry skeptical caution to complete denial. From his mother, Isabella Moodie, a Swedenborgian with love for poetry and religious mysticism, he inherited the intellectual and artistic interest, and love for reading, contrasting religious temperament and Gothic poetic traits. And, Frost grew into an unpredictable complex personality. Besides his family difficulties, Frost was also beset with monetary difficulties—he was eventually evicted from the chicken farm. His grandfather Frost had bought him Derry Farm, a move not totally appreciated by his grandson because of the poor relationship, which had always existed between them. The elder Frost had never quite approved of his grandson's difficulty in working permanently at one job, and he wasn't convinced that Robert could ever earn a living by writing poetry. However, they needed a place to stay and Derry Farm was available, so they took up residence at the New Hampshire farm. This was a period of great strife for the aspiring poet. His feelings of depression and guilt about his son's death so preoccupied him that he actually contemplated suicide. As a farmer, Frost could not make the soil yield full harvest; still as a poet he drew most of his poetic material from those days of pastoral isolation. The poems came slowly but spontaneously to him. In one of his interview he acknowledged that "to a large extent the terrain of my poetry is the Derry landscape, the Derry farm. Poems growing out of this, though composite, were built on incidents and are therefore autobiographical. There was something about the experience at Derry, which stayed in my mind, and was tapped for poetry in the years that came after. It is all fact—no fancy, but lots of teasing. I never invent for poetic expression. No poet really has to invent, only to record."

It would seem that a farmer was the last man to make a name as a poet. And, indeed, Frost achieved very little as a farmer-poet, though the twin vocation of farming and writing poetry remained with him as a pattern of living throughout his life. Also, he occasionally took up teaching to supplement his earnings on the farm. But farming served him as a pastime, as a mode of relaxation, after strenuous hours of study, teaching and poetic composition. He worked regularly and for long hours in the dead of the night or early in the day writing, revising and reading up his own lines to himself. By the time he reached his thirty-fifth year he had written a bundle of poems, but hardly a dozen of them saw the light of day, and the few pieces published were not his best.

Frost sold his farm in 1912 and took his family to England, where over a two-year period he met many English and American poets, including Ezra Pound, and achieved the poetic publication and recognition that had been eluding him for so long in America. He found a home in a small rural Buckinghamshire. After spending a year there, he tried farming again, this time in Gloucestershire, where his near neighbors were the poet-dramatist, Lascelles Abercrombie, and the poet, Wilfred Wilson Gibson. One evening, as Frost sat shuffling through the poems he had written during a period of about twenty years, it occurred to him that someone might agree to publish them. He contacted Mrs. David Nutt and she agreed to publish his book. He called his first volume of poems *A Boy's Will*. The title of the book was borrowed from a poem by Longfellow who had written "A boy's will is the wind's will/And the thoughts of youth are long long thoughts." After twenty years of writing poetry while doing odd jobs of farming and teaching, Robert Frost had at last a book of poems published, just six months after the Frosts had arrived in England. The reviews of this modest little volume of lyrics were quite favorable. One reviewer, for instance, wrote, "We have not the slightest idea who Mr. Robert may be, but we welcome him unhesitatingly to the ranks of poets born. If this is a true sample of his parts, he should presently give us work far worthier of honour than much which passes for front-rank poetry at the present time." Frost's characteristic manner and style are clearly visible. "The poet's eye is turned inwards. There is an expression of a variety of subjective moods, doubts, searching, questioning, affirming, etc." Lyrics like "Mowing" are in the characteristic style and tone of the rapidly maturing poet, and they show that tendency to moralize which was to grow and become obtrusive in his later poetry.

In 1914, Frost published his second book, *North of Boston* that virtually created a stir in literary world of England and America. It is "one of the most revolutionary books of modern times but one of the quietest and least aggressive", as Edward Thomas, its first reviewer, puts it. This is genuinely called a book of people and its prevailing mood is dramatic, narrative and dialogic. Robert Frost presents in the book the New England country life with its stark realities and the responses of its people to those harder and lonelier human situations to evoke through them universal extensions of meanings. Primarily, he focuses on psychological characterization that represents a tragic-comic blend of human failures and triumphs. The first American edition of *North of Boston* appeared in March 1915. Thus, at the precise moment, when the nineteenth century's political order was collapsing into the violence of the twentieth century, Frost emerged from obscurity and isolation into the foreground of American poetry where he remained for almost fifty years.

The poems in this volume paint the bleakest picture of human life to be found in the poetry of Frost. These blank-verse narratives of New England sways and manners are triumphs of psychological characterization, both in moments of success and failure in simple rural surroundings. This makes the volume a study of considerable interest, both of New England scenes and New England people. In this connection, Amy Lowell writes, "Mr. Frost has reproduced both people and scenery with a vividness which is extraordinary. Here are the huge hills, undraped by any sympathetic legend, felt as things hard and unyielding, almost sinister, not exactly feared, but regarded as in some sort of influences nevertheless. Here are great stretches of blueberry pasture lying in the sun; and again, autumn orchards cracking with fruit, which it is almost too much trouble together. Heavy thunderstorms drench the lonely roads and spatter on the walls of farmhouses rotting in abandonment; and the modern New England town, is pained in all its ugliness. For Mr. Frost's is not the kindly New England of Whittier, nor the humorous and sensible one of Lowell; it is a latter-day New England, where a civilization is decaying to give place to another and very different one."

Having achieved this measurable amount of success, Frost gave in to the homesick longings of his entire family, including himself, and returned with his wife and children to America, arriving just a few days after the Holt publication of *North of Boston* appeared in the American bookstores. Frost did not reappear on the American scene to be immediately hailed as a great and popular poet; on the contrary, he was still an unknown personage in his own country. He found and bought a farm near Franconia, New Hampshire, and sent his family ahead while he sought to make friends in the literary world. Once back in New England, Frost returned to teaching at the college level at different times at Amherst College, Dartmouth College, Harvard University and the University of Michigan where he served as one of the first "pets in residence" in United States. He spent time with literary clubs and college professors in Boston, making valuable friendships and introducing this small part of the world to Robert Frost. With these kinds of contracts, in addition to the resounding praise of the English reviewers, *North of Boston* became a best seller; by the summer of 1915 it was

in its fourth printing. As the author of a best-selling book, Frost became much in demand, and began a series of appearances and lectures throughout the New England area. He liked to go "barding around" than getting tied to a place. The people in *North of Boston* are depicted in their struggle with the elementary problems of existence—holding a farm together, paying off a mortgage, dragging through the routine of daily duties, at the same time not breaking under the strain of anxiety, isolation, and overwork. Those who speak of Frost as one of the few affirmative voices in the midst of disillusioned American between the wars should read "Home Burial," "The Fear," "The House-Keeper," "A Servant to Servants" etc. The book is at once an artist's necessary and desirable rebellion against a way of life and a mature adjustment to an environment. This complicated double movement of rejection and acceptance is the heart of the experience. It saved the affirmations in the later Frost from changing to the tones of sentimentality. And it allowed him to write honestly about the people of the countryside. There are the farmers like the one in "The Death of the Hired Man", who discovers the meaning of home and learns that everyone needs at least one place of refuge where the demands of strict justice are softened by a spirit of charity. Then there are the characters that Frost sees through the eyes of a humorist. "A Hundred Collars" has the genial, bibulous collector, a hulking fellow continually moving into a size-larger shirt; he is a poet in his perceptions, and he shares Frost's enduring love of the Vermont landscape—"The lay of different farms."

*North of Boston* became a best seller and as the author of a best-selling book, Frost became much in demand. The newly found fame brought him more than just speaking engagements. Frost's unconventional ideas concerning education were the source of much personal discontent whenever he returned to teaching. Although he did enjoy lecturing and communicating his ideas to students, he conducted classes with great informality and professed to believe that "If they want what I can give, they can take. If they don't, that's all right."

Frost's next book, *The Mountain Interval*, derives its title from the hill near New Hampshire farm, above the interval, where the Frosts lived after their return from England. This work presented as pattern in its interknit New England monologues; *Mountain Interval* scattered its effects, introduced new inflections, and puzzled the admirers of Frost's 'gray monotones' by an infusion of bright colour. It contains reflective lyrics, such as "The Road Not Taken", love poems, such as "Meeting and Passing", narrative poems, like "In the Home Stretch" and "Christmas trees", and aphoristic-descriptive pieces, such as "Birches". The general mood of this book is less somber than that of *North of Boston* though Frost's later, almost habitual, stoicism is already apparent in poems like "Out, Out". As Lawrence Thompson puts it, "the poems in this volume combine the two previously separated modes of the inner lyric vision and the outer narrative contemplation, in ways which reveal increasing poetic subtlety and versatility. For example, while all of Frost's lyrics partake of the dramatic, five lyrics gathered under the title "The Hill Wife" to provide a miniature drama in five moods rather than acts: obliquely, an isolated woman's cumulative sense of fear, loneliness, material estrangement, is represented as being so completely misunderstood by her husband that he is baffled when she disappears, irrevocably and without warning."

In *Mountain Interval*, Frost also shows an ironic interest in machines. He sees machines as invaders of the country, and as spoilers of the land. This attitude is clearly seen in "The Line Gang". W.H. Auden is of the view that "Frost's poems on natural objects are always concerned with them not as foci for mystical meditation or starting points for fantasy, but as things with which and on which man acts in the course of the daily work of gaining a livelihood." This attitude of keeping one's eye on the object, this respect for the individual person or things, shows itself more strongly in *Mountain Interval* than in his previous two volumes.

With the passage of time, the pattern of Frost's life began to change; it assumed greater variety and was enriched by broader circle of friends and acquaintances. More and more of Frost's poems were published in periodicals and magazines. A collection of his poems entitled *New Hampshire: A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes* appeared in 1938. It reveals that Frost chose at that time a different field for his poetic art, that is, he tried to present the eccentricities and divergences of temperament in strong people. The title poems of the book are a satire on the American glorification of commercialism and materialism, but other poems present an extraordinary combination of intellect and emotions. Reviewing the book, Louis Untermeyer said, "Frost has created a poetry which is at one time full of heat and humour, a poetry that belongs not only to America of our own day but to the richest records of English

verse." There is a new self-consciousness in this volume. The poet is willing to talk about himself and his art, somewhat defiantly. The longer dramatic poems show sententiousness. Some of the shorter poems like "An Empty Threat" and "I Will Sing You One-O" are written in a manner which is puzzling and which is sometimes carried to an extreme. These and the epigrams, which appeared in this volume for the first time, foreshadow the obscure manner in which he subsequently indulged more and more. But "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "The Need of Being Versed in Country Things" are absolutely clear, simple, and magical. The other major poems in this volume are: "A Star in a Stone-Boat", "The Star-Splitter", "The Witch of Coos", "Fragmentary Blue", "Fire and Ice", "To E.T.", "For Once, Then, Something", "Two Look at Two", and "Looking for a Sunset Bird in winter."

After an interval of five years, in 1928, Frost came out with another volume of verse, *West Running Brook*. The title of this book is significant. Like the brook, which runs west while all the other brooks flow east to reach the ocean, the speaker in the poem trusts himself to go by contraries. The black stream, striking a barrier, flings back one white wave. As it throws backwards on itself, while it falls, so most of it is always raising a little, sending up a little. In this backward motion towards the source, against the stream, man shows what he is. This stoic theme of resistance and self-realization is found in other poems in this book. The tension between man and Nature, hitherto always exciting and often harmoniously resolved, has loosened. Nature has grown more hostile, man more heroic. The increasing tone of humanism is beautifully eloquent in the sonnet "A Soldier". Some poems of this book show Frost's interest in astronomy while in others we find religious or philosophical reflection. Some of Frost's best lyrics are also contained in this volume. As for example, "Spring Pools", "A Peck of Gold", "Once by the Pacific", "Tree at My Window", "Acquainted with the Night", etc.

In *West Running Brook* Frost began to play with the role of a self-conscious homespun philosopher. He began to give reasons for his innate, countryman's conservatism, and not only reason, but arguments which were half-apologies. His own native shrewdness began to get the upper hand; and, although his lyrical gift remained very nearly untouched, he began to shift his sympathy, with almost imperceptible silence, away from wildness and unpredictability toward the weather-safe side of existence. "Let what will be, be" became his creed; he reinforced this stoicism with an active insistence upon burrowing under and digging safely in. We see in this attitude the ancient conservatism of the man who depends upon the earth for his living.

*Collected Poems* (1930) established Frost, to use Louis Untermeyer's words, "As one of the three bucolic poets of all times." The reviews of this volume are also all praise. The poems have that peculiarly artful air of simplicity and obscurity that characterizes Frost's mature work. Frost wrote his extraordinary preface, "The Figure a Poem Makes", to this volume. Frost's next volume of poems is *A Further Range*, which appeared in 1936, makes it perfectly clear that Frost is fundamentally a traditional poet who nevertheless knows that revolutions, whether literary or political, are an important part of life. It is a peculiarly youthful book with some excellent lyrics. The variety of *A Further Range* might seem a little willful and ingenious in a poet who most charms us when casual in tone if the finest of the poems themselves were not so notable and wonderful. To this volume belongs the poem "Provide, Provide" which is so conjuring that a critic like Randall Jarrell declared enthusiastically, "I was floating in a quarry with my chin on along when I first discovered that I knew 'Provide, Provide' by heart." The poem is a brilliant record of Frost's resourcefulness with language and his verbal tidbits. In this volume we have a few rhymed thoughts or aphorisms, such as "I never dared be radical when young/For fear it would make me conservative when old."

There are two groups of poems here, bearing the captions "Taken Doubly" and "Taken Singly". Frost had now developed a tendency to sermonize. In the poems "Taken Doubly", we have to keep our eyes on the theme and the moral. "A Lone Striker" is a sermon on individual freedom. "The Gold Hesperidee" is a parable on pride. "Two Tramps in Mud Time" teaches the necessity of uniting evocation and vocation. The deed that is really done is one where "love and need" become identical. The poems in this group are delightful, with a didacticism or moralizing which does not jar upon the reader. The poems "Taken Singly" appear somewhat pale by comparison. The natural world, once a source of great joy to Frost, suggests to him now the approach of old age and winter. Whereas once he pursued 'petals', now 'leaves' represent his 'darker mood'.

Other remarkable poems of the volume are "A Roadside Strand", "Departmental", "Lost in Heaven", "Desert Places", "The Strong Are Saying Nothing", "Moon Compasses", "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep Design", "To A

Robert Frost

Thinker" etc. These poems present and enact a mood, a scene, a season, an experience, and a lot of things. They reveal the poet's powers are combining psychological perception and visual imagination that make them easily recognizable as the work of Robert Frost. The technique in these poems is flexible and the language is carefully chosen and cadenced.

However, Frost's personal triumph was marred by one of family tragedy. His daughter Marjorie contracted an infection after the birth of her daughter and died in 1934. His wife Elinor had been frequently ill with a heart ailment. When the Frosts returned to Amherst in the fall of 1937, they found that Elinor needed immediate surgery for cancer but that the doctors feared that her heart would not withstand the operation. The surgery was performed however and Elinor made a slow but steady recovery. In fact, when she returned from the hospital, she insisted that her husband keep the speaking engagements to which he had committed himself previously.

The next spring, as they were house hunting together for a winter refuge in Florida, Elinor suffered a series of heart attacks. She died in March 1938. Frost was torn not only by grief but also by guilt, for he felt that his house-hunting ventures had been the ultimate cause for his wife's heart giving out. He suffered another of his frequent nervous ailments, this time coming very close to a serious case of pneumonia. When he finally moved to the South Shaftsbury farm which his son and daughter-in-law now owned. When Frost felt himself to be ready to return to teaching, it was to Harvard, the school he had quit forty years previously, that he went. He taught there under a Ralph Waldo Emerson Fellowship in Poetry for the next three years. Even here his personal difficulties could not be left behind. His son Carol killed himself in a fit of depression, just two days after his father had spent a whole night with him, trying to dissuade him from taking any drastic measures.

*A Witness Tree*, appearing in 1942, is Frost's next collection of poems. It has some of his flawless lyrics, such as "The Silken Tent", a poem of love and admiration rather than of passion, "Never again would bird's song be the same", a poem celebrating the beauty of a particular woman, "The most of it", a poem with a passionate protest ending on a grim note. "The subverted flower", the strangest and most powerful poem that states Frost's knowledge about love. Some of the other remarkable poems of this volume are "Come In", "The Gift Outright" (which was read at the Inauguration of President John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961), "A Considerable Speck", "On Our Sympathy with the Underdog", "A Serious Step Lightly Taken", etc. The first half of the book suggests a release of mind, heart and senses from the old prison. It deals with love in its diverse moods, and the second half is concerned with variations on the nature of man's contingencies and existence. It embodies the poet's anxieties regarding the outcome of the clash between man's humanity and the distinctive value of science.

*A Masque of Reason* appeared in 1945. It explores some of Frost's basic metaphysical assumptions. It is a little verse-play with four characters. Its meaning emerges from the interaction of the character's points of view. The poem, on the whole, is disappointing because of Frost's shallow conception of the divine nature and the human nature. God, perhaps, cannot be present in a play. Milton also failed to convince us with his God the Father. Frost is another link to his chain, though for different reasons he failed. To Miss Jennings, Frost has also failed with *Job* and his wife. She argues that "by bringing down the problem of evil and suffering to such very frivolous terms, Frost has not only not answered any of the questions he poses, but he has not even presented his queries in a way that carries conviction."

*Steeple Bush* came out in 1947. Some of the poems of this collection are "A Young Birch Something for Hope", "On Backward Taken", "Directive", "Too Anxious for Rivers", "To an Ancient". Of these poems, "Directive" is a highly condensed poem as may be gathered from its very title. It is an instruction, a warning but still it is not a piece of didacticism, mainly because one feels that the poet is learning about himself at least as much as he is instructing the reader. Another important poem of this collection is "Too Anxious for Rivers". In this poem, Frost explicitly invokes "images drawn from Lucretius and would seem to blend them with Herculean metaphors such as the death of the earth gives life to fire, the death of fire gives life to air, the death of air gives life to water, and the death of water gives life to earth, thus figuratively suggesting the endless cycle of birth and death and rebirth and continuity in nature."

*A Masque of Mercy* is the next publication in verse that appeared in 1948. It is reminiscent of Milton's *Paradise Regained* and carries greater conviction simply because it is so much concerned with fear—an emotion which appears in different forms throughout Frost's poetry. Fear is perhaps the one thing about which the poet is never ambivalent. He sees it both as a dominant human feeling and also as one of the chief factors governing the universe.

*The Complete Poems* published in 1949 introduced a new era in his life. The collection "offers abundant examples and many subtle skeptical nuances of negations and affirmation, tragedy and comedy. But if the reader inclines to arithmetic, he can surely prove that in this, that poet drawing strength and sturdiness from the positives of the nineteenth century and profoundly aware of the explosives of the twentieth, the positives prevail. He can walk to the edge of abyss, stare into it quietly and unobtrusively realize its psycho-pathological and scientific horrors to a point beyond despair, and with courage or humor retire to his meditative aphorisms; all in a few lines." Frost could accomplish this goal because he knew life so closely and so well. The metaphysical and religious consideration, which formed the inner core of the *Masque*, provided a thematic center for his last book, *In the Clearing* (1962). Actually, his strategic evasions enabled him to reach the destination in his poetic quest. If every poem has been "a momentary stay against confusion"; his poetry, with its enduring strength has become a "clarification of life." Hence, Frost becomes "an unacknowledged legislator of the world".

Despite his old age and illness, Frost kept up a frenzied pace of life as if he hoped to put off death by staying in action. He entered the hospital on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1962 after keeping an appointment of poetry reading on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, underwent an operation and showed remarkable tenacity during convalescence. On 23<sup>rd</sup> he had a heart attack, but he soon recovered to the amazement of the doctors. On 29<sup>th</sup> January 1963, Frost suffered another heart attack and died still "going deeper into life." In his last interview—the "Strolling Bird"—Frost summed up his view of life in his characteristic manner: "I guess, I don't take life seriously. It's hard to get into this world and hard to get out of it. And what's in between doesn't make much sense."

Frost knew shrewdly what life has to offer, and still he wished to live more. It shows his tremendous "power of resistance," to use Joseph W. Beach's words, which enabled him to live his own life in such a way as to be "The Horace of the day". Frost observed himself, studied himself, and analyzed himself. And depending on the situation he either rejected a part of himself or imbibed another self in himself. Thus, Frost finally caught up with himself and grew into a new poetic personality, with humor and inner seriousness, with human limitations, and a "whole" without "confusion". Only then he could "strike a line of purpose" on the "chaos of experience," and could give us the "old poetry as young as ever; and new only in extending the bounds of sympathy through the recorded to the unrecorded knowledge of humanity." Frost was writing poetry before twentieth century literature made its authentic beginning. And an area of Frost's thinking apparently shows the impact of the Romantic and Victorian sensibility but only to a limited extent. He began under the color of the Romantics to become a realist to the core, he began as a Victorian sharing their religious doubts and distrust of science, to be a modern in his mood and manner; he began realizing his poetic talent with the Georgians to take his withdrawal into the countryside as a perspective and not an escape as some of them did. This acceptance and rejection, which is at the heart of his personality and poetry, makes one discover the root of his gnomic wisdom, which taught the poet "in singing not to sing".

### Short Notes

#### 1. Why Frost's *North of Boston* is called a 'book of the people'?

*In North of Boston, Frost introduces a variety of New England characters and their reaction to the human predicament. The poems paint the bleakest picture of human life. He depicts the New England ways and manners and there are triumphs of psychological characterization, both in moments of success and failure in simple rural surroundings. Frost's people in this book are lovers of the old stock, morbid, pursued by phantoms slowly sinking to insanity. "Home Burial" gives the morbidity of death in these remote places; a woman unable to take up her life again when her only child has died. The charming idyll, "After Apple Picking" is dusted over with something uncanny, and "The Fear" is horrible revelation of those undercurrents which go on as much in the country as in the city, and with remorse eating away whatever satisfaction the following desire might have brought. The book is photographic. The pictures and the characters are reproduced directly from life.*

### Assignment

1. Discuss the evolution of Robert Frost as a poetic genius of America
2. Write short notes on:
  - (a) Comment on Frost's life in England.
  - (b) Comment on the theme of Frost's *New Hampshire*.



### (A) Frost's Conception of Poetry

The secret of Frost's wide appeal seems to have been that his poetry, from the beginning, caught fresh vitality without recourse to the limitations of modern experimental techniques. The problem of the experimentalists was to determine how free poetry should be if it were to escape the threadbare conventionalism of the outworn tradition. Naturally, the emphasis was on new forms. Frost carried on his own distinct experiments, emphasizing speech rhythms and the sound of sense. In his conception of poetry, the self-imposed restriction of metre in form and of concreteness in content stand not halfway down the scale of grace. He has made casual references to the general quality of those limitations that work to the advantage of new and lively poetry.

The restrictions of the experimentalists, ironically seeking liberation, have ticked Frost. With pleasant banter he has teased his contemporaries by jesting about their desperate "quest for new ways to be new". Once Frost pointed out the fantastic variety of restrictions in their freedom, and said, "Poetry, for example, was tried without punctuation. It was tried without capital letters. It was tried without any image but those to the eye. It was tried without content under the trade name of poetic pure. It was tried without phrases, epigram, coherence, logic and consistency. It was tried without ability. It was tried premature like the delicacy of unborn calf in Asia. It was tried without feeling or sentiment like murder for small pay in the underworld. These many things was it tried without, and what we left? Still something."

An intense wish to be himself caused in Frost a fear of belonging to any geographical boundaries or academic and philosophical school. It created in him a distrust of any systematized line of thought except the revelations from his own mind and heart. He boldly asserted, "No poet can honestly have one and only one philosophy running through all his work. It is all a matter of mood." It made Frost, to use his own words, "an unprincipled schemer," who staunchly believed in education by poetry. According to Frost, a writer has to depend on his heart-felt thoughts or experiences, even prejudices if at all he intends to be genuinely creative. In the case of diversion from this principle, the attempts could be called the product of attractive tricks and devices and could be treated as the works that are "believed into existence." Thus for Frost, genuine poetry grows in the soil of experiences, and its inspiration does not lie in the mud; it lies in the clean and wholesome life of the ordinary man. It indicates that he was strongly critical of those writers who unnecessarily invited pain and sufferings into their lives to write something extraordinary and uncommon.

There were certain kinds of restrictions, which amused Frost such as those of overemphasis. The restrictions which Frost accepts in his theory of poetry save him from the dangers of two extremes that poetry is pure art and contains nothing of content and that there is pure preaching in poetry. He is also against those who think they may set up as goals of perfection—the expression of thought or emotion in the form of abstractions—sound merely for the sake of sound. He hates to see poets use their medium as a vehicle for shrieking frustration and disgust. Grievance he would willingly restrict to prose, so that poetry might concentrate on grief, on "woes, woes immedicable" that might be permitted to go its way in tears. To Frost, the mystery, the wonder, the virtue, the magic of poetry is its heterogeneity of elements somehow blended to a single autonomous unit. The problem of the poet is to achieve this integration, this fusion.

Though Frost did not write much regarding his theory of poetry, and he was more concerned with the actual writing of poems, yet from a few observations he made here and there, we can gather that he had very clear ideas about the purpose and form of poetry, and that throughout his poetic career he put those ideas into practice. Frost was a traditionalist. He did not believe in the new experiments which were being made by the Imagists, who attached too much importance to the images and metaphors at the expense of the subject matter, nor did he have any sympathy for those poets who want poetry to be merely the vehicle of thought, especially an expression of the frustration, disintegration and loneliness of modern life. He believed that poetry must have substance in it.

One of the ways of approaching the meanings of Frost's own poetry is through analysis of several of the prose essays in which he discusses the nature and techniques of poetry in general and of his own poetry in particular. Three essays that contain some of his remarks on poetry, are "The Constant Symbol", "The Figure a Poem Makes" and "Education by Poetry". In his essay "The Constant Symbol", Frost has said about poetry, "There are many other things I have found myself saying about poetry but the chiefest of these is that it is a metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another. Poetry is simply made of metaphor. Every poem is a new metaphor inside or it is nothing." The flavor of New England life, an insight into New England character, and a surprising penetration into life's complexities are in

his poems. He uses "facts" of life, but it becomes apparent that the fact becomes metaphor and symbol—that Frost is penetrating into value and experience. He said, "I might be called a synecdochist; for I prefer the synecdechist in poetry—that figure of speech in which we use a part for the whole."

Frost may in a poem put on the mask of a child, an irresponsible boy's will; or he may assume the mask on witty rural philosopher of American tradition. He may be a sensitive poet or a modern Horace. But whatever mask or manner he assumes in a poem he has underlying honesty and integrity of language, of emotion, of form. He found the musical measure of the speech of his neighbors. He used the natural flexibility of language within the structure of meter, bringing originality in a personal style to the conventional patterns of poetry. Moreover, he brings that elfish equality of turning a phrase or a thought inside out or upside down to get a whimsicality of freshness of vision. As an artist he values himself and keeps coming back to those truths, which are his directives.

"Earth is the right place for love"

"Fate has her imagination about her"

"My object of living" is not "to go with the drift of things"

Through life as "a pathless wood."

All forms of knowledge are metaphorical because they give new insight and sense of pattern. But Frost goes on to say "there is a sense in which all poems are the same old metaphor always." That is, each poem serves as a way of rediscovering basic, enduring truth. It does not so much create new knowledge but it tells us something we didn't know we knew. Frost is not concerned with free verse, which is far less challenging. In life, the will must confront challenges and commit itself to meeting and resolving them. Similarly, the poet must struggle to interrelate his subject matter and his poetic form in such a way that the finished work will be a meaningful picture of or statement about reality. Success is not sure, but without the commitment of the will and the braving of the challenge, it can never be achieved. Frost sums up his theory, "Every poem is an epitome of the great predicament; a figure of the will braving alien entanglements." Human life is important when people try to give it meaning and structure. Poetry is one of the ways of doing this.

Form may be said to be the most important characteristic, which Frost finds essential to poetry of any age. We may start with the great variety of stanza forms and then break any of them down of the rich formal relationships of rhyme to rhyme, of line to line, of sentence to sentence, of words which talk back and forth to each other in the poem. Furthermore, form in poetry is modulated by the relation, the balance, of emotion and emotion, of thought and thought, of emotion and thought, of the image and the metaphor, of the specific and the general, of the trivial and the significant, of the transient and the permanent. All these facts appear to Frost as related aspects of the terse word "form". To give form in poetry is also to employ that intricate method of conveying organization, shapeliness, and fitness to the matter or substance of context or meaning of the poem. Before meaning finds its place in a poem, it must become subordinated to its proper balance with structure. Frost asserts that another requirement of poetry is that this formal fusion of distinct elements shall achieve the personal idiom of the poet's expression without sacrificing that happy correspondence which must exist between his own experience and the experience of those who came after to read or hear the poem.

In "The Constant Symbol" Frost says that the poet is constantly but unconsciously preparing for the writing of poetry throughout his life. The poet's "mind is a baby giant who, more provident in the cradle than he knows, has hurled his paths in life all round ahead of him like playthings given—data so-called. They are vocabulary, grammar, prosody, and diary, and it will go hard if he can't find stepping stones of them for his feet wherever he wants to go." The metaphor of the giant is used to suggest that the poet in some future life may use all elements of language. He can draw, in writing, from any past experience. But he does not self-consciously hoard experience, deliberately laying in poetic supplies; rather he retrospectively, naturally, and spontaneously draws from the past memories of emotions and experiences, as well as linguistic memories, which naturally relate to the poem he writes. The writing of poetry is discipline, but not the logical discipline of the scientist. The poet does not move deliberately in a straight line toward his goal, but with crookedness, in a natural, meandering manner. The goal is there, but he moves toward it with interruptions and partial diversions, as is the case in life.

Frost's essay "The Figure a Poem Makes", published along with the edition of his *Collected Poems* in 1939, clearly embodies Frost's poetic theories. For Frost, poetry is a fusion of sound and subject matter: "The object of writing poetry is to make all poems sound as different as possible from each other, and the resources for that of vowels

consonants, punctuation, syntax, words, sentences, meter are not enough. We need the help of context—meaning subject matter.” This sounds like an obvious statement, for all poetry is a fusion of technique and theme. However, Frost is here stressing the uniqueness of each poem, a uniqueness that results from the fact that in each work there is a perfect blend between the subject matter and the manner of expression. Poetry is not mere sound or rhythm—it has meaning. Frost believed that in poetry we find a combination of impulse and art. It has rightly been pointed out that in his theories of poetry, he avoided two kinds of extreme: the view of those who think that poetry is nothing except content and the view that poetry is nothing of content. Unlike many modern poets who hold that a poem is an artifact, a thing deliberately constructed, Frost declares that a poem is never a put-up job. Though Frost held with the Romantics that a poem is an expression of an experience, his best poems are marvels of construction, the more exciting to the reader because their form seems to evolve before his eyes and ears. Frost believes that poetry should have a wildness, by which he means freshness and vitality, a sense of exhilaration and discovery. But wildness does not mean that the poet should be erratic, hopping around like a grasshopper without purpose or direction. Frost prizes spontaneity above almost every other quality but he also laid stress on discipline, patience and watchfulness. It was his conviction that a poet could not eschew thought but he must think from the marrow of his bones. Thinking must become a part and parcel of his sensibility.

Frost’s statement that a poem begins with delight and ends in meaning has often been misinterpreted to signify a view that a work intriguingly leads the reader to a thematic conclusion or that the majority of the poem is enjoyable and the last few lines filled with the moral. Frost himself had a different interpretation: “The poem begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on but in a momentary stay against confusion.

Thompson says, “Frost prefers to leave to prose those questions suitable for debates; he finds poetry at its best when its statements and observations touch realms of spiritual values where there is no room for argument, sorrow, aspiration, loneliness and love.” Songs are built around perceived everlasting values, which are true for us all. It is not the poet’s function to argue that in “Adam’s fall we sinned all” or that “in Christ’s death we were all saved.” There are still a few of us who consider these as subjects for controversy. And Frost points out that we don’t join together in singing an argument. But in human nature there are certain enduring qualities and everlasting truths, which permit us to join in hymns of joy or threnodies of sorrow. Let a poem be written on these and it will last, says Frost, for “it will keep its freshness as metal keeps its brilliance.” Poetry deals with a meaning and truth that may clarify the mingled goodness and badness of life without growing too optimistic over the existence of the one or too pessimistic over the existence of the other.

Frost emphasizes the natural, spontaneous quality of writing. Both poet and reader must share the excitement and surprise of discovering a truth, which, because it is faithful to life, they have a sense of having known all along. It is the discovery and awareness of recognition, which is most important. “No surprise for the writer, or surprise for the reader. For me the initial delight is in the surprise of remembering something I didn’t know I knew. It must be a revelation or a series of revelations, as much for the poet as for the reader.”

Frost implies that there are two kinds of recognition which he has experienced as one part of the poetic impulse; two different ways in which this sense of interplay between the past and the present is first motivated and finally resolved in the form of a poem. The first way occurs when some experience in the present inspires an emotional recognition that is more a matter of sense impression than of clear mental perception. The emotional tension—the lump in the throat—, which is established through such recognition, impels the poet into the physical act of recording in poetry the details of immediate moment. And as this emotional tension finds its gradual resolution in the poem, the emotion finds its thought. The first kind of recognition, which Frost, suggests as examining “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” may see a part of poetic impulse. The poem is a dramatic lyric, which breaks into the middle of an incident so that there is a drama in miniature, revealed with setting and lighting and actors, and properties complete.

Frost implies a second kind of recognition that he has experienced in the poetic impulse. The second occurs when the emotional pleasure is derived from the sudden mental perception of a thought, which comes into sharp focus through the discovery, and recognition of a particularly apt correspondence or analogy. The difference between these two approaches to the writing of a poem should be clear. The first begins as an emotional response, which gradually finds its resolution in a thought metaphysically expressed; the second begins with the perception of the metaphor, and the

rational focus is so pleasurable in its sudden discovery that it produces an emotional afterglow. The first leads the poet to venture into the writing of the poem as an act of faith, without foreseeing the outcome; the second leads the poet to give shape and weight to a rational correspondence which has been perceived clearly before he begins to write the poem. Nevertheless, Frost is fond of handling each of these by letting the specific displace the general until the analogy is implied or stated as a kind of climax to the poem.

The essay, "The Figure a Poem Makes", concludes with a summation of the nature of the creation of a poem and of its effect on the reader: "Like a piece of ice on a hot stove, the poem must ride on its own melting. A poem may be worked over once it is in being, but it may not be worried into being. Its most precious quality will remain its having run itself and carried away the poet with it. Read it a hundred times: it will forever keep its freshness as a metal keeps its fragrance. It can never lose its sense of a meaning that once unfolded by surprise as it went." Here Frost emphasizes his belief that a poem cannot be artificially forced into being. Like ice melting, it generates its own lubricant. In a sense, it writes itself, and the poet, in putting words down, is merely discovering the significance of the events or characters he is recording. Because it records genuine discovery, it always remains fresh and never seems artificial.

It is the poet's virtue to develop insight and wisdom, which enable him to recognize and represent the apparent conflict between the constructive and destructive elements, the good and the bad, in nature and in human experience. Those elements, so inextricably related to each other, furnished the basis for dramatic conflict in Greek tragedy. They find expression in the all-inclusiveness of Shakespeare's insight. In his poetry, Frost has subscribed to them, as a general rule, even at the risk of being called didactic in his affirmations.

It has been said that in the highest art, ethics and aesthetics are one. Robert Frost's poetic theory quite at odd with Puritan aesthetics is nevertheless colored by his Yankee heritage of Puritan teaching. His own belief in poetry as a "clarification of life" seems to have close relation to the idea of the New England puritan, with certain differences indeed. Frost leaves no room for argument or debate in poetry—for what will prose do? Poetry to Frost meant the touching of realms of spiritual values. Frost's logic is that we don't join together in singing an argument. Poetry highlights certain permanent truths and enduring qualities in human nature.

Another significant essay entitled "Education by Poetry" discusses the relative lack of attention paid to American poetry at colleges and universities. Even in those places where poetry is taught, professors "manage to bar all that is poetical in it by treating it as something other than poetry." For example, its contents are treated as subject matter for history. Even those who would allow poetry would relegate it to the status of a recreation, not a vital part of the learning process. However Frost is of the opinion that even if we are not concerned with initiative, imagination, enthusiasm, inspiration, and originality, qualities with which poetry is basically concerned, we should be concerned with taste and judgment. Poetry cultivates these and, in so doing, gives direction and meaning to enthusiasm.

Frost writes: "Poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another." We begin now to see why poetry may be so important in a person's education. By showing relationships between apparently unrelated things, it is a means of presenting patterns in life. Having shown that a metaphorical way of seeing pervades all phases of life, Frost goes on to say: "What I am pointing out is that unless you are at home in the metaphor, unless you have had your proper poetical education in the metaphor, you are not safe anywhere. Because you are not at ease with figurative values, you don't know the metaphor in its strength and its weakness. You don't know how far you may expect to ride it and when it may break down with you. You are not safe in science; you are not safe in history." Because poetry is the most metaphorical of all modes of expression, the study of poetry becomes necessary to make sense of the world and to make structures. Moreover, because science and history are metaphorical in that they too try to place objects or events into patterns, the study of poetry is of further value. In reading poetry, one learns to understand and evaluate the strength and validity of metaphors. Not all poems are as successful as others in giving metaphorical visions of life. All poems are not completely successful for all metaphors breakdown at some point. Nevertheless, all poems as Frost said elsewhere, are at best "momentary stay against confusion." Thus in acquiring judgment in the study of poetry, the reader is learning to judge interpretations of life.

An intense wish to be himself caused in him a fear of belonging to any geographical boundaries or academic and philosophical school. It created in him a distrust of any systematized line of thought except the revelations from his own mind and heart. Frost boldly asserted, "No poet can honestly have one and only one philosophy running through all his work. It is all a matter of mood." It made Frost, to use his own words, "an unprincipled schemer," who staunchly believed in education by poetry. According to him, a writer has to depend on his heart-felt thoughts or experiences, even prejudices if at all he intends to be genuinely creative. In the case of diversion from this principle, the attempts could be called the product of attractive tricks and devices and could not be treated as the works, which are "believed into existence." Thus, for Frost, genuine poetry grows in the soil of experiences, and its "inspiration doesn't lie in the mud; it lies in the clear and wholesome life of the ordinary man." It indicates that he was strongly critical of those writers who unnecessarily invited pain and sufferings into their lives to write something extraordinary and uncommon. He, on the

contrary, demanded the freedom of material but attempted to convey through his poetry only the familiar. What the poet tries to do parallels what all men attempt: that is, he tries to see the relationship between the spiritual and the material realms of existence, the tangible and the intangible. Each man tries to see the larger significance of the passing moment, to see meaning in his life, to see metaphorically. To Frost, the lost soul is the person who cannot see any pattern or meaning in his life, which is so sunk into the present that he is unable to understand it even partially. In his poems, Frost presents characters and incidents that he finds symbolic of life's larger meanings. By giving a partial clarification of life through his metaphors, he is able to make a momentary stay against confusion. Often, however, his characters are unable to see their own situations in larger perspective. Their lives are thus meaningless and they are lost souls.

Frost's views about the dramatic character of poetry appeared in the Introduction to "A Way Out": "A dramatic necessity goes deeper into the nature of a sentence. Sentences are not different enough to hold the attention unless they are dramatic. The height of poetry is in dramatic give and take. Drama is the keystone of poetry. Sidney Cox has quoted Frost as having remarked "there should always be people in poems. Yes, even in lyrics. Lyrics ought to be dramatic. A poem ought to be something going on; not mere description or ejaculation-action." Frost defined poetry as a "performance in words", "words that have become deeds."

"Education by Poetry" concludes with a short discussion of various kinds of belief: self-belief, national belief, religious belief, and poetic belief. In considering the last type, Frost reiterates his view that poetry cannot be logically thought out in advance. The last line of the work cannot be written first. One must go from tentative beginnings, for poems should be "believed into existence" and should "begin in something more felt than known." Writing is itself a process of discovery, the gradual discovery of a truth contained within an emotion. As he says, a poem "begins in delight and ends in wisdom."

Frost did not develop a highly intricate philosophy of poetry. His works, not an abstract theory, are most important. By examining his prose works also, several recurrent ideas can be gathered together into a kind of pattern. That Frost should not have systematized himself is typical of his belief that poetry cannot be written by formula but must emerge as a natural process of discovery. Thus, just as the reader must carefully respond to the poems, so too he must respond to the prose, discovering the wisdom lurking within the homespun prose. He must create his own synthesis, his own momentary stay against confusion. The result will be well worth the effort, for it will enable the reader to return to the poetry with an added insight and enjoyment. He will more fully appreciate the interrelationship between the dramatic tones of meaning and the strict forms, chosen, the metaphoric aspects of the situations depicted, and the wisdom and momentary stay against confusion created by the verse.

## **(B) Critical Analysis of Frost's Poems**

### **Birches**

This blank-verse lyric was published in *Mountain Interval* in 1916. As a boy, the poet was much interested in climbing birch trees, swinging from the tops, till the supple branches bent down to the ground. The central theme of "Birches" is that the poet dreams of becoming a swinger of birches once again in his life as he was during his boyhood. As the poet is weary of considerations that his life involves, he expresses his desire to be a swinger of birches at least for the present time, but it does not mean that he wishes to escape from his life on earth. It is not the desire of escape that forms the central theme of the poem, but the love of the earth.

"Birches" begins by evoking its core image against the background of a dark-wooded landscape:

When I see birches bend to left and right  
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,  
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.  
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay  
As ice storms do.

The pliable, malleable quality of the birch tree captures the poet's attention and kicks off his meditation. Perhaps young boys don't bend birches down to stay, but swing them they do and thus bend them momentarily. The malleability of the birches is not total, however, and the poet is forced to admit this fact into the presence of his desire, like it or not. The ultimate shape of mature birch trees is the work of objective natural force, not human activity. Yet after conceding the boundaries of imagination's subjective world, the poet seems not to have constricted himself but to have been released.

Often you must have seen them  
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
After a rain. They click upon themselves  
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored  
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.  
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells  
Shattering and avalanching on the snow crust—

Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away  
 You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.

Fascinated as he is by the show of loveliness before him, and admiring as he is of nature as it performs the potter's art, cracking and crazing the enamel of ice coating on the birch trees, it is not finally the thing itself (the ice-coated trees) that interests the poet but the strange association he is tempted to make: "You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen." Certainly there is no question of belief involved here. The linkage of the scientifically discredited medieval sphere with the heaps of cracked ice suggests rather the poet's need to break beyond the rigid standard of empirical truth, that he himself has already allowed into the poem, and faintly suggests as well the kind of apocalyptic destruction that the imagination seeks when unleashed (the idea that the inner dome has been smashed clearly pleases the speaker). Eventually Frost in "Birches" comes round to exploring in much more sophisticated ways the complex problem broached by this statement from a later poem, "On Looking Up By Chance At the Constellations":

The sun and moon get crossed, but they never touch,  
 Nor strike out fire from each other, nor crash out loud.  
 The planets seem to interfere in their curves,  
 But nothing ever happens, no harm is done.  
 We may as well go patiently on with our life,  
 And look elsewhere than to stars and moon and sun  
 For the shocks and changes we need to keep us sane.

In "Birches" Frost looks not to natural catastrophe for those "shocks and changes" that "keep us sane" but to his resources as a poet:

You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
 Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground  
 Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair  
 Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.

Manipulating the simile, the overt figure of comparison, is a dangerous ploy for the poet, implying often that he does not have the courage of his vision and does not believe that his mode of language can generate a distinctive perspective on experience. For Frost, however, and for any poet who is rooted in the aesthetics of the fiction, the simile is the perfect figure of comparison, subtler even than metaphor. Its overttness becomes its virtue: in its insistence on the disparateness of the things compared (as well as their likeness) it can sustain a divided vision; can at once transmute the birches—for a brief moment nature stands humanized and the poet has transcended the scientific universe—and, at the same time, can allow the fictive world to be penetrated by the impurities of experience that resist the transmutative process of imagination. It is at such moments as this in Frost's work that the strategies and motives of poetry of play are revealed. There is never any intention of competing with science, and therefore, there is no problem at all (as we generally sense with many modern poets and critics) of claiming a special cognitive value for poetry. In his playful and redemptive mode, Frost's motive for poetry is not cognitive but psychological in the sense that he is willfully seeking to bathe his consciousness and, if the reader consents, in a free-floating, epistemologically unsanctioned vision of the world which, even as it is undermined by the very language in which it is anchored, brings a satisfaction of relief when contemplated. It may be argued that the satisfaction is greatest when it is autonomous: the more firmly the poet insists upon the severance of his vision from the order of things as they are and the more clearly that he makes no claim for knowledge, the emotive power of the poem may emerge uncontaminated by the morass of philosophical problems that are bound to dog him should he make claims for knowledge. Both poet and reader may submerge themselves without regret (because without epistemological pretension) in aesthetic illusion.

But I was going to say when Truth broke in  
 With all her matter of fact about the ice storm,  
 I should prefer to have some boy bend them  
 As he went out and in to fetch the cows—  
 Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,  
 Whose only play was what he found himself,  
 Summer or winter, and could play alone.

The shrewdness in Frost's strategy now surfaces. While claiming to have paid homage to the rigid standards of empirical truth in his digression on the ice-loaded branches, what he has actually done is to digress into the language of fictions.

Robert Frost

When he turns to the desired vision of the young boy swinging birches, he is not, as he says, turning from truth to fiction, but from one kind of fiction to another kind of fiction: from the fiction of cosmic change and humanized nature to the fiction of the human will riding roughshod over a pliable external world. And what are the motives for all of this fooling? There are two: one is that Frost intends to fox his naturalistically persuaded readers; a second is that this is what his poem is all about--the thrusting of little fictions within alien, antifictive contexts. As he evokes the image of the boy, playing in isolation, too far from the community to engage in a team kind of sport, he evokes, as well, his cherished theme of the imaginative man who, essentially alone in the world, either makes it or doesn't on the strength of his creative resources. And now he indulges to the full the desired vision that he could not allow him in the poem's opening lines:

One by one he subdued his father's trees  
By riding them down over and over again  
Until he took the stiffness out of them,  
And not one but hung limp, not one was left  
For him to conquer. He learned all there was  
To learn about not launching out too soon  
And so not carrying the tree away  
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise  
To the top branches, climbing carefully  
With the same pains you use to fill a cup  
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.  
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,  
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.

One figure seems to imply another--the image of the farm youth swinging up, out, and down to earth again recalls the boyhood of the poet:

So was I once myself a swinger of birches.  
And so I dream of going back to be.  
It's when I'm weary of considerations,  
And life is too much like a pathless wood  
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open.

For anyone but Frost the "pathless wood" is trite. But for him it carries a complex of meaning fashioned elsewhere. The upward swinging of the boy becomes an emblem for imagination's swing away from the tangled, dark wood: a swing away from the "straighter, darker trees"; a swing into the absolute freedom of isolation, the severing of all "considerations." This is the transcendental phase of redemptive consciousness, a game that one plays alone. The downward movement of redemptive imagination to earth, contrarily, is a movement into community, engagement, and love--the games that two play together:

I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
And then come back to it and begin over.  
May no fate willfully misunderstand me  
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away  
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:  
I don't know where it's likely to go better.  
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,  
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk,  
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,  
But dipped its top and set me down again.  
That would be good both going and coming back.  
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

One really has no choice but to be a swinger of birches. In the moment when, catapulting upward, the poet is half-granted his wish, when transcendence is about to be complete and the self, in its disdain for earth, has lofted itself into

absolute autonomy, nothing having any claim upon it, and no return possible, then, at that moment, the blessed pull of the earth is felt again, and the apocalypse desired by a transcending imagination, which seemed so imminent, is repressed. At the end of "Birches" a precious balance has been restored between the claims of a redeeming imagination in its extreme, transcendent form, and the claims of common sense reality. To put it in another way, the psychic needs of change—supplied best by redemptive imagination—are balanced by the equally deep psychic need—supplied by skeptical ironic awareness—for the therapy of dull realities and everyday considerations.

Frost creates the image of comparison between the two contrary aspects. Birches symbolize the ideal life, on the one hand, and the crude scientific reality on the other. Birches are bent in the one situation by ice or snow, in the other by the swinging boy. Both the activities symbolize naturalness and worldliness, nature versus man, spiritual experience and physical experience respectively. The poem is symbolic of man's longing for a momentary stay against confusion.

The poem is lyrical in content, but it has dramatic turns in its sudden changes of ideas and images. It is rich in eloquence and expression. In the main, it is a narrative or descriptive poem full of "fact and fancy." It has the power to blend observation and imagination. "Birches" is in blank verse, which is a fit vehicle for the expression of deep thoughts and feelings. Blank verse is also suitable for the "poetry of talk". Brower thinks that the poem has a perfect rhythmic form. He writes, "The life of the poem, ever fresh, runs through the unbroken span of the verse, which will not be stopped until the end, and which carries the voice through a series of upward and downward swings re-enacting the movement of thought." To the readers who come new to Frost's work, C. Day Lewis recommends the poem "Birches" with which to begin. This is "a poem in which observation and reminiscence, realism and fancy, the light tone and the serious are perfectly blended: it moves with beautiful assurance from moon to mood, image to image, thought to thought: its variations of speed within the blank-verse meter, are masterly. Like all Frost's best poems this has worn well and weathered well, and will go on doing so, because it is soundly constructed of seasoned materials, is carefully sited, is shapely, and because a spirit of sober joy inhabits it."

### Short Notes

#### 1. Comment on the element of sarcasm in "Provide, Provide".

Frost is almost sure that the society works in the dark as much against us as for us. "Provide, Provide" sums up his views rather sarcastically. The poem deals with the story of Abishag's life—a lady with the biblical name, once beautiful like her ancestor, and "the picture pride of Hollywood," but now reduced to the status of charwoman. The nursery rhyme employed in the poem adds to the comic effect, nonetheless, it deepens the tragic mode of the inner meaning. She enters into her sorry plight from being everything to nothing because she is a peculiarly twentieth-century extension of the American Dream, full of glitter without substance, fame without identity. Frost tends to criticize the American society not only for its glamour or materialism, or its pragmatism or political conviction—"Make up you mind to die in state"—but for triteness of its moral and human values. Her simple suggestion:

Better to go down dignified  
With boughten friendship at your side  
Than none at all. Provide, Provide

confirms that the society has lost its vitality to sustain its individuals. By endorsing the hypocrisy of a "boughten friendship" in his own insinuating style, which is quiet and sensible, the poet sardonically revolts against such a society.

### Assignment

- 1 Discuss Frost's theory of Poetry.
- 2 Write short notes on the following:
  - (a) The lyrical content of "Birches"
  - (b) Comment on the nature imagery of "Birches"



## Critical Analysis of the Poems Continued

### “Provide, Provide”

Robert Frost is almost sure that the society works in the dark as much against us as for us. “Provide, Provide” sums up his view rather sarcastically. The poem deals with the story of Abishag’s life—a lady with the biblical name, once beautiful like her ancestor, and “the picture pride of Hollywood,” but now reduced to the status of a charwoman. The nursery rhyme employed in the poem adds to the comic effect, nonetheless, it deepens the tragic mode of the inner meaning. She enters into her sorry plight from being everything to nothing because “she is,” as Elaine Barry observes, “a peculiarly twentieth century extension of the American Dream, full of glitter without substance, fame without identity.” Frost tends to criticize the American society not only for its glamour or materialism, or its pragmatism or political conviction—“Make up your mind to die in state”—but for the triteness of its moral and human values. Her simple suggestion:

Better to go down dignified  
With boughten friendship at your side  
Than none at all. Provide, provide!

confirms that the society has lost its vitality to sustain its individuals. By endorsing the hypocrisy of a “boughten friendship” in his own insinuating style, which is quiet and sensible, the poet sardonically revolts against such a society. The entire tone and manner is that of the public poet speaking to his democratic culture. The diction is appropriately drawn from the accessible middle level, with the exception of “boughten,” a regionalist trace of the authentic life, meaning “store-bought” as opposed to “homemade,” the real thing as opposed to the commodified version: no major problem if the subject is ice cream or bread, but with “boughten friendship” we step into an ugly world. The poetic voice speaks, but now in mock-directives:

Die early and avoid the fate.  
Or if predestined to die late,  
Make up your mind to die in state

counseling the value of money and power; how they command fear; how fear commands, at a minimum, a share of decency from others.

But whom, really, is Frost talking to? Who is this “you”? He appears to be addressing the audience he had been reaching through the press and from the platform: “For you to doubt the likelihood” is a poetic reminder to the masses. “What worked for them might work for you” is cynical and contemptuous counsel offered to the same. The penultimate stanza, however, whose triplet rhyme condenses the entire poem, makes no sense in that rhetorical scheme

No memory of having starred  
Atones for later disregard  
Or keeps the end from being hard.

Who among the ordinary, the unassuming, the obscure from fame, has any memory of having starred, or having lost it, of having to find a way to make up for later disregard? From a rhetorical point of view, the poem becomes *incoherent here, but the incoherence is interesting and calculated: an expressive sign*. We know who has this problem: Hollywood’s poet, talking contemptuously to and at himself, looking down the road at a possible fare that he would not be able to say he hadn’t chosen, were it to turn out to be his - because he had made the decision to commit himself to that course, within the cruel range of choices our culture offers to its serious writers, whose wares are so hard to unplug. Fate works in a diametrically opposite way in “Provide, Provide”. The tragedy is that Abishag is made to live miserably as a scrubwoman, while death could bring her relief. This sort of painful fall may lie in store for anyone of us, because nothing can “keep the end from being hard” if it is destined to be so. Even if nothing good or bad happens at the hands of fate, there is a sense of compulsion and uncertainty of direction that confuses and unnerves men.

Elizabeth Jennings considers this poem a spell and incantation, a riddle, an admonition and a consolation.  
Some have relied on what they knew;  
Others on being simply true

These lines urge us to lie up even the most unworthy earthly treasure for ourselves. They are an example of Frost’s resourcefulness with language and his verbal brilliance. The rhymes fall expectedly, yet without that monotonous

“click” which spoils a poem’s design. The first three lines of the poem have a haunting, magical quality, and they prepare us for the aphorisms that are to come.

Robert Frost uses an understated Biblical reference in his poem ‘Provide, Provide’ to expand his inherently modern critique of Hollywood. Frost mentions ‘the beauty Abishag’ in the third line of the poem very casually. He is so well versed in scripture that he drops this name as non-chalantly as many would a movie star’s or a famous athlete’s. This is not to say that Frost thinks the reference insignificant nor that it is presented blasphemously, but rather that his academic background fuels his mind with such stuff for everyday use. In actuality, this one brief reference sets the basic premise for the entire poem.

Indeed, the role of ‘the beauty Abishag’ is somewhat diminutive in the Bible itself. Abishag is mentioned only briefly in I Kings 1. She is a virgin brought to king David for the purpose of re-awakening his aging body and mind. The relevant information for Frost’s purposes is that the damsel was fair and innocent and pure.

Frost suggests that this symbol of innocence is what Hollywood transforms into ‘the withered hag.’ The crone he speaks of who must now ‘wash the steps with pail and rag’ began as ‘the picture pride of Hollywood.’ Frost cleverly and subtly translates the image of Abishag for a modern vocabulary by calling up our indexes of soft and chrome faces and golden locks.

After establishing this foundation by way of his Biblical reference, Frost goes on in the third stanza to construct his diatribe on the inherent corruption of show business. He advises that one should ‘Die early’ to ‘avoid the fate’ that awaits the poor, unsuspecting aspirant movie star.

Frost introduces the theme of greed in the fourth stanza, again giving his poem a Biblical bent. He criticizes Hollywood’s lust for fortune and worldly things. Frost mockingly suggests that if you do wish to avoid the fate of Abishag,

Make the whole stock exchange your own!  
If need be occupy a throne,  
Where nobody can call you crone.

This exemplifies the tendency of Biblical themes to find their way somehow into literature. Although Frost’s intention to reference the Bible here is questionable, his theme is clearly Biblical.

The fifth stanza is the only one that proffers a sense of hope, albeit a false one. Here Frost assures the reader that if he does try, maybe he really can occupy such a throne. However, if his meaning was not clear before, Frost, in the following stanza, eradicates any ambiguity about his view of Hollywood that possibly lingers in the reader’s mind. He advises in the sixth stanza

No memory of having starred,  
Keeps the end from being hard.

He warns here that a life in show business, a spiritually devoid life, will end in a painful, lonesome way. Frost attains the highest limits of seething sarcasm.

The entire mood of ‘Provide, Provide’ is a reminiscent one. Frost yearns for forgotten times when values were, in one way, more Biblical. Not to say that the poem’s very nature is didactically Christian, for it is obviously, in the most part, a critique on Hollywood. However, the consistent underlying moralizing tone could certainly be labeled as a religious one.

### **Mending Wall**

“Mending Wall” is one of the famous poems of Robert Frost, which was written in 1913 and was published in *North of Boston* in 1914. It is based on the custom of New England farmers to replace stones dislodged from fences by winter’s “ground swell” or by hunters. The poem dramatizes the redemptive imagination in its playful phase, guided surely and confidently by a man who has his world under full control, who in his serenity is riding his realities, not being shocked by them into traumatic response. The place of “Mending Wall” in the structure of *North of Boston* suggests, in its sharp contrasts to the dark tones of some of the major poems in the volume, the psychological necessities of sustaining supreme fictions.

The opening lines evoke the coy posture of the shrewd imaginative man who understands the words of the farmer in ‘The Mountain’: “All the fun’s in how you say a thing,”

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,  
That sends a frozen-ground-swell under it  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,

And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

It does not take more than one reading of the poem to understand that the speaker is not a country primitive. He knows very well what it is "that doesn't love a wall". His fun lies in not naming it. And in not naming the scientific truth he is able to manipulate intransigent fact into the world of the mind where all things are pliable. The artful vagueness of the phrase "Something there is" is enchanting and magical, suggesting even the hushed tones of reverence before mystery in nature. And the speaker (who is not at all reverent toward nature) consciously works at deepening that sense of mystery:

The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they would have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.

The play of the mature, imaginative man is grounded in ironic awareness—and must be. Even as he excludes verifiable realities from his fictive world the unmistakable tone of scorn for the hunters comes seeping through. He may step into a fictive world but not before glancing back briefly at the brutality that attends upon the play of others. Having paid for his imaginative excursions by establishing his complex awareness, he is free to close the magic circle cast out by his playful energies, and close out the world reported by the senses ("No one has seen them made or heard them made"). In knowing how to say a thing in and through adroit linguistic manipulation, the fiction of the "something" that doesn't love a wall is created; the imagined reality stands formed before him, ready to be entered:

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"  
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.  
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."

If the fact of a broken wall is excuse enough to make a fiction about why it got that way, then that same fact may be the occasion for two together to take a journey in the mind. For those still tempted to read "Mending Wall" as political allegory—the narrator standing for a broad-minded liberal internationalism, the thick-headed second speaker representing a selfish super-patriot—they must first face the line "I let my neighbor know beyond the hill."

"Mending Wall" has nothing to do with one-world political ideals, with good or bad neighbor policies: on this point the title of the poem is helpful. It is a poem that celebrates a process, not the thing itself. It is a poem, furthermore, that distinguishes between two kinds of people: one who seizes the particular occasion of mending as fuel for the imagination and as a release from the dull ritual of work each spring and one who is trapped by work and by the New England past as it comes down to him in the form of his father's cliché. Tied as he is to his father's words that "Good fences make good neighbors," the neighbor beyond the hill is committed to an end, the fence's completion. His participation in the process of rebuilding is sheer work—he never plays the outdoor game. The narrator, however, is not committed to ends, but to the process itself that he sees as having non-utilitarian value: "There where it is we do not need the wall."

The process itself is the matrix of the play that redeems work by transforming it into the pleasure of an outdoor game in which you need to cast spells to make rocks balance. Overt magic making is acceptable in the world of this poem because we are governed by the narrator's perspective; we are in the fictive world where all things are possible, where walls go tumbling for mysterious reasons.

The theory that work and the aesthetic activity are antagonistic, polar activities of man is, in effect, disproved, as the narrator makes work take on the aesthetic dimension. The real difference between the two people in the poem is that one moves in a world of freedom; aware of the resources of the mind, he nurtures the latent imaginative power within himself and makes it a factor in everyday living; while the other, unaware of the value of imagination, must live his unliberated life without it. And this difference makes a difference in the quality of the life lived.

The narrator of "Mending Wall" does not give up easily: he tries again to tempt his neighbor to enter into the fictive world with him and to share his experience of play:

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
"Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself.

The outrageously appropriate pun on "offense" falls on deaf ears. The neighbor won't say "elves," those little folk who don't love a wall; he will not enter the play world of imagination. He moves in "darkness," our narrator concludes, "like an old-stone savage armed."

The conflict in "Mending Wall" develops as the speaker reveals more and more of himself while portraying a native Yankee and responding to the regional spirit he embodies. The opposition between observer and observed—and the tension produced by the observer's awareness of the difference—is crucial to the poem. Ultimately, the very knowledge of this opposition becomes itself a kind of barrier behind which the persona, for all his dislike of walls, finds himself confined.

Ironically, although the speaker complains about his neighbor's unfriendliness, his own susceptibility to subjective vision and his willingness to let his imagination run away with him predispose him also to prejudicial attitudes. He sees the wall and its symbolism virtually overwhelms him. By contrast, the farmer, who surely knows that "fence" is a misnomer for the country-style stonewall they are working on, sees no sinister implications in it and evidently uses the slightly imprecise adage to show his desire not "to give offense." It was a brilliant touch by Frost to use wordplay in exposing his persona's central misjudgment. For wordplay is the mark of the poet, and it is a poet's sensibility that so delightfully plays this speaker false. It is only in the imagination that the fence gives offence, and it is only this visionary speaker who insists a wall cannot be innocent, cannot be the benign fence of the farmer's precept.

Wall imagery pervades his poetry, as a conscious poetic image and as a psychosexual marker of control and limitation. That the speaker is the one who calls the neighbor to mend the wall is vitally important, then, but it is not clear that Frost meant for the speaker to be ironically perceived as a hypocrite. The simple explanation, that the speaker acts out of a sense of inevitability, knowing his neighbor's habits, seems hardly enough given the contextual symbolism of the wall in Frost's poetry; the psychological explanation attendant upon this version might suggest that Frost's conscious intent was subverted by his own unconscious need for walls. So while Frost might not mean the speaker to be self-parodic, the reader might judge that there is an ironic discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, both by the speaker and by the poet. On a deeper level even than this is the possibility that Frost was aware of, had taken account of and justified, his own need for barriers. One does, after all, need something against which to push. In this case, the poem might be completely unironic, for while both men are engaged in the same task, each brings a different narrative to it, the one limited to a thoughtless cliché, the other enriched philosophically.

"Mending Wall" famously contains these two apparently conflicting statements. One begins the poem, the other ends it, and both are repeated twice. Which are we supposed to believe? What does Frost mean? "The secret of what it means I keep," he said. Of course he was being cagey, but not without reason.

At a reading given at the Library of Congress in 1962 Frost told this anecdote: In England, two or three years ago, Graham Greene said to me, "The most difficult thing I find in recent literature is your having said that good fences make good neighbors." And I said, "I wish you knew more about it, without my helping you." We laughed, and I left it that way.

Why doesn't Frost want to say what he meant? When asked, he'd reply, "What do you want me to do, say it again in different and less good words?" "You get more credit for thinking," Frost wrote in a letter, "if you restate formulae or cite cases that fall in easily under formulae, but all the fun is outside: saying things that suggest formulae that won't formulate—that almost but don't quite formulate." The formula is the easy answer that turns out to be, if right or wrong in general, certainly inadequate in particular. The formula, like a paraphrase of the poem itself, is made of those "less good words" the poet has tried to resist.

By the end of the poem the wall has become a symbol and the two farmers have turned into allegorical figures representing opposing views of freedom and confinement, reason and rigidity of mind, tolerance and violence, civilization and savagery. There is no mistaking the poet's meaning, or his attitude toward what the wall represents. It stands for the barrier between human contact and understanding. All that is primitive, fearful, irrational and hostile in the neighbor erects it. It is opposed by a higher "something" that Frost recognizes as in himself, the desire not to be alone, walled in, but to be one with the rest of the world.

"Mending Wall" opens with a riddle: "Something there is". And a riddle, after all, is a series of hints calculated to make us imagine and then name its hidden subject. The poem doesn't begin, "I hate walls," or even, "Something dislikes a wall." Its first gesture is one of elaborate and playful concealment, a calculated withholding of meaning. Notice also that it is the speaker himself who repairs the wall after the hunters have broken it. And it is the speaker each year that notifies his neighbor when the time has come to meet and mend the wall. Then can we safely claim that the speaker views the wall simply as a barrier between human contact and understanding?

Speaker and neighbor work together and equally. Although the job is tedious and hard, the speaker considers it "just another kind of outdoor game / One on a side." He acknowledges that his whimsical spell—"stay where you are until our backs are turned!" is useless, and that the result is impermanent and perhaps less important than something else. For all practical purposes this particular wall is not needed. But the project of mending it has taken on significance: "spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder / If I could put a notion in his head . . ."

The speaker's mischievous impulse is to plant an idea. He does not say that he wants to change his neighbor's mind, to make him believe what he himself believes. He wants to nudge the neighbor's imagination, just as a teacher might wish to challenge a student. So he asks questions: "why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it / Where there are cows? But here there are no cows." But the neighbor is unwilling to play this game of teacher and student. He won't answer the questions or consider the riddle. The speaker could suggest "Elves" but "it's not elves exactly," and of course it's not elves at all. The speaker's frustration is beginning to get the better of him. He wants to be fanciful—he wants to talk—and his neighbor does not. More importantly, and like a good teacher, "I'd rather / He said it for himself."

The poem does not merely advocate one position over another. It asks neither for advocacy nor for application, but for investigation. It is not a statement but a performance. It enacts its meanings. Who, finally, is right about the wall? The poem does not answer that question exactly, swerving off into deeper and more interesting territory. It uses that problem to engage us and this is the poem's pleasure, and its strategy. Sometimes good fences do indeed make good neighbors, and we might recall that the phrase "mending fences" means to restore communication and neighborliness. Equally true is the notion that something doesn't love a wall. The riddle isn't difficult one. We know that natural forces disturb those boulders, that the frozen ground swell is frost. The wall in the poem is not "the barrier between human contact and understanding." Certainly a wall may be just that, but it can also serve precisely the opposite function.

The repetition of "between" should give us pause and remind us of its two equally common meanings: "between" as separation, as in "something's come between us," and "between" as what might be shared and held in common, as in "a secret between two people" or "a bond between friends." The wall divides but it also connects, if you look at it that

way. All the meaning is in how you look at it. "Mending Wall" is a poem that lures the unwary reader into believing that thinking is merely voting, choosing up sides, taking out of the poem what most fits our own preconceived ideas. It adopts this subversive tactic because its ultimate purpose is to challenge us to go behind what we might find initially appealing in the formulas. "We ask people to think," Frost says, "and we don't show them what thinking is." "Mending Wall" is less a poem about what to think than it is poem about what thinking is, and where it might lead.

Northrop Frye believes that the center of the poem as two human attitudes toward a wall, one wintry, one spring-like. The two men in the poem this way: "One moves in a world of freedom because, aware of the resources of the mind, he nurtures the latent imaginative power within himself and makes it a factor in every-day living, while the other, unaware of the value of imagination, must live his unliberated life without it." It need not be assumed that Frost favors the walls-down, spring-like attitude over the walls-up, colder one, only that he is playing with the contrast between them. In fact Frost said, "Maybe I was both fellows in the poem." "I've got a man there; he's both of those people but he's man—both of them, he's a wall builder and a wall toppler. He makes boundaries and he breaks boundaries. That's man." Indeed that there are two such types and that one person can be both—those very facts make up one of the human walls that the poem is about.

It seems Frost is working with an infantile fantasy about breaking down the wall that marks self so as to return to a state of closeness to another. To lose the boundary between self and other is to perceive one's own impulses as part of the outer world and to feel the actions of the outer world as one's own. Keats called this the essential ability for a poet: negative capability, being able to put one's own identity aside and imagine oneself into the things and persons of the world outside.

### **The Road Not Taken**

In this fine and beautiful lyric, Robert Frost tells us that once while traveling all alone, he stood at a fork in the road, undecided which road to take. An awareness of human limitation that he "could not travel both/And be one traveler" enhanced the complexity of his predicament, and made the act of choice more difficult and significant. He waits, watches and decides to take "the other" road. He chose the one, which was a little less frequented, though actually there was no such difference. And one that particular morning when the poet made the decision, both the roads were equally untrodden. Thus it is the sameness of the road that made the choice more crucial and the act of choice more daring. He knows the fickleness of human fate and the uncertainty of human situations. He realizes fully how the choice of one road conditions him to make further choices; how one commitment leads to a series of commitments. It is not the act of choice but nature of choice that has made all the difference. "The Road Not Taken" is a prime example of a poem which succeeded in reaching out and taking hold, then something interesting emerges about the kind of relation to other people, to readers - or to students and college presidents - Frost was willing to live with, indeed to cultivate. "The Road Not Taken," perhaps the most famous example of Frost's own claims to conscious irony and "the best example in all of American poetry of a wolf in sheep's clothing." Thompson documents the ironic impulse that produced the poem as Frost's "gently teasing" response to his good friend, Edward Thomas, who would in their walks together take Frost down one path and then regret not having taken a better direction. According to Thompson, Frost assumes the mask of his friend, taking his voice and his posture, including the un-Frostian sounding line, "I shall be telling this with a sigh," to poke fun at Thomas's vacillations. Thompson's critical evaluation is simply that Frost had, in that particular poem, "carried himself and his ironies too subtly," so that the poem is, in effect, a failure. Yet is it simply that a too exact parody of a mediocre poetic voice, which becomes among the sentimental masses, ironically, one of the most popularly beloved of Frost's "wise" poems? This is the easiest way to come to terms critically with the popularity of "The Road Not Taken" but it is not, perhaps, the only or best way: in this critical case, the road less traveled may indeed be more productive. Frost's protean ability to assume dramatic masks never elsewhere included such a friend as Thomas, whom he loved and admired, tellingly, more than "anyone in England or anywhere else in the world". It might be argued that in becoming Thomas in "The Road Not Taken," Frost momentarily loses his defensive preoccupation with disguising lyric involvement to the extent that ironic weapons fail him. A rare instance in Frost's poetry in which there is a loved and reciprocal figure, the poem is divested of the need to keep the intended reader at bay. "The Road Not Taken" is an ironic commentary on the autonomy of choice in a world governed by instincts, unpredictable contingencies, and limited possibilities. It parodies and demurs from the biblical idea that God is the "way" that can and should be followed and the American idea that nature provides the path to spiritual enlightenment.

The title refers doubly to bravado for choosing a road less traveled but also to regret for a road of lost possibility and the eliminations and changes produced by choice. "The Road Not Taken" reminds us of the consequences of the principle of selection in all aspects of life, namely that all choices in knowledge or in action exclude many others and lead to an ironic recognition of our achievements. At the heart of the poem is the romantic mythology of flight from a fixed world of limited possibility into a wilderness of many possibilities combined with trials and choices through which the pilgrim progresses to divine perfection.

The poem also draws on "the culturally ancient and pervasive idea of nature as allegorical book, out of which to draw explicit lessons for the conduct of life (nature as self-help text)." I would argue that what it is subverting is something more profound than the sentimental expectations of genteel readers of fireside poetry . . .

The drama of the poem is of the persona making a choice between two roads. As evolved creatures, we should be able to make choices, but the poem suggests that our choices are irrational and aesthetic. The sense of meaning and morality derived from choice is not reconciled but, rather obliterated and cancelled by a non-moral monism. Frost is trying to reconcile impulse with a conscience that needs goals and harbors deep regrets. The verb Frost uses is 'taken', which means something less conscious than 'chosen' 'Take' suggests more of an unconscious grasp than a deliberate choice. Of course, it also suggests action as opposed to deliberation. In "The Road Not Taken" the persona's reasons wear thin, and choice is confined by circumstances and the irrational:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;  
Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same.

Both roads had been worn "about the same," though his "taking" the second is based on its being less worn. The basis of selection is individuation, variation, and "difference": taking the one "less traveled by." That he "could not travel both / And be one traveler" means not only that he will never be able to return but also that experience alters the traveler; he would not be the same by the time he came back. Frost is presenting an anti-myth in which origin, destination, and return are undermined by a non-progressive development. And the hero has only illusory choice.

This psychological representation of the developmental principle of divergence strikes to the core of Darwinian theory. Species are made and survive when individuals diverge from others in a branching scheme, as the roads diverge for the speaker. The process of selection implies an un-retracing process of change through which individual kinds are permanently altered by experience. Though the problem of making a choice at a crossroads is almost a commonplace, the drama of the poem conveys a larger mythology by including evolutionary metaphors and suggesting the passage of eons.

The change of tense in the penultimate line—to 'took—is part of the speaker's projection of what he "shall be telling," but only retrospectively and after "ages and ages." Though he cannot help feeling free in selection, the speaker's wisdom is proved only through survival of an un-retraceable course of experience:

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.  
I shall be telling this with a sigh

Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
 Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
 I took the one less traveled by,  
 And that has made all the difference.

The poem leaves one wondering how much “difference” ‘all’ implies, given that the “roads” already exist, that possibilities are limited. Exhausted possibilities of human experience diminish great regret over “the road not taken” or bravado for “the road not taken” by everyone else. The poem does raise questions about whether there is any justice in the outcome of one’s choices or anything other than aesthetics, being “fair,” in our moral decisions. The speaker’s impulse to individuation is mitigated by a moral dilemma of being unfair or cruel, in not stepping on leaves, “treading” enough to make them “black.” It might also imply the speaker’s recognition that individuation will mean treading on others.

### Two Tramps in Mud Time

“Two Tramps in Mud Time” was published in the *Saturday Review of Literature* on October 6, 1934, and was later included in *A Further Range*. The poem is the most characteristic of Robert Frost, and speaks highly of the dignity of manual labor. It is his most autobiographical poem where he probes his own personality and gives the reader glimpses about his activities. It is a striking example of the combination of psychological perception with visual imagination. The poet’s object in living is to unite his avocation and his vocation just as his “two eyes make one in sight”. Poems of this nature are very few in Frost, one because his habitual mode of poetic composition is dramatic and not lyrical, and also because Frost likes not to reveal himself in his poems. He did not often make his own person the stuff of his poetry.

The initial action in “Two Tramps in Mud Time” represents the poet as engaged in the ritualistic routine of splitting firewood in his farmyard, and as enjoying the play of such work until he is embarrassed by the passing presence of two expert lumberjacks. Their mocking comment suggests that they need, and could better perform the work he is doing. The poet is aware that if his own motive is more love than need and if their motive is more need than love, perhaps he should relinquish the task to them for pay. Nevertheless, he concludes with puritanical assertiveness, and there are other facts to consider. In splitting wood, a man may find a physical and emotional pleasure similar to the one Frost describes in this poem and in “Mowing”.

True to the nature of the theme, the movement of poem is lyrical and reflective. Frost’s habitual mode of recreation was farming, and the tramps once caught him splitting wood in the year. That day

Giving a loose to my soul  
 I spent on the unimportant wood.

The author cut the wood for pleasure, the situation around being pleasant. Frost here indulges in a series of descriptions of nature and its moods as though it was siding him in his pleasant task of woodcutting. The tramps, however, insist that the wood cut by the author must not be his,

I had not right to play  
 With what was another man’s work for grain?  
 My right might be love but theirs was need.

They insist on their right to carry away the wood  
 And where the two exist in twain  
 Theirs was the better right agreed.

Frost introduces into the otherwise lyrical and descriptive analysis of his pastime a little quirk, a dramatic turn. This he does as an occasion to philosophical reflection. After all, the central principle of the poem is to state the philosophical idea,

My object in living is to write  
 My avocation and my vocation  
 As my two eyes make one in sight  
 Only where love and need are one,  
 And the work is play for mortal stakes,  
 Is the deed ever really done?  
 For Heaven and the future’s sakes.

All the details of the poem point to this controlling and central idea. As Charles Kaplam says, “Two Tramps in Mud



Time" is a narrative all the details of which point to the controlling and central idea of a delicately poised equilibrium—the desire, means, and necessity of attaining balance are the subject behind the incident." In this philosophical statement Frost speaks directly in his own person. However, the last stanza, which declares the necessity for uniting vocation and avocation, love and need, work and play as the ideal way of doing a deed, does not resolve the dilemma of who should be chopping the wood. There seems to exist a separation between love and need, work and play.

Yet there is need and need: there is financial need and there is emotional need. There is also right and right—the right of a man to expect sympathy for his need to earn a living and the right of a man to chop wood—especially if it is on his own property—if he wants to do so. In fact the recognition on the part of the speaker is a generous and an unselfish one:

Nothing on either side was said.  
 They knew they had but to stay their stay  
 And all their logic would fill my head:  
 As that I had no right to play  
 With what was another man's work for gain.  
 My right might be love but theirs was need.  
 And where the two exist in twain  
 Theirs was the better right—agreed.

The claim on his conscience may not have been valid or fair, but it worked all the same. Their "logic" did fill his head as they had counted on its doing, and whether he gives up the task or not is irrelevant, for once their logic had filled his head, the pleasure in the task would be gone. At first their claiming the task simply intensified his love for it:

The time when most I loved my task  
 These two must make me love it more  
 By coming with what they come to ask

The resolution of the poem will depend on whether feeling wins out over logic, and then the question is which feeling—sympathetic feeling for another or feeling about the task that unites work and play, love and need. The separation the speaker sees between work and play, love and need, is, after all, the separation he assumes the tramps to see—it is their logic, and he shows himself to be very sensitive in assuming it. If the conflict is resolved on his terms, we must assume he will give up the task should these claims remain separate; that he will continue to do it should they be united. "Theirs was the better right" only "when the two exist in twain".

Here, as elsewhere in Frost, we are shown the seriousness of "play," for this activity was "play" as long as one did not do it from motives of gain. Pay then was what defined it as work rather than play, that made it vital and "right." That it was hard work in either case is beside the point; that there was something at stake—pride in the quality of the workmanship and the aim—is beside the point. The crucial question is what will be the gain. Of what importance is it to the chopper? At least that becomes the question once the speaker feels himself to have been "caught" in the act which leads him to consider the wood "unimportant" despite the fact that he was losing his soul, giving vent to whatever was pent up:

The blows that a life of self-control  
 Spares to strike for the common good

Losing his soul in spending these blows on the wood is an important activity whether the wood is important or not. In the inability of the tramps to understand his needs, Frost proves them inferior to the speaker who sees theirs. It is once more, a matter of how one is reading the scene and what one brings to the reading. Frost reads them better than they read him. They see what their agenda permits them to see, a criticism we could level at the socialist critics who made the poem—and Frost—a target on their agenda, often unfairly, certainly missing rich possibilities of interpretation, and maybe missing the point or mistaking the resolution.

Another need that the task answers is for a physical connection, muscular exertion, pitting oneself against an earthly tree, a nature that shows crystal teeth, that moves capriciously between March and May and back in a moment:

You'd think I never had felt before  
 The weight of an ax-head poised aloft,  
 The grip on earth of outspread feet.

The life of muscles rocking soft  
And smooth and moist in vernal heat.

A deed done "for...Future's sake" must exert weighty grip and muscle in the face of so uncertain and capricious a future. It must require poise and balance as surely as does that boy mastering birches.

In this poem, as in "Birches," "love" is introduced where it has not seemed to be the subject: love of the work, love of the feel of the earth, and

The life of muscles rocking soft  
And smooth and moist in vernal heat

love as it relates to labor, love as it relates to need. We see that only in uniting these will the speaker be entitled to make a claim that equals the claim of the tramps, for love must be related to need and to effort. Only in applying this union to any relationship, any task, or act of creativity does the last stanza seem to be genuinely a part of the poem and not simply the gratuitous non-resolution of Frost's poetic career, which it is so often taken to be.

But yield who will to their separation,  
My object in living is to unite  
My avocation and my vocation  
As my two eyes make one in sight.  
Only where love and need are one,  
And the work is play for mortal stakes,  
Is the deed ever really done  
For Heaven and the future's sakes.

Love and need, then, must be one, or the relationship, whether in marriage, in friendship, or in art, is exploitation. But there is another factor in a love relationship—in a relationship with any other human being or with one's task—which distinguishes love and need from exploitation, and that is "spending" oneself rather than merely spending another: "be it art, politics, school, church, business, love, or marriage—in a piece of work or in a career. Strongly spent in synonymous with kept. . . "The speaker in this poem speaks of the soul-loosing blows he "spent on unimportant wood," and if anything entitled him to "keep" the task rather than to give it up, it is the effort, the love with which he spent himself on the task. In the above quotation from "A Constant Symbol," Frost had been speaking of writing poetry: "Every single poem written regular is a symbol small or great of the way the will has to pitch into commitments deeper and deeper to a rounded conclusion and then be judged for whether any original intention it had has been strongly spent or weakly lost". The question of respect for self, of integrity of self as opposed to giving up of self, is posed in two ways in "Two Tramps in Mud Time," for there are two relationships: the relationship between the speaker and the two tramps, and the relationship between the speaker and his work. If the relationship between himself and his work is one of love, need, and spending of himself for his task and the perfection of the job for its own sake, then that may take precedence over a relationship with two strangers where there is no love, no pride in work, no effort, no mutuality of give and take. The self *and* its labor of love are united and preserved, kept, in the face of claims that would separate that unity. If, however, the task separates love and need, if nothing further will be "spent" on it, then the job is exploitative. It had better be given to those who can use it for gain.

While the drama of the poem is more overtly social than sexual, the relationship between love and need, keeping and spending oneself, respect for the needs of the self and the other, and willingness or unwillingness to surrender to it are clearly also applicable to a discussion of love, especially as the poet has drawn attention to this poem in such a connection. If we see the sexual undertone of "outspread feet. The life of muscles rocking soft / And smooth and moist in vernal heat" it would not be the only poem, as we shall see, to connect earth and love, the act of earth-labor with the act of love. Like many of Frost's poems, "Two, Tramps in Mud Time" unites divergent lines of thought by placing in tension opposed or contradictory values: the self and the other, the literal and the symbolic, the general and the particular, the straight-forward and the ironic, and so on. It is generally agreed that, at the end of the poem, Frost leaves it to his readers to apply to their own lives, to their "avocations and vocations," the maxim that love and need, work and play, can and should be one. The wood-cutting is obviously symbolic, so the matter is usually re-framed as follows: is Frost urging that we sacrifice self for others, or are we to expect those "others" to look out for themselves?

Commentators have always seen the tramps and narrator as locked into opposition. Actually, the narrator is not opposed to the tramps at all. The narrator, Frost himself, is “lurking” behind a second or pseudo-self, momentarily eclipsed by a world-view in which the terms of the debate are set—and more importantly by a worldview whose chief characteristic is that there is a debate at all. In short, Frost achieves his effects by manipulating the point of view from which we see and understand the world of the poem.

This becomes clearer towards the end when Frost not only talks about those preceding oppositions as unified, but unifies *them* with various rhetorical devices: paradox (“work is play”), pun (“play for mortal stakes”), simile (“as my two eyes make one in sight”), repetition of the conjunctive “and,” unity of idea (the idea of unity itself), and the unifying of form and content. As a result we learn a way of seeing oppositions as unified wholes, which resolves conflict not by avoidance or negation, but by asserting the equal importance of the opposed parts, in nature (cold and warm, water and frost), in self (body and soul, avocation and vocation), in human relations (love and need, narrator and tramps), and in our relations with the transcendent (Heaven and the future’s sakes).

### **Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**

“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” was written and published in 1923 in the volume of poems entitled *New Hampshire*. This is one of the most widely read lyrics of the twentieth century and a perfect example of Frost’s superb craftsmanship as a master lyricist. The poem came to him after he had been working all night on his long poem entitled, *New Hampshire*. He went outside to look at the sun and it came to him. He explains: “I always thought it was the product of auto-intoxication coming from tiredness.” Frost has made several remarks, which stir the reader to grasp the far-reaching meaning of the seemingly descriptive poem. He said, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening was the kind of poem he would like to print on one page to be followed with forty pages of footnotes. It contained all I ever knew besides a series of almost reckless commitments. I feel good in having guarded it so. It is my heavy duty poem to be examined for the rime pairs.”

The speaker in this brief monologue is a farmer who has stopped his sleigh for a time to admire the snow falling over the night-darkened woods. His horse, puzzled by the pause, takes the same attitude towards it, which would be taken by anyone with a worldly scheme of values. The stop serves no material purpose, so why make it? In time, the traveler himself recalls worldly demands—remembers that he has “promises to keep” and a schedule to follow. It is perhaps a simple story of a momentary halt to admire beauty, in the business of living. Or perhaps if one wants to follow one of the unobtrusive suggestions, it is a picture of a man who, in the midst of life, has a brief and dim comprehension of the inevitable sleep that is death.

Frost, through his remarks, has clearly indicated that the poem has to be explored at various levels. It begins as a dramatic lyric and then breaks into the middle of an incident.

So there is a drama in miniature revealed with setting and lightening, actors and all other paraphernalia complete. A rural traveler is the actor. He is attracted by the majestic beauty of the woods and briefly describes the circumstances under which he stops his horse drawn sleigh to enjoy, in spite of cold and loneliness, the strange beauty of white snowflakes falling against the background of dark tress. A careful study reveals that the poem is not primarily a description of nature but the dramatic utterance of a person on the occasion of experiencing the sense of being in the scene. He reveals that there are many commonsense reasons why he should not stop; but the spell of the moment is so strong that the traveler is reluctant to leave. Gradually, the poem reaches a climax of responsibility, the promises are to be kept and the obligations to be fulfilled. It is the last stanza that suggests two planes of reference where the ordinary errand becomes the journey of life, a journey including pleasures and hardships, duties and distances.

John Cierdi says that the dramatic force of the poem is best observable as a progression in the three scenes. The first scene that presents the wood as the property of a man that holds for him an economic value and practical purpose, establishes some unspecified relationship between the man and wood. It is important to note here that the errand is left generalized, perhaps to suggest an errand in life and therefore, life itself. The owner represents one of the forces of the poem—an order of reality from which the poet has separated himself for the moment. Thus the scene comes to establish not only a relation between the man and the woods but the fact that man’s relation with nature begins with his separation from mankind. The second scene that is covered by the second and third stanzas introduces a foil. The foil here is the horse. The animal has been conditioned to a routine of purposeful behavior. The traveler imagines

himself to be questioned by the horse: What could be the purpose of stopping there, away from bin or stall? Implicitly it means that the behavior of the speaker is not purposeful. He watches the wood, with no particular attention but just for watching, for contemplating and for appreciating. Obviously now the horse becomes a symbol without losing its identity as a horse. One senses that the darkness and snowfall symbolize a death wish, however momentary, that is that hunger for a final surrender that a man may feel but a beast cannot. Thus by the end of the second scene it becomes clear that the poem establishes man's relation to the world of the wood owner, his relation to the brute world of the horse and the presence of the unknowable world, the movement of all engulfing snow across all the orders of life, the wood owner's and the horse's—with a difference that the man knows of the second dark within the dark of which the horse cannot and the wood owner will not know. The third scene introduces a new force in the poem that can be named as obligation, personal commitment of duty. Finally the speaker has the decision to make. Can he indulge in his mood forever or must he move on. He repeats the thought and the poem ends here. It is the repetition in the last two lines that transforms "miles to go" and "sleep" into symbols. Many critics have given many interpretations but Frost himself has given no answer. It must be noted here that there are no pointed or overt symbols, no literary parallels or signposts to guide the reader yet he sees the poet's personal experience as the image of an experience common to all, that of preferring the arduous journey through human experience to an irresponsible indulgence in escapism. Hence the poem establishes a contrast between the 'merely natural and the human', a theme which continually preoccupied Frost.

Austin Warren says that Frost achieved the broader area of meaning by the use of "a natural symbolism": sleep, darkness and snow, by their very nature suggest death. Likewise, woods are an archetypal image for perilous enchantment. No doubt things have concrete meaning but they also point out certain other things, more fundamental realities beyond one particular experience. The enchantment of the woods opposed by the promises to be kept; the sleep, which he will enjoy after fulfilling obligation, will be a deserved reward in contrast to the unearned pleasure of looking at the woods. Hence the meaning of the poem grows out of the symbolic reference of a special kind. It works not through symbols and allegories but grows rather through a special perspective: "the point of view from which they are seen." Here as in many characteristic poems the point of vantage is the rural world and the poetic vision it reveals is pastoral. The poem is truly representative of Frost's art. The indirect and subtly suggestive quality of its symbolism results from its preference for implication rather than explicit statement. He does not interpret the scene; he uses it as the medium through which to view reality.

The visible sign of the poet's preoccupation—the word is not too strong—is the recurrent image, particularly in his earlier work, of dark woods and trees. Often, as in the lyric with which we have begun, the world of the woods..., a world offering perfect quiet and solitude, exists side by side with the realization that there is also another world, a world of people and social obligations. Both worlds have claims on the poet. He stops by woods on this "darkest evening of the year" to watch them "fill up with snow," and lingers so long that his "little horse" shakes his harness bells "to ask if there is some mistake." The poet is put in mind of the "promises" he has to keep, of the miles he still must travel. We are not told, however, that the call of social responsibility proves stronger than the attraction of the woods, which are "lovely" as well as "dark and deep"; the poet and his horse have not moved on at the poem's end. The dichotomy of the poet's obligations both to the woods and to a world of "promises"—the latter filtering like a barely heard echo through the almost hypnotic state induced by the woods and falling snow—is what gives this poem its singular interest.... The artfulness of "Stopping by Woods" consists in the way the two worlds are established and balanced. The poet is aware that the woods by which he is stopping belong to someone in the village; they are owned by the world of men. But at the same time they are his, the poet's woods, too, by virtue of what they mean to him in terms of emotion and private signification.

What appears to be "simple" is shown to be not *really* simple, what appears to be innocent not *really* innocent.... The poet is fascinated and lulled by the empty wastes of white and black. The repetition of "sleep" in the final two lines suggests that he may succumb to the influences that are at work. There is no reason to suppose that these influences are benignant. It is, after all, "the darkest evening of the year," and the poet is alone "between the woods and frozen lake." His one bond with the security and warmth of the "outer" world, the "little horse" that wants to be about his errand, is an unsure one. The ascription of "lovely" to this scene of desolate woods, effacing snow, and black night

complicates rather than alleviates the mood when we consider how pervasive are the connotations of dangerous isolation. Throughout the poem—brief in actual time, but with the deceptive length of dream—we are being drawn into silence and sleep, yet always with the slightest contrary pull of having to go on. The very tentative tone of the opening line lets us into the mood without our quite sensing where it will lead, just as the ordinariness of ‘though’ at the end of the second line assures us that we are in this world. But by repeating the ‘o’ sound, ‘though’ also starts the series of rhymes that will soon get the better of traveler and reader. The impression of aloneness in the first two lines prepares for concentration on seeing the strange process not of snow falling, but of woods ‘filling up.’ The intimacy of “My little horse must think it queer” reminds us again of the everyday man and his life back home, but ‘queer’ leads to an even lonelier scene, a kind of northern nowhere connected with the strangeness of the winter solstice, “The darkest evening of the year.”

In this second stanza the unbroken curve of rhythm adds to the sense of moving imperceptibly into a spell-world, as we dimly note the linking of the rhymes with the first stanza. The pattern is catching on to the reader, pulling him into its drowsy current. The lone quietness of the third stanza is heightened by the ‘shake’ of bells, but ‘to ask,’ humorously taking the horse’s point of view, tells us that the driver is awake and sane. The sounds he now attends to so closely are very like silence, images of regular movement and softness of touch. The transition to the world of sleep, almost reached in the next stanza—goes by diminution of consonantal sounds, from ‘gives . . . shake . . . ask . . . mistake (gutturals easily roughened to fit the alert movement of the horse) to the sibilant ‘sound’s the sweep ‘Of easy wind . . . Sweep,’ by virtue of the morpheme ‘-eep,’ is closely associated with other words used for ‘hushed, diminishing’ actions: seep, sleep, peep, weep, creep. The quietness, concentration, and rocking motion of the last two lines of stanza three prepare perfectly for the hypnosis of the fourth. (Compare similar effects in ‘After Apple-Picking.’) ‘Lonely’ recalls the tender alluringness of ‘easy’ and ‘down,’ ‘dark’ and ‘deep’ the strangeness of the time and the mystery of the slowly filling woods. The closing lines combine most beautifully the contrary pulls of the poem, with the repetitions, the settling down on one sleepy rhyme running against what is being said, and with the speaker echoing his prose sensible self in ‘I have promises’ and ‘miles to go’ while he almost seems to be nodding off.

‘There is nothing more composing than composition,’ Frost has said, and ‘Stopping by Woods’ shows both the process and the effect as the poet-traveler composes himself for sleep. The metaphorical implication is well hidden, with no hint offered like

a call to come in

To the dark and lament.

The dark nowhere of the woods, the seen and heard movement of things, and the lullaby of inner speech are an invitation to sleep—and winter sleep is again close to easeful death. (‘Dark’ and ‘deep’ are typical Romantic adjectives.) All of these poetic suggestions are in the purest sense symbolic: we cannot say in other terms what they are ‘of,’ though we feel their power. There are critics who have gone much further in defining what Frost ‘meant’; but perhaps sleep is mystery enough. Frost’s poem is symbolic in the manner of Keats’s ‘To Autumn,’ where the overt meaning is equally vivid and equally unnameable. In contrast to ‘The Oven Bird’ and ‘Come In,’ the question of putting the mystery in words is not raised; indeed the invitation has been expressed more by song than speech. The rejection though outspoken is as instinctive as the felt attraction to the alluring darkness. From this and similar lyrics, Frost might be described as a poet of rejected invitations to voyage in the ‘definitely imagined regions’ that Keats and Yeats more readily enter.

The poem’s formal qualities, while not obviously “experimental,” also contribute to its balancing act. The closing repetition emphasizes the speaker’s commitment to his responsibilities. It also emphasizes the repetitive tedium that makes the woods an attractive alternative to those responsibilities. This leaves open the question of just how much arguing is left to be done before any action is taken. The rhyme scheme contributes to the play. Its linked pattern seems completed and resolved in the final stanza, underlining the effect of closure: *aaba, bhcb, cc’c, dddd*. But is a repeated word a rhyme? Is the resolution excessive; does the repeated line work as a sign of *forced* closure? None of this is resolved; it is kept in complementary suspension. Similarly, the poem is clearly a made thing, an object or artifact, as its formal regularities attest; it is also an event in continuous process, as its present participial title announces and as the present tense employed throughout suggests. At the same time, the poem has a narrative thrust that tempts us to see the speaker move on, just as too much insistence on the poem as stranded in the present tense falsely makes it out as static.

## The Onset

"The Onset" examines a theme similar to that of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening". The poem records Frost's optimism based on his understanding of the reality of life. He does not shut his eyes to evil and death that are hard facts, but his attitude is not pessimistic. The presence of evil must be recognized and faced with courage and determination. The onset in the poem is the onset of snow. Frost has observed the phenomenon every winter and noticed that it is "always the same". There is heavy snowfall every winter. The snow falls in such abundance that even the dark woods become white.

When there is the first onset of snow, the snowflakes fall with a hissing sound, a song that they would never sing again throughout the winter. The use of the word hissing makes the snow a symbol of death and evil and links up with the snake-image of the next stanza. The snow fall is so abundant that the poet stumbles as he walks abroad looking around. He stumbles and gives up his efforts at walking out, like a dying man who finds himself helpless at the approach of Death, gives up his fight against evil, and "lets death descend upon where he is." He resigns himself to death, gives up his fight against evil, without having won any victory over it, and dies as if he had never lived and fought against evil. The poet stumbles like such a man, but the use of the word 'almost' is significant. He stumbles, but only 'almost' and not totally. He despairs but his despair is not total. He still has some hopes of the victory of good over evil. Frost depicts two aspects of the inevitability of the cycles of nature. It is on a fated night that winter comes and it is inevitable that it will end:

Winter death has never tried  
The earth but it has failed.

The second inevitability places the first in perspective for it shows that life, here symbolized by the April rill, the peeper's croak, and the white birth, is permanent, outlasting the temporary death of winter.

Frost shows a Presbyterian and a Swedenborgian impact on his religious thinking. "The Onset" portrays a God, who is angry and demands self-abasement as a chastisement for the sins of life. It is the Puritanical God of the bygone ages as the allusions suggest. He direct retribution against man who has also come to learn through "trial by existence" that "all the precedent is on my side." So the God of the Puritanical, Christian tradition is no longer the dominant power. It is needless to say that with the new awareness man will need a different kind of God as "something has to be left to God," who is there and expresses Himself through the natural world around.

## Robert Frost : After Apple-picking

"After Apple-Picking" is one of those poems of Frost which illustrate almost perfectly his theory of poetic creation. First of all, note Frost's statement on the process of poetic composition:

It begins in delight and ends in wisdom. The figure is the same as for love. No one can really hold that the ecstasy should be static and stand still in one place. It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life – not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion.

Here is Frost's account of how a poem gets imitated, how it runs a course of its own, and how it ends in a certain clarification about life, which provides a temporary stay against confusion. Frost's theory stated here is essentially romantic, reiterating the Wordsworthian "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." Also like the romantic poetic theory, Frost's composition has its own organic growth. In a way, it measures up to the Aristotelian requirement of form having a beginning, a middle, and an end. The poem develops towards the growth of fruit (wisdom), and yet it is not didactic. It is only an internal resolution of a problem, a clarification, a temporary stay against confusion. In that sense, the poem is dramatic, presenting wisdom or truth within the framework of a given situation.

Let us now see how well Frost's "After Apple-Picking" illustrates the poet's own theory of poetic creation. Not that poems are (or can be) composed to illustrate a theory. In fact, theories are evolved (or inferred) from the composed poems. But if we have both available to us, we can make sense of both by seeking correspondence between the two. Apparently, the poem "says" nothing, and only renders a monologue of the speaker. As the title itself suggests, what is being monologued is what the speaker feels after he has done with apple-picking. Like a typical Romantic or

Victorian poem, it depicts a mood. However, as we move on reading the account being given by the speaker, the poem assumes larger overtones. The activity of apple-picking becomes every activity of life. The mood of the speaker becomes every one's mood. Not only that, the speaker's activity becomes the act of living; the poem a record of life. As Frost himself said, every poem is a metaphor. Decidedly, the poem called "After Apple-Picking" becomes a metaphor, yielding more and more suggestions about itself as we go over the poem's text. As someone has remarked, a metaphor is like throwing a stone in the pool of water. It sets a number of waves which keep enlarging into wider and wider circles. Some such thing always happens with a Frost poem. It acts in our mind the same way. Suggestions emanate like the waves and keep multiplying to no end.

The very simple details of apple-picking assume in this poem allegorical overtones as if the activity were representative of human life itself. Note, for instance, the opening eight-line unit. In "long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree," the tree here easily becomes the tree of life; the ladder the ladder of ambition, which is still pointing towards heaven. Life, however, does not grant all ambitions to be realized. Most human ambitions remain partly or largely unrealized:

And there's a barrel that I didn't fill  
Beside it, and there may be two or three  
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.

Human body is fated to get fatigued and tired, fated to reach its limitations, compelling man to finally call it a day deciding to stop on the ladder of ambition and go no further:

But I am done with apple-picking now.  
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,  
The scent of apples; I am drowsing off.

Here, once again, the words, the key ones, that Frost chooses to use, easily assume symbolic overtones. "Essence of winter" can be read as odour of old age. Once one gets the feeling of growing old, one tends to abandon the ambitious pursuits, acquiring the mood of indolence, the mood of the lotos-eaters.

Frost's poem makes a strong suggestion of having an affinity with Tennyson's "Lotos-Eaters" on the one hand, and with Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" on the other. Note, for instance, the following:

I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight.

This strongly reminds us of the opening of Keat's poem. The mood of indolence, the creative mood between sleeping and waking, lies at the center of Keats's poem. We can recall how the "Ode" ends on the note of the poet's wonder "Do I wake or sleep?" This line is followed by a detailed description of an after apple-picking hallucination in which the speaker's subconscious repeats the apple-picking scene all over again. One also recalls here Hemmingway's Santiago of *The Old Man and The Sea* who, too, in his old age, dreams in a similar state of mind, of the activities he had been performing all his life. The dreams reinforce once again the unfulfilled ambitions, as also the harsh and painful realization that they would remain unfulfilled:

My instep arch not only keeps the ache,  
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.

In this hallucinatory state of mind, between waking and sleeping, between the pleasure of doing, of accomplishing, and the pain of failing to accomplish all that was desired, the speaker falls into what we can symbolically call the "lotos-eater" mood:

For I have had too much  
Of apple-picking; I am overtired  
Of the great harvest I myself desired.

Here, again, the poem assumes larger overtones, suggesting the larger and representative character of whatever is happening to the speaker who is an apple-picker. One does fall into such a mood when overworked and over-wrought pursuing one's desires; too many desires, pursued too long, do make one embrace the "lotos-eater" mood.

Frost's "After Apple-Picking" echoes certain other poems as well. We call a study of such echoes intertextuality, which has emerged as one of the critical pursuits of our time. We have already heard echoes, for example, of Keats's "Ode to

a Nightingale” and Tennyson’s “Lotos Eaters.” We also hear in the following lines an echo of Wordsworth’s “Daffodils”:

There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,  
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.

We can recall here how Wordsworth’s poem records “Ten thousand I saw at a glance,” etc., emphasizing the “host” of daffodils, their sheer number suggesting unlimited spread. The second line here also echoes Wordsworth, this time his simple language and syntax, his matter-of-fact manner of reporting and recording things.

The ending of “After Apple-Picking” makes a still louder echo of Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale:”

One can see what will trouble  
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.

or

Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,  
Or just some human sleep.

It (the ending) at once brings to mind the closing lines of Keats’s “Ode”:

Do I wake or sleep?

And it is not merely the hallucinatory state of mind in psychological terms that is implied in the two endings. There are larger suggestions as well about human life or existence itself. We can recall here Wordsworth’s “Immortality Ode” where “waking” and “sleeping” have larger connotations of life and death, youth and age, earth and heaven. All these meanings are not ruled out – neither from Keats’s poem, nor from Frost’s. Thus, true to Frost’s definition of poem as metaphor, “After Apple-Picking” shows its character as a metaphor, carrying so much of suggestive shine on its surface. The more matter-of-fact account of life it becomes, the more suggestive the poem emerges. Also, the more unassuming the speaker’s account becomes, the more pregnant of meaning it becomes in its garb of simplicity. The poet’s attempt to keep the account “mute” makes the poem’s language all the more speaking or suggestive.

Although written in free verse, having no restriction of a regular metrical line or rhymed stanza, the poem is not without rhyme. Most lines, though irregular, rhyme with one or another following it. Also, no artificial inversions of syntax are imposed anywhere in the poem for the sake of effecting end-rhyme. The lines are also marked by alliteration, though without any attempt at effecting balance or harmony or parallelism. The effect of avoiding all these artificial ways of making the poem harmonious or musical is that it becomes a sort of relaxed conversation, although it is only one side of conversation, there being only the speaker’s, monologue in the poem. The conversational tone of Frost’s poetry also adds a touch of “realism,” which is missing in most Romantic and Victorian poems.

### Short Notes

#### 1. Comment on the opening of “Birches”

The open lines of Robert Frost’s “Birches” present a contrast between what he would like to believe caused the bending and what in fact did cause it. He would like to think that a boy has been swinging, but he knows the ice weighing down the trees has caused it. There is a contrast between imagined desire and reality. In the lines that follow, Frost gives a realistic description of the ice on birch trees: how the branches are weighed down, how the ice cracks and shatters like glass on the crusty snow, and how the trees are permanently bent but unbroken. Years after the ice storm they bend their branches down to the ground like a kneeling girl’s hair cascades to the ground before her. It is an imagery drawn from life’s experiences and observations.

Frost has observed the phenomenon minutely, and his description is vivid and picturesque. When the wind blows, the birches swing up and down and the ice on them shines, and turns many-colored, as the rays of the sun are refracted in passing through ice. As the sun grows warmer, the ice is shaken down. It falls on earth covered with snow. It seems as if the central dome of heaven has cracked and the earth is covered with heaps of broken glass. It is with the burden of ice that the birches are bowed so low for so long that, “they never right themselves.”

#### 2. Comment on the deeper meaning of Frost’s “Birches”.

Taken from *Mountain Interval*, “Birches” is one of the best-known poems. Beginning in an easy conversational note, “When I see birches to left and right”, it plunges the reader into the realm of fancy which weaves imaginative



pictures out of simple facts. And this blending of fact and fancy continues as a sustaining metaphor through the poem and is one of its characteristic features. Accordingly the crystal ice is spoken of as heaps of broken glass so that we might think, "the inner dome of heaven had fallen." The arched trees are girls on hands and knees throwing their hair before them over their hands to dry in the sun. No other image could be more exotic. The country boy, whose only play was what he found himself, riding and subduing his father's birches, grows into the nature poet whose belief is stated thus:

Earth's the right place for love:

I don't know where it's likely to go better'

There is, in fact, a whole series of pictures in the poem that make it so sensuous in appeal. Its popularity, however, is further enhanced by the mingling of wisdom and fancy so that, despite its shrewd turns and the rare twinkle, the poem rises much above the level of a poem of observation of the mere matter-of-fact and thus meant for the naïve and the uninitiated, into a poem of depth and a new dimension. It moves with beautiful assurance from mood to mood, image to image, and thought to thought.

### **3. Comment on the opposite view points in "Mending Wall".**

Frost's popular poem, "Mending Wall" in which two menders of the wall are doing the same job, presents opposite viewpoints: man of tradition vs. man of reason. However, their contradiction is logical which creates the dramatic situation and makes the existence of both the individuals equally meaningful. The speaker of the poem is obviously the man who likes to go by reason rather than by tradition. He knows that "something there is that does not love a wall," still he goes all the way beyond the hill to inform his traditional neighbor about its being broken and to fix up a day to "set the wall between us once again."

The teasing tone and ironic play on the word "wall" work out indirectly the symbolic allusions. The metaphor of "outdoors game" used by the speaker makes it a ritual that lacks conviction; but the neighbor's firmly held belief: "Good fences make good neighbors" needs no proof to attest its validity. The former, who had already resented the very idea of having wall, grows more critical about the latter, because to him the notion seems contradictory. To be good neighbors means to have no walls, and if the wall ought to be there the very thought of holding friendship is fictitious. The situation incites "a lover's quarrel" between them. No hot word is exchanged; only the tones play the trick. The narrator's exploratory, quizzical tones, when juxtaposed with the simple talking tone of the neighbor, heighten the total effect and contribute to their peculiar attitudes. Like their beliefs, their tones will not interfere lest they leave their identities ambiguous.

### **4. Comment on the nature of duality in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening".**

The duality of the narrator's response to the woods is caught in the contrast between the relaxed, conversational idiom of the first three lines (note the gentle emphasis given to 'think', the briskly colloquial 'though') and the dream-like descriptive detail and hypnotic verbal music ('watch . . . woods', 'his . . . fill . . . with') of the last. Clearing and wilderness, law and freedom, civilization and nature, fact and dream: these oppositions reverberate throughout American writing. And they are registered here in Frost's own quietly ironic contrast between the road along which the narrator travels, connecting marketplace-to-marketplace, promoting community and culture - and the white silence of the woods, where none of the ordinary limitations of the world seem to apply. In a minor key, they are caught also in the implicit comparison between the owner of these woods, who apparently regards them as a purely financial investment (he lives in the village) and the narrator who sees them, at least potentially, as a spiritual one.

This contrast between what might be termed, rather reductively perhaps, 'realistic' and 'romantic' attitudes is then sustained through the next two stanzas: the commonsensical response is now playfully attributed to the narrator's horse which, like any practical being, wants to get on down the road to food and shelter. The narrator himself, however, continues to be lured by the mysteries of the forest just as the Romantic poets were lured by the mysteries of otherness, sleep and death. And, as before, the contrast is a product of tone and texture as much as dramatic intimation: the poem communicates its debate in how it says things as much as in what it says.

'Everything that is written', Frost once said, 'is as good as it is dramatic'; and in a poem like this the words of the poem become actors in the drama.

The final stanza of 'Stopping by Woods' does not resolve its tensions; on the contrary, it rehearses them in particularly memorable language.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
 But I have promises to keep,  
 And miles to go before I sleep,  
 And miles to go before I sleep.

Having paid tribute to the dangerous seductiveness of the woods, the narrator seems to be trying to shake himself back into commonsense reality by invoking his 'promises' or mundane responsibilities. The last line is repeated, however; and while at first it seems little more than a literal reference to the journey he has to complete (and so a way of telling himself to continue on down the road), the repetition gives it particular resonance. This could, after all, be a metaphorical reference to the brief span of human life and the compulsion this puts the narrator under to take risks and explore the truth while he can. The poem is the act of having the thought', Frost insisted; it is process rather than product, it invites us to share in the experiences of seeing, feeling, and thinking, not simply to look at their results. So the most a piece like 'Stopping by Woods' will offer - and it is a great deal - is an imaginative resolution of its tensions: the sense that its conflicts and irresolutions have been given appropriate dramatic expression, revelation and equipoise.

### 5. Comment on "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening as an interior monologue.

Perhaps the first thing we notice is that the poem is an interior monologue. The first line establishes the tone of a person musing quietly to himself on the situation before him: "Whose woods these are I think I know." He pauses here on "the darkest evening of the year," the point in time poised between the day and the night, between consciousness and unconsciousness, between waking and sleeping, between life and oblivion. There is a slight lack of surety in the speaker saying to himself, "I think I know," thus again signifying the meeting ground between what he knows and what he does not. These antimonies, his lack of certainty, and the muted sense of passion provide the tension by which the poem operates.

Yet, though the poem is an interior monologue, the speaker does not look inward; rather, he focuses on recreating in his imagination the sense of his surroundings. Indeed, he seems much more conscious of his surroundings than he is of the inner-workings of his mind (which, at least for the reader remain nearly as inscrutable as the dark woods). In such a way, the speaker by implication hints that the outer-wilderness corresponds to his inner one. This is of course most evident in the final refrain in which the outward journey becomes a symbol for his inner journey, but it is furthered by the concentration on his perception of his surroundings.

### 6. Comment on the symbolic significance of "The Onset".

In his "The Onset" Robert Frost has given added depth by the presence of a human observer, the "I", and his very conscious reaction to the natural scene. In this respect, the words "I know" are crucial because it is the knowing that raises man above nature. We notice that the speaker almost stumbles but he does not. Winter might have created in him a complete negation or death of his being, a giving up of the errand of life

With nothing done  
 To evil, no important triumph won,  
 More than if life had never been begun.

He is unable to understand the full implication of the cycle of nature—that winter is followed by spring rebirth—and to see that there are three kinds of whiteness: the tempo rary winter white, the white of the living birch, and the white of the houses and church. The last details are so unobtrusively introduced that they may escape notice on a first reading; but if this is so it is because the speaker sees their importance as being so obvious as not to require great emphasis. The supreme white that, with his knowledge he sees will survive the winter white, is the white of the houses and church, human artifacts which are products of human relationship.

The poem serves as an example of how Frost's subtle handling of symbols can give such richness of meaning to an apparently simple short poem. He takes the simple and yet universally understood and accepted symbols of nature, ones requiring little explanation, and gives, not a hackneyed restatement of the idea "if winter comes can spring be far behind", but a complex picture of the relationship and difference between man and nature.

### Assignment

Attempt any two of the following questions:

1. What is Frost's attitude towards the action described in "Mending Wall"?
2. Discuss the thematic complexity of "Fire and Ice"
3. Discuss the element of autobiography in "Two Tramps in Mud Time".
4. Discuss Frost's lyrical frame and meditative tone in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening."
5. Discus "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "The Onset" as pastoral poems.

## Major Themes in the Poetry of Robert Frost

The poetry of Robert Frost deals largely and explicitly with the old rural New England stock that cultivates their rocky acres with stubborn courage and forbearance. His subjects are the common places of the countryside –apple picking, hay making, the sleep of an old man alone in an old farmhouse, the cleaning of the pasture spring. His diction is simple and colloquial, whether the person speaking is the farmer who sees no reason for mending the wall between his apple orchard and his neighbor's pine grove; the man and wife to whose kitchen the incompetent worn out hired hand comes 'home' to die.

Frost is a thorough going realist in the sense that he knows his subjects, people and places. His treatment of humanity is free from romantic exaggeration, but at the same time he did not allow it to be in the form of photographic representation. Frost's realism is free from any taint of vulgarity or shoddiness. Untermeyer has made these significant remarks about Frost's realism: "Many attempts have been made to define Realism and no two definitions have agreed with each other. It seems safe to say that a realist is one who really knows what he is talking about". If this is true Frost is a realist, for no American writer knows his subjects, people and places, so thoroughly. But his is a peculiar kind of realism. It does not insist on a catalogue of mean trifles, on a piling up of bald or brutal details. "There are two types of realists," Frost once said, "There is the one who offers a good deal of dirt with his potato to show that it is a real potato. And there is the one who is satisfied with the potato brushed clean. I am inclined to be the second kind. To me the thing that art does for life is to clean it, to strip it to the form."

Frost always aimed at the truth, and truth was his central passion. However his persistent search for truth does not mean that he is a grim philosopher. He is light hearted and casual in handling even the most tragic subject. In his relation to his fellowmen, man must be imbued with the spirit of service. Everyman has certain commitments, he is duty bound to honor them to the best of his capacity. Instead of fleeing away from the world and its hard problems, man must share the burden of his fellowmen, endeavor to ameliorate their predicament and provide joy and happiness to them. This is the burden of the lyric "Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Evening" where he says

The woods are lovely, dark and deep  
But I have promises to keep  
And miles to go before I sleep  
And miles to go before I sleep.

The journey no longer remains the journey through the woods, but it becomes the journey through life, and the promises become great commitments, which a man has made to improve the condition of his fellowmen. Sleep becomes the sleep of death, and long miles become schemes of far reaching importance, which have to be accomplished.

The characters of Frost's poems are neither good nor evil, neither saints nor sinners. His people are attractive and admirable, pitiable or unpleasant. To him such qualities are evidently sufficient. Frost shows men who may really be capable of dignity and stature, joy and detachment, which is ironic, humorous or merciful. He made of their toil and defeat what they would never have imagined for themselves. We know the people in his poems by the very style of their humor. His humor, like his truth seeking, is in the main stream of native tradition. Poems such as "Two Tramps in Mud Time" and "Fire and Ice" are a perfect mixture of quiet witticism and casual wisdom.

Frost as a working farmer could not be romantic about Nature. According to W.H.Auden, Frost's poems on natural objects are always concerned with them not as food for mystical meditation, or starting points for fantasy, but as things with which and on which man acts in the course of the daily work of a dweller of a countryside. The following examples from his poems will substantiate the point:

- (a) He is all pine and I am apple orchard  
My apple trees will never get across,  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him ("Mending Wall")
- (b) Home is the place where, when you have to go there,  
They have to take you in. ("Death of a Hired Man")
- (c) Earth's the right place for love  
I do not know where it's likely to go better.

These quiet, patchy little bits of moralizing are quite significant. As Frost himself said a poem "begins in delight and ends in wisdom." C. Day Lewis says that he could define Frost's poetry in one word: "wise". Some of his poems are palpably moralistic. Others like "The Road Not Taken" and "Two Look at Two" have the moral concealed under the surface. But all the poems have a hard core of moral truth. The tendency to attribute qualities and sensation to inanimate objects—a certain anthropomorphic qualities—is a particular feature of his work.

As a poet Frost gives significance to seemingly insignificant things and places. For example "The Road Not Taken" owes its significance to the fact that it is based on the problem of choice that the poet had once been faced with. For Frost, man can very nearly be defined as a choice-making animal. He fulfills himself in the fact of choosing deliberately and with a sense of consequences. Similarly in "Fire and Ice", fire stands for the heat of love and passion and ice for coldness and hatred. The inner suggestion of the poems is that the extremes of these conflicting passions possess enormous power for destruction. Also fire stands for desire and ice for reason and this leads to a conflict between heart and mind which remains unresolved.

Frost was always a regional poet and his region was New England, more particularly, New Hampshire, which he considered one of the two best states in the U.S.A. He never felt the slightest desire to include all America within the scope of his poetry. But at the same time he never tried to bring his characters into a regional unity and did not dream of a utopia for them. The men and women in his poems are isolated, like their farms. The main thought of the poem "Mending Wall" is that in the present day world men seem to be suffering from a contradiction. On the one hand they feel that there should be no barriers amongst people and nations, on the other hand they have a feeling that they should also have the freedom to live within themselves. The contradiction or paradox forms the essential theme of the poem and the poet's attitude is that this contradiction is undoubtedly a problem and it is difficult to find its solution. Frost does not take sides and presents the problem in a fairly objective manner.

Life for Frost is a mystery, which poetry may partially reveal without discovering the whole truth. So his poems are partial revelations. But Frost is not an autobiographical or introspective writer. His first concern is outward things and objects, and he looks inwards to examine how the human mind works and not because he is especially interested in his own mental process. Like all great poets he does possess a generalizing power, but he always starts from a particular case, a certain scene, a single man or a group of people. Truth to experience was the cardinal principle of Frost as a poet and he hated anything that seemed like trickery in poetry. Throughout his life he remained faithful to his own dictum that "Poetry begins in delight and ends in Wisdom." Many of his poems certainly carry a moral. But the moral is usually presented either as an argument running through a descriptive or sensuous lyric, or as an ingredient of a dramatic situation. Seldom does he make a moral lesson as explicit and obvious as Wordsworth sometimes did. As Cleanth Brook remarks, "Frost's themes are frequently stated overtly, outside the symbolic methods. At his best, of course, Frost does not philosophize. The anecdote is absorbed into symbol." His poems chart his own inner world. Although he is gazing constantly at the external world, he is also very much an inward poet. He never imposes himself on the external world. Instead he strikes an extremely delicate balance in his poems between the world he sees and works in and the process of thought and emotion that he is always keenly aware of in himself. When this balance is disturbed, his poems become either merely didactic on the one hand, or else descriptive, on the other hand.

But for all his descriptive realism, he is temperamentally a poet of meditative sobriety. He is no philosopher with a formal system. The truths he seeks are innate in the heart of man and in common objects. But people forget and poetry, he says, "makes you remember but you did not know you knew". A poem is not didactic, but provides an immediate experience and it provides at least "a momentary stay against confusion". Like Thoreau and Emerson, Frost is willing to become a rebel in the cause of transcendentalism, of earlier New Englanders, and like them but so unlike the skeptical poets of his age, he had only a "lover's quarrel with the world."

### **Frost as a Poet of Humanity**

Frost grew up in a time when there was no commanding poetic voice in American. Walt Whitman was still alive, still writing, but the force of his career was spent and he had become the Good Gray poet. Emily Dickinson, the one vital spirit in American poetry, was significantly enough unheard and unknown, having chosen to write her poetry to posterity instead of addressing it to a contemporary audience. The career of Lawrence, Joyce, Eliot and Pound had of course not begun; Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and Hemingway had not even been born. As Trilling remarks, "the manifest

America of Frost's poems is rural in a highly moralized way, in an aggressively moralized way. It thus represents an idea that is common especially to Americans of the literary kind, who express their distaste for the life of the city and for all that the city implies of excessive complexity, of uncertainty, of anxiety, and of the demand that is made upon intellect to deal with whatever are the causes of complexity; uncertainty and anxiety."

*A Boy's Will* had a genius of its own that announced to a small circle of discerning critics the arrival of a new voice in poetry. Aspects of the New England countryside flash through it and since Thoreau had responded so sensitively to the particularities of a rural landscape. O'Donnell remarks that "the reader finds himself in the midst of the wooded valleys and the hills; he hears the blue jay's speech and the whimper of hawks beside the sun; he comes upon the purple-stemmed wild raspberry, the sodden pasture lanes of late fall, and the abandoned cellar holes gradually being reclaimed by nature." Again in *North of Boston*, Frost has reproduced both people and scenery with extreme vividness. Here are the huge hills, undraped by any sympathetic legend, felt as things hard and unyielding, almost sinister. Here are great stretches of blueberry pasture lying in the sun, and again, autumn orchards cracking with fruit. In fact, as Elizabeth Jennings observes, Frost, in his various books, "has created a poetry that belongs not only to the America of our own day but to the richest records of English verse."

The nature of his pastoral retreat can best be seen by observing the difference between his poetry and that of the Georgians, who too were interested in poetry of rural life and sought, like him, to bring the language of everyday speech into their verse. The Georgians, like other poets, were half-consciously groping toward a solution to the problem posed by scientific thought. At its best, their poetry represents an attempt to discover human values in the hard, realistic fact, but they had no very clear notion of the problem they faced and hence no definite program. What they shared was a common sensibility, one that recoiled from the drab sameness of urban life and sought to find in the countryside the color, romance, and rude spontaneity which industrialism had banished from the life of the average Englishman. Although it was under Georgian influence that Robert Frost began to write of regional life, the sentimental rusticity of their verse is quite unlike his vision of New England. The Georgians do no more than paint the rural scene. Frost discovered how to shape it into a mystic world within which he could express symbolically other ranges of experience. The Georgian's retreat to the country is only an escape; Frost's is a fresh approach to reality.

Frost has written almost on every subject. He has illuminated things, as common as a woodpile, and as uncommon as a prehistoric pebble, as natural as a bird singing in its sleep, and as 'mechanistic' as the revolt of a factory worker. But his central subject is humanity. His poetry lives with a particular aliveness because it expresses living people. Other poets have written about people, but his poems are the people; they work and walk about, and converse and tell their stories with the freedom of common speech. The characters are regionally exact and indigenous. He invests them with universality. His rural Yankees face the problems of farmers everywhere: adverse weather, shifting prices, loneliness and isolation. They may wear American-made overalls and speak with a down East accent, but they are fundamentally ordinary men and women confronted with the need to make a living and to adjust to conditions which sometimes seem intolerable. Frost captures their peculiar idioms, their folklore; on occasion he also dramatizes his characters. But primarily he keeps them human.

His approach to the rustics is neither romantic in the Wordsworthian sense, nor realistic in the sense of Flaubert. Unlike the Romantics, who in their treatment of the village folk invest them with a halo, and exaggerate their simplicity, innocence and piety, and build out of the village atmosphere a Utopia, Frost looks at the village life and its people with accuracy and realism. He steers clear of the Utopian as well as of the pessimistic and depressing depiction of village life. If we accept Untermeyer's definition of realism that "a realist is one who really knows what he is talking about," then Frost is certainly a realist, for no American writer knows his subjects, people and places so thoroughly. Frost remarks, "there are two types of realists—one who offers a good detail of dirt with his potato to show that it is a real potato and the other is satisfied with the potato brushed clean. I am inclined to be the second kind. To me, the thing that art does for life is to clear it, to strip it to form." He is thus fundamentally a realist but

unlike Hardy, does not paint the sordid and dismal picture of the village folk. They have the courage to face life in their own way, and put up the most stubborn resistance against it. They show a vitality that is lacking in the characters of Hardy, and Frost has every sympathy and even admiration for them. He is, like Whitman, their companion, meeting and understanding them on the level of equality.

Frost has portrayed characters as diverse as can be imagined and his method of presenting them varies like the characters themselves. Sometimes they walk leisurely into our hearts like 'the Gum-Gatherer', or trip lightly into our hearts like the youngster in "To a Young Wretch" or enter pathetically like the young couple in "The Investment", or flash suddenly into our vision like "The Figure in the Doorway", glimpsed by the poet from the window of a dining car while the train speed through the Ozarks. These people live with increasing vividness. They are drawn with affection, but not with a blurring sentimentality. They lose neither their sweetness nor their vigor, for they are portrayed with an un pitying sympathy, a tender exactitude. Frost has as much to say of happy wooing and mating, of friendly encounters and generous neighborliness, as of the bleaker aspects of farm life. This, together with the fact that his little dramas are enacted amidst the steady caring for crops and creatures, further distinguishes them from the pomp and circumstance of Robinson's narrative poem, while their humor gives them a salty quality not found in Mansfield's tales of the English countryside. The people about whom he writes are usually of New England stock, who cultivate their rocky acres with stubborn courage and bear, until they break, the drudgery and isolation of their lot.

In the stories, anecdotes and dialogues, he lets them express their opinions freely and frankly, however divergent they may be. In "Mending Wall", for example, Frost does not want walls to separate people and nations, and believes that "something there is that does not love the wall" but his neighbor has quite an opposite approach, and believes that "Good fences make good neighbors". To emphasize the point, the younger, whimsical, new-fashioned adds playfully"

He is all pine and I am apple orchard  
My apple tree will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.

But the old-fashioned farmer refuses to change his stand. He insists to uphold the conventions. To live amicably there must be a line of demarcation that should be honored by both the parties. So he is seen straining himself to mend the wall that has fallen. Though his stand is conservative and unprogressive, yet Frost presents it convincingly.

Frost's greatness as a poet consists mainly in his sympathetic understanding of the psychology of the village folk. He penetrates into their conscience with tender sympathy, and depicts their feelings truthfully. Thus he does not simply delineate the inner character of his contemporary New England rustics, but universalizes them. In "Birches" for example, he describes the pastime of a village boy, the climbing of birches, which can be the source of enjoyment of any poor rustic boy anywhere in the world, who being deprived of playing any sophisticated game with his companions, satisfies himself by swinging on the branches of tress. Like Wordsworth Frost recapitulates his past memories and asserts"

So was once myself a swinger of birches  
And so I dream of going back to be.

Below the simplicity and innocence of the life that his pastoral poems depict, there lies the terrifying picture of life. His poems deal with characters that suffer from frustration, disillusionment, disintegration, isolation and helplessness—banes of modern life, which are portrayed in Eliot's "The Wasteland". In "The Hill Wife" Frost shows obliquely the cumulative sense of fear, loneliness and marital estrangement of an isolated woman who is so completely misunderstood by her husband that he is baffled when she disappears, irrevocably and without warning. Both the husband and the wife feel lonely in the house and are afraid of entering it. Again in "The Road Not Taken", the traveler is confused and indecisive. It is difficult for him to make a choice of means he should adopt in order to come out of the present impasse:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference

"Home Burial" in which the husband and wife imprecate and irritate each other on the day when their son is dead shows the disharmony and estrangement between the bereaved pair:

No, from the time when one is sick to death  
One is alone, and he dies more alone  
Friends make pretence of following to the grave.

In some poems we find characters that in spite of their bleak life have sweetness and vigor. In "The Gum Gatherer" the poet admires the 'pleasant life' of the poor man who goes about gathering gum from trees and sells it in the market. In "The Investment" he appreciates the poor husband and wife who paint their drab house and keep a piano to muse their insipid and monotonous life. And in "Mowing" the laborer identifies himself with his scythe, and as the man and his tool perform their task, their 'earnest love' reveals to them a simple and profound truth:

The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows  
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

A rural dweller for much of his life, but a philosopher by temperament, Frost found lyric and meditative verse his natural medium of expression. His poetic concerns are akin to those which led Wordsworth to choose incidents and situations from common life and then to present them in a language actually used by the common man whose heartfelt passions are not restrained. Like Wordsworth, Frost has particularly emphasized his concern for catching within the lines of his poems the rhythms and cadences and tones of Yankee speech. Beneath the simplicity can be found an intellectuality of attitude, a discernible structure and highly developed figurative technique. By consciously and consistently maintaining a conversational tone, he keeps the texture of his verse remarkably even. His poems are sometimes dull but they are never false, pretentious and artificially stimulated. His images are homely and familiar, but his rhymes often have a surprising adroitness. He does not use conceits, nor does he wrench ideas and figures in order to achieve a specious originality. He depends, rather, on insight and perceptiveness, which he supplements with a profound understanding of the singularities and the frailties of humanity.

Where Frost juxtaposes rural and urban life, the regional and the cosmopolitan, the human and the natural, Eliot contrasts the social classes and holds up disparate historical periods for comparison. In both too, the contrasting planes are not only different but also parallel. They are held together and made to interpret each other by a dominant sense of analogy. Thus in "The Wasteland" one finds ranges of correspondence similar to those evoked by Frost's symbols. *The wealthy neurotic at her dressing table is reflected both in Philomela and the woman being discussed by her vulgar friend in a pub; Elizabeth, Cleopatra, a stenographer of easy virtue, and the Rhine maidens are ranged in a single perspective; biblical scenes parallel pagan myths; arias from Wagner blend with echoes from "The Divine Comedy"*. Eliot is not simply balancing off disparate items. Each introduces its entire context, and, at the same time, each reflects within its context some element of myth, which, as a key analogy, joins all the contexts together. Similarly, in Frost's poetry the regional world is kept quite separate from the everyday life of urban society, and nature from the level of human experience; yet the separate contexts, though never allowed to merge, are held together by the contrasts between them, which creates a constant reference from one to the other and an awareness of ironic parallels.

Whitman enumerates all types of people of America and professes his sympathy with them, but his approach remains distant and vague. Frost, on the other hand, talks in an informal manner with the real people, and establishes an intricate, human contact with them. He has given us a study of the essential human nature that in spite of facing the trials, vicissitudes and tribulations of life almost to the breaking point, still manages to keep intact its basic and imperishable vitality. He has explored wide and manifold ranges of being by viewing reality within the mirror of the natural and unchanging world of rural life. Pastorals, whether in Frost or in the poets of the Arcadian tradition, will always at first appear to involve an escape from the world as we know it, but actually it is an exploration upstream, past and city with its riverside factories and shipping, against the current of time and change to the clear waters of the source.

## Theme of Loneliness in the Poetry of Robert Frost

Frost's poetry has a rare wealth of idyllic beauty, sparkling wit and laconic humor. It is remarkable for a lively portrayal of the New England peasants whom he knew intimately and loved dearly. But underneath the bright surface of his Yankee comedy runs a constant current of deep tragedy giving one the idea of what Trilling calls "a terrifying universe". The New England ethos, which is prominently reflected in Frost's poetry, represents a decadent phase of life, bereft of its pristine simplicity, ideality and opulence.

Frost's tone in *North of Boston* is thoughtful and meditative. The poems of this volume bear on the little pressing problems that confront the New England peasants for whom a glory has passed away from the earth. The Industrial Revolution and the impact of modern life effected a transformation of society leading to the disease of incommunication. And Frost recurrently, sensitively articulates this overwhelming human predicament. As an integrated writer, he sees life steadily and evinces it whole. He pursues truth and communicates it through his poetry that is both tragic and comic like life itself.

Frost's close study of the behavior and attitudes of the American peasants has inspired some of his greatest poems in which the essential loneliness of man is convincingly expressed. In "Acquainted with the Night" he evokes the atmosphere of loneliness with a consummate art. Superficially, the poems depict the feeling of loneliness that grips the soul of a man who walks late at night in a lonely city. On the symbolic plane, it reveals the poet's loneliness in a world that is strange and baffling, unfriendly and incomprehensible. It is a deeply felt utterance of the poet's distressing consciousness of man's stance in this world where but to think is to be full of sorrows. This poem is a precious, personal document rooted in Frost's own experience. The habit of walking late at night has enabled him to individualize and concretize the experience. Randall Jarral is enchanted with the calm universal precision of the poem, its antique form and spirit, its suavety of movement and diction and its infinite, sad gentleness.

It reminds of Frost's other great poem, "An Old Man's Winter Night" in which loneliness is bound up with the problem of old age, posing the eternal question of man's place in the universe. The poem is charged with a deep note of pathos, summed up in the lines

One aged man—One can't keep a house,  
A farm, a countryside, or if he can,  
It's thus he does it of a winter night.

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is saturated with an atmosphere of loneliness stillness. The well-known passage

The woods are lovely, dark and deep  
But I have promises to keep  
And miles to go before I sleep  
And miles to go before I sleep

creates the image of a melancholy traveler moving in the wilderness of this world. "Desert Places" points to a wasteland in the heart of man which is harder to bear than the wasteland of the surrounding world. However, Frost suggests that an intimate acquaintance with the grim realities of human life strengthens man's spirit to bear isolation and separateness, as the poet puts it:

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces  
Between stars—on stars where no human race is  
I have it in me so much nearer home  
To scare myself with my own desert places.

It is a poem that overwhelms us with a sense of frightening forsakenness. In spite of its playfulness of tone, we cannot escape the pervasive note of sadness.

"The Death of the Hired Man" offers us a vivid picture of an age-worn, life-weary character, Silas, who returns to the house of his old master when life to him is an irksome burden. His solitariness is so complete that in spite of his being at death's door, he must work to earn himself a shelter. As Mary and her husband, Warren, debate Silas's right to home, one is deeply touched by his forlorn plight. Though Silas is not introduced to us directly, his character is vividly presented through the dialogues of the couple. When the tenderhearted Mary succeeds in persuading her husband to



tolerate Silas who is all the time languishing in a lonely corner, we make an ironic and shocking discovery of the servant's death which alone releases him from life's fitful fever. The destitute old age that has benumbed Silas's faculties has also rendered him unfit for the practical purpose of life. Presenting as he does, "a miserable sight and frightening too", Silas must place himself at the mercy of others to make survival possible. Isolated from his own brother, he is like a stricken deer moving in the desert of society, changing masters, and finally succumbing to his ineluctable fate.

The sense of isolation is also implied in the richly ambivalent poem, "Directive". It deals with a kind of journey, which assumes different forms and directions but is, in reality, an inward movement, an exploration of the wounded psyche of the modern man who has fallen upon the thorns of life. It is a nostalgic yearning for the glamour and glory of the days that are no more. It suggests that our quest for the dead yesterdays is a pretty lonely business. Frost would, therefore, have man cultivate a realistic outlook. He illumines the proper course of life that lies in the endeavor to make peace with the world. The words "then make yourself at home" amply affirm this idea.

In poem after poem, Frost has mirrored the somber aspects of human life and indicated that man must endure his human condition and live authentically in it, for there is no escape from his impending fate. Man's bound and disabled lot is brought out in "The Bear" which states that:

Man acts more like the poor bear in a cage  
That all day fights a nervous inward rage  
His mood rejecting all his mind suggest

Frost has powerfully demonstrated the perplexity that haunts the modern man who suffers because of a dichotomy between his mind and his mood.

Frost has also painted a state of emotional atrophy in a number of poems. The volume, *A Boy's Will*, has "Going to Water", "In Neglect" and "A Line-Storm Song", mirroring the miserable life of the sequestered lovers who find communion with their kind difficult. Again a deep tragic note informs "The Fear", "A Servant to Servants" and "Home Burial" as an instance of a subtle and ingenious study of human behavior and character under the stress of a crushing personal loss. It is a great irony that the couple in "Home Burial" who have suffered the loss of their only son are divided by what should unite them. There is a grievous lack of communion between the husband and the wife whose reactions to their son's death are sharply different. Frost has highlighted the innate insecurity of the delicate human relationship. For the mother the death of the son is a stunning blow while the father rates it as a sad but inevitable reality unredeemable by extravagant sorrow. The poem shows that there is no emotional articulation between husband and wife that alone can make the shock endurable. As a corollary of this, the mother's grief deepens into insanity. Thus both the spouses get entombed in the caverns of their divided lives.

Loneliness in Frost's poetry is often produced by various kinds of barriers that checkmate human relationship. His poetry emphatically illustrates that walls and fences, physical as well as emotional, are a defiant monument of the alienation that is a sign and symbol of our age. The cult of democracy and individualism and the destruction of the old world values in the wake of the Industrial Revolution have produced a crop of hollow and isolated men. Frost knows well enough that the dictatorship of intellect that bedevils our age militates against the realization of our ideas. This he has shown in *A Masque of Reason*. "Mending Wall", with its precision and concretion and its stress on the use of barriers between neighbors, is a sad commentary on modern society. Isolated from nature which is impersonal and unfeeling man is also cut off from his fellowmen by the preponderating presence of all kinds of unwanted frontiers between individuals as also between various nations of the world. But this is not all. The rational bias of our age also denies us the bliss of communion with God. The cynical modern materialist in Frost's *Masque of Mercy* chooses to be "lost in the woods than found in the church." However, Frost suggests in this poem that reason must be joined with faith to make life an agreeable affair.

Readers of Frost's poetry are tempted to think of him as a major poet of nature. But a close study would reveal that Frost uses nature to evaluate or illumine and clarify human life. In his pastoral poems, he has, with his deceptive simplicity, suggested thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. While he has the artist's love for the loveliness of country life, his rational mind has revealed to him the futility of man's efforts to have a dialogue with nature. We may consider the well-known poem, "Two Look at Two", which is a wonderful dramatization of man's encounter with nature. It shows a subtle matching of a man and a woman with a buck and a dog. Some critics think that in this poem,

there is a good deal of the spell of nature exercised upon human nature. The truth is that a solid wall defines the frontiers of human nature and "deer" nature and thus makes the meeting meritorious. One spell of nature of man is ephemeral and ineffectual. It breaks soon enough and we are made to realize the existence of the barrier.

"The Tree at My Window" is often regarded as a poem in the Wordsworthian vein. While love for nature is certainly implied by the beautiful image in which a kind of fellowship between the branches of the tree and the ramifications of man's mind is indicated, soon there is an inversion of the analogy and man and the tree pull in opposite directions and part permanently. Man draws into his inward self while the tree enjoys the outer weather:

Your head so much concerned with outer  
Mine with inner, weather.

Though nature in Frost has a protean and constantly changing character, it often heightens and intensifies our sense of separateness that marks the relationship.

In a long philosophical poem, "The Lesson for Today," Frost bemoans the omnipresence of suffering in the world. He states that there is always something to be sorry for, and it needs no stressing that the demon of loneliness is one of the things that disturbs and distresses the poet. Perhaps few poets have so perfectly and superbly voiced the heartache of man who lives in the desert of society. Frost's constant concern with loneliness is, psychologically speaking, an instinctive and passionate expression of the need for warm human ties, of love, sympathy and fellow feeling which alone will give us the requisite strength to go the miles that we have to go before we sleep. Frost's poetry, which is a genuine expression of his gnarled and gnomic wisdom, teaches man to endure hardships cheerfully, to see life in its clarified form, and to live it with faith and hope. This, it seems, is the meaning and message of the poetry of Robert Frost.

### **Frost as a Poet of Nature**

Being a pastoral poet, Robert Frost writes about natural scenes and sounds. He deals with rural life, and Nature always provides the background. His description of Nature is accurate and lively. But it is never an impulse from the vernal wood. In fact, Frost best poetry is concerned with the drama of man in Nature whereas Wordsworth is generally best when emotionally displaying the panorama of the natural world. Frost also confirmed this fact in a television interview in the fall of 1952: "I guess I'm not a Nature-poet. I have only written two poems without a human being in them." Proposing an epitaph for himself, Frost observed, "I had a lover's quarrel with the world." This lover's quarrel is Frost's poetic subject. Throughout his poetry, there are evidences of this view of man's existence in the natural world. His attitude towards Nature is one of armed and amicable truce and mutual respect interspersed with crossings of the boundaries separating the two principles, individual man and forces of the world. It is significant to note that reference to nature have been so successfully integrated into the texture of the poems that nowhere do the readers feel that Frost is wantonly indulging in elaborate nature descriptions. The nature descriptions in Frost are an integral part of the major theme of the poem, that is, the descriptions are warranted by the situation the poem purports to enact, and are not thrust on it. Even in poems like "Blueberries", "The Wood Pile", and "Birches" the main interest is in the people who talk, and references to nature have only a marginal function to perform.

Frost as a working farmer could not be romantic about Nature. According to W.H. Auden, Frost's "poems on natural objects are always concerned with them not as foci for mystical meditation or starting points of fantasy, but as things with which and on which man acts in the course of the daily work of actual tone of a dweller of a countryside." Frost's love for nature is different from Wordsworth's or the Romantics' love for nature. Wordsworth and the Romantics loved Nature for its own sake, for its colors, and went to it with a bumping heart, as though caught by it. Frost's enthusiasm for nature is not of that sort, nor has he written rhapsodically about it. It comes to him in the nature of the talk of his characters who are mostly country-bred and who cannot dissociate themselves from the background of their living, and desist referring to it in their conversations. Wordsworth loved to paint only the spring-time beauty of nature, or what Coleridge called, "Nature in the grove", but Frost has an equally keen eye for the sensuous and the beautiful in nature, as well as for the harsher and the unpleasant. "A Boundless Moment" gives us one of those fresh glimpses of beauty which have made Frost's nature poetry so popular"

Oh, that is the Paradise-in-bloom, I said  
And truly it was fair enough for flowers.

Frost can appreciate that, "Nature's first green in gold", and he can enjoy the beauty of nature's "green" and "gold". but it would be mistake to suppose that Frost is a mere painter of pleasant landscapes. Rather, the bleak, the barren, and the sinister are more characteristic of his nature painting. Even when reveling in the sensuous charms of nature, Frost is not long unaware of the sinister and the ugly that may lay hidden beneath the surface. As John Lyden remarks, "Even in Frost's most cheerful nature sketches there is always a bitter-sweet quality. Admittedly he can and does enjoy nature. His flowers, trees and animals are all described with affection, yet none of the nature poems is free from hints of possible danger; under the placid surface there is always the unseen presence of something hostile." In "Birches" the scene serves as a background to the major action—the yearning of one,

When I'm weary of considerations,  
And life is too much like a pathless wood  
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open

to go a-swinging the birches "toward heaven". In "Blueberries" the action interest is in the theme—the way in which the Loren's' thrift is ridiculed. The descriptions, minute and pointed, serve to highlight the situation"

I wish I knew half what the flock of them know  
Of where all the berries and other things grow,  
Cranberries in bags and raspberries on top  
Of the boulder—strewn mountain, and when they will crop  
I met them one day each had a flower  
Struck into his berries as fresh as a shower

Frost's love for nature is deep and it is inborn"

Lord I have loved your sky,  
Be it said against or for me,  
Have loved it clear and high,  
Or low and stormy.

He referred to the elements, to the season, to day and night, and to whatever surrounded his house in the farm in one or the other of his poems. But a few of his poems like "[The Sound of Trees", "Of the Stones of the Place" refer to nature directly. The following lines from "The Sound of Trees" are worth mentioning:

I wonder about the tress.  
Why do we wish to bear?  
Forever the noise of these  
More than another noise  
So close to our dwelling place?

Or the following lines from "Of the Stones of the Place":

I farm a pasture where the boulders lie  
As touching as a basket full of eggs,  
And though they're nothing anybody begs  
I wonder if it wouldn't signify  
For me to send you one out where you live,

May not be such that would earn for Frost the name of a nature poet, but they suggest that his ability to understand and picturesque nature is no less powerful than Virgil's or Wordsworth's. He has referred to all objects of nature—birds, beasts, and trees, indeed, all things both great and small. His poem "Departmental" has the life of an ant as its theme. "The Oven Bird" has the gift of the poet in that he can voice his knowledge of the changing season in the way the poet does. Thus though Frost's main interest is in human beings, in human action, nature too plays a major role in defining his

mode of poetic composition. Frost "The Pasture", a two-stanza poem, bears a unique relation to the entire body of his work. This poem, with its invitation "you come too," as the poet's invitation to share with him the pleasures of poetry:

I'm going out to clear the pasture spring;  
 I'll only stop to rake the leave away  
 (And wait to watch the waster, I may)  
 I shan't be gone long—you come too;  
 I'm going out to fetch the little calf  
 That's standing by the mother. It's so young  
 It totters when she licks it with her tongue.  
 I shan't be gone long—you come too.

In these lines Frost has not shown himself to be a poet who merely wonders at nature, nor has he worked out a deep philosophical meaning into the simple reference to nature.

Frost does not make any explicit statements on theory of nature or on man's relationship with nature. According to Frost's scheme of values, it is one of the grave errors to go against nature or natural processes or to temper with nature. In other words, Frost shows a distrust of the unnatural. Consider the poems like "A Book in the City", "To a Moth Seen in Winter", "Mending Wall", "The Code" and "A Star in the Stone Boar", "There are Roughly Zones" etc. As the logical consistency demands, he does not believe that getting permanently in tune with nature would lead to a successful living; though there are some poems in which such adjustments appear, take for example, "Blue Berries", "Brown Descent" and "The Ax-Helve". It proves that Frost shies away from a merely theoretical consistency and nature to him is a fairly protean term. Its meaning undergoes a change from one poem to the other. George W. Nitchie very perceptively observes that Frost is ultimately not very much concerned with developing a philosophically consistent concept of nature. Important though nature is to him, he is not really concerned with it as an object of disinterested philosophical speculation, as something to be conceptualized. What really interest him is not definitions but attitudes, not what nature is in itself but how man responds to it in a world he never made, whatever the organization of the world may be. What troubled Wordsworth was the meaning of nature and he managed to find grandeur in it. Emerson too had difficulty rallying on his relation to the universe in the face of a tough world but Frost is rarely disturbed by the debate. However complex the intellectual background of Wordsworth's nature may be, his essential poetic idea remains constant—the union of the mind and the external reality of the blending of thought and landscape while Frost never permits himself the Wordsworthian rapture. In other words, the major difference between the two is that Wordsworth, quite explicitly does and Frost does not perceive an organic relationship, a vital continuity between man and nature for various socio-historical reasons.

Frost knew that any traditional elaboration of nature myth would not have the power to satirize the modern temper. Besides, the difference between English and American country life made Frost well versed in country things. Consequently, Frost maintains an entire different attitude which is not simple but of ironic disillusionment toward the possible malevolence of the natural world. The contrast between man and nature becomes the central theme of his poetry. Even his most deeply felt relationship with nature is dramatic rather than conceptual. R.A. Brower beautifully sums up this aspect of Frost's nature factory and states: This consciousness that he is playing a high game—as poet and worshipper in the nature—is what is most modern in Frost." Thus his treatment of nature shows that he rejoices in doubt and uncertainty of vision.

Frost writes from personal experience of those activities in nature that he himself has observed and experienced. His realism, his authenticity and veracity, has been admired and confirmed by numerous dwellers in the countryside. Indeed, realism is a marked feature of Frost's nature poetry. The woods are no doubt 'lovely' but their beauty cannot detain the poet for long as he has promises to keep and miles to go. "The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows"; fact, reality is never long absent from Frost's nature poetry. He is not concerned with nature as such; he is more concerned with the common human activity that goes on in her lap as mowing, apple picking, birch swinging, etc. By noting such everyday activity he seeks to study man in relation to his physical environment, and to the lower creatures that live within her.

Robert Frost

Frost holds that man has certain limitations. His understanding of the natural world comes slowly. "The most exciting movement in Nature is not progress, advance, but expansion and contraction, the opening and the shutting of the eye, the hand, the heart, the mind." Man lives in the natural world and thereby develops his mind so that he may perhaps reach beyond the boundary separating the natural and the supernatural. In some of his most interesting poems nature predominates as in "Birches":

You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground  
Like girls on hands knees that throw their hair  
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.

A marvelous imagery indeed! The trees are shown trailing their leaves under the impact of the storm like girls drying their hair in the sun. Thus his descriptions of nature are vividly effective. His descriptive power is the most wonderful thing in his poetry. A spring flower, a snowfall, a storm, a bending tree, a valley mist, a brook—these are all brought into the experience of the reader. His method of description is so simple, and so deceptive. In "Our Singh Strength", we follow him disputing with birds, and in "A Hillside Thaw", we see him on his knees trying to feel with his hands the process of snow turning into water. With the kind of simultaneity we find in Frost's poetry, he becomes most fascinating to us. Mark the lyricism in the following:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

The woods play a curious part in Frost's poetry. They serve as his symbol for the unexplored country within ourselves, full of possible beauty, but also full of horror. From the woods at dusk, one might hear the hidden music of the brook, "a slender, tinkling fall"; or one might see a buck and a doe, looking at one over the stone fence that marks the limit of the pasture. But one should not cross the fence, except in dreams; and then, instead of brook or deer, one is likely to meet a strange Demon rising "from his wallow to laugh". And so, for fear of the Demon, and also because of one's moral obligations, one must merely stand at the edge of the woods to listen "Far in the pillared dark,/Thrush music went". To explore the real horrors of the mind is a long tradition in American literature. But Frost, even in his finest lyrics, is content to stop outside the words, either in the thrush-haunted dusk or on a snowy evening. But as Malcolm Cowley puts it, "Frost is a poet neither of the mountains nor of the woods, although he lives among both, but rather of the hill-pastures, the intervals, the door-yard in autumn with the leaves swirling, the closed house shaking in the winter storms and no one has described these scenes more accurately and in more lasting colors than Frost."

Apart from the transparency that we find in Frost's poems, the one remarkable thing about his treatment of nature is that his descriptions of the natural objects and sights show that he did not idealize them. He rather described them with the touch of a realist. Frost's poetry reveals that nature is primarily a kind of withdrawal according to a plan, a means by which things are simplified and rendered manageable. In other words, it is a strategic evasion that enables him to escape the complexities of the commercial life and complicated choices, because nature encourages emotional simplification of him as it did for Thoreau. Take, for example "A Prayer in Spring", "Putting in the Seed" or "Out-Out" in which nature, like tragedy, affords a kind of ideal simplification. At times nature takes up the role deserted by human beings as in "The Woodpile". Some of Frost's poems suggest that the world of nature is better than man's. It is pure, simple and innocent while other poems show that it is far below the human sphere because "Man thinks, feels, he suffers, while nature exists."

Another aspect of Frost's nature poetry is his tendency to personification that in the case of Romantic poets takes the form of brief metaphor but in Frost it is more explicit and nearly always an extended analogy as means of seeing things. "Frost's preference for personifications is indicative of his whole manner of conceiving nature, for such a mode of sustained comparison is only possible within the framework of world view in which natural and the human are conceived as distinct and separate yet parallel plans." He reaches a conclusion that man can never find a home in nature, nor can he live outside it. Therefore the only way out to assert the reality of his spirit is to exist independently

by looking at the world and the nature squarely. While observing nature closely, Frost moves towards, what Nina Baym terms, "the poet's theme." In *New Hampshire*, Frost calls this theme "flux", "alternation" and critics give the theme its old name "mutability". Frost like Emerson believes that nature can be used to uncover and illustrate the underlying laws of universe, because it operates by such laws. He does find in nature a transcendental unity or an assurance of rebirth, but the grim laws of change and decay that emphasize the inevitable and ceaseless movement toward death—nightfall, leaf-fall and snowfall. Fall in Frost's poetry is less a static season than a process that continues through all season signifying the moment towards death.

Frost treats nature both as a menace and a comfort. Natural disasters are eerie and unpredictable. Nature is the mother and home of man, and it is at the same time utterly indifferent to him. This duality is clearly visible in the poetry of Frost. With the passing of years, he became more and more aware of the pretentiousness of all human theorizing. He was more and more shaken by the ambiguous place of man in nature. He seems to hold the humanistic faith that, whatever the odds against man, man should not confuse his doubts about the earth with a total distrust of nature.

### Short Notes

#### Comment on the Pastoral Design of Frost's poetry.

Frost's nature poetry is closely related to his paternalism. The pastoral design of his poetry became clear many years before he produced pastorals. A pastoral comes to life when the poet writes about rural life with its rustic scenery and humble folk, to contrast it with the great outer world of the powerful, the wealthy and sophisticated. In short it is the recognition of a contrast, implicit or expressed between pastoral lives and some more complex type of civilization that constitutes the main element of the pastoral. Frost's concept of pastoral gives unity on the diverse components of his poetry and reveals at the same time that he, as a Pastoral poet, stands outside the conventional form of this genre. He does not idealize the rural life and keeps the two worlds in equilibrium. Frost knows that with the decay of the Arcadian myth and the advent of modern science, a new attitude toward rural life is essential so that it becomes representative of human life in general. This is what adds a remarkable depth of reference to his poetry. Instead of eulogizing the unhappy shepherds and the fair shepherds, the flowery wreaths and the wandering flocks, Frost has discovered a new myth of rural life. As a result his achievement as a pastoral poet is distinctly individual. It has resulted from his discovery of a new and realistic basis for examining the rural scene within the structure of the pastoral.

The pastoral form is peculiarly in accordance with the sense of quality that we find in his poetry. Through this medium, the poet is able to highlight the two utterly contrasted ways of life: the rural and the urban, both being so essential to the attainment of a fuller life. In Frost's poetry we witness contraries at every step—human life is placed against the mechanical power, light versus darkness, good versus evil, living nature versus insensate toil, etc. The pastoral method is more easily adaptable to new treatment than the traditional allegory. It does not demand the note of sententiousness or moralizing that the allegory often implies. Take the example of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening". Its indirect and subtly suggestive quality arises from the poet's preference for implication rather than explicit statement. In this poem, the poet does not interpret the scene; he simply uses it as the medium through which to view reality.

#### Robert Frost as a Modern Poet

The mere fact that Frost was born in the twentieth century does not necessarily make him a modern poet. In his book, *The Struggle of the Modern*, Stephen Spender remarks, "when we describe a work of literature as 'modern', we do not merely mean that it has been published in the last year or two, or since the beginning of the century, but we ascribe certain intrinsic qualities to it." The question of date need not arise at all. We may find Chaucer to be modern though not Galsworthy or H.G. Wells. All through the literature of the past, there are certain works, which in the attitudes and problems they deal with have a peculiar affinity with the spirit of the modern times. T.S. Eliot remarks, "One is not modern by writing about chimney pots." Far deeper perceptions are required for writing modern poetry than a mere knowledge and awareness of the outward changes wrought by the inventions of science. Stephen Spender defines modernism as "a sensibility to contemporary phenomena like machinery, the industrial city and neurotic behavior." Two marks of modernist literature are: the loveliness that comes from topicality and the difficulty that comes from intellectual abstruseness.

Frost started writing poetry when the Georgian poets were in the forefront, and like them he wrote pastoral poems

dealing with the unsophisticated life of the common folk living in New England and New Hampshire. They are all written in a plain, simple, conversational style making use of the common speech of these rustics and remained aloof from the experimental techniques of the Imagists of which Eliot was profoundly influenced. Moreover, he is neither very philosophical, nor religious and does not show much interest in politics. In all these respects his approach and method are decidedly Georgian. But a thorough probe into Frost's poetry reveals that he did not follow the Georgian rut. Recognizing the special qualities in his poetry, which made it different from their poetry not only in the matter of thought, but also for style, Ezra Pound congratulated Frost for emancipating himself from "stilted pseudo literary language and daring to write in the speech of New England." W.D. Howells remarks that *North of Boston* is "unaffectedly expressive of rustic New England" and that "amidst the often striving and straining of new poetry, here is the old poetry as young as ever, and new only in extending the bounds of sympathy through the recorded to the unrecorded knowledge of humanity." Frost is precise in his observations, and his study of the rural people and their problems, is not superficial, but shows a deep understanding of the poet. Again, whereas their poems are simple, and their meaning lies on the surface, Frost's poems have profundity and new layers are revealed at every successive reading.

Critics have viewed his retreat to the agrarian world of New England with suspicion. They opine that Frost has been over anxious to shun the vital issues of the modern times, which others have strived to tackle. His use of the pastoral form in poetry was not an escape but an advantageous thing for the seclusion to a remote rural world provided him the chance to analyze trenchantly and subtly the world he seemed to escape from. Lyneen observes that Frost's poems evince the same concern as the Romantics, the Victorians and the modern symbolist poets show their affinity with the disparity between the world of intuition, experience and emotion and the world as envisaged by science. He tries to preserve within the disorganized world created by science and the sense of order and unity a meaningful life requires. In his pastorals his dominant motive is to reassert the values of individual perception against the fragmenting of experience resulting from modern technology. Thus whereas the Georgians went to the countryside to escape from reality, Frost did so in order to have a fresh approach to reality. There in the rural areas of New England he discovered a proper ground for building up a mythical world within which he could express symbolically other ranges of experience. The region to which Frost escaped was not the romantic, colorful region of the Georgians, but it was a region where man was encountered not only with the hard problems which had been created by science and industrialism, but also those fundamental problems with which mankind has always been faced. Thus his regionalism gave him place to stand, from where he could get a clear view above hills to the further range in this respect.

It is in his realistic study of the rural people of New England, their frustration, disillusionment, isolation and helplessness, as well as their faith, basic vitality and their stubborn resistance to new changes, that Frost is truly a modern poet. Though he does not openly criticize industrialism and urbanization, which have brought about this disintegration, yet it is implied in all his poems. Though on the surface his poems seem to be full of ironic humor and non-seriousness, yet underneath each of them there is a criticism of life, which reminds of the modern poets like Eliot. In his treatment of the rural scenes and characters, he creates a picture of reality. Like Eliot and Yeats, who while criticizing contemporary society, take their readers to ancient civilizations in order to create the impression that the modern problems are akin to the fundamental problems of man faced by him in all ages, Frost takes us to the rural areas of New England to produce the similar effect. Again like them, his approach is non-controversial, detached and free from any reformist zeal. He is more a portrayer of modern life than a preacher or a reformer. He does not enter into an argument and makes no attempt to prove anything, but for those who can understand, there is always a subtle meaning which conveys. As Cleanth Brooks remarks, "the sense of realistic detail, the air of casual comment, are employed to build up and intensify a serious effect."

Frost's portrayal of the disintegration of values and disillusionment of the modern man is very significant. Most of his poems deal with characters that suffer from frustration, isolation and helplessness—disease of modern life, which is portrayed in modern poems, like "The Waste Land" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." His poetry reflects modern life not in the sense that it depicts the outward events and conditions, but it brings out the central facts of twentieth century experience—the uncertainty and painful sense of loss. For example in "The Hill Wife", Frost has portrayed obliquely the cumulative sense of fear, loneliness and marital estrangement of an isolated woman who is also completely misunderstood by her husband that he is baffled when she disappears, irrevocably and without

warning. "The Road Not Taken", depicts the confusion prevailing in modern life and it is difficult for the man to make a choice of the means he should adopt in order to come out of the present impasse. The protagonist in the poem represents the modern man, habitually wasting energy in regretting any choice made, but belatedly and wistfully sighs over the attractive alternative which he rejected"

Two roads diverted in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by  
And that has made all the difference.

"Home Burial" in which the husband and the wife are cursing and irritating each other on the day when their son is dead, depicts the disharmony and disintegration of modern life, when each person holds a divergent view from the rest, and there is no common, basic approach to life, which is characteristic of the modern age. Here man has lost all sympathy for his fellowmen, and has become brutally selfish, callous and self-centered:

No, from the time when one is sick to death  
One is alone, and he dies more alone.  
Friends make pretence of following to the grave  
But before one is in it, their minds are turned.

Frost's best poetry exhibits the structure of symbolist metaphysical poetry, much more clearly, than does many modern poets. For example in "Mending Wall", he symbolizes the conflict between the new trend of bringing down barriers between men and nations, and the old view that for good neighborly relations fences and demarcations are essential. In "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", depicts the region of fancy, where one loses sense of reality. The "miles to go" and the "promises to keep" are suggestive of the down-to-earth attitude of a man who knows that life is not a dream. Symbolically, "The Road Not Taken" deals with the choice of the poet faced with two different lines of poetic development.

Like the modern poets, Frost works out the pattern of his poems through metaphors. "Birches" is a fine example of a gradual unfolding of meaning through a progression of metaphors. He begins the poem as a simple, concrete description of the 'habits' of birches and the changes wrought upon them by wind and ice storms, but soon it becomes a parable of human aspiration. The boy who swings the birches shrewdly and carefully suggests metaphorically to the poet that he himself, "weary of considerations", and "wishing to get away from earth a while", partakes of the same experience. The poem concludes with a note on the question of earth, life and death, and the balance demonstrated in the metaphor of swinging birches between heaven and earth.

It is often alleged that Frost neither describes the conditions of life in the industrialized urban world, nor has he written much about the specific political and economic problems that are the subject matter of the contemporary daily papers. Subject matter is a poor measure of poet's modernity. The question is not whether Frost depicts the scenery of modern life, but whether he deals with its major problems. It is a superficial view, which would equate these problems with the issues of political campaigns, or the questions settled by warfare—the burning issues of one decade are apt to be different from those of the decade before or the decade after. Obviously the poet, if he is going to be truly representative of his age, will have to penetrate the level of social action with its constantly shifting controversy and succession of practical choices to the broad intellectual problems which remain unresolved. This Frost has done much more bravely, more adventurously and perceptively than his readers are yet aware. Frost does not depict the outward events and conditions, but the central facts of twentieth century experience, the uncertainty and painful sense of loss are there and seem, if anything, more bleakly apparent in that their social and economic manifestations have been stripped away.

Frost is unquestionably an outstanding modern poet. He has illuminated things as common as a woodpile and as uncommon as a prehistoric pebble, as natural as a bird singing in its sleep and as 'mechanistic' as the revolt of a factory with a particular aliveness because it expresses living people. Other poets have written about people, but Frost's poems are the people; they work, and walk and converse and tell their stories with the freedom of common speech.



## Assignment

Attempt any two of the following questions

1. What are the major themes in the poetry of Robert Frost? Give illustrations from the poems you have read
2. "Frost is a great poet of barriers and boundaries." Justify the statement.
3. Write an essay on the theme of isolation and alienation in Frost's poetry.
4. Frost is a poet of 'pastorals'. Substantiate the statement drawing illustrations from the poems prescribed in your course.
5. Bring out the element of modernity in Frost's poetry

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## WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

"The Revelation," "Sea-Trout and Bufferfish," "Tact," "The Widows Lament in Spring Time,"  
"Young Sycamore," "Preface to Paterson Book One," "The Orchestra," "Negro Woman"

### William Carlos Williams - Unit II

#### (A) Introduction to American Poetry

American poetry, once an offshoot, now appears to be a strong parent stem. Speculative, daring, and sometimes melodious, it has become the register of some of the most independent minds. What poets have written has urgency, sensitivity to contemporary conditions and forceful utterance. That isolated figures should have achieved so much might be put down to chance. Beyond chance, however, these qualities have been sustained and fostered by many good poets as well as by a few great ones. Such clustered enterprise makes persuasive the claim of this poetry to have a distinctive and national character.

For the new settlers in North America, versifying was as natural as ploughing. Their early poems were usually prayers lauding the deity for enabling them to supersede the Indians, who themselves addressed poems in other languages to less responsive deities. Yet if writing English verse was a prevalent pastime in America from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, it was hardly ever done well. The stronger talents, founding fathers or God's ministers, were more felicitous in prose.

Almost from the beginning there must have been a glimmer that new exploits might be hazarded in creative literature as in other kinds of endeavor. The colonists came, after all, from lands that were already storied and poemed, and there seemed no reason why the new country should not have its moments and places similarly memorialized. If memorialists were scarce, it is salutary to recognize, in an age of chairpersons, that **the first American poet of consequence was a woman**. Anne Bradstreet, born before Shakespeare died, belonged to a pious and workaday world as unlike his as possible. She was modest about her poems,

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue,  
Who says, my hand a needle better fits,  
and about her sex,  
Men have precedency and still excell...  
Men can do best, and Women know it well...

But friends who were proud of her talent had her poems published in 1650 under the title, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*. Nine European incumbents were displaced. If Anne Bradstreet's verse did not live up to this billing, even to the degree of parochialism (she had, after all, been born in England, and was devoted to the mother country), it has some elegance in its handling of simple themes such as the burning of her house or the absence of her loving husband. What her title suggested was true, that through her an upstart country was claiming audience.

Yet no one followed her, or so it seemed until, in the late 1930s, the discovery of Edward Taylor's poems indicated that she had in fact had a successor. Taylor, also born in England, thirty years after Anne Bradstreet, outrivaled her self-effacement by publishing nothing. It might be supposed that humility would also pervade his poems. They are humble enough before God, but Taylor has, even in abasement, a firm and often grand manner. He has as models the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poets, as Eliot would have after him; and like them, he is intricate even when testifying devotion, and sonorous as well:

Oh! What a thing is Man? Lord, Who am I...  
Make me, O Lord, thy Spinning Wheel complicate...  
I keening through Astronomy Divine  
The Worlds bright Battlement, wherein I spy  
A Golden Path my Pensil cannot line,

From that bright Throne unto my Threshold ly.  
Or he can ask like Blake,  
Who Lac'de and Fillitted the earth so fine,  
With Rivers like green Ribbons Smaragdine?

Taylor's force of utterance and homely figures have their precedents, and he does not mind being within a tradition. Nor did Philip Freneau, born a century later, who lacked Taylor's heights and depths and controlled a middle style closer to that of the Augustan poets. Some of his verse was satirical, and ably so, but he had a capacity also for tight declarative statements:

The space between, is but an hour,  
The frail duration of a flower,  
There ages past have rolled away,  
And forests bloomed but to decay.

Not much is being said, but that little is said well.

What we usually think of as American verse is more freestepping than this. But in fact much American verse of good quality, including some of the most familiar poems, is in established forms and presents accustomed feelings. If poets who can be described as traditional seem less representative of the new country, they provide the setting for more spectacular excursions. And some of them wrote very well. William Cullen Bryant regarded his art as consolatory, and he found nature a consolation which he could celebrate. That it might be, as Wordsworth was attesting across the water, a transforming power as well, did not occur to him. He sought long-established truths which he could impressively reiterate. He informed the Waterfowl (in his poem to that bird) of what it presumably did not need to be told:

There is a Power, whose care  
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast...  
Yet he could do better than that, in descriptive passages,  
All day they wings have fanned,  
At that far height, the cold, thin atmosphere...

**Longfellow** had wider interests and keener melancholy than **Bryant**. He could write commonplaces too, but apart from moral uplift, he was 'one acquainted with the night.' So he could address the darkness.

Peace! Peace! Orestes-like I breathe this prayer,

The cult of integrity is the very essence of the cultural heritage that the Puritan fathers bequeathed to modern Americans, even though it was thinned down through many generations; and without it we could not understand **Ezra Pound's** belligerence, **Gertrude Stein's** experimental daring, **Hemingway's** clipped style and tough philosophy, **Faulkner's** prophetic cruelty, **Dos Passos's** radical writing and **Dewey's** drastically reductive thought. Impatience is sometimes translated into suicide more often into exiles; the American rebel does not settle for compromise, either in life or in literature, and he may have to pay very dearly for it.

### Change in Style

In the half-century between 1920 and 1970 the **writing of poetry in the English language underwent radical changes in style and sensibility**. Such established poets as Frost, Williams, Stevens, Pound, and Eliot were producing some of their most characteristic work, but another generation was composing poetry with another consciousness, a new tone as well as a new technique. In those fifty years the poets attained an unprecedented range and diversity. The gamut was all the way from immediately communicated verse in traditional forms to indirect and difficult innovations in fluid movement and free association. The very mutability of styles was one of the features of the era.

Much of the poetry seemed improvisational, the dictates of a 'stream of consciousness' boldly **adventurous** in subject matter and treatment. Much of it, complying with the demand for new words to express a new age, was marked by startling unions, sudden leaps from one image to another, and by uncommon juxtapositions that dispensed with logical connections.

If the attitude frequently assumed was an existentialist acceptance of a universe indifferent to the individual, it was counterbalanced by a feeling, often a passionate concern, for what had hitherto been regarded as material too

unpoetic for poetry. Most of the modern poets accepted all aspects of reality, sordid as well as striking, and luxuriated in the complexity of the modern world. Old forms were refreshed with new idioms; a loose rhetoric was followed by a return to precision. There were those who insisted that any discipline was an inhibition that fettered free expression, and there were those who believed with Thoreau that art, like life, is at its height when it is subject to the highest discipline. It is a truism that all the arts are in a perpetual state of rotation: a swing to and from convention and revolt. Modern poetry is no exception. It continually alternates between traditional and experimental modes. The moot matter of formal versus nonformal verse was projected in a concise and cogent, as well as amusing, metaphor by Greg Kuzma in the December 1971 issue of *Poetry*. Logically entitled "Poetry," it maintained that

The old forms are like birdhouses that  
 have been made homes so long they are  
 full of stuffing. Only the rarest birds  
 can squeeze in and out of the doorways. And  
 then they can't move around much inside, but  
 keep peeping the same sounds. Which the  
 stuffing almost insulates. But  
 still they stay stuck, up on their poles.  
 And we keep listening hard for voices  
 to come out of them. And they do.

The place of the poet in today's world is an ambivalent one. On one hand he feels himself dedicated to convey what is beautiful or exalted or hopeful. On the other hand he is faced with a world torn by tensions, split by hatreds, threatened with annihilation. Rawness can be the price of such a violently sought answer, and its marks are clear in much of what Dr. Williams wrote; *Paterson* itself, and the two volumes of his *Collected Poems*, afford abundant evidence. Here blunt realism and dare-devil **experimentation** never make concessions to decadent aestheticism.

**William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) represents modern American Poetry of the twentieth century.** There have always been many attempts to define the 'Americanness' of American literature, and there always will be. In fact this has been an obsessive theme with the American critics themselves. For them, it has to be part of that larger assertion of American self-hood in the terms of the highest kind of expression, that of literature. And it is a continuing process. This point was made, for example, by Francis Murphy in his 'Going it Alone – Estrangement in American poetry' (*Yale Review*, Autumn, 1966). The American writer being orphaned, so to say, from literary tradition, is always rather desperately trying to be self-reliant – both in form and content. This has its advantages, but at the same time, there is a price to pay:

Ours is a literature of exile. It is full of isolates and eccentricities who express themselves in watchful declamation or defensive mimicry or in the ingenious spinning out of hallucinatory tales as if to call into existence by tricks of spell-binding that audience which they know is not there except they manage to create it... It cultivates the private nervous sensibility preferring the rough and unpolished to polished forms... The American writer is at least a Maverick; he says 'no in thunder' to more than conventional forms and his characteristic tone is blasphemy, the voice of the upstart...

As this writer sees it, the true and only tradition in American letters has been to say "no" to tradition and to take one's chances. One therefore engages oneself in a futile search for new forms, confusing ingenuity with art. This continuing drawing on of one's personal resources is exhausting, debilitating. The result has been, as Auden noted, "too cranky, too earnest, too scornful of elegance" though, of course, at the same time bold and vigorous and original – may be, not always in the best sense of that term.

## (B) Introduction to the Poet

### William Carlos Williams, (1883 – 1963)

A close contemporary and lifelong friend of Ezra Pound, born in 1883 in Rutherford, New Jersey, to an English father and Puerto Rican mother, William Carlos Williams is considered an important modern American poet of the first rank.

Conscious of standing in the shadow of leaders like Pound, whom he admired, and Eliot whose *Waste Land* seemed to him a disastrous influence, Williams acknowledged that his place in literary history would probably be that of a poet of limited achievement. But history has a way of confounding prophesy and even modest prediction. The swift insensibility in the years following the Second World War brought Williams full if belated recognition and a high place equal to Pound's and perhaps greater than Eliot's, in the eyes of the younger poets of the Third Generation. After medical training at the University of Pennsylvania, he spent the rest of his life, until his retirement in 1951, practicing medicine in Rutherford. He met Ezra Pound at the University of Pennsylvania, and later came to know Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, Louis Zukofsky, and other poets and artists. During a long lifetime **he published several dozen books – poems, plays, stories, novels, essays, a book about American history, an autobiography.**

Though he has been primarily considered a doctor specially a gynaceologist and an obstetrician who completed more than forty years in the medical profession, yet he wrote enduring poetry almost every day of his life. His long profession as a doctor and unusual life long vocation as a poet combined well. Ford Madox Ford writes: "Dr. Williams is an admirable and abominably overworked physician from the State of New Jersey. I hope that this publicity may get him struck off the medical register so that he may produce many thousand fewer babies and many, many thousand more clear caustic words. He has been writing for many years and the product of his hours between deliveries has long since drawn to him the consciousness at once of the intelligentsia and the writers of this country and of the country across the Atlantic ... He is, in short, adored among his patients as a physician and among writers as a writer. Lawrence Ferlinghetti states in a review that Williams "is happiest when hard at his medical practice letting the poetry germinate while he works, finding the resolution of medicine and poetry in the final, limitless search for poetic essence in the life he is able, because of his profession, intimately to touch." Some of his own natural gifts of character are highlighted by Mathew Josephson in another review: "William is an excellent physician by reason of the same qualities that have made him a good poet: imagination, independence of mind, quickness of eye and hand. Though he turned out poetry in gushers from boy-hood on, he vowed that he would never seek to earn money with his pen, but would live by some other calling rather than by the low shifts of professional and 'commercial' writers. Some of his best lines were written in the hours of waiting for an accouchement. Thus Dr. Williams has embodied in literature what we used to call the 'amateur spirit,' which is now so rare."

### **Influence of Keats**

It is fascinating to note how the modern American doctor-poet, an imagist happened to hero-worship the British physician poet, a perfect romantic of the nineteenth Century: "Keats, during the years at medical school, was my God. *Endymion* really woke me up. I copied Keat's style religiously starting my magnum opus of those days on the pattern of *Endymion*." Williams, in fact, composed his first poem, a long one, fully modelling Keat's *Endymion*. There is no denying the fact that during those months devoted to his own poetic germination, doctor Williams, in the style of Keats, considered poets as superior beings. However, this prolific effort on his part never saw the light of day in print because a well known teacher of literature, Professor Bates, helped in stunting the imitative style of the young and effervescent doctor-poet. Prof. Bate's advice to Williams is noteworthy: "I can see that you have a sensitive appreciation of the work of John Keats' line and form... you have done some creditable imitations of his work. Not bad. Perhaps in twenty years, yes, in perhaps twenty years you may succeed in attracting some attention to yourself."

As he opened his eyes, he found himself alone, lying in a comfortable place among the trees, quite in the open, with torn branches on all sides of him and leaves, ripped from their hold, plastered in fragments upon the rocks about him. Unfortunately, though, he didn't recognize the place. No one was there to inform him of his whereabouts and when he did begin to encounter passers-by they didn't even understand, let alone speak his language. He could recall nothing of the past. In this text alone of his mature work does Williams describe **the state of deprivation which was his starting point**. It appears only once because it was so soon transcended. The poet does not become himself, nor is his writing possible, until he has gone beyond it. Only in Williams' first published work, the *Poems of 1909*, that pastiche of the romantic motifs he was soon to reject, is there an echo of the experience here described:

But now among low plains or banks which rear  
Their flower hung screens o'erhead I wander-where?

These fields I know not; know not whence I come;  
 Nor aught of all which spreads so touching near.  
 The very bird-songs I have heard them n'er  
 And this strange folk know not e'en my name.

The young man who found himself alone in a strange land was the hero of the long narrative poem, modeled on Keats's *Endymion*, which Williams wrote during his medical training, at about the same time that he was writing the poems published in the slender volume of 1909. Though he added more and more scenes to the poem, it remained unfinished. Williams says in his autobiography that he finally burned the poem, but the manuscript is extant and is now in the possession of John C. Thirlwall. See *The Massachusetts Review*, 3:307 (Winter 1962) for a facsimile of one page of it. "Be mostly silent!" How can this be? In the years after *The Wanderer*, Williams was anything but silent. He wrote poems, plays, stories, and essays in a constant stream. How can he have gone from his silence to a justification of literature? A good poet, he says, "doesn't select his material. What is there to select? I is." Words have to be used as they are.

**Importance of Words** : Words as the expression of man's separation from things disappear with the poet's plunge into the Passaic, but this does not mean that language vanishes. It reappears in the new silence as something which already exists, like trees and rocks. **Williams' poetry takes language for granted, just as it takes chicory, daisies, plums, and butter fish for granted.** His plunge into the substance of things does not reach a shapeless blur in which all distinctions have been lost. The world is within rather than at a distance, but it is still full of things existing in the exactness of their forms. Language has a kind of sanctity for Williams, and most of his vocabulary can be found in any pocket dictionary. There is scarcely a trace in his poetry of that attempt to reconstruct language by deformation which characterizes a writer like Joyce

Words are first of all things: "But can you **see**, can you not **taste**, can you not **smell**, can you not **hear**, can you not **touch**-words? ... Words roll, spin, flare up, rumble, trickle, foam—". A word is its sound and feel in the mouth when spoken, or the way it looks on the page, black marks against a white background, graphite which could be "scraped up and put in a tube" or ink which could be lifted from the page. As a painting is made of paint or music of sound, so "**A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words**". This does not mean that Williams wants to drain words of meaning and make them dull surds, mute lumps of voiceless matter. "Words are indivisible crystals," and if they are broken up nothing is left but meaningless letters. To suppose that words in themselves are meaningless would be a return to one form of the dualism Williams has escaped. In the realm where man and things are one there is nothing which is not intrinsically meaningful. To suppose that man ascribes meaning to things is to suppose a separation of subject and object. Every gesture, every flower, every stone has its meaning as part of its substance, and words contain their meaning as an inextricable part of themselves. Like gestures or facial expressions they are ways man affirms his solidarity with the world, proof that meaning is always incarnated, never purely spiritual. "The words," says the poet, "must become real, they must take the place of wife and sweet-heart. They must be church  $\frac{3}{4}$  Wife". No symbolism, no depth, no reference to a world beyond the world, no pattern of imagery, no dialectical structure, no interaction of subject and object — just description.

This acceptance of words as things manifests itself in several ways in Williams' work. A modern painter makes his collage of bits of newspaper or cigarette packages. Picasso creates a bull's head out of a bicycle seat and handle bars. Marcel Duchamp sets up a urinal as a "ready-made." In the same way Williams makes poetry out of a list of kinds of ice cream, with prices (CEP, 62, 63), or out of street signs (CEP, 353), or out of a fashionable grocery list: "2 partridges/2 mallard ducks/a Dungeness crab/24 hours out/of the Pacific/ and 2 live-frozen/trout/from Denmark" (P, 262). Nonverbal things cannot be put into poetry, since poems are after all made of words, but words also are ready-made and may be taken out of their contexts and put into a poem just as they are found. **It is not necessary to change something to make it poetic.** All things, including words, are already poetic, and what the painter does with bits of burlap and old nails the poet may do with words, put them without arrangement on the page, so they will be present - *there*.

### **Patriotism**

Unlike Pound, who chose exile from the "half-savage country" of his birth, **Williams felt always a deep attachment to his home locality and a pride in his Americanism** - a pride intensified by youthful resentment of the Englishness

of his father. Pound called him a two-hundred-percent American. His patriotism was combined with a temperamental equalitarianism, a feeling for the common life, and a passionate openness to experience. These qualities help to explain the affinity he felt for Whitman and the effort he made in his epic work *Paterson* and other poems to endow his local experience with universal significance. Resisting Pound's repeated urgings to come to Europe and "bite off a chunk of it" Williams clung tenaciously to the red clay soil and unlovely industrial sprawl of his native New Jersey, finding the subject of his poems in what Emerson had approvingly called "the near, the low, the common" — taking the speech of America, as he once said, from the mouths of Polish mothers, but purging and refining it to an unostentatious elegance.

His first book, *poems* (1909), privately printed in Rutherford, appeared under an epigraph adopted from "Ode on a Grecian Urn," by John Keats, one of his early favourite poets: Happy melodist forever piping songs forever new. The poems of this first collection are largely conventional and often, like Pound's in the same period, somewhat archaic in manner and diction. But Williams responded quickly to the new ideas about poetry of the Imagists and Vorticists, maintaining through a long transatlantic correspondence a lively dialogue with Pound. A marked change appeared in his second volume, *The Tempers* (1913), which includes, besides love songs from the Spanish (reflecting a continuing interest in translation from that language), successful poems in a modern manner like 'To Mark Anthony in Heaven' and 'Portrait of a Lady'. In *Al Que Quiere: A Book of Poems* (1917), Williams revealed full mastery of the free verse forms that he was to work in for the rest of his living career.

### Objectivism

The term Williams preferred to Imagism and sought to establish through critical essays and his editorial association with the little magazine *Contact* (especially during its first run in 1920-23) is Objectivism. His Objectivism has sometimes been mistaken as purely objective Imagism: an effort to copy or imitate (represent) physical objects in nature. But to Williams, the primary object was the poem itself, the words which the poet creates or 'invents' in a manner determined by the nature of his perception. His chief commitment, accordingly, is to the reality and integrity of the poetic object rather than to the physical reality of its "subject," even though this physical reality is important to him both in itself and as stimulus or inspiration to his work. The forms created by the poet enhance and enlarge the common life of the writer and his readers. As Williams remarked in a prose passage from *Spring and All* (1923), "in great works of the imagination A CREATIVE FORCE IS SHOWN AT WORK MAKING OBJECTS WHICH ALONE COMPLETE SCIENCE AND ALLOW INTELLIGENCE TO SURVIVE," and, further, "works of art . . . must be real, not 'realism' but reality itself."

### The Red Wheelbarrow

The view may be illustrated by one of the most familiar of all Williams's short poems, of sixteen words 'The Red Wheelbarrow,' also from *Spring and All*:

So much depends  
upon  
a red wheel  
barrow  
glazed with rain  
water  
beside the white  
chickens.

The poem has often been cited as an example of **objective Imagism**, an effort to devise a verbal representation of a thing in nature. The sensuous values of the rain-glazed barrow and the chickens are important, but it is also clear that what is presented is not so much a scene from nature, with all its profusion of detail, but a telling metrical composition of rigorously selected images in a symmetrical pattern. The entire poem consists of sixteen words measured into four two-line stanzas of three and one words each.

The discursive opening, "so much depends," points to the question of the significance of the images. If one thinks of them as representing nature on the level of physical commodity, in Emerson's terms, he is made to reflect that human civilization depends upon the interrelated forces of the machine (the wheel-barrow lever), the natural force of fertility (rain), and animal life (the chicken as a source of food and a symbol of human fertility). To Williams, who is not an Emersonian Transcendentalist, these basic physical values are not to be despised.

But the traditional wooden barrow has also been transformed and enhanced by the red paint and the rain water that glazes its surface; and the selective arrangement of which it is a part has value beyond the physical values of the represented natural objects. In Williams's Objectivist view, the "so much" that depends much primarily refer to the aesthetic value of the poem as an arrangement in words that he has contrived, although the economic values of the presented objects cannot be excluded. Nor would Williams, a lover of the sensual life, wish to do so. As he acknowledges in the quotation from *Spring and All*, "Much may be represented actually."

This view is one Williams shares with many modern poets and critics. Even the Imagists' presented "thing", as required by their tenets, can if properly understood and not confused but to be identified with Williams' poetic object. The effect of this distinctively modern theory is to **place a value on the poetic image as a unique reality rather than as a representation or symbol of a pre-existing reality**. Like Marianne Moore and more than Pound, Williams was actively antisymbolic in much of his early poetry. (His later tendency toward symbolism grew during the writing of *Paterson*.) He wished to renew language by placing words and images in fresh contexts that would cleanse them of conventionalized symbolic associations and free them to reveal new meanings and relationship. He wished, in other words, to present the image as image, with meanings suggested only by its immediate content, and to avoid both symbolism and discursive statement.

### (C) Main Characteristics of Williams' Poetry

- (i) Williams was an excellent physician by reason of the same qualities that had made him a great poet: **imagination, independence of mind, quickness of eye and hand**. Though he turned out poetry in question from boy hood on, he had vowed that he would never seek to earn money with his pen, but would live by some other calling rather than by the low shifts of professional and commercial writers. Some of his best lines were written in the hours of waiting for accouchement. Thus Dr. Williams had embodied in literature what is know as 'amateur spirit' which is now so rare.
- (ii) In 1929, to the question 'what is your strongest characteristic?' posed by the editors of *The Little Review*, he had replied: "My sight. I like most my ability to be drunk with a sudden realization of value in things others never notice". He firmly believed, "**the moment sight ceases art ceases**". The imagery of visual sensation in the poetry of Williams has its additional importance in the sense that he, on receiving the visual impulse, he would often dissect, analyze, arrange, rearrange, and effect some permutations and combinations of the components and their parts under examination in his mental laboratory for finalizing the poetic image concerned.
- (iii) William had the eyes of a scientist who is devoid of any emotional complexity in the act of perceiving the world around him through the organ of sight. Appearances, as scrutinized under the examining eye, are often associated with the other sensory phenomena as well. An important critic J. Hillis Miller emphasizes the fact that **Williams' imagery of sensation is an important fact of his poetic art** as he gives due importance to al the five physiological sensations – tactile, palatine, olfactory, auditory and visual. Concern for human feeling and value is strong in Williams' poetry from the beginning.
- (iv) Like Whitman he identifies himself with the common life and regards himself as its recorder and critic. The cultural interests of *Paterson* do not represent a sudden shift of interest or only a late development in his work (although these interests certainly depend in his later years). Side by side with his technical preoccupation with the form and direction of modern poetry is a steadfast commitment to the role of **social poet**. As early as 'The Wanderer: A Rococo Study' (1914), Williams presents himself as spokesman for the life of the modern metropolis as, with the "great towers of Man hattan before me," he confronts the question "How Shall I be a mirror to this modernity?" Accepting baptism in the "Passic, that filthy river," a recurrent symbol of the corruption of the common life, he nevertheless identifies his own life with it. In a number of poems, including the early 'Tract'.
- (v) Williams assumes the role of a **poet conscious of his social duty** even though it may be ignored by his fellow citizens. In 'Gulls', he tells his towns people that it would be more profitable for him to live "in the great world," where his talents would be recognized, and urges them to listen because they "will not soon have another singer." He begins another poem, 'Apology,' by asking "Why do I Write today?" and proceeds to answer himself:

The beauty of



the terrible faces  
of our non entities  
stirs me to it:  
Colored women  
day workers –  
old and experienced –  
returning home at dusk  
in cast off clothing  
faces like  
old Florentine oak.

- (vi) Many of his poems are characteristic example of his emphasis on the **five senses of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling** and above all **touch**, that *tactus eruditus*, which is, indeed, proper for a physician to have. The assimilation of the world by the senses makes of the body kinesthetic pantomime of the activity of nature. "A thing known passes out of the mind into the muscles," says Williams. The poem 'Young Sycamore' affirms this possession not only in the tactile imagery of "round and firm trunk" and "bodily" but also in the pattern of verbs or verbals which makes up the framework of the poem "rises," "undulant/thrust," "dividing and waning," "sending out," "hung," "thins," "knotted," "bending." These words articulate the way the poet lives the life of the tree

I must tell you  
this young tree  
whose round and firm trunk  
between the wet  
pavement and the gutter  
(where water is  
rickling) rises  
bodily  
into the air with  
one undulant  
thrust half its height – and then  
dividing and waning  
sending out  
young branches on  
all sides –  
hung with cocoons  
it thins  
till nothing is left of it  
but two  
eccentric knotted  
twigs  
bending forward  
horulike at the top (CEP, 332)

The organic sense, as the tree "rises bodily", is strengthened in the image of a single undulant thrust of the dimension of half its height that helps the firm and rounded trunk shoot up. The image depicts the organic phenomena of growth noted in the human transformation from adolescence to youth projected on our vision in high speed. The image of the tree branching and slimming down at its upper extremity adds sense of normality of it were in the tapering upper limbs of a human body, the arms being raised high with the open and stretched

fingers inclined at an angle, "bending forward". Viewed with another orientation of imagination, the horn-like structure of the two "eccentric knotted twigs" that bend toward lends to the description a potent animal imagery.

- (vii) Although all the physiological sensations are given their due importance by William Carlos Williams, it is the **visual** that plays a major role in his sensory art. His obsession with visual sensation is primarily because of his natural talent in using his own organ of sight for assessing the world around him with a curious look from a close range. In the process, the poet notes with a great interest the eyes, real and imaginary, of several animate and inanimate objects, recording meticulously their physiological functions, and relating them often to his own imagistic vision. Critics have noted a few interesting phenomena associated with the eyes of the poetry of Williams, but no concerted effort has been made so far to isolate the organ of vision for a systematic analysis of the sensory patterns concerned.
- (viii) Similarly, critics sometimes refer to Williams' **montage technique** and **collage method** of placing different objects side by side in his specific images, but many of them seem to be oblivious of the fact that the poet's art of juxtaposition is related primarily to his own unique power of visual discrimination. Viewed from this angle, there is a need to assess the importance of the primordial position of the technique of juxtaposition in a substantial corpus of the poetic imagery of Williams.
- (ix) It is surprising to note that although a few critics tangentially admit that sensations seem to overlap in certain images in Williams' poetry, none has significantly analyzed the role of **synaesthesia** in the sensory art of the poet. Synaesthesia is intermingling of sensations. As an admirer of Keats's sensuous imagery, it is but natural for Williams to be occasionally haunted by certain subtle and compact synaesthetic expressions of the former. On this assumption, on a close examination, one finds several images in which the visual participation in synaesthesia becomes quite obvious. However, there is a need to categorize systematically such image patterns, while broadening the scope of synaesthesia in consonance with the pace and style of advancing literary criticism.
- (x) **The role of empathic imagery** is often pronounced in the poetic art of Williams. It is fascinating to see how the poet involuntarily projects himself into the animate and inanimate objects on envisioning the images of myological stress and strain in them. However, it is not enough to examine how the poet empathizes with objects under contemplation. The success of Williams, in this particular context, lied in the fact that he is able to arouse in the neuro-muscular system of the reader a parallel physiological process. As a consequence, the reader experiences the mysterious pull of empathy.

The most striking surface characteristic of Williams' writing, therefore is its extraordinary **empathic responsiveness**, noted by many critics, to trees and flowers especially. In this respect he seems more akin to Lawrence than to Pound. Sometimes, in 'The Botticellian Trees,' for instance, he makes everything in nature seem the work of some delicately erotic artist, some Botticellian demiurge. And sometimes the terror of reality chills the skin of a poem, and we have a realization such as that in 'Spring and All' of the oneness of all initiation into life:

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish  
 dazed spring approaches—  
 They enter the new world naked,  
 cold, uncertain of all  
 save that they enter. All about them  
 the cold, familiar wind—  
 Now the grass, tomorrow  
 the stiff curl of wild carrot leaf  
 One by one objects are defined—  
 It quickens: clarity, outline of leaf  
 But now the stark dignity of  
 entrance—Still, the profound change  
 has come upon them: rooted, they  
 grip down and begin to awaken

(xi) Poetry like this, in which the writer temporarily holds his own personality in abeyance and then returns to it with what he has taken from the world outside, is reality subjectively encompassed. Perception has not been falsified. Thus, the figure 'dazed spring' is more than a convenient personification. It has been derived inductively from the whole set of the poem, its verbal shaping-up of the experience of birth. It is the essential link between the objective description of a late-winter landscape and the passionately conceived subjective imagery of 'profound change' and 'awakening.'

(xii) This empathy carries us back to Williams's most precious attribute, **his driving conviction** (which he shares with Lawrence) **of the importance of each individual life** and of the individual moment within it. These lives and moments are so precious that one cannot ignore any truth about them. As early as "The Wanderer," a poem of his twenties, Williams wrote that his muse compelled him to come to terms with his part of the real world—the industrial city Paterson with its fouled rivers, its scarred and patchy surrounding countryside, and its people.

Grasping, fox-snouted, thick-lipped,  
Sagging breasts and protruding stomachs,  
Rasping voices, filthy habits with the hands.

The Muse held him to his task. At the age of seventy, in "To a Dog Injured in the Streets," he wrote:

It is myself,  
not the poor beast lying there  
yelping with pain  
that brings me to myself with a start—  
as at the explosion  
of a bomb, a bomb that has laid  
all the world waste. . . .

(xiii) Here is indeed a sensibility like Lawrence's. One thinks of his close-ups of ordinary folk which strengthen our awareness of the individual flame behind the common mask of anonymity, or of his anguished description of the carnage winter wreaks on the birds, or of his feeling for the blazing life of flowers. **Motifs of symbolic death and rebirth are important in both poets**, and in parallel form; Lawrence's 'New Heaven and Earth' might serve as a credo for Williams. Williams does part company with him in his unfaltering confidence in art's redeeming and healing powers, although the poets' difference on this score can easily be exaggerated. The salvation implied in Williams's localist programme from 'The Wanderer' on is, despite its compassion and anger, primarily an aesthetic one, not a purely religious, mystical, or social one. The poet, seeking to awaken the people to their own rich potentialities, purifies himself by taking into his own being the whole degradation of modern traditional life bereft of all traditional graces. The waters of the 'filthy Passaic' enter his heart and soul and transform him. But it is a transformation like that of which Yeats writes in 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' when he speaks of the 'foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart' out of whose wares are ultimately created the 'masterful images' of 'pure mind.'

This sacramental-aesthetic theme enters most of Williams's work.

### (D) Theme and Technique of His Poetic Works

Of the many poets who were supposed to owe their existence to the arrival of Ezra Pound's "Les Imagistes" and Amy Lowell's army of "free" versifiers. William Carlos Williams was the last to gain public recognition. His first book, *poems* (1909), appeared before the "poetic renaissance" had officially begun and some three years before the mysterious term. "Les Imagistes" had been invented. The book was also published a year before Williams began his medical practice, which he maintained throughout his life.

(i) For the most part Williams verse has been unrhymed. The free verse he uses is an instinctive part of his unfettered, untraditional attitude to poetry, and of his spontaneity. In temper it has been farthest removed from "professional" verse; it has been protestant, yet formal, and the virtues of even his slightest pieces have been those of presenting definite objects and scenes before the eye of the reader. His small poems (little portraits

whether it be a suburban pastoral ("The Young House Wife") or a poem such as 'Nantucket' have the qualities of cleanliness, freshness, and neatness.

- (ii) The poems are the records of the eye and hand of a singularly alert observer, where each notation has been scrupulously selected, and the entire brilliant, almost antiseptic scene has 'attained the formal virtues of restraint and a thoroughly unpretentious dignity'. It is simply no more or less than what it pretends to be, and one is not invited to read deeper meanings in the poem than the first sight of his words convey. Many of the shorter poems of Williams rest upon the same premise. The selection is always firm, however lightly its choices may seem to have been made (Cf, By the road to the contagious hospital, To Waken and Old Lady, To a poor Old Woman). Williams has always been very much his own man, and one might almost say his own poet". In one of his polite Essays Ezra Pound observed the slow growth to Williams's poetic maturity, but the slow growth, so visibly reflected through the three-hundred odd pages of *The Complete Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams* (1938) was an advantage for him. Despite the fluidity of many poems and their thin if not transparent lines the impression that one gains of a poet who has wisely accepted the laws of 'the pace at which he has lived'. Consequently poems such as 'The Botticellian Trees', 'Young Sycamore', 'The sea Elephant', and 'The Jungle' attained perfection of an art that had earlier seemed a tentative experiment" in verse fibre.

- (iii) Williams is distinguished (like the French Symbolist poet, Verlaine), for suggesting emotion, and delicate control over language rather than "ideas". But the mood created by him in his love lyric "Rain" places him at a great distance from the French Symbolist and his impressionist.

In his introduction to Williams' Collection poems (1921-31) published in 1934 Wallace Stevens found occasion to speak illuminatingly of Williams, of the romantic poet in general, and of the "anti-poetic" element in so-called "modern" poetry. Stevens wrote "

"...and generally speaking one might run through these pages and point out how often the essential poetry is the result of the conjunction of the unreal and the real, the sentimental and the anti-poetic, the constant interaction of two opposites. This seems to define Williams and his poetry". So defined Williams looks like "the realist struggling to escape from the serpents of the unreal" Stevens further remarks: He is commonly identified by externals. He includes here specimens of abortive rhythms, words on several levels, ideas without logic, and similar minor matters, which, when all is said, are merely the diversion of the prophet between morning and evening song. It will be found that he has made some veritable additions to the corpus of poetry which is certainly no more sacred to anyone than to him. His special use of the anti-poetic is an example of this. The ambiguity produced by bareness is another. The implied image, as in 'Young Sycamore', the serpent that leaps up in one's imagination at this prompting, is an addition to imagism, a phase of realism which Williams has always found congenial...."

- (iv) Williams' search for "an honest man" as well as an instruction to others "to stand out of my sunlight", are the kinds of truth that he sought in verse. The search may at times seem wantonly naïve, and at times it has resulted in incomplete and "experimental" poems, but it is certain that Williams has never falsified his language; and he has made an ethical distinction between the use of artifice of an art. His concern is craftsmanship, not artifice, and in this respect he is the greatest twentieth century writer. Consequently a number of Williams's poems contain a substance that is "unliterary" in the best sense of the term. Some poems may be "sentimental" in Stevens's sharp and well-mannered use of the word, but whether or not the poem achieves its end, the "truth" of the poem remains unimpaired.

The later poems of Williams, including the 'Elegy in Memory of D.H. Lawrence' define the range of his poetic maturity. Two quotations from his latest book, *The Wedge* (1944) illustrate the sureness with which he practised his art. One is from "Burning the Christmas Green", and the second from "The Cure" shows another aspect of his plainly spoken and formal austerity in un-rhymed verse.

His several works in prose since 1921 are 'works in progress' towards the control in prose over which Williams has accomplished such excellent mastery in his later poetry.

Like Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, T.S. Eliot, E.E. Cummings, D.H. Lawrence, and Ezra Pound, Williams has never modified the quality of his gifts to meet the temporary demands of commercial publication; and unlike

them, his poetic maturity has been of an almost stubborn and yet hardly growth.

During the course of our discussion we have made reference to the term 'Imagists'. Let us now explain it briefly.

- (v) Of the so called literary "movements" that Pound fostered none received wider publicity than **Imagism**, which came to light in 1912 and achieved recognition nineteen years later in having an entire book *Imagism and the Imagists* by Glenn Hughes (1931) devoted to its rise and fall. The climate that produced *Les Imagistes* deserves a few words of explanation. In London itself something like a "rebirth" in poetic speech, style and manner had begun to be strongly felt among young men who had come down from the universities. The "Georgian" poets who met in Harold Manro's (he who had written "Nymph, nymph, what are your heads"), Poetry Bookshop, and who had been assembled in anthologies edited by Edward Marsh, seemed to lead poetry far away from the intimacies of sir Edmund Gosse's drawing room into the open English countryside. The venture was a far more sedate and domestic journey than the call to the delights of vagabondia that Bliss Carman and Richard Hovey sounded in America during the preceding decade; the 'Georgians'. He assesses the world around him from a close range by making use of his five sensations and notes with great interest the real and imaginary, the animate and inanimate objects, recording metriculously their physiological functions, and relating them after to his own imagistic vision.
- (vi) Similarly critics sometimes refer to Williams' montage technique and collage method of placing different objects side by side in his specific images, but many of them seem to be oblivious of the fact that the poet's **art of juxtaposition is related primarily to his own unique power of visual discrimination.**
- (vii) In the sensory art of Williams, it is often seen that the discriminating mind of the poet is revealed by the choice of his words which are "isolated and cleaned", put down on the page like splashes of paint on a canvas, and allowed to explode into the multitude of meanings which emerge from their juxtaposition. Therefore, **modern poem is like a modern painting having plural interpretations.**
- (viii) Williams's imagist objectivist (a critic calls him 'formal objectivist') background and bias have helped his poems by their emphasis on **truthfulness, exactness, concrete 'presentation'**; but they have harmed the poems by their underemphasis on organisation, logic, narrative, generalisation—and the poems are so short, often that there isn't time for much. Some of the poems seem to say, "Truth is enough"—Truth meaning data brought back alive. But truth isn't enough. Our crudest demand for excitement, for the 'actions of men', for the 'real story' of something 'important', something strange—this demand is legitimate because it is the nature of man to make it. And the demand can hardly be neglected so much as a great deal of the poetry of our time—if the good poetry of our time—has neglected it. The materials of Williams's unsuccessful poems have great reality. But very little has been done to them. In these poems the Nature of the American city—the weeds, clouds, and children of vacant lots—and its reflection in the minds of its inhabitants, exist for good.
- (ix) Williams has a real and unusual dislike of, and dislike in Authority, and the note of priggishness and superiority is conspicuous for its absence in his poetry. He possesses the ability to rest in contradictions, doubts, the general guess work without showing any traces of certainties. This characteristic is the opposite of Whitman's love of uncertainty, but the spirit behind the two poets is the same. Williams's range is narrower than Whitman's, and yet there too one is reminded of Whitman. Williams has much of the freshness of an earlier America, though it is freedom "haunted about by desperation and sorrow." The little motto one could invent for him—"In the suburbs, there one feels free"—is particularly ambiguous when one considers that those subjects of his are overshadowed by, and are a part of, the terrible industrial landscape of north-eastern New Jersey. But the ambiguity is one that Williams himself not only understands but insists upon, if his poems are full of what is clear, delicate, and beautiful, they are also full of what is coarse, ugly, and horrible. There is no optimistic blindness in Williams though there is a fresh gait, a stubborn or 'invincible joyousness'. But when one thinks of the poems of Williams, himself in the midst, of these factories dumps, sub-divisions, express high ways, patients, children, weeds, and wild-flowers of theirs—with the city of New York rising before them of the horizon a pillar of smoke by day, a pillar of fire by night when one thinks of this, one seen an ironic light, the flat matter-of-fact light of the American landscape, James's remark that America 'has no ruins' "America is full of ruins, the ruins of hopes"
- (x) One remarkable thing about Williams' poetry is how radically sensational and perceptual it is: "Say it! no ideas but

in things." What Williams shares with Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens is a feeling that almost nothing is more important, more of a true delight, than the way things look. Reading their poems is one long shudder of recognition; their reproduction of things, in its empirical gaiety, its clear abstract refinement of presentation, has somethings peculiarly and paradoxically American about it. All three of these poets, might have used, as an epigraph for their poetry, that beautiful saying that it is nicer to think than to do to feel than to think, but nicest of all is merely to look. Williams' poems so far as their spirit is concerned, remind one of Marianne Moore's. "It is not the plunder, but accessibility to experience".

All three poets (Williams, Stevens, Marianne) did their first good work in an odd climate of poetic opinion. Its expectations of behaviour were imagist (the poet was supposed to see everything, to feel a great deal, and to think and to do and to make hardly anything), its material demands were minimal, and its ideals of organisation were negative. The subject of poetry had changed from the actions of men to the reactions of poets—*reactions being defined in a way that left the poet almost 'without motor system or cerebral cortex'*. This easily led to strong kind of abstraction: for what is more abstract than a fortuitous collocation of sensation? Stevens, with his passion for philosophy; order, and blank verse, was naturally least affected by the atmosphere of the time, in which he was almost a tourist. Williams found his own sort of imagism considerably harder to modify. He had a boyish delight and trust in things: there are always on his lips, the familiar, pragmatic America. *These are the facts* – for he is the most pragmatic of writers and so American that the adjective itself seems inadequate. A true son of the soil. One almost exclaims in despair and delight. *He is the America of poet.* Few of his poems have that pure 'crystalline inconsequence' that the imagist poem ideally has—the world and Williams himself kept breaking into them; and this was certainly their salvation.

- (xi) Williams' poetry is more remarkable for its empathy, sympathy, its unsecular and emotional identification with its subjects, than any modern poetry except Rilke's. After reading *Paterson* one realises how natural is the identification, how very hypnotic is the feel or rhythm of the poem. There is absolutely no question of disbelief William's knowledge of plants and animals, our brothers and sisters in the world, is surprising for its range and intensity: and he sets then down in the midst of the real weather of the world, so that the reader is full of an innocent lyric pleasure just in being out in the open, in feeling the wind tickling his skin. The poems are full of 'Nature': Williams' has reproduced with exact and loving fidelity both the illumination of the letter and the movement of the spirit. In these poems emotions, ideals, whole attitudes are implicit in tone of voice, in the feel of his own overhead speech, of are expressed in terms of complaints, animals, the landscape, the weather. You see from his instructions "to a Solitary Disciple" that it is what the landscape does that matters to Williams, and it is only as the colours and surfaces reveal this that they are important.

At first people were introduced into Williams' poems mainly as overheard or overlooked landscape; they spread. Williams has the knowledge of people one expects, and often does not get, from doctors; a knowledge one does not expect, and almost never gets, from contemporary poets. One believes in and remembers the people in Williams' poems (unlike in Eliot's 'Four Quartets' which has only one real character—the poet and the recurrent state of that character which we are assured is God) though they usually remain behaviouristic, sharply observed, sympathetic, and one cannot get from these sketches the knowledge of a character that one gets from some of Frost's early dramatic monologues and narratives, from a number of Hardy's poems, or from Williams' detailed and conclusive treatment of the most interesting character in the poems, himself. Some of the narrative and dramatic elements of his poetry seem to have drained off into his fictions. Williams's attitude toward his people is particularly admirable: he has neither that condescending, impatient, pharisaical dismissal of the illiterate mass of mankind, nor that manufactured, moving awe for an equally manufactured little or common man, disfigures so much contemporary writing. Williams loves, blames, and yells despairingly at the Little Men naturally and legitimately because he *feels* not just says, that the differences between men are less important than their similarities— that he and you and I, together, are the Little Men.

**To sum up the discussion:** Williams, besides being out-spoken, warm hearted, and generous is also, according to a critic, "fresh, sympathetic, enthusiastic, spontaneous, open, impulsive, emotional, observant, curious, rash, courageous, undignified, unaffected, humanitarian, experimental, liberal, empirical, secular, democratic". Both what he keeps and what he rejects are unusual in comparison with other good poets of time. Williams was born younger, with more of the

frontier about him, of the this wordly optimism of the eighteenth century. He has the honest that consists in writing down the way things seem to you yourself, not the way they really must be, that they are, that everybody but a misguided idealist or shallow optimist, or bourgeois sentimentalist knows they are. There is a delightful generosity and extravagance about the man in and behind the poems; one is attracted to him automatically.

Williams is one of those poets, like Hardy, whose bad or mediocre poems repay reading and do add to our respect for the were more decorous in pursuing their escape from both Swinburne and Victorian "respectability", and, it must be admitted more mature. Among this group, of which Wilfred Gibson and Rupert Brooke were prominent figures, Pound quickly discovered and welcomed a fellow American, Robert Frost, but no sooner than he recognised the "new England Eclogues" as being 'infinitely better than fake', Pound returned to an earlier circle. The Poet's Club, which had its meetings in a Sono restaurant under the spell of a young philosopher from Cambridge whose name was T.E.Hulme, Pound had been introduced to the members of the club by F.S.Flint. The members of the club were high-spirited talkers, and they sustained the atmosphere of after mid-night conversation held by undergraduates of College. To be sure, the phrase "Les Imagistes was not unattractive, and pound bestowed its magic (and whatever mystery it contained to the uninitiated) upon all the poetry written by his friend. He gave it to Hulme, to Richard Aldington to F.S. Flint to John Bournos, to Ford Madox Ford and most importantly, and with an air of conferring a special honour upon her and gifts, to Hilda Doolittle "H.D."

Within a few years several Imagist anthologies were planned and some were published. The movement attracted the willing co-operation of Amy Lowell from Brookyline, who was given strictly limited permission to spread its gospel in the United States.

Pound, however, deserted his followeres by joining forces with Wyndham Lewis in newer "Movement" that had the more exotic name of "Vorticism" to its credit.

Pound's critical affinity in his friendship with T.E.Hulme can be attributed to his critical remarks in *The Spirit of Romance* (1910): "I have used the term classic in connection with Latinity...both terms (classic and romantic) are snares, and one must not be confused by them.....Certain qualities and certain furnishings are germane to all fine poetry; there is no need to call them either classic or romantic..... The difference is neither of matter nor of paraphernalia. Seeking a distinction in the style, we are nearer to sanity....". Terms of architecture such as "*Doric Romansque and Gothic* would convey a definite meaning and would, when applied to style, be difficult of misinterpretation... **Poetry is sort of inspired mathematics, which gives us equations, not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres, and the like, but equations for....human emotions the spells or equations of "clasic" art invoke the beauty of the unusual"**.

### (E) Theory of Imagism

As poets Pound and Eliot specialise in compression and intensity. For them the malaise was due to external forces" it was society and its standards that were crumbling. A culture adapted to the older aristocratic system of landed proprietors was falling to pieces in a world governed by big business. Civilisation was becoming a few scores of broken statues, an old bitch gone in the teeth, or 'a heap of broken images' It was necessary to sift out from the mass of habits, institutions and conventions the traditions that were worth preserving. For the moment all that the poet could do was to concentrate upon surfaces: in a world in which moral, intellectual and aesthetic values were all uncertain: only sense impressions were certain and could be described exactly. From such minute particulars perhaps something could be built up. In 1913, a few poets shocked at the vagueness and facility of the poetry of the day, determined:

- (i) To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the *exact* word.
- (ii) To create new rhythms-at the expression of new moods, and use free verse in place of conventional forms in order to express better the individuality of a poet.
- (iii) To present an image-not as in painting-in the belief that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal with vague generalities.
- (iv) To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred of indefinite.
- (v) Finally, to believe that concentration is the very essence of poetry.

Edited by Ezra Pound, a number of "Imagist " anthologies appeared. The later development of the movem " "

appears, in the work of Marianne Moore T.S. Eliot had been influenced by Baudelaire, Laforgue and Rimbaud.

The name 'Imagist' itself recalls 'Symbolist', and the Imagists themselves sometimes confused the image, the clear evocation of a material thing, with the symbol, the word which stirs unconscious memories. Such, indeed was their intention: their poetry was meant to widen outwards like the ripples from a stone dropped in clear water. But the scope of 'pure' imagist poetry was limited to clear renderings of visual experience: the poetry of D.H. Lawrence shows both the possibilities and the limitations of the method.

Wallace Stevens in "The Emperor of Ice-cream" writes a poem to insist that only the commonplace is real: let 'be' be the end of 'seen'; but the reality he describes is itself highly-coloured and poem contains more than a clear visual image.

The poetry of Wallace Stevens and Miss Sitwell still shows the Imagist concentration upon the sensuous surface of things, but even with the latitude which they allow themselves, Imagism, is limited in scope.

T.S. Eliot possesses 'imaginative order', which is not something arbitrary, specific and inexplicable. If the images which are used to denote complex situations were replaced by abstraction, much of the apparent incoherence of the poem would vanish. It would become a prose description of the condition of the world, a restatement of a myth and a defence of the tragic view of life. The images and rhythms of "the Waste Land" are not conventionally poetical: their aura of suggestion radiates from a definite meaning relating to the ordinary world.

The obscurity arising from the use of little-known or intricate ideas in say Eliot's or Empson's poetry is easily removed when accompanied by elucidatory notes to make it vanish. The condensation of metaphor demands an initial effort or understanding in the reader and is less difficult than the understanding of a simile or a more prosaic and long-winded metaphor. The compressed analogies moreover involve no denial of logic: it is simply an extension of the implications of grammar.

This new form of poetry, therefore, makes interesting study.

### (F) General Assessment of His Poetry

This lesson on William Carlos Williams (1883-1963), the great American poet will introduce to some of his representative poems prescribed for general study in the book *Modern Poets One* edited by Jim Hunter and in his *Collected Earlier Poetry* and *Collected Later Poetry*. By this time we know that he published his first book of poems at the age of twenty-six. At the University of Pennsylvania he enjoyed long association with Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens and D.H. Lawrence. One must credit the character of his poetry to this association. All four represented in varying degrees a 'Pennsylvania School'. All four were subject to 'European influence', and of the four, Williams appears to be the most firmly and determinedly rooted in an American locality-Rutherford, New Jersey, a suburb of New York. Of this early life and its background, Williams remarked, as quoted in *The Oxford Anthology of American Literature*:

"...my forefathers seem to have been restless souls, never long in the same place.... Writing has been my constant companion during these years of stay at school, university and Paris."

Like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, Williams also visited Europe and unlike them he did not choose to stay and settle, and his poetry takes its own original, American Course, Like Wallace Stevens, Williams has not caught on widely in England, and deserves better recognition. His voice is more assertively New-world even than of Stevens: It is a repudiation of the intellectual (and mainly European) tradition, and a determined re-exploration of the 'real world'. Along with his English contemporary Williams looks clearly back to Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, the most remarkable book in American poetry. Williams agrees with Stevens that things, not ideas, are his concern and subject-matter, but while Stevens is "severe and intellectual" by instinct, Williams is responsive to emotions, sentiments and is quick to record them colloquially.

With regard to Williams's poetic style and diction it may be remarked that his poems are full of imperatives, exclamations, torches-the rhythms and dynamics of their speech are being insisted upon as they could not be in any prose. In it this insistence upon dynamic that is fundamental in Williams' reading of his own poems" the listener realises with astonished joy that he is hearing a method of reading poetry that is both excellent-for these particular poems- and completely unlike anything he has ever heard before. About Williams' metre one remark might be enough; that no one has written more accomplished and success full free verse. In the following pages I have taken almost all the significant representative poems which are prescribed by the various Universities for their Post-Graduate Courses. I have given the text for ready reference.



Almost any list of Williams's best poems would include the extremely moving, completely realised, 'The Widow's Lament in Springtime'; the poem in 'Spring and All' which begins, 'The product of America go Crazy'; 'The Yachts'; a poem that is paradigm of all the unjust beauty. The necessary and unnecessary injustice of the world: 'These'; a poem that is pure deprivation; 'Burning the Christmas Greens'; the unimagably delicate 'To Waken an Old Lady'; the poem that begins, 'by the road to the contagious hospital'; the beautiful 'A Unison', in which Nature is once again, both the ritual and myth; and perhaps 'The Sea-Elephant', 'The Semblances', and 'The Injury'. And many more. These sharp, short poems so accurately put us into the heart of the thing that he has immediately seen and felt. One wanders why after all these he really tried long poems such as *Paterson* (mixed with a good deal of prose).

That Williams' poems are honest, exact, and original; that some of them are really good poems, is obvious and undeniable. But what is even more obvious is their generosity and sympathy, their moral and human attractiveness. The major difficulty in reading Williams' poetry is to become accustomed to the ways in which he uses visual imagery. Like Charles Olson, he dismisses all "pictorial effects", all that "'evocation' of the 'image' which served us for a time". Eyesight is the most abstract and detached of the senses. It opposes man to a world which he sees from a distance. A poem made of word-pictures compounds these divisions. The reader contemplates language which generates mental pictures of an absent reality. Poem, reader, and world are kept in separate compartments. The aesthetic theory which defines poetry as images for the mind's eye is a natural product of a literate, subjectivistic culture, a culture which would develop photography and the printed book. A poetry of this sort would be a return to the abstraction Williams abhors.

His practice confirms his theoretical choice. His poems are often nonsense if the reader tries to make a coherent mental picture of the sequence of phrases. "To All Gentleness" (CLP,24-29), for example, moves bewilderingly from the silvered tank to the pink roses bending ragged in the rain, to a girl practicing archery, to a sailor knocked into the sea by the shattering prop of a plane, and so on. *Paterson* is often a sequence of images which seem disconnected if the reader thinks of them visually:

like a bull  
or a Minotaur  
or Beethoven  
in the scherzo  
from the Fifth Symphony  
stomped  
his heavy feet  
I saw love  
Mounted naked on a horse  
On a swan (P, 260)

The sense of bewilderment disappears if the reader understands that the words are not primarily visual at all. They are meant to energize the mind in certain ways, and express in their sonority some quality of matter, thickness and weight, or airy delicacy, or any one of the other innumerable textures which our senses may know through words. The poet assumes "that we smell, hear and see with words and words alone, and that with a new language we smell, hear and see afresh" (SE, 266). Words carry the reader to the solidity of things and to their movement. All words are both verbs and nouns for Williams, both action and matter, and his poetry is the product of an imagination which puts the mind within the life of objects. To express this identification in language the poet must break up the fixities of words and make them flow together like figures in a dance or ice melted into a stream. "Then it begins," he says, "that happy time when the image becomes broken or begins to break up, becomes little fluid<sup>3/4</sup> or is affected. floats brokenly in the fluid. The rigidities yield<sup>3/4</sup> like ice in March, the magic month" (SE,307). How can this melting be brought about? It seems plausible enough in theory or as a metaphor, but words are after all fixed sounds, and even the volume occupied by the falling Passaic seems bound by the universal laws of space. Any one place in it is excluded from all other places. The poet must transcend the limitations of logical, visual, or geometrical space in order to bring into existence the new poetry of multiple elements in fluid intimacy.

WILLISMS' POETIC STYLE rebels against the drudgery of traditions and conventions of his predecessors. He distrusts traditional form, as a kind of restraint or inhibition: since he fails to grasp its significance, it appears to him another mechanical sentimentalism; and he desires that the theme create its own form.

### Definition of a Poem

Williams explained what a poem is in the following words: "A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words. When I say there's nothing sentimental about a poem I mean that there can be no part, as in any other machine, that is redundant. . . . Its movement is intrinsic, undulant, a physical more than in literary character therefore each speech having its own character, the poetry it engenders will be peculiar to that speech also in its own intrinsic form. The effect is beauty, what in a single object resolves our complex feelings of propriety. When man makes poem, makes it, mind you he takes words he finds them interrelated about him and compose them-*Without distortion* which would mar their exact significances- into an intense expression of his perceptions and ardors that they may constitute a revelation in the speech that he uses. It isn't what he *says* that counts as work of art, it's what he makes, with such intensity perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity".

The explanation is most relevant with regard to the criticism about the insufficient organisation of Williams' poem, Consider, in this context, his own lines:

"And we thought to escape rime  
By imitation of the senseless  
Unarrangement of wild things-the stupidest rime,  
of all"

One realises, however, with a sense of reassurance, that few people know better than Williams how sensible the arrangement of 'wild things' often is. Williams' good poems are in perfect agreement with his explanation.

It is embarrassing to call Williams original. Originality is one of his major virtues and minor vices. About some of his best poems one would think: *I've never read or imagined anything like this*; and about some of his worst poems one can remark: *I wish to God this were a little more like ordinary poetry*. He is even less logical than the average good poet he is an intellectual in neither the good nor the bad sense of word<sup>3/4</sup> but loves abstractions for their own sake, and makes accomplished, characteristic, inveterate use of them, exactly as if they were sensations or economic. There is no "dissociation of sensibility" in Williams. But he handles both generalisations and particulars with unique freshness and humour and imagination, with a delicacy and fantasy that are especially charming in so vigorous, realistic, and colloquial a writer.

### William Carlos Williams: Poems

Reading any poem by Williams we need to remember or keep in mind a few preliminaries, in fact, a few paradoxes. The first of these paradoxes is that the voice we hear in his poem is almost always wholly romantic, as Wallace Stevens, a fellow American poet, said long ago; but when the poet tells us what he intends, what he thinks poetry is, the clichés he falls back upon are generally as anti-romantic as those of Eliot and Pound. The second of these paradoxes is that the man behind the voice we hear in the poetry is likely to strike us as characterized chiefly by his simplicity, honesty, and openness; yet he produced a body of poetry and poetic opinion so complex, various, and self-contradictory that no single generalization about it is valid for all of it. A third paradox is that this poet who is not known to be an abstract thinker, prided himself particularly on his role as *theorist* of poetry. When all these paradoxes are added up, we can see that even the *method* of paradox fails to do justice to the man and the work at once. But to live with his work for any considerable time is to come to feel a unity which partially defies any simple formulation into statement. The nearest we can reach to define the man and his work is what Randall Jarrell said several years ago: That Williams' poems are honest, exact, and original, that some of them are really *good* poems, seems to me obvious. But in concluding I had rather mention something even more obvious: their generosity and sympathy, their moral and human attraction.

The first thing one notices in this, as well as other poems, of Williams is how racially "sensational and perceptual" (Randall Jarrell) it is: "Say it! No ideas but in things." One thing that Williams does seem to share with his contemporaries, Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore is a feeling that herein almost nothing more important, more of a true delight,

than the way things look. Reading their poems, the present one is an example, is one long shudder of recognition. Their presentation of things, in its empirical gaiety, its clear abstract refinement of presentation, has something about it which is peculiarly paradoxically American. One could say about Williams, and again the present poem is an illustration, that for him it is nicer to think than to do, to feel than to think, but nicest of all merely to look.

As the poem amply proves, Williams had a boyish delight and trust in things. The poem here seems to say in the familiar American phrase "*There are the fact.*" Decidedly, the poem is typical of the most pragmatic of the modern poets. The poem is, for sure, remarkable for its empathy, sympathy, as also for its muscular and emotional identification with the subject. Here, the identification is so natural, the feel or rhythm of the poem so hypnotic, that the problem of belief never arises. For us as Indian readers, especially the non-Christian readers, the custom and convention of the burial of the dead, the very design of the hearse, the performing of the funeral, are totally alien. But the Christian beliefs do not come in our way so far as the emotional impact and intellectual argument of the poem are concerned. The poem impressed us by the sheer force of its firm grasp of the empirical details it offers about the subject of the funeral ceremony. The poet's knowledge of the as usual event, is surprising for its range and intensity. He sets it down in the midst of the real climate of the society to which it belongs. The whole thing is so well done that as readers we feel an innocent lyric pleasure in being out in the open, in feeling the weather on our skin.

In a way, the poem is full of "Nature": Williams has reproduced here with exact and loving fidelity both the illumination of the spirit and the movement of the spirit. What is all the more important to note is the poet's tone which subsumes within itself, or reflects, emotions, ideals, and attitudes associated with the poem's subject. The poem comes out as a sort of overheard or overlooked landscape; it spreads. In a Williams poem one believes in and remembers the people (characters), though they are seldom "portrayed" in the usual sense. They are only sharply observed, sympathetic, and empathetic sketches, not characters like Frost's or Browning's in their dramatic monologues. Here, in the poems they are no individuals; only in general people are addressed. But his attitude to them (his people) is typical of him: he seems to love them, blame them, even yell at them. He does so because he considers them his "own people," believing that the differences between individuals are less important than their similarities – that the and you and I, together, are the Little Man.

As we can see there is a similarity between Williams and Whitman so far as the poem's free verse is concerned. The two are also similar in their direct address to people as if they were sitting or standing amidst their "folk." Note, how the opening lines make a piece living and speaking:

I will teach you my townspeople  
How to perform a funeral –  
For you have it over a troupe  
Of artists –  
Unless one should scour the world –  
You have the ground sense necessary.

Here is, like Whitman, not merely a "direct" address to the people, the common folk, the national community, but also an unconventional outlook and confident or authentic tone. William does not wear the mask of an inspired bard that Whitman so well performs; he plays the role of an ordinary but unconventional instructor. He does share with Whitman, as well as with Wordsworth, an originality of earthy or ground sense, not prepared to sacrifice at any cost the truth of Nature. One can note how he goes about his prescription for "performing a funeral" step by step, exposing, on the reverse side of his prescription, the usual practice the American follow as a matter of convention.

William follows in the poem the full-scale design of the hearse, showing how the conventional practice is full of sham and polish, indicators of the very culture of those practicing the convention. Decrying the black as well as white polish, in fact, any polish whatsoever, he recommends a plan, "weathered" hearse, as natural as a "farm wagon." He also asks for "knocking" out "glass." He goes about wondering as to the purpose of encasing the dead in glass. Speculating about the possible uses of the glass and also rejecting all at the same time, he prescribes:

Let there be no glass –  
and no upholstery! phew!

and no little brass rollers  
and small easy wheels on the bottom –

Like Whitman, to maintain the conversational mode, he keeps interrupting his prescriptive discourse with such interlocutors as

my townspeople what are you thinking of!

This done, he does not wait for their answer (since it is not a dialogue) he proceeds with his next step uninterrupted, presuming to have drawn them to attentiveness from a possible distraction:

A rough plain hearse then  
with gilt heels and no top at all.  
On this the coffin lies  
by its own weight.

Like a community leader, like Emersonian force at his command, he proceeds on with his prescription, assuming general consent to whatever he has been proposing. He gives the impression of enjoying an undisputed position of an experienced or elevated elder, who is above the rest – in his moral and spiritual position. But the language and manner he uses is the typical American business executive or instructor:

No wreaths please –  
especially no hot-house flowers.  
Some common memento is better,  
something he prized and is known by:  
or  
For heaven's sake though see to the driver!  
Take off the silk hat!

The last stanza brings to fore the real point of the prescription for performing funeral – the point is to be plain about expressing grief; don't mask it all in a falsifying series of untruths, turning a plain fact into a pleasant fiction.

sit openly –  
to the weather as to grief.  
Or do you think you can shut grief in?

See how Whitman, again, Williams poses rhetorical questions, implying an emphatic assertion. The last line here is such an interrogative, asserting in question form. The statement that you cannot shut in grief. His advice is: you better share with others; it would do you good :

Or do you think you can shut grief in?  
What – from us? We who have perhaps  
nothing to lose? Share with us  
share with us – it will be money  
in your pockets.

Note here the repetition, for emphasis, of “share with us.” Also note the business expressions, not really suited to the occasion: “it will be money in your pockets.” He deliberately uses it here only to ironically spite those who are so accustomed in their daily life to the use of these expressions. But he speaks with a sense of superiority, knowing that however harsh he might become in his treatment of the townspeople, they will not challenge his authority, undisputed as it is.

The poem, it must be noted, like most Williams poems, is full of imperatives, exclamations, trochees. The rhythms and dynamics of their speech are being insisted upon as they could not be in any prose. This habit was fundamental to the poet's reading of his own poems. The listeners would realize with astonished joy that they are hearing a method of reading poetry very much original. His free verse remains an example of excellence, being highly accomplished.

Thus, the poem, like any of his best compositions, is honest, exact, and original. Above all, it reflects its generosity and sympathy, its moral and human attractiveness.

### **“The Widow’s Lament in Spring time”**

This is another short poem of William Carlos Williams. Here, the speaker is not the poet himself, but a widow, expressing her lament (ironically) in springtime. Let us see how Williams articulates the lament in dramatic verse. The poem, as we see, makes a bright start, with novelty of expression, such as “Sorrow is my own yard,” or “where the new grass flames.” It goes on impressively with such paradoxical oxymoron as “cold fire,” and the Keatsian sensuousness of descriptions such as “masses of flowers” that “load the cherry branches. However, the verse goes flat the moment the widow starts giving direct expression to her grief. It becomes all the more dull towards the end. One possible reason for the poem being not as good as “Tract” is the subject not being an experienced truth. We know that Williams had no talent for dramatic creations of characters, much less the female ones. Here, he chose to attempt an expression of a widow’s state of mind in springtime which cruelly reminds her of her youthful days when she too bloomed like the flower tree fed on her husband’s love.

Besides, the poem moves on a stereotype track, expressing what one expects a widow to say in springtime. Although otherwise an unconventional poet, an *avant-garde* artist, he seems to have no notion of an individual female. Thus, having no particular knowledge of an individual or specific character, he takes recourse to stereotype attitudes. The widow “speaks” and “feels” all that a widow in any conventional society is supposed or expected to speak and feel. In the entire description, and a little bit of narration, there is no sure touch of the master realist and empiricist. The poem tends, in fact, to be sentimental, especially towards the end. One does not see any attempt at making the situation or sentiment inclusive of more and larger situation and sentiments of life. As such, the poem is very much limited in scope. It is almost a pedestrian poem with one or two touches of brilliance.

What one cannot help admire, however, is Williams’ command of the blank verse, which is always marked by a sureness of its movement and steadiness of its rhythm. Certain repetitions heighten the rhythmic effect of the poem. Note, for instance, the following:

The plumtree is white today  
with masses of flowers.  
Masses of flowers  
load the cherry branches

The poem’s ending is rather tame. Look at the following lines which close the poem:

I feel that I would like  
to go there  
and fall into those flowers  
and sink into the march near them.

This sounds rather bland, with very unimpressive “I feel” and “I would like,” for these are not expressions of any powerful passion. She lived with her husband for thirty five years, she says. But we don’t know how long he has been dead, and hence how strong is the feeling for the dead husband. All in all, it cannot be considered one of Williams’s better poems.

### **“The Revelation”**

Marianne Moore is said to have described Williams as a poet who is able to fix the atmosphere of a moment. “The Revelation” can be characterized one of those poems. The poem opens with narrator, awakening from sleep, still feeling the memory of an interrupted dream impinging upon him. The poem’s form clearly illustrates the poet’s belief that new verse structures and rhythms were required to embody the individual experience and particularity of moment. It is a verse vignette, a sort of piece Hemmingway wrote in prose as interchapters in his collection of stories *In Our Time*. The lines and sentences, too, in the same manner, in staccato form. The poem also reminds us of the Medieval dream poem which was so much in vogue in the age of Chaucer. Williams once said, “The poem being an object, it must be the purpose of the poet to make of his words a new form: to invent, that is, an object consonant with his day.” The definition of poem seems to hold good in the present case. With Williams, verse does not follow preconceived

rules. At the same time, it is not, in the purest sense of the word, to be 'free' either. It is, in fact, to obey, in its rhythm and language, the exigencies of the specific occasion.

If we look at the verse line by line, we find that the meditative pause in the middle and at the end of the first line, the delicate, monosyllabic tread of the second, and the echoing effect of the word 'voices': all help to capture the sense of mystery, and lost bearings, which most of us experience when drowsy. In lines 3 and 4, the convoluted syntax and rather clumsy rhythms represent the narrator's stumbling attempts to remember his 'revelation' – the girl just dreamed about. She still seems to be present in the room when he wakes up. In lines 5 and 6 the 'revelation' returns to the narrator for a moment. As it does so, the lines assume a sort of stillness or breathless wonder and are left unfinished, very much like an unconsummated desire. Lines 7 to 12 describe the detailed memory of the dream, which returns only as a memory now. It is not a moment of transcendent vision. In line 9, the pause which makes us linger over the word 'girl' is deliberately made to enable us to discover in it an excitement and sense of possibility which it does not usually have. As poet, Williams aimed at re-vitalising simple words such as this one, and thus avoid what Wordsworth had disparagingly called poetic diction.

In lines 11 and 12 the emphases on 'leaned' and 'stroked' recapture the girl's movement, while the reference to 'my car' indicates how far this dream is from the conventional poetic dream, and how close it is to the dream of the common man. With lines from 13 to 18 the poet returns to the waking world. However, he does so with the intention of finding in it the strange beauty of his dreams. Thus, the poem turns out to be at once an affirmation as well as demonstration of the belief that only in ordinary, everyday sort of experience can absolutes be discovered. As Williams himself asserted, "This is the poet's business. Not to talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particular to discover the universal." Coming from a practicing doctor we know what force this formulation has in the context of Williams's own poetry. The monotonous rhythm of lines 13 and 14 'other' prepares us for the clinching affirmation of the last three lines. It is characteristic of Williams to cling (as he does in lines 16 to 18) to the specific. The larger, universal meaning of the poem never gets separated from the particular occasion. It leaves off on a note of expectancy, with the poem, grammatically speaking, still unfinished. His express objective was to capture the movement of things, as well as their individuality: 'living' rather than 'life,' was his absolute. That is why Williams always tried to impart to his work a sense of possibility, to leave it open as though it could continue to change like the world it imitated. Here again, Williams's poem comes out to be a verse counterpart of Hemingway's open-ended short-stories, which the publishers, to begin with, always found 'unfinished' and asked for the 'rest.'

### **"Sea-trout and Butterfish"**

It is the kind of poem where Williams is at his best. We call such a poem "word painting." Keats is another poet who is equally good in creating word-painting. Williams once remarked, "Something occurred once when I was about twenty, a sudden resignation to existence... which made everything a unit and at the same time a part of myself." Thus, for Williams, as well as for Keats, the essential experience is contact, the bridging of the gap between the perceiving subject and the perceived moment or object. In the present poem, for example, the poet is trying through the agency of the poem to live the life of the sea-trout and butterfish that are described in the poem, to realize their separate identity. The poet is, of course, trying to make the reader, as Whitman always does, do the same.

As can be seen, the poem is wholly focused on the sensuous (aesthetic) details of the fish. The poet's objective, undoubtedly is, as it is in Keats, to achieve an effort of empathy. As Williams puts it, "A thing known passes out of the mind into the muscles."

The poem realizes the inter-penetration of subject and object, partly, through the use of verbal ambiguity. For instances, in line 2, the word 'caught' could refer to the observing eye (its attention caught by the fish); it could as well refer to the observed sea-trout and butterfish. Similarly, the words "unraveled" (in line 10) and 'separates' (in line 11) could refer to both the observing subject as well as to the observed object. Each word in most lines seems to stand out, as though it had a separate life of its own, and yet acquire additional force when seen in its context. For instance, the word 'weight' (in line 6) has its innate meaning and energy brought out because the rhythm forces us to pause over it, and roll it around our tongues. However, the word gains further momentum when we relate it to pun on 'scales' (in the same line 6) – the pun relates to the word 'scales' (that is the scales on a fish and weighing-scales). It also

increases the feeling for the substance and density of the fish aroused by the entire line. This clearly shows Williams' reverence for the individuality of words, as well as objects, which, he said, he learnt from the writings of Laurence Stern and Gertrude Stein. Interestingly, both these writers were writers of prose fiction, not poets. It also shows the intense inner activity of verse. In this context, he had once remarked, "The poem is made of things - on a field." We can safely say that the words in a typical Williams's poem insist on their status as separate entities, engaged in an active relationship with their context, just as a series of particles on a magnetic field.

In the last four lines of the poem, the grammatical relationship of eye and fish is reversed. In other words, the eye, in the grammatical sense, is the object in the opening lines, but the subject in the closing ones; the fish, vice versa. This further obliterates the conventional distinction between subject and object; and increases our sense of the interpenetration of the two. The world 'sea' (in line 10) literally means the matrix from which all individual life derives. And by extension, it also means the mass of undifferentiated matter from which the poetic eye 'separates' its chosen objects. In line 12, the hissing sibilants and fricative 'f' sounds offer us a verbal equivalent for the act of touching. Thus, this small poem stands solid as a rock, a piece in which all elements are so blended that each shines in its place and yet none remains an alien presence. The exclusive focus on recreating in words a specific object keeps away all distracting elements of side glances. It is a beautiful poem indeed.

### "Young Sycamore"

This poem is perhaps the perfect epitome of Williams' earlier work, the poetry he wrote during what has been called his 'objectivist' period. The discovery of object as a 'thing in itself,' the absence of figurative language or any attempt to make it stand for anything else, the structuring of the poem around a pattern of verbs and dynamic rhythms which are meant to re-create the life and growth of the object, the tactile imagery and feeling for intrinsic energy of words - all these aspects are typical of a poet who sees poetry as 'an extension of nature's processes... transfused with the same forces which transfuse the earth' - and whose own verse is best compared, not with the work of any other poet, but with the paintings of Vincent Van Gogh. As we have seen in some of the earlier poems discussed here, and shall see in the present poem, the chief strength of Williams as a poet seems to be his ability to recreate objects in words. Here is the picture drawn of a "young tree" standing firm "between the wet pavement and the gutter." The picture grows, like the tree itself, from trunk to branches, ending with "two eccentric knotted twigs bending forward hornlike at top. We can see how the tree emerges in the picture, with subtle suggestions by a word here and by a word there, of its being, metaphorically, the tree of life itself.

Note how the very first line of the poem attracts our attention. It does so with a characteristic informality and sense of urgency. From line 3 onward, the rest of the poem is a subordinate clause which describes the tree from trunk to topmost twig. The sentence with which the poem begins is never completed. As a consequence, the reader is left at the end of the poem with that of rising anticipation which Williams saw as natural to the person meditating on a world governed by change. In line 3, note the expression '*round and firm.*' It is the first in a series of tactile images which help in articulating the way the poet lives the life of a tree. Here is one of the best examples of what Keats called 'Negative Capability.' In a Keats poem one may still get the impression of the poet remaining a presence right at the center of the picture being drawn in words. Here, in this poem, except for the flickering presence in the first line, the poet remains entirely invisibly. It is only the tree that we see growing piece by piece, and so growing that all pieces fall into their respective places to complete a picture which does not look a picture, but a real tree itself.

Now, let us attend to lines where the sense of the tree as an activity rather than a passive object is emphasized by means of the pattern of verbs and verbals which create the framework of the poem. These verbs and verbals are 'rises,' 'undulant/thrust,' 'dividing and waning,' 'sending out,' 'hung,' 'thins,' 'knotted,' 'bending.' Now, note how in line 8, the word 'bodily,' placed by itself, assumes a roundness and substance, as we linger over it, which makes it a dramatic equivalent of its meaning. Further, in line 12, notice how the pause at the end of the line seems full of breathless expectation. The only figurative word that we come upon in the entire poem is 'hornlike' in line 24. Suggesting the animal like power of the young sycamore, the metaphor imparts an implied personification to the tree. It is to be noted that stroke-by-stroke the poet painter's brush completes the picture without using any mark of punctuation. He only uses the line as a grammatical or syntactical unit to give whatever emphases he feels necessary for the reader to take note of. The absence of formal punctuation marks keeps the poem unbroken into pieces. The tree

grows in the poem just as naturally as it does in nature, without there being any presence in the act of the shaping it.

We cannot help noticing at the same time the typical aspect shared by Williams with poets like Frost, the aspect that makes symbolic suggestions without in any sense affecting or denting the concrete specificity of the object painted in the poem. The tree here easily and naturally evokes the sense of the tree of life, or life being like this tree. Remember this tree is placed between the "wet pavement and the gutter," which corresponds to the human condition. Life, being not bed of roses, generally grows in the midst of a lot of anti-life elements like the rocky pavement and the gutter. Both hardship and ugliness surround human life, and yet life grows amidst such hazards. The growth does not, as a matter of fact, remain totally unaffected by the surroundings. This fact is suggested by the tree ending up finally, thinning "till nothing is left of it but two/eccentric knotted/twigs/bending forward/hornlike at the top." The suggestion of symbolic connotations is, of course, never deliberate. Both in Frost, as well as Williams, it emerges only as a suggestion by way of its being close to life one way or another. The poet may or may not have meant it to be so, but we get that feeling while reading it.

### **"Preface to Paterson: Book One"**

The present poem is only a set of introductory verses to the Book I of Williams's long or epic poem *Paterson*. The "Preface" was published along with Book I in 1946. Williams kept writing this poem the rest of his life; when he died in 1963 he was working on Book six. Long before he died. Williams had said that there would never be an end to his epic poem because, like all his poems, it had to remain open to the world of growth and change. *Paterson* is concerned, in the first place, with the reverent investigation of the particular history and life of the city of Paterson. Actually, the fictional or imaginative city of Paterson is no other than the poet's own home town of Rutherford, New Jersey, and, by extension, America. As Williams explains in his introduction to the poem, the purpose is to see the city of Paterson, to achieve contact with it, and thereby to discover forces that can build a new world. In other words, the attempt is to seek universal in particular; universal 'ideas' are to be found once again, by means of a close study of 'things.' The enterprise in the present case is, of course, on a much larger scale than ever before. The scale had to be large because Paterson is itself a conglomerate of particular moments and objects. Also, these particular objects and moments have each to be seen properly before being brought together to form a total pattern of meaning. It can be said that the form of the poem of is the same as that of "The Night rider." This new form is created by the technique in which a series of 'things' are brought together in a mosaic. By setting up juxtapositions between different things a feeling of calm after fulfillment is suggested. And by inference, the whole notion of life as a rhythmic ebb-and-flow is touched upon. In other words, what Williams does is to try to weave things into patterns and then squeeze ideas out of the patterns that have emerged.

Since our express concern here is only the "Preface" to Book one of *Paterson*, we need not discuss in detail the long poem. Let us, therefore, see what this "Preface" (or prefatory poem) is like:

As we have just seen, Williams begins this poem by making a statement of purpose, following the epic convention. We know how Homer, Virgil, Spenser and Milton begin their respective epic poems by making a statement about the poem's theme or purpose. *Paterson* is, thus, very deliberately designed as an epic, in the tradition of *Iliad* and *Aeneid*, *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*. However, before we move into the present poem, let us first consider the aspect of epigraph prefixed to the poem. Just as the title of a poem generally indicates the subject dealt with in it, so does the epigraph. In fact, epigraph is especially prefixed to the poem for providing a key to unlock the poem's meaning. The best example in this regard comes from T.S. Eliot. Consider any of his poems, *The Waste Land*, or *The Ash Wednesday*, and you will see the significance of the title. Also, consider the epigraph to "Prufrock" or "Gerontion," you will find the key to the poem's meaning. Here, in the case of Williams's poem, although the title is only "Preface" to *Paterson*, and that to only the poem's first Book, and is as such dependent as a pre-knowledge of that poem, the epigraph is specific and does not demand any such pre-knowledge of the entire poem.

The epigraph here is very much an embodiment of the poem's theme, which is also announced in its opening lines. The subject stated, as well as indicated, is: that Beauty is to be discovered by the study and gathering up of particulars. Here is the opening announcement:

To make a start,  
out of particulars  
and make them general, rolling  
up the sun, by defective means --

After the statement the poem proceeds to mention the method by which particulars are to be gathered:



Sniffing the trees,  
just another dog  
among a lot of dogs. What  
else is there? And to do?

To compare poet's job of sensing the particulars to the dog's sniffing of trees has something American about it. From right from the start, there has been a sort of demystification of the artist in American literature. One can think of the very first of the true American poets, Walt Whitman, who identifies himself with every object of nature, living as well as non-living. We are also reminded by this reference here of Dylan Thomas's famous *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*, which in turn reminds us of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Such echoes in text are now considered a case of intertextuality.

Williams, in his manner of self-deprecation, describes himself an inferior one even among dogs, having greater share of limitations than certain other American poets of his time:

The rest have run out –  
after the rabbits.  
Only the lame stands – on  
three legs. Scratch front and back.  
Deceive and eat. Dig  
a musty bone. . . .

These "rest" are the found, who are after fresh meat, poets like Eliot and Pound, who went to Europe for fresh (and more meaty) subjects. Williams counts himself among the "lame" ones, who, bound to his own limited terrain, has no choice but to remain content with whatever can be available to the less adventurous. He makes do with digging the "musty" bones. He is making out a difference between the High Modernist, expatriate, *avant-garde*, artists, such as Eliot, Pound, Joyce and the less daring poets like himself who preferred to remain content with their native surroundings, with the American themes. Here may be the case of an inverted irony, directed against the more flamboyant, and less American, more European, high brow artists, who looked down upon America as not a very interesting subject for the artists, nor a congenial culture for arts.

Williams quarrel with these High Modernists is no merely not the question of America as the subject of poetry, but also on the point of the status of the cycle of life from birth to death. Whereas Eliot goes after transcendental life deprecating the cycle of physical or natural life, Williams accepts, like Whitman, the cycle itself, and does so without making it a part, as Whitman does, of any larger transcendental design:

For the beginning is assuredly  
the end – since we know nothing, pure  
and simple, beyond  
our own complexities.  
Yet there is  
no return: rolling up out of chaos,  
a nine months' wonder, the city  
the man, an identity – it can't be  
otherwise – an  
interpenetration both ways. Rolling  
up! obverse, reverse;

Here is a terse reply to Eliot's line, 'In my beginning is my end,' which appears in his poem 'East Coker' (a part of *Four Quartets*). As Williams asserts in the above lines, his poem is about the acceptance of the cycle, the world of process and change, the contingent world. As is emphatically asserted, 'there is no return,' which is that we have only one life in which to discover 'rigor of beauty.' It is from the actual objects in nature, which the poet 'sniffs,' that the poet draws whatever beauty there is in life. He objects in nature, *in* included, are only 'nine months' wonder. As is clear, the

emphasis falls here on the word 'wonder,' obviously implying a denial of any other wonder beyond the physical or material world. The word interpenetration in this context refers to the interpenetration of man and city, subject and object. From line 26 to 29, the poet *catalogues* a quick series of examples of the many things the poem Paterson contains:

Rolling  
up! obverse, reverse;  
the drunk the sober; the illustrious  
the gross; one.

From line 29 to 31, the poem seems to suggest that by starting off without pre-conceptions, the illusion of knowledge, we can then learn by means of a reverent study of particulars. The knowledgeable man, relying on the vast abstractions supplied to him by his intelligence, is the really ignorant one:

...In ignorance  
a certain knowledge and knowledge,  
undispersed, its own undoing.

The succeeding lines from 32 to 36 suggest that when knowledge remains 'undispersed,' into particulars, then the various potentials of life ('multiple seed') are lost in a chaos of undifferentiated detail ('flux') and the mind ends in confusion ('floats off in...scum'):

(The multiple seed,  
packed tight with detail, soured,  
is lost in the flux and the mind,  
distracted, floats off in the same  
scum)

the next two line (number 37 and 38) suggest the idea that the knowledge is like a globe slowly growing as it is pushed on, gathering more detail:

Rolling up, rolling up heavy with  
numbers.

Continuing with the idea, the poem elaborates the point insisting that each day brings a new world, and a new and innocent ('ignorant') sun filling the empty space left by the old suns, for the man who never relies on stale knowledge:

It is the ignorant sun  
rising in the slot of  
hollow suns risen,

continuing the idea's elaboration, the poem in lines 41 to 45 suggests that in order to 'live well' and know the truth, a man must accept his own morality and mutability:

...so that never in this  
world will man live well in his body  
save dying; yet that is  
the design.

A step further in the argument is taken in the lines 46-47, when the poem lays emphasis on adding up particulars to create a design, or idea, and then dispersing those particulars preparatory to creating a new design. In other words, it insists that the pursuit of knowledge is a continuous, never-ending process:

...Renews himself  
thereby, in addition and subtraction,  
walking up and down.

The poem takes a turn after lines 47<sup>th</sup>, far from the next line (no. 48) onward, the poem lays stress on the deadly effect of received ideas on poetry. From line 48 to 54, this emphasis is clearly placed on the negative effect of 'thought' or received ideas on a poem:

and the craft,  
 subverted by thought, rolling up, let  
 him beware lest he turn to no more than  
 the writing of stale poems...  
 Minds like beds always make up  
 (made story than a shore)  
 unwilling or unable.

The poet's assertion receives force from the two similes or comparisons he uses to describe what the mind of the poet of received ideas is like. The comparisons are: 'Minds like beds always made up'; and minds 'more stony than a shore.' In other words, such poets as receive ideas from external sources are not thinking mind. They are rather stony, not sensitive enough to experience life of their own.

Here again Williams seems to be hitting at poets like Eliot and Pound who relied, for their analysis of contemporary life on received ideas from modern psychology, anthropology, philosophy, etc. But if we come to think of it, can we really say that there has been any great writer who had remained uninfluenced or unaware of the ideas current at his time. In fact, there are critics like Matthew Arnold who thought that only the climate of ideas created by men of ideas through the advertising agency of the critics could create great writers. These polemical views, however notwithstanding, we can say that ideas as such are neither injurious nor beneficial for the health of poetry. All depends on the quality of mind a poet has. The important aspect is not of ideas as such, but their assimilation and integration into the experience or fable or plot the poem embodies. The import of Williams's assertion, too, points in this very direction. In fact, what Williams seems to be opposed to, as the central movement of the poem supports, is, not ideas as such, but their acceptance by the poet as beliefs or dogmas, using them rabidly for structuring his own or any life experience.

Thus the poem heads towards its conclusion with a celebration of the cyclical process, which man imitates in his quest for knowledge, from 'things' to 'ideas' and then back immediately to 'things' again. It is a quest which now begins with the exploration of Paterson.

Rolling in, top up,  
 under, thrust and recoil, a great clatter:  
 lifted as air, boated, multicolored, a  
 wash of seas –  
 from mathematics to particulars:

the study of particulars leads us to the science of combinations (mathematics), which in turn should lead us back to the study of particulars:

divided as the dew,  
 floating mists, to be rained down and  
 regathered into a river that flows  
 and encircles:  
 shells and animalcules  
 generally and so to man,  
 to Paterson.

### "The Orchestra"

Williams has constructed this poem as an imitation of an orchestral piece in five parts. It can be said to be an attempt to discover an idea of order which is capable of uniting man with man, man with nature. The order also includes uniting of the different parts of an art-work with one another. In Williams's scheme of things, this order has to be achieved without betraying the individuality of the various elements involved in the grand order. By inference the idea of order becomes a celebration of many of Williams's later poems; arranged as they are like mosaics, in a significant combination of detail. We may recall here Wallace Stevens, a contemporary of Williams who, too, was preoccupied with the same idea. A poem of particular interest in this regard is Stevens's 'The Idea of Order at Key West.' In fact

the theme of order preoccupied most of the contemporaries of Williams, including Eliot and Pound.

As can be seen, the poem is divided into five parts, like the five components of an orchestra. All the parts assemble to constitute an order, offering a sort of model that the universe is believed to have.

The first part of the poem runs from line 1 to 9. It introduces the organizing image of the orchestra, which offers a key to the musical structure of the poem (as well as of the universe). It is this orchestral design which eventually provides a solution to the problem of design. For a good orchestral piece represents a blending together of different notes and instruments into a coherent pattern. It is this which is precisely the kind of pattern or design for which Williams is searching. In the very opening, the poet introduces the second crucial element (*cacophony of birds*), the world of natural objects the individuality of which must not be forfeited in the interests of the design. The third element (besides 'orchestra' and 'cacophony of birds') is the world of human beings (*us all*), whose individuality must not be sacrificed either. Thus, the first part of the poem states a theme which is to be given a number of variations in the following lines. An order that does not deny the individuality of its components is the one founded on the different operations of 'love': the sympathy that unites man to man; the empathetic response that involves man in nature; and the imaginative energy that gives organic unity to a work of art. It is summed up in the following concluding lines of Part I:

Love is that common tone  
shall raise his fiery head  
and sound his note.

The second part of the poem consists of lines 10 to 16. It relates to the 'lento' movement, the slowness of which is a result of the prevalence of open vowels, the frequent pauses required by the syntax and punctuation and by the short feet, and the final emphasis of the spaced periods:

The purpose of an orchestra  
is to organize those sounds  
and hold them  
to an assembled order  
in spite of the  
'wrong note.' Well, shall we  
think or listen? Is there a sound addressed  
not wholly to the ear?  
We half close  
our eyes. We do not  
hear it through our eyes...

All this is quite appropriate to a section which is almost prosaic in its statement of the problem. How the different organs come into play to have harmony among disharmonies different sounds, through an interrelatedness is corresponded by a similar harmony achieved between the different elements of language in the poem.

Part III of the poem, which consists of lines from 17 to 23, develops the 'allegro' movement and the themes with greater energy. As we see, words swirl around, disappearing and reappearing. It seems as impossible to pin them down as it is to pin down things for long. Note, for instance, the following:

And so the banked violens  
in three tiers  
enliven the scene,  
pizzicato. For a short  
memory or to  
make the listener listen  
the theme is repeated

stressing a variant:  
it is a principle of music  
to repeat the theme. Repeat  
and repeat again,  
as the pace mounts. The  
theme is difficult  
but no more difficult  
than the facts to be  
resolved. Repeat  
and repeat the theme  
and all it develops to be  
until thought is dissolved  
in tears.

In Part IV, the poem's themes are stated again, although with a difference. Instead of stating them in abstract, now the poem offers them in experiential terms. Consisting of lines from 23 to 32, this part contains development from an idea believed in theory to an idea proved or pulses. The poem shows it achieved in two ways: first, by using metaphor rather than discursive argument to articulate the ideas; and second, by introducing an urgent personal element into the poem:

I love you. My heart  
is innocent. And this  
the first day of the world.

The 'tears' in line 23 and the 'heart' in line 26 evoke one level of experience with which Williams is concerned, the level of personal relationships. Then follow images like *dreams... memory... voices*, which evoke the world of art, since as Williams sees it, they are elements crucial to the writing of poetry. The inclusion of *French horns* suggests both the 'assembled order' of music and the world of nature, horns being a traditional emblem of outdoor activity. The introduction of personal note, mentioned earlier, shows the poet feeling the principle of love. It is only through feeling or experience that he can comprehend its true nature. It is an 'innocent' and empathetic response to experience which must be renewed every day. Consequently, the design it fosters must be reshaped every day as well. Each day must be like that 'first day' on which Adam gave names, and so a type or order, to the objects around him. As line 32 emphasizes, each day must be like the last day too because the design it witnesses must die with it:

And this the first  
(and last) day of the world  
The birds twitter now anew  
but a design  
surmounts their twittering.

Part V concludes the poem, consisting of lines 33 and 34, with a coda. In this coda, the opposing terms of the poem are recapitulated: the birds whose 'twitter' introduced the problem posed by things, and the design created by love into which those birds are absorbed, and within which they may be said only fully to live. Note the ending:

the birds twitter now anew  
but a design  
surmounts their twittering.  
It is a design of a man  
that makes them twitter.  
It is a design.

Thus ends on an emphatic note this poem in its own right, although prefixed as a "preface" to the long poem *Paterson*. One can enjoy and make sense of it as an independent entity. Williams's strength as poet comes out in his manipulation of rhythms; just as it is done in orchestra, so is it done in the poem.

### “A Negro Woman”

There was a time when people brought (actually bought) from Africa, kept as slave for domestic, industrial, or agricultural work, were called “niggers.” A more formal and racial expression was “Negroes.” Then came an assertion of human and equal rights in the twentieth century. As a result, these people came to be called “black Americans,” still kept as a separate community of the “others,” not accepted as equal to the “more equal” white Americans. Today they have secured more rights and maintain their self-respect as “Afro-Americans.” The terminology has been changing with more and more acceptance of these people as a part of American society. Socially and psychologically the distance still remains between the two communities, although officially there is no “discrimination” against the “Afro-Americans.” The present poem belongs to the early period of the twentieth century when these people were called Negroes. Let us see how Williams, as a white American poet, represents a black woman.

Both Williams’s poetical theory to focus on the object as a particular and specific reality in time and space as well as his limitation as a white American to have any interest in the inner life of a Negro woman prevent the poet from going beyond the mere physical description of woman. Here, as we see, the woman described is not different from an inanimate object – a tree or a stone. And yet certain items or gestures in the description do bring out the whiteman’s stereotype attitude to the Negro woman. Read, for instance, the following:

the bulk  
of her thighs  
causing her to waddle  
as she walks

Here, the typical image of the Negro woman, her excessive fat as against the whitewoman’s slimness, is so much common in the “white” American literature. There is a certain sense of superiority implied here on the part of the white artist or man who focuses on nothing else but the thighs of the Negro woman. How about her face? Her eyes? Her emotions? In contemporary criticism in which all kinds of deconstructive stances are taken, what the poet chooses to ignore about the “other,” or about life and society in general is equally, if not more, important. It reveals or betrays the artist’s racial, cultural, gender biases. Here, it is racial.

Also important in Williams’s description of the Negro woman is the glance the woman throws in the lines next to the ones mentioned above. Here are those lines:

looking into  
the store window which she passes  
on her way.

Here, the Negro woman’s “looking into the store window” expresses a good deal about her deprivations, social and cultural. She is not among the privileged who can just walk into the store and buy whatever they like. She is among those unprivileged who can only “look into the stores” from outside, for they are not rich enough to afford buying anything from the “store,” which in itself is a symbol of a class, nor is she, perhaps, as a Negro woman entitled to enter such stores where the whites do shopping. The “look” here is a hungry look, a metaphor for deprivation. She does not belong to the world of stores; she is an outsider, racially, economically, socially and culturally. The binary of ‘we’ and ‘they’ is in operation here. The poet, of course, being a part of the privileged community would not have much concern about the inequality and injustice implied in the power structure. Or even if he does, the poem refuses to reveal any indication to that effect.

In fact, the woman’s “otherness,” and the poet’s smugness, come out all the more clearly and directly in the subsequent lines. Note the following:

What is she  
but an ambassador  
from another world  
a world of pretty marigolds  
of two shades

which she announces  
not knowing what she does  
other  
than walk the streets  
holding the flowers upright  
as a torch  
so early in the morning.

Here, the associations of the Negro woman with the “other” world as its ambassador, the world of flowers, seem positive, not negative. The world of nature and fragrance, as against the world of stores, does give the woman a privilege of a different sort, a Nature’s privilege. However, we can see how the emphasis is on the other world as such, not so much on the woman representing it. Her link with this world is no more than that of a flower vase or a cart carrying fruits or flowers. The comparison of the flowers held in her hand to a torch may suggest her being a torch-bearer for the change that would flow from the other world, Nature. Here, we as readers face the difficulty of knowing what precisely the poet is trying to convey through these metaphors. The difficulty arises from Williams’s philosophy of poetry which refuses to go beyond the word painting. Some subtle suggestions that might slip from the concrete description, too, are not very “speaking.” We have to rest content with talking about the various possibilities that seem to be there in these suggestions. It is owing to this rock-like nature of a Williams poem that he is considered a poet of mute pictures, not a poet of ideas. Whatever, we might work out in the name of interpretation of a poem, it comes out more of a superimposition than a deciding of the mute picture. The pictures he draws are so solid that they refuse to yield to any “solution” we choose to dissolve the solid in.

### Suggested Reading

1. John Malcolm Brinnin : William Carlos Williams, 1963
2. Linda W. Wagner : The Poems of William Carlos Williams, 1964
3. James Guimond : The Art of William Carlos Williams
4. J. Hillis Miller : William Carlos Williams :  
Collection of Critical Essays, 1966
5. Mita Biswas : William Carlos Williams: Imagery of Visual  
Sensation, 1994
6. Paul Mariani : A New World Naked, 1973

### List of Possible Long Questions

1. Critically analyse some of the salient features of William Carlos Williams’ poetry.
2. Write an essay on the major themes of Williams’ poetry with special reference to the poems prescribed for you.

### Short Questions

1. Write a note on theory of Imagism
2. Write a short note on the influences of Keats, Pound, Stevens and Whitman on William Carlos Williams
3. Give the critical appreciation of the poem ‘The Red Wheelbarrow’ or ‘By the Road to the Contagious Hospital’

**Langston Hughes - " I, too, Sing America, " Dream Variations ,"  
 "The Weary Blues," " Mother to Son," " The Negro Speaks of Rivers  
 ," " Personal, " " Merry Go- Round," " Song for a Suicide,""  
 Harlem," " Birmingham"**

**From the Poetry of the Negro 1941-1970 ed. L. Hughes**

**Langston Hughes - Unit-III**

**The Writer and His Age**

Langston Hughes, a black (Negro) American writer in the early half of the twentieth century, was born in the Southern state of America called Missouri. He was born in the year 1902. All his life he remained unmarried. He emerged as a poet in the 1920's and became one of the leading figures of his time in black American literature. He came to be regarded as a leading voice of the Renaissance of Black Arts that upsurged during the 1920's. He made a remarkable contribution to that movement. Hughes was highly influenced, as a poet, by the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar (a black predecessor), Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg. He was greatly inspired by the movement DuBois (a senior black writer) represented. Hughes started writing poetry at an early age. He was only thirteen when he started composing poems.

Langston Hughes, in an effort to liberate his self, evolved a unique theory of aesthetics. The liberation he sought for his self was from the bondage of conventions in poetry, which, he thought, were representative of the white supremacy. His theory of poetry was given a social foundation. It was based on his affinities with his black brothers in America, who had been for centuries slaves to the dominant white people of America. It was also based on the intensity of life, considered a peculiar characteristic of the black American's life. He also chose for diction the language spoken by the blacks in America. Of course, like Wordsworth, he made it, as an idiom of poetry, "fluid, resilient and expansive" in character. He adopted for his poems the format of the blues (melancholy jazz songs). Using the popular Jazz rhythms and the blues' form, Hughes created, by blending the two, a binary polarization of the sentiments of his people in America. The predominant feelings among the blacks in America of the 1920,s were both of gaiety and sorrow. Hughes articulated these feelings in his poetry to make it an expression of the black anger against the ruling whites. *What emerged from his effort was the poetry of protest, for which Langston Hughes is best known in the history of American literature.* It is owing to this very quality of his poetry that it still rings a message in our ears.

Langston Hughes had started publishing poems while he was yet a student at Central High (school) in Cleveland, Ohio (one of the fifty two states of the United States located in the Mid-West). Even before he graduated from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania (an American state in the North-East) in 1929, he was supporting himself by his writing, which he continued to do all his life. To live by letters, so to say, earning livelihood from poetry, that too by a black boy in America, was nothing short of a miracle. It is, for sure, a testimony to Hughes's great talent as a poet. A lesser poet would not have survived on the strength merely of poetry. His public readings of his own compositions began soon after the publication of his first volume of poems entitled *The Weary Blues*. This volume came out in 1926, which continued to be warmly received for a long time. Of course, a talent of Hughes's measure, that too involved in the cultural and political struggle of his people, could not have been content with the writing of poetry alone. Hughes wrote, besides poetry, novels, newspaper columns, books for children, song lyrics, and even works of historical interest, including the story of the NAACP (the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).

In Langston Hughes's own words, "The Blues are today songs here and now, broke and broken-hearted, when you're troubled in mind and don't know what to do." The blues are marked by the qualities of being, as someone remarked, sad. Hughes gave these blues the individuality of his race, the stamp of his black heritage of rhythm and warmth. He used several forms of the Afro-American oral tradition. He mixed in them the laughs and cries of his people so that they (his people) would be served with the spiritual food that not only sustains them in the grim cultural climate but also emboldens them to challenge the bondage crushing them. In Hughes' own words, his poems were designed to inspire his people in America to courageously face the hardships, frustrations, disappointments, loneliness, weariness and restlessness of the American situation. Without permitting self-pity to creep into his poems, Hughes generally closed his individual compositions with a sardonic (even demonic) laughter symbolizing the victory of the human spirit over suffering and pain. In the view of Arthur Miller (an American dramatist of the post-war period), the poems of Langston Hughes, representative of the "blues", was an attempt to secure his sense of personal dignity.



Although at times described as artificial, vulgar and obscene, coming nowhere near the great black music of the spirituals, the blues of Langston Hughes, from the viewpoint of narcissism, are quite significant. They unfold the mind of a common Afro-American, showing a keen consciousness of the contingent. They are also, to an extent, autobiographical. They express a good deal of the poet's own experience of life. Loneliness, weariness, pennilessness are fairly representative of the Afro-Americans of Hughes's time, including his own. Isolation of spirit in the world of Hughes has its source in the sad history of the black Americans. It is the same source that creates music, language and rhythm of ghetto life. His blues present a message of resignation for the Negroes who are pitted against the heavy odds:

Sun's gonna shine  
Somewhere  
Again.

The Sun does not shine on the black in the America of Hughes's time. It shines elsewhere. It is going to shine somewhere again. But Hughes does not go down into the deep depression of despondence. To face the odds he and his people are pitted against, he seeks power within himself, displaying "sheer toughness of spirit," accepting failure without defeat. Thus, in his blues we find an overwhelming predominance of the speaker's determination to endure life and enjoy: "I'm gonna be happy—anyhow—in—spite—of—this—world." His singular contribution is that his blues offer a sort of profile of black folks, both in their parochial racial aspect as well as in their aspect of broader humanity. Langston Hughes also made contribution to the Jazz tradition, quite as much as he did to the tradition of the Blues, relatively low-keyed, generally elegiac, but more vocal and mellow than the blues. The jazz must be viewed, not contrary, but complementary to the blues, for while the blues are pensive and sullen, the jazz is bouncy and exuberant. Generally written in colloquial idiom, jazz is not only quick-paced and informal, but also energetic and aggressive. Discovered by Walt Whitman, and carried forward by Vachel Lindsay and Carl Sandburg, jazz reached its high watermark and became an operative principle of black art in the compositions of Langston Hughes. He ensured it a place of distinction in the literature, comparable to the one the blacks had secured in music. Boisterous, forward-moving, largely instrumental, jazz used musical sounds to express the agony and torture of the black experience. One can recall here Ralph Ellison's description of jazz, which is still one of the best available:

For jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz movement (as distinct from the uninspired commercial performance) springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight or improvisation represents . . . a definition of his identity, as a member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition.

Another aspect of the work of Langston Hughes is that it tries to rediscover the Negro's original home in Africa. It is there, he thinks, that the blacks in America can go (imaginatively) to seek spiritual sustenance. He shows how the Negro soul, so deep and ancient, is still conscious of its heritage. Thus, he seeks identity, unity and community in the remote history of the race in Africa, far beyond the American frontier. As he puts it,

So long  
So far away  
Is Africa.  
Not even memories alive  
Save those that history books create,  
Save those that song  
Beat back into the blood—  
Beat out of blood with words sad—sung  
In strange un—Negro tongue—

Like Whiteman, Langston Hughes assumed the bardic role for the blacks in America:

Dark ones of Africa,  
I bring you my songs  
To sing on the Georgia roads.  
To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.

Then rest at cool evening  
 Beneath a tall tree  
 While night comes gently,  
     Dark like me—  
 That is my dream!

Langston Hughes not only gave a personal touch to the blues and added vigour and grace to the jazz, he created consciousness among his people in America by defining them for themselves and by showing them the mirror. He also created in them a pride of their own race and self, a confidence to stand on their own legs, and in their own right, even in the midst of a sea of white hostility. He created through the most simple and rhythmic verses a literature of the people, for the people, and, of course, by the people. He gave voice to the blacks in America, articulating their grudges and grievances, their aspirations and ambitions. See how the black identity is created in the following famous poem of his, "Negro":

I am a Negro:  
     Black as the night is black,  
     Black like the depths of my Africa.  
 I've been a slave:  
 .....  
 I've been a worker:  
 .....  
 I've been a singer:  
 All the way from Africa to Georgia  
 I carried my sorrow songs.  
 I made ragtime,  
 I've been a victim:  
     The Belgians cut my hands in the Congo.  
 They lynch me still in Mississippi.  
 I am a Negro:  
     Black as the night is black  
     Black like the depths of my Africa.

Langston Hughes not only created an identity of their own for his people (the blacks) in America, binding them together not only through a common plight, but also, and more so, through a common origin and spiritual source of sustenance, but also awakened them to an activism that ensured the community a dignity, though not without a long revolution. But even that revolution was triggered, among others, by Langston Hughes. His contribution as a poet prophet of his people, a community leader, is not less than any other leader in the movement. Most of these leaders we are talking about were men and women of letters. We shall have occasion to talk about them at length while writing about this movement or revolution which has come to be known as the Harlem Renaissance. Meanwhile, see how, through simple but powerful verses—powerful precisely owing to their simplicity, for it is only in simplicity that poetry could reach the common people and have its work done:

Now I see the thunder  
 And the lightening  
 In your smile  
 Now I see  
 The storm clouds  
 In your waking eyes:  
 The thunder,  
 The wonder,  
 And the young  
 Surprise.

Since the slavery in America flourished in the South, because of agriculture being predominant in that region, the blacks developed a love-hate relationship for the place and the people of that region. We may recall here how

Ibrahim Lincoln's efforts to ensure equal rights to these slaves was met with fierce resistance from the South, which ultimately led to the Civil War in 1865, in which Lincoln himself lost his life. But the great American president did win the war for the freedom of the blacks in his country. Note, how Hughes articulates the feelings of the blacks for the South and the North of America, which in the black psyche stand as the two contrary states, the two opposing worlds

Beautiful like a woman,  
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore  
Passionate, cruel,  
Honey-lipped, syphilitic—  
That's the south.  
And I, who am black, would love her  
But she spits in my face.

.....  
So now I seek the North—  
The cold faced North,  
For she, they say,  
Is a kinder mistress,  
And in her house my children  
May escape the spell of the South.

The reason for these feelings, bitter for the South, mild for the North, is not far to see. The ill-treatment and injustice, causing pain and suffering, and for years at end, that the blacks in the South underwent for almost three hundred years, could have caused no better feelings for the place and its people. The place, perhaps, they loved, almost as their home. But when home becomes a torture house, those warm feelings turn into volcanic substance. Some such thing happened to the blacks in the South. See how Hughes brings out the plight of his people in the South in the simplest possible language, as if the speaker is just one of those ill-favoured labourers of the fields:

When the cotton's picked  
And the work is done  
Boss man takes the money  
And we get none,  
Leaves us hungry, ragged  
As we were before.  
Year by year goes by  
And we are nothing more.

Denying their dues was not all. They were lynched on slightest pretext of social or moral fault. Langston Hughes puts it as plainly as one could, arousing horror from the straight-faced description of atrocities of the South on the Negro slaves from Africa. Here is one such simple account:

Southern gentle lady  
Do not swoon.  
.....  
They've hung a black man  
To a roadside tree  
In the dark of the moon  
For the world to see  
How Dixie protects  
Its white womanhood.

Castration, lynching, and burning of blacks in the South for the alleged (mostly made up) charge of raping a white woman was very common. Even when kept alive, they were treated worse than animals: they were chained to a post, and the chain used to be filed through the hole bored in the palm of the slave.

Langston Hughes, like most black writers (and many white ones) came under the Marxist influence during the 1930's. If his poetry of the 1920's was the voice of protest, his poetry of the 1930's became the voice of revolt. He began,

now, to openly ask his people to rise against those that deny them the dignity that they deserve as human beings, that ill-treat them and cause them pain and suffering. From protest to revolt was a natural shift for the black writers in those days, for the winds of Revolution had spread all over the depressed region of the western world. We can get a glimpse of the poet's charged mood and ideology from the following:

Revolt! Arise!  
The Black  
And white world  
Shall be one.  
The worker's world.

Or the following:

The past has been  
A mint of blood and sorrow –  
That must not-be  
True of tomorrow.

In the case of Langston Hughes, as well as in the case of most western writers of the 1930's, the decade of depression proved more of a flirtation than a lasting love affair. Like most others, he made a tactical retreat from the radical position of Marxism to the moderate position of liberalism. Liberty replaced revolt in his poems. The shift was as smooth and sudden as it was from protest to revolt. So Langston Hughes's journey as poet passed through three distinct phases, with protest, revolt and liberty as the informing spirit respectively. Note, for instance, the following verses from his third phase (of liberalism):

O, let my land be a land where liberty  
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
But opportunity is real and life is free,  
Equality is in the air we breathe.

Hughes now embraces the Whitmanian vision of Liberty and Democracy, becoming in the grand American dream Whitman's black brother:

They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed  
I, too, am America.

Thus, his poetry in this phase becomes the poetry of reconciliation; it no longer remains the poetry of protest, much less the poetry of confrontation. Old age seems to have mellowed the fiery youth in Hughes. See, now, the way he sings:

That tree (of freedom) is for everybody,  
For all America, for all the world.  
May its branches spread and its shelter grow  
Until all races and all people know its shade.

Thus the familiar pattern of usual enthusiasts and common crusaders of revolution. Langston Hughes, too, settled, at the end, with a softer option available to him as an artist; he turned more of a visionary like Whitman than continue as a committed crusader for the cause of the repressed and tortured people of the African origin thrown by a stroke of destiny into the hostile territory of the white Americans.

### **The Harlem Renaissance**

The 1920's saw not only the second Renaissance in the history of mainstream America literature, but also saw a new upsurge in Afro-American culture and literature, which came to be known as the Harlem Renaissance. Harlem is a sector of the New York City, which is predominantly inhabited by the American Negroes. During the 1920's a number of cultural and literary leaders of the black people lived there. Other artists also—painters, musicians, singers—rushed to reside in the emerging capital of the Afro-American. From Harlem emerged the waves of change that spread among all the blacks in the different parts of America. New energy was released that found expression in arts and literary compositions, in the assertion of black identity in every walk of life. To meet the rising needs of self-expression among the black Americans, magazines and journals came up, which gave exclusive space to the black writers. Some of the better-known journals and little-magazines included *Fire*, *Harlem*, *Styles*, *Quill*, and *Black Opals*.

A few organizations came up to promote the Negro cause in America. One of these was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Another was the National Urban League (NUL). Both these organizations published powerful journals, namely *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* respectively. These publications encouraged promising black writers, especially the young. Another adventure in the literary field was *The Messenger* published by A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, which, too, made significant literary contributions from time to time. Then, the mainstream American journals, magazines and periodicals also started giving space to the black writers, signaling in clear terms recognition of the black talent. The upsurge was so powerful that it could not be ignored any longer. The end-result of it all was the powerful movement of the Harlem Renaissance, which has not been equalled, although almost a century has elapsed since then.

Seeing the force of the movement, several talented people came forth to direct and influence the course of the movement. One of these leading lights was Alain Locke, who chose to describe himself a "midwife" to the younger generation of black writers. It was Locke who propounded the concept of a Negro renaissance and tried to develop a movement of black American arts. In his *Survey Graphic*, of which Locke was the editor, he brought out a special Harlem issue. Later, that year, he also expanded that special number into an anthology entitled *The New Negro*. The contributions to this anthology came from (mostly) the younger generation of young black writers. It called upon the young talented blacks for continued attempts at racial self-expression with the context of culturally pluralistic America. Quite a number of black writers responded to Locke's call and offered accounts of black life at different levels and in different roles. Thus, a sort of nation was born within the American society, consciously cultivating its new-found identity, deliberately asserting its pride and dignity in being separate and different from the white American nationhood. Locke's anthology also triggered a debate on the black writing that initiated an endless controversy during the 1920s, which continued until much later. Although it was not Locke who coined the term "New Negro", his use as title of his anthology gave it a tremendous impetus. This became a badge of distinction for the upcoming writers and people of African origin; it came to represent the new consciousness of a confident, free Negro who was ready to stake his life for this new identity and freedom. Although Locke had also authored the term multi-culturalism, yet it was the New Negro that really caught on with the people and became very popular. New Negro Societies came to be set up in big cities, and it became prestigious to be a member of these societies. Journals and magazines responded and brought out special numbers of the New Negro writing. In a way, it accelerated the spread of the movement named Harlem Renaissance. The spate of black writers who gave expression to their emotional and historical links with Africa and the American South was unprecedented. Although there were some writers in the nineteenth century, such as Frederick Douglass, David Walker, William Brown, etc., who had shown such a consciousness, the time was not yet ripe for a movement. However, poets like Paul Lawrence Dunbar, James Johnson, Charles Chestnut, W. E. B. Dubois, etc., did create a consciousness among a large number of blacks, which helped cause the movement of the Renaissance. The actual renaissance of Harlem is coterminous with the modernist movement in Anglo-American tradition-both were born around the end of World War I and both ended with the end of the World War II. In other words, Harlem Renaissance as well as the second Renaissance in American literature occupied the years between the two wars.

The movement called Harlem Renaissance assumed a wider character in the 1920s, with a number of writers holding the flag in different cities of the United States. For example, Jean Toomer, Jessie Fausset, Zora Neale Hurston in Washington D.C.; Wallace Thurman in Los Angeles; Eugene Gordon in Boston; Alain Locke and Ethel Waters in Philadelphia; Bessie Smith and Paul Robes in Mid-West; so on and so forth; all combined to make it a country-wide movement. The World War I, with the black American troops fighting alongside the white troops to make the world safe for democracy, with the large-scale migration of the blacks from South to North of America, too, contributed to the birth of this new consciousness. In fact, these events matured this consciousness into a consolidated feeling hard to be contained in the old power-structure of the American society and literature. The gates had to be opened for the millions clamouring for entry. They were ready to even gatecrash. Hence all the effusion of energy in life and letters, arts and crafts of the Negro people in America.

The significance of the "city" within city (Harlem within New York) is well brought out by James Weldon Johnson's article published in *The New Negro* (1925) anthology edited by Locke. The following paragraph from the article is important:

Harlem is not merely a Negro colony or community; it is a city within a city, the greatest Negro city in the world. It is not a slum or a fringe, it is located in the heart of Manhattan and occupies one of the most beautiful and healthful sections of the city. It is not a "quarter" of dilapidated tenements, but is made-up of new-law apartments and handsome dwellings, with well paved and well-lighted

streets. It has its own churches, social and civic centers, shops, theatres and other places of amusements. And it contains more Negroes to the square mile than any other spot on earth.

With this description of the place and people of Harlem, no wonder that it became "a symbol of elegance and distinction, not derogation." Also, since the possibilities of greater freedom and better opportunities seemed more tangible in Harlem, all the ambitious young men of African origin in America thronged to it. The community grew during this period so rapidly that the number of 14000 in 1914 grew to 175000 in 1925.

The results of these phenomena were rapid. Black writers, painters, actors, and other members of the intellectual brotherhood of blacks from all over the country experienced the magnetic pull of the place called Harlem. It became, indeed, the cultural capital of the blacks not only in America but all over the world. As Alain Locke wrote in the special Harlem number of *Surrey Graphic*, "In Harlem, Negro life is seizing upon its first chances for group expression and self-determination." A corollary of this unprecedented concentration of black population in a portion of New York (Harlem) was that the place became an ideal testing ground for the cultural, political and racial clashes between the two communities of the blacks and the whites. What Roi O Hley said about Harlem in 1943 was in fact more true of the place during the 1920s: "It is the fountainhead of mass movements. From it flows the progressive vitality of Black life. . . . To grasp the inner meanings of life in Black America one must put his finger on the pulse of Harlem."

Decidedly, the Harlem Renaissance was a logical outcome of the New Negro's racial, cultural and political thinking, volubly expressed in arts and literature. Someone has rightly traced the origin of the literary movement to Claude McKay's poem "Harlem Dancer" published in 1917. Incidentally, the same year saw the publication of James Johnson's collocation of his poems entitled *Fifty Years and other Poems*. A serious dramatic presentation with a black cast appeared for the first time in that same year of 1917. Locke emerged at the time the leading spokesman of the upsurge. His thesis was that a spirit of cultural nationalism, derived from the Negro's own traditions and folk arts, had led to a desire for self-determination, leading finally to "an unusual burst of creative expression." He saw in this movement the same potential that had been released by the similar movements of cultural awakening in Ireland, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. He also observed a parallel between the New Negro movement and the European dominance in life and letters. Harlem Renaissance, he also saw, as a part of this very larger movement.

Most leading articulators of the Harlem Renaissance, Locke in particular, reflected an optimism and an idealism typical of the progressive reformers, Locke's considered belief was that the old Negro had already got reduced to a myth, and was no longer an actuality. In his view, the Negro had been for long more of a formula in America than a human being—"a something to be argued about, condemned or defended . . . a social bogey or a social burden." He saw the New Negro nourishing his racial roots, responding to his responsibilities as an active participant in the American experience. In his view, the creed of the new generation of the black Americans in the 20's was "the efficacy of collective effort, in race-cooperation." As he elaborated,

In this new group psychology we note the lapse of sentimental appeal, then the development of a more positive self-respect and self-reliance; the repudiation of social dependence, and then the gradual recovery from hyper-sensitiveness and "touchy" nerves, the repudiation of the double standard of judgment with its special philanthropic allowances and then the sturdier desire for objective and scientific appraisal; and finally the rise from social disillusionment of race pride, from the sense of social debt to the responsibilities of social contribution, and offsetting the necessary working and commonsense acceptance of restricted conditions, the belief in ultimate esteem and recognition.

This explains a good deal of what the Harlem Renaissance actually stood for. Interestingly, like most such movements in literature, the Harlem movement had no formal organization. Its orientation was, in fact, more aesthetic and philosophical than political. Locke, the most vocal mouthpiece of the movement, never made any political claims for his philosophy of cultural pluralism. He did, of course, make sure that the movement did not acquire a political colour; he was aware of the hazards a literary movement was bound to face the moment you aligned it with a political cause. He knew how the Irish and Czechoslovakian movements did not last long because of their getting mixed up with the political revolutions in those countries.

In Locke's view of pluralistic culturism, there was no conflict between being American and being Negro. Instead, a multicultural society like the American provided opportunities for both blacks and whites to enrich their respective cultures through an active interaction between the two. In other words, what Locke was trying to offer to the young black writer was a balanced and flexible approach to the richness and diversity, the anguish and intensity of the black

American experience, which alone could create enduring works of art. He had little sympathy for the didactic and propagandistic art that Dubois had advocated. He was also not in favour of regional, class, or sectarian art. For him, proper art always cut across such narrow confines and spoke to every human heart. He was also not in favour of the black American writers seeking inspiration from the African, which many European black painters and sculptors had done. He was of the firm belief that the most useful lesson the black American artist could learn from the African art was "not cultural inspiration or technical innovations, but the lesson of a classic background, the lesson of discipline, of style, of technical control." The only other Afro-American who matched Alain Locke's vigour and enthusiasm in promoting the movement of Harlem Renaissance was the sociologist Charles S. Johnson. He did not, however, share Locke's optimistic vision of cultural pluralism. In his opinion, the Afro-American was a marginal person, and would not be easily granted equality by the dominant cultural community of the white Anglo-Saxon breed. As he viewed it, the black American could not escape the evolutionary change from folk to industrial way of life. Even though painful, the process, he thought, was inevitable. In his five-year editorship of the influential journal, *Opportunity*, Johnson stressed the need for the black American to advantageously understand and absorb this change from the rural South to the urban and industrial North.

The objective of *Opportunity*, as the title itself suggests, was "to stimulate and encourage creative literary effort among Negroes... to encourage the reading of literature both by Negro author and about Negro life... to bring these writers into contact with the general world of letters... to stimulate and foster a type of writing by Negroes which shakes itself free of deliberate propaganda and protest." Whatever the individual promoters might have wished; the literature of the Harlem Renaissance is heavily marked by the rancour of racialism, although without much enthusiasm for any political cause or movement. Of course, it cannot be said to be free from the politics of race in that the writers of the period do speak of the plight of the Negroes in America, of ill-treatment, injustice and indignity meted out to them, of the need for the Negro in America to rise and assert for his rights enshrined in the edicts of the constitution of the United States. Now, if all this is not covered under the subject of politics, what else is? They may not have made Marxism their creed, may not have chosen one or another particular brand of politics, although certain individuals did that also, they do go all out to create among the black Americans a political consciousness for their rightful place in a free nation.

During the 1920's, the period of the Harlem Renaissance, both in America as well as Europe, interest in the Negro came to be centred around the cult of the primitive. It was quite fashionable in the Jazz age (the 1920's) to defy prohibition and to find joy and abandon in exotic music and dance. (It was for such a stock response to life that in the context of Hemingway the same decade came to be called "the Lost Generation.") A popular interpretation of Freudian theory, too, had contributed to the promotion of primitivism. The Negro naturally became the representative symbol of that primitivism. Quite naturally, and also quite conveniently, in the western world of the whites, "the Negro had obvious uses: he represented the unspoiled child of nature, the noble savage—carefree, spontaneous and sexually uninhibited". Freud's famous (or notorious) exalting of instinct over intellect became a legitimate protest against Puritanism, which, like Victorianism, had become, at the time, a password for whatever was decadent and dead in the culture. We can recall here how Freud, in his *Civilization and its Discontents*, had surmised that civilization was based on the suppression of "powerful instinctual urgencies," and that the privation of instinctual gratification (most prominently the sexual) demanded by the ideal of culture or social conduct was a major source of neurosis. It was no surprise, therefore, that the popular Freudianism became "the rationalization of sex primitivism," making way to the "cult of the primitive... an extraordinary foothold on the American continent.

Thus, the Negro fad of the 1920's promoted a new Euro-American interest in jazz, African art, and a return to the values of a preindustrial way of life. The black European or American was taken to be a representative of that way of life. As the French journalist, Paul Morand, expressed in a gesture of gratitude, it was the contribution of the Harlem blacks that they shattered "the mechanical rhythm of America." Using a revealing image, he compared the subway blacks, "clinging with long hooking hands to the leather straps, and chewing their gum," with "the great apes of Equatorial Africa." As for the young black girls playing in the streets with "an animal swiftness, a warlike zest... Savage and triumphant." they compared, in his mind, with "the black virgins of some African revolution of the future." The French journalist was pretty sure in his mind that if the white policeman, symbol of Western civilization, were removed from Harlem, the place will quickly revert to a semi-savage state like Haiti, "given to voodoo and rhetorical despotism". Carlvan Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* (1926) was one of the greatest instruments in promoting the primitive image of the Negro in America. The book was a sort of counterforce that hampered the growth of

genuine self-expression among the black writers of the Harlem who were crusading the movement for the black identity. For unless the image of the blacks endorsed the myth created by the Whiteman's *Nigger Heaven* it would not be favoured for publication.

Langston Hughes, himself a victim of this myth, gave representative expression to the black writers' problem, when he penned the following:

Here are our problems. In the first place, Negro books are considered by editors and publishers as exotic. Negro material is placed, like Chinese material or Bali material or East Indian material, into a certain classification. Magazine editors will tell you, "We can use but so many Negro stories a year." (That "so many" meaning very few.) Publishers will say, "we already have one Negro novel on our list this fall."

The market for Negro writers, then, is definitely limited as long as we write about ourselves. And the more truthfully we write about ourselves, the more limited our market becomes. Those novels about Negroes that sell best, by Negroes or whites, are almost always books that make our black ghettos in the big cities seem very happy places indeed, and our plantations in the deep south idyllic in their pastoral loveliness. . . . When we cease to be exotic, we cease to sell.

For Langston Hughes, the whole issue of racial expression converged on the subject of classes within the black community. As he put it, "the low down folks furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps these common people will give to the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself." Hughes refrained from using the black American's atavistic or African heritage as a point of departure from his white counterpart. He thought there were enough themes within the American social scene itself to "furnish a black artist with a lifetime of creative work. To these the Negro artist can give his racial individuality, his heritage of rhythm and warmth, and his incongruous humor that, so often, as in the Blues, becomes ironic laughter mixed with tears." Hughes's conclusion to the long-debate, that went on during the years of the Harlem Renaissance, was that "until America has completely absorbed the Negro and until segregation and racial self-consciousness have entirely disappeared, the true work of art from the Negro artist is bound, if it have any color and distinctiveness at all, to reflect his racial background and his racial environment."

Langston Hughes, as a black artist, welcomed the appearance of a growing middle class among the black Americans, although he regarded it also as a potent threat to his artistic integrity. As he put it, "the Negro artist works against the undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from the whites." Using his own poems and Jean Toomer's *Cane* as examples of the kind of racial expression he approved and encouraged, Hughes made an assertion of his independence of both white as well as black camp. This statement of his later came to be known as the literary manifesto of younger writers of the Harlem Renaissance:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are, pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

The clear and resonant voice here of one of the greatest products of the Harlem Renaissance gives expression to the highest ideal of art. It is an indication of the black writing coming of age, writing which has come out of the stereotype, suppressed or exploded, expression of the nineteenth-century Negro literature in America. Langston Hughes and other writers of the Renaissance raised the artistic as well as moral status of the black literature in America. They made it a direct and honest reflection of the reality of blacks as it obtained in their age. Even an almost a century afterwards we find the Harlem Renaissance as a golden period of black American writing, remaining totally unrivalled by any of the subsequent periods. It is only the individuals like Richard Wright or Ralph Ellison who stand out, but not a whole galaxy of artists as it did during the 1920's. •



### Hughes's Poems for Special Reading

One of the major poems that came from the pen of Langston Hughes is "Harlem." The poem runs as under:

What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore –  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
Like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
Like a heavy load.  
Or does it explode?

As a matter of fact, "Harlem" is not a whole poem by itself; rather, it is a part of a longer poem called "Lenox Avenue Murals." The whole poem consists of five parts, namely "Harlem," "Good Morning," "Same in Blues," "Letter," and "Island." Although generally a poem yields its complete and whole meaning when read and interpreted in its wholeness, not understood part by part. However, "Harlem" is a part in the poem which is self-contained. It is not like an incident in a chain constituting an "action;" rather, it is a thought unit having a wholeness of its own. As such, it stands apart and independent of the "whole" poem. Such a poem is called sequence poem, one after another, forming a larger whole. *The Wasteland* by T.S. Eliot and *Hugh Salwyn Mauberly* by Ezra Pound are sequence poems, which can be called the classic examples of this new form. A parallel form appeared in fiction also during the modern period (1914–1945). Two well-known examples of such a form are Hemingway's *In Our Time* and Joyce's *Dubliners*. Such compositions, in verse and prose, are indicative of the broken form of life in "our time." The popular belief among the writers of the modern period was that the continuity of civilized life in the west had been broken by the Great War. Hence the idea of fragment or broken life leading to the conception of the broken or fragmented form of literary composition. Langston Hughes belonged to the same period, and it is not surprising that his "Harlem" is a small poem, a part of a sequence of fragments, reflecting the condition of life in the poet's period of disruption.

The poem is only a set of questions on the single subject of what happens to a dream. The subsequent questions are a set of possibilities that can happen to a dream. But the possibilities, a sort of a set of answers, too, are offered in the form of questions. In that sense, the poem has a uniform progress through a set of questions, and it concludes with a question. One might as well argue that the poem does not really conclude, because it just ends asking yet another question, suggesting yet another possibility. By so doing Langston Hughes meets the highest requirement of art—to stand in a sort of stasis, suggesting no movement whatsoever in any direction back or forth. In such a position, it only calls for contemplation of mankind's dreams and aspirations. This kind of poem offers life experience in its inclusiveness, its complexity, making no attempt at any sort of simplification or false-fiction. New Critics coined a name for such a poetry, "inclusive poetry." They called the other kind of poetry the "poetry of exclusion," which is lyrical, focused on a single idea or emotion, excluding all other conflicting or associated ideas and emotions. In their scale of critical judgment, while lyrical poetry of the Romantics is the poetry of exclusion, the ironic and satirical poetry of the moderns and metaphysicals is the poetry of inclusion. Langston Hughes being a modern poet follows the model of his age. In his "Harlem," however, he does not follow the modernist love of allusion and ambiguity, irony and erudition. The beauty of this short poem is that it achieves the same complexity of modern poetry without taking recourse to its difficult style of indirection.

Langston Hughes's poem is written in the simplest language and in the simplest possible syntax. It opens with the master question of "what happens to a dream deferred?" followed by the subsidiary questions arising out of the "deferred." The word used here does not suggest a willed action, a willful or deliberate abandoning or putting aside of a dream, keeping it for some other time in future; nor does it imply a forced inaction, an externally imposed inactivity, not permitting pursuance of the dream. The word remains open to possibilities. It takes the state of deferment

as a given, for whatever reasons, and focuses only on what follows such a state. The poem exclusively dwells upon the various forms a dream can assume in the state of deferment. Here deferment actually means failure; the dream deferred means the dream not realized, not translated into its actual life form. If it has failed to come in your life, then what happens to it. Actually, what happens after it has not come true relates more to the dreamer than to the dream. What happens to an individual or a community that had dreamed, or been shown a dream, but then denied its realization in their actual life. Listing the various forms the deferred dream can assume, the poem poses the question (actually suggesting its possibility): "Does it dry up/ like a rasin in the sun?" A rasin is only a grape dried up in the sun. We need to note here that grape does not dry up in the sun the way water does—evaporate and disappear. It does stay, not in its plump and juicy form, but in its squeezed and solidified state. The juicy part of the dream, its romantic, luxurious side goes, only the hard reality of the fruit stays. That, of course, is one destiny or fate a human dream, of an individual or a community, can be subjected to. Life conditions being, not utopian or ideal as in the dream, but disenchanting and disillusioning as in reality, the dream is, perforce, being not a commodity of the real world, being other worldly, that is, bound to have that fate or destiny as one of its possible end.

In the same style, the same manner, the poem poses the next question (and the second possibility as to the fate of dream in actual life): "or fester like a sore —/and then run?" "Sore" is a boil in the body; "fester" to be septic. To "fester" like a sore" means to turn septic like a boil that causes pain and keeps causing it until the pus remains in the boil. So, that can also happen to a dream deferred; it can become a boil in the mind, a continuous cause of pain, hurting. In that condition, dream is like the fruit which, before it could ripe, has turned rotten. Hughes does not stop at the image of the sore as such. He adds "and then run on." The sore, here, is not something short-lived. It has become a sort of permanent condition. It runs on. The pus, which is full in the boil, keeps coming out, and keeps coming to no end. It is a horrifying image, when you have a boil on your body, full of pus running to no end. "Does it stink like rotten meat?" Well, boil or rotten meat, the stink comes out, and it is as bother some as anything in the world; it is most unpleasant to live with. For it is not something you come upon and pass by, it is right there in your own body (or mind), and it is a permanent pain (in the neck, so to say). These unpleasant images (comparisons) are also typical of the modern poetry of the 1920's. In the conventional use of the comparison, as Wordsworth says, its function was twofold, to please and to clarify. Wordsworth, in his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, speaking of the function of simile, says that it clarifies the idea and has an added charm of its own. In Romantic poetry of the nineteenth century or of the Elizabethan period, these two functions of the simile are predominant. When Robert Burns compares his love to a red, red rose, the idea of his beloved's beauty gets clarified to us. We know what he means better than just saying she is beautiful. Also, the image of the rose has an added charm in the poem, a charm of its own. Similarly, when Wordsworth compares, in his sonnet "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free/ Quiet and holy like a nun/ Breathless with adoration," the idea of the evening's quietness and holiness gets amply clarified by the image of the nun. Also, the image of the nun, breathless with adoration, decidedly, has a charm of its own. These are pleasant images that make the respective romantic poems themselves beautiful.

But when the modern poet of the 1920's uses a comparison—simile or metaphor—he deliberately reverses its functions. For instance, when Eliot, in the opening lines of his "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," compares evening to "a patient etherized upon a table," his intention is not to clarify the idea in the sense that the idea is simplified, nor is his intention to use a pleasant image to make his poem attractive. On the contrary, he makes the idea more difficult for understanding and makes the comparison unpleasant. Apparently, the evening and the patient etherized seem to have nothing in common. But when we work out the conceit (like we solve a mathematical equation), the implied idea of death-in-life for which the patient's image stands, the idea does get clarified. Here, the comparison, in the first place, obscures the idea and makes it unpleasant. Langston Hughes, who belongs to the same modernist period of the 1920's to which Eliot belongs, also makes use of comparison (simile or metaphor) in the style of modern poetry. Dream compared to "sore" or "rotten meat" are not pleasant images, both are very unpleasant images. Also, the idea is a little obscured, a little puzzling. We do wonder as to the common ground between dream and sore or rotten meat. But with a little exercise of the mind, we do come to see the force of the comparison. The effort, here in the case of modern poetry, is to "make it difficult" and "make it new," as Ezra Pound insisted, as against the softness and staleness of romantic poetry. Langston Hughes is not, of course, as radical a modernist as T.S. Eliot, but he does show an influence of the modernist movement now and then, as we have seen here in the use of comparison.

Langston Hughes goes on with his comparisons, adding more possibilities to the form a dream can take if deferred, and not realized. Yet another form it can assume is "crust and sugar over/ like a syrupy sweet." The idea here is more implied than stated. Of course, it is partly stated also, but not entirely. The idea is that the dream deferred, and not realized, can become a crust, something solid and hard, no longer wooly and soft. Obviously, not something sweet to hold on to, to cherish, and to entertain. But the crust can be made attractive by covering it with sweet syrup. In other words, the bitter pill of the dream gone hard can be made attractive by adding sugar coating to it. The failed dream of the Negro can be made palatable by mythisizing the Negro into sweet images of dancing, singing, sporting, etc. When the whole idea of the image of sugar-coated bitter pill is made clear, it no longer remains pleasant. It becomes as painful as "sore" or "rotten meat," and no less painful or bothersome.

In yet another comparison (and yet another possibility open to the dream deferred), Langston Hughes adds "Maybe it just sags/like a heavy load." Sagging, you know, means drooping or curving down in the middle under weight or pressure. One example is the sagging of human body in old age. It wilts under its own weight. The skin goes loose, the bones bend, the belly protrudes. Now, this phenomenon of sagging, too, is unpleasant rather than pleasant. It is also obscure than clear in the first place, on first reading; the deferred dream can just gather weight owing to disuse as human body does in old age, and just take to sagging. In other words, it will get distorted over the years; it will decay, and then die its own death. One can see behind the comparison the painful consciousness of the Negro in America, who once inspired by the dream Harlem evoked, finds himself faced with the failure of that dream, which is definitely deferred, and deferred permanently. These unpleasant images convey the constant prick of the pain and suffering the deferring of the dream has caused to the Negro in America.

Last of all, Langston Hughes adds the grim and terrible possibility the deferred dream can turn to. It can also explode: "Or does it explode?" Yes, that, too, remains a possibility. When the rights of a people are withheld and denied for long, the patience exhausted, the anger born, the deferred dream can, decidedly, explode into violence, a rebellion or revolt. Note, that this time Hughes does not use a comparison. He only puts the last possibility straight like a bullet issued from the gun. The issuance of the question seems quiet, creating a tension between the explosive matter and the quiet form. The poet uses all such devices of rhetoric or prosody to effectively convey his idea or emotion to the reader. This strategy or method of teaching or making aware or conveying something through question is called catechizing. Hughes adopts the method like a priest, with all his rhetorical power, and conveys the Negro's (including his own) dismay and despondence, mixed with anger and anguish, over the denial of the realization of the Harlem dream by the American ruling community of the whites. Without being voluble, and without being direct, without raising his voice, and without showing any agitation, he has conveyed it all, and conveyed it most effectively.

### **"I, Too, Sing, America"**

As usual, Langston Hughes's poem is once again a short one. One can always make a quick reading of his short poem and easily remember it. Here is the whole poem:

I, too, sing America.  
 I am the darker brother.  
 They send me to eat in the kitchen  
 When company comes,  
 But I laugh  
 And eat well,  
 And grow strong.  
 Tomorrow,  
 I'll be at the table  
 When company comes.  
 Nobody'll dare  
 Say to me,  
 "Eat in the kitchen"

Then.  
 Besides,  
 They'll see how beautiful I am  
 And be ashamed –  
 I, too, am America.

Here is a poem based on an earlier poem or poet. The reader of American poetry immediately knows the reference. The allusion here is to Walt Whitman, the pan American poet, who wrote his *Song of Myself* as an epic song of America. The particular poem may be "I Hear America Singing." Here is the allusory aspect of modern poetry. Just as Eliot's poem, "Prufrock" or "The Waste Land", refers to earlier poems and plays, just as Joyce's *Ulysses* refers to Homer's *The Odyssey*, or just as Dryden's *MacFlacknoe* refers to another poet and his work, so does Langston Hughes's poem refer to Whitman and his poetry.

The point that the poem of Langston Hughes makes is that America is not the white people alone; the black Negroes, those of African origin, who were brought as slaves to work on the farms and in the homes of the white Americans, and have now been there for over three hundred years, are also a part of America. The poem implies a reference to the American dream, enshrined in the country's constitution, which promises human dignity, and liberty and equality and fraternity. In a way, this poem relates to the earlier poem "Harlem," wherein the theme of "dream deferred" also includes the American dream, which promises equality and freedom to all irrespective of race and colour, but which in actual practice has been denied to the Negroes, the black Americans of African origin. While the reference to Whitman evokes the American dream, the actual description of the Negro's plight in the poem evokes the counter image of reality, thereby setting up a dynamic tension between dream and reality. The poem carries in its deceptively simple style a good deal of irony. The use of the word "too" in the opening line, and its repetition in the last, is meant to be highly ironic, reminding us how the blacks, despite Whitman's bravado of embracing one and all, does not actually include these unprivileged, marginalized, even repressed, black Americans. The greater force of the irony is directed, not so much against Whitman, as against America, its white population, which has denied to the black Americans their legitimate, promised, share in the life and wealth of the nation. The poem draws a graphic and telling picture of how a black servant in the whiteman's house is treated with indignity. Like an eyesore, he is to be kept out of sight of the visitors who come on a social visit to the Whiteman.

Like most poems of the period produced by the black American poets, this too has two sides to it—protest on one hand and promise or assertion on the other. Here, while the first half of the poem describes the plight of the Negro servant in America, who is a representative case for all the black Americans' plight in that country, the second half makes an assertion of the Black Americans' determination to get their due, to win liberty and equality with their white counterparts. The two things that are held, in popular American myth, against the Negroes in America are: one, that since they are uncivilized, they are not worthy of sitting side by side with the whitemen; two, that they are ugly (not beautiful) having flat nose, large mouth, thick lips, and awkward walk, above all their dark skin. The speaker in the poem, the Negro servant, makes an assertion on both of those points, emphatically telling the white Americans that the day is not far away when he will sit on the same table they dine, and right beside them. Not only that he asserts his right to equality, but also that the black is as beautiful (or even more) as the white. When he asserts his beauty, it is important, to note, he does not use "too". He just asserts it, and asserts it in its own right. He claims that to see how beautiful he is, they will be ashamed." Here, "they" obviously refers to the whites.

The poem is representative of the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance in that it attempts to arouse among the blacks in America their feelings for self-pride and self-assertion; it attempts to make them feel self-confident and self-assured; it attempts to embolden them to claim and win their right to liberty and equality. Thus, like other poems of the period, it is a poem of hope, besides being a poem of protest. The two, in fact, protest and hope, are two sides of the same coin. Protest must lead to promise, otherwise the protest will remain weak and pitiful. With hope and promise, it becomes forceful and optimistic. For this kind of poetry, Langston Hughes emerged in his own time a model for the future black poets. The younger black poets imitated him as well as sought his advice.

### Dream Variation

A related poem to the two we have just discussed is "Dream Variation." This, too, is a poem of protest, and full of promise, as the other two. The poem runs as under:

To fling my arms wide  
 In some place of the sun,  
 To whirl and to dance  
 Till the white day is done.  
 Then rest at cool evening  
 Beneath a tall tree  
 While night comes on gently,  
     Dark like me –  
 That is my dream!  
 To fling my arms wide  
 In the face of the sun,  
 Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
 Till the quick day is done.  
 Rest at pale evening...  
 A tall, slim tree...  
 Night coming tenderly  
     Black like me.

Langston Hughes uses symbols here, which fact allies his poetry once again with the modernist movement of the 1920's, headed in the Anglo-American canon, by Ezra Pound and T.S.Eliot. Symbolism, as we know, was one of the important, features of modern poetry. Influenced by the French symbolists, such as Laforgue, Valiere, and Baudlaire, T.S.Eliot made symbolism a strong ingredient of the new poetry of his time. James Joyce, Virgima Woolf, and D.H.Lawrence also made symbolism an aspect of their novels. Langston Hughes, though not as prominently as did the writers just mentioned, used symbols in his poetry. The present poem is one such example.

The poem's texture is interwoven around the two major symbols of day and night, light and dark, associating the two respectively with white and black people in America. Sun is symbolic of white supremacy, of the dominance of the white man. Night is symbolic of black man's freedom from the ruling white sun. The associated symbols of dancing, whirling, etc., are meant to express the full freedom of the black Americans, expressed in the free and ecstatic music and dance to which they abandon in the night. Since sun represents the white world, the day-time world, it is not treated kindly. To dance in some place of the sun, and to dance till the day is done, shows how sun is being treated as the oppressive other, the enemy force which the speaker wishes to defy. His looking for a place to do so expresses his eagerness for revolt against the ruling sun. Alternately, the speaker is as soft towards Night as he is harsh towards day. night "comes on gently," "tenderly" in the poem, showing the speaker's desired place and time, as against the undesirable place and time represented by day.

The second stanza, following the general pattern of Langston Hughes's poem, is more assertive, promising a positive stance and better status. Now, in the second stanza, the speaker is not looking for "some place" to dance or to register his protest or revolt against the white sun or day. He would dance now "In the face of the sun;" he will "Dance! Whirl! Whirl!" showing a determination and self-assurance not expressed so forcefully in the earlier stanza. The "Variation" of the dream is, of course, effectively conveyed. Now, he speaks, not in terms of seeking a (sort of safe) place to dance, but to do his dancing till "the quick day is done." Obviously, the day is made quick, here in the variation; it is made short. Not only that he promises to do it till the day is done," which means till it is ended, suggesting the determination to carry on his protest and rebellion against the ruling white sun until its supremacy is done to death, is ended. The beauty of Hughes's poetry is that it conveys, through the most simple and straight diction and syntax, in a natural and conversational tone, the most powerful sentiments of his people. He also does it without being arrogant and offensive, without being vulgar and mean, without being vindictive and inimical.

### **Mother to Son**

Whereas it is generally the male voice we hear in the poems of Langston Hughes, once in a while he does choose to introduce a female speaker. "Mother to son" is one such example. Here is a poem in which a mother from black

American community narrates to her son the kind of life she has led in the "white" America, what indignities and hardships she has known as a member of the repressed community. The poem runs as under:

Well, son I'll tell you:  
 Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
 It's had tacks in it,  
 And splinters.  
 And boards torn up,  
 And places with no carpet on the floor—  
 Bare.  
 But all the time  
 I'se been a-climbin' on,  
 And reachin' landin's.  
 And turnin' corners,  
 And sometimes goin' in the dark  
 Where there ain't been no light.  
 So boy, don't you turn back.  
 Don't you set down on the steps,  
 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.  
 Don't you fall now —  
 For I'se still goin', honey,  
 I'se still climbin',  
 And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Here, the very first thing one notices is the difference in diction. In the earlier poems we discussed, the diction was standard American English, clearly indicating that the speaker, if not the poet himself, is a close approximation of his personality. Here, on the other hand, the speaker is far removed from the poet and his personality. The woman, the mother, speaking to her son, is an almost illiterate person, speaking in the Negro dialect of those who have not had the benefit of schooling. *This dialect is peculiar to the Negroes in America.*

While dialect of the South had come to be used in prose fiction (of Mark Twain and others) in the later nineteenth century, it was only in the twentieth that its use became prevalent in poetry. One reason why dialect was admitted to the realm of poetry was in the interest of realism. Although Wordsworth had, a century ago, given call for discarding the "poetic diction," and for the use of the language of the people, he did not use the dialect of the people he chose to write about. His leech gatherer, idiot boy, and Cumberland beggar, all speak the language Wordsworth would consider fit for poetry. Here, the speaker uses the same language (actually dialect) she uses in everyday conversation with people. From her mouth, it does not ring artificial. In fact, it rings authentic. Another reason for its use is to given a separate identity to the Negro expression in America. Since the poets want their racial community to be itself, and not an extension or backyard of the white community, they deliberately allow their Negro characters speak their own dialect. Thus, they are attempting to remove their inferiority complex and create self-confidence, showing that they no longer feel intimidated to use their masters' or superiors' idiom. The subject is the same, familiar plight of the poor Negroes in America who have not known even the benefit of basic comforts of civilized life. Here, the mother tells her son the condition of grim poverty in which she has spent her life. The poem's charm lies in the simplicity and honesty of the speaker, reinforced by the same virtues of the speech she is using in communicating with her son. While in spoken English, even the whites (and the poets for prosody's sake) use "ain't" for "have not," and "I'll" for "I will," it is only the Negro who would use "climbin'" for "climbing" and "reachin'" for "reaching." Similarly "I'se" for "I have" is typical of the Negro only. Also typical here is the use of double negative, such as "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair," which in the dialect of the South is used by all illiterate natives, especially the Negro. Even the expressions like "life as no crystal stair" is a part of that dialect or vernacular culture, not to be found in the academic language or standard poetic diction.

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### **The Negro Speaks of Rivers**

This poem shifts the focus from America to Africa. It is directly not a protest poem. It is a poem in which the American Negro goes back to his African roots to seek identity and spiritual resource for facing the hostile environment of an alien race and culture. Here is the poem's text:

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
Went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
Bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

In Langston Hughes's work, the blues and jazz poems depicted the black man in America. He is presented in those poems as deracinated, alienated and exiled. He feels as if he were a caged animal in the zoo. He thinks his status is no better than that of a circus animal who is kept for a show. In these poems, America emerges a sort of zoo or circus, a gory monster, cannibal and syphilis whore, wherein the Negro fails to realize his self, even to recognize it. As in Dubois, the Negro in Langston Hughes's early poetry (Blues and Jazz), unable to find a home for self integration, finally turns his back on it. In the subsequent poems, like the present, he tries to form a vision of Africa, the home of his ancestors, where his racial brothers still live. When Hughes published this poem ("The Negro speaks of Rivers"), which he significantly dedicated to Dubois, he had not seen Africa. He had only heard and read about it. The poem, quite apparently, echoes Walt Whitman's work. The historical and geographical associations evoked in the poem gradually coalesce and culminate into an intense experience of the speaker through whose journey the whole scenario is presented. The speaker's identification with the rivers in Africa assumes mythical dimensions. The poem gives a powerful expression to the strength and heritage of the Negro race. As such, it captures the force of the spirituals. A simple but significant statement like "My soul has grown deep like the rivers" becomes a metaphoric expression. Rivers, quite obviously, represent here depth and timelessness. The soul of the Negro race is shown linked up with the depth and timelessness of the rivers. The two come to reflect each other. The race has been a witness, like the rivers, to the rise and fall of civilizations along these rivers. The poem also reminds us of Teunison's "Man may come and man may go, but I flow for ever." The Darwinian idea of human species having had its evolution in Africa also seems to have been at the back of the poet's mind, who seems to consider the continent as the birthplace of the human race as well as the emerging civilizations to which these rivers have been witnesses.

In the later part of the poem, as is generally the case in so many poems of Langston Hughes, there takes place a shift of scene from the river Nile to the river Mississippi. The shift is from Egypt to America. It conveys the idea of getting rejuvenated by the mother country, one's spiritual source, and then returning to the country of his destiny, to face life doled out to him by the historical accident or exigency. There is an apt similarity between this juxtaposition and movement and its counterpart juxtaposition and movement in Shakespearean comedy. From court to country to court in those comedies, the characters complete their spiritual journey from degeneration to regeneration to a return, in a state of paradise regained, to the world where you are placed to work out your destiny. Here, too, the Negro's journey from America (equivalent of Elizabethan court) to Africa (equivalent of the Elizabethan pastoral) to a return to America signifies a similar rejuvenation, regeneration, or a sort of paradise regained. Whenever one is confronted with the threat of decadence and dissolution, one desperately seeks to recapture one's lost spiritual power, to recover the vital strength. One is driven to one's very origin or source of life to get back to the remedy their state of soul. Hence the significance of the pastoral.

### The Weary Blues

"The Weary Blues" is the title poem of the first volume of poems by Langston Hughes, which came out in 1926. About the general characteristics of these poems we have already talked in these pages. As for the individual poem, it runs as under:

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,  
 Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,  
 I heard a Negro play.  
 Down of Lenox Avenue the other night  
 By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light  
 He did a lazy sway....  
 He did a lazy sway....  
 To the tune o' those Weary Blues.  
 With his ebony hands on each ivory key  
 He made that poor piano moan with melody.  
 O Blues!  
 Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool  
 He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.  
 Sweet Blues!  
 Coming from a black man's soul.  
 O Blues!  
 In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone  
 I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan –  
 "Ain't got nobody in all this world,  
 Aint got nobody but ma self.  
 I's gwine to quit ma frownin'  
 And put ma troubles on the shelf."  
 Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.  
 He played a few chords then he sang some more –  
 "I got the Weary Blues  
 And I can't be satisfied.  
 Got the Weary Blues  
 And can't be satisfied –  
 I aint happy no mo'  
 And I wish that I had died."  
 And far into the night he crooned that tune.  
 The stars went out and so did the moon.  
 The singer stopped playing and went to bed  
 While the Weary Blues echoed through his head  
 He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

Once the poem has been given a reading, identify the words unfamiliar to you. Then look up your dictionary and (if necessary) encyclopaedia. Here, in this poem, the following words may be unfamiliar to you, including the "dialectic" expressions.

*Syncopated*– to syncopate is to change the beats or accents in music; so, syncopated time means tune with changed accents or beats.

*Croon*–means to sing softly; mellow croon is in softened voice.



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*Lenox Avenue*—name of a street in New York, where the city is divided vertically and horizontally in streets and avenues.

*Pallor*—it is noun; adjective is palled; means pale.

*Ebony*—hard black wood of a tropical tree.

*Rickety*—shaky, insecure.

*Raggy*—means teasing (like students' carnival)

*Aint*—have not

*Ma self*—myself

*Frownin'*—frowning

*I's = I is = I am*

*Gwine* = going to

*Crooned* = softened, mellowed

With difficult and unfamiliar expressions known from the dictionary, return to the poem again and see how it reads now. We begin to understand its import and emphasis. The poem, as we see, describes a Negro singer in action, as to how he conducts himself in the act of singing, the stool he sits on, the piano he uses, his ebony fingers on the iron keys. It also describes the act of singing, how the Negro singer raises and lowers his voice, modulating it in a variety of tones, suggesting joy or grief. The poem also tells us the subject of the Negro singer's song, that it is his own life the singer talks about. The poem then ends with the Negro singer exhausted by his intense activity of singing, calling it a day, and falling asleep, in a sound sleep, lying like a log of wood.

Once the narrative is grasped, we begin to see its import and emphasis, its motive and purpose, its relevance and significance. The very setting of the poem conveys the poverty of the singer and his audience, his own community. He is singing "By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light," sitting on a shaky insecure stool, playing on a poor piano. Thus, the poem conveys the poverty of the Negroes in America, their general living being in slums and ghettos. The Negro singer's setting conveys it all. The facts of his life that the singer states in his song reinforce the pitiable condition of the black community in America. When he says that he has got nobody in this world, that he is all alone, like an orphan, giving it still greater emphasis with the following qualifier, that he has got nobody but himself in this world, the deep pathos of his plight are powerfully brought home by the poem. The poet or his persona in the poem, the speaker, does not say anything, does not make his narrative sentimental. He only lets the singer sing his song without any intervention, without any comment.

In poetry, as well as in novel, this method of letting the character speak, and the incident happen, without any authorial or narratorial interruption or comment, is called "showing" rather than "telling". In other words, this method or technique of narrating in verse or prose is dramatic in its essence and effect. This technique became popular in the novel after Henry James's experiment with the point of view technique, elaborately explained by Percy Lubbock in his book exclusively devoted to the subject, entitled *The Craft of Fiction*. In poetry, the same method or technique was adopted by Robert Browning, whose poems using this technique came to be known (rightly) dramatic monologues. Here, in Langston Hughes's poem, there is a narrator, and not the speaker as in Dramatic Monologue. In that sense, and to that extent, the poem is narrative, not dramatic monologue. However, the narrative, as in a James novel, is allowed to stand by itself; it is purely descriptive of the action without a single word added as way of authorial or narratorial comment. Besides, the Negro singer, the subject of the narrative, is allowed to speak directly, showing us what he does or says in neutral light, without any coloring of light or shade.

Although no one is mentioned as the agency responsible for the plight of the Negro singer, the message comes through in unambiguous terms. The moment the black American poet, Langston Hughes, makes a Negro singer sing his plight to an unmentioned (anonymous) audience, the context gets evoked. We know it is the American Negro singing. We follow the nuances of his implied complaint. In fact, the complaint becomes all the more powerful by being less voluble on the subject. The mellow, moaning tune of the song conveys it all. Nothing more is needed to bring home the message.

When the emphases of the poem are comprehended, we attend to the poem's beauty, which lies in its perfect blending of the subject and style, of the singer and song, of rhythm and gesture. We are reminded of Yeast's lines in "Among school children," where he rhetorically asks, "How can we separate the dancer from the dance?" Here, a similar sort of artistic perfection in blending of subject and object, body and soul, has been achieved by the poet. Thus, there are certain beauties of individual expressions, which remain ringing in our ears even after the act of reading is over. For example, the following:

And far into the night he crooned that tune.  
 The stars went out and so did the moon.  
 Or  
 He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.  
 Or  
 Ain't got nobody in all this world  
 Ain't got nobody but ma self.

The poem is highly evocative. Every picture comes alive as we read through the poem. We not only see the action of the Negro singer, we feel it too. It is a highly moving poem. It is a powerful rendering of the Negro's plight in America, and all without even once mentioning the white America, the racial discrimination, etc. There can be read, of course, an extra-meaning in the poet's play upon the words white and black, that too done through variations rather than in a direct manner. When we read or hear "With his ebony hands on each ivory key! He made the poor piano moan with melody," the blackness of "ebony" and whiteness of "ivory" strike us in sharp juxtaposition. Associated with these variations of black and white are also the sturdiness of the ebony wood and the softness of the ivory piece. With these associations in mind one cannot help extending the opposition to the opposition of the racial context in America between the black Negroes and the white Anglo-Saxons. That the former are sturdy, and the latter delicate in physical terms, as often expressed in the American myths, are also relevant extensions of the juxtaposition. The Blues convey it all without any statement on the subject.

Thus, the poem can be called a masterpiece of the Blues. The poem's masterly handling of the haunting cadences, street slangs, and strategically deployed repetitions are meant to release the turbulence of his emotions, which are highly consistent with the singer's mood. Here, mood and melody, tone and tenor go hand in hand in a perfect harmony. One is tempted to compare the poem to a sculpture or a painting, where there are no statements, no addresses, but the form conveys what even the statement or address would not. The poem is, indeed, a fine piece of art. No doubt, there is a large number of great poems that Hughes has left behind, but "The Weary Blues" has a charm which is very special. No other poem matches it with its purity of art, and perfection of form.

### Langston Hughes: Poems

#### "Personal"

"Personal" is a poem from Langston Hughes's volume of poems called *Distance Nowhere*. Although Hughes wrote short poems, "Personal" is perhaps the shortest of them all. It consists of just twenty words, including articles like 'a' or 'an.' Here is the poem's text:

In an envelope marked:  
 Personal  
 God addressed me a letter.  
 In an envelope marked:  
 Personal  
 I have given my answer.

It is one of those poems that mean so much because they speak so little. Hughes exploits a routine office convention of marking certain letters "personal," others "official." While the "official" letters are received and opened by receiver or despatcher of letters, or by an assistant of the officer, letters marked "personal" cannot be opened by anyone except the one to whom the letter is addressed. The use of a routine, office convention gives the poem a touch of

lightness, of profanity. It makes clear to the reader that the poem is meant to be comic, and must be read and received in that spirit.

The poem, by implicating God as a letter writer, chooses a solemn subject, but gives it the treatment of profanity. From the viewpoint of religion, any religion, God cannot be brought down to the level of the mortals. If someone does it, he does it to do disrespect or irreverence to the most sacred institution of mankind. However, whoever chooses to do so implies a message for the mankind, that he does not subscribe to that institution, not at least in the form it is created and upheld by mankind. A similar intention on the part of Langston Hughes is very much apparent in this poem. Hughes seems to intend a mockery of the conventional or dogmatic view of God, which institutionalizes Him in the form of rituals and ceremonies, altars and worships, temples and churches, etc. One meaning of the poem, therefore, is that God is "personal," and not an "institution"; He is available to each and every individual, without the agency or services of any middleman, claiming to be His nominee or representative. Reformist interpretations of religion have always held that position. Puritans in Christianity, Arya Samajis in Hinduism hold such a view. They decry the orthodox view of religion, terming it as an exploitation of individuals for ulterior purposes, personal or communal.

Another possible meaning the poem seems to suggest is in the direction of parody, although, comparatively, it is not so plausible as the others we include here. Since all religions are based on the assumption or belief that God conveyed his "word" or message through a certain prophet or prophets. It may be *The Bible*, or *The Gita*, we are told that the "word" of God, for so are these texts called, was uttered by God to someone qualified, or chosen to hear Him, to receive His message. From the viewpoint of that interpretation, the poet here becomes that chosen one or the qualified one, who has received the word of God. But the fact that Hughes terms the message "personal" takes away that meaning because in religion the message is taken as gospel truth, not as a "personal" communication for anyone. Yet another interpretation possible of these mysterious lines of the shortest poem is that the poet has received a "personal" or "confidential" communication. It can be one's explanation also, asking for a reply to something committed by the person not to the liking of God, the supreme authority. Hughes makes the answer, too, equally mysterious, making it "personal." It implies that to know what God asked and what the poet replied is no one's business. It is a highly private matter between God and the poet, and it must remain as such. And the suggestiveness of the poem does not stop there. It can be subjected to several more interpretations, though not too many.

We must here say that the poem is mysterious, and as such, paradoxically, amenable to numerous interpretations, much more than would be a less mysterious poem. One way of looking at the mysterious aspect of the poem is that it is an absolutely objective poem, where the text is so composed that the poet has refused to drop even a single hint as to the import of the poem. Since the advent of Modernism in the early twentieth century, objectivity has been considered the greatest virtue or excellence of art. But critics like Wyane Booth have raised questions also as to the desirability of such an objectivity, impersonality, or invisibility of poet. Booth's objection to such an objectivity is two-fold: one, that absolute objectivity is not possible, for after all the words are arranged in a certain order to create a piece of art, and that arrangement or order would reveal the author's intention; two, that absolute objectivity is not desirable because it ends up by making the composition ambiguous and obscure, leaving the reader helpless as to the meaning or sense of what has been composed. The point made is that art is communication, and as such it must clearly speak to the reader or audience whatever is intended in the composition.

### Suicide's Note

Here is another very short poem, consisting of only three very short lines. The poem runs as under:

The calm  
Cool face of the river  
Asked me for a kiss.

Suppose the poem did not have a title. In that case, it could be interpreted in several more ways. Now, we are bound to read it as we are directed by the title to do. In a way, the title of a literary work often, if not always, indicates the writer's intention, certainly the subject of the work. Looked in the light of the poem's title, one would see that the poem suggests a psychological reading. For otherwise, the three lines of the poem only convey the speaker's attraction for the river. One recalls, in this context, Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," which, too, depicts a

similar scene of an attractive evening:

Woods are lovely dark and deep

That poem, too, has been interpreted in terms of the speaker's death-wish which gets indicated or revealed by his unusual attraction for the dark and deep lovely woods. We have similar passages in Keats where the attractive nature seems to make a call for ending life, an expression of death-wish. In several poems of Keats, including "Ode to a Nightingale" and the sonnet "Bright Star," there is a strong temptation offered by something sensually intoxicating—beloved's swooning breasts or nature's enchanting lap.

This very short poem also proves that the writer's intention, in whatever form it finds expression, cannot be wished away. In fact, we must try to ascertain the poet's intention from whatever signals the poem might send in that direction. Here, since the poet wishes to present death as something irresistibly attractive, it is presented as a female inviting for a kiss. Here, there is a metaphor implied. We call such metaphors suppressed or condensed. It is also important to note, that unlike the *death-as-enchanted* image in Keats and Frost, here the image is the *death-as-quiet*. It is the quietness, or coolness of the river which is made an inviting aspect of its personified figure—personified by implication:

The calm  
Cool face of the river  
Asked me for a kiss.

Also implied in these lines is an aspect of worldly life in which this particular individual lives, an aspect which must be the reverse of calm and cool river. The implied reason for his presumed response to the river's call seems to be his having become disgusted with the absence of calm and cool life where he is living. Hence, suicide, or the call of the river, comes as a relief from the worldly life of disquiet pursuits. One recalls here Jack London's short novel *Call of the Wild*. Here, too, it is the call of the wild, which makes an attractive offer of permanent peace.

### "Merry-Go-Round"

In the poetry of an artist like Langston Hughes, or any other Afro-American poet, the context of the poem, the American cultural context, is an important factor for its interpretation. Just as the title reveals the poem's intention, so does the context bring out its essential import. For instance, the preceding poem indicates no cultural or historical context. As such, the speaker embracing an end to life, suicide, could be any one, any where, any time. But actually that cannot be done in the case of Langston Hughes's poem; we must first know that it is a poem by an Afro-American poet who wrote on the inhuman treatment of his people in the "white" America. So, even if no historical or topical context is given to the poem just discussed, it is in our mind, it is implied, and it is a sort of given, which must matter in the interpretation of the poem. Now, grounded in that historical or cultural context, the speaker wanting to commit suicide (in fact, who committed suicide) is an Afro-American, who has taken the extreme step, not because death was attractive by itself, but because that seemed to be a better option compared to the life of humiliation the black American (we now call Afro-American) is made to live by the dominant white members of the American society.

The present poem, "Merry-Go-Round," is not without a context; here, the poem's text provides within its very body the historical or cultural context. The poem reads as under:

Colored child at carnival:  
Where is the Jim Crow section  
On this merry-go-round,  
Mister, 'cause I want to ride?  
Down South where I come from  
White and colored  
Can't sit side by side.  
Down South on the train  
There's a Jim Crow car.  
On the bus we're put in the back—  
But there ain't no back

Langston Hughes

To a merry-go-round!  
Where's the horse  
For a kid that's black?

This is one of the best poems from the pen of Langston Hughes. It says something very serious in a very casual manner. It makes a strong protest against racial discrimination, but without raising any dust over the issue as such. The poem is a sort of snap shot showing an Afro-American at a carnival time. The person is a child. He only inquires about "his" place, "his" horse, in the round chain of horses in the merry-go-round. He does it innocently, taking his discriminated position as a fact of life. As such, the poem's protest against racial discrimination gets greater sharpness. The unself-consciousness of the child, his innocent query, strikes sharp in the mind and conscience of the reader. Decidedly, the poet is targeting the "white" reader in the American society (and the international reader of English poetry, the highly educated and supposedly emancipated) to interrogate his complacency, his complicity, in the most inhuman treatment meted out to the "Negroes" in America, although Constitutionally, by Law, they are the "equal" citizens of America.

Langston Hughes always shows, in such poems, a firm grasp of the Negro slang (the kind of language they use, which is a dialect, not a language, in the strict sense of the word). It is because of his supreme command of his idiom that the poem gets a flow and a rhythm, and gets it so effortlessly that we hear it so naturally, so casually, that we are suddenly awakened to what the poet has quietly said to us. We get stung in our consciousness. We feel ashamed of our complacency. We feel small being a part of such a society that treats the colored people as untouchables, as inferior. Thus, Langston Hughes uses an art to make his poem look artless, registers a protest without seemingly making any. The poem is left totally "bald" both in language as well as the subject or the matter of the composition. The speaker is an innocent child, speaking innocently, but speaking of something very sensitive. The poem is correspondingly as simple and straight as the speaker, as innocent, too.

#### **"Birmingham Sunday"**

Among the more frequently anthologized poems of Langston Hughes is also "Birmingham Sunday." As usual, it is an episode-poem, based on an incident at Birmingham. It is again a typical short poem of Hughes, which is chisled like a marble piece without any enclosing frame of contextual detail. The poem, "Birmingham Sunday" reads as under:

Four little girls  
Who went to Sunday School that day  
And never came back home at all –  
But left instead  
Their blood upon the wall  
With spattered flesh  
And bloodied Sunday dresses  
Scorched by dynamite that  
China made aeons ago  
Did not know what China made  
Before China was ever Red at all  
Would redden with their blood  
This Birmingham-on-Sunday wall.

Four tiny girls  
Who left their blood upon that wall,  
In little graves today await  
The dynamite that might ignite  
The ancient fuse of Dragon Kings  
Whose tomorrow sings a hymn  
The missionaries never taught  
In Christian Sunday School

To implement the Golden Rule.  
 Four little girls  
 Might be awakened some day soon  
 By songs upon the breeze  
 As yet unfelt among  
 Magnolia trees.

The poem, written in free verse, reads like a simple, matter-of-fact account of what happened at Birmingham on a particular day in a Sunday School. As is the nature of an episode-poem, it focuses on a chosen aspect of a certain incident, removing it from the complex of things associated with that incident. Since the poet is not a historian, he is not bothered about collecting facts related to the causes that led to the incident, about the whole range of involvements taking place in that incident, or the aftereffects of that particular happening in terms of various factors related to the incident. The express purpose of a poet is emotional rather than intellectual, so he picks up some one aspect of the incident which would highlight its human loss or gain.

Although the ramifications of a dynamite explosion are manifold, political, commercial, social, emotional, etc., the poet places in sharp focus only a sensitive item which would expose the human dimension of the incident, highlighting its absurdity or senselessness to general humanity. And the poet does so because his primary purpose is human rather than any narrow or partisan purpose which relates to any particular community, nationality, ideology, etc. The poet as poet would never attach his emotion to any such partisan cause. As Aristotle said, while history deals with particulars, literature deals with universals. It is precisely for this very reason that the present poem focuses on "four little girls" *without naming any particulars about them – their nationality, their ethnicity, their political or economic philosophy.* These girls are presented only as human beings. That these human beings are girls and of tender age makes their case all the more emotional, enlisting the reader's sympathy all the more quickly and squarely. Their emotional appeal becomes all the more strong because of their being utterly innocent in the matter provoking dynamite explosion.

These four little girls were not linked with any politics, national or ideological. They had only gone to Sunday School for the noble purpose of education, religious or secular. And yet, it is these little girls who became the target for a political or ideological revenge. The dynamite explosion hit them, blasting them in pieces, throwing their blood and flesh on the wall. We do not know who did it and why, we do not know who else and how many more besides these four little girls became victims of the explosion. The poem focuses only on these little girls and refuses even to take a side glance. It is deliberately done by the poet because he wants to arouse our pity and sympathy for the innocent. In fact, he wants to arouse ultimately our indignation for the explosion, whatever might have been its cause. He achieves his objective by selecting the most sentimental aspect of the explosion's episode – the four little girls. Not only that. He then concentrates on these little human figures, making more details available to us about them. No information of any kind. Only the details of how they were killed and what was seen of them after the blast.

Note how sharply the poem evokes the images of this horrid incident, tearing the tiny girls into bits and pieces of flesh and blood stains on the wall:

Four little girls  
 Who went to Sunday School that day  
 And never came back home at all –  
 But left instead  
 Their blood upon the wall  
 With spattered flesh  
 And bloodied Sunday dresses  
 Scorched by dynamite that  
 China made aeons ago

We must note here that the speaker in the poem is deliberately a non-specialist common man who can only tell us what he physically saw with his own eyes. He is not the one who would investigate or make inquiries, dissect and make analysis. He tells us in the manner of a folk tale, a ballad, how the four little girls who went to Sunday School did not return home, and how their blood and flesh was found spattered on the School wall. Nothing more. And there lies the

force, the power of the poem's narrative. It does not make any special efforts to arouse our emotions. No direct emotional appeal is made to the reader. One can recall here Stephen Spender's poem, "Thoughts in the Time of an Air-Raid," where the poet speaks of a child killed in the air attack and then makes a direct emotional appeal, saying "He was a better target for a kiss." To say that is to sentimentalise the situation. Langston Hughes does not do any such thing. He only uses a speaker who would only narrate what he saw.

The speaker in the second verse stanza comprising the second sentence is no longer a simple folk narrator. Now he speaks of China and Chinese history, relating the dynamite to its movement from the reign of ancient Dragon Kings to the Red Communist regime:

Four tiny girls Who left their blood upon that wall,  
In little graves today await  
The dynamite that might ignite  
The ancient fuse of Dragon Kings  
Whose tomorrow sings a hymn  
The missionaries never taught  
In Christian Sunday School  
To implement the Golden Rule.

As we see, the poem has now moved in the "present." The first stanza was in the past telling about the girls who "went" to school and never "came" back at all. Now they await in the present for something to happen for the future. *Their graves may ignite "the ancient fuse of Dragon Kings," which the Christian Schools never taught.*

In the perfect logical order of past, present and future, the poem in its third section or stanza moves into the future tense. Four little girls Might be awakened some day soon By songs upon the breeze As yet unfelt among Magnolia trees. The poem is deliberately made apolitical, pushing into the background the politics that lies behind the dynamite explosion. It only brings into sharp focus its senselessness, its aimlessness, its callousness, its monstrous killing of the most innocent girls who had nothing to do with anyone's quarrel or conflict of any sort. It is this absurdity of the explosion which is made outrageous by the manner of the poem's presentation of the episode. Although the poem does not seemingly make any attempt to sentimentalise the issue, it does 'rub' the case of the four girls through a set of repetitions. The very opening line, for example, "Four little girls" appears three times in the poem. The repetition is decidedly deliberate to achieve and enlist empathy for the dead. Even more than that, it is done to arouse our indignation against the explosion. Also, the fact of their not returning home is rubbed through repetition. And then the fact of their death by explosion is elaborated in detailing their remains in the form of flesh and blood spattered on the wall. Further, this blood on the wall is repeated in the subsequent verse stanza.

Juxtaposing the Dragon Kings and Red China, Chinese philosophy and Christian theology, the poem moves towards a sort of Pantheism with hope reposed in Nature. The closing lines of the poem suggest that these "Four little girls: Might be awakened some day soon." They would be awakened, it is hoped, "By songs upon the breeze/As yet unfelt among/Magnolia trees." The Magnolia trees echo Mangolia, the land of the race of Mangoles, that is the Chinese. Thus, the poem moves from the concrete to the abstract, from the particular to the general and universal.

### **Chronology of Contributions**

Although there are only a few poems put down in the syllabus for special reading, we cannot appreciate the whole magnitude of the poet's greatness or achievement unless we are aware of his entire work. In fact, a knowledge of his life, too, is equally important in that respect. Let us, in a quick resume, therefore, go over the achievements in life and letters that Langston Hughes made. (James) Langston Hughes (1902–1967) was, for sure, one of the lasting leading-lights of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's. If we were to offer only one name to represent the scope, flavour and vigour of the Harlem Movement, undoubtedly the name to figure in the forefront would be Langston Hughes. He was perhaps the most prolific of the writers of his age. And, together with Richard Wright, he was the most powerful influence on the black literature in the first half of the twentieth century. He has left behind work in an extraordinarily wide variety of literary forms. He introduced in American poetry the beat of blues, jazz, boogie-woogie, folk music, and street speech. This was a singular contribution he made, which no other poet of the time can show to his credit.

Basing his own poetry readings on those of Vachel Lindsay, who helped discover him, Langston Hughes was the first to arrange musical backgrounds for poetry readings. His attempt in this regard was to infuse the words with the anguished yet vibrant black American life from which the words sprang.

The life of Langston Hughes itself seems like something from a bildungsroman. He was born in a small place called Joplin, in the state of Missouri. His birth was in a home that was soon to break apart. The discovery that was made years later, that he hated his father, threw the young Hughes into a temporary emotional breakdown. He grew up wandering all over America, covering the states of Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Mexico, Illinois, and Ohio. But wherever he went, he carried with him the political possibilities (soon to blossom) of the fact that his grandfather was one of the black Americans who fought side by side with John Brown at Harpers Ferry. Hughes was, so to say, a one-man distillation of the experiences of the labouring poor Negroes in America. He was fitted by his natural gifts, as was no one else among the blacks of his time, to devote himself to the single purpose of his life: to tell the world what it means and what it is like to be a Negro in America. His unique and remarkable achievement is that he did the job most pleasantly and powerfully. His poetry is a pleasure to read, more so to hear. His message in poetic idiom, a "criticism of life" in Arnoldian sense, is done under the laws, as Arnold demanded, of beauty and truth.

After he completed high school in Cleveland, Langston Hughes lived for more than a year in Mexico. He continued there the writing he had started as a class poet of his Lincoln school in Illinois. Thereafter, he moved on to New York City, where he worked as a delivery boy and as a truck-garden farmhand. While living in New York, he enrolled in courses at Columbia University in 1921. It was in this very year that he published his first poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." His classroom studies did not interest him much. In fact, he felt rather bored, and decided to leave the university on in 1922. Like most dropouts of his day, he, too, went to the sea. He worked ships on runs to Africa and Europe. He beachcombed and drifted through France and Italy. He even washed dishes in a Paris night club. Finally, he decided to return to the United States. He was full of words and rhythms he wanted people to hear, so he took to composing songs and lyrics, articulating feelings his experience over the years had accumulated in him. As for a job for livelihood, he had to make do with the work of a busboy in the restaurant of Washington's Wardman Park Hotel. By 1925 Langston Hughes had done quite a bit of composition in poetry. But he needed public attention to which Vachel Lindsay brought him in that year. Lindsay favoured him by including some of his poems in the weird and sensational readings of his own poetry. Hughes got a big boost in his young career when he was awarded prize for his poems by *Opportunity*, a contemporary literary journal. The very next year, in 1926, Hughes published his first volume of poems, *The Weary Blues*, the title poem of which we discussed a little while ago. From this time on his career as a poet zoomed straight up almost like a rocket. In the midst of the fire and roar of his success, he decided to join the university once again. He went to Lincoln university, where he earned a degree in 1929. Later, in 1961, the same university, his *alma mater*, awarded him an honorary doctorate. He also received the honour of getting elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters. For a poet of his performance and reputation, these two honours were not, in fact, commensurate with his accomplishments.

His very first book, *The Weary Blues*, made amply clear the field with which his name would later come to be associated: The social and political overtones in the very titles of some of his best-known books reflect his dedication to his experimental and radical identity. They also reflect his dedication to his African roots, from which and toward which he aimed his writing. His daring literary objective was, of course, contrary to the conventional literary marketplace. Besides *The Negro Mother* and *Dear Lovely Death* (both in 1931); *The Dream Keeper* (1932); *Scottsboro Limited* (1932); *A New Song* (1938); *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942); *Jim Crow's Last Stand* (1943); *Fields of Wonder* (1947); *One Way Ticket* (1949); *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951); *Ask Your Mama* (1961); Hughes published in 1967, the year of his death, *The Panther and the Lash*, which is a work about the Black Panthers movement of the Afro-Americans and the retaliatory backlash of the whites. By the time his *Selected Poems* were published in 1959, he had long since become the greatest lyric poet in the black American poetry. Several honours followed in recognition of his merit as a poet. He still remains, perhaps, the best lyric poet the black American community has produced so far.

With all his stature as a poet, poetry alone could not contain and consume the multi-dimensional personality of Langston Hughes. It was only one among the several facets of his creative gifts. In literature, he also published a novel named



*Not Without Laughter* in 1930. His reputation as a writer of prose fiction, however, rests, not on this novel, but his "Simple" prose pieces, considered among the classics of American literary folk satire and humour. These pieces include *Simple Speaks His Mind* (1950), *The Best of Simple* (1961), and *Simple's Uncle Sam* (1965).

During the decade of depression, the 1930s, like so many black and white Americans, Langston Hughes, out of anger and disillusion, went out to support the radical labour movement, and developed sympathy for the communist cause, and for the Soviet Union. He joined the Communist Party in America. He also joined the group of Harlem writers and students who went to the U.S.S.R. in (1932–1933) and stayed there for over one year. There in the U.S.S.R. he was also engaged to make a movie about black life in the U.S.A. This, of course, was not his first venture into the world of theatre and drama—in a way, movie is only a visual drama. Earlier, in 1930, he had composed a play, *Mulatto*, for a small experimental theatre. Two years after his return from the U.S.S.R., in 1935, his play *Mulatto* was produced on Broadway. He also established, almost single-handedly, the Negro theatre in America. He made journeys from Harlem to Chicago to Los Angeles to set up as well as write for local black theatre groups. Thus, he promoted the cause of the Harlem Renaissance not merely by writing poetry, fiction, and drama, but also by igniting awakening among the blacks to their own culture and identity, self-pride and self-respect. For Harlem was as much of a cultural movement as it was literary. Some of Hughes's plays include *Little Ham* (1936); *Joy to My Soul* (1937), *Soul Gone Home* (1937); and *Don't You want to be Free?* (1938). He even wrote script for a Hollywood movie *Way Down South* (1939). In collaboration with William Grant Still, he also wrote the first full-length Negro opera, *Troubled Island*. It was based upon a play with the same title Hughes had produced in 1936.

As though to prove to the literary world that he had the capability to compose any form of literature in verse or prose, Langston Hughes also wrote musicals. Some of the better known of his musicals are *The Sun Do Move* (1942); lyrics for the famous *Street Scene* (1947); Christmas cantatas such as *The Ballad of the Brown King* (1960) and *Black Nativity* (1961); and musical folk comedy: *Simply Heavenly* (1957). Langston Hughes made a mark in the art of short story also. The various volumes of short fiction which he published include *The Ways of White Folks* (1934), *Laughing to keep from Crying* (1951); and *Something in Common* (1963). Even in writing non-fiction prose he was not second to any one of his age. He wrote histories and documentaries, such as *Fight for Freedom. The story of the NAACP* (1962); and *Black Magic: A Pictorial History of the Negro in American Entertainment* (with Milton Meltzer, 1967). Hughes's reputation as a journalist was equally great. He wrote for several American and foreign newspapers. He also edited some fine anthologies of black literature, such as *The Poetry of the Negro* (with Arna Bontemps, 1949); *Poem from Black Africa* (1963); and *Best Short Stories by Negro Writers* (1967).

Langston Hughes wrote his autobiography also under two titles (parts): *The Big Sea* (1940); and *I Wonder* (1956). His juvenile books were no less popular, which include *The Gold Price* (a play, 1921); *The First Book of Negro* (1952); *The first Book of Rhythms* (1954); *The First Book of Jazz* (1955); *The First Book of the West Indies* (1956); and *The First Book of Africa* (1960); He also remained for a while on the teaching faculties of *Atlanta University* and the *University of Chicago*. He excelled in the work of poetry translation also, which he did from French and Spanish. His writings are so varied and so voluminous that all need not be listed here, being of no immediate interest to us. However, we may remember that numerous titles we have mentioned here clearly indicate that his involvement in creating and promoting the cultural and literary revolution among the black Americans was at various levels and in many areas of life and letters. Decidedly, his contribution to the cause of the Afro-Americans in America—their cultural, social, and political share in the country of their living—was unprecedented and unequalled. He worked like a missionary and emerged almost a prophet for his people. His poetry, our immediate concern, is the finest expression of his concern for that cause.

### Special Features of Negro Poetry

When we say Negro poetry, our reference in the present context is to the poetry of the Black or Afro-Americans in America. The poetry of the black American poet is, quite often, hard to pin down. Like the Negro music, the Negro poetry in America is marked by a certain special riff (short repeated phrase in jazz). Note, for instance, its use in the following poem, "Jazzonia" by Langston Hughes:

Oh, silver tree!

Oh, shining rivers of the soul.  
 In a Harlem cabaret  
 Six long-headed jazzers play.  
 A dancing girl whose eyes are bold  
 Lifts high a dress of silken gold.  
 Oh, singing tree!  
 Oh, shining rivers of the soul!  
 Were Eve's eyes  
 In the first garden  
 Just a bit too bold?  
 Was Cleopatra gorgeous  
 In a gown of gold?  
 Oh, shining tree!  
 Oh, silver rivers of the soul!  
 In a whirling cabaret  
 Six long-headed jazzers play.

The repetition of short duo of lines is repeated on a regular beat, ending with the repetition of another duo picked up from the opening. Such repetitions (called riff) are a regular feature of the Negro poetry in America, especially the poetry of Langston Hughes. Spirituals or gospel songs, blues or jazz, all forms of black American poetry has riff as an important aspect of the poem's structure. This aspect makes the Negro poetry more musical than its counterpart in the Anglo-America tradition. Music being an essential and most prominent component of the Negro culture, it enters in all of their activities including literature, more so in poetry than elsewhere. Besides, most Negro poets write poems for music. Their blues and jazz determined in the 1920's the structure and rhythm of their poetic compositions.

This special "riff" in the American Negro poetry is a sort of extra glide, a kick where none is expected, and a beat for which there is no notation. Like any other poetry, it follows the literary traditions of the language it uses, but it does not hold them sacred. Frequently, it departs from the mainstream American poetry's conventions only to induct the special flavour of the Negro culture in it. The poets do it deliberately, and with a purpose. This has led to treat it as a category apart, outside the main body of American poetry. A more pertinent reason may be racial, as they have not been considered a part of the Anglo-Saxon white community, which alone remains America and American people. Even though the blacks are very much on the American land, and are to be treated equal in terms of the law of the land, but de facto the two communities form the "two nations," to borrow a phrase from Desreily. Histories of American literature leave very little room for the Negro writings. When they do include for form sake, it is just a nominal mention of the black literature. Interestingly, they do not make a similar discrimination against the American Jewish writers; they are treated very much a part of the mainstream writing. No history allots a separate space for the Jewish writers. It need to be noted that the Negroes take to poetry just as they take to music. During the period of the Harlem Renaissance, the 1920's, poetry showed the path to the other arts. The poets of the period touched off the awakening, through their compositions, that brought novelists, painters, sculptors, dancers, dramatists, actors, and intellectuals of many hues to the notice of the white American people. The white Americans, until the 1920's, had paid no heed whatsoever to whatever Negro writing or arts had appeared. In the cultural world of these people the blacks had no existence. The very first utterance of the Harlem Renaissance struck an arresting new note:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older  
 than the flow of human blood in human veins.

As we know, these lines come from Langston Hughes's poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." Decidedly, there was nothing of the kind in the mainstream American poetry; in fact, not even in the Negro poetry before the Renaissance. Not long after the same generation of black Americans responded to a poem that had been written even earlier, and which Claude McKay included in his anthology, *Harlem Shadows* (1922). "So much have I forgotten in ten years,"

the first stanza began. It closed with

I have forgotten much, but still remember  
The poinsettia's red, blood red in warm December.

And before these notes subsided. Jean Tooner raised his voice:

Pour O pour that parting soul in song,  
O pours it in the sawdust glow of night....

And let the valley carry it along.

Another distinguishing feature of the American poetry is its utter simplicity of both diction and syntax. It marks a sharp contrast to the most difficult "modernist" poetry of the same period. Whereas Pound, Eliot and Stevens were writing the poetry of indirection, relying heavily on irony, paradox, ambiguity, allusion, etc., the black American poets of the same period, Hughes principally, were writing the poetry of direct statement, relying largely on short, simple, positive, and direct sentence. They preferred to remain close to their folk origins maintaining the simplicity and directness of folk speech. It is, decidedly, not Wordsworthian simplicity, although it does share with his poetry its antipathy to the artificial and erudite. The Negro poetry's simplicity springs from the life style of the black folk.

Note, for example, the following ("Midnight Raffle") from Langston Hughes:

I put my nickel  
In the raffle of the night.  
Somehow that raffle  
Didn't turn out right.  
I lost my nickel.  
I lost my time.  
I got back home  
Without a dime.

When I dropped that nickle  
In the subway slot,  
I wouldn't have dropped it,  
Knowing what I got.

I could just as well've  
Stayed home inside:  
My bread wasn't buttered  
On neither side.

In the Anglo-American canon, we do not find this kind of simplicity even in the medieval ages, not to speak of the twentieth century. All the poetry of the period, like the "Songs of Innocence" of Blake, is marked by an ease of expression and a naturalness of emotion. It gives the impression as if it had never been composed. It exemplifies an artless art of artful artlessness. Hughes's art can be legitimately compared to that of Jelly Roll Morton and the other creators of jazz. His sources are street music. His language is Harlesemese. In his own way, he, too, is an American original.

Still another feature of the American Negro poetry is the element of folk life. Langston Hughes and his contemporaries chose for theme the folk life of the American Negro. Beginning with the physiological peculiarities of the Negro, covering his dress and speech habits, his fondness for dance and music, for jazz and the blues, it focuses on the plight of the black folk in America. All the folk activities of occupations and entertainments are chosen as themes of Negro poetry. The folk characters, too, crowd the compositions of these poets. This poetry is, therefore, essentially public, meant to be narrated and sung, not meant to be read and contemplated. It is a sort of performing art. The poet is a performer, an entertainer. It is owing to this element in Negro poetry, most so in Langston Hughes, that Hughes,

despite his being an acknowledged major Afro-American poet of the twentieth century with over nine hundred poems to his credit, the myth of his being a mere entertainer still persists. However, the folk element in his poetry is felt all over—in diction, syntax, tone, tenor, mood, attitude to life and nature, etc. Note, for instance, the following:

Goin' down the road, Lawd,  
 Goin' down the road.  
 Down the road, Lawd,  
 Way, way down the road.  
 Got to find somebody  
 To help me carry this road.  
 Road's in front o' me,  
 Nothin' to do but walk.  
 Road's in front o' me,  
 Walk... an' walk... an' walk.  
 I'd like to meet a good friend  
 To come along an' talk.  
 Hates to be lonely,  
 Lawd, I hates to be sad.  
 Says I hates to be lonely,  
 Hates to be lonely an' sad,  
 But ever' friend you finds seems  
 Like they try to do you bad.  
 Road, road, road, O!  
 Road, road... road... road, road!  
 Road, road, road, O!  
 On the no' thern road.  
 These Mississippi town ain't  
 Fit fer a hoppin' toad.

Here is a folk character, speaking folk speech, in folk intonation, using street speech and folk diction, reveals his folk problem. The poem is more of a monologue, though not without the flavour of folk talk. It is very much in the nature of dramatic monologue, though without the express purpose of a Browning dramatic monologue to ironically undercut the speaker's statements. Here, it is simple and straight talk of a simple and straightforward folk character. Thus, the American Negro poetry is specifically designed to be different from the main-tradition American poetry. It is forged specially to give expression to the feelings and emotions of the black people in America. It embodies all their traits of speech and sound, attitude and anxiety, complaint and compassion. It is as naturally awkward, musical, and repetitive as is the Negro folk itself. You cannot separate the Negro from his poetry, just as you cannot separate the dancer from the dance.

### More Poems For Special Study

One of the poems of Langston Hughes prescribed for special study in our course is "Personal." It is one of the shortest of Hughes's short poems. It runs as under:

In an envelope marked:  
 Personal  
 God addressed me a letter.  
 In an envelope marked:  
 Personal  
 I have given my answer.

In this short poem of four lines (or six), two (or four) are repetitions. It consists of two simple, direct and positive sentences constructed on the principle of parallelism. Like a Frost poem of two lines, this, too, is a sort of riddle. For it uses indefinite nouns like "letter" and "answer". There is no indication whatsoever in the poem as to the contents of either the letter or the answer. Since both the letter from God and the speaker's answer are "personal," we are not supposed to know also the contents of either.

However, one thing seems to be implied—a comment on religions that institutionalize God into rituals and ceremonies, dos and don'ts, alter and worship, with God's representative, middlemen inbetween God and individuals. The comment seems to be an adverse one, against the in personalization or institutionalization of God, suggesting that every individual has a "personal" relation with God, and no middleman or house of God is required to mediate between the two. Yet another poem of Langston Hughes for special study is "Merry-go-Round," which was included in the 1942 volume of his poems that appeared under the title *Name in Uphill Letters*. The poem's text is as under:

Colored child at carnival:  
 Where is the Jim Crow section  
 On this merry-go-round,  
 Mister, cause I want to ride?  
 Down south where I come from  
 White and colored  
 Can't sit side by side.  
 Down South on the train  
 There's a Jim Crow car.  
 On the bus we're put in the back --  
 But there Ain't no back  
 To a merry-go-round!  
 Where's the horse  
 For a kid that's black?

Like majority of Hughes's poem, this one, too, focuses on the plight of the Negro in America. There is, in this poem, a direct treatment of the theme of apartheid, racial discrimination. The dominant and ruling white population in America is shown treating the black people, the Negroes, the Afro-Americans, as untouchables. They are not to sit beside a white man. They cannot seats in a separate train. In bus, they have to sit in the back seats in a separate sector. The poem shows a complete segregation between the two communities of the whites and the blacks.

The force of the presentation gets enhanced by its coming from the mouth of an innocent child. It is a colored child at the carnival. Conscious of his being a black child, he remembers that in the south of America, from where he hails, he has to stay away from the white boys lest they get contaminated by his blackness or primitiveness. Like a stray animal, the black is to be avoided and feared for reasons of his being unclean and wild. When the child says that in a merry-go-round, there are no back seats, the irony gets an extra edge. In a sense, merry-go-round is a metaphor for life, too, which moves in a cycle of up and down, birth and death, joy and sorrow. Also implied in the poem is another universal truth about *condition humane*, that no race, white or black, is exempt from the cycle of life, and none is above the law of nature. Like Blake's "Songs of Innocence," Hughes's poems are most suggestive when they are least articulate. The innocence of the speaker innocently brings home to us the entire racial tension that lies in the social and psychological fabric of the American society. The child utters only what he has experienced at the physical level. No intellection of action or event follows, neither from the child, who is incapable, nor from the poet, who is completely outside the poem. And yet, the poet's method conveys it all to us. The submerged reality comes to the surface. The iceberg shows its face. We can quickly guess the rest. For the poem is so designed; the style is so shaped.

### **Hughes and The Blues**

One of the most outstanding features of Hughes's poetry is his use of the Negro music as a model for various poems.

especially in his first volume of poems *The Weary Blues*. The distinctive Negro music consists of the blues and jazz. And it is both of these that provide the form for the various poems of Hughes. One can recall here in particular the title poem, "The Weary Blues," in which this Negro music is the model. Although he picks up for depiction Negro characters and Negro life of the South, he remains essentially an urban poet. He had great familiarity with the Negro life in Harlem, but little familiarity with the Negro in the South. Life in the Negro metropolis remained a basic element in his work throughout his career. Throughout his literary career, he experimented with the adaptation of black musical forms to his work. Consequently, he stood out as one of the few truly innovative poets to come out of the Harlem Renaissance. In the process, he forged a poetic style that was adaptable to a variety of circumstances. For instance, the blues form with its repetitive reinforcement was a very effective technique to impart a subtle sense of suffering and despondency.

When I was home de  
Sunshine seemed like gold.  
When I was home de  
Sunshine seemed like gold.  
Since I came up north de  
Whole damn world's turned cold.

.....  
Weary, weary,  
Weary early in de morn.  
Weary, weary,  
Early, early, in de morn.  
I's so weary  
I wish I'd never been born,

After reading a poem like the above, which is typical of Hughes's style, it is difficult to imagine a literary form that could capture the exhaustion and despair of the working class more effectively.

In order to achieve different effects in his poems, Hughes used jazz rhythms and the tempo of black work music. He found in jazz a particularly fertile area for experimentation... he took this music with its choppy, breathless, almost chaotic tempo and recreated the bursting rhythms of city life and the boisterous atmosphere of the ghetto at night. He refined his technique in his later, post-Renaissance, poetry and most successfully applied it in his Harlem epic, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, where he used jazz models to capture the full essence of Harlem life. In a poem like "Brass Spitoons," work rhythms set the pace of the poem and succeed in capturing the feeling of menial, methodical labour. Hughes's success as a poet lies in adapting the different rhythms from the working-class Negro's life to the dramatic and musical effects of his poems. No one of his age, or even before and after, could make such an effective use of the work rhythms. By so doing, he made his poetry a powerful organ of folk life, and an equally powerful instrument for Cultural Revolution.

In his blues poetry also Langston Hughes is able to capture the mood, the feel, and the spirit of the blues. We can see in his poems the rhythms and the impact of the musical form they incorporate. One can reasonably say that his blues poems are blues as well as poems. The blues is known for reflecting the trials and tribulations of the Negro in America on a secular level, much as the spirituals do on the religious level. Both expressions are, for sure, necessary releases. In one of his "Blues for Men" poems in *Shakespeare in Harlem* Hughes dramatizes the necessity for this release. In "In a Troubled key," we see the blues maker turning his despair into song instead of into murder. One gets the feeling that the mood of the blues is often one step away from death—either murder or suicide—and that the presence of the blues form makes it possible for the anguished one to direct his sorrow inward into song and find happiness in the release. As has been aptly remarked, the blues is an integral part of Black American culture, and it is appropriate that one of America's greatest poets chose this form to express himself in so many poems.

While Langston Hughes decidedly did not limit himself to any one form or subject, his concern with the common man—

the source of the blues—makes his use of the blues form especially “right”. There appears, to be a real marriage of art and artist, poem and poet, in the blues that Hughes composed. There is no doubt that he was intensely interested in the plight of the common man. It is evident in all of his works. The man and the form are in consonance with each other; there is a perfect harmony between the two. The blues offered to Hughes a format in which to express his interest in the common men and their problems. The poet brought to the form a sensitive ability to create within its limits. The simplistic and direct nature of the blues gives strength and effectiveness to the blues poetry of Langston Hughes. The blues poet, of course, cannot turn and twist the lyrics to fit a mood and tempo. But a blues singer can. And Hughes was a good blues singer. He could, and did, overcome this handicap by his artistic ability as a poet.

It is a well-known fact that the blues, like any art form, has definite patterns, which are adhered to in its composition. In his introductory “Note on Blues” in *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, Hughes gives us the most common pattern:

*The Blues*, unlike the *spirituals*, have a strict poetic pattern: one long line repeated and a third line to rhyme with the first two. Sometimes the second line in repetition is slightly changed and sometimes, but very seldom, it is omitted.

In order that a closer semblance to poetic form is maintained, Hughes breaks the first two lines into two lines each, and also divides the final line, creating a six line stanza. In some of his poems the repeated first line has dropped a word and the repeated second line has changed by dropping one word and adding others in its place. This changing of lines helps to keep the flow of the poem going, without ruining the effectiveness of the repetition.

Another fairly common form of the blues stanza is a simple four-line stanza in a rhyme scheme of a-b-c-b. Hughes uses this stanza form once in a while. An example of such a stanza form is his “Reasons Why”. Most poems in the volume *Madam to You* form this form. The most interesting of all is, of course, “Ballad of the Man Who’s Gone”:

No money to bury him.  
The relief gave Forty-Four.  
The undertaker told ‘em,  
You’ll need sixty more.

For a first-class funeral,  
A hearse and two cars –  
And maybe your friends’ll  
Send some flowers.

His wife took a paper  
And went around.  
Everybody that gave something  
She put ‘em down.

She raked up a hundred  
For her man that was dead.  
His buddies brought flowers.  
A funeral was had.

A minister preached –  
And charged five  
To bless him dead.  
And praise him alive.

Now that he's buried –  
 God rest his soul –  
 Reckon there's no change  
 For graveyard mold.

*I wonder what makes  
 A funeral so high?  
 A poor man ain't got  
 No business to die.*

It is such comments on the "small" affairs of life, as well as of death, that the small poetic snippets of Langston Hughes offer. The comments are naïve, coming from the mouth of a simple, "small" man, who brings to bear upon the ways of the world his naïve outlook.

As is the case with any poetic style, the blues' form is directly related to its content. What a particular blues is about can, of course, vary from blues to blues. But the basic content of the blues usually has to do with some form of disappointment, most commonly in love. The disappointment in other areas of life, too, figures in many of the blues coming from Langston Hughes. An example is the poem we just cited in another context. The disappointment can, in fact, be in just plain living. Yet the blues also contain an essence that is found in almost every facet of Black American expression (in verse or prose). This essence is the duality of laughing and crying at the same time. Once again, the poem we just quoted a little while ago exemplifies this aspect as well. We saw how even in a matter like the funeral humour finds a place. As Hughes himself put it, "laughing to keep from crying." Laughing at a trouble is a concept we may all try to adopt at one time or another, but Black American writers, especially Hughes, have wrought this fine ability into a grand motif. It consistently runs through their works. Hughes is most qualified as an artist in weaving this quality into his verse and prose.

It can be emphasized here that, problem of a broken Roman, or a dream deferred, for one reason or another, dominates the thematic scheme of the blues. Hughes makes an extensive use of that theme in several of his blues poems. An extended treatment of the man's side of the lost-love blues is found in the "Seven Moments of love" section of *Shakespeare in Harlem*, which Hughes chose to subtitle "An Unsonnet Sequece in Blues." It is a progressive series of seven poems dealing with a man's state of mind after his woman has left him. Throughout this series of poems Hughes manages to maintain a sense of identity in the singer of the blues and keeps at work a progression that ties together all the seven poems very neatly. Edward Wallborn explains how an interesting stanza variation occurs in another "Blues for Man" poem from *Shakespeare in Harlem*, named "Only Woman Blues." In this poem, we are told; the first four lines of each stanza are different. There is not the repetition that is common in the blues stanza; in this form Hughes retains the usefulness of the repeated line. But he frees himself in the first four lines and is able to expand the thought of the blues beyond the restrictive pattern normally used.

An interesting example of perfect blending of content and form, humour and pathos, is found in "Ballad of the Fortune Teller," in the volume *Lament Over Love*. The poem also exemplifies the typical stanza form and rhyme scheme of the Blues that Hughes used so frequently. Here goes the poem:

Madam could look in your hand—  
 Never seen you before—  
 And tell you more than  
 You'd want to know.

She could tell you about love,  
 And money, and such.

But she couldn't



A fellow came one day.  
Madam took him in.  
She treated him like  
He was her kin.

Gave him money to gamble.  
She gave him bread,  
And let him sleep in her  
Walnut bed.

Friends tried to tell her  
Dave meant her no good.  
Looks like she could've knowed it  
If she only would.

He mistreated her terrible,  
Beat her up bad.  
Then went off and left her.  
Stole all she had.

She tried to find out  
What road he took.  
There wasn't a trace  
No way she looked.

The woman who could foresee  
What your future meant,  
Could not tell, to save her  
Where Dave went.

Here, as elsewhere in Hughes, form reflects content. Leaving the more common blues stanza, Hughes switches here to an a-b-c-b stanza. He maintains here, as he generally does, the staccato pace of his popular figure of the ballad narrator. Typically, both the "madam" and the speaker in the poem remain anonymous, for what is important in a ballad is not the specific reality but the general message. The comic formula used here is the old familiar formula of the seventeenth-century English comedies—"she would it she could" is comically implied and employed in Hughes's poem. This is one of the most original uses of the blues form in his poetry. Humour, as usual is mixed with pathos. A woman's ill-treatment, including physical beating, is no laughing matter, but the fact that she would tell everyone's fortune and would not know her own causes laughter.

The folk humour is the staple food of the blues. Langston Hughes makes use of the tradition, uses traditional material, and provides folk entertainment. His humour is, of course, never without some small sting in the tail—always a comment on one or another aspect of social life that sounds odd to the simple, straight folk character. Very simple affairs of very simple people, with all the crudities and cruelties form the contents of Hughes's blues. An interesting example is a poem called "Early Evening Quarrel" from *the Weary Blues* volume. Here is the poem:

Where is that sugar, Hammond,  
I sent you this morning to buy?

I say, where is that sugar  
 I sent you this morning to buy?  
 Coffee without sugar  
 Makes a good woman cry.  
     *I ain't got no sugar, Hattie,  
     I gambled your dime away.  
     Ain't got no sugar, I  
     Done gambled that dime away.  
     If you's a wise woman, Hattie,  
     You ain't gonna have nothing to say.*

I ain't no wise woman, Hammond.  
 I an evil and mad.  
 Ain't no sense in a good woman  
 Bein treated so bad.  
     *I don't treat you bad, Hattie,  
     Neither does I treat you good.  
     But I reckon I could treat you  
     Worser if I could.*

Lawd, these things we women  
 Have to stand!  
 I wonder is there nowhere a  
 Do right man?

The poem is written in typical Negro street speech. It is faulty in grammar. It uses the speech unrefined, unimproved, unconnected. It uses the speech as in itself it really is. It reflects in poetry what Zola attempted in prose fiction—"a slice of life." Of course, the implication of the slice being formless is not true of Hughes's poem. But the slice being taken from life without any artwork ornamentation done on it is wholly true of this, as well as a lot other, poems of Hughes. Form again reflects the content as husband and wife argue.

Leaving the more common stanza of the blues form, the poet quickens the argument by shortening the stanza to four lines, with a-b-c-b rhyme scheme, for Hattie's reply. The shorter stanza helps in maintaining the quick movement of the narrative. At the same time, it does not destroy the blues' format. This is one of the original variations or innovations Hughes makes, at times, in the blues format. Although a sad situation in which the man gambles away the dime given for buying sugar. A typical poor family's situation, where whatever savings women in the house make, the men drink or gamble away. And yet the poem is not without humour. It springs from the incongruity between the sobriety of the woman and the drunkenness of the man, between the task assigned and the task done. Despite our sympathy for the situation, for the woman in particular, we find ourselves laughing at the way the conversation goes. Style does the trick, if the situation does not demand it.

Hughes also makes use, at times, of less common subjects in his blues. A natural disaster, for instance, can find its way into a blues or a folk ballad of his. One of his poems, for instance, has for its theme the terrible flooding of the Mississippi. Also, the blues themselves, at times, serves as the subject for some of his blues. But the best single example of this kind of poem is the title poem of *The Weary Blues* that we discussed early in this essay on Langston Hughes. The poet sets up in this poem a "frame" wherein he recalls the performance of a blues-singer-pianist "on Lenox Avenue the other right."

Thus, we may sum up, the blues poetry of Langston Hughes has a great deal to offer. Although he decided, by choice and with a purpose, to limit his source of creativity, he is still able to develop his themes fully in many of his poems. In his blues poetry, we repeatedly come across treatment of the themes of loveliness, despair, frustration, and a nameless longing for "home" or "solace," presumably for the spiritual roots in Africa. In his later poetry, however, Hughes came

to believe that the home for the Afro-Americans is America itself, and they have to seek their destiny, whatever it is or becomes, in that very land, and nowhere else. These themes are, of course, not peculiar to Hughes alone. They are common to most poets of the Harlem Renaissance, being the common aspects of the life experienced by the Negro people in America. What direction Hughes's poetry of the blues would have taken had he continued writing in the 1970's or later is clued in the one traditional form blues, included in the last collection of his verse, *The Panther and the Lash*. The poem in question is "the Backlash Blues," in which the poet, once again, emphasizes his concern for the social plight of the Black man in America. Traditionally, the blues were not directly, not at best seriously, concerned with the social or political problems of the black community in America. Although Hughes follows the tradition of the blues fairly closely in his blues poetry, Hughes did raise, directly or indirectly, social problems of the American blacks. And the indications are, as in this poem, that he would have dealt with these themes more directly and openly than he did in the earlier bulk of his poetry.

Resisting speculative criticism, however, we can safely sum up our discussion of the blues subject in Hughes's poetry, to say that at any rate, Hughes has given most effective and artistic expression to the great art form of the blues. Although his blues today are read rather than sung, their charm as poems for music has not diminished. In literature, they decidedly remain a treasure to be preserved for posterity. A remarkable feature of his blues poetry is his masterly reproduction of the language of the blues in all its nuances. This language is the language of the common man, who is, indeed, the blues maker. Also remarkable about Hughes's blues poetry is its ability to restore the rhythmic effect of a sung blues, which makes it hard for us not to feel tempted to sing. Hughes's contribution in this regard will remain unique and valuable in the annals of black American poetry.

### **HUGHES AND THE JAZZ**

The adoption and adaptation of the jazz is as much in the poetry of Langston Hughes as of the blues. Although this influence is visible in most volumes of his poems, in greater or in smaller measure, the volume entitled *Ask Your Mama* stands out among all other volumes, which more fully conforms than any other, in many respects, to a certain concept of Jazz poetry. We find that almost all through the twelve sections of this volume, there are notes on quite an elaborate scale, that call for the reciprocal interplay of music and poetry. One of the predominant themes of the jazz poems is that in "The Hesitation Blues." This is an old blues number, which is used as a recurring leitmotif throughout the volume *Ask Your Mama*. Another prominent feature of the jazz poem is the ringing indictments of social and moral injustice in the American society, especially in relation to the blacks. This customary indictment can be seen in full evidence in the volume of Hughes's poems just mentioned. These indictments in Hughes's poems are, of course, delivered with his peculiar blend of anger, irony, and humour.

The very phrase "the Quarter of the Negroes," used by Hughes also as a title of one of his poems, is in itself full of anger and irony. We find that in this poem Hughes replaces tribal togetherness by a pervasive hatred of oppressive institutions, mandates, and regulations. In fact, now it is not the tribal togetherness that binds the blacks together, but a common or shared hatred, which seems to have become the only "umbilical cord" tying one black person to another. At the same time, being negative, this tie offers no tribal shelter for the unwed mother, the orphan child, the unemployed youth, or for any of those who "just wait" in the "shadow of the welfare." In other respects, "Ask Your Mother" is not a typical jazz poem. Some of the poem are rather obscure and recondite. In such passages in the passages there is a lack of clarity one usually finds in the direct statements of a usual jazz poem. We can also see in this poem a complication of the poet's communication by an excessive use of thematic discontinuity. Hughes uses the device of discontinuity as a rhetorical ploy adapted from the bebop musical style. He uses it with some effectiveness in blending a musical mode with a poetic style in *Montage* in 1951. But in the 1961 volume (*Ask Your Mama*) the message is frequently marred and coherence lost when there are sudden shifts of meaning. The ambiguity, even confusion, is also created by thematic breaks that snap the thread of meaning in a given passage and splinter off into elusive tangents of poetical comment, which confuse rather than clarify.

One recalls here the narrative pattern in *Ask Your Mama* across this kind of thematic discontinuity at the beginning of the poet. The poet attempts to communicate the dismal, isolated and fragile condition of the "quarter." The impression we are given is whatever the country or climate, life in the "Quarter" is flat, filled with the gray monotony that afflicts the poor. Yet, amidst all this gloom there is a glittering exception, which is embodied by the life-style of Leontyne:

Yet Leontyne's unpacking  
 In the quarter of the Negroes  
 Where the doorknob lets in lieder  
 More than German ever bore,  
 Her yesterday past grandpa  
 Not of her own doing –  
 In a pot of collard greens  
 Is gently stewing.

The reference in these lines is to the ironic juxtaposition of two cultures in the life-style of the opera star Leontyne Price. . . . After bringing out the significant opposition between two cultures Hughes falls back to his habitual mannerism, which some critics find rather crippling to his poetic style. This mannerism relates to listing of names of those well-to-do, successful blacks. These people are the ones who are brought into view when an African diplomat is sent to visit the "Quarter" by the State Department. Then follow fine lines listing certain problems the blacks have to face in their movement from one Quarter to another, say from Harlem to Long Island (both form parts of New York). Next follows a rather elusive, even confusing, passage about Ralph Ellison and some other noted personalities sailing to Ghana and Guinea, which had been newly liberated from the colonial rule.

These discontinuities in the poem's narrative pattern would be all right if Hughes intended to offer only a collage of his impressions of life in the "Quarter of the Negroes," with no conclusive comment or coherent summarization. In that case, the poet's skipping rapidly from one theme to another would be poetically as appropriate as the ingenious musical soloist who weaves an arabesque of sound around a single musical idea. But no such purpose seems to be there behind Hughes's poem. In fact, as Jean Wagner has observed, the direct superimposition of the Jazz mode on poetry does not seem to produce felicitous results. In the present case, an infelicitous consequence is the fragmentation of idea and mood. A more aware reader, for instance, may like to investigate further the social and psychological implications of the opera star's involvement in two conflicting cultures. This may sound reasonable. But actually it is not. We should not treat a poem a "study," and examine how much more it could have done with a little more exploration. We should not also demand treatment of a subject in its aspects not raised or covered in the poem. A poem, especially a lyric or song, focuses on some one aspect or emotion only to create a piece of art from that object. Of course, art is not entirely irrelevant in relation to society, not at least in the case of Langston Hughes. But to look for something which is not there in a poem-absences-is, to my mind, not a legitimate function of criticism. Each individual artist would bring to bear upon the same subject his or her own emotional and intellectual reactions. No single artist can include all the possible treatments of a subject. He can only include one, and that is his own. The business of criticism is only to examine the performance part of the artist, as to how successful or otherwise an artist has been in the treatment of his subject. Here, in the particular aspect of the jazz in Hughes's poetry, we can only say that he used jazz to his advantage, and he did not allow himself to be bogged down by its limitations. He went beyond its bounds wherever necessary.

### **Langston Hughes and The American Dream**

The Emersonian tradition in American poetry has been an illustration of the visionary or utopian view of the American dream. The climax of this illustration reaches in the poetry of Walt Whitman, although its persistence continues even in the twentieth century. A counter tradition has been almost parallel to it, from the days of Emerson himself. Hawthorne and Melville laid the foundation of that tradition. A fully critical view of the American dream, however, appeared in the twentieth century, especially in the post-World War II period, where writers like Norman Mailer, Joseph Heller, John Barth, and a host of other writers produced distopian novels, making the American dream an object of parody, burlesque, satire, etc. The black writing in America has been similar to the literature of the Beats, always showing an ironic gap between the dream enshrined in the American constitution and the disenchanting reality that actually prevails in American society, oppressing the minorities and dissenters. In that sense, the black American literature has, almost always, been distopian, underlining the failure of the American dream right from the beginning of the independent nation. Langston Hughes, among the black writers, has been one of the leading lights so far as emphasis on the plight

of the blacks in America as an example of the severe limitations of the so-called American Dream is concerned. To realize the full intensity of Hughes's critique of the American dream, we may take just one poem, such as "Children Rymes" and examine it from the viewpoint of this crucial subject of the dream. In this poem, we are offered a brief but significant experience of Black children at play on city streets. It is complete with jingles that have been improvised out of the Black experience to replace more innocent ditties (short simple songs):

What's written down  
 For white folks  
 Ain't for us a-tall:  
 "Liberty and Justice --  
 Huh--for all.

The poem offers here a familiar contrast: it is the well known contradiction between the American promise of "liberty and justice," on the one hand, and on the other hand, the political and socio-economic disadvantages of the Black American. However, looked at more searchingly, we discover that the poem is interrelated with additional ironies. The ironic ambiguity of the poem implies that if Blacks have been excluded outright from the American Dream, white Americans have also denied themselves the substance of those ideals that have been enshrined in the sacred rhetoric and history of the American Revolution. The poem seems to suggest that liberty and justice have been "written down" for, but not actualized by, white Americans.

The provocative nuances of the phrase "written down for white folks" suggests, in the poem's context, invoking a *time* reference. The reference is, obviously, to the period of American Revolution, in which these ideal notions were written down in various guises, such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. Thus, the doubts the poem's irony casts on the substance of liberty and justice in American history also extend to the American Revolution itself. The poem raises a finger at the substantiality of the revolutionary rhetoric itself, underlining its essential limitations. In other words, it raises questions about the substance of the Revolution itself: how revolutionary, it ironically seems to ask, was the American Revolution? The identity of the speaker in Langston Hughes's poem is crucial here. The image of the children at play, the traditionally innocent connotations of children's rhymes, both seem deliberately to invoke an image of innocence upon which the Americans have always insisted in their cultural history. It is an innocence defined by allegations that the American War of Independence was not simply a rebellion but a revolution. Here, in the poem, Hughes associates these revolutionary notions with *only* an image of childhood innocence. But it is manifest that the poem's children are not innocent in a behavioral sense. They are noisy, rambunctious window-breakers. Also, as their knowing sneers about nonexistent liberty and justice clearly imply, they are not innocent in the sense of ignorance or inexperience.

Altogether, the lack of these children's own innocence and their archetypal roles as deprived outsiders have the effect of stripping away their society's complacent mask of innocence. What is made to come out in the poem is the inference that the American Revolutionist is not, in fact, an indisputable fact of history. Rather, it is very much a part of America's myth of innocence. Here, the poet seems, clearly, to explore the nature of revolutionary inclinations in order to find out whether they are fundamental revolutions against the majority dream and culture as a whole, or whether they are actually rebellious attempts to break down barriers to their realization of the majority dream.

Considered as a whole, the poetry of Langston Hughes inclines towards the latter direction. As the poem just analyzed suggests, the poet ironically invokes the myth of the American Revolution, with its attendant dream of equality and socio-economic fulfillment, and then places them in contrast to the Black American conditions of deprivation and rebellious impatience. In the poem's emphasis on assumptions, nothing seems to be inherently revolutionary. In fact, the poem's acid reminders of a tradition of revolutionary rhetoric are actually taunts directed at the majority culture. They are not some sort of species of exhortation aimed at Black Americans. In this context, too, the child-identity of the poem's protagonists is revealing. Their truant sidewalk games and their destruction of neighborhood property are presented as rebellious acts of frustration. They are not the result of some calculated revolutionary posture. The child-identity itself minimizes the possibilities of such a posture. It also emphasizes at the same time the Black American as child-heir to the American dream-legacy of freedom, equality, and individual fulfillment.

Thus, the poem's exposé of the failure of the American Dream in Black America is, at the same time, an implicit challenge to America to make its tradition of revolution a socio-political reality rather than a semantic imposture. All in all, Hughes's poem explores the essentially *rebellious disposition* of the disinherited Black American, while at the same time implying the very real possibilities for *revolution* in the situation of Black Americans. Their situation as the dispossessed heirs to a mythic revolution encourages an intensely partial interest in the threat of a genuine American Revolution. The poet does not explore this legacy of revolution in any exhortatory sense. That is, he obviously identifies with the Black rebel heirs to the American Dream. In fact, their rebellion is the very essence of his own poetic protest. But he lodges his protest without necessarily espousing any concept of a radically transforming revolution. It is here that we are brought face with to face a basic ambiguity in some of Hughes's own "dream" poems. We find that while on the one hand, his satiric exposé of the deferred dream in Black America is invariably couched in terms which taunt white America about the essentially non-revolutionists nature of its Revolution, on the other hand, his identification with the Black American's rebellion does not go beyond protest to any revolutionary ideology of his own.

The "dream" that Langston Hughes offers us to replace the failed American Dream is also, ironically, in the rhetoric of a "dream". Essentially, it is on the same plane as the mythical American Dream. An illustration of Hughes's dream figures in his poem "I Dream a World," which runs as under:

I dream a world where man  
 No other will scorn,  
 Where love will bless the earth  
 And peace its paths adorn.  
 I dream a world where all  
 Will know sweet freedom's way,  
 Where greed no longer saps the soul  
 Nor avarice blights our day.  
 A world I dream where black or white,  
 Whatever race you be,  
 Will share the bounties of the earth  
 And every man is free,  
 Where wretchedness will hang its head  
 And joy, like a pearl,  
 Attend the needs of all mankind.  
 Of such I dream—  
 Our world!

Decidedly, the dream presented here is even more utopian than the one enshrined in the American constitution. The latter, in comparison, would come out as being more concrete and feasible than the Whitmanesque dream of the poem. It is, of course, a dream only, and only a dream. Otherwise, Hughes's poems are quite specific in detailing the race and colour discrimination in American society. He is also not for much patience and promise for tomorrow. His poem "Democracy" tells us all that:

Democracy will not come  
 Today, this year  
 Nor ever  
 Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right  
 As the other fellow has  
 To stand

On my two feet  
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,  
*Let things take their course.*  
*Tomorrow is another day.*  
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.  
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom  
Is a strong seed  
Planted  
In a great need.  
I live here, too.  
I want freedom  
Just as you.

These two poems put together reveal the gap between the poet's utopian dream and the people's dystopian reality. Hughes's "Freedom Plow" insists on a frank, if unflattering, admission of the wide gap, which the poet deliberately crosses so that he can share a popular faith in the American Dream. His frank admission has irked the revolutionary enthusiasts among the Blacks. But in the absence of any obvious enthusiasm for radical revolution (as distinct from rebellious impatience) among those masses, one is left with the suspicion that Hughes is perhaps more realistic about the actual relationship between the Black American masses and the American Dream. Black poem as Black world is another dream legacy. In other words, it is another revolution as dream. In sum, we can say that Hughes is ebullient as poet (depicting life as he saw it), even if he is not a great prophet of another "American Dream". He remains at his best in his poems about the "Dream Deferred."

### **Hughes and The Ballad**

Hughes made a mark as a poet of the Blues. He also made a mark as a poet of the jazz. But he also made a mark as a poet of the ballads. His ballads stand out just as do his Blues and jazz poems. So many of them are memorable, even haunting. Here is one such ballad, a fairly representative of his types, "Ballad of the gypsy":

I went to the Gypsy's.  
Gypsy settin' all alone.  
I said, Tell me, Gypsy,  
When will my gal be home?

Gypsy said, silver,  
Put some silver in my hand  
And I'll look into the future  
And tell you all I can.

Aw, what a lie!  
I been waitin' and a--waitin'  
And she ain't come home yet  
Something musta happened  
To make my gal forget.

Uh! I hate a lyin' Gypsy  
 Will take good money from you,  
 Tell you pretty stories  
 And take your money from you—

But if I was a Gypsy  
 I would take your money, too.

Hughes's ballads, too, are not free from the key aspects of the blues and the jazz. Negro jazz, itself an obvious convention of the Negro folk—especially during and after their migration from the South to the North—almost seems to haunt all of the early verse of Hughes. At times, it appears in the rhythm and the arrangement of the line. At times, it appears in the language. It is quite often in the mood. In both Hughes's blues and jazz there is almost always something else. This something else is that links Hughes and his poetry, and the people presented in his poetry, to a convention seemingly universal in its hold upon ordinary people, all ordinary people. That something else is the technique of the ballad.

Recalling Hughes's technique of the ballad, one need to read his "When Love is Gone," where a voice speaks: we are told a story by the character with this voice who informs us as we would be informed in a play. The method, the resort to dialogue or dramatic monologue, is the ballad technique. It is the same technique which may be found, for example, in a ballad like "Sir Patrick Spans." It is a favourite technique with Hughes. Even in his "lyric" *personae* he is often able to copy this social convention of the Negro folk, their use of the method of the ballad, to tell others how they feel. In the same "lyric" *personae*, also, he is able to reflect in subject matter the kind of happenings which ordinary Negroes tended to notice during the Harlem Renaissance and in theme the issues which those same Negroes tended to discuss in their familiar intercourse with each other. These qualities can be seen even in not so prominent a poem as "Ballad of the Girl Whose Name is Mud,"

A girl with all that raising,  
 It's hard to understand  
 How she could get in trouble  
 With a no good man.

The guy she gave her all to  
 Dropped her with a thud.  
 Now among decent people,  
 Dorothy's name is mud.

But nobody's seen her shed a tear,  
 Nor seen her hang her head.  
 Ain't even heard her murmur,  
 Lord, I wish I was dead!

No! The hussy's telling everybody—  
 Just as though it was no sin—  
 That if she had a chance  
 She'd do it again!

In ballads of such simple order, quietly and innocently told, Hughes makes the intricate dialect of the folk character so effectively speaking that the conventional life of the Negro folk is made to come alive. It is the life of the Negro folk



as they actually lead. It is the life that, in America, has set the Negro masses apart from the white people. Why do they act like that? Signifies only that a middle-class white has observed a custom which he does not share. It signifies for Hughes, who understood much of the *why* and managed often to incorporate insights into its nature in his verse, that he was, of all Renaissance poets, the true new Negro of the Renaissance poet's definition. He made his poetry act like that. His was the common touch, the touch that really mattered.

It is this touch of the common folk that makes Hughes's poetry stand out in his age. It is the ballad touch. Perhaps, however, this touch may have been (after all, Hughes is not perfect) in his art too much of precisely that, a touch. As Hughes can be related to the ballad, he can also be related to impressionism. It will not be too much of an exaggeration if we say that all his poetry seems to do is collect impressions. It will also not be an exaggeration if we say that perhaps in all of Negro poetry, he can be given the title of the great Impressionist. But to say this is also to attach a limitation to his poetry. Impressions, by their very nature, tend to lack depth, if not also intensity. His impressions do, however, come from right places. They are the impressions of an artist who does not stand in his own light. Also, they do witness to the reality of community experience of American life. As Blyden Jackson has remarked, "Hughes was not a genius at synthesizing big things. He could, and yet he could not, quite see the whole forest as some writers do. It may have been his greatest lack and probably the reason he has never seemed as serious as writers like Ellison or Wright, or Tolson at his best. Even so he saw enough . . . to be a leading interpreter of the Negro in twentieth-century America and twentieth-century literature." What makes his poetry more striking than those of the "more serious" poets is his touch of the balladry in his verse. Whatever be the form of a Hughes poem, it will always carry in it that special touch of the ballad.

### **Hughes and the Negro Identity**

It is an established fact that, for historical reasons, the Negro in America is conscious of his singular identity. He is, in fact, a little too much conscious of that. But as yet there have been rather few among the black writers who could be considered equipped to meet the requirement of this consciousness of identity with a consciousness of its material. The Negro artists generally divide into three categories: (i) those who have capitalized the fact of colour without paying for it by the study of its essence and peculiarity; (ii) those who recognize the need for a separate expression of a racial material but whose aesthetic apprehension or control is not adequate; and (iii) those who attack the essential material for what it can yield under aesthetic suation. It is evident that an artist is great in proportion as he approaches the third category. Of the Negro poets only Jean Toomer is said to have entered this category with both feet. Langston Hughes is generally branded a popular poet, and as such is said to fall short of the very great. The critical grouse has been that despite his great potential as poet, he never went beyond the popular parameters of the blues and the jazz.

It is Hughes's deep concern with the theme of black identity in America that took him into the thick of the Negro folk life. He followed the oral traditions of the community, and came to acquire it to such an extent that it almost got interiorised in his writings. In his poetry, the oral tradition is, perhaps, strongest in those poems that are modeled on black music—the jazz and blues poems. Hughes came to maturity during the 1920's, which was the classic age so far as jazz and blues are concerned. Feeling as he did about the beauty of black life, it is not surprising that he should see black music as a paradigm of the human experience and a suitable melody for his poetry. His blues poems parallel the popular blues. They capture, more fully than the work of any other writer, that "ironic laughter mixed with tears" which is the spirit and the essence of the genre. This spirit of the blues pervades, in fact, the whole of Hughes's poetry, whatever the form. Similarly, the jazz poems move with the essential gaiety and swiftness of the music, developing from the counterpoint of "Closing Time" and "The Cat and Saxophone" to the sustained complexity of *Montage of a Dream Deferred* and *Ask your Mama*.

Regardless of form, however, the subject of most Hughes's poems remains the black struggle for political power and economic well-being within the American framework. He has coded this struggle into his concept of the *dream deferred*. The black dream of liberty and equality, of well being, is an aspect of the "American Dream"—that segment of it whose fulfillment has constantly been thwarted by racism in America. Hughes depicts black life, including and in

particular the efforts to fulfill the dream. He was primarily a social poet. He always recognized himself as such. And so did his readers. But he was also a lyricist of the highest order. His adherence to oral tradition inscribes and embodies the theme of black identity in every ingredient of his poetry. For all the aspects of his poetry derived from the oral tradition come from the folk life of the Negro. His poetry was largely responsible for giving the black identity a presence and a place in letters as well as life. His poetry's aspect of the economy of means, achieved by an almost ruthless exclusion of extraneous embellishments, is a rare virtue. Consequently, his style is lean, spare, and untutored. It is marked by efficient structure and logistics that permit no tedious or unnecessary diversions. His commitment to the auditory, which in oral poetry is primary and definitive, and to a popular mass audience, make indispensable a lucidity of surface, normal syntax. His poetry's idiom, therefore, remains contemporary and colloquial rather than archaic and learned. His diction is vivid, concrete, and evocative. His technically efficient poetic machinery is modelled and assembled with parts borrowed from the oral tradition. It is used in the service of sweeping oral vision. It is made a vehicle for moving matters that are of importance to the Negro community, its distinct identity. He is very much aware of his historical placement, of the imperatives of his *race, moment, milieu*. And he makes his art to fully respond to those imperatives, which include the raising of consciousness among an oppressed people, the affirmation, conservation, and onward transmission of their culture, and the battling of injustice through exposition and protest. The black artist's mission, as Hughes defined it for himself and his contemporaries in *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*, calls for depth of vision, breadth of sympathies, passion and courage. So far as Hughes's passion and courage are concerned, they are quite clear from the tenacity of his themes and methods. However, the intensity of his anger is, perhaps, not as intense, because he usually holds it at a distance, quite controlled and barricaded behind the sardonic humour of the blues. He always wraps it in irony, satire, wit and a general playfulness.

Hughes's persona wears a genial mask, and it fits so well its wearer that it is possible to mistake it for the face itself. But if we make a careful second reading, the man behind the mask can be found out. In fact, he can be discovered even without a visit to the backstage dressing room. The man we discover behind the mask is found burning with a rage as absolute as the fiery furnaces of LeRoi Jones or Sonia Sanches. The indices of his anger are so unmistakable that we miss it only if we willfully elect to concentrate on his humour alone, and care not to see what the humour hides behind itself. Usually, Hughes succeeds in giving his anger the shape of it, but with outing blunting its sharp and bitter edges. On the contrary, the jagged edges remain pointed rather more fiercely against the smooth surface of art.

In Hughes's work, poetry as well as prose, two things distinctly stand out, which can be described as two positive compulsions of radical energies that dominate the entire Afro-American literature. One of these is its impulse towards the oral tradition. The other is the impulse towards a literature of social struggle. Much of Afro-American literature of any consequence utilizes and reflects black folk culture to a greater or lesser degree. It handles its matter in such a manner that would tend to promote the black struggle. In a sense, the two propositions are one or can become one. Some works, including that of Langston Hughes, hold the two impulses in equilibrium, giving them more or less equal play, or fusing them and thus compelling them to function as undifferentiated whole. In the case of Hughes's work, this process is quite clear. In his work, the dual energies are not only clearly visible, prolonged, and relentless in their operation, they are, in fact, held in balance, and quite often fused, so much so that the form becomes the fusion. The instrument itself becomes the purpose; the medium itself becomes the message. Note, for instance, the following poem, "Aunt Sue's Stories," one of the simplest to appear in *Afro-American Fragments*:

Aunt sue has a head full of stories.  
 Aunt sue has a whole heart full of stories.  
 Summer nights on the front porch  
 Aunt sue cuddles a brown-faced child to her bosom  
 And tells him stories.

Black slaves  
 Working in the hot sun,  
 And black slaves  
 Walking in the dewy night,  
 And black slaves  
 Singing sorrow songs on the banks of a mighty river  
 Mingle themselves softly  
 In the flow of Aunt Sue's voice,  
 Mingle themselves softly  
 In the dark shadows that cross and cross  
 Aunt Sue's stories.

And the dark faced child, listening,  
 Knows that Aunt Sue's stories are real stories.  
 He knows that Aunt Sue never got her stories  
 Out of any book at all,  
 But that they came  
 Right out of her own life.  
 The dark-faced child is quiet  
 On a summer night  
 Listening to Aunt Sue's stories.

Here, the beauty of the poem lies in its simplicity and suggestiveness. It does not actually tell any 'story' in the real sense of the term, and yet it tells all the story there is of the Negro people in America. Had Hughes gone into detail, given us any 'story,' it would have become rather sentimental and pathetic. Here, by relying on hints and suggestions, the folk life of the black people in America comes to life. We are drawn into it so powerfully, we smell it, we breathe it, we feel it. The form and the folk matter are so blended that the two become one. The medium does become the message in this typical poem of Hughes's handling of his favorite subject.

In the poetry of Langston Hughes, as we have seen in so many poems cited above, black folk culture works as his weapon, poetic weapon. Black social and economic sufficiency is the prize fought for with that weapon. By making a full utilization of the black heritage in his work, Hughes preserves as well as transmits that heritage. And by so doing he aids the survival of Afro-Americans as a distinct people. One of the far-reaching effects of Hughes's esthetic, and of its elaborations and extinctions by others, is to force us, in evaluating a black writer on his own terms. We can no longer apply the esthetic principles of the mainstream American literature to it. For evaluating it, we have to take into account the black writer's attitude to himself and his people and their heritage, as well as what use he makes or fails to make of that heritage. In other words, we must consider the presence, balance, and power of the positive compulsions in his generation. Langston Hughes permits these positive energies the most uninhibited, prolonged and unified play. Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that Hughes has recorded a poetic transcription of Negro folk life. His merit as poet lies in the fact that he has done it with sensitive nonracial excursions. Although direct and clear when traditional (only occasionally sentimental), he is stylistically most interesting when experimental. Through be-bop and folk slang—his "cool bop-daddies," "ace boys," and women who "put de miz on" their men come alive. Nightclub names, new paper

headlines, visual patterns, and multiple protagonists shape or alter meanings. Plodding lines about nature, instructional and remonstrative verses about Negroes, and even intraracial scandal have come from Hughes's poetry. Yet, his quite typical "Dressing Up" in *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (for which he was called a sewer-dweller), has the straightforward charm and unplanned emotional appeal that predominate in his work. His best poems, and those plentiful devoted to depicting the talk, moods and habits of his urban folk, remain a remarkable contribution to American literature. His chief virtue as artist lies mostly in his style. His dialogue responds unerringly to the facts of Negro race. He shapes its substance to the cadences, accents, and ductile phrases familiar to most those who know the Negroes. He has the rare ability to weave incident, personality, and social history into recurrent patterns.

Humour is one of the rare elements of Hughes's poetic style. He shows the ability to incorporate in his poems comfortable chuckles. We notice that quite often his humour has a cutting edge that presses down the social substance of horse-laughs and uproarious-mirth to a residual, mordant satire. It flexes in antic phrases, and is expressive of a creative joy linguistic in nature. In the mouths of Negro characters, that humour is often their way of transforming the ugliness in their environment. As the author's own interpretive style, it reveals a mind that steadily revolves the contradictions, the pretenses, and the bumptious weaknesses of mankind. His highest achievement has been to have been universally acknowledged as "The Poet Laureate of the Negro People." As such, he earned the affection of the Afro-American people. An intimate account of his true position is capsuled in the many lines of poetry written to him or about him. His poetic humanity softens the stern picture of the factual world his poetry reveals. His poetry reflects the whole man, native to a culture demanding of him emotional range and resiliency. It is fully responsive to the pressures uniquely felt by the Negroes.

Although his recognition as one of the world's outstanding Negro poets remains secure, it has not been established without dissensions. Of course, he achieved that position not only owing to the superior merit of his art but also because he was a devoted spokesman for the Negro cause in America. All his work sensitively deals with the tribulations of his voice, as well as with their consoling joys. Much of his writing, just as his life, was devoted to improving the condition of the Afro-Americans. He did see also in his life time great progress made by his people. But he also lived to see in his own life time his gentle approach to Negro problems rejected and ridiculed by militant voices, noisy marches, and street violence. To many an angry young men of his race, who sought quick solutions to old and complex problems of their race, Langston Hughes sounded rather old-fashioned and outmoded, a sort of relic of less turbulent times. History seems to have proved Hughes right. For while the militant movements miserably failed, his idea of achieving slow and steady progress through democratic means seems to have paid dividends. His writing often combines the realistic admission of temporary or past defeat for his race, but never without an optimistic conviction that America will ultimately, if not immediately, fulfil the Negro hopes and dreams.

The poetry of Langston Hughes, decidedly, demonstrates his comprehension of Negro folk culture, his awareness of historical and individual forces at work in the Negro life in America, and his implied vision of a decisive moral encounter that will bring brotherhood to America. His poems on racial exploitation and brutality reveal his abomination as well as sensitivity to human weakness and valour. His poetic style bears out his vision. It is through his style that he is able to give an imaginative expression to an angry situation. The style helps soften that anger; art mellows the arduous. His typical stylistic elements of irony, fragments for pictures, exclamations in exposition, contrasts, ambiguities and paradoxes, are all a sort of detour to the problems with explosive potential. It presents sharp spectacle but soft speculation. It offers volatile material but in the form of "weary" blues.

### Books for Further Reading

1. Norman Coombs. *The Black Experience in America*. New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1972.
2. James Emmanuel. *Langston Hughes*. New Haven: College and University Press, 1967.
3. Essien-Udon. *Black Nationalism: A search for Identity in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1962.
4. Addison Gayle (ed.) *The Black Aesthetics*. New York: Doubleday Press, 1971.

5. Robert Hayden. *Afro-American Literature: An Introduction*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Inc., 1971.
6. Stephen Henderson. *Understanding the New Black Poetry*. New York: Morrow, 1973.
7. Frederick Hoffman. *The Twenties: American Writings in the Post-War Decade*. New York: Collier Books, 1955.
8. Onwuchekwa Jemie. *Langston Hughes: An Introduction to Poetry*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.
9. Peter Mandelik. *A Concordance to the Poetry of Langston Hughes*. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1975.
10. Elisabeth Myers. *Langston Hughes: Poet of His People*. Champaign, Illinois: Garrard, 1970.

### Question Bank

1. Write a long note on the *Harlem Renaissance*. Highlight Langston Hughes's contribution to the movement.
2. Discuss Langston Hughes as poet of the Afro-Americans.
3. Examine Hughes's use of Jazz and the Blues in his poetry.
4. Discuss Langston Hughes as a poet of protest.
5. Illustrate the salient features of Hughes's poetic style.
6. Bring out the qualities of folk literature in the poetry of Langston Hughes.
7. Discuss the role of humour in Hughes's poetry.
8. Critically examine Hughes's relation to the Modernist movement of the 1920's.
9. How do the features of popular art blend with the high art of poetry in the work of Langston Hughes? Discuss.
10. Make a comparison between Hughes and Wordsworth as poets.

## Hemingway – A Farewell to Arms - Unit IV

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### Hemingway: Life and Work

Ernest Hemingway, the second child of their parents, was born on July 21, 1899, at Oak Park, a suburb of Chicago, the second biggest city of America (the first being New York). While his father was a highly successful and unusually skillful doctor, his mother was a singer, with a wonderful voice. She taught singing in Chicago where she had handsome earnings from her teaching. His father, truly an outdoor man, had a great passion for hunting. The Hemingways were traditional in their views on child-rearing, wanting their wards to acquire the virtues of obedience, hard work, clean language, decency and moral sense. They wanted them to have higher education and achieve some ambition in life. Like most parents, the Hemingways imposed their convictions on their children. The docile ones submitted to the discipline. Ernest by nature was not given to submitting to outside disciplines, even if it came from his own parents. For instance, his mother would want him to practice playing the cello, which he intensely hated. He took his mother's music room as a torture room. He started using the room for boxing practice, which he immensely liked to do. His mother used to sing in the choir of the Congregational church and brought up all her children, six of them, as staunch believers. With Ernest Hemingway, neither music nor religion could take any hold on him.

Hemingway's father decidedly influenced him so far as his liking for outdoor life was concerned. At very young age, he was able to master the names of all the birds and flowers his father showed him. In fact, he became very much enthusiastic about whatever he saw in outdoor life. Just as in the cases of Rousseau and Wordsworth, nature took profound hold of Hemingway as a source of refreshment and rejuvenation. His father's familiar points of entry into the countryside were walking, hunting, fishing, and camping. The same activities became a great passion with Ernest Hemingway. In fact, he went even beyond pursuing them as physical activities; he studied them more closely than did his father, studying them as arts in their own right, and mastering them as perfectly as his father did the art of surgery. These outdoor activities released his soul and healed whatever wounds the civilized world inflicted on his mind and spirit.

Beyond this Hemingway seems to have received no other influence from his father of any significant consequence on his character. In fact, several things that his father tried to make him acquire created strong reaction in the boy's character, leading finally to revolt against the moral taboos, forbidding dancing and drinking, sexing and smoking. More than the moral taboos that drove Hemingway out of his parent's home was the deep discord between his father and mother. Seemingly smooth as a married couple, the Hemingways were deeply dissatisfied with each other, and lived a life of perpetual tension within the four-walls of their home. While Mrs. Hemingway felt that marriage had deprived her of a career as concert singer, Dr. Hemingway felt deprived of his adventurous life because his wife would view it as an affront to culture and civilization. Here was an open conflict between nature and culture, though they kept it under the carpet and maintained a show of a happy couple. However hard you may try to cover up marital incongruity, it would always be felt by your children. The very air they breathe within the four-walls would transmit the tension. Every word of the covered conversation, every mental or bodily reaction to each other's actions, would affect, and affect adversely, the delicate psyche of the children. The uneasy environment of the suburban Oak Park home caused sharp cuts into the growing soul of the young Ernest.

Ernest Hemingway went to grammar school at Oak Park and attended Church. He spent his summers on Walloon Lake, in a section of northern Michigan, which was still inhabited by the Ojibway Indians. Dr. Hemingway, for pursuing his outdoor activities, much to the disliking of his wife, had bought a house here, which the family used as a summer home. By the time Ernest Hemingway reached the senior school stage, studying in Oak Park High, his interests could be clearly seen. He was a member of the school football team, a reporter on the school paper, and wrote satirical pieces for the school magazine. While his satirical humour in the magazine pieces was written in the style of Ring Lardner, which Hemingway deliberately imitated, his acid little stories about big-time athletes in the sports reporter were marked by his masterly technique of every game. His passion for sports cost him damage to one of his eyes, caused both by football and by boxing.

Despite his participation in school activities of sports and writing, Hemingway had the temperament of a loner. He made few friends in Oak Park, although he knew almost everyone living there. He developed a feeling that Oak Park was rather a closed world, not open to the vast world outside of it. He felt fascinated to flee out of it to Europe and

experience the world on his own. On at least two occasions he ran away from home and went on the road, heppa freights, washing dishes in cheap cafés, working on the docks, and even boxing for a living. He finally graduated from Oak Park High School in 1917. His English teacher, a lady, did remember him for his flair for writing. Not many remarked him having any distinction, although the fault may be of those who failed to see the signs of his great potential as a writer.

Now came the crucial stage of his life. His parents wanted him to join college, which he refused. He insisted instead on joining the American army. The year Hemingway did his High School, America had joined the First World War in Europe. Hemingway's damaged eye came in his way of becoming an infantry soldier. But he was hell-bent on joining the force in any form so that he could go to Europe and see the war first hand. And he succeeded in his mission, but not before 1918, the last year of the great war. Meanwhile, he joined a job in the profession of journalism, for he remained adamant on not joining college at any cost. He became a cub reporter on the *Kansas City Star*, which at the time was one of the great newspapers in the country.

The *Star* had great pride in its accuracy of the news coverage, and more so in its pithy simplicity of English prose. The style they made all their reporters to adopt. Its famous style sheet had a list of rules, which were issued to all new editorial staff. Some of the strictures in the style sheet were as under: Be brief; be simple; be clear. We know how these very qualities of brevity, simplicity and clarity became the hall-marks of Hemingway's fictional prose. These rules of writing were drummed into Hemingway's ears, not as classroom lectures, but as practical instructions, which had to be obeyed if he were to stay with the *Star* as a practicing journalist.

Hemingway began his career as a journalist by covering fires, then was assigned to police and hospital beat. Even at his tender age of eighteen, he got an exposure, rather early in his life, to life and death at their most savage. Earlier, Hemingway had experienced, as a small boy, pain and illness while accompanying his physician father on medical calls to the Ojibways during his summers on the Michigan Lake. Now, in Kansas City, he experienced the full range of human misery, from the underworld of criminals to the shattered bodies in the hospital wards. Still greater spectacle of death and suffering Hemingway was to experience soon on the war fronts in Europe. When he had not even completed one year as a journalist, he came to know that the American Red Cross needed ambulance drivers and medical aids for service in the war in Europe. He jumped at the opportunity, left his job with the *Star* in the Spring of 1918, and signed on with the Red Cross. He returned home only to say good-bye to his family, then departed for New York to board the boat for Europe. He was sent to Italian-Austrian front, where he soon found himself behind the lines, distributing Red Cross packages to Italian soldiers in the trenches.

On the sixth of July, close to his nineteenth birthday, in the tiny village of Fosselta di Piave, a few hundred yards from the dug in Austrian army, Hemingway was hit by an Austrian mortar shell right in the trenches while he was handing out chocolate bars to a group of soldiers. While some died, some got badly wounded, Hemingway was seriously injured in his right leg, and fainted from the shock. He was removed to a field hospital along with the wounded and then to the military hospital in Milan. He was given a medal for his valour, and allowed to join the Italian infantry notwithstanding his foreign nationality. There he fell in love with an American nurse attending on him, whose name was Agnes H. von Kurowsky. She was older than Hemingway by a few years. Before leaving for the front after his recovery from the war wound, Hemingway proposed to her for marriage, which she declined. The war soon ended, and before leaving Italy for America, he proposed to her again, and she again turned down his proposal. How is it so much infatuated by her that on reaching Oak Park in 1919, he proposed to her through a letter the third time, and she refused to accept this proposal. All this experience of war and love in Italy he later made into a roman-tic novel named "*A Farewell to Arms*".

Back home, Hemingway felt out of place in Oak Park. The gap between the small town and Hemingway's vision widened further. The provincial outlook of the place and the cosmic vision of the ex-soldier seemed as far apart as the earth and the sky. His parents again pressed for college education, which Hemingway again refused to do. He only looked for an opportunity to get out of this provincial town of Oak Park as well as the Pentecost of the parental home. He saw a silver lining when the season for going to Michigan came. When the other Hemingways returned to Oak Park, Hemingway stayed back. He rented a room there near a house in Petoskey – the locale of his first novel *The Torrents of Spring* – and began writing poems and short stories.

This helped him to put up an excuse before his parents for his not returning to Oak Park. His parents viewed his writing as pointless. When the pieces did not find favour with the editors of magazines, Hemingway, too, felt inclined to agree with his parents. But even this could not persuade him to return to Oak Park.

Hemingway left Petoskey in 1920 and went to Toronto (in Canada) in search of a job. His earlier experience with the *Kansas City Star* helped him get a job in the field of journalism. He was engaged as a reporter by the *Toronto Star Weekly*. Here, he felt even happier than before, because he got an opportunity to write features of general interest, and was given a chance to express his humour and irony, for which he had shown great promise in his school writings for the school magazine. For the first time now, his articles began appearing under his own by-line, Ernest M. Hemingway, the M standing for Miller, a letter which he dropped as a writer of novels and short-stories. The happiness of his parents on his getting a job did not last long. For Hemingway left his job in the Spring of 1920 and returned to Oak Park. He showed greater signs of irresponsibility now than even before, which irritated his mother most. This resulted in an internal discordance between them.

Now Hemingway must move out of Oak Park forever. Perhaps that is how he felt, and the event would be most welcome to his mother in particular. She had written him off as a "do nothing." Hemingway proved it otherwise by joining a job as advertising copy writer for a real-estate firm in Chicago. Although he did not find the job inspiring, he found plenty of time to do other things. So he started writing once again, turning out stories and sketches vignettes and anecdotes, recalling his experience in Michigan and Europe. Chicago at this time was coming to the close of its literary renaissance. It had emerged as a sort of magnet for gifted young men from all over the Midwest region. Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Carl Sandburg, and a host of other writers of the time made Chicago their home and place of creative activity. It was natural for Hemingway to get attracted to the literary circle of the second biggest city of America. His intimacy became greater with Sherwood Anderson than with any other of the said circle. Sherwood Anderson had recently become famous by the publication of his *Winesburg, Ohio*, a collection of tales about the small town of Winesburg with several characters appearing in more than one story. This new form of fiction, a sort of sequence novel, something midway between a mere collection of short stories and novel, became later a model for Hemingway. His *In Our Time*, first collection of his short stories, had the same genre of fiction. Sherwood Anderson was a warm-hearted person, eager to promote new and young writers. For him, literature was much more than a mere profession; it was a welcome escape from his dreary life as a businessman in Ohio. His contribution to American prose fiction was that he had brought a fresh note by introducing the style of direct statement of immediate emotion in the refreshing sentences that were short and stripped, brief and economical. This new style was a complete reversal of the style in which the classic American novelists like Hawthorne and Melville, James and Howell wrote. That style was suitable for the fiction of ideas and reflections. It consisted of long and complex sentences, always taking an indirect and intricate syntactical course. Anderson believed, and so did Hemingway after him, that their thinking got in the way of feeling and sense impression, which to him, as well as Hemingway, were decisive elements in human life. They wanted to keep feeling and sense impression free from interference of any kind of analysis of emotion or impression. Both Hemingway and Sherwood wrote as their characters felt and perceived, in quick exhalations, in brief, that seemed more natural and lifelike than the formal literary manner of the earlier age. When Hemingway started living in Chicago, Anderson had returned from Europe just about the same time. He impressed upon Hemingway the literary advantage of living in Paris. Hemingway needed no such promptings. He himself was very eager to see and settle in Europe. His experience of war in Italy had created in him a fascination for the life there, as against what was available to him in Oak Park. In the 1920's, Paris had emerged the literary capital of the western world. Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, and several more were already there. Hemingway was anxious to join the select band of the bohemian artists. Anderson promised him letters of introduction, especially to Gertrude Stein who had settled in France before the war and knew the entire circle of literary figures. Besides Anderson, Hemingway also came across in Chicago a young pianist from St. Louis named Hadley Richardson. He fell in love with her at first sight. He at once proposed to her, just as he had done to Agnes von Kurowsky. This time, his proposal was readily accepted. Thus, the Spring of 1921 became the happiest time in the life of Hemingway. Full of promise and hope, Hemingway began to entertain the idea of quitting his advertising job, and going back to his reporter's position with some newspaper.



Hemingway got married to Hadley in September 1921. After a brief honeymoon in the family's summer home, the couple set off for Toronto where Hemingway, having quit his job in Chicago, resumed his earlier connection with *The Star Weekly*. He enjoyed his new work, but his ambition remained to reach Europe as soon as possible. As luck would have it, he was offered in December 1921 a post as foreign correspondent by a sister newspaper, *Daily Star*, which he accepted gratefully. Armed with the letters of introduction which Anderson gave him, Hemingway and Hadley sailed for France the same month. In 1920's, Paris was a paradise for American writers; as expatriates, they thronged the city. It was the experimental and fermenting centre of all arts. Although highly sophisticated, it broke into small and intimate quarters. Its cafés were the haunts of intellectuals, where pent-up energy of the war period was released unhindered. Young people from all over the world flocked to Paris, drawn not only by the intrinsic attractions of the queen of cities but by the fall of the franc. Hemingway with his wife settled on the left bank. Hemingway did much of his writing in these cafés, where he would sit for hours over a beer or *Pernod* with paper spread before him. He and Stein remained friends for a few years in Paris. They talked about writing rather endlessly, with Hemingway mostly a passive listener. Her room was full of paintings, including one of her own done by Picasso. It was also full of unpublished manuscripts. One of these was *The Making of Americans*, which Hemingway read through and saw it published in Ford Madox Ford's magazine *transatlantic review*.

Meanwhile during the years of 1922 and 1923, Hemingway got an opportunity to roam through Europe on free-lance assignment for the *Toronto Daily Star*. He covered several political conferences in Germany, Italy, and the Near East, and interviewed among others, Mussolini, Clemenceau, and Lloyd George. His visits to Spain were speeded-up by his passion for bullfighting. He was a witness to the treaty of Versailles, which laid the groundwork for the Second World War. He also covered in 1922 the bloody conflict between Greece and Turkey. Incidents from this war provided Hemingway with several transitional sketches in his collection of short-stories called *In Our Time*. During the cold weather, he and his wife would also visit Swiss and Austrian mountains and enjoy skiing there. Amidst these days of fun and joy Hemingway also experienced one of the shocks of his life on receiving the news from his wife that at the railway station the trunk containing all his manuscripts, including that of his war novel based on the First World War, *A Farewell to Arms* could be rewritten only after several years of his protracted recovery from the shock.

During his Paris years, Hemingway also made friends with the fellow American poet, Ezra Pound, with whom he often played tennis and practiced boxing, and occasionally discussing the art of writing. He also got to know here James Joyce, the Irish novelist, whose writings made a great impact on Hemingway. They seldom discussed literature, because Joyce discouraged such discussions. Paris was also full of all sorts of aesthetes, who would throng the cafés, spend long hours discussed arts, and would seldom produce a piece of any consequence. This class of writers was highly irksome to Hemingway. It was this activity of pseudo-artists which made the atmosphere of Paris "arty." This led to his being driven to hard work at home, avoiding this café crowd as much as he could.

Hemingway's creative work, both poetry and prose, now was being accepted for publication. It started appearing in little magazines. Six of his poems were published in the January 1923 issue of Harriet Monroe's magazine *Poetry*. In the summer of the same year came out his first book called *Three Stories and Ten Poems*. Next year followed his greater work, *In Our Time*. The more fame Hemingway achieved as creative writer, the greater strain he felt about doing his journalistic work. Gertrude Stein had warned him of the danger of mixing the two, telling him that one would surely drive out the other. It was a crucial period for Hemmingway as a writer. As he said later in his *Death in the Afternoon*, "In waiting for a newspaper you told what happened and, with one trick and another, you communicated the emotion aided by the timeliness which gives a certain emotion to any account of something that has happened on that day; but the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me and I was working very hard to try to get it."

Hemingway was forced to return to Toronto in the Fall of 1923, reason being his wife's pregnancy and poverty, to take up a steady job with the *Star*. As advised by Stein, he saved money, quit journalism, and returned to Europe in 1924, to try to live by creative writing alone. They returned with their first baby, a son named John, but nicknamed Bumby. Owing to their small savings brought from Toronto, the Hemingways were forced to lead an austere life, with short rations and less entertainments. The poverty was, however, counterbalanced by the young couple's happy matrimony and the excitement

of being a budding writer in Paris. The mixture of the two – hard life and artistic ambition – gave the whole thing a romantic flavour. As is recalled in his later long short-story, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” it was still the happiest life Hemingway ever lived as a writer, much happier than his later affluent life as a successful writer.

Although Hemingway was getting known as a promising new writer in Europe, where alone his publications had so far appeared, he remained still ignored in his own country where publishers did not see much merit in his poems and short-stories. General ignorance apart, writers like Sherwood Anderson were enthusiastic about Hemingway’s promising writings. He even urged his New York publishers, Boni and Liveright, to bring out a volume of Hemingway’s short stories. Hence came out in 1925, the American edition of his *In Our Time*. Another enthusiast in America for Hemingway as a writer was F. Scott Fitzgerald, who was also generous, like Anderson, in his support to fellow writers. He also admired Hemingway’s work to his editor at Scribner’s, Maxwell Perkins, to bid for Hemingway’s book. When Fitzgerald visited Hemingway in Paris, where he was seeing the city and meeting Hemingway for the first time, he made Hemingway see the benefits of changing publishers. Hemingway was moved by Fitzgerald’s admiration for his work. The admiration was, of course, genuine with no personal interest involved in it. Like Sherwood Anderson, he had become an established novelist in America, after the publication of his very first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. He had become more famous after the publication of his third novel, *The Great Gatsby*, in 1922. His admiration of Hemingway brought the two together; they became great friends thereafter.

Perhaps inspired by his ambition to compete with his peers, Anderson and Fitzgerald, Hemingway aspired now, in 1924, to try to write longer fiction rather than remain a writer of short-stories. His life in Paris and his periodic visits to Pamplona (in Spain) combined to constitute the plot of his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. While the novel opens in Paris, depicting the post-war life of the young generation that came to be called the “lost generation,” it culminates in the festival of San Fermin in Pamplona, the festival of bullfighting. Hemingway had launched the novel’s writing in the summer of 1925, and completed its first draft in just five weeks. However, he spent five long and agonizing months in extensive revisions. As a break from the strenuous exercise of revision, he dashed off in November 1925, just in a week’s time, a short but blistering satire, *The Torrents of Spring*, which was, as a matter of fact, a parody of Anderson’s novels, *Dark Laughter* and *Many Marriages*. When the book appeared in 1926, it led to souring of Hemingway’s relations with Anderson, and later with Stein. As the story goes, Hemingway took the unpleasant step only to break contract with Anderson’s publishers, Boni and Liveright, signed for the publication of *The Sun Also Rises*.

Even with his only literary friend left at the time, Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway’s relations became rather strained. The reason in this case was the writer’s wife, for whom Hemingway had developed an instant disliking. In Hemingway’s view, Zelda Fitzgerald was jealous of her husband’s talent and success as a writer, and that she drove him to write substandard stories for popular magazines to pay for her extravagant style of living. He thought she was almost mad, and would surely cause his wife’s ruin. Hemingway was proved right a few years later when the famous crack-up followed. At his own domestic front, Hemingway was falling out of love with Hadley around the same time he received success with his first great novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. The reason in his own case was his involvement with a young woman named Pauline Pfeiffer, a fashion designer from St. Louis. (Strangely, all the first three wives of Hemingway came from the same town of St. Louis.) The first divorce and second marriage both came about in 1927. This also led to Hemingway’s conversion to Catholicism, the religion of his second wife.

During the intervening period between marriages Hemingway lived in Paris, where he continued writing short-stories, resulting in the publication of his second volume called *Men Without Women* in 1927. It included some of his famous stories, namely “The Killers”, “The Undeclared”, “Fifty Grand” and “In Another Country.” The themes of these four pieces – gangsters, prizefighters, soldiers, and bullfighters – handled rather superbly, were typical of Hemingway’s choice of material. With these several publications in book form Hemingway was able to earn roughly enough to afford a modest living. But the index of income showed a rising graph, and indicated increasing confidence in the young novelist. Wanting to have a change of scene after his second marriage in 1927, Hemingway left Paris and returned to America; the couple settled in Key West, Florida, which remained their home for the next ten years. Key West being on the Gulf of Mexico, Hemingway liked to go deep-sea fishing, which he found both relaxing and interesting. Here, the people in large measure were Spanish speaking, the place being close to Cuba and other Spanish-speaking islands in the Caribbean. Being fluent in speaking Spanish and grown fond of the Spaniards,

Hemingway enjoyed being there among this non-American population. It gave him a feel of still not living in the interior of America, like his birthplace of Oak Park.

In Key West, his writing schedule was different from that observed in Paris. He wrote regularly in the early hours, never missing a sun rise which gave him hope, and went out fishing in the afternoon. The sea was as absorbing to him as his writing desk where he could write standing for six hours every day. As he once remarked, "It's the last free place, the sea." Here, he began work on his new novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, and spent almost the whole of 1928 writing it. In that year he also produced his second son along with the production of his second novel. But the happiness of this double creativity was soon overshadowed by the suicide of his father, which came as a rude shock to the sensitive son. Dr. Hemingway, the writer's father, had been under growing nervous strain during the 1920's. With his general health failing fast, his heart getting trouble, worsened by the collapse of the Florida real-estate boom in which he had heavily invested, he fell into depression and acute melancholia, from which he never returned to normal. One morning, he was found dead in his study upstairs with one of the guns he used to handle firmly held in one hand.

Hemingway was highly influenced by this event. The natural grief over the death of a dear one was mixed with a disturbing question about the coverage of the man who took his own life. For Hemingway, courage always meant, as he had learnt from his father himself, the ability to take punishment or suffering without crying or complaining. Both father and son greatly admired the virtue of courage. But when the same father wilted under pressure of nerves, he felt that his father had failed in an important test of life. He personally felt let down, and took his father's failure a challenge to his own self. It was soon afterward that he assumed the name of Papa, by which he was familiarly called in his later life. Unconsciously, he seemed to be assuming the role of an ideal Papa that his father failed to be. After ten years of this tragic event, Hemingway's hero, Robert Jordan, in his novel about the Spanish Civil War, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), recurrently recalls his father's suicide. He even debates at a crucial point whether he should follow the same course.

Hemingway went back to Paris in the Spring of 1929, correcting proofs of his new novel, *A Farewell to Arms*. It was the difficult phase of his life which seems to have coloured the ending of this novel. The obsession with death that the hero expresses at the end of the novel seems to have been Hemingway's own mood on the death of his father. After the publication of this novel, achieving instant success, he seemed to have tided over the mood of despondence. He liked to think of *A Farewell to Arms* as his version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Both the works have Italy as their location. Both pairs of lovers seem "star-crossed." The First World War can be considered the modern counterpart of the family feud in *Romeo and Juliet*. Also, both the pairs withdraw from the conflict, not of their making nor under their control, and sign a separate peace. The parallel between the two works is, in fact, so close that there are equivalents of even minor characters from Shakespeare's play in Hemingway's novel. The tone of the two is also much the same, the peculiar pathos of young love flowering in a hostile universe.

The great success of *A Farewell to Arms* brought Hemingway to the height of fame, and freed him from financial constraints of the Paris years. He was now thirty years of age. He had on his shoulder a whole life-time experience of war, love, marriage, sports, travel abroad, etc. Although Hemingway's main base of operations remained Key West until 1938, he was not altogether confined to that place. As was his way of life, he would frequently go out hunting or chasing some other adventure for days and months together. On a hunting trip in Wyoming in 1930 he got seriously injured in an automobile accident, almost losing an arm. In 1932 was born his last child, his third son named Gregory. Around this time in his life, Hemingway's circle of friends included very few writers and artists, and very many movie personalities, sailors and sportsmen. Also around this very time he developed a certain prickliness with regard to "intellectuals." He began to dislike professional critics, especially the academic. As a reaction to this class of readers and commentators he acquired in his affected speech an anti-educated, pidgin-Indian vocabulary peppered with pungent metaphors from baseball and boxing. This gave birth to the mistaken (or deliberate) theory of the "dumb-ox" about him. The notorious article to that effect by Wyndham Lewis created a lot of prejudice against him in certain circles of the "modernist" intellectuals.

Hemingway's quarrel with the critical credo of the modernists, as well as with their view of life "in our time", was fundamental. While the modernists, headed by Pound and Eliot, based their outlook on the "decline-of-the West" philosophy, Hemingway remained highly committed to the humanist values of the Renaissance. Similarly, while the

modernists adopted the style of indirection, allusion, irony, and paradox, Hemingway maintained his first faith in the power of the simple, straight, and solid narrative. He was not prepared to deflect from the purity of his concentration of what lay at the heart of his writing. There cannot be any doubt about his being a highly intelligent and widely read writer. If he had dislike for excessive analysis of experience, of substituting talk for action, it was a matter of technique that he chose to adopt, which was the only possible one for the kind of subjects he wrote about. While the writings of Eliot and Joyce are based on ideas and notions of the modern age, Hemingway's is based on the experience of that very age. His narratives about them have a ring of authenticity, whereas theirs are mere constructions from their neoclassical type of learning and method. While theirs is the mock heroic method of presenting the contemporary world, his is the narratology of experience. There is no meeting ground between the two so far as the technique is concerned. Like Shakespeare's plays, his novels not only make us see the contemporary reality, they also make us feel it. In the case of Eliot and Joyce, the "feeling" aspect is missing, because they have never been there where action is. Hemingway produced during the thirties two non-fictional books, namely *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) and *Green Hills of Africa* (1935). The first covers both the history and tradition of bullfighting in Spain as well as the changing style of the art of bullfighting. Much of the book is written in the form of conversation between Hemingway and an elderly American woman who does not know much about most things being talked about in the book. The other about the green hills of Africa brings about the natural beauty of the mountains and forests of the continent of Africa, where the western crusade for the destruction of nature by the monsters of machinery has not yet got entry. For Hemingway, such places, as also the ocean, were the last good places left on earth. They are no less than earthly paradise, or the Garden of Eden, for him. Hemingway also exploited his experience of hunting in Africa for composing two wonderful short stories, which have remained among the best creations of his fictional work. These stories are "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." In the early thirties Hemingway had also produced another volume of short-stories, his third, entitled *Winner Take Nothing*, which came out in 1933.

The thirties being the "decade of depression" in the entire western world, even the sales of Hemingway books went down considerably. Like all the other cities of America, Key West, too, was badly hit by the bad days of Western economy. Also, like most leading writers of the decade, Hemingway's attention was also drawn to the plight of the people facing unemployment, finding hard to make both ends meet, in those years of general collapse of Western economies. And influenced, like others, by the mood of the decade, he, too, wrote his version of the left-oriented fiction, although his novels of the period were not to the taste of either the Marxist critics or the anti-Marxist ones. First came out *To Have and Have Not* in 1937. It is the story of a free-lancing fishing-boat operator named Harry Morgan, who, unable to earn legitimate living owing to depression, is forced to smuggle cargo between Cuba and Florida. The other, and perhaps Hemingway's climactic, novel was about the Spanish Civil War of 1937. This story of the civil war appeared under the title *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1940. The background to the work relates to the Spanish elections of February 1936, which brought to power the first liberal democratic regime in the history of Spain. However, just a few months later, in June, a monarchist Fascist coalition led by General Francisco Franco revolted against the government. Hitler and Mussolini, the Fascist Dictators already established in the Germany and Italy, came at once to the aid of Franco. Britain, France, and the United States did not side with the expected liberal-democratic legitimate government. On the contrary, by imposing an embargo against the legal Spanish government, they lent indirect support to the dictators. For reasons of his own, only Stalin's Russia came to the assistance of liberal-democratic side. The ferocious civil war that followed aroused passionate emotions all over the world, for people began to see the dangers of Fascism. The confrontation finally led to the Second World War (1939-1945).

Hemingway's sympathies were with the Republicans or the legalists, as they came to be called. He deeply detested Fascism wherever he saw it. Also, his love for the Spain was deeper than any political concern. He spent all the money he had and borrowed more to buy ambulances for the government. He was very anxious to reach Spain at the earliest, and for this he accepted an offer from the North-American Newspaper Alliance as a foreign correspondent to cover the government's side of the war. The essential difference between Hemingway and the modernists is shown in its true form when we find a high priest of Modernity like Pound openly siding with Mussolini in World War II. The war in Spain continued for three years, during which period Hemingway made four trips, visiting battlefronts, fraternizing the soldiers, staying for varying periods in the big cities of Valencia, Barcelona, and Madrid. When he

finally saw the government side losing, he felt rather depressed. But when it came to fictionalize his experience in the novel form, his artistic integrity, which, as he demanded, was like the standard metre in Paris, would not allow his personal sympathies to come in his way of narrating the truth in all its nakedness. So he did, annoying the partisan minds on both sides. Be it as it may, the novel remains Hemingway's greatest and most complex

Besides this great novel, Hemingway embodied the various aspects and episodes of the Spanish Civil War in several other pieces. One such piece was a play, the only one he ever wrote, entitled *The Fifth Column*. It clearly shows that Hemingway did not have great talent for drama. Another piece he wrote was a brilliant short story called "Old Man at the Bridge." It covers a small incident in the war that somehow manages to embrace the whole tragedy of Spain. With the close of the decade of the 30's also came the end of Hemingway's stay in Key West. Hemingway's second marriage with Pauline, too, ended with the end of the decade of depression. He shifted his residence a few miles outside Havana where he bought a hacienda. He lived there for two decades, and left the place only reluctantly after Fidel Castro came to power. His love for another woman, this time Martha Gelborn, broke his second marriage, just as it had broken his first. This new one was a newspaperwoman and a fiction writer. They were married in 1940. He dedicated *For Whom the Bell Tolls* to this very woman, his third wife. They spent parts of 1940 and 1941 in the Far East where Hemingway went on an assignment from a New York newspaper to report on the growing crisis in the Pacific, soon to be climaxed by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.

As he had participated, directly or indirectly, as a combatant or an observer, he would not keep out of the World War Two that started in 1939 and ended with the American bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. He was unofficially drafted, during 1942 and 1943, by the American Navy for antisubmarine duty in the Caribbean. Hemingway himself volunteered to chase Nazi U-boats with his own vessel, the *Pilar*, which he had got built for deep-sea fishing. He gave the boat the name of his great fictional character, the guerilla woman Pilar, who dominates crucial scenes in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. This experience of the chase went into his novel, posthumously published, entitled *Islands in the Stream*. In 1944, Hemingway once again secured a job as war correspondent with the Allied Forces in France, thus moving from sea to land, and found himself soon in the front lines. Never satisfied with mere observation and reportage, he turned to free-lance combatant. Even before the regular troops got into Paris, Hemingway moved into it at the head of a small military party as a liberator of the city. He made it to the Ritz Hotel, his favourite place in Paris, and set up his "headquarters" there. He did face trouble with the military authorities for having violated his limited role as a reporter, but it blew over after some time. He got permission to get into the field, this time with General Patton's army advancing through eastern France towards Germany. He soon took the command of a unit, managing its tactical operations after the officers got killed. His experience of the war had now extended to thirty years. He was not only a celebrated writer but also a veteran hero. His fame shot up higher than that of any other living novelist.

Even before the end of the war, Hemingway's third marriage ended. The cause was the same old - he had fallen in love with another woman. This time it was Mary Welsh. She too, like his third wife, was a newspaperwoman. After his third divorce he married her. This fourth marriage proved lasting. Mrs. Mary Hemingway lived for many years after the death of Hemingway in 1961. After the war was over in 1945, Hemingway returned to Cuba. His involvement in war had not given him time for writing, but he had accumulated experience of several. Now, out of that involvement, he set down to working on his fiction. First, he completed *Across the River and into the Trees*, a sort of quasi-autobiographical novel. Actually, all of Hemingway's works are of the same type; all are based on his own experiences. The latest novel appeared in 1950. As a work of art, it has been considered Hemingway's most poor, second to none. But this was followed what many considered his best, *The Old Man and the Sea*, which appeared in 1952. It first appeared in the September 1, 1952 issue of *Life* (a popular magazine), arousing uncommon interest among readers the world over. On whatever level one considered it, *The Old Man and the Sea* turns out a powerfully moving novel. As a straight narrative of a sea adventure, as a struggle of man for survival in a godless world, as a tragedy of overreaching, or even as a Christian parable of sacrifice, the novel does not disappoint the reader. Although the shortest of Hemingway's novels, it came to be considered his richest, which won him Nobel Prize for literature for the year 1952. Never away from his favourite pursuits of hunting, fighting, or fishing, Hemingway got out in 1953 for a big-game hunting in Africa, this time in Kenya. The expedition proved a disaster. The airplane taking him and his wife to Victoria Falls crashed in

the jungle. A rescue plane was sent to pick them up, but after they had boarded, that too crashed. The injuries Hemingway received in the two crashes were serious, from which he could never really recover, and which ultimately led to his unfortunate death. He returned to Cuba midway through 1954, still not fully recovered. But no experience of Hemingway went waste. He always turned it into fiction. The hunting experience in Kenya, too, he made into a novel, which has only recently (in 1999) been published under the title *True At First Sight*.

The unfortunate result of the two air crashes in Africa was that in the later 1950s Hemingway developed signs of paranoia. A man of strong determination as he was, he always kept pursuing his writing projects against all odds. One of the books he did during this period was his reminiscences of Paris where he had gone right from 1920's onward almost regularly on one pretext or another. This book, too, came out posthumously under the title *A Moveable Feast*, classified as non-fiction. It gives an insight into several things about the author and his times. It particularly illuminates his work *The Sun Also Rises*. He continued his avocations of fishing and hunting despite his indifferent health, operating mainly from a house he bought in Ketchum, Idaho. A dramatic bullfighting episode in Spain – another avocation of Hemingway – attracted him into his last assignment in the summer of 1959. It was a competition, between two great bullfighters, both of whom were close friends of Hemingway. He was commissioned by *Life* to cover the contest between the two giants. The contest came to its close with one of the bullfighters badly gored by the bull, leaving Hemingway free to write his articles. These articles appeared in *Life* under the title "The Dangerous Gummer." The pieces did not receive as much critical appreciation as had come forth for his earlier writings on the same subject when he was younger living in Paris.

In the last two years or so of his life Hemingway was plagued by all sorts of physical problems. He had grown very heavy with a thick neck, heavy shoulders, massive chest, large belly, all on a pair of spindly legs. He tried hard to reduce his weight, going on severe diets, losing thirty to forty pounds. But he emerged ravaged from this exercise and developed increasing nervousness and temperamentality. All these manifestations swelled into full-blown paranoia, so much so that he started suspecting even his close friends of wanting to eliminate him. He also imagined that the Federal agents were after him. The intense care of his wife and some of his friends were of no avail; his paranoia remained unrestrained. In 1960 he gave up his home in Cuba, owing to anti-Americanism of Castro. His migration, so to say, from Cuba to Idaho was rather painful. He loved the place and was deeply attached to it. Leaving it at such a critical time of his life only worsened his nervous condition. Various ailments came upon him crowding – hypertension, deafness, hepatitis, slackening of sensory perception, failing vision. He was twice prevailed upon for a psychiatric treatment at the Mayo Clinic, but it did not help. Back home he had to be forcibly restrained from doing violence to himself. Finally, in the early morning of July 2, 1961, he followed the same course his father had adopted; he ended his life with a gun. A pathetic end indeed to a heroic life. But this happens often where one has committed oneself to a life full of continuous excitement. If drabness and immobilization is thrust upon you, you would rather not live as a vegetation. That is what Hemingway would say in his last days. 'A champion is either a Champion, or no more!'

### Title and Theme

Like most other titles of Hemingway's novels, and in the dominant fashion among the leading writers of the time, the title of *A Farewell to Arms* has been derived from a literary source of the past. The titles of Hemingway's *In Our Time* and *The Sun Also Rises*, of Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* and *Tender is the Night*, of Joyce's *Ulysses* and of Eliot's *The Wasteland*, are all derived from the Biblical and literary sources. The title of Hemingway's war novel is said to have been borrowed from a poem of George Peele, a poet and dramatist of the Elizabethan age in England. In his poem called "A Farewell to Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake," dated 1589, and included in *The Oxford Book of English Verse* edited by Robert Bridges, from which Hemingway is said to have picked up the title for his novel, the sixteenth century poet advocates the cause of war by invoking the popular sentiments of "honour" and "glory." The critics have interpreted the title to mean a farewell to the arms of war, a farewell to female arms, and a farewell to the arms of both war and women, raising the fundamental question about the nature of the novel – whether it is a novel of war, a novel of love, or a novel of both love and war. Before we proceed to examine the theme or themes of the novel it seems imperative to first examine the poem from which Hemingway picked up his title, for a firsthand look at the poem would reveal the context which provoked or suggested to the novelist the title for his work. Peele's poem in the anthology runs as under:

Have done with care, my hearts! aboard amain,  
 With stretching sails to plough the swelling waives.  
 Bid England's shore and Albion's chalky cliffs  
 Farewell; bid stately Troynovant adieu,  
 Where pleasant Thames from Isis' silver head  
 Begins her quiet glide, and runs along  
 To that brave bride, the bar that thwarts her course,  
 Near neighbour to the ancient stony Tower,  
 The glorious hold that Julius Caesar built.  
 Change love for arms; give to your blades, my boys!  
 Your rests and muskets take, take helm and targe,  
 And let God Mars his consort make you mirth,  
 The roaring cannon, and the brazen trump,  
 The angry sounding drum, the whistling fife  
 The shrieks of men, the princely courser's neigh,  
 Now vail your bonnets to your friends at home,  
*Bid all the lovely British dames adieu,*  
 That many a standard well advances  
 Have bid the sweet alarms and braves of love.  
 Bid theaters and proud tragedians,  
 Bid Mahomet's Poo, and mighty Tamburlaine,  
 King Charlemagne, Tom Stukeley and the rest,  
*Adieu. To Arms, to arms, to glorious arms!*  
 With noble Norris, and victorious Drake,  
 Under the sanguine cross, brave England's badge,  
 To propagate religious piety,  
 And hew a passage with your conquering swords  
 By land and sea, wherever Phoebus' eye,  
 Th' eternal lamp of heaven, leads us light;  
 By golden Tagus, or the western Ind,  
 Or through the spacious bay of Portugal,  
 The wealthy Ocean main, the Tyrrhene sea,  
 From great Alcides' Pillars branching forth  
 Even to the gulf that leads to lofty Rome;  
 There to deface the pride of Antichrist,  
 And pull his paper walls and popery down:  
 A famous enterprise for England's strength,  
 To steel your swords on Avarice's triple crown,  
 And cleanse Augeas' stalls in Italy.  
*To arms my fellow soldiers!* Sea and land  
 Lie open to the voyage you intend.  
 And sea or land, bold Britons, far or near,  
 Whatever course your matchless virtue shapes,  
 Whether to Europe's bounds, or Asian plains,

To Afric's shore, or rich America,  
 Down to the shades of deep Avernus crags,  
 Sail on, pursue your honour to your graves.  
*Heaven is a sacred covering for your heads,*  
 And every climate virtue's tabernacle.  
*To arms, to arms, to honourable arms!*  
 Hoist sails, weigh anchors up, plough up the seas  
 With flying keels, plough up the land with swords.  
 In God's name venture on, and let me say  
 To you, my mates, as Caesar said to his,  
 Striving with Neptune's hills; 'You bear,' quoth he,  
 'Caesar and Caesar's fortune in your ships.'  
 You follow them, whose swords successful are.  
 You follow Drake by sea, the scourge of Spain,  
 The dreadful dragon, terror to your foes,  
 Victorious in his return from Ind,  
 In all his high attempts unvanquished;  
 You follow noble Norris, whose renown,  
 Won in the fertile fields of Belgia,  
 Spreads by the gates of Europe to the courts  
 Of Christian kings and heathen potentates.  
 You fight for Christ, and England's peerless queen,  
 Elizabeth, the wonder of the world,  
 Over whose throne the enemies of God  
 Have thunder'd erst their vain successful braves.  
 O, ten times treble happy men, that fight  
 Under the cross of Christ and England's queen,  
 And follow such as Drake and Norris are!  
 All honours do this cause accompany.  
 All glory on these endless honours waits.  
 These honours and this glory shall He send,  
 Whose honour and whose glory you defend,'

Now, if we compare Hemingway's novel with Peele's poem, the antithetical nature of the two works becomes conspicuous: whereas Peele's poem powerfully advocates the cause of war, asking the youth to take up arms for wining honour and glory for their country, Hemingway's novel condemns the war in no uncertain terms and advances the attraction of love. The rhetorical poem from the Renaissance period, trying to hypnotise the English youth for throwing them into adventures abroad, explains the Hemingway hero's disgust, with the empty rhetoric in *A Farewell to Arms*. Note how the hero echoes the key words from Peele's poem as if he were directly responding to the Elizabethan rhetoric. The poem's repeated use of words like 'sacred,' 'honour,' 'glory,' 'glorious,' etc., marks its emphasis on the abstract values for which it calls upon the British youth to sacrifice their lives. Frederic Henry in Hemingway's novel feels nauseated at the very mention of these words:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifices and the expression in vain. We had heard them ... and had read them ... now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to buy it. There were many words that



Hemingway

you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity .... Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage, or hallow were obscene besides the concrete names of villages, the number of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.

As against the imperial dream of conquering new and newer lands with the untiring use of arms projected in Peck's poem, Hemingway's novel projects a dream of peace and happiness possible only by bidding farewell to the arms. Whereas the poem asks for bidding farewell to the beautiful British dames, to homes and theaters, and to all that is loved in times of peace, the novel lays stress on bidding farewell to war and violence and take recourse to the activities of love and sport; whereas the poem is a war song meant to incite the youth to sacrifice for the imperial dream of enslaving other people, the novel is a love song meant to ensure the liberty of every nation as well as every individual. Thus, the title of Hemingway's novel is straight enough, which indicates the theme of the novel's fable. It is another matter, though, that the dream of love and peace remains in the novel only a dream. Hemingway's ironic view of life would not permit him to settle with anything less than the whole truth.

Even though *A Farewell to Arms* is about World War I, involving the larger political question of the liberty of individual persons and nations, the American critics of the novel always tend to ignore these questions and concentrate instead on the emotional or psychological problems of the hero, reducing the novel to an account of an individual's trauma of the wound or his love for the British nurse. Ignoring the general social and political issues informing a work of art and reducing it into either a case study or an aesthetic game remains the dominant trend in American criticism. There seems a deliberate and determined effort at keeping the activity of literary criticism away from the real issues of life which great works of art always raise. *A Farewell to Arms* has been, like most other American novels, a victim of the very tendency. The interpretations of the novel that the American critics have made include that it is the story of a young American who in search of the excitement of war gets wounded and becomes a pathological case of trauma which he tries to overcome by the medicine of love; that it is the story of love between two young persons with war only an accidental background; that it is a story of an American who having nothing better to do at home stumbles into the war in Europe and finding himself faced with the prospect of death runs away from the war; that it is a symbolic story juxtaposing mountain and plain, home and not-home, love and war. Thus, the novel is reduced into either a story of an individual having nothing to do with the larger questions of society involved in the politics of war, or into a symbolic story involving only the general abstracts of love and war, home and not-home. No doubt, Hemingway focuses, as always, on the concrete experience of his protagonist both of love as well as war, he does not restrict the experience to the sensations of the protagonist. His hero is a man of education having sharp understanding of the international political situation and of the politics and business of war. Besides, he has strong commitment to the idea of liberty and equality, which have brought him across the Atlantic to fight for the liberty and equality of nations attacked by the dictators who are enemies of individual liberty. It is these questions which we need to take cognizance of along with our emphasis on the physical experience of the hero in love and war. We must recognize that *Farewell to Arms* is primarily a war novel, which exposes the politics of war as well as its disastrous consequences for human society. Note, for instance, the following rumination of Frederic Henry:

This was a strange and mysterious war zone but I supposed it was quite well run and grim compared to other wars with the Austrians. The Austrian army was created to give Napoleon victories; any Napoleon. I wished we had a Napoleon, but instead we had 11 General Cadorna, fat and prosperous, and Vittorio Emmanuel, the tiny man with the long thin neck and the goat beard .... What was the matter with this war? Everybody said the French were through. Rinaldi said that the French had mutinied and troops marched on Paris.

This shows the hero's awareness of fighting for a nation (Italy) deficient in great war generals like Napoleon. He knows he is supporting a cause on the side of those that are not really honest to that cause. He is not happy with the way the war in Italy is being managed. He is aware of the dishonest and incompetent generals on the Italian side. Note the following conversation between Passini and Manera:

'War is not won by victory. What if we take San Gabriel? What if we take the Carso and Manfalcone and Trieste? Where are we then? Did you see all the far mountains today? Do you think we could take all them too? Only if the Austrians stop fighting. One side must stop

fighting. Why don't we stop fighting? If they come down into Italy they will get tired and go away. They have their own country. But no, instead there is a war.'

'You're an orator.'

'We think. We read. We are not peasants. We are mechanics. But even the peasants know better than to believe in a war. Everybody hates this war.'

'There is a class that controls a country that is stupid and does not realize anything and never can. That is why we have this war.'

'Also they make money out of it.'

The class interests of those who make wars and those who suffer the war are shown to be different from each other; in fact, the two interests are in clash with each other. But because the common men are not organized, they are not the ruling force in the country. They have only to serve the interests of the ruling class. Note another instance of a similar analysis of war which comes up in a conversation between the wounded hero, Frederic Henry, and his visiting friend, the Italian priest:

'What is the matter father? You seem very tired.'

'I am tired but I have no right to be.'

'It's the heat.'

'No. this is only the spring. I feel very low.'

'You have the war disgust.'

'No. But I hate the war.'

'I don't enjoy it,' I said. He shook his head and looked out of the window.

'You do not mind it. You do not see it. You must forgive me. I know you are wounded.'

'That is an accident.'

'Still even wounded you do not see it. I can tell.

I do not see it myself but I feel it a little.'

'When I was wounded I was talking about it. Passini was talking.'

The priest put down the glass. He was thinking about something else.

'I know them because I am like they are,' he said.

'You are different though.'

'The officers don't see anything.'

'Some of them do. Some are very delicate and feel worse than any of us.'

'They are mostly different.'

'It is not education or money. It is something else. Even if they had education or money men like Passini would not wish to be officers. I would not be an officer.'

'You rank an officer. I am an officer.'

'I am not really. You are not even an Italian. You are a foreigner. But you are nearer the officers than you are to the men.'

'What is the difference?'

'I cannot say it easily. There are people who would make war. In this country there are many like that. There are other people who would not make war.'

'But the first ones make them do it.'

'Yes.'

'And I help them.'

'You are a foreigner. You are a patriot.'

'And the ones who would not make war? Can you stop it?'

'I do not know.'

He looked out of the window again. I watched his face.

'Have they ever been able to stop it?'

'They are not organized to stop things and when they get organized their leaders sell them out.'

'Then it's hopeless?'

'It is never hopeless. But sometimes I cannot hope. I try always to hope, but sometimes I cannot.'

Here again, the difference between those who rule and make war and those who serve and fight war is clearly made out. Besides, the difference between those who make money out of war and those who lose their lives, and between those who are insensitive to the loss of life involved in war and those who feel the loss on their nerves is sharply brought out in the conversation. It is this exposure to the politics of war, to the deception the rulers play upon the common man, which has caused disgust among the sensitive ones like the hero and the priest, Passini and Manera. The priest is of course unaware of the fact that the hero is more acutely sensitive to the war than is the priest himself, he is also unaware of the fact that the hero is on the side of the common man, not on the side of the exploiters. Thus, the novel also focuses on the general politics of war even as it does on its emotional and psychological impact in the particular case of the protagonist. Of course, Hemingway is not one of those writers who would make the novel a forum for the debate of ideas or a medium for propagating an ideology. His aesthetics requires an objective dramatization of the action, not a subjective intellection of that action. But his treatment of the action is not like the mute and dumb picturing; it is a sensitive capturing of the event in all its dimensions – political, social and ethical.

*A Farewell to Arms*, for certain, portrays, not just the experience of war of the American protagonist but the entire situation of the war on the Italian-Austrian front. The war accounts, spread over two years and involving scores of characters from several nationalities, are extensively reported by the narrator, which are either directly observed by him or received from his fellow soldiers. That the war in the novel is meant to be seen in all its implications, and not merely in relation to the individual response of the hero, can be judged from the length of space the narrator devotes to incidents like the retreat of Caporatto. Note, for instance, the following description in the retreat portion of the narrative:

In the night many peasants had joined the column from the roads of the country and in the column there were carts loaded with household goods; there were mirrors projecting up between mattresses, and chickens and ducks tied to carts. There was a sewing machine on the carts ahead of us in the rain. They had saved the most valuable things. On some carts the women sat huddled from the rain and others walked besides the carts keeping as close to them as they could. There were dogs now in the column, keeping under the wagons as they moved along. The road was muddy, the ditches at the side were high with water and beyond the trees that lined the road the fields looked too wet and too soggy to try to cross.

This shows the wide canvas of the novel meant to depict the entire complex of the war situation in Italy in which the hero's story is only an efficient instrument of structure and perspective. The description here shows how the war has disrupted the peace and home-life of innocent common people in Italy. In between the descriptions of war on the Italian front where Henry is participating the narrator keeps interrupting reports about happenings on the other fronts, such as France. Besides, several times the participation by the British and the American soldiers is stated or discussed extending there by the boundaries of the canvas on which Henry's story occupies only the pivotal place.

Hemingway's treatment of the theme in the novel is most realistic. He uses as narrator a central character whose perspective on life is starkly rational. Frederic Henry not only experiences the conflict without any external axes of religion or tradition but also narrates those experiences without any kind of falsification. For instance, although his girl, Catherine Barkley, has given him Saint Anthony as a saviour against any danger in war, he does not subscribe to her Catholic superstition. Note, for instance, the following conversation between Henry and a fellow driver:

'Saint Anthony?' asked the driver.

'Yes.'

'I have one.' His right hand left the wheel and opened a button on his tunic and pulled it out from under his shirt.

'See'

I put my Saint Anthony back in the capsule, spin the thin gold chain together and put it all in my breast pocket.

'You don't wear him?'

'No.'

'It is better to wear him. That's what it's for.'

'All right,' I said. I undid the clasp of the gold chain and put it around my neck and clasped it. The saint hung down on the outside of my uniform and I undid the throat of my tunic, unbuttoned the short collar and dropped him in under the shirt. I felt him in his metal box against my chest while we drove. Then I forgot about him. After I was wounded I never found him.

This reveals how the narrator-hero refuses to seek shelter in any superstition and does not permit anything except his own experience to guide him in his reporting of the war incidents. Be it religion or patriotism, love or friendship, he does not sacrifice truth for the sake of any of these sentiments. He values patriotism and nationalism and attaches great value to love and friendship, but he would not allow any of these sentiments and beliefs to interfere with his commitment to truth. Neither does he allow any of these factors to prevent him from a direct experience of life, including love and war, nor does he permit any belief or sentiment to distort his account of his experience. Thus, his vision of life and his projection of that vision are both conditioned by the common force of truth. The quiet irony in the passage just cited, which places side by side the fact that Henry keeps with him the capsule of Saint Anthony only out of courtesy to his girl and the fact that it is of no use in the war as the hero gets wounded soon after, works very effectively to expose the general superstition to which most people are driven out of despair.

As the narrator refuses reliance on superstition so does he refuse to indulge in any form of self-deception. For instance, when the priest starts giving his make-believe picture of the end of war, the hero immediately distances himself from the account and exposes the naivete of the priest reflecting his inability to see the realities of war. The conversation between the two is revealing:

'What will happen?' I stroked the blanket with my hand.

'I do not know but I do not think it can go on much longer.'

'What will happen?'

'They will stop fighting.'

'Who?'

'Both sides.'

'I hope so,' I said.

'You don't believe it?'

'I don't believe both sides will stop fighting at once.'

'I suppose not. It is too much to expect. But when I see the changes in men I do not think it can go on.'

'Who won the fighting this summer?'

'No one.'

'The Austrians won,' I said. 'They kept them from taking San Gabriel. They've won. They won't stop fighting.'

'If they feel as we feel they may stop. They have gone through the same thing.'

'No one ever stopped when they were winning.'

'You discourage me.'

'I can only say what I think.'

'Then you think it will go on and on? Nothing will ever happen?'

'I don't know. I only think the Austrians will not stop when they have won a victory. It is in defeat that we become Christian?'

'The Austrians are Christians – except for the Bosnians.'

'I don't mean technically Christian, I mean like Our Lord.'

He said nothing.

'We are all gentler now because we are beaten. How would Our Lord have been if Peter had rescued him in the garden?'

The hero's response to the war is rational, whereas the response of the Priest is emotional. Even the Bible comes under the rational scrutiny of the hero. His assessment of the war as well as his reading of Bible and human nature are based on his personal experience of men and on his absolute reliance on reason. Obviously, the conversation is meant to expose the naivete of the priest's faith in human goodness as well as to reiterate the hero's total commitment to reason and good sense. Later, confronted in the Caporetto retreat with rumours about the Germans, Frederic Henry again shows a strong reliance on reason by disbelieving the Italian rumours about the enemy: "Last night on the retreat we had heard that there had been many Germans in Italian uniforms mixing with the retreat in the north. I did not believe it. That was one of those things you always heard in the war. It was one of the things the enemy always did to you. You did not know anyone who went over in German uniform to confuse them. Maybe they did but it sounded difficult. I did not believe the Germans did it. I did not believe they had to. There was no need to confuse our retreat". Once again the American hero relies on his reason and good sense; he is not credulous to believe anything without examining it with the touchstone of his reason. His attempt always is to see the situation in its stark reality.

The war theme continues through at least two third of the novel's length. Although in between there are love scenes, the novelist places the love story in the larger context of war. The war is not a background to the love story, which by some critics is considered the main theme of the novel. On the contrary, it is war which constitutes the major theme within which appears the love theme, not so much for providing an alternative to war as for giving relief in the midst of conflict. When the hero finally bids farewell to the arms, the weapons of war, he does not do it to choose love in place of war, pleasure in place of purpose; rather, he only escapes a stupid death by the Italian battle police. "You saw emptily, on your stomach, having been present when one army moved back and another came forward. You had lost your cars and your men as a floorwalker loses the stock of his department in a fire. There was, however, no insurance. You were out of it now. You had no more obligation. If they shot floorwalkers after a fire in the department store because they spoke with an accent they had always had, then certainly the floorwalkers would not be expected to return when the store opened again for business. They might seek other employment; if there was any other employment and the police did not get them." Most critics have considered the hero's desertion as a farewell to arms for an embrace of the arms of Catherine Barkley. However, considered in the novel's context, the hero's love for Catherine has nothing to do with his desertion. His being a foreigner does certainly have much to do with his escape from Italy, if not from war. His foreign accent becomes responsible for his being suspected as a German in Italian uniform, and his being a foreign volunteer becomes responsible for his quick decision to desert the war. Had he been an Italian, perhaps the situation had not arisen; and yet it must be emphasized that he is quitting the war and Italy only to save his life, for otherwise he would either have been shot dead on the spot, or if spared, would have been made a prisoner. In any case, he would not have remained in the Red Cross service which he had voluntarily joined for serving the suffering humanity in the war.

The war theme continues even through the last portion of the novel dealing with the escape of Henry and Catherine into Switzerland. The lovers are always haunted by the disturbing memories of war, by a guilt feeling of having deserted the war, and by a fear of possible capture by the Italian police. Besides, the experience of war has been for Henry no less than an experience of the absurd. The irrational and imperial order governing the war world was another face of the absurd for the hero. The impersonality of the nameless voices interrogating the officers after the retreat is an example of the absurd. Note, for instance, the following:

'Your brigade?'

He told them.

'Regiment?'

He told them.

'Do you not know that an officer should be with his troops?'

He did.

That was all. Another officer spoke.

'It is you and such as you that have let the barbarians onto the sacred soil of the fatherland.'

'I beg your pardon,' said the lieutenant colonel.

'It is because of treachery such as yours that we have lost the fruits of victory.'

'Italy should never retreat.'

The lieutenant-colonel is shot on the spot. The impersonal order of the military governed by abstract words such as 'sacred,' 'victory,' 'motherland,' 'loyalty,' 'patriotism,' is exposed by the bedrock of personal experience of the particular individuals like Henry and the lieutenant-colonel. Putting in an ironic juxtaposition the impersonality and abstraction of the war order on the one hand and the sincerity and authenticity of the individual experience on the other, the novelist shows how the rational and authentic hero is faced with the irrational and arbitrary powers.

It is this core of the war experience which generates a sense of tiredness, lostness, and meaninglessness among those caught up in the mill of the conflict. Note, for instance, the disgust that Rinaldi expresses at the meaninglessness of his routine in the war: "You're dry and you're empty and there's nothing else. There's nothing else I tell you. Not a damned thing. I know, when I stop working". He keeps working because he cannot face blankness which the war has created in his life. The priest experiences a similar feeling. On Henry's observing that the priest looked tired, the latter replies, "I am tired but I have no right to be." His religion keeps telling him that he must maintain faith and hope. He tries to, but his experience does not support his conviction. Hence the inner despair. The British major in the Italian war becomes cynical and pessimistic: "They were all cooked. The Germans won the victories. By God they were soldiers. The old Hun was a soldier. But they were cooked too. We were all cooked." The obsession of death generated by his confrontation with the imperial order of the military does not leave the American hero even after he has left the scene of war: "That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you. On they killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you the syphilis like Rinaldi. But they killed you in the end. You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you". Henry's outburst at a time when his son has just been born dead and there is a prospect of sure death of his unmarried wife is, understandably, not against the gods or supernatural powers, but against the human war-gods 'they'. The anonymous 'they' have been mentioned all along the narrative as those who make wars and control the affairs of society. Henry is one of the victims of war, so is his would-have-been wife, Catherine, and so are Aymo, Rinaldi, the lieutenant-colonel, and all those who get exhausted during the long war and crack under pressure of their consciousness of nothingness, cultivated self-destruction, nourished diseases, and get out of the war the difficult way. It is these 'they' that the American hero is vehemently registering his complaint against.

This outburst, however, is an inevitable one in the context of the series of experience Henry has gone through in the novel, beginning with the threat of sure death after having served the Italian army with utmost dedication, leading to his forced exit from Italy and living as a fugitive in Switzerland, where he finally loses his new-born son, born dead, and his dear love, whom he has not even formally married. Taking an overview, however, we can see that Henry is meant to project a viewpoint of war and life which is rational and balanced, which avoids the irrational faith of the Italian priest, the nihilism of Rinaldi, the criticism of the British major, the romanticism of Catherine Barkley; amidst all these contrary pulls and temptations the hero keeps standing firmly on the ground of reason and good sense, of commitment to the abiding values of love and compassion. It is the hero's position that provides to the title and theme of the novel an axis around which the entire complex of contraries of love and war, personal relations and impersonal order, blind faith and aware cynicism, revolve and are held together in a meaningful balance of opposites.

Thus, Hemingway succeeds in creating a war novel to expose war, a political novel to expose politics, a romantic novel to expose romanticism, and a modern novel to expose modernism. Combining within its fold the strains of the pastoral as well as the anti-pastoral, the scientific as well as the anti-scientific, *A Farewell to Arms* projects through the central consciousness of its protagonist a balanced view of life, which rejects the dogma of religion as well as the amorality of science, and accepts the secular and moral outlook of liberal humanism. The writer's success lies in dramatizing a contemporary situation in terms of disinterested art, giving not only the both sides of the case but also the abiding fibers of man and society. Narrating through an individual story a tale of our time the novelist is able to convert a topical piece into a universal whole.

## The Plot of a Farewell to Arms

Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* is a story of love between an American Red Cross officer and an English V.A.D. nurse, as well as of the Italian-Austrian front in World War I. The novel is divided into five parts, very much like the five acts of a play. In the first, we are introduced to the war and the meeting of the lovers who are brought together ironically, by war. The American is named Frederic Henry, who is working with an Italian ambulance unit. The English nurse is named Catherine Barkley, who is working with a British hospital. War being the over-all theme of the novel, the important opening chapters take us at once into its atmosphere. We see the movement of troops in an unfamiliar terrain, with a certain sense of unusualness about the scenes in sight, for they are so uncommon for the readers, and even for the foreign participants. The narrator being the hero himself, who is a foreigner in Italy, seems to carry a similar sense of unreality about the whole thing. This feeling is heightened by the artificial intimacy the officers, actually strangers to each other, try to make a show of. It is, actually, an attempt to get over the tedium and boredom of war. Their giving themselves to hard drinking and bawdy jokes is merely to balm their over-taut nerves. The more they indulge in these activities, the more is the horror reflected of the war in which they are caught. Their recourse to the girls at the Villa Rosa is also a part of the same attempt to seek digression from the deadly and seemingly never-ending encounter. The more they indulge in digressive activities the more they betray their despair and desperation. The first part closes with the hero getting wounded on the war front while distributing chocolates to soldiers in the trenches and his being sent to the hospital in Milan.

The second part of the novel, or the second act of the tragedy, is dominated by the theme of love, which provides in the novel's plot the counterpoint to the theme of war, the two being juxtaposed in a dramatic tension. Catherine, as a stroke of good luck for Frederic, is transferred to the Milan hospital where the hero reaches as a wounded patient. It is a kind of love at the first sight, involving the two in an intense affair, making Catherine so mad that she does extra duties during the nights, at times not being able to get any sleep. In an abnormal situation like that of a long war, they deny themselves even the benefit of a clergy, and readily declare themselves man and wife. Part two comes to an end with the end of the love-episode, for Frederic, after recovery, returns to the war front for further duty.

The third Part of the novel, or the third act of the love tragedy, proceeds with a long account of the Caporetto retreat on the Italian side. It is the autumn season of 1917, in which the Italian army has broken in panic, facing near-disaster. The season of fall or autumn is an appropriate background for the fall of the army. The mood and atmosphere correspond each other; the event and the climate continue to generate the appropriate atmosphere in the novel. This only shows how careful a craftsman Hemingway is in so far as the designing, patterning, or plotting of his artwork is concerned. The hero, since he speaks Italian "with an accent" (which he would be an English-speaking American), faces sure death. The Italian military police, in a summary trial of officers who are not found with their men and have somehow got separated in the utter confusion and chaos of the retreat, is shooting all those found guilty. Frederic is not only guilty, in their eyes, of having separated from his unit, but also a German spy in Italian uniform (the basis for this being his speaking Italian with an accent). Sensing a sure death, and no chance of escape on trial, Frederic Henry jumps into the river Tagliamento, on the bridge of which the army has put up a check post. They fire at him, but he escapes unhurt, floats on a log, comes out at a distant small railway station; takes a train, and reaches a safe place bordering Switzerland, with only the vast lake between the two. Thus, the hero is forced out of the international "feud," and in a way, makes a separate peace. With this ends the climactic scene of the novel that closely follows the pattern of the Elizabethan or Shakespearean tragedy.

In the alternating pattern of war and love, part four of the novel shows the reunion of lovers. Catherine, too, has quit her V.A.D. work owing to her pregnancy. Here in the town of Stresa, far away from the battle field, they try to forget the war. But the shadow of war looms large on them. The Italian battle police reaches the hotel in which they are staying. Even otherwise a feeling of being fugitive haunts them, especially the hero. He feels like a student who has bunked classes and is playing truant. The guilt feeling only shows that the hero is not a willing drop-out of the war. He has been forced to take a step which he would never willingly do. Feeling unsafe within the Italian territory, they cross over to Switzerland by a boat in extremely difficult weather. It is heavily raining, and the rowing is a long exercise which would take several hours to reach the shore of Switzerland. Catherine, being in an advanced stage of pregnancy, holds an umbrella against the wind, while Frederic works with the oars. They finally, in an act of unusual bravery,

make it to Switzerland. Reaching the new territory, they are questioned by the Swiss coast guards, but they manage to hoodwink them and get entry into what they feel is an escape into a romantic idyll.

Part fifth, the last act of the love and war tragedy, deals with the suffering leading to death of Catherine Barkley. In the typical Hemingway fashion, the novel has a tragic ending, showing an irony of life, that while an individual suffering and death is taking place, the world moves on indifferently, utterly unconcerned and undisturbed. The unconcern and indifference shown through the image of a café where people are noisily engrossed in eating, drinking, and talking. It is also conveyed through an image of a dog sniffing into an empty beer can. While the formal construction of this tragedy in five acts has received critical acknowledgement, Hemingway's ability and concern for careful craftsmanship has also received recognition. However, the classical or neoclassical pattern, which is always imposed from outside, making the entire presentation as a formal affair, informed more by contrivance and artificiality in the manipulation of incidents and characters. In the case of Hemingway's *A Fare to Arms*, the tragic plot is close to that of Shakespearean tragedy, growing from within, rather than imposed from outside. The juxtaposition of love and war, their balancing and interweaving, is only one aspect of the writer's craftsmanship. This juxtaposition, balancing, and interweaving, in fact, extends to scenes and situations, characters and conversations, making the tragic pattern as tightly woven as a carpet design, leaving no loose end on any single thread of the tapestry. There are contrasts and parallels made between beliefs and attitudes to war and love, to nationalism and internationalism, to life and death, to individual and society, so that from the micro to macro level, the pattern forms a certain symmetry arising from the effects of juxtaposition of the various opposites. An examination of these contrasts can serve to illustrate the tightly woven texture of the tragic novel, and the complex structural design which unifies the narrative into an organic whole. When we encounter the hero the first time in the novel, he is in the officer's mess where Captain Rinaldi is indulging in the bantering of the country priest, accusing him of sexual introversion. We learn that he is about to go on leave and is told by certain officers to visit several places where he could find girls, of which they promise to give him addresses. The priest suggests that the hero should go instead to the Abruzzi:

"There is good hunting. You would like the people and though it is cold it is clear and dry. You could stay with my family. My father is a famous hunter."

"Come on," said the captain. "We go whore house before it shuts."

The hero, Frederic Henry, not only goes to the Villa Rossa with Rinaldi, he later visits all those places Rinaldi had suggested where, in "the smoke of café's, ... nights in bed, drunk, ... waking and not knowing who it was with you." But it is also Rinaldi, ironically, who introduces Frederic to Catherine Barkley as yet another whom he could meet and have fun. It is another matter, though, that the affair takes a serious turn between Frederic and Catherine.

Contrasted to Rinaldi's role in the novel is that of the priest; the two stand for opposing interests. While Rinaldi stands for pleasure as an escape from pressures of war, the priest stands for purpose beyond the war. The priest's visit to the hospital, where the hero is being treated of his wound, just after Rinaldi, is meant to make clear this contrast. They do not discuss the ways of escaping the pressures of war. Rather, they discuss the war itself. Weary of war, the priest wishes to return to Abruzzi, a symbol of regression in the face of challenges of life (war is one), "where it is understood that man many love God." Although the priest stands for serious commitments in life (God is one), he is unexposed to the challenges of life, protected as he has remained by his blind faith in God. Frederic cannot accept his blind faith. He can certainly love, not an abstraction like God, but a concrete like Catherine. At the same time, the hero, unlike Rinaldi, does not buckle under the pressure of his exposure. He is indeed heroic in modern times in that he maintains his human commitments, refusing to regress into the priest's blind faith as well as to seek escape into Rinaldi's cynicism. Such contrasts run through the entire fabric of the novel.

Another major contrast is between the various opposing attitudes to war. While Rinaldi takes it, being a man of science and reason, as a monstrous destruction by machine and madness, the priest takes it as a work of the devil. There are other characters, the fellow drivers of Frederic, who take it as an individual venture, which could come to an end if the individuals stopped fighting. Frederic Henry alone is fully aware of the intricacies involved in the affair of the war, the conflicting interests of the war managery, the democratic values at stake, the individuals being of no consequence, the importance of protecting certain values, etc. Contrast is also involved even within the case of a



single character. For instance, the hero's idealism of playing the saviour of mankind followed by his coming to consider the world no better than a death house. The lovers' dream of a happy life ending in the death of the child of their love and the death of Catherine herself. The contrasts built into the structure of the novel are mostly of ironic nature. That is what tragic vision of life is, and that is what Hemingway had acquired through experience, and dramatized through the tragic design and structure of his artwork.

Those that have made out a case for the lyrical plot structure of the novel are highly mistaken. In the first place, no tragedy has ever been lyrical, nor can it ever be. The fundamental principle of tragedy is to show the ironic gap between the course that the protagonist comes to pursue, for whatever reason, and the constraints that life offers in the path of that course, bringing to light the inherent contradiction that lies at the heart of the human condition. The desires and aspirations that man wishes to pursue are not supported by the natural conditions that govern the universe. On the contrary, the universe or the world defeats and frustrates those wishes and aspirations. However, in the face of all the odds of life, the tragic vision would require, the heroic individual faced the impediments and insurmountable forces in a manner that lends grace and dignity to his character and imparts meaning to the business of living. Let wishes and aspirations be defeated and frustrated, the hero must keep going on the path of life, making every moment an effort to give shape to chaos, to oppose the evil, to do the positive, to prove the potential of man to take life as it comes, to take suffering stoically, and to uphold the dignity that man is capable of.

What seems to go contrary to the tragic mood in the novel's structure is the hero's attitude to life at the end, which borders cynicism:

That is what you did. You died. You did not know what it was all about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught off base they killed you. They killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you the syphilis like Rinaldi. But they killed you in the end. You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you.

This disillusioned mood, reinforced by the parable of the ants, seems to go contrary to the tragic mood of grace and grandeur under pressure. But does it? Doesn't Lear, or Hamlet, or Othello, or Macbeth, or Malfi, or any other protagonist of a great tragedy utter such outbursts against gods or natural forces controlling the conditions of man's life? All of them do it. But we also know the special circumstances in which they make such statements. And we also know that such statements are meant only to reflect their special state of mind that compels such utterances. These statements cannot be taken as the final verdict of the tragic play on man's life in this universe. These statements are in consonance with the frustrated or defeated condition of the hero. But only in that particular moment. The end effect of the tragic structure is to enlarge awareness about the terror and pity of life. These cynical statements expose us to the terrifying aspect of life, but the tragic structure subsumes the bitterness in its larger view of life that places this particular mood in its place. We are made to see the end-view, but we are also made to place in the overview of life, where it is only a part, and not the whole. The tragic structure is the whole, not the final act, or the momentary mood.

### **Symbolism in a Farewell to Arms**

There was a time, the middle decades of the twentieth century, when Hemingway was read as a symbolist in the great American tradition of Melville and Hawthorne. Much came to be made, then, of his use of symbols, particularly by Carlos Baker. No doubt, Baker's study of Hemingway is a major contribution to the critical effort made so far in the unfolding of the writer's work. Not many of the numerous studies that have come out over the years can claim the distinction Baker has enjoyed, and deserve to enjoy. However, Baker seems to have made an overstatement when he traces symbolism in all aspects of *A Farewell to Arms*, including landscape, weather, incident, even character. A. E. M. Halliday has pointed out, in his "Hemingway's Ambiguity: Symbolism and Irony," an excessive search to interpret each and every aspect of the novel in symbolic terms can lead to misunderstanding of many scenes and situations which are meant to be of local effect in the complex structure of the novel. Let us examine one or two examples of symbolic interpretations made by the critics of Baker's persuasion.

The major symbols that have found favour with Baker are those of mountain and plain in *A Farewell to Arms*. Baker not only considers these contrary landscapes as symbolic but also views them significant structural polarities. We are

told that while mountain stands for war and disaster, plain stands for peace and love. Frederic makes love in the plains and fights on the mountains. Broadly taken as tokens of different moods that these landscapes generate in the central characters of the novel, Baker's view seems to make sense. But when he tries to make out a case for these symbols constituting a conscious and considered structural design of the novel, one realizes that the critic rather overreaches in his attempt, ending up finally in falsifying the concrete reality that Hemingway worked hard to create as a monument of an abiding event of life—experience. Examined closely, one discovers that the mountain-plain anthesis is not a structural principle as made out by Baker. We find that at times war and violence occur in planes as well as on the mountains. Similarly, we see that the characters make love on the plains as well as the mountains. In Switzerland, for instance, which is mountainous, the lovers do not stop making love, although Catherine finally dies there. Hemingway, for sure, is not one of the symbolists, such as Hawthorne, or Melville. He is only as much symbolic as Sophocles is or Shakespeare is, or any writer of tragedy is. He uses symbols at times, but only for local effect, for creating a momentary mood, or for contributing to the atmosphere of the work. Snow, for instance, seems to spell disaster whenever it appears as it does on the mountain. In the same view, rain spells disaster whenever it appears. When the Caporato disaster of retreat takes place, it is raining all the days of the retreat, making the vehicles stuck into mud, immobilizing the movement of troops, creating the consequent chaos of men and machines. Catherine, too, often sees herself dead in the rain, as she tells Frederic. And it does rain, when she dies in childbirth. So far so good. But these symbols don't embody the tragic vision of the novel; they only lend support to the particular mood of the moment. They also sustain the tragic atmosphere. But their contribution is at the level of mood and atmosphere, not thought and vision, which the structure designates.

Another instance of imposing or tracing excessive symbolism is Frederic's desertion from war by jumping into the river, traveling from the mountain landscape to that of planes. All sorts of symbolic interpretations have been ingeniously read more than is actually there in the incident. One such reading is that Frederic's "love for Catherine draws him out of the war, away from his friends, and into the isolated, exclusive love that fills the last two books of the novel." The attempt being made here is on the same pattern that Baker follows; which is to make out a mutually exclusive antagonism between love and war, to make desertion a symbolic act of sacrificing war for love, purpose for pleasure. There are no such sharp and simple antagonisms in Hemingway. Being committed to the reality of life, rather than to myth or symbol, Hemingway views love and war as inextricable activities of life, which are interwoven into the very constitution of man, and which constitute the two contrary aspects of a single psyche. The two coexist side by side, run into each other, conflict with each other, but they do not cancel each other; they do not live in separate and isolated spaces. That kind of separation and isolation is possible in an adolescent dream or romantic illusion. For sure, Hemingway has presented in *A Farewell to Arms* neither of the two simplicities available to infantile imagination.

The simplistic view of seeking mutually exclusive antagonism of love and war is belied by the facts of the fictional world that the novelist presents in the work. For example, Frederic has been in love with Catherine from at least the time he was receiving treatment of the wound in the Milan hospital, but the idea of deserting the war and making a "separate peace" with his beloved never occurs to him, not even once, nor even in a dream. Instead, he goes back to the front after his wound is healed, even though Catherine is pregnant at the time. Frederic's "separate peace", his jumping into the river, has no link with his war wound as well. In his attempt to impose the Freudian theory of trauma on the Hemingway hero, Philip Young gives the wound a symbolic meaning, making it a scar in his psyche which he carries all his life, and which casts his character into the pathological mould. Once again, it is a case of doing violence to the poise of Hemingway's prose. We know how the hero takes his wound. Once healed, there is not even a mention of it thereafter. Even when others try to rake it up, he does not allow any discussion to take place about it. He even underplays it as an accident.

To interpret his jumping into the river in terms of all sorts of symbolic gestures is another instance of reducing criticism to an act of ingenuity. For instance, while for one critic, Frederic's jumping into the river is "an act of purgation, symbolizing the death of war and the beginning of a new life of love," for another, the hero "has been bathed into the waters of death, not life, and he is reborn." What the first critic is trying to suggest here is to split the novel into two sections dealing separately with war and love, implying also a split in the hero's life into two separate phases of war and love. We know from the text of Hemingway's novel that there are no such simple divisions either in the life of the

hero, or in the plot of the novel. As a matter of fact, love and war always appear together in the opening chapters of the novel, nor are they in any way separated in the later chapters. So, there is neither any symbolic death nor any symbolic rebirth attached to or implied in the hero's jumping into the Tagliamento river. It is only a physical venture of escaping an absurd death that was staring the hero in the face. When a man's integrity is ignored in favour of an accident of life, when chaos is dressed up as order, an individual is left with no choice except to opt out of the chaos, to evade the absurd. That is precisely what Frederic does, and that is what a real person in such a situation would do. In other words, the situation, the climatic, in the novel demands a realistic, rather than symbolic, reading. None of the symbolic meanings makes sense in the context of the concrete situation depicted in the novel.

The extreme, rather absurd, symbolic reading is made by yet another critic who views Frederic's escape from his execution on the Tagliamento bridge as an act of making "a farewell to military arms," as well as to the "arms of love – and almost at the same time". We know how Frederic loves Catherine more, not less, after he has been forced to flee the war front. In fact, he loves her all the more, for his own sake as well as for hers. The act only indicates the hero's presence of mind in a difficult situation, a rather dangerous situation. What he does thereafter is equally natural for a man of his make-up. He is not entirely happy that he has been thrown out of participation in war for which he had come all the way from his far-off land. Although he loves Catherine as deeply as any human can be capable of, he cannot get over the fact that he has been forced to play truant from war. All along the narrative's length in the novel, it is repeatedly reinforced that the Hemingway hero in *A Farewell to Arms*, as well as in other novels, has strong drives, of equal magnitude, for *eros* as well as *agape*. Decidedly, the two are not mutually exclusive also. In fact, both are such strong urges of his being that he cannot remain happy when either of the two is denied to him. There are numerous instances to suggest that while forced out of war, he carries a sense of uneasiness even in the midst of his life in the Swiss idyll. Note, for instance, the following:

The war was a long way away. Maybe there wasn't any war. There was no war here. Then I realized that it was over for me. But I did not have the feeling that it was really over. I had the feeling of a boy who thinks of what is happening at a certain hour at the schoolhouse from which he has played truant

Thus, it is only by ignoring the textual facts that we can swing into a symbolic reading of the novel. No incident in *A Farewell to Arms* can be subjected to symbolic interpretation unless the concrete structure of the narrative is violated one way or another. Symbolic meanings do arise in Hemingway's prose but seldom at the cost of surface reality.

Even the rain symbol, which Baker makes much of, is not a static one, carrying the same connotations in all the scenes in which it appears. As argued earlier, symbols in Hemingway serve, largely, local functions, and seldom serve structural purposes. For instance, the rain that falls in the opening scene, causing malaria resulting in several thousand deaths, also falls on the mud of Isonzo; it also pets into the streets of Lausanne as Catherine is dying. However, rain also falls in Switzerland when Frederic and Catherine escape there, feeling elated and cheerful. Thus, what we can say is that Hemingway makes a skillful use of the appropriate landscapes and weathers to set or to intensify a particular mood or emotion. At best, symbolism in this novel can be said to constitute a sort of sublayer of the surface narrative; or, we may equate these symbols to epithets in a sentence, which qualify a noun or a verb. Decidedly, they play a subordinate role, and not the main structural role as they do in Melville and Hawthorne. Hemingway uses natural landscapes and weathers only to match them with the emotional tones of his various scenes.

The novel's last scene about the death of Catherine has also been a handy event for the symbol-hunters. One of these critics opines, "There is . . . a symbolic reason for the Catherine's death at this moment. When Frederic Henry made his farewell to arms, he became incapable of being in any sort of community, even a community of two: that is incapable of lasting sexual love. Catherine has to die because the hero must henceforth live alone." One wonders at such sweeping statements that fall flat the moment one tries to relate them to the actualities of Hemingway's fictional world. If the critic means by "lasting sexual love" the martial love, then Harry in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Morgan in *To Have and Have Not*, Hudson in *Islands in the Stream* are happily married, and the last two have children as well. And if he means by it a happy heterosexual love without marriage, then Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and Richard Cantwell in *Across the River and into the Trees* have very satisfying affairs with girls much younger than themselves. Either way, the critical observation made by Cowley is utterly untenable. The only large significance of Catherine's death, beyond a personal loss to the lover, is the dimension of its tragic awareness, that life

kills the virtuous and the villainous alike, and that individual suffering makes no difference to the indifferent and impersonal world in the midst of which the individual tragedy takes place.

Hence to speak of symbolism in Hemingway's prose fiction one should never ignore the fact that it is a fiction in the tradition of modern realism, and not modern symbolism. The greatness of Hemingway as an artist lies in his ability to combine irony as well as symbolism within the parameters of realistic prose. Here, symbols emerge from a subtle suggestiveness of the narrative without destroying, or even damaging, the concrete surface of the solid prose. Hemingway never plants symbols, or thinks through symbols; he only modulates his prose in such a manner that some of the key objects or scenes acquire symbolic overtones. Thus, it is one thing to create symbolic meanings in solid prose, quite another to have a symbolic vision or design a symbolic structure. Hemingway belongs to the first category.

### Prose Style in a Farewell to Arms

Hemingway received his reputation as a pioneer of modern English prose style soon after the publication of his first book of short stories entitled *In Our Time* in 1925. While to begin with critics spoke of the Hemingway style, for until then only the early novels and short stories had appeared. But after the publication of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1940, critics started speaking of his early and later styles. Whatever the difference of early and later, or one and another kind of style, the critics have always related the Hemingway style to Hemingway the man. Psychobiographical approach to Hemingway's fiction, including all the aspects of its art, has been a bane of Hemingway criticism. While several aspects have been misunderstood, several others remain ignored. Biography is a useful source for the interpretation of a writer's work, but it has to remain as background material, not as a key to open the treasures of his art. We need to make use of our biographical knowledge about him, but only to the extent it is able to illuminate an aspect or an item of his art within the artistic frame itself, not in violation of the artistic frame. With these preliminaries we can now examine the prose style of Hemingway, as to how it was shaped in its early stage and under what influences, and how the author forged it to serve the ends of his art.

The view that "style is the man" has been quite popular even outside of Hemingway. Although there is an element of truth in the statement, it is not adequate enough to cover the entire range of styles that have been there in the history of English literature. Clearly, the man behind the artist is only one of the many factors that go into the style of an artist. We can see how the style of an artist or artwork is determined by the genre (drama, epic, or novel), by the narrative (tragic, comic, or farcical), by the narrator or speaker (whether peasant, professor, or priest). It is therefore comparatively more appropriate to speak of style in relation to individual work, rather than individual writer. It is also important to remember that the style of an artwork must be studied in relation to the various aspects that determine and necessitate it.

In the life of every writer there is always a formative period, when various influences work to shape the writer's distinctive style, having certain peculiarities of its own. As for the style of individual work, that is decided by its subject and form, but the writer's peculiarities will always creep in whatever be the individual case. About his formative period, Hemingway is said to have remarked: "that's how I learned to write – by reading the Bible." The element of simplicity both in diction and syntax – chief characteristic of the *Old Testament* narratives – is the main quality of Hemingway's prose also in all his works. Of course, not all Hemingway characters would speak simple language or use simple syntax; also, not all situations would call for the quality of simplicity. But, by and large, the Hemingway narrators, who are close approximations of the author himself, would prefer to use the simple language and sentence structure. Note, for instance, the following:

In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves.

Here is the opening paragraph of the novel, stating the theme of war as it comes through the individual consciousness of the narrator. Nothing could be simpler than this piece. The simplest of words in the straightest of syntax, absolutely without any qualifying or subordinate clause, without any ornamental or explanatory epithets. The whole piece runs

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like the stream, taking no devious route; it just flows unhindered on the wheels of "ands", making a smooth movement of slides showing the house, the village, the river, the mountains, the troops, the military vehicles, but also the pebbles and boulders, trees with dust on the leaves, etc., all these objects stand just as they do in the landscape, captured as if by the camera eye. There is unique freshness about the words and sentences, very much like the pebbles and boulders, rivers and mountains

We cannot also fail to notice that the narrative here is not only stark but also impersonal. Even though the narrator is first person, we find him dropping not a single word which could detract our attention from the objects to the person showing them. Whatever emotion the scene arouses in the reader's mind is done through the objective correlative of the objects, not even once through direct expression of that emotion. The narrator remains almost invisible: only a voice comes out narrating the events of the plot. The bare and bony prose here shows the strength of simplicity: a simple accumulation of details creates a complete picture in the reader's mind. Hemingway also acknowledged his debt to Ring Lardner, whose regular column in the *Chicago Tribune* was one of the municipal glories, from whom he learned "some of the technicalities of idiomatic prose" as well as of "humour, burlesque, and satire." Although *A Farewell to Arms* is a tragic novel, the humour of the trenches, that heightens rather than relieve the tragic tension, is quite pronounced in the novel. A little instance of irony would do here: "At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army." And the dark humour of the comedy is what those caught in the war live by: "Their rifles were wet and under their capes the two leather cartridge-boxes on the front of the belts, gray leather boxes heavy with the packs of clips of thin, long 6.5 mm. cartridges, bulged forward under the capes so that the men, passing on the road, marched as though they were six months gone with child."

One of the most powerful influences on Hemingway's writing was that of *Kansas City Star*, which "had been for almost twenty years the natural target of talented, ambitious Midwesterners." During his less-than-one year association before joining the war in 1918, Hemingway received valuable training in writing neat and solid prose. The *Star* required its reporters to master its famous style-sheet before they went into the profession. The very first paragraph of the style-sheet insisted: "Use short sentences. Use short first paragraphs. Use vigorous English. Be positive, not negative." Hemingway, more than anyone else, mastered these rules so well that they became a matter of habit with him. Note, for instance, the following:

I went on to the hospital. There were some letters, an official one, and some others, I was to have three weeks convalescent leave and then return to the front. I read it over carefully. Well, that was that. The convalescent leave started October fourth when my course was finished. Three weeks was twenty-one days. That made October twenty-fifth. I told them I would not be in and went to the restaurant a block away up in the street from the hospital for supper and read my letters and the *Corriere Della Sera* at the table. There was a letter from my grandfather, containing family news, patriotic encouragement, a draft for two hundred dollars, and a few clippings; a dull letter from the priest at our mess, a letter from a man I knew who was flying with the French and had gotten in with a wild gang and was telling about it, and a note from Rinaldi asking me how long I was going to skulk in Milano and what was all the news?

Nothing could be better. No other prose would be so solid. It does not think. It does not feel. It only acts, and acts slowly or swiftly as the matter deserves causal or careful attention. And it keeps moving without any wet emotions or dry thoughts. It just keeps us fixed with the camera eye that moves on uninterrupted. The stream flows, and flows in a rhythmic fashion. This vigorous prose makes a sharp contrast to the intellectual prose of James which lacks motion, which only weaves circles, creating a web, keeping the reader involved in the thoughts and emotions generated by any little action. Hemingway's short, direct, positive sentences are in marked contrast to James's long, indirect, and round-about sentences.

Another instruction of the *Star's* style-sheet (Rule No. 3) insisted: "Never use slang. Such words as *viani*, *cut me*, *get his goat*, *come across*, *sit up and take notice*, *put one over*, have no place after their use become common. Slang to be enjoyable must be fresh." Hemingway, we know, does not use any slang whatever, stale or fresh. He knew that while slang was topical, standard English was universal. He uses slang only where he must, such as in a character's speech who must not lose his local colour. Rinaldi is one such character in *A Farewell to Arms*. Another

important instruction of the style-sheet (Rule No 21) was: "Avoid the use of adjectives, especially such extravagant ones as *splendid, gorgeous, grand, magnificent*, etc." Hemingway followed it equally faithfully, never ignoring the precious advice. It is for this reason that his prose is free from the heavy and turgid writing which was so common around the time Hemingway took up the career of creative writing. Of course, it is neither possible nor necessary to avoid the use of epithets (adjectives and adverbs). At times, their fundamental use makes it necessary for the writer to rely upon them. However, merely ornamental or decorative use, serving no purpose except that of embellishment, is what Hemingway always stayed away from. But he makes effective and functional use of epithets wherever required. Note, for instance, the following:

Now in the fall the trees were *bare* and roads were *muddy*. . . . The *mulberry* trees were *bare* and the fields were *brown*. There were *wet dead* leaves on the road from the rows of *bare* trees and men were working on the road, tamping stone in the ruts from piles *crushed* stone. . . . On a narrow street we passed a British Red Cross ambulance. The driver wore a cap and his face was *thin* and *tanned*.

It is only this kind of adjectives and adverbs that Hemingway uses; apparently, they are highly functional, being as necessary as the nouns themselves. Also, they do not distract from the action that the narrative is after. The epithets appear in a matter-of-fact manner, never creating any "sides" to the stream of moving action. Since the narrator is himself involved in the war effort which is the subject of narration, the prose remains only as much concerned with the non-essential objects of nature or society as it is possible for a soldier in action. Hence attention to the beauties and luxuries in natural or human world would seldom appear on the screen used by the novelist.

Hemingway's prose in *A Farewell to Arms*, as well as elsewhere, heavily relies on the conjunctives, such as "and," for furthering the narrative. They act like wheels on which the train of narrative moves, never causing any halt or hinderance. No other writer has perhaps ever made such a wonderful use of "and" and such other conjunctives. We may pick up any page of the novel, any novel, the abundant use of "and" will at once strike the eye. Note how effectively it works in the following passage:

The wind rose in the night *and* at three o'clock in the morning with the rain coming in sheets there was a bombardment *and* the Croats came over across the mountain meadows *and* through the patches of woods *and* into the front line. They fought in the dark in the rain *and* a counter-attack of scared men from the second line drove them back. There was much shelling *and* many rockets in the rain *and* machine gun *and* rifle fire all along the line. They did not come again *and* it was quieter *and* between the gusts of wind *and* rain we could hear the sound of a great bombardment far to the north.

Here, the conjunctive "and" does the trick. It is a magic device with Hemingway that does wonders with words, phrases, clauses, putting them all together, connecting them like the boggies of a train, keeping it always on the rails, always in simple linear movement, always straight in reaching its next destination. Hemingway's conjunctives, such as "and" act like glue that connects the different slides of pictures to make a whole scene. The technique works wonderfully well. There is no other writer in English who has been able to make such a powerful use of "and."

Using more the technique of showing, rather than of telling, Hemingway relies a good deal on dialogue, which is one way of keeping the narrator invisible, and keeping the narrative impersonal. Hemingway is a master of this technique as well. Like his prose in general, his dialogue is pruned of all the unnecessary reporting of manners and gestures and is allowed to appear only in functional form. See, for instance, the following:

"Who else did you see?" Catherine asked.

"Mr and Mrs Meyers."

"They're a strong lot."

"He's supposed to have been in the penitentiary at home. They let him out to die."

"And he lived happily in Milan forever after."

"I don't know how happily."

"Happily enough after jail I should think."

"She's bringing some things here."

"She brings splendid things. Were you her dear boy?"

"One of them."

"You are all her dear boys," Catherine said. "She prefers the dear boys. Listen to it rain."

"It's raining hard."

"And you'll always love me, won't you?"

Nothing can achieve greater objectivity than is there in the present piece. Even drama is not objective as the dialogue in Hemingway, for in drama there are instructions indicating exits and entries of characters as also about the manner in which they go out or come in, singing a song or banging a door, etc. Here there are no instructions whatsoever. It is absolutely stark, with nothing to cover the bare bones. Characters seem to speak as mere voices. They are not aided by the narrator in any manner.

Thus a good deal of what Hemingway was to acquire as a writer had been handed over to him by the Kansas City *Star* style-sheet. As Hemingway himself is said to have recalled, "those were the best rules I learned for the business of writing...I've never forgotten them. No man with any talent, who feels and writes truly about the thing he is trying to say, can fail to write well if he abides by them." Of course, like any other great writer, Hemingway only absorbed those influences to suit his own temperament as well as his artistic needs. A Moise is said to have aptly remarked, "Like all real writers, Hemingway owes his well-deserved eminence not to any influence, but to his ability to select from a host of influences – part of that little thing called genius." Another influence that Hemingway absorbed even after his apprenticeship was over was that of his senior fellow expatriate in Paris, the famous Gertrude Stein. One of the characteristics of Gertrude Stein's prose was the device of repetition used for emphasis and clarification. In his Paris days, we know how Hemingway was close to her and sought her advice. This device of repeating the key words Hemingway decidedly borrowed from her and put it to remarkable use. Here is one such instance:

He said the offensive in Flanders was going to be bad. If they *killed* men as they did this fall the Allies would be *cooked* in another year. He said we were all *cooked* but we were all right as long as we did not know it. We were all *cooked*. The thing was not to recognize it. The last country to realize they were *cooked* would win the war. We had another drink. Was I on somebody's staff? No. He was. It was all *balls*. We were alone in the club sitting back in one of the big leather sofas. His boots were smoothly polished dull leather, they were beautiful boots. He said it was all *balls*. They thought only in divisions and man-power. They all squabbled about divisions and only *killed* them when they got them. They were all *cooked*. The Germans won the victories. By God they were soldiers. The old Hun was a soldier. But they were *cooked* too. We were all *cooked*. I asked about Russia. He said they were *cooked* already. ... soon see they were *cooked*. Then the Austrians were *cooked* too.

Here, the repetition of the key words like "cooked," "killed," "balls," etc., clarifies the hopelessness of the war situation with both parties facing a no-war situation. The repetition reveals more about the speaker whose remarks are being reported by the hero-narrator. The obsessive repetition in Hemingway is always the style of a drunk. Whatever subject or word he gets hooked on, the drunk will keep on repeating it – also becoming a source of great humour. This device is also used by Hemingway in the service of satire and parody, and used quite effectively. Here is one such example:

I did not say anything. I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometime standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.

Here, the satire on the rhetoric of war used by the political and religious leaders is quite harsh. The emptiness of the

rhetorical cant and the solidity of the simple objects of life – road, river, village, etc. – are so juxtaposed as to ironically and satirically hit the deceptive idiom of the phony characters. Thus, the language reveals the character. The effectiveness of the style is enhanced by the simplicity and naturalness of the narrator, who only puts before us, very simply and naturally, what he had heard with his own ears and what he has seen with his own eyes, putting the two together only to show the ironic gap between the things heard and the things seen.

In his tragic novels, including *A Farewell to Arms*, irony is not merely a device used for humour and satire, for local and dramatic effect, it ultimately becomes a structural device, which puts the entire plot into tragic perspective, relating the beginning, middle and end, juxtaposing the themes of love and war, contrasting with each other the tragic characters and those that are either funny or phony. Irony goes further in weaving the fabric of the entire texture of the novel, arranging in the ironic pattern the scenes and situations, metaphors and symbols. We can recall here, for instance, how, in a joke, the soldiers carrying cartridge boxes on their bellies are compared to women carrying babies in pregnancy. When we reach the end of the novel, we see how Catherine, carrying a baby in large part of the later narrative, finally dies in child birth. The irony in the structure connects the two scenes, as well as the two themes of love and war, to show that the product of a destructive war could not have been a live baby, for war and violence can only produce death, not life.

The furthest penetration of the structural irony in the novel, just as in other tragic novels of Hemingway, and, in fact, in all the great tragedies, is to underline the gap between what man aspires or dreams and what life grants him, and how when the individual tragedy takes place the world moves on as indifferently as ever, highlighting through this powerful device the horror that lies at the centre of man's existence, the cold indifference of the world surrounding him. Note, when Catherine is in suffering in the hospital, facing a sure death (emotionally sensed by Frederic), how the surrounding world stands in relation to it:

Outside along the street were the refuse cans from the houses waiting for the collector. A dog was nosing at one of the cans.

"What do you want?" I asked and looked in the can to see if there was anything I could pull out for him; there was nothing on top but coffee-grounds, dust and some dead flowers.

"There isn't anything, dog," I said. The dog crossed the street. I went up the stairs in the hospital to the floor Catherine was on and down the hall to her room. I opened the door; the room was empty, except for the Catherine's bag on a chair and her dressing-gown hanging on a hook on the wall.

The way Hemingway puts together here, in a significant sequence, the refuse can being searched by the dog followed by Frederic's looking for Catherine, leading to horror of there being nothing but emptiness both in the refuse can as well as Catherine's room. Both the searches end in finding "only coffee-grounds, dust and some dead flowers" in one case, and only "Catherine's bag on a chair and her dressing gown hanging on a hook." These are death images after the living material is emptied – "dust and dead flowers" or "dressing-gown hanging on a hook." These objective-correlatives evoke horror.

The horror is no less evoked when after Frederic has had a look at Catherine in her suffering (surely) leading to (imminent) death, he reaches the café' out there, where

It was very hot and at the first mouthful I had to take a drink of beer to cool my mouth. . . . I drank several glasses of beer. I was not thinking at all but read the paper of the man opposite me. It was about the break through on the British front. When he realized I was reading the back of his paper he folded it over. I thought of asking the waiter of a paper, but I could not concentrate. It was hot in the café and the air was bad. Many of the people at the tables knew one another. There were several card games going on. The waiters were busy bringing drinks from the bar to the tables. Two men came in and could find no place to sit. They stood opposite the table where I was. I ordered another beer. I was not ready to leave yet. It was too soon to go back to the hospital. I tried not to think and to be perfectly calm. The men stood around but no one was leaving. So they went out. I drank another beer. There was quite a pile of saucers now on the table in front of me. The man opposite me had taken off his spectacles, put them away in a case, folded his paper and put it in his pocket and now sat holding his liquor glass and looking out at the room.



Here is the world out there, "very hot", just as it is very cold inside the hospital room where Catherine is dying, where the mercury is sinking in the mouth of the dying. In the indifferent world in which Catherine (or any individual) has her death in a corner, they eat and drink and remain individuals, each to himself or herself, instinctively holding the newspaper if another seems to be reading it, instinctively ordering another drink if another seems to be wanting it, knowing a few and yet watching them as others. Here is the ironic view of life showing the horror that always surrounds an individual tragedy. One cannot resist here quoting in full that beautiful little poem of W. H. Auden, "Muse' des Beau Arts," which paints it all through yet another painting of the same life:

About suffering they were never wrong,  
The old Masters: how well they understood  
Its human position; how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a window just walking dully long;  
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting  
For the miraculous birth, there always must be  
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating  
On a pond at the edge of the wood:  
They never forgot  
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course  
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot  
Where the dogs go on with their dogy life and torturer's horse  
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.  
In Brueghel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away  
Quiet leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may  
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone  
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green  
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen  
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

Here is the tragic vision, the ironic view of the world, which Brueghel's Icarus, Auden's poem, and Hemingway's novel so beautifully put across, each through an individual case, anyone's case – Icarus's, or Christ's, or Catherine's. At the centre of the picture is the irony, which reveals it so coldly, so unconcernedly.

## **Characters – Major and Minor**

### **The Priest**

In the thematic pattern of *A Farewell to Arms* the Italian priest is an important character. He, along with Rinaldi, forms a pair of opposites in the meaning pattern of the novel. While Rinaldi, is a doctor representing rational attitude to life, the priest is a man of faith representing religious attitude to life. Belonging to a small village of Abruzzi he feels rather uncomfortable in the big city. When Henry discusses in the officer's mess his plan for the vacation in the opening of the novel, as against Rinaldi's and the major's advice for going to Rome and other big cities, the priest advises him to visit Abruzzi "where there is cold but clear and dry, where there is good hunting, and where peasants take off their hats and call you Lord". Thus, the priest is a pastoral character having the representative characteristics of simplicity, shyness, straightness, and solidity. He constitutes a type representing the rural way of life unaffected by the industrialization and modernization of the big city. That is why when he proposes to Henry that the latter should go to Abruzzi, one of the officers retorts: "Listen to him talk about the Abruzzi. There's more snow there than here. He doesn't want to see peasants. Let him go to centres of culture and civilization".

Kept carefully unnamed throughout the novel the priest is obviously meant to represent his profession. He is a Catholic

Christian having staunch faith in the Church of Rome. The officers keep teasing him about his faith, keep ridiculing the Pope. At the meal times in the officers' mess he remains the main target of baiting:

'The Pope wants the Austrians to win the war,' the major said. 'He loves Franz Joseph. That's where the money comes from. I am an atheist.'

'Did you ever read the *Black Pig*?' asked the lieutenant. 'I will get a copy. It was that shook my faith.'

'It is a filthy and vile book,' said the priest. 'You do not really like it.'

'It is very valuable,' said the lieutenant. 'it tells you about those priests. You will like it,' he said to me. I smiled at the priest and he smiled back across the candlelight. 'Don't you read it,' he said.

'I will get it for you,' said the lieutenant.

'All thinking men are atheists,' the major said. I do not believe in the Free Masons however.

Cool and composed like a true believer the priest remains unruffled by the officers' attack on his faith as well as on his person. Although not given to using irony or sarcasm he takes the ironic and sarcastic remarks in the spirit in which they are made. Most criticism made by the officers is taken by him as a joke. Besides being strongly opposed to war, he is also baited for his supposed sympathy for the Austrians. However, he always takes these remarks as jokes:

... we two stopped talking and the captain shouted, 'priest not happy. Priest not happy without girls.'

'I am happy.' Said the priest.

'Priest not happy. Priest wants Austrians to win the war,' the captain said. The others listened. The priest shook his head.

'No,' he said.

'Priest wants us never to attack. Don't you want us never to attack?'

'No. if there is a war I suppose we must attack.'

'Must attack. Shall attack!'

The priest nodded.

The fact that the priest can take all kinds of filthy jokes coolly and calmly without ever getting angry and agitated shows the strength of his faith. His faith in religion and the conventions of Abruzzi shield him from the onslaughts of reason and protect him against the disintegrating effects of war. Whereas people like Rinaldi not only become depressed by the long war but also lose the balance of mind, the priest remains comparatively composed.

The priest is meant to constitute an opposite polarity to Rinaldi in his response to the war. While Rinaldi fully involves himself in the war working day and night, and thus receives the corroding effects of the exposure, the priest remains more of an outsider moving on the periphery of the conflict, never really getting into the thick of it. Physically as well as intellectually the priest remains unexposed to the war.

'Maybe the war will be over.'

'I hope so.'

'What will you do then?'

'If it is possible I will return to the Abruzzi.'

His brown face was suddenly very happy.

'You love the Abruzzi?'

'Yes, I love it very much.'

'You ought to go there then.'

'I would be too happy. If I could live there and love God and serve Him.'

'And be respected, I said.'

'Yes and be respected. Why not?'

'No reason not. You should be respected'

'It does not matter. But there in my country it is understood that a man may love God. It is not a dirty joke.'

'I understand.'

He looked at me and smiled.

'You understand but you do not love God.'

'No.'

As the dialogue here reveals, while the hero has been transformed by his exposure to the war, and to the extent that he cannot return to his earlier settled life, the priest would immediately return to his village life of respectability without any discomfort on account of the war which he has not really experienced. Thus, his faith is both a strength as well as weakness. It is a strength in that it keeps him protected from the nihilistic effects of war; it is a weakness in that it keeps him ignorant about the experience of war as well as of life.

The Priest's attitude to love – another experience offered by the novel – is as orthodox and conventional as it is to war. He looks at love, as well as at war, through the eyeglasses of his religion; he only follows the principles and conventions of his faith and never exposes himself to the experience of love. Obviously, he remains as much unaware about love as he remains ignorant about war:

'... How about loving women? If I really loved some woman would it be like that?'

'I don't know about that. I never loved any woman.'

'What about your mother?'

'Yes, I must have loved my mother.'

'Did you always love God?'

'Ever since I was a little boy.'

'Well,' I said. I did not know what to say. 'You are a fine boy,' I said.

'I am a boy,' he said. 'But you call me father.'

'That's politeness.'

He smiled.

Now, this shows how much of an handicap the priest's religion is in his response to the various aspects of life. He does indeed remain a "boy" in terms of his intellectual growth. Remaining unexposed to the experiences of love and war he also remains ignorant about them. No doubt, he remains unshattered, solid as a rock, but he also remains unaware, static as a stone. Thus, the simple, shy, and straight priest offers the possibility of "return to nature," which the hero, Frederic Henry, rejects as an inadequate response to life in an age like the modern in which the city civilization marked by science and technology is the predominant force.

### Doctor Rinaldi

Another native Italian character, besides the priest, who plays an important part in the thematic scheme of the novel is Doctor Rinaldi. Just as the priest is meant to represent the pastoral and priestly approaches to life, so is the doctor meant to represent the urban and rational approaches to life. Right from the beginning of the novel we find him pleading for the city as against the village, for reason as against religion. If the priest stands on one extreme of the thematic spectrum of the novel, the doctor stands on the other extreme. In between the two extreme poles stands the hero, Frederic Henry, who exposes the limitations of the two, quite as the two underline the strength of the central character. Rinaldi is an extrovert – talkative, humorous, and hard – working. Unlike the priest, he makes his presence felt wherever he is. The officers' mess is always enlivened by his baiting of the priest. Besides, he is a lively company for Henry, who shares a room with the former. The doctor is the complete opposite of the priest: the former is an atheist, the latter staunch believer; the former a lover of women, the latter shy of them; the former an hedonist loving drinks and food, the latter an ascetic observing fasts; the former an untiring talker, the latter rather reserved. the former given to hard work, the latter rather passive; the former a thorough nihilist, the latter dogmatic believer.

Doctor Rinaldi, though a rationalist and a non-believer, is not cynical to begin with. He enjoys all the good things of life – wine, women, and work. Besides, he is a joyful friend. Henry likes him for his jest for life:

We shook hands and he put his arm around my neck and kissed me.

'Oughf,' I said.

'You're dirty,' he said. 'You ought to wash. Where did you go and what did you do? Tell me everything at once.'

'I went everywhere. Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples, Villa San Giovanni, Messina, Taormina –

'You talk like a time-table. Did you have any beautiful adventures?'

'Yes.'

'Where.'

'Milano, Firenze, Roma, Napoli –'

'That's enough. Tell me really what was the best.'

'In Milano.'

'That was because it was first. Where did you meet her? In the Cova? Where did you go? How did you feel? Tell me everything at once. Did you stay all night?'

'Yes.'

'That's nothing. Here now we have beautiful girls. New girls never been to the front before.'

'Wonderful.'

While this jest for life keeps him going, it also serves as a defense weapon against the nihilistic onslaught of war. Similarly, while his rationalism gives him the advantage of exposing himself to the experiences of love and war, it also takes him, at the same time, to the end of the road of enquiry where he finds himself faced with the dead end, the void, the blankness. As a result, the doctor is taken over by depression; he disintegrates under the pressure of his consciousness.

When we meet Rinaldi the second time – on Henry's return to the front after his recovery from the wound – we find him altogether changed. He is no longer his spontaneous self, taking on Henry as well as the priest, enjoying drinks and good food. Rather, he is a better man, taken over by depression and cynicism, a decomposed personality, cracked and falling apart:

'I don't give a damn,' Rinaldi said to the table. 'To hell with the whole business.'

He looked defiantly around the table, his eyes flat, his face pale.

'All right', I said. 'To hell with the whole damn business'.

'No, no', said Rinaldi. 'You can't do it. I say you can't do it. You're dry and you're empty and there's nothing else. There's nothing else I tell you. Not a damned thing. I know, when I stop working.'

Obviously, Rinaldi has been broken by the war. He is no longer able to cope with his consciousness. Not being able to face loneliness and nothingness he has to keep himself busy with the physical work of operating on the wounded soldiers the whole day so that his consciousness is dulled under physical tiredness.

As Rinaldi has grown nihilistic through his experience of war, he has grown cynical through his experience of love: "To hell with you," Rinaldi said. "They try to get rid of me. Every night they try to get rid of me. I fight them off. What if I have it. Everybody has it. The whole world's got it. First, he went on, assuming the manner of a lecturer. It's a little pimple. Then we notice a rash between the shoulders. Then we notice nothing at all. We put out faith in mercury, . . . A mercurial product . . . Good old priest," he said. "You'll never get it. Baby will get it. It's an industrial accident. It's a simple industrial accident". The doctor has got syphilis through indiscriminate sex with girls at the brothel house. He is no longer desirous of marrying any woman. He sees no difference between one woman and another. As for the difference between a girl and a woman, with the girl it is more painful. That is how even love for the female sex has lost meaning for Rinaldi. The meaning of life has been lost for him. It has happened with him because his reason has destroyed his faith in everything. He is without the religious faith of the priest. And he has no commitment to Henry's secular values of love and friendship, freedom and equality. Hence a nihilist and a cynic. Thus, as the priest remains innocent without the fruits of experience, the doctor becomes broken by the burden of experience in the absence of an abiding commitment in life.

### Helen Ferguson

Just as Frederic Henry is flanked by the priest on one side and Rinaldi on the other, Catherine Barkley is flanked by Helen Ferguson on one side and Miss Gage on the other. Also, just as the priest and Rinaldi represent antithetical approaches life, which Henry moderates by adopting the middle path, Ferguson and Gage, too, represent opposing

responses to life, which Catherine moderates by adopting the middle path. Further, just as Rinaldi and the priest ne define the hero's character by providing juxtaposition to him in various situations in the novel, so do Ferguson and Gage help define the character of Catherine by providing juxtaposition to her at various points in the novel. A Scotch by nationality, who has "a brother in the Fifty-Second Division and a brother in Mesopotamia", Helen Ferguson is a full nurse in the British hospital on the Austrian front in Italy. Just as Henry and Rinaldi share a room in the villa, Ferguson and Catherine not only live together, they are always found together. The two make such an inseparable pair of girls that they could be rightly called "Juno's Swans." Ferguson is deeply attached to Catherine, so much so that she finds it difficult to live alone. Still, when she discovers that Catherine has fallen in love with Henry, she does not mind leaving them alone:

'I'll leave you two,' she said. 'You get along very well without me.'

'Don't go, Helen,' Miss Barkley said.

'I'd really rather. I must write some letters.'

'Good night,' I said.

'Good night, Mr. Henry.'

'Don't write anything that will bother the censor.'

'Don't worry. I only write about what a beautiful place we live in and how brave the Italians are.'

'That way you will be decorated'

This shows how Ferguson can rise to the occasion and make healthy responses to changing situations of life. From finding an excuse for leaving a friend with her lover to finding a fitting reply for the censor question raised by Henry, Ferguson shows an agility of mind which is comparable to that of Catherine.

Ferguson is so devoted to her friend Catherine that she makes this friendship an occupation of her life outside the hospital. She seems to have sacrificed all her interests for Catherine. We do find her once in the company of Rinaldi, but perhaps she accepts Rinaldi also only to leave Catherine and Henry alone. Rinaldi, too, does not find her very attractive. Perhaps not being very attractive herself she seeks satisfaction in being serviceable to her beautiful friend who, like Juliet, falls headlong in love with an equally handsome, young Henry. However, her attachment to Catherine is so genuine and deep that she cannot bear even the thought of her being in difficulty. Although she likes to see her friend making love, she cannot bear the thought of her getting into the trouble of pregnancy in the war front

'Will you come to our wedding, Fergy?' I said to her once.

'You will never get married.'

'We will.'

'No you won't.'

'Why not?'

'You'll fight before you'll marry.'

'We never fight.'

'You've time yet.'

'We don't fight.'

'You'll die the. Fight or die. That's what people do. They don't marry.'

Helen's cynicism here has to be viewed in the context of the war which has been there for long and has caused so much destruction that to have developed such a cynical view is very natural for all those who have been there in it for all that long. Helen has been in war since its very beginning and has seen so much devastation of death that she cannot believe anyone would have the luck to marry and live happily. Besides, her experience of men in war has also made her cynical. From the attitude of Rinaldi towards the nurses of the British hospital we can imagine Ferguson's knowledge about the hundreds of officers like Rinaldi who would not make much difference between the girls in the hospital and those in the brothel house. She must have seen a lot of so-called love-affairs in war time which would leave the girls pregnant and deserted by their seducers pretending as lovers:

I reached for her hand. 'Don't take hold of me,' she said. 'I'm not crying. Maybe you'll be all right. You

two. But watch out you don't get her in trouble. You get her in trouble and I'll kill you.'

'I won't get her in trouble.'

'Well watch out then. I hope you'll be all right. You have a good time.'

'We have a fine time.'

'I won't.'

'Don't fight then and don't get her into trouble'.

'Mind you watch out. I don't want her with any of these war babies.'

Later, Ferguson's fears come true. The lovers do not get married. Catherine gets into trouble. She gets a war baby. And she also dies. Thus, all of her fears come true. Hemingway uses Ferguson as a device in the tragic pattern of the novel. The fears that Ferguson expresses here give us an idea about the events to come, and at the same time keep us in suspense; for, after all, these are only fears expressed by a character and cannot be taken as foretellings by an oracle. Thus, it serves the double function of preparing us for the tragic end as well as of keeping us in suspense about the events to come.

The more important function, however, that Ferguson has to perform in the novel is that of providing juxtaposition to the character of Catherine as well as to the character of Miss Gage. Her point of contrast with Catherine is that while she is rather committed to the conventional outlook on life, the latter is committed to the truth of experience. The contrast that she provides to the character of Miss Gage is that while she remains an orthodox girl, abiding by social taboos and conventions, the latter behaves very unconventionally defying all taboos. Between orthodox Ferguson and unorthodox Gage, Catherine maintains a balance by showing reverence for the social conventions but at the same time defying them if her life situation so requires.

Ferguson is rather inflexible. She would not brook the kind of bold defiance of conventional behaviour Henry and Catherine make by producing a baby before marriage. When she sees Henry in the hospital at Milan after the latter's desertion from the war she cannot even stand the sight of the man because he has got Catherine into trouble and because he has not cared for social conventions:

'I can't stand him,' Ferguson said. 'He's done nothing but ruin you with his sneaking Italian tricks. Americans are worse than Italians.'

'The Scotch are such a moral people,' Catherine said.

'I don't mean that. I mean his Italian sneakiness.'

'Am I sneaky, Fergy?'

'You are. You're worse than sneaky, You're like a snake. A snake with an Italian uniform: with a cape around your neck.'

'I haven't got an Italian uniform now.'

'That's just another example of your sneakiness. You had a love affair all summer and got this girl with child and now I suppose you'll sneak off.'

I smiled at Catherine and she smiled at me.

'We will both sneak off,' she said.

'You are two of the same thing,' Ferguson said. 'I'm ashamed of you, Catherine Barkley. You have no shame and no honour and you're as sneaky as he is.'

'Don't Fergy,' Catherine said and patted her hand. Don't denounce me. You know we like each other.

'Take your hand away,' Ferguson said. Her face was red. 'If you had any shame it would be different. But you're God knows how many months gone with child and you think it's a joke and are all smiles because your seducer's come back. You have no shame and no feelings,' She began to cry . . .

Ferguson's use of Biblical imagery here wherein Catherine becomes an Eve and Henry a snake in the bush, her seducer, shows the conventionality of her thinking. She may not mind even the baby before marriage if Catherine can put on the pretence of feeling ashamed of her unconventional behaviour. But Catherine is neither ashamed nor proud

of what she has done. She has only discovered through experience that Henry is a true of what she has done. She has only discovered through experience that Henry is a true lover, and she has found fulfillment of her life in her love affair with the man. Besides, she never wanted any baby in war and before marriage. She tried her best to avoid it. But when it could not be avoided, she is prepared to face it. As for Ferguson, she, like the priest, cannot rise above the conventions and see for herself the realities of an actual situation. Her commitments are not experience-based; they are other-directed. However, like the priest, despite her virtues of simplicity and sincerity she is a positive character having natural affection for people, particularly friends. If she is being bitter here and rather unreasonable with the lovers, it only reveals the intensity of her love for Catherine whom she cannot bear to see in trouble.

### Miss Gage

Opposed to the orthodox and conventional Ferguson is the character of Miss Gage, who is not inhibited by any taboos or conventions, nor bound by any rules or regulations. Against all rules she cheerfully serves the wounded hero, Frederic Henry, whatever drinks he prefers to have: "Miss Gage brought a pitcher of water and a glass. I drank three glasses and then they left me and I looked out the window a while and went back to sleep." And then,

She opened the armoire and held up the vermouth bottle. It was nearly empty. 'I put the other bottle from under the bed in there too,' she said. 'Why didn't you ask me for a glass?'

'I thought may be you wouldn't let me have it.'

'I'd have had some with you.'

'You're a fine girl.'

'It isn't good for you to drink alone,' she said. 'You mustn't do it.'

And a little later, she actually drinks with Henry. She has no hangover of any taboo. She is one of those girls who were beginning, around the time of World War I, to assert their right of equality with men, even to defy the social conventions. In the midst of orthodox women of the British hospital, particularly in comparison with the strict disciplinarians like Miss Van Campen and the orthodox Ferguson, the appearance of Miss Gage is rather refreshing. Whenever she appears on the scene, she brings ease and joy so rare in the midst of the long War. Note, for instance, the following:

... I rang the bell and in a little while Miss Gage came in.

'What is the matter?'

'I just wanted to talk to you. Don't you think Miss Barkley ought to go off night duty for a while? She looks awfully tired. Why does she stay on so long?'

Miss Gage looked at me.

'I'm a friend of yours,' she said. 'You don't have to talk to me like that.'

'What do you mean?'

'Don't you want a vermouth?'

'All right. Then I have to go.' She got out the bottle from the armoire and brought a glass.

'You take the glass,' I said. 'I'll drink out of the bottle.'

'Here's to you,' said Miss Gage.

Miss Gage's understanding tone, her uninhibited behaviour, and her undemanding friendship make her the female counterpart of Rinaldi. Only she does not get broken by the war and become bitter and cynical the way Rinaldi becomes in the later scenes of war in the novel. She does not show any strain of war, nor any strain of social pressure. She provides a contrast to Ferguson who is just the opposite of Gage. Besides, she helps to reveal through juxtaposition the character of Catherine Barkley. Catherine, too, like Gage, is not dogmatic about social conventions. But while Catherine still shows reverence for the conventions and defies them only when compelled by the conditions of life, Miss Gage is always ready to defy the conventions without having the slightest hesitation in doing that. Her ease and unselfconsciousness with which she drinks with Henry shows how lightly she takes the social taboos.

Miss Gage believes in living happily, in the philosophy of "eat, drink and be merry." But she will help a friend like Henry even if she has to tell a lie for doing so. Note, for instance, the following:

'What did you say to Van Campen? She was furious.'

'We were comparing sensations. I was going to suggest that she had never experienced childbirth--'

'You are a fool,' Gage said. 'She's after your scalp.'

'She never liked you,' Gage said. 'What's it about?'

'She says I've drunk myself into jaundice so as not to go back to the front.'

'Pooh,' said Gage. 'I'll swear you've never taken a drink. Everybody will swear you've never taken a drink.'

And she does try to help him. She packs all the bottles in the rucksack and starts for the door to hand over the rucksack to the porter, but Van Campen arrives and takes the bottles in her possession. Thus, Miss Gage shows total irreverence to the conventional morality of not telling a lie, or of not taking liquor, or of being free with male strangers. She is totally uninhibited by the social taboos and morals. She not only provides a sort of comic relief in between Henry's tiffs with Miss Van Campen, she also provides fresh air in the otherwise suffocating atmosphere of war. She is one of the memorable characters in *A Farewell to Arms*.

### Minor Characters

Besides these major characters – Henry, Catherine, the priest, Helen, Rinaldi and Miss Gage – there are several minor characters in Hemingway's novel, who are functional in the thematic pattern and structural design of the novel. Also, they appear in their own right and remain memorable despite their brief appearances in the novel's action. The captain who does the priest baiting; the English major who "combines his world pessimism and personal cheeriness"; the doctor Valintini who fixes Henry's knee; the aged Count Greffi who plays billiards and discusses with Henry war, politics, and life in general; the barber who shaves Henry in the Milan hospital and suspects him for an officer from the other side; Manera, Passini, Gino, Ettore, Aymo, Bonello, all of whom are involved in the war from the Italian side, with whom the hero has to work at different stages of the war; the sergeants who join Henry's men in the Carporatoo retreat and desert the hero and his men at a crucial moment; the Meyers couple that joins Henry and Catherine at the horse races; the barman at Stresa who gives the deserting hero shelter and later helps the lovers escape into Switzerland; and several more minor characters who appear to widen the novel's canvas and help carry the narrative forward; all of them are so masterly done and in such short space devoted to each one of them that the reader keeps wondering at the superb art of Hemingway in portraying sketches with just a few strokes of pen. As Carlos Baker has aptly observed, "that he could draw a character fully, roundedly, and quickly is proved by a dozen minor portraits.... They are enough to show that the ability to draw character was by no means lacking in the Hemingway of 1929. If he went no deeper into the backgrounds of his displaced persons, he went as deeply as he needed to do for the purpose of his narrative. And the paring-out of the superfluous had always been one of his special addictions." The minor characters are not merely memorable, they are highly functional, locally in a scene or situation as well as generally in plot, contributing to the complex web of thematic pattern and an equally complex structural design of *A Farewell to Arms*. Manera and Passini's conversations with Henry on the subject of war underlining the hero's awareness of the war situation; Doctor Valintini's fixing of the hero's knee in a day as against the advice of the panel of three doctors who would require six months to handle the surgical part of the wound, bringing the difference between experience and knowledge; Count Greffi's encounter with the hero showing the dynamics of growth through the contraries of youth and age; the comic interlude provided by the barber in his encounter with Henry highlighting the atmosphere of suspicion and distrust vitiating even personal human relations; etc., show how carefully Hemingway introduces these characters at different stages of the fast-moving novel's action and gives the novel's action depth and magnitude.

### Background Characters

In a work of art like the novel we always have three categories of characters: one, the foreground or major characters, who remain in the fore front of the novel's action and constitute the main outline of that action; two, the minor characters who make limited appearance in the novel's action and constitute the minor or subsidiary lines of the plot-structure; three, the background characters who do not make any contribution to the novel's thematic or structural design as such, but who do constitute the background to that action. These characters are not really characters in the strict sense of the term. They merely appear as names like people appear in the town or street whose presence give a realistic location to any notable incident happening in their presence. Thus, these characters are not a part of action as such; rather, they are a part of the background to that action. We have scores of such characters thronging the



pages of *A Farewell to Arms* who appear and disappear as the action keeps moving forward. The ones who become memorable as we easily forget them because they are not drawn in any detail, not even as sketches: the several officers in the mess who are not even given names; the several girls in the brothel house for the officers; the numerous soldiers fighting on the front or moving in the retreat; the men of the battle police who que up the officers separated from their units and shoot them; the German soldiers who are seen marching over the bridge or across the river; the wounded soldiers at the field hospital; those who lift Henry and other wounded soldiers; the porters at the hospital and the station; the people in Stresa that Henry and Catherine come across; the security guards in Switzerland; the doctors and nurses in the hospital where Catherine dies after delivering a dead baby; the crowds of people drinking, eating and talking in the cafes and bars Henry has to visit while Catherine is struggling for life in the hospital; all these people and hundreds of others who are mentioned, along with the names of places and countries and the calendar dates, constitute the historical background of the novel without which the novel's action would become not only thin but also highly incredible.

### **Narrative Technique In *A Farewell to Arms***

As is apparent from the very start, *A Farewell to Arms* uses the first person narrative technique, in which the central character himself narrates his own story. It is Frederic Henry, the novel's hero, who tells us about whatever he experienced – saw, felt, thought – during the limited period of the first world war in which he had participated on the Italian-Austrian front as an officer in the Red Cross. All the events he saw during less than two years of his participation, involving quite a few characters, concerning several places in Italy and Switzerland, come to us through the single consciousness of this central character of the novel. There are various advantages as well as disadvantages of using the first-person narrative technique in a novel. Hemingway's merit as a novelist lies in the fact that while making full use of all the advantages he also succeeds in almost eliminating the disadvantages attendant upon the technique he chose to make use of in his *A Farewell to Arms*.

One of the chief advantages of the first-person technique is that the reader responds to the narrative with greater credulousness. He takes the story to be an authentic account because it is being told by someone who saw it all with his own eyes, felt it all with his own heart, thought it all with his own mind. He does not tell us anything he has not seen, anything he has not felt, anything he has not thought himself. In other words, by using this technique the novelist can more easily create the illusion of reality, can more easily arouse the willing suspension of disbelief in the reader's mind. However, the mere adoption of the first-person narrative technique is not enough to make the fiction credible. The novelist also needs to create a narrator who is reliable, whose sincerity in telling the whole truth is beyond doubt. In the case of Browning's speakers in his dramatic monologues, the reader cannot rely upon the speaker's version of events. If he did, the purpose of the poem gets defeated. In Browning's case, his success as an artist lies in making clear to the reader, through the very speech of the narrator, that all that is being rendered does not reveal the truth, and that the truth has to be gathered by disbelieving the narrator, by following the subtle workings of the writer's irony which exposes the speaker and shows the truth behind the apparent speech. Here, in the case of Hemingway's novel, we are convinced by the narrative that the author intends to present the narrator as an honest confessor who tells only what he knows. Of course, since the narrator is also one of the characters, it is always possible that he is prejudiced against a character, or is indulgent in the case of another. In that case, he may not remain equally reliable all along the long narrative of the novel. Hemingway tides it over by making his narrator truly honest in such moments in the story, so much so that the narrator separates himself as a character and tells us about his own attitudes in relation to characters he tends to be prejudiced about or those he tends to be indulgent about. The narrator himself puts a question mark to his objectivity. In other words, he himself shows us where and to what extent he is unreliable and where and to what extent he is reliable. For instance, Frederic Henry's treatment of his fellow officers during the retreat, his reporting on them, the narrator makes clear to us, is not all that honest. He makes a confession that perhaps he was not being fair to them in presenting their case. Also, the novelist never allows us to forget that the narrator is also a character, and that his views of places and people, events and ideas, are his, and not universal truths. The gap between the author and the narrator may not be much, but the fact of the narrator being one of the parties involved in the novel's situations is never obliterated. And this fact keeps the reader conscious of the fact that the narrator is to be judged taking into account the fact of his being one of the parties in the case before us. In the two volumes of it

the author and the narrator are identified with each other, the narrator and the reader are not. No writer worth the name would create such a narrative. That, decidedly, is not the intention of art. Piece of propaganda can make such an attempt; it always does. But never an artistic composition. Its attempt only is to convince the reader that such a story is possible to happen because here is a person to whom it has happened. And here Hemingway has eminently succeeded. The novel's narrative comes through like an historical account of the war that actually happened. The fact that it is based on Hemingway's own experience of that war makes it sound all the more authentic, lending the story an additional weight of credibility and reliability.

Hemingway also overcomes the limitations of the narrator's subjectivity by adopting certain measures that restrict his role or power as narrator. For instance, one of the measures is to make the narrative "a recall" of events that took place several years ago, making thereby the narrator less involved, giving him an advantage of a grown-up hind-sight, to be able to see his past life from the vantage point of his mature outlook. What Frederic felt at the moment an accident took place and how he looks at it a few years later are kept separate, and we are kept at a distance from the happening, never allowed to be involved in the eye-witness account. It is for this very reason that Hemingway places the narrator as well as the reader look at it from the position of a later-day perspective. Some of the other measures that Hemingway adopts to overcome the limitations of the first-person technique are: minimum reliance on description or reporting; greater space to showing through direct dialogue; permitting other characters to present their views directly; making the narrator almost invisible during the dialogue, even though technically it is his reporting. In *A Farewell to Arms*, as well as in other novels of Hemingway, the dialogues or conversations are so designed that the narrator is either only one of the participants or just unintruding camera-eye, showing only what is happening before it without offering any comment or instruction with regard to anyone including himself. Note, for instance, the following:

"What's the matter father? You seem very tired."

"I am tired but I have no right to be."

"It's the heat."

"No. this is only the spring. I feel very low."

"You have the war digust."

"No. But I hate the war."

"I don't enjoy it," I said. He shook his head and looked out of the window.

"You do not mind it. You do not see it. I can tell. I do not see it myself but I feel it a little."

"When I was wounded we were talking about it. Passini was talking."

The priest put down the glass. He was thinking about something else.

"I know them because I am like they are," he said.

"You are different though."

"But really I am like they are."

"The officers don't see anything."

"Some of them do. Some are very delicate and feel worse than any of us."

"They are mostly different."

It goes on for over three pages, as stark as this one, nowhere any intrusion made in the form of any comment, nor any attempt made to show any knowledge beyond what the character is saying. Also, even after the conversation is over, the narrator does not say a word about the priest, his views on war, love, and God. All that comes out is only through the dialogue itself, not through direct comment. We are shown, not told, which is a dramatic method, and Hemingway follows it to the extent it can be possible in a narrative.

As for the descriptions of places and people in *A Farewell to Arms*, only the accounts of events and places are given space in the narrative. In such passages the personality of the narrator as character is not so much involved as an observing eye, or imaginative appreciation, or artistic insight, taking the narrator farther away from the character and taking him instead closer to the author himself. Of course, absolute objectivity is neither possible, nor perhaps desirable, in the narrator or the author. As has been observed by Wayne Booth, one of the soundest scholars on the subject of narrative technique:

Even among characters of equal moral, intellectual or aesthetic worth, all authors inevitably take sides. A given work will be "about" a character or set of characters. It cannot possibly give equal emphasis to all, regardless of what its author believes about the desirability of fairness. Hamlet is not fair to Claudius. No matter how hard G. Wilson Knight labours to convince us that we have misjudged Claudius, and no matter how willing we are to admit that Claudius' story is potentially as interesting as Hamlet's, this is Hamlet's story, and it cannot do justice to the King. Othello is not fair to Cassius; *King Lear* is not just to the Duke of Cornwall; *Madame Bovary* is unfair to almost every one but Emma; and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* positively maligns everyone but Stephen. But who cares? The novelist who chooses to tell this story cannot at the same time tell that story; in centring our interests, sympathy, or affection on one character, he inevitably excludes from our interests, sympathy, or affection for some other characters. Art imitates life in this respect as in so many others; just as in real life I am inevitably unfair to everyone but myself or, at best, my immediately loved ones, so in literature complete impartiality is impossible.

Here, Wayne Booth is quite right in his assertion that the author's partiality to the central character, whose story he has chosen to tell, is inevitable. Obviously, a literary work cannot at one and the same time do justice to the "stories" of several characters involved in the plot of that literary work, for it is not possible to place at par all the points of view represented by those several characters. It is no wonder that in Frederic Henry's story of *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway's narrator is not fair to all others except himself and his beloved, Catherine Barkley. Since it is the hero's point of view that prevails all over the narrative, all other that do not endorse it or are in conflict with it have to be treated unfairly. Even we as readers would not like to have that absolute fairness. We take up to read a literary book precisely because it is the story of one of us, and not because it is an example of the God-like fairness to all. Hence, Frederic is not fair to all those who come in the way of his love for Catherine, including the head nurse, who has large duties to perform than to make things smooth for the lovers; the battle police that are after him because he is a fugitive from war, and those that kill you by one thing or another. We cannot expect him to be fair to others in an absolute sense, nor can we take it as humanly possible. He is fair to them to the extent his kind of person in the given situation in which he is caught up reasonably can be. And that is what literature is all about; it narrates, whatever be the technique it adopts to do that, a human story, involving human thoughts and emotions in all their imperfections, not excluding dreams and aspirations.

At the same time, it is not fair to say that the author or the narrator is unfair to so and so, for all characters in a literary work exist only within the world of the work, and they exist only as they are in that work; they have no existence outside the work, and as such there cannot be any question of the author's being fair or unfair to them. They are what they are within the pages of the book, and they cannot be otherwise. Hence the question is irrelevant, unless, of course, the characters are historically verifiable with definitive history available about them. In fact, even in that case, we cannot consider the fictional characters as historical, because the fiction writer never claims his commitment to "historical" reality. The characters of Shakespeare history plays are never judged on the basis of their existence in history; they are judged solely on the basis of what they are within the pages of Shakespeare's plays. Also, even if we agree with the assertion that no writer can be fair to all characters in the comparative sense that he is more so to the central, we cannot overlook the fact that while some works are more dramatic and less potential or partisan in their presentation, others are less dramatic and more polemical or partisan in narration. Booth himself makes out a distinction between telling and showing; while in telling the teller's point of view dominates to the extent that certain characters are bound to get much less exposure than the others, in showing there being dramatic presentation all characters are equally exposed or shown to the reader to form his own opinion of them each. In the latter case, the point of view of the narrator is not overbearing.

In terms of Booth's distinction, it can be said with certainty that in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* there is much greater showing than telling, and hence much less dominance of the narrator's point of view than in the third-person omniscient author or the purely first-person biographical narrator. As has already been demonstrated, in Hemingway's novel, just as in dramatic compositions, there is heavy reliance on dialogue as the vehicle of narration than on direct telling. Besides, whatever telling is there is largely in the form of factual reporting without intensive or overbearing comments. There are no analyses of characters and situations, no theorizations or philosophisations, no polemics or

contentions. It is simple, solid story-telling, and deliberately nothing more. At the same time, in the absence of authorial intrusions, Hemingway's novel does not suffer from the kind of ambiguity that Booth talks about in the case of certain modern novels such as Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, or *Ulysses*, where the reader is not always sure whether the scene is serious or comic. As Booth has rightly observed, "There is this much truth to the demand for objectivity in the author: signs of the real author's untransformed loves and hates are almost fatal. But clear recognition of this truth cannot lead us to doctrines about techniques, and it should lead us to demand of the author that he eliminate love and hate, and the judgments of the implied author are . . . the very stuff out of which great fiction is made." One of the serious disadvantages of the first person narrative technique is that it limits the scope of social scale to a narrow range of characters as well as incidents. Since the action gets limited to the life of the narrator himself, only those characters and incidents will get included in the plot that are related to his life. Unless a long life span is made the scope of the novel, the number of people entering his life as well as the number of happenings would remain rather small. Novelists like Defoe or Fielding overcame it by making almost the whole life of the narrator as the scope of the novel. *Moll Flanders* is born at the beginning and is nearing her end at the end of the narrative. *A Farewell to Arms*, designed as tragedy, and not an autobiography, cannot avail of that advantage. For achieving the tragic intensity, the events must remain limited to a small space of time and involve only a small number of characters. What comedy achieves in variety and width, tragedy accomplishes in intensity and depth. Hemingway's novel does achieve tragic intensity with the rain and snow suggesting a sense of doom right from the beginning. The inevitable and imminent sense of tragic end looms large in the novel's action all along; it hangs over the events like a dark cloud, which bursts into rain at the end, carrying with it Catherine and the child she gives birth to. Nowhere in the novel this sense of doom is allowed to relent, much less to absent from the reader's mind. Hence, the limitation of limited scale is no disadvantage to the novel; in fact, it is an advantage for achieving its tragic end.

Even within the tragic structure of *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway is able to include a large number of characters by locating the novel's incidents in the public places, rather than the private space of the hero's life. The theme of war itself ensures the involvement of a large number of soldiers and officers. Also, even when it is not war time, Hemingway keeps the action outdoor – in cafés and hospitals, officer's mess and sports complex. Since Hemingway always preferred to focus on action rather than thought, event rather than emotion, his narratives never had to face the problem of missing the social dimension. In fact, his strength lies in showing the tremendous scope there is within the framework of the first-person narrative for social variety as well as tragic intensity. Hence, Hemingway's choice of the technique for his novel proved appropriate for his vision of life he wished to communicate through the ware experience of a single character.

### ***A Farewell to Arms* As Tragedy Of Star-crossed Lovers**

Shakespeare calls Romeo and Juliet as star-crossed lovers. Hemingway, we are told, is said to have called *A Farewell to Arms* his *Romeo and Juliet*. Edmund Wilson was the first to have quoted Hemingway's remark. It was then taken up by Carlos Baker, and elaborated into a case of great similarity between the two tragedies:

The most obvious parallel is that Henry and Catherine, like their Elizabethan prototypes, might be seen as star-crossed lovers. Hemingway might also have been thinking of how rapidly Romeo and Juliet, whose affair has begun as a mere flirtation, pass over into the status of relatively mature lovers. In the third place, he may have meant to imply that his own lovers, caught in the tragic pattern of the war on the Austrian-Italian front, are not far different from the young victims of the Montague-Capulet family feud.

Thus speculating on the possible reasons for Hemingway's remark on his novel being a sort of modern love tragedy like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Baker examines the case seriously and finds several valid grounds which can justify the comparison. Seeking further threads of similarity between the fabrics of the two tragedies separated by a space of over four centuries, the critic makes the following comment.

Neither in *Romeo and Juliet* nor in *A Farewell to Arms* is the catastrophe a direct and logical result of the immoral social situation. Catherine's bodily structure, which precludes a normal delivery for her baby, is an unfortunate biological accident. The death of Shakespeare's lovers is also precipitated by an accident – the detention of the message-bearing friar. The student of aesthetics, recognizing another kind of logic in

art than that of mathematical cause-and-effect, may however see that Catherine's death, like that of Juliet, shows a kind of artistic inevitability. Except by a large indirect, the war does not kill Catherine any more than the Veronese feud that kills Juliet. But in the emotional experience of the novel, Catherine's death is directly associated and interwoven with the whole tragic pattern of fatigue and suffering, loneliness, defeat and doom, of which the war is itself the broad social manifestation. And one might make a similar argument about *Romeo and Juliet*.

Thus making out quite a plausible case between the two tragedies focused on the love between two young lovers—Baker traces close similarities between the two works in terms of the lovers' age, their affair progressing from a mere flirtation to serious commitment, their being caught between two warring forces around them of which their love becomes a casualty, the actual accident, rather than the feud, being the real cause of the tragedy, etc. The parallelism between the two works goes well down to even minor details of individual characters and incidents. After reading Baker one begins to see the significance of Hemingway's seemingly casual remark. One begins to feel convinced that Hemingway might have deliberately designed his novel on a conscious imitation of the tragic pattern in Shakespeare's early tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Making a further exploration in the parallelism between *A Farewell to Arms* and Shakespeare's tragedy Baker goes on to add

In application to Frederic and Catherine, the phrase "star-crossed lovers" needs some qualification: it does not mean that they are the victims of an actual malevolent metaphysical power. All their crises are caused by forces which human beings have set in motion. During Frederic's understandably bitter ruminations—while Catherine lies dying in the Lausanne hospital, fatalistic thoughts do, quite naturally, cross his mind. But he does not, in the end, blame anything called "Fate" for Catherine's death. The pain of her labor reminds him that her pregnancy has been comfortable and apparently normal; the present biological struggle is perhaps a way of evening things up. "So now they got her in the end. You never got away with anything. But he immediately rejects his own inference: that is, that her sufferings in labor are a punishment of sinful pleasure.... The anonymous "they" is nothing but a name for the way things are.

Continuing further into the deeper regions of the tragic pattern, Baker then examines the various statements that the hero makes in the last section of the novel while Catherine is dying in the hospital at Lausanne. It is these statements, finally, which would reveal the specific meaning that Hemingway might have associated with their love being star-crossed. Baker is quite right in not considering Hemingway as a believer in any metaphysical system of governance operating in the natural world where human species live. Rejecting the metaphysical, Baker examines its implications in terms of the natural. His analysis of Henry's ruminations or responses in the crucial last scene is quite convincing.

A little later Frederick Henry bitterly compares the human predicament first to a game and then to a swarm of ants on a log in a campfire. Both are homely and unbookish metaphors such as would naturally occur to any young American male at a comparable time. Living now seems to be a war-like game played "for keeps," where to be tagged out is to die. Here again there is a moral implication in the idea of being caught off base—trying to steal third, say, when the infield situation and the number of outs make it wiser to stay on second. "They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you." One trouble, of course, is that the player rarely has the time enough to learn by long experience; his fatal error may come in the second half of the first inning, which is about as far as Catherine seems likely to go. Even those who survive long enough to learn the rules may be killed through the operation of chance or the accidents of the game. Death may, in short, come "gratuitously" without the slightest reference to "the rules."

It is plainly a gratuitous death which comes to the ants on the burning log in Frederick's remembered campfire. Some immediately die in flame, as Catherine is now dying. Others, like Lieutenant Henry, who has survived a trench mortar explosion, will manage to get away, their bodies permanently scarred, their future course uncertain—except that they will die in the end. Still others, unharmed, will swarm on the still cool end of the log until the fire at last reaches them. If a Hardyean President of the Immortals takes any notice of them, He does little enough for their relief. He is like Frederick Henry pouring water on the burning campfire log—not to save the ants, only to empty a cup.

Catherine's suffering and death prove nothing except that she could not have become pregnant. But she had to become pregnant in order to find out that becoming pregnant was unwise. Death is a penalty for ignorance of "the rules": it is also a fact which has nothing to do with rule or reason. Death is the fire which, in conclusion, burns us all, and it may singe us along the way. Frederick Henry's ruminations simply go to show that if he had Catherine seem star-crossed, it is only because Catherine is biologically double-crossed, Europe is war-crossed, and life is death-crossed.

This reproduction of Baker's analysis of the hero's ruminations on life and death in order to elucidate the meaning of the term "star-crossed," which is too long for a quotation, became necessary because the analysis could not be cut short without losing the very point that is being made in the argument. Baker's contention here is that the meaning of "star-crossed" in Hemingway's tragedy is very different from the one in Shakespeare's. Here it is the star-crossing of a natural world, there it is the star-crossing of a metaphysical world; the two tragic visions are very different, the difference being the vast gap between the Elizabethan England of the Renaissance and the Modern world of the post-Darwinian outfit.

Once we start looking into the differences between *A Farewell to Arms* and *Romeo and Juliet*, several other aspects come to the fore. One of these is the difference of focus in the two works: while Shakespeare's work is centred on the love theme, the feud is an impediment that comes up in the path of love; in Hemingway's work love crops up in the heart of war. In Hemingway, love is accidental, not the main theme. It remains peripheral in the international arena of war; it gets burnt like every thing else does in the vast violence, the engulfing fire, that makes the Hemingway hero not a bit prejudiced about the existence on earth. His special state of mind entirely affected by the war, a cynical and senseless war, has to do with the course of love that, even though it runs under the shadow of war, in essence, is not determined by the war. His prejudiced view of life is forced on him by the sudden end to his love that comes in the very prime of its birth. He had understood all that was involved in the war, although the understanding came the hard way. But he could not comprehend the greater senselessness of the death of love. It came too suddenly compared to war; he had had no time to learn it. Hence the total upsetting of his mind. He feels knocked out in the very first round. Hence it is a greater shock than that of war. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, no such bitterness about life and world is generated by the end of love. There the lovers find fulfillment even in death. Lovers always carry that sense in Shakespeare. If one dies, for whatever reason, the other follows. *Othello* or *Antony and Cleopatra*, or *Romeo and Juliet*, at that level the story, is the same. In Hemingway, no such consumation is sought in love. Death does not fulfil anything; it empties everything. Obviously, the metaphysical world of the Renaissance is replaced here by the naturalistic world. There is no god here, nor any soul that craves for the abode elsewhere. It is only here and now that alone constitutes reality. Nothing beyond.

Also, while Shakespeare's lovers remain in a state of innocence, Hemingway's lovers have already matured before they fall in love. The various comments that Catherine makes on man and life during their conversations, making love amidst the pressures of war, clearly mark the difference from the rather adolescent minds of the lovers in Shakespeare. When Henry quotes Shakespeare's Caesar saying "cowards die many times before their death," or Marvell's lover in "To His Coy Mistress" always hearing on his back the Time's winged chariot, Catherine's comments are critical of both. Her utterances are a witness to her maturity. So are Henry's observations on war whenever his fellow soldiers talk pure patriotism or eerie idealism. One can recall here his remark that men turn Christian in defeat, or how those tasting victory behave with your women, etc. There seems a vast difference in the levels of consciousness that Hemingway's lovers demonstrate and that shown by the innocent lovers of Shakespeare. When an overview is taken of the two works, one feels that while the similarities between them are rather superficial, the differences are decidedly deep. Hemingway's remark here seems as ironic as is his vision of life in his novel.

### The Priest As Code Hero

One of the banes of Hemingway criticism has been the concept of "code hero" that Philip Young, misusing Freud's theory of trauma, devised in his early book on Hemingway. Describing the hero in Hemingway as autobiographical, making the author's war wound at Forsetta in the First World War as the basis of trauma, he concluded that both Hemingway and his hero received in that physical wound also the psychological wound of trauma, and became both

and permanently pathological cases, always needing someone to show them the way to control and compose their shattered nerves. This gave rise to the concept of the "code hero." Since the disease diagnosed was psychological – a matter of nerves only, the remedy was the model health of the sportsman – prize fighter, bullfighter, fisherman – even the priest whose faith permits no disruption of his nervous system. The concept suited so well the critical crank of the modernists who had a life-long quarrel with Hemingway because of his anti-modernist humanism that they found an easy ground to dub him as a "dumb ox," capable, as a writer, of describing only the mindless objects of nature or purely physical activities of the human animals.

The concept of the "code hero" was not only misconceived, it was also consciously and deliberately mischievous. It did the damage to reputation of the writer, who was made to suffer on that count in comparison with his contemporaries like William Faulkner, even Scott Fitzgerald. However, the mischief could not have lasted for ever. It finally got exposed, and thereafter discarded and buried for good. We know now, and for sure, that Hemingway was more modern than the self-styled High Modernists. The latter got exposed by the time of the Second World War. Their fascist sympathies, their anti-semitism, their irrational opposition to science, democracy and humanism – three pillars of modernism – was thoroughly exposed, paving way for the emergence of the genuine modernist, Ernest Hemingway. In the light of his true colour, the "code hero" in Hemingway came to be recognized for what in truth the character is – a primitive human not having had the benefit of developed consciousness. The bullfighter Pedro Romero in *The Sun Also Rises* or the Priest in *A Farewell to Arms* are simple primitive characters, who have remained protected by their blind faith in the tradition that has been handed down to them by their ancestry. They have never been exposed to the challenges of the post-Reformation, post-Renaissance, and the post-Darwinian consciousness which is characteristic of the modern man in the twentieth century. Hemingway created a hero who represented the modern world, represented the modern consciousness, and heroically confronted a godless world of an absurd existence, making Titanic attempts to stand on his own strength in the face of an indifferent world that kills the virtuous and the villainous alike: "you stay around, and you can be sure they will kill you." In his battle of consciousness there is no place for these regressive characters who, when faced with the challenges of modern consciousness, can only withdraw into the simpler world of primitive religion or physical sport. Pedro Romero has no answer to the challenge of Brett Ashley. She spares him only out of pity, finding him so pathetic a case for her modern outlook on love, marriage, and life in general. The priest has no answer to the international war. When confronted by the hero with the realities of war, he feels baffled and decides to return to his village of Abruzzi where there is hunting and people do not make fun of religion. The priest comes out equally pathetically in his encounter with modern love. He cannot comprehend the intricacies of the love between Frederic and Catherine. When asked by Henry if he had ever loved anyone living (as against the non-existent God), he only fumbles to say that he must have loved his mother. Thus, both in love and war, the two challenges the characters face in the novel, the so-called "code hero" is an utter failure, a butt of ridicule, a specimen of the medieval man. Hemingway deliberately, with a design, creates invariably two foils to his hero, his central character. While on the left side is the primitive figure, already outdated for the modern world of Hemingway's fiction, on the right is the pseudo-modernist who has acquired knowledge of the modern world but has lost all strength to withstand its pressure. Thus while one represents the unaware faith, the other represents faithless awareness. The hero alone in Hemingway is so shaped that he carries a modern consciousness but without having lost his capacity to make commitment to lasting values that act as substitute-faith. Hence he combines the strength of both and remains free from their weaknesses. Thus, it is the hero himself who embodies a set of values, who represents a code. It is absurd, therefore, to speak of any code outside of the hero's person, embodied in a minor character, which the hero is supposed to pick up as a sort of *tyro* learning from the *tutor*, that too, from a distance in a studied silence. Nothing can be more pathological than this concept of the "code hero"; it is good that it stands discarded and buried.

Hemingway's merit as an artist lies, not in his rejection of the modern world in favour of the primitive or natural or pastoral; rather, it lies in his honest encounter of life in the modern world, a facing of the challenges without any crutches of any blind faith or mindless tradition. His strength lies in shaping a hero who stands out among his colleagues and contemporaries as a genuine explorer of life and an honest report of what he discovers in his pursuit of truth. He hates to wear any eyeglasses to escape the sun or to get a colourful view of things colourless or dark. He is prepared to burn his finger, or affect his sight, but he would see the world with his naked eye and with empty hands. No opium

would be acceptable in the face of pain or suffering, opium of religion or tradition. One can recall here the hero's rejection of his wife's soothing opiates when he is undergoing the pain of gangrene in the green hills of Africa and is facing an imminent death in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." His strength is his secular, scientific, democratic outlook on life and the values embodied in that outlook. These values constitute a substitute faith to replace the old blind faith of the Catholic religion to which Hemingway and his hero are born, and which remains, if at all, as a technical tag attached to them meaning nothing. What matters is the value that has been derived from an honest exposure to life for coping with the challenge that one faces while making such an honest attempt to face life without irrational beliefs and conventional attitudes. It is for this very strength that Hemingway's fiction still carries an appeal with the readers, whereas his contemporaries like Faulkner and Fitzgerald have started sounding rather dated. This strength of honest facing up to the challenges also gets reflected in Hemingway's prose style. There again, it is the same virtues of simplicity, honesty, and authenticity that shape his prose, which again has not become dated with time; it still sounds as fresh as it did in the 1920's. And it is this very quality of his fiction, of both his matter and manner, subject and style, his honesty to say precisely what he perceives, that makes his stories parables of life. For the individual stories assume the general character of man's struggle in a world not made to suit his desires and purposes, a world with which he finds himself at odds. Such parables never become dated, for such a struggle is what has marked the history of human civilization on earth. It is this very quality of his fiction which has made him immortal like Shakespeare and Homer.

### Books For Further Reading

1. Carlos Barker. *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist*. Princeton University Press, 1952.
2. Sheridan Baker. *Ernest Hemingway: An Introduction and Interpretation*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967.
3. Jay Gellens (ed.). *Twentieth Century Interpretations of A Farewell to Arms*. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.
4. Richard Hovey. *Hemingway: The Inward Terrain*. University of Washington Press, 1968.
5. Frank Seafella. *Hemingway: Essays of Reassessment*. Oxford University Press, 1991.

### Question Bank

1. Write a note on Hemingway's prose style.
2. Discuss Hemingway's narrative technique in *A Farewell to Arms*.
3. What is heroic in the Hemingway's hero? Discuss with special reference to *A Farewell to Arms*.
4. Examine *A Farewell to Arms* as a modern tragedy.
5. Discuss *A Farewell to Arms* as a war novel.
6. Write a note on the character of Catherine Barkley.
7. Examine the role of minor characters in the plot of *A Farewell to Arms*.
8. Are there comic reliefs in the tragedy of *A Farewell to Arms*? Discuss.



## John Steinbeck – The Grapes of Wrath - Unit V

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### Life And Works: John Steinbeck

**Born:** February 27, 1902; 132 Central Avenue, Salinas, CA  
(what is now the reception room of the Steinbeck House)

**Graduated** from Salinas High School—June 1919

**Attended** Stanford University—1919-1925

**Died** in New York, December 20, 1968

#### Family

**Father:** John Ernst Steinbeck, 1863-1935, County Treasurer

**Mother:** Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, 1867-1934, Teacher

**Sisters:** Elizabeth Steinbeck Ainsworth, May 25, 1894 - Oct. 20, 1992  
lived in Pacific Grove, CA

Esther Steinbeck Rodgers, April 14, 1892 - May 9, 1986; lived in Watsonville, CA

Mary Steinbeck Dekker, Jan 9, 1905 - January 23, 1965; buried in family plot

**Wives:** Carol Henning Steinbeck Brown, married 1930 and divorced 1942; lived  
in Carmel Valley, CA, died February 8, 1983, Monterey, CA

Gwyndolyn Conger Steinbeck, married 1943 and divorced 1948 died on December 30, 1975, Colorado

Elaine Anderson Scott Steinbeck, married 1950, lives in New York

**Sons:** Thomas Steinbeck, August 2, 1944

John Steinbeck IV, June 12, 1946 - February 7, 1991 (mother of Thomas and John IV is Gwyndolyn)

#### Awards & Honors

**1935** - Commonwealth Club of California Gold Medal for Best Novel by a Californian (Tortilla Flat)

**1936** - Commonwealth Club of California Gold Medal for Best Novel by a Californian (In Dubious Battle)

**1938** - New York Drama Critics' Circle Award (Of Mice & Men)

**1939** - Member of National Institute of Arts and Letters—American Booksellers' Award

**1940** - Pulitzer Prize Fiction Award (The Grapes of Wrath)

**1946** - King Haakon Liberty Cross (The Moon is Down)

**1948** - Member of American Academy of Arts and Letters

**1962** - Nobel Prize for Literature

**1963** - Honorary Consultant in American Literature to the Library of Congress

**1964** - United States Medal of Freedom

- Trustee of John F. Kennedy Memorial Library

- Annual Paperback of the Year Award

- Press Medal of Freedom

**1966** - Member of the National Arts Council

**1979** - US Postal Service issued a John Steinbeck Commemorative Stamp

**1983** - Steinbeck Center Foundation started in Salinas, CA

**1984** - American Arts Gold Medallion of Steinbeck issued by the US Mint

**1993** - Steinbeck Center Foundation opens interim head quarters

**1997** - National Steinbeck Center groundbreaking

**1998** - National Steinbeck Center Grand Opening (June 27, 1998)

#### Steinbeck & Salinas

Important years in the relationship between Steinbeck and Salinas

**1902:** Born February 27 in the Salinas family home, 132 Central Avenue. Steinbeck wrote his first stories there. As an adult, he visited his Parents and wrote section of various works including "The Red Pony" and "Tortilla Flat"

**1919:** Graduated from Salinas High School, then located on West Alisal Street across from the post office. Began attending Stanford University.

**1925:** Went to New York City, working odd jobs, including manual labor for construction of Madison Square Garden. Could not find a publisher. He returned to California the next year.

**1929:** "Cup of Gold" became his first published novel.

**1930:** Married Carol Henning and moved to the family home in Pacific Grove. His father helped support the struggling couple. They divorced in 1942.

**1932:** "The Pastures of Heaven" became his first published work set in Monterey County: Corral de Tierra.

**1934:** His mother died in the Salinas home. Steinbeck had stayed in the home to take care of her. "The house in Salinas is pretty haunted now. I see things walking at night that it is not good to see," Steinbeck wrote to a friend. A short story set in Monterey County; "The Murder" won an O. Henry Prize.

**1935:** His father died. This was the first year Steinbeck had commercial success. "Tortilla Flat" was an instant hit.

**1936:** "Of Mice and Men," set around Soledad, was produced as a novel and then as a play; also more of "The Red Pony." Steinbeck mentioned labor violence in Salinas in a letter: "There are riots in Salinas and killings in the streets of that dear little town where I was born."

**1937:** "The Long Valley" - a collection of short stories set in the Salinas Valley.

**1938:** "The Grapes of Wrath." - inspired nationwide attention on the living conditions and exploitation of farm workers. From Los Gatos, Steinbeck wrote: "The vilification of me out here from the large landowners and bankers is pretty bad. The latest is a rumor started by them that the Okies hate me and have threatened to kill me for lying about them. I'm frightened at the rolling might of this damned thing, it is completely out of hand; I mean a kind of hysteria about the book is growing that is not healthy."

**1940:** Film version of "The Grapes of Wrath." Steinbeck also received the Pulitzer Prize for the novel.

**1943:** Married Gwyndolyn Conger; divorced in 1948. War correspondent in Europe for the Herald Tribune of New York. First edition of "The Portable Steinbeck" was published. On a visit to Africa, Steinbeck wrote, "The sea was the same blue as in Monterey and it made me very terribly homesick."

**1944:** Movie "Lifeboat" released. Steinbeck bought a house in Monterey but was unwelcome; no one would rent him an office for writing. He was harassed when trying to get fuel and wood from a local wartime rations board.

Steinbeck wrote that his old friends did not want him, partly because of his works and partly because he was so successful: "This isn't my country anymore. And it won't be until I am dead. It makes me very sad." He left Monterey the next year and moved to New York.

**1945:** "Cannery Row," which is set in Monterey.

**1948:** Moved from New York to Pacific Grove. Examined The Californian's files of old newspapers to research "East of Eden," which is set in the Salinas Valley. Wandered around many childhood hangouts in the hills around Salinas and San Juan Grade.

"I am told that a little quiver of terror has crept through old Salinas at the project. I am on no punitive expedition. I just want it straight," he wrote.

Steinbeck wrote that people were already telling untrue but dramatic stories about him: "I have a whole life and adventures in Salinas all of which are new to me. It would be fun to collect them sometime."

Steinbeck said he was being credited with other boys' mischief, including "the throwing of the roast of beef through the glass door at City Hall. I have become a giant kind of half criminal, half ape over there."

Steinbeck also wrote that he was trying to buy the ranch where he had set "The Red Pony," partly because he wanted to write "East of Eden" there. He did not.

"I am on my marathon book, which is called 'Salinas Valley.' It is what I have been practicing to write all of my life. Everything else has been training."

**1949:** Met Elaine Scott at the Pine Inn at Ocean Avenue and Monte Verde in Carmel. They married the next year.

**1951:** "The Log from the Sea of Cortez" published; the work is frequently referred to at the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

**1952:** "East of Eden," his major work about the history of the Salinas Valley, was published.

**1955:** Holiday magazine ran a series by authors about their hometowns. Steinbeck wrote an article, "Always Something to do in Salinas," that included many barbs at his hometown.

**1956:** Steinbeck wrote to an aspiring writer from Salinas: "Don't think for a moment that you will ever be forgiven for being what they call 'different.' You won't! I still have not been forgiven. Only when I am delivered in a pine box will I be considered 'safe.' After I had written the Grapes of Wrath and it had been to a large extent read and sometimes burned, the librarians at the Salinas Public Library, who had known my folks remarked that it was lucky my Parents were dead so that they did not have to suffer this shame."

**1957:** Salinas contemplates naming North Salinas High School after Steinbeck. Steinbeck wrote a now-famous letter to a Californian staff member against the idea, saying he doesn't want school children to curse his name: "If the city of my birth should wish to perpetuate my name clearly but harmlessly, let it name a bowling alley after me or a dog track or even a medium price, low-church brothel; but a school!"

**1960:** Traveled through America with his poodle to write, "Travels with Charley." Took his last view of the Salinas Valley from Fremont Peak.

**1962:** Steinbeck accepts the Nobel Prize in Stockholm. He wrote a college friend, "This prize business is only different from the Lettuce Queen of Salinas in degree."

**1968:** Died December 20 in New York.

**1969:** On March 4, his ashes were buried in the Garden of Memories cemetery.

### **Summary with Critical Comments on Plot, Characterization and Important Issues**

(The discussion has been designed to give to the students a fairly critical and comprehensive understanding of various topics on the novel.)

#### **Chapter 1**

The first three chapters of the Grapes of Wrath create the world of Steinbeck, which we shall live through. It is a world peopled with men of meager resources and possessions, people who are placed on the lower strata of society, people like truck drivers and Tom Joad, the son of a cropper.

Steinbeck's world has a host of animals too, flies, grasshoppers and turtles, all struggling for food, all searching for a safe haven. The struggle to live, the anxiety for survival, fashions all their instincts and actions. In men, the fight is voluntary; in animals involuntary. The animals work on reflexes, the men on reflections and thought.

Nature manifests itself in life, human, animal and vegetable. The plant life is the most mute of all, trying neither to protest against nor counter the power of nature; it simply submits itself to the cruel moods of nature and dies.

Chapter one, in the book, introduces us to the partly red and partly grey countryside known as the 'dust bowl'. The country has suffered recently from a long spell of drought, "The last rains came gently", the author says, "but did not cut the scarred earth. The efforts to plough this land fail. People who had looked at the clouds with eager hope are disappointed, the draught sets in and crops are covered with gloom".

In the first chapter, Steinbeck slowly builds the atmosphere of a doleful land. Beginning with the month of May, when the sharp sun starts to strike the corn, it becomes deadlier in June. "Then it is June, and the sun shines more fiercely. The brown lines on the corn leaves widen and move in on the central ribs. The weeds fray and edge back towards their roots. The air is thick and the sky more pale and every day the earth pales".

There is a premonition of death and annihilation in the atmosphere. The 'Dust Bowl' as the area is referred to, is described, with the word 'dust' repeated more than twenty times in one paragraph, till the word becomes the nomenclature of menace and darkness.

*"In the roads where the teams moved, where the wheels milled the ground and the hooves of the horses beta the ground, the dirt crust broke and the dust formed. Every moving thing lifted the dust into the air, a walking man lifted a thin layer as high as his waist and a wagon lifted the dust as high as the fence tops, and an automobile boiled a cloud behind it. The dust was long in settling back again".*

When the month of June is half gone, the big clouds move up from Texas bringing hope to the people. It should be noted that Steinbeck, while dealing with life on earth, the planet we inhabit, takes into life's fold life as it is manifested in humanity, beasts and plants. Nothing that is born, lives and dies, is out of Steinbeck's ambit.

Change in human life is generally preceded by change in nature. The winds come close at the heels of the clouds and after a little spattering they hurry onto another country. The gentle wind slowly turns wild and violent. "The wind grew stronger", says Steinbeck, and describes in the most poetic language the paradox of beauty and death.

The chapter builds up an atmosphere of darkness and death through images like the "red sun", the 'whimpering wind' and the 'fallen corn'. The evil face of nature becoming darker, it seems bent upon ruining the people of Oklahoma. Men and women huddle together in their houses. They cover their noses, they tightly shut and wedge the doors with cloth to fight the dust but they fail to stop it. The dust settles, despite their best efforts, on the chairs and tables. Even the dishes are covered with dust and people brush the dust from not only their doorsills and windows but also from their shoulders.

The nights are black, so black with dust that the stars cannot be seen from the earth. In the morning the dust hangs like fog and 'the sun is as red and ripe as new blood.'

The atmosphere is one of despondence and disheartened men, women and children look at the ruined crops. They share silently the foreboding of their hearts. They find no words to express them. The children do not yell and play as they would after rain and the women just stand by the men trying to assess their minds. "They come out of their houses to stand beside the men". The children look at men and women and draw figures in the dust with their toes. The horses come to the trough and clear the dust with their muzzles to drink the water.

Everything is amiss; one cannot fathom why. The helplessness in men slowly turns into anger and they become more resistant. To Steinbeck, resistance is the sign of life and the women feel safe when they see the building up of resistance and the will to fight in their men. The women and children know that no misfortune is too hard to face for them if their men are whole.

Reassured by men the women go about their daily chores and the children go to play. Bugged down they are but not beaten and vanquished.

The novel is based on some true historical facts. Colossal dust storms blew in the United States of America, across the common territory called the 'dust bowl', for months, in 1935, blotting out the sun for days at a time. Farms reeled under the stifling storms and farmers struggled to save their crops. But the dust blown by the relentless winds crept into every nook and corner and choked life.

## Chapter 2

We meet Tom Joad in the second chapter. He is on his way home, where his father, Tom Joad his namesake, is a tenant cropper. He is looking for transport and finds a truck standing in front of a little roadside restaurant.

The truck belongs to the Oklahoma City Transport Company and in spite of the 'No Riders' sticker on it; Tom Joad waits to take a chance.

Steinbeck gives through the driver's life, the reader a view of the drudgery of the lives of people who earn their livelihood doing these monotonous jobs.

The waitress in the restaurant, the driver driving the truck, are all part of a system where conditions of work and wages are decided for them, they having no say in them whatsoever.

Tom Joad, a man of thirty is oddly dressed. He is wearing new clothes, beginning from top, his cap, shirt and trousers, even his shoes are new. His cap is stiff and the button on it is intact. In the due course it will be used as a carrying sack and handkerchief alternately. His coat is too big, his trousers too short for him.

The music in the restaurant, the slot machine inside and the flies outside help to create the atmosphere of a cheap way-side hotel where the truck drivers stop for respite. The truck drivers' complaint that the slot machine had been fixed and his conversation with the waitress and Tom later tell us about the thoughts of the people of his class.

The truck driver is a heavy man whose blue eyes are slitted from having squinted always at sharp light. Steinbeck's keen observation of the life lived and relationships made by these men emerges clearly in his description of them. The

truck drivers' relationship with the waitress can be gathered from her asking about his return, and his good bye." well, don't do nothing you don't want me to hear about."

The truck drivers continuous chewing of gum is also described with a cutting and pointed vividness.

When Joad asks him for a lift he sharply rebuffs him, 'didn't he see the 'no riders' sticker on the wind screen', he asks. The first words spoken by Joad reveal something of the man to us; that he hates the rich and that he knows how to handle people and situations. Tom's words have put the truck driver in a fix. He had seen the sticker, he says, but adds, 'sometimes a guy'll be a good guy even if some rich bastard makes him a carry a sticker'. To prove that he is good guy and that he can defy the rich, the truck driver takes Tom on the truck.

The inquisitiveness of the truck driver and his ridicule of Tom show Steinbeck's deep study of human nature, the tendency to malign and run the other down.

Since Tom is the hitchhiker, the truck driver is in a superior position. The driver tries to scrutinize Tom, looking at him, "slitting his eyes and chewing, as though thoughts and impressions were being sorted and arranged by his jaws before they were finally filed away in his brain."

There is a kind of derision in the way the driver addresses Tom. 'you ought to take no walk in new shoes—hot weather'. Tom's simple reply has a touch of pathos in it, "didn't have no other shoes—guy go to wear 'em if he got no others."

The insinuation in the drivers voice becomes sharper with each question. When Tom tells him that his father was a cropper on a forty-acre farm, the driver's reaction is an indication of what is in store for the Joad's. "A forty acre cropper and he ain't been dusted out, and he ain't been tractored out?" He continues to tell him, "croppers going fast now—one cat takes and shoves ten families out—how's your old man holding on?"

In the conversation that follows a kind of defiance can be marked in Tom's tone. He knows that the driver has been trying to be nosy. To neutralize the tension the driver starts telling Tom about the difficult life that truck skimmers lead. To prove his point he relates stories about truck drivers. One truck driver he knew passed time by writing poetry. The guy used to carry a dictionary to look up the meaning of words. All truck drivers do screwy things he tells Joad. The driver has his own dreams too. He shall take up a course in mechanical Engineering in one of the Correspondence schools. He will then be the boss and others will drive for him.

Joad has had enough of the driver by now; he takes two pints of whisky to brace himself up. Tom taking pints of whisky and crushing the glowing end of the cigarette suggests the growing anger in him. Joad now assumes a more aggressive posture at the opponent. The incident reveals the psychology of a man who has felt debased and vitiated. The truck driver had been trying to stick his nose out too long. He must be knocked down. Tom's tone is now offensive.

*"Joad's lips stretched tight over his long teeth for a moment and he licked his lips like a dog—you give me a goin-over when I first got in. I seen you—I ain't keeping quiet about it. Sure I've been in McAlester. Been there four years. Sure these are the clothes they gave me when I came out. I don't give a damn who knows it—that big old nose of yours been stickin' out eight miles ahead of your face. You had that big nose goin over me like a sheep in a vegetable patch.... I know you are wetting your pants to know what I've done. I ain't guy to let you down—Homicide—that's the word—means I killed a guy. Seven years. I sprung in four for keeping my nose clear."*

This is what Joad has turned into in a few moments—this is what most men will do under duress. Violence, verbal or physical is the end result of being pinned down too long. The violence is symbolized in the chapter by the crushing of the grasshopper. Joad chuckles after crushing the grasshopper and letting its bits into the air.

### Chapter 3

Chapter three is a survey of life on a small stretch of a concrete highway lined with broken dried grass, oat beards, seeds and thorns.

The instinct to survive, to climb, to persist and to procreate is the inherent instinct in the animal as well as plant life. The seeds lying on the pavements, hidden under the grass are all waiting to be dispersed—to burst into life and live—however short its duration. On the road, with Tom, a turtle is hurrying to go somewhere.

The turtle's effort to climb the embankment is an allegory of the endeavour of all living beings to cross the hurdles and move ahead.

The turtle faces other dangers too. The sedan that a woman is driving and a truck that almost hits it are sudden

dangers, not anticipated, only accidental. They are like the natural calamities that man faces, unforeseen and all too powerful for him. Wars, famines, droughts, wind and rain, changes of economy and much more, Steinbeck is fully conscious of all these dangers, the culmination of all suffering into death might, render man helpless for a while but never conquer him completely.

The turtle uses all its physical and mental adroitness to save itself.

#### Chapter 4

In the fourth chapter we meet the reverend Jim Casy, the erstwhile pastor who knew the Joad family and all the other Parishioners of the Parish very well. Getting off the truck Joad is walking towards home when he meets Casy, taking respite from the sun.

Tom Joad has walked a long way in the sun and the dust; he tries to soothe himself with the pint. Steinbeck's description of Tom's walk to the house intends to give us a picture of the severity of nature and the vulnerability of man under these conditions. Tom's journey on foot is described thus:

*"He leaned down and untied the laces, slipped off first one shoe and then the other and he worked his damp feet uncomfortably in the hot dry dust until little spurts of it came up between his toes and until the skin on his feet tightened with dryness. He took off his coat and wrapped his shoes in it and slipped the bundle under his arms. And at last he moved up the road, shooting the dust ahead of him. Making a cloud that hung low to the ground behind him. Steinbeck gives a realistic picture not only of the dusty hot road but also of how people of Tom's class came to grips with the hostile conditions. "The corn lay beaten down by the wind and heat and draught and the cups where leaf joined stalk were filled with dust."*

On his way, Joad picks up the turtle and rolls it up with his coat and shoes. Man is as indifferent to the life beneath, weaker than him as nature is to him. Whereas the turtle struggles and fusses helplessly under Tom's arm, the willow tree, scrawny and tattered is slowly withering in the drought and Tom himself hurriedly walks towards the shade for shelter from the oppressive heat. Each is in the grip of something stronger than itself.

It is here under the tree that Tom meets reverend John Casy, leaning against the tree. He is whistling the tune of 'Yes, Sir, That's My Baby' and the movement of his foot is in tune with the whistling.

The meeting between Casy and Tom is of great consequence in the story. It is Casy who first recognizes Tom, staring questionably at him. He asks, "Now ain't you young Tom Joad—o'l Tom's boy." and adds, "you wouldn't remember me, I guess—you wouldn't remember. You were always too busy pulling the girls' pigtails when I gave you the Holy spirit—baptized both of you in the irrigation ditch at once."

Tom takes no time to recognize the preacher. Jim Casy tells Tom that he is no longer a preacher. At one time a zestful preacher, singing Jesus to Glory, he had somehow grown out of it, "ain't got the call no more", he says.

Tom recalls Jim Casy as a good preacher. He remembers how in one of the meetings he had done a whole sermon walking around and yelling his head off. Tom's mother always favoured him but the GrandMa considered him lousy with the spirit.

Tom is comfortable with Casy. He brings out his pint and offers it to him. Casy is now free of all taboos. He doesn't consider drinking a sin anymore. Religious sanction or disapproval has no meaning for him any longer, his newfound renunciation sounds more sensible to him.

Casy has, like Tom, returned to this place after a long time. He went on alone, he tells us and sat alone and figured things out. The spirit though still strong in him is not the same. Many doubts have arisen in his mind. Unsure of the authenticity of what he had been preaching, he has freed himself of all religious dogmatism. Casy is shown, not only accepting the pint of wine but also chewing a bite of tobacco.

Casy's search for truth does not help him resolve the question of right and wrong, of the solemn and the frivolous, of the holy, spiritual and venerated as against the impious and unsanctioned. What is good for humanity becomes to his spirit the sanctioned law. His mood is reflected in his drawing his thoughts on the dust, with a finger or a stick. Recounting his days as a preacher Casy confides how he used to go and lay with a girl immediately after a sermon and warning people of burning in hell if they did but slip from the path of virtue.

Casy has realized the incompatibility of religion with human nature, of the futility of preaching religion when the problems of hunger, drought and poverty stand challenging them.

This is how Casy puts his thoughts across to Tom:

*"I wouldn't take the good of gospel that was just laying there to my hand. I got to be pickin' at it and working at it until I got it all tore down. Here I got the spirit sometimes an' nothin' to preach about. I got the call to lead the people an no place to lead em."*

Casy has torn off his religion to pieces; able to bear the burden of hypocrisy no longer he is trying to figure out life and morality. Though not an iconoclast in the sharper sense, he has realized that what he preached was true neither for him nor for his people. The bodily existence of man is there and it cannot be negated.

"Ironically," says the preacher, "the laying up with a girl, considered to be the work of a devil does not deter people from it, immediately after the preacher has bestowed grace, men would take a girl to the grass and lay her. Similarly the more grace a girl got in her, the quicker she wants to go out in the grass"

Casy's guilt of betraying the confidence of people always gave him a feeling of remorse. It was the pain of deceiving the people, the responsibility of whose souls he had taken, which ultimately forced him to relinquish his revered position.

Casy and Toad are engaged in talk of morality as it is professed and practiced. Joad relates his childhood experience of a Jehovite couple. The husband would preach in the evening and pound on the wife. Joad and Casy take a dig at the people who profess sticking to hard-laid norms of morality and Casy summarizes his own sense of it. "There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't nice, but that's as far as any man got a right to say."

To Casy, the call of a spirit means love and confession. His love of people is sometimes so strong that it can prompt him to hurt somebody. Casy's judgement of people is amoral, small errors; temptations and bad words mean nothing to him. Casy's impatience with a code of conduct, which is not conducive to human happiness, becomes amply clear from the long speeches he makes in this chapter.

Casy is not sure if any good came out of baptizing the children, he calls all these rituals, 'a messing around.' Holy Spirit, to Casy, is all the men and women, we can love. Think he does, but is unable to figure out the ultimate morality. Tom in the meanwhile is intently keeping the turtle secure in his pocket. That's the only gift he has for the kids, he says. Tom also relates that he had served a sentence in McAlester. He tells Casy that the entire thing was an accident. He says, "I killed a guy in a fight. We was drunk at a dance, he got a knife at me an I killed him with a shovel that was laying there. Knocked his head plumb to squash."

Tom did not hear from parents for these four years, he received two cards, one from Ma and the other a Christmas card from GrandMa.

A sense of easy laughter prevails in these early chapters of the book. The naivety of the Oklahoma peasants erupts from their manners and life through out the novel. They are civilized in a different sense, in their humanity, compassion and quest for a life of togetherness in their families as well as their community.

The hardship of the lives of these people is hinted at before we meet the Joad family. The lack of conveniences, proper food and shelter in the countryside as against the proper facilities in prison houses is elaborated in the following speech of Joad. This is what he has to tell Casy about McAlester:

*"You eat regular, an' get clean clothes, and there's place to take a bath. It's pretty nice some ways. Makes it hard not havin' no women." Suddenly he laughed. "They was a guy paroled. A guy as't him why he bust his parole. 'Well, hell', he says. 'They got no conveniences at my old man's place. Got no electric lights, got no shower baths. There ain't no books, an' the food's lousy. Says he come back where they got a few conveniences an' he ate regular. He says it makes him lonesome out therè in the open havin' to think what to do ext. So he stole a car an' come back."*

Casy is keen to look up Tom's father and both of them decide to walk together towards Tom's house.

It is interesting how Steinbeck manages to bring out the subtleties of both these characters in this, their first meeting. Casy never took collections after a meeting, he only took what he needed for a meal, he is a great talker, he is ill-at-ease

with things that make people unhappy and he is scared of the slightest injury. He says, "I hate so much as a cut toe." Tom talks when required, he has no guilt of having killed a man since it was not intentional and that provocation can raise his temper. Both Tom Joad and Jim Casy hate exploitation and physical atrocity. These features of their characters come to light in almost every chapter, culminating in Casy's death and Tom's second murder towards the end. An atmosphere of unbearable dust and heat is built up and a premonition of the approaching devastation can be felt in words like, "raw smell of hot dust", "the plants strove against the sun", "smell of burned dust was in the air", "The menace of dust and heat is felt in the mucous in the nose dried to a crust" and "the eyes watered to keep the eye balls from drying."

Nature, sometimes a friend and at other times an adversary plays a significant role in the lives of these croppers. It stands nurturing as well as annihilating them without any concern for their well being. Tom tells Casy how his father, grandfather and Noah, his elder brother had forcibly taken the house from the family who lived there. Might is right was the law of the land when the Joad family took the house and might is right will be law of the land when the inhabitants of the place will be forced out of their houses to become nomads. The life of the men folk who live in these lands is of mere subsistence; they live their lives without much ado about principles of temperance. They draw their joy from drinking and occasional revelry and they judge each other less sternly. Tom, the elder was a great one, Tom and Jim agree, "For a godless man he was a great one."

Uncle John, old Tom's brother is drawn in sharp contrast to his godless brother. He is the best Jesus jumper in these parts. It is when the sun has waned down a little that Casy and Tom reach close to Tom's house. Joad's eyes are inward, remembering how his father and uncle John had put wire fence around the forty-acre farm where Pa worked. It gave Pa a feeling of ownership. Tom recollects how Pa and uncle John had fixed the wire, which Uncle John had managed from somewhere.

Thefts and encroachments are a part of the lives of these people, not much heed is paid to their moral implications. People pick up things that belong to others without much feeling, either of guilt or shame.

Every man is a character by himself. Uncle John is the one who, when he kills a pig, would eat so much that he would throw up. He would let no one share a morsel till he was through. Tom relates some of the incidents of his childhood to Casy, uncle John's Pa's and Grandpa's but none of them with any malice.

The description of how Uncle John killed and ate a pig and how Pa would be more 'squaking' while killing a chicken than the chicken itself gives a touch of hilarity to the episodes.

At last Jim Casy and Tom Joad reach near the Joad house. Steinbeck describes Tom's shock and apprehension on looking at the house quickly at a brisk pace:

They moved over the curving top of the hill and saw the Joad place before them. And Joad stopped. "It ain't the same," he said. "Looka that house. Somepin's happened. They ain't nobody there" The two stood and stared at the little cluster of buildings.

## Chapter 5

The reader of 'The Grapes of Wrath' must keep in mind the fact that Steinbeck is telling us the story of a people, tenant farmers, large in volume, scattered all over this side of America, who were displaced from their lands and homes by the advent of a new kind of commercialism in the wake of mechanization. The machines revolutionized life in the entire country, in the big cities, in the suburbs as well as in the agricultural sector.

The new owners of the land come to their lands, inspect them, test their soil. They are by the consequence of their ownership forced to evacuate people from their homes. Steinbeck describes the emotional as well as socio-economic repercussions of the people being evacuated from their homes. He describes things objectively, without being partial, he indicts no one but the rise of commercialism for the action of the owners, he also believes that changes are inevitable and men must gear themselves up for these changes to avoid suffering to their fellow human beings.

The feelings of the tenant men as well as their women and children are described veritably, giving the minutest details, at once projecting the entire picture in front of the readers eyes.

*"The tenant men stood beside the cars for a while and then squatted on their hams and found sticks with which to mark the dust."*



He describes the owners without reproach or blame

*"Some of the owner men were kind because they hated what they had to do, and some of them were angry because they hated to be cruel, and some of them were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one were cold. And all of them were caught in something larger than themselves."*

The banks become the masters, the owner men the evacuator. They have their own reasons for taking over the land; it is too poor for the farmers to work on it. The tenants are perplexed, thinking, trying to find ways to retain the land, wishing that the dust settle down and the land regain its fertility. They offer their arguments, which are too feeble: the land they know is poor.

The banks are the monsters who need to eat and breathe as men do. Their survival depends on the interest, which the farmers pay. If the farmers don't get a good crop they don't pay, the bank won't survive. The banks have to look for their survival and so the farmers must go.

For the tenant farmers, the whole thing is an enigma, they try hard to understand the logic of interest and profits but find the whole thing too puzzling.

Repeatedly the bank is labeled as the monster, it has to have profits all the time, it has to grow, it will die if it does not get its subsistence—the subsistence comes from the profits, from the interest it earns from the farmers to whom it lends money.

The tenant system won't work no more. One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve or fourteen families.

The miseries of the tenant farmers are multiplying. Their poverty is described by the squatter-men themselves. Their kids are hungry all the time. They have no clothes. They would feel shamed of going to the meeting if the neighbours kids were also not in the same tattered clothes.

What will happen to them if they leave? Where shall they go? What shall they eat? These are the questions that alarm and worry them.

This is the only land they have known; they are strangers to the rest of the country. They have their roots in this land, a history of their own.

*"And now the squatting men stood up angrily. GrandPa took up the land, and he had to kill the Indians and drive them away. And Pa was born here, and he killed weeds and snakes. Then a bad year came and he had to borrow a little money. An' we was born here. There in the door— our children born here. And Pa had to borrow money. The bank owned the land then, but we stayed and we got I little bit of what we raised."*

The owners however cannot be held responsible, they have no power in their hands, it's not them, it's the bank.

Steinbeck's own feeling about the tenants claim to the ownership of the land is revealed at many places. "We measured the land", the tenant men say, "we broke it, we were born on it and we got killed on it" Even if the land was not good it was theirs, they wanted to work on it and live on whatever little they got out of it. Ownership does not come with a mere piece of paper; it comes by birth, by death and above all by the love of the land.

Hunger and helplessness lead to anger, anger to rebellion. The tenants want to survive. They want to fight the new enemy, the bank, just as they had fought the Indians and the snakes. But the power that they have to fight is indomitable; Banks are supported by the Sheriffs and the troops. The tenants don't have the power to defy and fight them they will have to go. The owners don't want the tenants to starve. Why don't they go to the West, to California? There is work there and it never gets cold.

Steinbeck describes the family life of these people assigning them roles as they were played in their daily lives, to men the authority to decide, of the responsibility that lies on their shoulders, to women of looking after the needs of the family, watching men's moods and children's requirements.

The 'snob nosed monsters', the tractors invade the land in no time. They are beyond the access of man, the tenants cannot approach them like they cannot approach the banks. Possessing incredible strength, the tractors move through fences and dooryards, ignoring the hills and gulches, they raise everything to ground. Even the driver does not look human, gloved, goggled and with a rubber mask over his nose and mouth, he becomes a "part of the monster, a robot in the seat." The drivers mind becomes impervious to any human thought, in his goggles and mask, he only looks ahead working as a part of the tractor, the machine. "If the young plant withered in drought or drowned in a flood of rain, it was no more to the driver than the tractor. — He loved the land no more than the bank loved the land."

The tractors cut the earth with their blades, the tractor has no heart in cutting the land, it was just like surgery. It is not like ploughing a field with hands, With feeling and hope.

Steinbeck's repugnance or mechanical farming comes out in paragraph like the following:

*"Twelve curved iron penes erected in the foundry, orgasms set by gears, raping methodically, raping without passion. The driver sat in his iron seat and he was proud of the straight lines he did not will, proud of the tractor he did not own or love, proud of the power he could not control. And when the crop grew and was harvested, no man had crumbled a hot clod in his fingers and let the earth sift past his fingertips. No am had touched the seed, or lusted for the growth. Men ate what they had not raised, had no connection with the bread. The land bore under iron, ad under iron gradually died; for it was not loved or hated, it had no prayers or curses."*

The personal life of the driver is monotonous; he eats without relish like he works without relish. When asked by one of the tenants, why he did this job, which made him work against his own people, demolish their houses and drive them away from their lands. He was one of them. Joe Davis' boy is not expected to harm his own people. But Joe Davis' son has his own compulsions, he could not tolerate the creeping hunger for dinner, he had a wife and kids, he had to fend for them. This job gave him steady three dollars a day, it kept him and his family from hunger and want.

Joe Davis' son knows better than the tenant farmers. Times have changed he knows and the cropland is not for little guys like them. They should also try to get three dollars a day somewhere that was the only way.

The driver has been instructed to damage, cave in the houses where people have obstinately stayed on. He is likely to get two dollars extra for this job. He is keen to earn some extra money to buy small little things for the kids.

The farmer can do nothing about it. If the driver is killed by the Squatters, another will come and take his place. Their houses will be demolished in front of their own eyes if they don't move. They cannot fight the enemy, since it is not one man but the bank. The orders of the bank are "Make profit or be sacked"

But the thing that is threatening them has to be understood, they have to fight it out.

The chapter ends with the demolition of a house with the owners looking on helplessly. The house is hit by the tractor, the foundations tremble, the walls swerve and fall side-ways. The cluster of houses lies deserted, with inhabitants left roofless, embarking on a new life—without destination and purpose.

## Chapter 6

It is on this scene that reverend Casy and Tom descend. The Joad house is mashed in one corner, it stands slumped at an angle, its foundations reshaken and the fences gone. A family of mice has taken the place of the Joad family. Joad enters the tool room first and exclaims in dismay, "There ain't nothing left, there ain't nothing left."

Neither of the men have inkling of what had happened; both Jim and Joad had been away for a long time. Joad seems to be uttering a sort of soliloquy—thoughts that abound in his mind coming in a row. Though Casy is with him, he seems to be talking to himself, reminiscing about the things in the house. The inanimate things like tools, the trough and the well come to life in the words of Tom.

Tom is unable to figure out. He looks at things and muses. Are all of them dead? Is Ma dead, have all of them gone somewhere? Tom recollects each and everything in the house clearly. The long separation of four years has not even clouded his memory. Incident's come flocking to Tom's mind.

*"Joad stopped at the step, a twelve by twelve timber. Doorstep's here, he said. But the're gone or Ma's dead. He pointed to the low gate across the front door. If Ma was anywhere about, that gate be shut and hooked. That's one thing she always done—seen that gate was shut. His eyes were warm. Ever since he pig got in over Jacobs an' et the baby. Milly Jacobs was jus' out in the barn. She came in while the pig was still eatin it. Well Milly Jacobs was in the family way, an she went ravin. Never did get over it. Touched ever since. But Ma took a lesson from it. She never left that pig gate open' less she was in the house herself."*

Tom looks at Ma's shoes and remembers how much she liked them. Casy tries to help Tom to find a clue to what could have conspired. Casy, no longer able to believe it as a curse of Gods, is bewildered at what could have caused this wreckage. He has his misgivings but cannot put his finger at anything. Casy and Joad through their conversation and

comments throw light on the lives of people as they lived it. Since it is the story of the Joads, which depicts the story of the migrating people, it should be read only as representing the saga of the whole people whose life is disrupted. Tom gets thinking, how come nobody stole the lumber from their house. The house seems to have been deserted for three to four months and all the plants on the barn shed are intact.

The anecdotes of the earlier days help us form a picture of the people, their moral values. Tom is surprised to see the planks safe on the barn roof and recollects how Albert Rance had once taken his family to Oklahoma for Christmas. *"I don't know. Seems like maybe there ain't any neighbours. If there was, would all them nice plunks be here? Why, Jesus Christ! Albert Rance took hi family, kids an dogs an' all, into Oklahoma city one Christmas. They were gonna visit with Alberts cousin. Well, folks around here thought Albert moved away without sayin' nothin'—figgered maybe he got debts or some woman squarin' of at him. When Albert came back a week later there wasn't a thing lef' in his house—stove was gone, beds was gone, winds frames was gone, an' eight feet of plankin was gone off the south side of the house so you could look right trough her. He came drivin home just as Muley Graves was goin' away with the doors an' the well pump. Took Albert two weeks drivin aroun' the neighbors' fore he got his stuff back."*

Casy scratched his shoes luxuriously. "Didn't nobody give him an argument? All of em jus' give the stuff up?"

*" Sure. They wasn't stealin it. They thought he lef' it, an they jus took it. He got all of it back - all but a soul pilla, velvet with a pitcher of an injun on it. Albert claimed GramPa got it. Claimed GramPa got Injun blood that's why he wants that pitcher. Well GramPa, did get her, but he didn't give a damn about the pitcher on it. He jus liked her. Used to pack her aroun' an' he'd put her wherever he was gonna sit. He never would give her back to Albert. Says, If Albert wants this pilla so bad, let him com and get her. But he never come shootin cause I'll blow his goddamn stinkin head off if he comes messin' around my pilla"*

These anecdotes and curious little incidents serve the dual purpose of entertaining as well as equipping the reader with the traits of the characters, individually as well as a group. They also prepare him for what is to come about in the later chapters. That the people living in these surroundings did not have much ego about the loss of their dignity in small matters and some of them who asserted themselves aggressively were forgotten without much clamour. The law of this land is rather lax treating small offenders leniently. Enmities, in Steinbeck, are not at a one to one level, battles are fought against nature and machines, pitched battles are fought but the mighty machines and institutes survive, the poorer and dispossessed are lost forever.

The characters of Grandpa and Tom are revealed in the conversation that takes place between Casy and Tom. Tom wasn't mean but he was tough, says Casy, and Grandpa was a tough old bastard.

The background, so important for the development of the story, is never forgotten by the writer. The dusty air is present throughout and so is the cotton crop. The birds, dogs and cats cross intermittently to keep the landscape filled with life. The small creatures are not forgotten, nor is the turtle that Tom has kept in his pocket so far. Tom lets him of wandering where he would go but little turtles are always going some place. They always seem to want to get there, observes Tom. In the dust and the heat they meet Muley Graves, whose clothes and appearance betray the desolate condition he lives in. Muley Graves relates how the Joads had moved out. He tells Tom that his father was very concerned about informing Tom that they were moving. When asked to write a letter to Tom, he simply told Muley that he would see about it. He entrusted this job to Muley.

Two things emerge from the meeting between Muley and the two men. Steinbeck uses repetition of words and sentences to bring out and confirm the personality of character. We remember Tom saying that Pa knew how to write but always avoided it. This is established again by Pa's evading to write a letter and leaving a message instead.

Muley Graves has been around. He did not budge- and around he will be. "I'll be around till hell freezes, says Muley. "there ain't nobody can run a guy name of Graves outa this country"

Muley also relates how the Joad house has been tractored, how his Grandpa had resisted, blowin' the headlights of the tractor with his rifle.

"Grandpa didn't want to kill the driver so the tractor came and shook the house like a dog shakes a cat. It took somethin outa Tom. Kinda got into im, He ain't been the same ever".

All of them are now at uncle John's chopping cotton. All of them even the kids and Grandpa have been chopping cotton to get money together so that they can move to the west.

Tom comes to know that John had also been served a notice and that all of them had to leave that place in about two weeks. There is frequent use of abusive language, words like 'son-a-bitches' occur throughout. Muley tells them how the dust has been ruining everything. The crops were so bad that a man didn't have enough crop to plug up an ants ass". The scarcity of food can be well imagined.

Muley's profile comes alive, sharp and clear from his meeting with Tom and Casy, obstinate and defiant to the people who show their authority, he dares the new owners to move him.

Those people were not so easy to push off and Tom is surprised that his people moved without putting up any resistance. The conversation between Tom and Muley throws light on the characters of Muley, Grandpa, Grandma Ma and Pa. It should be read carefully to understand that sobriety and decorum, restraint and steadiness are not of much consequence in their appraisal of a character. Neither are they important for Steinbeck.

*"Well you know I ain't a fool. I know this land ain't much good. Never was much good 'cept for grazin'. Never should a broke her up. An' now she's cottoned damn near to death. If on'y they didn't tell me I got to get off, why I'd prob'y be in California right now a-eatin' grapes an' a-pickin' a orange when I wanted. But then sons-a-bitches says I got to get off—an', Jesus Christ, a man can't, when he's tol' to!"*

*Sure:, said Joad. "I wonder Pa went so easy. I wonder Grandpa didn't kill nobody. Nobody never tol' GramPa where to put his feet. An' Ma ain't nobody you can push aroun' neither. I seen her bet the hell out of a tin peddler with a live chicken one time 'cause he gave her an argument. She had the chicken in one han', an' the ax in the other, about to cut its head off. She aimed to go for that peddler with the ax, but she forgot which han was which, an' she tkles after him with the chicken. Couldn't even eat that chicken was she was done. They wasn't nothing but a pair of legs in her han'. GramPa threwed his hip out a joint laughin'. How'd my folks go so easy?"*

*"Well, the guy that came aroun' talked nice as pie. "You got to get off. It ain't my fault." I's the Shawnee Lan' an' Cattle Company. I jus' got orders.' 'Who's the Shawnee Lan an Cattle Company? It ain't nobody. It's a company.' Got a fella crazy. There was nobody you could lay for. Lot a the folks jus' got tired of lookin' for somepin to be mad at— but not me. I'm mad at all of it. I'm stayin'"*

Muley's family, his wife and kids moved to California, he was the only one who refused to go. He didn't want to break the family but something just wouldn't let him.

Muley feels ashamed of the life he has been living and the food he has been eating to survive. He ate frogs and squirrels and prairie dogs sometimes. Muley has in his sack two cottontails and a jackrabbit.

It is without a moment's hitch that Casy and Tom settle down to make the meat ready to eat. Steinbeck's elaborate descriptions of the felicity with which people handle their jobs is remarkable for its vividness. The movement and operation of the act are shown exactly as they would be.

Scenes of hunger and consumption of food are important since man's first need for survival is food.

Muley, after a slight hesitation, is generous with what he has, the meat as well as water. He is aware of the degradation in which he is living, he is also lonely. With not a single soul to talk to he becomes conscious of what others think of him. "You fellas' think I'm touched the way I live", but is immediately reassured by Joad, "If you're touched, I wish everybody was touched?"

Muley is still nursing the hope that people who belong there may come back. He is looking after things so that when all the folks come back it'll be all right. The fact that people had to get off the place they had lived in for so many years has affected them mentally. Casy understands the pain and difficulty of compromising with the change.

*"Fella gets use to a place, it's hard to go— Fella gets use to a way a thinking. It's hard to leave. I ain't a preacher no more, but all the time I find I'm praying."*

Muley recalls his early experiences to Casy and Tom. Muley has the story of his first sexual experience to tell. Characters in Steinbeck's novels get drawn towards places where 'stuff happened'. Deaths are remembered and the loved ones become a part of the earth they lie buried in. Muley remembers, "Pa got gored to death by a bull. And

his blood is right in that groun right now—An' I put my han' on that groun where my own Pa's blood is part of it. Muley is all the time afraid that people don't understand him. But Casy and Tom do.

The bond of blood and earth is strong in Steinbeck's characters. Muley remembers vividly not only his father's death but also the birth of his son Joe. The place where Joe was born and the place where his father died are equally sanctimonious to him.

Muley's utter loneliness has made him hungry for human talk and he shares all his thoughts with Casy and Tom.

While Muley likes to talk of his loneliness, Tom relates how he killed Herle. He did not mean to kill him just as Muley does not mean to kill the men who force people out of their houses.

Tom is on parole and is warned by Casy not to leave the state as it could land him in problems. Tom and Casy relate how they had spent their years, Tom in McAlester and Casy wandering all by himself, trying to figure out the truth. Tom relates how a man in the jail, who was serving a term talked of the fallibility of judiciary. Casy wants to preach but in a different context—not the religious scriptures but love to the people who are homeless and need to be talked to.

Muley is still being haunted by the Sheriff and his men but has evaded them so far.

While the three of them are talking, they see the vigilance cars approaching; they however manage to dodge them. While Muley and Joad talk of their past, Casy thinks of the future. The three of them are puzzled but the things that puzzle them are different.

## Chapter 7

'The Grapes of Wrath' depicts two different worlds, diametrically opposite and playing a tug of war. The commercial world, the money making men striking deals and counting their profit is represented by the car dealers, the owners of the land, the absent landlords, the bank and the middle men of all sorts; while the earlier chapters gave a close look at the life of the poor tenant farmers stung with pain, dispossessed of their homes and land, this chapter gives us a glimpse of the commercial world.

Steinbeck describes a typical old car dealers yard and office. The car dealers are spread all over, in towns, in fields and vacant plots. They have the neon signs, blazing and bright, to attract the customers

*"Used cars, Good Used Cars. Cheap transportation, three trailers. '27 Ford, clean. Checked Cars, guaranteed cars. Free radio. Cars with 100 gallons of gas free. Come in and look. Used cars. No overhead."*

The car dealers anxious wait for their customers, their ways of trapping them, soliciting them at one time, insulting them at other times, shows Steinbeck's close study of not only the life of the vagrant cotton pickers but also of the new world of competition, of selling and marketing. He describes these set ups:

*" Owners with rolled-up sleeves. Salesmen, neat, deadly, small intent eyes, watching for weaknesses "*

The rule of this world is the survival of the fittest and the buyers being in no position to choose, succumb to the demands of the owners.

The volume of business is large, the variety of cars big. The migrants have to buy a vehicle, they have to move to the west, to California.

Selling has to be aggressive, they have to make people buy, they need to sell to survive, to make profits. The salesmen are given these directions by the owners.

*" Get em' under obligation. make em' take up you time. Don't let them forget they're takin' your time. People are nice mostly. They hate to put you out. make em' put you out, an' then sock it to em' "*

The utter desperation of the owners is seen in their hurry to sell, sell junk, or whatever, with parts changed, parts repaired. Cheating and lies are fair in business. There are no principles of selling their stuff. Profits must be made.

Steinbeck as you shall see, uses the technique of repetition, repetition to hammer and fix a point in the reader's mind.

The activity in the car yard is mind-boggling. There is no time to waste. People must be somehow trapped. The owners feel disgusted with people who are hard buyers. Jalopies are the only answer for a good sale and so owners want more jalopies.

*" Get jalopies. I can sell em' fast as I get em'. Nothing over two hundred fifty. Jim, corral that old bastard on*

*the sidewalk. Don't know his as from a hole in the ground. Try him on that Apperson. Say, where is that Apperson? Sold? If we don't get some jalopies we got nothing to sell."*

There are piles of cars, rusty, noisy and busted. All this pile has to be sold—cars, which have been in the yard for a long time, must be sold on priority- they must be sold at all costs.

The man who is not a prospective buyer must be thrown out. Only those who are likely to buy should be attended to. That is the principle of selling. Whatever the deals, people have to buy a car. They are not familiar with the world; bewildered they come because they need to buy a car.

The owner's one point programme is selling. They must get the cars they can sell. This is what is conveyed to the reader by words like, "I wish't I had five hundred jalopies", and "God, if I could only get a hundred jalopies. I don't care if they run or not" and "All right Joe. You soft'n them up and shoot em' in here. I'll deal em' or I'll kill em'. Don't send in the leumns. I want deals"

The owners use all the tools at hand. Insulting and provoking the migrants as well as wooing them.

Every deal is good for the owner, never good for the buyer. If they barter their stuff, their animals, their tools, their clothes, they get nothing for it. A mule that a customer offers will only be used for dog feed, it has no value for the owner, not even five-dollar worth is it.

The bargains are always made to the owners advantage. If the buyers come with a complaint, they are shown the door. They are coerced and warned till they surrender.

*"Sure we sold it. Guarantee? We guaranteed it to e automobile. We didn't guarantee to wet nurse it. Now listen here, you—you bought a car, an' now you're squakin'. I don't give a damn if you don't make payments. We ain't got your paper. We turn that over to the finance company. They'll get fter you not us. We don't hold no vaper. Yeah. Well you jus' get tough and I'll call a cop. No we did not switch the tires. Run'im outa here, Joe. He bought a car an' now he ain't satisfied. How'd you think if I bought a teak an' et half an' try to bring it back? We're runnin' a business, not a charity ward. Can ya imagine that guy, Joe? Say—looka ther! Got a Elk's tooth! Run over there. Let'em glance over that 36 Pontiac, Yeah."*

The owner pushes, cajoles, is tough or soft as per the need of the time. The growing lust for money is subtly brought out in the owner's growing greed for jalopies. Whereas, he had wished only for a hundred jalopies in the beginning of the chapter, it rises to a thousand jalopies by the end of the chapter.

The chapter is important since it prepares the reader for what is to happen later.

## Chapter 8

To Steinbeck human life is incomplete without nature, without air, dust, clouds, birds, coyotes, rabbits, turtles, mules and bulls. It is early dawn when Casy and Tom start for uncle John's house. The sky greys among the stars and the pale late quarter moon is described as insubstantial and thin. The two men walk together in silence. Smelling the dust their feet kick into the air. Tom's familiarity and fondness for the place is evident in his conversation with Casy." I could shut my eyes and walk there—Hell man, I was born right aroun' in here. I rom' aroun' here when I was a kid." He remembers how his father had once hung a dead coyote on a tree there.

Tom and Casy talk about Muley for a while. Muley is getting serewy, he is nuts, says Tom. They discuss how Muley has become crazy living alone. Casy prophesizes that meaner things are likely to happen. They wonder if he would ever join them. Joad feels that he is become vary of human presence, grown cared of human presence.

Uncle John has a humble dwelling with just one room and a cooking corner and a little barn. "Must be a mob there now,' says, Tom, with all the people around.

Uncle John is introduced to us before we reach his house. He is like Muley, a kind of crazy man, slightly worse, found drunk at Shawnee, visiting a widow twenty miles away.

Uncle John was held responsible for the death of his wife. "Pa tells about it, he had a young wife. Married four months. She was in family way, too, an' one night she gets a pain in her stomach, an she says, "You better go for the doctor". Uncle John thought it was something not so serious and therefore did not call the doctor. Next morning she

was out of her head and she died. Uncle John an easygoing fellow took it to heart, took it as a sin. He went around crazy for two years, blank and praying. He recovered a little after two years but was never the same again. Everybody thought he would not live for long, but he is still alive, older than Pa he has survived. Only he has grown meaner day-by-day, meaner than Grand Pa. Every time a kid fell after his wife's death he brought along a doctor, holding himself responsible for the death of his wife, he became wild with anxiety. Uncle John is a good farmer and keeps his land nice.

His guilt troubled him all the time. He bought packs of gum and hid them under children's pillows. The children thought he was Jesus Christ Almighty and there was not a child who was not crazy about him.

By the time they are near Uncle John's house the eastern sky has gained a little colour, awed by the beauty of the coming morning, Tom recalls how he used to walk around by himself when he was a child.

As Joad and Casy draw near Uncle John's house, Joad recognizes the tank, the house and the barn. Thoughts come pouring into his mind and raise many questions, "I wonder if all the folks are there" and "I wonder if Ma-". Questions which show the fear lurking in Tom's mind.

A truck stands in the middle of the yard and it occurs to Tom that they were preparing to leave. The truck that is being loaded has been modified as per their needs. Tom is so excited that he wants to give them a surprise. Tom suggests that they creep into the house stealthily and quietly and both of them come upon the yard.

Tom sees his Pa working on the Hudson Super-Six sedan whose top has been ripped into two with a cold chisel. Old Tom stood in the truck bed, hailing on the top rails of the truck sides. With his old grizzled face bent low he is working intently. Tom stood near the truck, looked at his graying, ageing father and called him.

This Chapter is important to the theme of the novel in two ways. It brings to the reader Steinbeck's view of family life. It introduces us to all the members of the Joad family and it from here that their migrant life really begins.

Tom's meeting with each member evokes a different feeling, his relationship with each one of them is one of love and affection, yet it has its own intensity and shade with each.

Pa is the first one to meet Tom and Steinbeck succeeds in bringing to us not only a picture of the filial love in Tom but also the pathos of a man, grown old, weaker in strength and long missing his son. Steinbeck's style brings out the feelings of both Tom and his father. Vividly masking each emotion, touching the readers' heart.

Joad looked up at the ageing graying man on the truck. He wet his thick lips with his tongue and he said softly, "Pa." "What do you want?" old Tom mumbled around his mouthful of nails—he looked over the truck side at Tom. Looked resentful at being interrupted. And then his chin drone forward and his eyes looked at Tom's face and then gradually his brain became aware of what he saw—he said wonderingly, as though he told himself the fact. "It's Tommy—". And then, still informing himself, "It's Tommy come again"

And then suddenly a fear comes into his eyes and he asks Tommy "You ain't busted out? You ain't got to hide". He is relieved to learn that Tom had been paroled and that he has his papers to prove that he was free.

Ma's fears that she may never see Tom again are also described with great psychological understanding. She has fears that she may never be able to see Tom, she doesn't want to leave for California lest Tom fails to find them, her deep sorrow, which makes her grieve as if somebody was dead. The depth of her feelings for Tom can be felt throughout the novel. Even the other members of the family feel it and express it in all that they say.

The emotion, the feeling of the moment is summed up briefly by Casy. Its brevity conveys much more than many words would. Casy says, "Glad to be here. It is a thing to see when a boy comes home. It is a thing to see."

This part of the novel reveals a whole gamut of feelings and a system in full view. Ma's welcome of the two reveals, to a great extent, not only her character but also how families welcomed the strangers to a meal and did not mind sharing whatever little they had. The family structure and the hierarchy are at once revealed. The father is the breadwinner but the mother is the 'citadel of the family'. It would be more in place to discuss certain parts of the chapter while dealing with Steinbeck's delineation of characters, yet a look at the following lines is imperative to understand the mark that suffering has left on Ma, especially the absence of Tom.

"Her fall face was not soft; it was controlled kindly. Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and suffering like steps into a night calm and a superhuman understanding."

Her position is strong and cannot be taken lightly. She does not show her sorrow or anxiety for fear of making her family unhappy and tries to build laughter and joy out of inadequate happiness. She knew that if she wavered the family would fall.

Ma's realization that Tom had come home is also worked out by a simple dexterity by Steinbeck. He also doesn't forget to voice the fear that everybody from Pa onwards would have about Tom, the fear that he may not have busted jail. The full realization of Tom's return dawns on Ma.

*"She looked up pleasantly from the frying pan. And then her hand sank slowly to her side and the fork clattered to the wooden floor. Her eyes opened wide and the pupils dilated. She breathed heavily threw her open mouth. She closed her eyes. " Thank God, " she said, " Oh, Thank God!" And suddenly her face was worried, " Tommy, you ain't wanted? You didn't bust loose?"*

*And then, " she moved towards him lithely, soundlessly in her bare feet, and her face was full of wonder. Her small hand felt his arm, felt the soundness of his muscles. And then her fingers went up to his cheek as a blind man's fingers might. And her joy was nearly like sorrow. Tom pulled his under lip between his teeth and bit it. Her eyes went wonderingly to his bitten lip, and she saw the little line of blood against his teeth and the trickle of blood down his lip. Then she knew and her control came back, and her hand dropped. Her breath came out explosively. " Well!", she cried, " We come mighty near to goin' without ya. An' we was wanderin' how in the world you could ever find us."*

Pa's amused at having befooled her. He is happy to see Tom, his teasing Ma and remembering how Grandpa had whacked himself so hard that he had thrown his hip out. He recounts this incident and then recalls how Grandpa had once got so mad at Al that he went to get his gun. This was when Al had said in zest that he should go and become a priest. Grandpa was always a devil Tom recalls, he is told that both Grandpa and Grandma had grown old and since they did not get proper sleep at night, they slept during the day sometimes. Right then, Tom is told, they were sleeping in the barn.

Steinbeck's suggestion of what a term in jail can do to a person, how it can damage him psychologically comes out in Ma's fear that Tom may have been 'poisoned mad', he may have been treated so harshly that he may have started hating people. She wants to be assured that they didn't hurt him like some other prisoners are. But she is told that Tom was spared all this because he never indulged in any stuff that could provoke them.

The atrocities that the police, the sheriff and the cops can exercise on people are suggested in words like, " hunt down like a coyote till they are jus kinda stunned, walking aroun' like they were half asleep."

Ma fears Tom's boldness, she fears that he may be convicted again. She also knows the enormity of what is happening since people are talking of hundreds and thousands of people being shoved out.

Grandpa is a funny figure, larger than life, physically disfigured, fumbling at his fly for buttons, talking in an ancient cracking bleat. He comes praising God for victory, with his eyes full of childlike excitement.

Grandma is more than a match to her husband. Holding her own, she has beaten Grandpa at his own game and got the better of him in fights. The relationship between the two is described with a sense of humour, peculiar with a tinge of rustic laughter. *"Once after a meeting while she was still speaking in tongues, she fired both barrels of a shot gun at her husband, ripping one of his buttocks nearly off, and after that he admired her and did not try to torture her as children torture bugs."*

Noah is the eldest son of the Joads, Tom is the second, Al the third and Winfield is the youngest. The older daughter is Rose of Sharon, the younger Ruthie. Rose of Sharon has married Connie, a young man of nineteen whom Tom meets now for the first time since the marriage took place when he was at McAlester.

All the characters in ' The Grapes of Wrath' are drawn with a precision, the contours explicitly drawn for a clear picture of the characters physical existence.

The way Noah is born has cast an impression on his entire mind and body. Steinbeck sums him up as giving the impression of a misshapen pen.

*" Pa was ashamed, and never told. For the night when Noah was born, Pa frightened at the spreading thighs, alone in the house, and horrified at the screaming wretch his wife had become, went mad with apprehension. Using his hands, his strong fingers for forceps, he had pulled and twisted the baby. The mid wife arriving*



*late, had found the baby's head pulled out of shape, its neck stretched, its body warped and she had pushed the head back and moulded the body with her hands. But Pa always remembered and was ashamed.*

Grandpa has a different way of greeting Tom. Loud mouthed and with eyes glistening with evil, he has his own style of caressing and pampering people. "Where is he" he demands, and welcomes Tom as a jailbird who had made it out of jail. Boastful of the Joad blood he remembers how the boy Tom murdered was boasting of his Hatfield blood when he attacked Tom. Grandpa continues to brag about the Joad blood and dares anyone to keep Tom in jail.

Everyone seems to have forgotten Casy when Grandma suddenly remembers that there was present among them a preacher and demands that they have a grace.

And Casy comes; he is forced to give grace in spite of his refusal to do so. In spite of Casy's repeated requests that he was no longer a preacher, he does say a prayer. Casy explains why he had to renounce his religion, though not an atheist, he no longer believes in the sort of religion that he once preached.

He doesn't know, he says, what holiness means, what sin is, what righteousness means and what virtue is. Prayers, to him have lost their meaning, since the troubles of men and the suffering of children have not ended. Thinking, wondering and trying to figure out life, he is concerned now only with finding a solution to people's problems. Sadly but good humouredly he says, "seems like Jesus got all mixed up with troubles and he couldn't figure nothin' out—got tired—and his spirit all wore out—An' so went off into the wilderness—I got mixed up like him."

But Casy got the realization of truth, the truth that the one we pray to and we the ones who pray and the hills in the wilderness where we seek truth are one and the same. Casy had realized the oneness of existence, of life.

While everyone watches Casy turn his mind and spirit to them, Ma realizes the truth of what he says and participates in the experience that Casy has undergone.

While Casy is busy solving the riddle of life, smart Aleck-Al is oblivious of everything. As Pa says his nut is just egging him on, thinking of nothing but girls and engines, he is plain smart aleck. This is what he remains throughout the novel, looking for girls and spending nights out with them.

The dream of grapes and oranges, picking them up and eating them away when they reach the rich land of California is first told by Grandpa.

Tom enquires about Uncle John and others. He is told that Uncle John has gone to Sallisaw with a load of tools, chickens, pump and the other stuff to sell. Ruthie and Winfield have gone with him.

Rose of Sharon is married to Connie Rivers and is three-four months pregnant. The family plans to leave for California and is building some money to start this long journey of two thousand miles. They have been raising money by cutting cotton crops, desperate to earn even Grandpa has been labouring to make additional wages.

Al is described as a rakish youngster who likes to show off but feels subdued by the sobriety of Tom's manner. Al's character and adolescent impulse is also disclosed by the fact that he feels disappointed that his brother had not busted the jail. To Al abiding by law is not as brave as breaking it.

## Chapter 9

Steinbeck's bond with the past, human ties with the past, man's pride and love of his lineage, the cord that binds him to the land where he was born, the nostalgic, mystic feeling of belonging, these and much more touch the reader's soul.

The writer renders into words the miserable thoughts that are too deep for words. Man is revealed in his uniqueness, flesh and blood human beings with a heart throbbing with indiscernible feelings, a mind full of inexpressible thoughts. Steinbeck builds up thoughts with words, thoughts in syllables, spoken as if in a monologue all to one self. The universality, the commonality of the feelings is suggested by repetition, the suffering is co-suffering, everybody's loss is common and each one can identify the sorrow of the other. From the beginning we know that Steinbeck had picked up Joads to keep a track of, a hold on the turmoil. Specificity is a safeguard against too general a generalization. Through the story of the Joads, Steinbeck is goading us the story of the millions who were uprooted from their homeland to wander and get lost in the wilderness of the beautiful but alien California.

People are selling whatever they possess, whatever they can sell and whatever price they can sell. The buyers are out to

make profits, they know people have no choice but to sell and bargains are made to the grievous disadvantage of migrants. There is a frustration building up in the people as is also building up anger within them. They sell but sell in desperation cursing and invoking evil.

*" Well, take it, all junk— and give me five dollars. You're not only buying junk, you're buying junked lives— you're buying bitterness— you're buying what will plough you own children — you're buying years of work, toil in the sun; you're buying sorrow that can talk— you cut us down—and soon you'll be cut down."*

The anguish and bitterness of the people quietens them, something in them is dead and they come back to the farms thinking and figuring—raising the red dust with their feet. Dancing, singing and laughing have gone out of their lives: But a ray of hope lights up once in a while giving them strength to hope, of dreaming to make it up in the land of grapes that is California.

But the past lingers on in them, it is deeply enclosed in them, the thought of leaving their land gives them pain, stabs them to the heart. And it seems hopeless again, they can't start all over again, they tell themselves.

Steinbeck describes the marching people as a parade of hurts— he foresees danger and terror when this parade of hurts explodes.

They have sold everything and sold their hopes every time they sold something, clothes and food gone, there is only a little hope left and when that is also gone, they will resort to rifles.

The children are not bothered about beds and bedsteads, they have just one anxiety, they must carry their dolls, their toys. There are family heirlooms, books and letters that the now dead wrote. These things are precious to them, precious as their lives and they can't imagine living without them.

## Chapter 10

In this chapter the Joads get rid of all that can be sold so that they can start their journey. Ma is busy washing and scrounging the clothes but her mind is full of thoughts, thoughts of hope and fear of the future. Tom is on a pilgrimage to the past, trying to visit each and every place in the house that he remembers. Returning home after four years, he hasn't had his full of the place.

Everybody in the Joad family has, like Ma, apprehensions and fears of the uncertain and the unknown place. Ma has seen the handbills, telling people of the high wages, of the oranges, grapes and peaches, which are in plenty, but she is not sure in spite of what the handbills say. She doesn't have faith, she says and is cared that something isn't so nice about it: The conversation between Tom and Ma shows their ignorance, naivety and lack of knowledge. Simple, with no idea of scriptures, geography, even the maps of their own country, they quote and talk from whatever little they have seen or read. Tom's got mixed up on reading ' The Winning of Barbara Worth' as Grandpa had got mixed up after reading Dr Miles' Almanac'. Ma wonders at the prospect of moving to California, " They say it is two thousand miles—How far ya think that is—I seen it on a map, big mountains like on a post card—How long ya's suppose it'll take to get that far Tommy?"

Tom utters words of wisdom, wisdom that he has learnt the hard way. He advises Ma not to build very high hopes lest they get smashed later. He also tells her to take each day as it comes and not to worry about failure.

Ma knows that this is the best way to think but hopes come visiting her in spite of that.

*" But I like to think how nice it's gonna be, maybe in California. Never cold. An' fruit ever 'place, an' people just bein in the nicest places, little white houses in among the orange trees, I wonder—that is, if we all get jobsan' work—maybe we can get one of them little white houses. An' the little fellas go out n' pick oranges right off the tree. They ain't gonna be able to stand it, they'll get to yellin' so."*

Tom knows better than that. He knows of the people who have been to California and suffered unemployment and poverty. They live in no white houses in California but only in shacks.

Grandpa's senility bursts out in laughter and anger, he talks randomly, having lost control over his hands and thoughts, he is like a child. He has no inhibitions either about using foul language or scratching under his testicles, without hesitation, without even being conscious about it.

Grandma treats him like a child and in spite of his protests, catches hold of him to button his underwear and fly. She even chides him for using foul language.

Grandpa is excited about the dreamland they are going to. "By God, they's grapes out there, just a hangin over on the road. Know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna pick me a washtub full of grapes, an' I'm gonna set in em, an' scrape around. An' let the juice run down my pants"

Grandpa remembers how his brother had run away with his colt to settle down in California, Grandpa wants to start working the moment he reaches California.

Ma has been thinking about the Grace that Casy gave that morning and that it hardly had the words of a Grace, though it sounded like one by it's tone. The preacher imparts a feeling of holiness in spite of corrupting the words of a conventional Grace, his words have their own meaning and message. Casy, no more a preacher looks solemn to Ma. Casy looks baptized to her.

Casy decides to go the West, the call to help people is beckoning him there, he says. A proposal is made that he accompany the Joads on their journey west and is agreed upon after a brief discussion. Casy wants to be near the folks, he wants to accompany them, hear them talk and sing. He wants to hear people cures and recite poetry, to share the life of the people, their suffering, their happiness. He wants to see and live life without distinction of class, without the make-up of etiquette, he wants to live life the natural way, not camouflaged by fear of sin, by fear of religious indictment. He wants people to talk to him, he doesn't want to preach no longer, he doesn't want to live in isolation, though he knows he will always be lonely at heart.

He has discarded institutionalized religion, packed up churches, Jesuits and the Salvation Army in one go

The truck has in the meantime returned with layers of red dust piled up on its bed, reminding us that we are still in the 'dust bowl' Ruthie is twelve, Winfield ten and Rose of Sharon, the older sister is in the family way. Rose of Sharon, once a young giggling girl is now mature, firm and hardened. Connie her nineteen-year-old husband is perplexed at the change in her, "for there were no more cat fights in bed, biting and scratching with muffled giggles and final tears". Connie, a young man of Texas strain is described as a hard worker, "sometimes kindly and sometimes frightened". He fought only when it was required, didn't speak very much and yet made his presence felt. He drank but never beyond limits. In short, he could make a good husband for Rose of Sharon.

Uncle John is a man who prefers to abdicate in favour of others. He assumes the authority because he is one of the 'natural rulers of the family'. The older son of Grandpa, fifty years old. He is a lonely man and all the time the barrier of loneliness cuts him off from the people and from appetites. This is what the author says of him:

*"He ate little, drank nothing and was celibate. But underneath, his appetites swelled into pressures until they broke through. Then he would eat some canned food until he was sick, or he would drink jake or whisky until he was shaken paralytic with red wet eyes, or he would raven with lust for some whore in Sallisaw- but when one of his appetites was sated, he was sad and ashamed and lonely again"*

Uncle John would then leave gum under children's pillows for reprieve, he gave away his possessions and worked free of wages. The death of his wife followed by months of being alone had marked him with guilt, shame and loneliness

Al is on the wheel, he loves to drive, work on vehicles and has an intuitive rapport with engines. His dream is not of peaches and grapes but of working in a garage. Right now, he is intently watching each and every jerk of the truck, each and every sound. The other men sitting beside him, in the front are quiet and glum.

The men are returning home after selling all the stuff they had taken. The deal that they have struck has made them heavy. They are frightened at the meager amount they have got for all the stuff, eighteen dollars, just measly eighteen dollars. They have no business sense, no experience and cunning to stand them in good stead. Merchandising is a secret to them.

Pa is happy that Tom is back in the nick of time. He trusts his boy and decides to fix about moving out after consulting him. Al mentions that people have been talking about Tom's parole. They have said that if he moves out of the state, he would be breaking the parole and that he would be sent back for three years.

The younger ones Ruthie and Winfield met Tom shyly but consider him special since he had been to prison. To them it is almost enviable to have that experience. The two men, Connie and Tom, when introduced, try to read each other, try to size each other up and feel satisfied.

Tom jokes with Connie and Rose of Sharon, teasing them about her pregnancy. A man who loves his family, he at once reads into Rose's of Sharon's mind and makes her happy by saying that her child will be born in one of the white houses in California, a white house surrounded by trees.

Steinbeck sings like Wordsworth, two songs, one of nature, the other of humanity. He is akin to Wordsworth in this. No attention has ever been drawn to it, there are concerns of human love, suffering and ultimate rebellion which can be traced in both. The family is the absolute unit of Steinbeck describes the family life of a tenant farmer with a kind of reverence, visible in his descriptions,

*"The family met at the most important place, near the truck. The house was dead and the fields were dead but the truck was the active thing, the living principle. It is near the truck that the Congress, the family government, goes into session. The family is the nucleus; men stand together representing one force, the women together symbol of a complementing power."*

A discussion follows, considerations of funds available are made and opinions are asked before taking any decision. The family Congress, though patriarchal, is not autocratic. Every one has a say and each one is respected for his viewpoint and expertise.

Noah as the eldest son has the privilege of asking how much money they have and Al is given the authority to make the deal about the truck and also envisage the expenses and performance of the vehicle. Powers are delegated but each is conscious of the obligation and responsibility that ensues from it and tries not to jeopardize the chances of the family in any way.

A hundred and fifty four dollars they have in all, they are told by Pa. Al explains why he bought a Hudson Super six, justifying by soundness of some of its parts and also by the fact that getting spare parts would not be a problem.

Grandpa's position in the family is described by Steinbeck in a concise manner, with an amazing succinctness,

*"Grandpa was still the titular head, but he no longer ruled. His position was honorary and a matter of custom. But he did not have the right of first comment, no matter how silly his old mind be"*

*"You've growd up good, he tells Al, approving of Al's purchase and opinion. Grandpa's words are spoken in the tone of benediction and a consensus is awaited from the other members of the family."*

Tom proposes that they take Casy along, enumerating his points in favour of this proposal but as per the tradition, relinquishes the decision to the family. Grandpa who still has the old superstitions lingering in his mind warns them that preachers are considered by some folks as 'poison luck', but Tom counters this by saying that Casy was no longer a preacher. Grandpa is however, obstinate about it. He agrees that preachers have a special vocation, which is recognized by all. He then adds, that he liked Casy more than the other preachers knew. Since he was not stiff.

Pa's concern about accommodating Casy in the face of paucity of food as well as lack of space in the truck is repudiated by Ma. Ma offers her own reasons, she argues that if they have the will, there is no question of can't. The issue to her is one of family convention, human consideration and principle. She reminds Pa that never had the Joads refused food, shelter or a lift on the road to anybody who asked for it. There were already twelve people traveling in place of six and another is not going to make any difference.

Ma occupies a supreme position in the family; she can bring people around by persuasion, coercion or thrust, as per the need of the occasion. She affirms her own point, "one more ain't gonna hurt, an a man, strong and healthy, ain't never no burden. And any time when we get two pigs an' over a hundred dollars, an' we wonderin' if we kin feed-a-fella" Ma stops and Pa felt subdued, his spirit raw from the whipping.

Casy is now part of the family, suffering and sharing the course of their lives. Casy is happy to be as part of the family. "Casy got to his feet. He knew the government of families, and he knows he had been taken into the family. Indeed his position was eminent, for Uncle John moved sideways, leaving space between Pa and himself for the preacher. Casy squatted down like the others, facing Grandpa enthroned on the running board."

Casy retains his position of eminence till the end and the reader retains his memory, thinking of him even when he is no more. Casy vies with Tom and Ma in leaving the deepest impression on the reader's mind.

Ma's position remains unchallenged throughout. When she goes to the kitchen in the middle of the discussion, they wait for her to come back before proceeding with the discussion. Ma, Steinbeck reminds us, "was powerful in the group". Amongst the family, her position is undisputed.

They all agree that they should leave without any delay. Preparations are made for the departure. The two most important things are packing the stuff and getting the pig meat ready, salted and preserved.

Since it would be too hot in the morning to salt the meat, it is decided that the pigs be slaughtered that very night. Ma is ready with the salt, two nice kegs.

They are all ready to disperse now, to be at their jobs fast. The journey is now coming near and the minds return to California. The reader is intermittently brought back to the title of the book, "The Grapes of Wrath", with each character indulging himself in the dreams of plenty from time to time.

Grandpa is the one who concluded the meeting with the final remarks, "Come time we get to California. I'll have a big bunch of grapes in my hen all the time, — a nibbling of it all the time, by God!" The children are excited about the killing of the pig; it makes them excited since occasions of excitement are rare in their drab lives. Water is boiled, the pig tied and the whole family is at the job. As in other operations, whether of mending a car or delivering a baby, Steinbeck describes the slaughter of the pig, giving the minutest detail from the tying of the pig to the dripping of the last drop of blood. Steinbeck tries to distinguish between slaughter for food and killing of pets and domesticated animals. His characters can make this distinction too and have no feeling of remorse, no qualms whatsoever about killing the pigs.

*"All right", said Pa. "Stick 'em, an' we'll run 'em up and bleed an' scald at the house." Noah and Tom stepped over the fence. They slaughtered quickly and efficiently. Tom struck twice with the blunt head of the ax, and Noah, leaning over the felled pigs, found the great artery with his curving knife and released the pulsing streams of blood. Then over the fence with the squealing pigs. The preacher and Uncle John dragged one by the hind legs, and Tom and Noah the other. Pa walked along with the lantern, and the black blood made two trails in the dust."*

Pa suggests that they leave the day after next but is vetoed by Tom and a sense of hurry creeps into them. And then the hurry infects all of them, they have all set their minds on leaving in the morning and all get absorbed in work. Ma starts packing the clothes, Tom the implements and tools. There is judgement required to select the best and discard what is not so good, not of much use.

Rose of Sharon helps to bring the tarpaulin and mattresses and piles them on the truck.

Since everybody is working, Casy assigns himself the job of salting the pork, he silences Ma when she says that it is a woman's work.

The memory of Tom's trial is always there, the fear of Tom's life is always there in Ma's mind. While packing the things she finds the letter of Tom's trial lying with other letters and other small things. Ma doesn't want to preserve this. She wishes to forget that it ever happened and confines the letter to the flames in the stove.

Things are piled in the truck and mattresses spread over them to make room for the family to sit.

Nobody is sure what lies in store for them, hope usurps fear and fear overtakes hope. But there is one hope, which they all have, of plenty of work, a good country with white houses surrounded by orange trees.

The chapter closes with a touching farewell to Muley. Muley comes to meet the Joads, shy by nature he is reluctant to accept food from them. He is unable to go along with them in spite of his desire to meet his people. He wavers for a moment but decides to live there only as a 'grave yard ghost.'

The struggle of the migrants against their own minds and hearts, which are in this land, is brought out in Muley's determination to stay on and in Grandpa's obstinacy not to leave. He can take care of himself if Muley can, he says. Grandpa has ultimately to be dragged with whisky: he is loaded on the truck and carried off.

The final scene of departure is a touching one, a scene that lends a feeling that life is vacant, premonition rather than hope. Ma is unable to look back because of the load that intercepts her view, but the others do look back.

*"The people on top of the load did look back. They saw the house and the barn and a little smoke still rising from the chimney. They saw the windows reddening under the first colour of the sun. They saw Muley standing forlornly in the dooryard looking after them. And then the hill cut them off. The cotton fields lined the road. And the truck crawled slowly through the dust toward the highway and the west."*

## Chapter 11

Steinbeck's preference for life, where the hands of a man work on the land, where a man establishes a relationship with the earth, with the very horse that ploughs his fields is clear. Apparently Steinbeck was looking for warmth in man's relationship with his surroundings.

The houses and the land are left vacant now. With the Joads and the others gone, the land is vacant and so is the barn, since the horses have been replaced by the tractors. With horses the barn was alive even after the work was done, when the horses shifted their feet in the hay, when they munched, the warmth of life was still there in the barn.

There is no life when the tractor stops its work; its breath goes out like the breath of a corpse. The work with a tractor is easy and efficient, mechanical and precise, but it takes the wonder out of work.

Steinbeck looks at man as a much larger entity than his physical presence, his chemistry, his flesh and blood and nerves. He is all this yet much more than this. The land is also, to him, much more than its analysis. The machine-man, the man on the tractor remains deprived of this deeper understanding between himself and the earth and the land never becomes his home.

The houses are now the dwelling places of the cats and the bats. A sense of desertion and decay slowly spreads in the houses, the bats 'swoop into the houses and sailed about', through the empty rooms, and in a little while they stayed in dark corners during the day, folded their wings high and the hung head down among the rafters, and the smell of their droppings was in the empty houses"

A sense of desolation creeps in slowly. The rats move in and store weed seeds in the corners and weasels come to hunt the mice. The houses fall apart, dust settled on the floor with only mouse, weasel and cat tracks to disturb it. On windy nights the loose shingles fall to the ground, the doors bang and the ragged curtains flutter in the broken windows.

## Chapter 12

Joads are like many migrants in the 66 Highway, cutting through Mississippi and Bakersfield; it enters the rich California valleys.

Steinbeck's description of roads, highways and side ways, of the camps and the Hoovervilles is accurately drawn. The mountains the valleys and the waters are specific, with names. Steinbeck prefers to stick with the authentic geographical details instead of traversing imaginary paths. Highway 66 is pulsating with life, the carrier of people, the refugees.

"66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrieking land—66 is the mother road, the road of flight"

This chapter, like many others in the novel tells us the story of the whole migrant mass, a mass passing through different places dotted on the highway. Holbrook, Winslow, Flagstaff are some of the places in the mountains of Arizona. Then out of the broken sun rotted mountains of Arizona to the Colorado with green reeds on its banks, the end of Arizona and California at hand, just beyond the river. Before California one has to pass through the long deserts with Barstow in the middle, ultimately the beautiful valley, with its orchards and vineyards can be seen in the distance. The people of flight coming out from different directions, stream out on 66, sometimes a family in a single car, sometimes many families in a little caravan.

The people in flight, all the migrant people in flight have the same worries. They are anxious about their provisions, they are anxious about the fuel, how long are these going to last is the question, the worry. The slightest sound in the car disturbs them. Money is also going fast.

The anxiety keeps them on tenterhooks. They try to cope up with emergencies; they have to fight the heat and the dust, hunger and breakdowns, hostility of people, hostility of the authorities. They gear up to fight; they will survive the struggle only if they could reach California.

Steinbeck in his inimitable ironic style describes the reality of the conditions in America, the condition of the depressed and how they are loathed by the people of the west, the owners of the lands and the orchards. The car dealers on the way, are awed by the number of people on the roads and a fear of their numbers strikes them:

"I seen forty-two cars a you fellas go by yesterday. Where you all come from? Where you all goin'?"  
Wee, California's a big state.

*It ain't that big. The whole United States ain't that big. It ain't that big. It ain't big enough. There ain't enough room for you and me, for your kind an' my kind, for rich and poor together in one country, for thieves and honest men. For hunger and fat. Whyn't you go back wher you come from?*

*This is a free country. Fella can go where he wants"*

John Steinbeck

The migrants shall be stopped by the Los Angeles police, they are told. The hatred of the people on the way comes out in the words they use for them. Bastards and Okies are common words. They don't want them nor does the administration in California. They want no beggars; they want people who have money to buy estates.

There are altercations between the migrant and the tyre-dealers and the garage owners and mistrust builds up on both sides. The anger grows with each deal and along with the anger grows the bitterness.

*"That's a service club. Fella had a story. Went to one of them meetings an' told the story to all them business men. Says, when I was a kid my ol' man give me a haltered heifer an' says take her down and get her serviced. An' the fella says, I done it, an' ever 'time since then when I hear a business man talk 'bout service I wonder whos 'getting' screwed. Fella in business got to lie en' cheat, but he calls it somepin else. That's what is important. You go steal that tire an' you're a thief, but he tried to steal your four dollars for a busted tire. They call that sound business."*

Steinbeck's distaste for commercialism is founded in two things, its legalization and justification of foul profits and its chilling influence on human mind, its chilling indifference to fellow human beings.

The migrants maneuver and devise makeshift arrangements. They tow weak vehicles along 66. Steinbeck makes comparisons between things, not so similar, creates similes to strike our minds with the awful images of awful circumstances. Here is one such simile:

*"Cars limping along 66 like wounded things, panting and struggling."* People in flight along 66 are dried up, on the open road shining like a mirror in the sun they go on. They are running out of food, out of water. The children are thirsty, Danny has been asking for water, but they will have to wait till the next service station. The child is hot and thirsty but there is no water. They will have to wait till the next service station.

The number of people, the number of cars on the road is swelling. Some cars move, the others lie abandoned on the roads. The people look at these cars and wonder what could have happened to the occupants of the car, did they walk or did they perish? Who gave them the courage to walk, to struggle? These questions perplex the minds of the people who look at these wrecked cars. Man's faith in man is rare but it is amazing in its power, whenever it is there. There are rare incidents when fellow men have helped people, they have accommodated them. An incident of a family stranded on the road trying to pull the trailer with their hands is related to remind us of our moral obligation to our fellow men. The family moved to crawling with the loaded trailer when a man came up and put them on his Hudson and drove them to California. Such incidents are rare but they do tell us that human kindness and compassion have not died.

*"The people in flight from the terror behind—strange things happen to them. Some bitterly cruel and some so beautiful that the faith is refined forever"*

### Chapter 13

Joads are on their way from Sallisaw, calculating the distance from one town to another. They have turned west but have miles to go, from Sallisaw to Gore to Warner to Checotah, a long distance to Henrietta. They calculate the distance, the miles and wonder whether they'll come across hills on the way.

Al is at the wheel, his face purposeful and his body listening to the car, he's absorbed only in one thought, the car and the journey. Al has become the 'soul of the car'.

Al has his own fears, the new place may not be as nice as they thought it would be. Does Ma have the same fears and he asks her, 'you scared goin to a new place?'

Ma doesn't have the kind of fears that Al has or maybe Tom and Rose of Sharon have. They are all young and have their whole life before them. Ma is old and has a responsibility. She would not like to nurse nay fears in her mind lest it reach her family.

*"No I aint. You can't do that. I can't do that. It's too much—livin' too many lives. Up ahead they's a thousand lives we might live, but when it comes it'll only be one. If I go ahead on all of em' it's too much. You got to live ahead, cause you're so young, but— it's jus' the road goin by for me. An' it's jus' how soon they're gonna wanta eat some more pork bones" Her face tightened, "That's all I can do. I can't do no more. All the rest a get upset if I done any more 'n that. They all depen' on me jus' thinking about that"*

The troubles of the older people are of a different nature. Grandma cannot control herself when she wants to pass urine. She needs help to squat for it. Grandpa has still not gained his mind fully and keeps murmuring that he would like to stay back like Muley, he is still fiercely refusing to come along. The hunger comes and the family eats the pork bones, standing beside the road, like nomads. And there is panic because the water jug is not there. And realization that there is no water makes them all the more thirsty.

Moving from castle to Paden, Al stops the truck to sooth the radiator cap, which is hot and jiggling with steam. He finds a hose and a faucet and is about to use the water, when a stout man comes and interrupts him. He wants to know if they have the money on them and whether they would buy any gas. The man tells them people with gas stations are feeling as harassed as them. ' Road is full of people, come in use water, dirty up the toilet, an' then. by God, they'll steal stuff an' don't buy nothin', got no money to buy with. Come beggin' a gallon to move on.'

Everybody is wondering where these people are going and what they are going to do there. They all wonder what is going to happen to the people, to the country, but fail to figure it out. They are beaten by the uncertainty that has beset the country. The small petrol pumps are fearing a shut down to. The competition with the big yellow painted station is too tough. He is trying to get some business to survive but is as uncertain as the migrant. The man relates how some people come to the station in such desperate situations that they offer their children's toys, and their own shoes and clothes for a gallon of petrol.

Casy sees no harm in people moving, people moving if they need to, people moving for better prospects, what hurts him is when people get hurt because of the changes that are coming about in the country.

Casy presents a balanced view of things, he doesn't believe in immobility and stagnation, attaches no value to it but change must also be for the good, without loss of dignity.

Tom supports Casy and disparages people who use the time worn cliché, " what's the country coming to"

It is difficult to understand what lies behind the changes and what it is taking people to. People like the Joads and the fat man are all being rolled along

Rose of Sharon and Connie are by themselves. Rose of Sharon is the center of the universe, she thinks, and Connie revolves around her like an orbit. Rose of Sharon and Connie have their own dreams; the world has drawn close around them and they have shut themselves up in the picture that they have drawn of their future.

While the Joads have left their dogs with Muley, they had brought along one. This dog is now killed by a speeding car. The feeling of different family members is one of sadness but they all show their feelings in a different way. To Rose of Sharon, the hurt of the dog matters the most, to Pa it is painful but he exclaims as if relinquishing everything to fate and their poverty, " just as well maybe—how we was gone feed him anyways. Just as well maybe.

Winfield the youngest cannot put his feelings straight, with eyes watery, and a running nose, he can simply say that the death of the dog is different from killing a pig. The one has a meaning the other is absurd.

The family passes through one city after another till they reach Oklahoma. The family still has fears of Tom crossing the State since he is on parole but he tells them that if he doesn't create problem he'll be safe.

They move on and decide to camp at a place after passing through Bethany. A car is already parked there and somebody is camping nearby too.

The Joads decide to camp there and make friends with the lean man and his wife. The man is Iny Wilson, the woman Sairy and here they have come from Galena.

They are very polite people. Sairy, the wife is described in a fashion that leaves a mark on the readers mind. A wizened woman, with face wrinkled like a dried leaf and eyes that seemed to flame in her face. She has a beautiful low timbre, soft and modulated and yet with ringing overtones. The words spoken by her and her husband are as soft and modulated as her voice, ' tell em' good an' welcome" and " proud to have ya."

While the Joads are in conversation with the Wilson's, Grandpa begins to cry. His heart is full and suddenly he bursts into sobs. Ma tries to help him and John is surprised to see him cry. As far as he remembers, he has never seen him blubbering.

Grandpa has suffered a stroke, Sairy tells from experience. She had seen three strokes already and knew the symptoms. Grandpa is losing control over his words and movements, his condition is not good. Grandma's character is brought out superbly in the scene of Grandpa's death. Aggressive and volatile she just accuses Grandpa of being



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tricky and sulking and suddenly realizing what could be the matter with him orders Casy to pray. She would have none of Casy's pleading. He doesn't know what to pray and whom to pray to? With the condition of Grandpa worsening, it seems clear that his time has come.

*"Grandpa seemed to be struggling, all his muscles twitched. And suddenly he jarred as though under a heavy blow. He lay still and his breath was stopped. Casy looked down at the old man's face and saw that it was turning a blackish purple. Sairy touched Casy's shoulder. She whispered, "His tongue, his tongue, his tongue." It is worthwhile going through the scene; it is imperative to understand Steinbeck's power of words and insight into human mind. The physical movements and gestures lend a touch of strangeness to the experience of human life and death.*

*"Grandma hopped like a chicken. "Pray," she said. "Pray, you. Pray I tell ya." Sairy tried to hold her back. "Pray goddamn you!" Grandma cried.*

*Casy looked up at her for a moment. The rasping breath came louder and more unevenly. "Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name—"*

*"Glory!" shouted Grandma.*

*"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done—on earth—as it is in heaven."*

*"Amen"*

*A long gasping sigh came from the open mouth, and then a crying release of air.*

*"Give us this day—our daily bread—and forgive us—"*

*The breathing had topped. Casy looked down into Grandpa's eyes and they were clear and deep and penetrating and there was a knowing serene look in them.*

*"Hallelujah!" said Grandma. "Go on."*

*"Amen." Said Casy,*

After the death of Grandpa, Grandma is described walking out of the tent with dignity. Holding her head high, she accepts his death calmly.

Life goes on in the Joad family, things continue to happen. Pa assumes the place of Grandpa, he is now the head of the family. The family has another congress. The change in the atmosphere can be felt, the change that Grandpa's death has brought about. Even the children sense it and do things more quietly. There is in the relationship between the Wilson's and the Joads, a civility and a courtesy that is more than etiquette. When Pa wishes to thank Wilson for loaning their tent to them, Wilson says that they need not feel obliged since there is no obligation taken or given at a time when somebody is dying.

Al, also feels that the Wilson's have done them a good turn and expresses his desire to fix their car.

The family meeting has been convened to discuss the burial of Grandpa. They are in a difficult position. Under the law, if they report Grandpa's death, they will be obliged to pay forty dollars for the undertaker or they take the dead man for a pauper.

Uncle John wants to give a proper cremation and so does everybody else. Tom reminds them that they cannot afford to their prestige since they were in a precarious situation, they had no money.

Pa wants to bury his father with the same dignity that he had buried his father. He reminds his family that since they had never in their lives taken what they could not pay for and suffered no man's charity, they could hold their heads high even when Tom was in trouble. Pa decides not to suffer from any feeling of guilt and dig Grandpa's grave with his own hands.

John though in agreement is pained that a man who dared the devil in broad daylight would be buried in the dark at the night, secretly, quietly. But none of them can afford to have reservations.

There is another dig at the law of the country by Tom. The law of the country would always suspect a burial done secretly, it is always in the scent for catching things against the law, not really doing anything to keep people from breaking it.

It is Ma who lays Grandpa out for the final ritual.

*"For a moment Ma looked down at the dead old man. And then in pity she tore a strip from her own apron and tied up his jaw. She straightened his limbs, folded his hands over his chest. She held his eyelids down and tucked*

*a silver piece on each one. She buttoned his shirt and washed his face.* ”

Grandpa has died on Wilson's quilt and Ma doesn't know how to make up for it. She apologizes for spoiling their quilt and promises to give her own in return.

But poor people are proud to help, they gain confidence if they help. As Sairy puts it “ we're proud to help—I ain't felt so safe in a long time. People need to help”

Grandma is too old to have a full impact of what has happened. She is seen sleeping soundly after a while. Ma explains that the Joads have always believed in holding their dignity even at suffering and death. She has a sense of contentment that a preacher is there at the burial and so is Grandpa's entire family.

While the men dig the grave, Sairy and Ma share their feelings, telling proverbs and sharing stories.

Tom always fearful of law suggest that message be written on a piece of paper and placed on Grandpa's body to avoid suspicion. A page from Sairy's bible is torn and the name of Grandpa and the circumstances of his death are inscribed on it. On Ma's insistence that a word from religious scriptures be added, Tom carefully chooses the following lines from the Bible.

“ Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered”

Casy is not present at the funeral, since he wishes to avoid people pestering him to pray when he is a preacher no more. He doesn't want to pray since he has no faith in prayers.

Tom suggests that they level the grave and hide it under the grass lest the vigilance find it and open it. Pa is sad that the grave has to be left unrounded, it doesn't sound good to him.

The Wilsons and Joads eat together that night, the families sit together and eat quickly staring into the fire. Pa tells Wilson, who is happy with the pig meal, how they had slaughtered them before they left.

The family have on their minds the death of Grandpa, Ma reminds Rose of Sharon that Grandma musn't be left alone and asks her to go and lie down with her.

Noah expresses his surprise that he isn't feeling no different from what he felt before Grandpa's death, it hasn't made the difference it should have made to him.

Casy feels that leaving his land has taken its toll on Grandpa. He was, says Casy, aware that he will not be able to live away from home.

The automobiles have become an evil. Wilson relates how his brother Will bought a car and smashed it. Being a new learner he banged the car, ran through a fence and fell into a ditch. He has lost the car and all the money he put into it. Wilson's had other problems. They hadn't driven even a hundred miles when a tooth in the rear busted, then they had to get a tire and then a spark plug. Now the car is broken down again. Wilson, like many others is stranded, losing money as well as time getting the car done. Wilson hopes that he may be able to get a new car when they reach California. Wilson's hopes are also based on the handbills that show how there is work and good wages in California. Pa's favourite dream, which he wishes to fulfill, is of picking fruits in California. Ma favours a white house with oranges around, there's a pitcher on a calendar she seen, and that is what he would like her to have. Ma looks to Sairy and realizes that she was shrieking with pain. There is a foreboding in Sairy's haunted looks.

## Chapter 14

Chapter fourteen is a digression. At times Steinbeck takes leave from the Joad family and starts a dialogue with the reader. The issues are many, poverty, the causes of poverty, the result of poverty, anger, pain, violence and the united violence at the end.

Though people find it difficult to fathom the reason behind strikes, the reasons behind the unions, the reason is just one, “hunger in a stomach multiplied a million times, a hunger in a single soul, hunger for joy and some security, multiplied a million times, muscles and mind aching to grow, to work, to create, multiplied a million times. The last clear definite function of man—muscles aching to work, minds aching to create beyond the single need—this is man.”

Steinbeck sees hope and promise in every step that man takes. Even the ticking of a bomb shows the urge in man, the spirit in man.

John Steinbeck

The change is making people nervous, the birth of banks; the invention of tractors is making people nervous. The people are mortgaged to the banks; their work has been usurped by the tractors. The future is dark to them. They are driven, intimidated, hurt by both. "We must think about this", the intimidated people are losing their patience. they have started planning, they wish to gain strength, they are getting ready to fight.

The children are listening with their souls; their minds are registering what the elders say. Men, women and children are all getting closer, trying to form a forum, fight for their needs, oust and crush the exploiters and the profit makers. Steinbeck urges people to understand that the unions and the revolutions are not the causes but the results, people like Paine, Marx, Jefferson and Lenin were results.

The need to unite comes from the need of the body, the head for dignity and joy and then after a while need becomes the stimulus for concept and concept for action. The men, the exploited, the helpless, then unite from one to two and then to many and they are no longer perplexed and weak.

## Chapter 15

Steinbeck describes America, he loves and hates it all the time. He wants a sure grip on everything, folks, peasants and owners, garages, petrol stations, stall, snack bars and fields. He observes everything from close quarters and passes on the impressions to us. He believes in knowing things through and through and works out each minute detail with the precision of a craftsman, with the exquisiteness of an artist.

In this chapter the reader is still on Highway 66. But he is looking at the hamburger stands and the snack bar. The stalls on the way are described with all their ware, cigarettes, candy, blades, aspirin and what you have. The tempting offers to get free stuff with Coca Cola are also displayed on big cars. The middle aged sales women behind the counter are described with a touch of sad humour.

*'hair curled and rough and powder on a sweating face, the cook is not in a white coat, the women are screechy like a peacock, the man is moody and silent'*

The truck drivers are the backbone of these joints, can't afford to annoy them, they are the backbone. they bring customers. The truck driver has his burger—pressing it with a scapula and his fingers, getting the cream and butter together. it goes off. He has finished his meal.

There are cars whisking by on 66. Some are rich with painted ladies sitting inside. Steinbeck's description of these ladies betrays a tone of mockery.

The women in these rich cars carry bottles, syringes, pills, powders, fluids, jellies to make their sexual intercourse safe, odorless and unproductive. And this apart from clothes. What a hell of nuisance, the pot bellied men, in light suits and Panama hats have a puzzled and worried look about them.

The woman is worried that the sun will dry her skin, the man worried that the White House is not working in collaboration with them, the government is no good or he can't make profits. Steinbeck disparages the rich. they are a mess, but they do wear nice clothes.

These people visit the stalls and make fuss about cleanliness and hygiene. They are fastidious; they twist their noses but don't spend money. They even steal towels and napkins. Al, like the other waiters despises them. He calls them shit heels. People on the roads, people in the camps, and people eating in the stalls, talk of the flux of cars moving towards California. They talk of accidents and they talk of love making in the car.

## Chapter 16

The Wilsons and Joads are now one family, together in flight. They are moving from place to place, surviving on scraps, pan biscuits turned hard, swallowed with water.

Nature's role in man's life, is to Steinbeck, indifferent. Apathetic to human suffering, it strides the world, destroying or nurturing unconsciously, without paying heed to life, human, animal or vegetable.

Nature is unfriendly to the migrants. Steinbeck describes the families moving like "land turtles crawled through the dust and the sun whipped the earth, and in the evening the heat went out of the sky and the earth sent up a wave of heat from itself."

They have learnt a new technique of living now, the highway has become their home and movement their expression. They have got so accustomed to pitching their tents that every place becomes temporary home.

The end of Texas and Mexico and they see the mountains, springing up in the distance. They are weary of the heat and discomfort but each one of them is trying to build up resistance in his or her own way. Rose of Sharon is tired, but tries to keep herself up. She confides about her and Connie's dreams to Ma.

*"Wanna live in a town." She went on excitedly, "Connie gona get a job in a store or maybe a fact'ry. An' he'll gona study at home, maybe radio, so he can git to be an expert an' maybe later have his own store. An' we'll go to pitchers whenever. And Connie says I'm gona have a doctor when the baby's born; an' he says we'll see how times is, an' aybe I'll go to a hospiddle. An' we'll have a car, little car. An' after he studies at night, why—it'll be nice, an' he tore a page outa Western Love Stories, an' he's gonna send off for a course, 'cause it don't cost nothing to send off."*

Complications and problems arise in the way, whenever there is a breakdown of the car. Al tries to justify every time something goes wrong, for he holds himself responsible for having purchased the truck.

Steinbeck brings out the contrast between Tom's and Al's temperament through subtle strokes. He builds up the tension between characters and then releases it gently. Al is shown as impatient, grumbling, sensitive about his reputation. Tom and Ma are careful not to hurt him. The rod in the truck, they find will have to be replaced.

The chapter, one of the most important in the novel has some of the most important incidents. It is this chapter that we see Ma emerging as a new woman. Fearful that they may lose Tom, if they proceed leaving him behind, she assumes a power beyond herself and is able to confront the family. She has made up her mind and would not leave Tom behind. Ma's fear of losing Tom makes her almost crazy.

"The whole group watched the revolt—Ma waved the jack handle. — the eyes of the family shifted back to Ma. She was the power. She had taken control."

All that Ma wants is the family unbroken and she would do anything to save it from falling apart.

Tom and Casy take up the job of the car repair. Casy and Tom left alone, get an opportunity to share their views, while they work, removing the pan, saving the oil and taking out the rod, they gossip about their lust for flesh. Steinbeck attempts to keep sex out of moral issues, sex to him is not a sin nor is it immoral in any sense.

Tom cuts the back of his hand while unscrewing the pan. He stops the blood coming out of the gash with mud made wet by his own urine. It is, to him, the best in the world, to stop blood. The villagers have their own cures and tips ready to cure every day ailments and hurts. Casy suggests that a spider's web is as effective as urine.

While Casy and Tom are on the job, their minds again shift to the enormity of the numbers moving to California.

Casy's vision being broader than any member of the Joad family, he sees migration of people to the west differently. Casy is not opposed to change, rather he sees good in every change that may come. He is only afraid of the pain and suffering that it may cause to many and would put up a fight against it.

Tom is a person who can resolve issues, patiently, wisely. He has learnt from his McAlester days that getting anxious and impulsive doesn't pay. Tom dismisses Casy's anxiety with what has become his guiding principle. "I climb fences when I get fences to climb". Casy has remembered Tom as a tough child, tough but not mean and that is what Tom remains throughout the novel.

Grandma is getting older and as Al reports 'she's got no sense more. — I think Grandma gone nuts'. Ma is busy taking care of everyone and when she sends the food for Casy and Tom who have been on the job, repairing the car, Casy remarks, 'she don't forget nobody.'

Ma is all the time concerned about Tom's welfare. She's afraid that he will pick up an argument with somebody or the other. Al says, that Ma had given him a message. She said that Tom shouldn't drink anything and should get in no arguments. Ma is scared that Tom will be sent back to McAlester.

Tom's special bond with Ma is clear. Noah feels that nobody needs him and Al tells Tom that Ma was "awful partial to him, she moaned when he was gon. She did it all to herself", he says, "kinda crying down inside of her throat."

The brothers talk about their future and Al is always curious to know what Tom's life in McAlester was like. Tom

finds it difficult to explain; he simply says that there was something about it that wasn't like nothing else in the world. He felt that there was something screwy about locking people up. It is a kind of unpleasant talking about it and I promises not to talk about it anymore.

Steinbeck describes another Service Station on the way, full of yards, shacks and junk. The Service Stations present to him a spirit of decay. Here they meet a salesman who is important since he represents a class apart. He is described as a specter of a man, thin dirty and with hardly any muscles. Steinbeck describes here the agony of a man disabled physically, handicapped by virtue of his poverty as well as the physical disability. With one eye gone the young man feels that he can never get married as people jeer at him.

The man, we know belongs to the lowest strata of society. He blows his nose into his palm and wipes it on his trousers. Steinbeck subtly describes the manners and destitution of a particular class through these representative characters. He works for the boss, and since he works for him under duress, he hates him. He jeers at his boss in his absence and hates him for being rich. Tom tells him, "you got that eye wide open, an' ya dirty, ya' stink, ya' jus' ascan' for it, ya' like it. Sorry for ya' self. Course' ya' can't get no woman with that empty eye flappin' aroun'. Put something over it and wash ya' face." The Joads have a fighting spirit and would like to confront all misfortune with dignity. They all hate self-pity.

Anecdotes are an essential part of Steinbeck's novels. They generally occur to bring some respite to the reader. Tom tells the story of a one legged whore who made an asset of a lump. She told folks that rubbing her lump brought good luck to people and there she was earning much more than the other whores.

Tom is lucky to get the spare part that he needs. His last words to the one-eyed man are, 'cover up that goddamn eye.' The one-eyed man is let lonelier than he earlier was. "He felt his way to the mattress on the floor, and he stretched out and cried in his bed, and the cars whizzing by on the highway only strengthened the walls of his loneliness."

Steinbeck has the art of weaving the plot in such a way that recurring references are made to the other characters. Al remembers how Connie was talking about studying at nights in California. Al has been thinking if he could do that too. He could perhaps study Radio or Television or Diesel Engines. Tom is not so hopeful as according to him there are very few who can finish up the courses. He talks of his experience with fellows who started taking mail lessons in McAlester and then simply let them slide. Al and Tom together fix the rod over the shaft and study the engine. Before they proceed, Al says good-humouredly that the boss in the yard was going to pretty mad when he looked to the socket wrench which they had pinched from there. Steinbeck works out the details of the car engine. He describes how the two men strain themselves working on the pan, screws and bolts.

They return to Casy, and Casy the thinker expresses his wonder at the way these fellows can fix a car. The campground where they reach is littered with gasoline lanterns, half a dozen tents are already pitched there and the campfire is still glowing. The proprietor of this ground is a sullen lanky man. He's sitting in a chair on the porch. Al drives the Dodge to the side of the road. Pa is happy to see them return with the car's fixed and Tom tells him that they had been lucky to manage the part so fast. Pa talks about Ma worrying constantly about the family and the grandmother going from bad to worse. The Joads are forced to pay money at every place they camp at and get worried about their dwindling funds. They are forced to pay since there is a law against sleeping out and the Sheriff makes sure that nobody is on the road. The migrants are referred to as 'vagrants' by the proprietor. The problem is common to all the migrants.

*"The circle of men were quiet, sitting on the steps, leaning on the high porch— their faces were hard in the hard life, and they were very still. Only their eyes moved from speaker to speaker, and their faces were expressionless and quiet.— In one of the tents a child wailed in complaint, and a women's soft voice soothed then broke into a low song, Jesus loves you in the night. Sleep good, sleep good. Jesus watches in the night. Sleep, Oh, sleep, Oh, sleep".*

Tom breaks his silence when he can hold himself no longer. He didn't want to make no trouble but he was prepared to face the Deputy Sheriff and the proprietor. He also warns the proprietor but refrains from an argument because there's going to be no good in it. The Joads like others are fighting a lost battle. Pa is hopeful that with so many able bodied men in the family they would be able to work out good wages. The other men on the camp, who have seen the same handbills, also discourage them. They know of the conditions in California. The fact that there s a lot of

competition or work and the wages are meager. The proprietor also tells them of the migrants putting themselves into trouble by forming unions for proper wages. Another man in the camp has his own story to tell. He had lost his two kids and wife in California. He demanded no money, no wages for the job he did, he was prepared to work just for a cup of flour and a spoon of lard. Even that was hard to get by. There have been other incidents of death by starvation. The numbers of people in the family fall because of deaths and disintegration and the migrants are now 'shipless fellows'. The people on the move to California become more and more fearful and their hopes and spirit fall with every story that they hear on the way. The poor have hearts bigger than the rich. A woman who is cooking beans in the morning offers it to Tom and others in spite of the utmost scarcity that her own family has of food. Tom is considered to be one of the likely troublemakers by the proprietor. He calls himself a 'Bolshevisky'.

Casy and Tom are comrades in arms against suppression. These are the two characters who would stand up against the police and the capitalists towards the end of the novel.

### Chapter 17

The camps become by the passage of time the units of a new community. Strangers become friends and people share their ordeals and apprehensions. Twenty families sitting together as one family and the children become the children of all is a signal of communal harmony amongst the migrants on one hand and their terrorizing power, as a group, on the other. The loss of homes being common and the dream of the west being common they comfortably identify with each other, sharing their joys and apprehensions without any effort.

A sick child "threw despair into the hearts of twenty families, of a hundred people, that a birth there in a tent kept a hundred people quiet and awestruck through the night and filled hundred people with the birth-joy in the morning."

The unit grows bigger everyday and now it is the unit of the camps. At night, the families sit together, chatting and singing. "Men sang the words, and women hummed the tunes."

It's a world full of different kinds of people. A world complete by itself. They talk of their future but 'keep the past black hidden in the heart'.

The families also learn, in the process, their rights to fight the monsters who oppress them. The police, the banks, the landowners and the proprietors.

The people are ostracized and punished at the same time by the orchard owners and the Sheriffs. That is the nexus, which oppresses them, and the people are unconsciously growing aware of it. They are gearing themselves up to fight them. To be able to wield power they make themselves strong by laying down a strict code of conduct within themselves. Social conduct in the camps assumes supreme importance.

The touchstone of being civilized in these camps is of being an asset to others. No woman and no child is allowed to be hurt or troubled in the camp. In the circumstances of utter suffering and death people unite and pool in their resources "and when a bay died a pile of silver coins grew at the door flap, for a baby must be well buried, since it has nothing else of life." An older man may be left in a potter's field, but not a baby. The migrants find favourable spots for their habitat, where the water, a spring or a stream or even an unguarded faucet is at hand. A brush or wood nearby to build the fires and a garbage dump where scrap and equipment can be found are added advantages. The daily lives of the migrants, from dawn to dusk, is described by Steinbeck in minute and painful detail. Each member of the family has, during the difficult times, learnt to assign himself and perform the duties he can.

### Chapter 18

The Joad family moves lowly westward up into the mountains of New Mexico. Climbing the high country of Arizona, they can see through the gaps, what to them looked like 'painted deserts'. Crossing the jagged ramparts in the night, they reach Oatman. By daylight they are in Colorado, which they cross by an over bridge and find themselves in 'broken rock wilderness.'

Grandma's condition has been constantly deteriorating. Noah has heard her croaking over the truck the whole night "She's all of sense", he says. The Joads and Wilsons decide to stay there for a while. They scrub themselves and

enjoy the water. A little respite from heat gives them rest. The men take off their pants and shirts and wade through the water. They settle lazily into the water and wash themselves. Here they come across a man who is bathing there along with his son. The man is going back to his home in Pampa. The Joads are surprised that he should be traveling back home when the other people are going west. Pa asks him as to whether he would be able to make a living in Pampa. The man replies that it would be better for them to starve to death with the folks they knew and loved than amongst people that hated them. Pa and Tom are curious to know more about the conditions in California and the man informs them that the folks out there hated each one of them. They were all scorned by them and called 'Okies', since they had come from Oklahoma. 'Okies' to them meant the scum of the earth and they would kill each one of them if they could do so. He also tells them that there is no steady work available in California and that most of the folks had to scabble for their dinner every day. He describes the country of California as a pretty country with orchards of grapes, peaches and oranges. But the land is owned by the 'Land and Cattle Companies' and they are not bothered about the people who work on them. There are people who own hundreds and thousands of these acres but would not cultivate them. Crop pickers by profession, the migrants fail to understand the intricacies of their economy.

Casy the preacher gives us another discourse on the poverty of the people who feel satisfied only by getting more and more rich. The people in California, he says, 'were busy as a prairie dog collecting stuff that wasn't disappointed' to him the rich people looking for happiness in the material things were poor inside themselves. Uncle John feels that they shouldn't be discussing the prospects and conditions prevailing in California since they had to move on and none of this talk was going to keep them back.

Noah's decision to stay back can be anticipated in his first reaction on reaching the place. "Like to jus' stay here. Like to lay here forever. Never get hungry an' never get. Lay in the water all life long, lazy as a brood sow in the mud." Uncle John is a man of few words but when he talks he talks sense. This is what Tom has to say about him.

Noah has decided to stay back on that piece of land. He won't starve, he tells his family. He'll catch fish and survive. Noah has never been wanted by his parents the way the other children are. Noah says with his eyes half shut. "Folks are nice to me. But they don't really care for me." They would be sorry if he goes but the call of the river is too strong for him. He'll go down the river, he tells Tom, "catch fish and stuff but never leave the river."

The first separation in the family, which Ma had feared all along, came with the death of Grandpa, the second one comes with Noah disappearing into the bush along the river bank never to meet his family again. Grandma is old and weak but still overbearing in her attitude to the family. She talks, as if in the grip of some super natural power and goes through hallucinations. Steinbeck philosophizes on the twin cycle of birth and death. He says, "things aren't lonely anymore and they don't hurt anymore when you realize that death and birth are two things universal happening to everyone."

Grandma in her hallucinations remembers her husband, chiding and commanding him all the time. "Wipe you're feet Will, — you dirty pig!" Grandma cries in her sleep. We meet in this camp another woman, a black woman, a Jehobite, who comes and makes her acquaintance with Ma and Rose of Sharon. She wants to hold a meeting in the Joad tent and accuses Ma of being an atheist because she wouldn't have the meeting going in her tent. Ma is scared of the ritual and the magic of this kind of prayers. 'Jehobites is good people', she says, 'but they are howlers and jumpers.' In a small digression from the story Steinbeck describes the meeting of the Jehobites, which they hold in their tent. It is a singsong chant of exaltation; it slowly rises into a growl of power. It swells and pauses and growls again and then the rhythm quickened, "Male and female voices become one tone. A sort of hysteria takes hold of the people's mind. The tempo of the chants rises till the people's howls go on so long that their lungs seem to burst. Rose of Sharon gets nervous and it takes Ma quite some time to compose her."

They also discuss the attitude of Casy towards religion and wonder at his statement that what people do is right because they have a right to do what is right to them. Rose of Sharon is also worried about Connie who is thinking all the time. Ma is afraid that if Connie takes up a job and settles in the city of California, there will be another break in the family.

Grandma is slowly getting worse and there is already a premonition of a death in the atmosphere. They proceed on their journey but still have three hundred miles to go before they reach their destination. Pa repeats his guilt of having harmed Noah at the time of his birth and takes the fault of Noah's decision to stay back on his own head. The Wilson's are also forced to stay back since Sairy has not been keeping well. When pressed by people Casy is at a loss.

having renounced religion, he doesn't know whom to pray to and what to pray for. When Sairy asks him whether he did know things he replies, "I know but I don't understand."

Music holds a great power for Steinbeck. Time and again in the novel he talks of music as spiritual experience. Sairy is described as a very ordinary woman with a beautiful voice. She recalls before her death that when she was a little girl she sang as nice as Jenny Lind. She says, "that never can so many folks feel so full up together as when they are standing together in a singing." To her singing and praying are one and the same thing. Sairy is in a way the voice of Steinbeck as Tom and Casy are in other ways.

Ma is the pillar of the family, the support, the giver of the food, the giver of counsel as well as solace. She doesn't forget to peel the potatoes, boil the coffee and fry the side meat, whatever the conditions. Life's preservation and family's togetherness are most important to her.

On the onward journey, the Joads meet apathetic people on the Gas Stations and the Checkpoints. Called Okies now, they are, to the people in the west hard looking. The people in the west on their side feel surprised at their nerve. How do they venture to climb such heights in their old and unreliable vehicles? passing the desert is a terrible experience in other ways too.

Talking of the hazards they have faced, Ma says that they haven't come exactly clean out of the difficult journey. They had lost so many people. They had lost Wilson's too. Connie and Rose of Sharon are always talking about their future affluence in California. In the pitch dark of the night Connie and Rose of Sharon cover themselves up with the mattress and whisper to each other in mellow tones.

Each character of Steinbeck has one prominent streak, one obsession. Uncle John is obsessed with the idea of his sin; he hadn't called the doctor when his wife asked for it when she got a pain in the stomach one day. The next morning she died, leaving Uncle John with a feeling of guilt, which he seems to have nurtured in his heart till it has grown into an obsession with him.

They stop at another check post at Barstow but are allowed to go by the Officer on Ma's plea that the old woman in the truck was not well. We learn later that Grandma had died during the night only and that Ma had been keeping it to herself so that the family can move on. She had even pretended to hold Grandma since she did not want that the family be disturbed before they reach California. We learn about another aspect of Ma's character here. We look at her as her family does with a little terror at her strength. Connie and Rose of Sharon feel ashamed that they were busy making love when the Grandma was dying. They haven't traveled clean at all. They have lost the third member of their family, the grandmother.

## Chapter 19

California once belonged to Mexico and its land to Mexicans till a horde of tattered Americans invaded and grabbed it. The Americans were aggressive- they lusted for possession and took the land from the Mexicans, who wanted nothing in the world as frantically as the Americans. The Americans then became the owners of the land, settled there and made their fortune. Their children became wealthy owners; they were no longer farmers. They forgot to till the lands and reap them. Crops were hot money, reckoned in dollars, they were sold before they were planted, they were sold for the principal amount plus interest.

The lust for land and the business acumen of the new owners made the farms bigger and larger and in the process the small landowners were eliminated. Steinbeck, as we shall read in another chapter, traveled through the length and breadth of America and wrote a book on it. Apart from being very well acquainted with its history and geography, he had lived with different kinds of people and read their way of life from close quarters. Overly fond of telling about men and their lineage, Steinbeck traverses through each and every feature of American life, intently and voraciously. Talking about the change that came about in California, he says, "*Now farming became industry, and the owners followed Rome, although they did not know about it. They imported slaves, although they did not call them slaves: Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos. They live on rice and beans, the businessmen said. They don't need much. They wouldn't know what to do with good wages. Why, look how they live. Why, look what they eat. And if they get funny—deport them. And the imported serfs were beaten and frightened and starved*"



*until some went home again, and some grew fierce and were killed or driven from the country. And the towns grew larger and the owners fewer."*

Then the crops were replaced by fruit trees, by orchards. And the owners were no longer on the lands they signed the papers in absentia, their book keepers keeping a record of their gains or losses.

Now there are owners in America who have never seen their lands and there is a flux of hungry migrants moving to the west. The docile people looking for work are turning fierce as a result of their gnawing hunger and destitution. The town men hate them because the Okies are a threat to them. The owners are physically weak, the Okies tough. The town men have no interest in them since they can give them no profits. The Okies have no power to buy anything and are therefore, a nuisance.

More and more migrants flow into California, new waves of the dispossessed and the homeless, they want just food and land. They want land because it brings them food, they have no idea of accumulation, social success and amusement. The migrants may be tempted to grab the land and this is a serious threat to the landowners.

The grapes become the Grapes of Wrath, the golden oranges on the dark green trees beckon them but there are guards with shot guns patrolling along the lines.

There are too many people, too little work. For every little job, there are a thousand willing men, man can be had in a few cents a day, and one man can be fired if another can be hired for still lower wages.

People have to eat. They have to grab food if they can't earn it. If they stealthily grab a piece of land, they are killed. The Californian people are vary of these outlanders, these foreigners, they must be controlled, they must be eliminated if necessary. Otherwise they will take over the country.

They're to the Californian people rattle-snakes, they are sick, they are full of disease and they can spread it all around them. They are thus uprooted and hunted out from one place to another.

Hoovervilles, which have come up on the edge of every town, life is full of monstrous suffering and tragedy. The men are weak and vulnerable but God Fearing and good. It is a paradox that the good are poor, the unscrupulous rich. Is there hope for mankind, will there ever be a time when the good are not poor and the children of kind people can eat?

## **Chapter 20**

The family is at Bakerfield now. The legal formalities of reporting Grandma's death are completed. Pa and Ma would have been happier if they could give her a nice funeral. She always wanted that, they know.

The people of these cities seem strange to the migrants as migrants seem strange to them.

The camp where they put up is vast with forty tents in all. Some of the tents have been fixed in a disorderly fashion. The shacks are erected out of whatever material becomes available, tattered strips of canvas, paper and bits of cardboard. Over the camp hangs a slovenly despair of hunger, want and desperation.

Some tents are more neatly pitched, one is not only properly arranged but is also swept and sprinkled.

The Joads are met by a woman who calls her man from the shack to answer their queries. The man, as we see later, is called bull simple, he cannot talk straight and his mind seems to have lost focus. People feel that he must have been like many other migrants pushed around so much by the cops that he was still spinning. The Deputy Sheriff keeps shoving them around so that the migrants don't stay in one place for long for fear that the people might become eligible for grants or may demand the right to vote.

The young man, Tom meets, has many things to tell. Sarcastic in tone to begin with, he slowly becomes friendly with the family. He tells Tom the same story about work. If the owners want three thousand people to work, they get six thousand. The extremity and enormity of hunger is described by Steinbeck in almost every chapter of the novel. But never in the novel is it so clearly pictured:

*" Tom, looking down toward the Joad tent, saw his mother, heavy and slow with weariness, but a little trash fire and put the cooking pots over the flame. The circle of children drew closer, and the calm wide eyes of the children watched every move of Ma's hands. An old, old man with a bent back came like badger out of a tent and snooped near, sniffing the air as he came. He laced his arms behind him and joined the children to watch Ma*  
*" The children, fifteen of them, stood silently and watched. And when the smell of the cooking stew came to*

*their noses, their noses, crinkled slightly. Ma looked up. "Didn't none of these here have no breakfast? The circle of children shifted nervously and looked away" from the boiling kettle. One small boy said boastfully, "I did—Ma na' my brother id—an' them two did, 'cause I seen em'. We et good. We're goin south tonight"*

The boys real story is however different.

*The girl sneered. Oh, him! He was braggin'. High an' mighty. If he don't have no supper—know what he done? Las' night, come out an' say they got chicken to eat. Well sir, I looked in whilst they was eatin' an' it was fried dough jus like every boy else"*

The young man, Tom and Casy discuss the need of people getting together and fighting for their rights under a good leader. There are people who have dared to raise their voice against the police, against the middlemen employed by the owners. Such people have been silenced, taken to jail or quietly eliminated.

The people who show their guts end up becoming bull simple. The cops like meek and simple people, they like people who are dumb and who don't understand, people who don't argue or ask questions. The people need leadership and direction, comparing them to the birds beating their wings against a dusty window, Casy calls them an army without a harness.

There has to be an awakening in the people, somebody needs to show them the direction. The way to overcome is not through prayers and preaching but by putting up resistance.

Casy's impatience grows with the things that he sees around him. He holds himself responsible for not doing anything to help the people, to fight the unjust system, by mobilizing the strength of the people.

Connie is not happy to have come. Resenting his decision to have come; he says that he should have stayed back and learnt tractors. It would have at least given him three dollars a day. He is, we observe, losing hope like all others are. Afraid that Connie may decide to go back, Rose of Sharon tries to tap his mind. Connie doesn't give himself out until, finally, completely destroyed, he leaves Rose of Sharon, deserted and alone.

Steinbeck believes in affirming and reaffirming the features as well as the views of his characters. Al is always looking for girls or for work on engines, he tells the young man himself. But his brother Tom is so different, he takes nothing from nobody. When the young man tells him that Tom looked nice to him, Al warns him, "He is jus' as nice as pie till he's aroused" But Tom is by no means a mean guy.

Floyd Knowles, the young man, becomes a friend to the family. He relates how he left home with the entire family but lost them. He is now with his wife and children, the others are gone, lost to him.

Al's fascinated by cars. He dreams of big cars and relates how he has once driven a 16 that belonged to a rich guy. The coming of a 'Chevrolet Coup' to the camp is of great significance in the novel. The two men who come by this car are a cop and a contractor. The contractor tells them that there are jobs at Tulare Country and he was contracting them. The men do not commit what they are going to pay—it is — to the price. The man in khaki says, 'ends can vary'. Floyd steps out as the leader of the group and asks them for their licence. He asks them to tell them precisely where they are offering the work and how much they are going to pay.

The contractors have, it is shown, the support of the police and are ready to crush the people who question them. The workers who ask for fair wages are said to be talking red and agitating trouble. Floyd is one of them, says the contractor and the deputy is asked to whisk him away in the car. When Floyd splashes his fist into the Deputy's face, Tom puts his foot in front of the Deputy and he stumbles over. It is then that he shoots abruptly and hits a woman's hand. The Deputy is about to fire again when Casy suddenly comes out from the group of men. He kicks the Deputy in the neck and the Deputy crumples into unconsciousness.

A crowd gathers around the woman who is screaming hysterically at her shattered hand. The situation having become explosive, Tom at once becomes conscious of his delicate position. Casy asks him to get to safety and asks even Al to go into the tent. Casy is driven away by a police car, which has come in blowing its siren. Everybody in the camp, especially the Joads, is deeply affected by Casy's arrest.

Uncle John gets drunk because he got hurting inside unable to express his feelings at Casy's arrest. Uncle John says sadly, "Can't say her. I feel awful. He done her so easy. Jus' stepped up there and says, "I done her. An' they took im' away. An' I'm gonna get drunk".

Uncle John walks to the grocery shop across the road, suffering with the a feeling of self-reproach and self-

abasement, he takes his hat off, drops it in the dust and grinds it with his heels. Leaving his hat broken and dirty, he enters the grocery shop.

Floyd warns Al and Tom that they must all move out of the camp immediately. Better knowing the ways of the government, he tells them that the camp will be put on fire if they don't move.

Steinbeck is critical of police, since it is to him the malignant power that crushes the helpless and the poor. Floyd tells them, "I don't know about here but up north the Deputy's got to take guys in. Sheriff gets seventy-five cents a day is from each prisoner and he feeds them for a quarter.

Steinbeck is not only disgruntled with the hunger but the rampant corruption too.

A decision to vacate the place is taken by the Joads. They manage to find Uncle John but are unable to trace Connie. The Joad family does not think much of Connie. The Joad family moves out with a low spirit. The sinister power of the Sheriff is wearing their spirits out. Tom's decision to move to the government camp, where no Sheriffs are allowed, is a result of this feeling.

*"I know Ma. I'm tryin'. But them deputies—Did you ever see a deputy that didn't have a fat ass? An they waggle their ass an' flop their gun aroun'. Ma, he said, "if it was the law they was workin' with, why we could take it. But it ain't the law. They're workin' away at our spirits. They're tryin' to make us cringe and crawl like a whipped bitch. They're tryin' to break us. Why, Jesus Christ, Ma, they comes a time when the on'y way a fella can keep his decency is by takin' a sock at a cop. They're workin' on our decency."*

With a sense of revolt and revenge building up, the Joads move to the government camp.

## Chapter 21

The migrant people are forced to face the hostility of not only the police but of the industry as well as the California people. Essentially an agrarian community, these people have so far lived simple lives with no knowledge of the power and danger of machines in private hands. They haven't grown up in the paradoxes of industry. Suddenly pushed by the machines the hostility of the 'little towns' people gives them the feeling of complete alienation.

There is panic in the west too. With the migrants multiplying, the Californian people are scared of the suburbs being filled up with the invaders, the goddamned Okies, they call them. They are to them dirty and ignorant, degenerate and sexual maniacs. They are thieves, they'll steal anything, they have got no sense of property rights and so they must be kept away.

The local people whip themselves into a mould of cruelty to keep the migrants at bay. The migrant people do not have the ability to rationalize, to argue or to confront these people. Their funds fast exhausted, their relatives lost, they are at a loss for their destination. They have only one thing in mind. They want work. Steinbeck describes them as 'crowds of men, ravenous for work, murderous for work, vacillating between hunger and anger, anger is taking the better of them, every passing moment until the anger begins to ferment'

Steinbeck speaks of the coming danger to the big companies and the banks through the union of these migrants, but the companies are as yet oblivious of it.

## Chapter 22

The Weed patch camp is the government camp. A little cluster of white wooden buildings shows them the sign to the camp. Steinbeck draws in this chapter the picture of an ideal camp, as he would have it. It is a utopian picture but gives us an idea of how Steinbeck would like people to organize and fashion their lives in times of such emergencies. A watchman posted at the gate is polite. He asks them their number and immediately allocates them a place in number four sanitary unit. There are no cops in this camp. They have their own cops selected by the people here to look after the safety and welfare of the families living here.

The camp was only a dollar a week and people who are unable to pay can work it out by carrying garbage and keeping the camp clean. The camp has its own government; they choose their representatives and their preachers too. The representatives can be ousted if they don't do a good job and the preacher preaches but no collections are made after the meetings.

It is the central committee, which controls the entire administration in the government camp. Saturday nights are the

dance nights and they have the best dances in the country on these weekend nights. The Joads wonder why it's not possible to have more camps like this one in the country.

The government camp is well planned. The tents are all in a row and there is no litter about the tents. The streets have been swept and sprinkled.

While everybody in the camp is sleeping Tom takes a round of the place and is happy to have come there. Dawn has not yet fully come when Tom comes across a young girl with a child in her lap, cooking the morning breakfast. The graceful movements of the girl at work win Tom's admiration and he walks closer to the girl. The girl is frying bacon and baking a bread. The girl has just started to talk to Tom when two men, her husband and his father join them. The father and the son look much alike, they are sharp faced and both support a beard. One can make out from their wet faces and dripping hair that they have just come from a bath.

The men invite Tom to join them for breakfast, which they say, is by God's grace plenty. Tom cannot resist the temptation since the food smells so good.

The men are not only alike in their looks, with their stubble beards but are also wearing similar clothes, stiff blue shirts, new ones. They eat together contently but rather eagerly. The younger man tells Joad that they have been eating well for the past twelve days since they had been lucky to get work.

The father and the son are working at Mr. Thomas' place, laying down a pipe. They tell Tom that they can put in a word for him if he would like to do that job. Tom is happy to get this chance and proceeds to work, leaving a word about it, with Ruthie.

They are friends now, Timothy Wallace, the father, Wilkie the son and Tom Joad. Timothy relates how they had almost starved to death before they got this job. They were also forced to sell their car since they had nothing left with them. The car dealers, he tells Tom, came to the camps and bargained with people who are hungry and who have run out of their resources. The car that they had sold for ten dollars had a tag of seventy-five dollars on her in a car dealers yard in Bakersfield. Wilkie had seen it with his own eyes.

Mr. Thomas whom the two men work for is a small timer. He owns a small place, works with them and has his sympathies with them too. But his work is on a small scale and cannot provide them for long.

Thomas is a part of the farmer's association and is bound by the decisions they take. His disagreement with them or with the bank of the west cannot benefit the workers since he is too small to dictate terms. The changes and amendments that the association or the bank makes are generally in the interest of the owners, against the interests of the labour.

Timothy and Wilkie are surprised to learn that their wages have been lowered from thirty to twenty five cents. They sulk but have no choice except working for what they can get. Thomas also tells them that the Deputies were planning to disrupt the Saturday night dance, make some people fight and enter the camp.

*"Well, the Association don't like the government camps. Can't get a deputy in there. The people make their own laws, I hear, and you can't arrest a man without a warrant. Now if there was big fight and maybe shooting—a bunch of deputies can go in and clean out the camp.— Don't you ever tell what you heard. There's going to be a fight in the camp on Saturday night. And there's going to be deputies ready to go in."*

Thomas also reads the news about the burning of the other camp. The police have blamed the angered red agitators for burning the camp, which they have burnt, out of vengeance, themselves.

The biggest threat to the migrants comes from the police and the big farmers. To the farmers the unions pose a big threat. The big farmers want to keep them scattered, defenceless and disintegrated.

*"They're scairt we'll organize, I guess. An' maybe they're right. This here camp is a reorganization. People there look out for themselves. Got the nicest strang band in these parts. Got a little charge account in the store for folks that are hungry. Fi' dollars—you can git that much food an' camp'll stan' good. We ain't have no trouble with the law."*

Rich people like Hines, who owns about thirty thousand acres of land, with peaches and grapes, owns a cannery as well as a vinery, besides other things, are the people who hate the reds the most. To him any worker who demands the fixed rate of thirty cents wages, when Hines wants to pay twenty, is a red. Timothy tells the story of Hines and Chuckles. To him, by that definition all of them are reds.

Steinbeck keeps us abreast with the happening all around, but doesn't forget the characters who don't have a direct role in the growth of the plot.

Winfield and Ruthie are present throughout, acting drunkards after Uncle John goes on his drinking spree, fighting and playing their own games. Ruthie the older of the two is more of a bully. Exploiting Winfield's curiosity and fear, she plays with his emotions, making him unhappy or sad according to her moods.

The bathrooms in the camps are the children's latest fascination. Winfield is curious to go and have a look at them but Ruthie tells him that she already had been there, she had even Pee'd in one, she says, to show her superiority

*"There," said Ruthie, "Them's the toilets. I seen 'em in the catalogue" The children draw near to one of the toilets. Ruthie, in a burst of bravado, boosted her skirt and sat down." I tol you I been there"—and to prove it, there was a tinkle of water in the bowl."*

Ruthie, by her wicked manipulations throughout, is able to curb Winfield's sense of importance or equality with his sister. The shame of ignorance is felt by the children and even Ma, at one place, when she, by mistake, goes and uses the men's bathroom instead of the ladies.

Ma's joy at her bath is so great that she immediately wakes up her family to go and wash themselves in the newly found luxury. She is excited about the new life they can live in the camp. She wants everybody to be washed and combed and to wear whatever best they have.

She asks Rose of Sharon to clean herself, to braid her hair and wear her shoes. She won't have nothing of her feeling puky, noting of Connie's either. Ma is suddenly brisk and bubbly. She requests Pa to take Winfield and Ruthie for a bath, she wants them scrubbed, she wants to see the whole family clean, the whole family shining and red.

Jim Rawley, the manager, tells Ma about the people in the camp during his first short visit to appraise her. He at once puts her at ease with his courteous behavior. He tells her how good the people living in the camp are. He tells her how they joined themselves in a group, working, doing jobs for the community and the children.

*" You wait till the women get to washing. Pretty soon now. You never heard such a fuss. Like a meeting. Know what they did yesterday, Mrs. Joad? They had a chorus. Singing a hymn tune and rubbing the clothes all the time. That was something to hear I tell you"*

The manager accepts Ma's offer of coffee, his friendly manners and lack of presumption makes her more and more comfortable with him. Ma hasn't seen like compassion and friendliness ever since they left home; she is overcome by a feeling of gratitude, her heart full " she put down her head and he thought with a desire to cry".

The Joads find it hard to believe, after what they have gone through, that such people and such places exist. Rose of Sharon is happy with the place. She has seen the birth of a child in the camp. The child was given presents, a cake was cut and it was such a celebration. She also wants to consult the nurse so that she has a healthy baby.

The confidence of people having been restored they come out with what they had been suppressing within themselves. Ma tells her how she had started feeling mean and ashamed living amongst people who despised them. Having come to her own folks, she no longer suffered from shame.

The friendliness of the people brings new joy in the life of Rose of Sharon. She feels happy and wanted when a woman asks her whether she was going to have a boy or a girl. Rose of Sharon exults in pregnancy once again. The woman, however, doesn't give much hope of work.

The visit of the brown woman to the Joad tent draws the reader's attention, once again, to the question of good and evil, virtue and sin. The woman is, like many, obsessed with the idea of sin, clutching and hugging is a sin, dancing and kissing is a sin and love making is the biggest sin of all. The woman and her companions are self-appointed Lieutenants of Jesus. They keep their eyes open and are on the look out for sinners.

The visit of the Committee to the Joads is dealt with a kind of humour. The good intention of the women, their discipline and decorum and their consciousness of their position is touched upon with light satire. They're the ladies committee of the sanitary unit no. four and are fully aware of their responsibility as well as importance.

The children of the families play together and supervision during playtime is done by the ladies by rotation.

The Joads are happy in the camp. Tom has brought some money but the fear of work lurks in everybody's heart. Ma is happy to have the money, she wants Pa to get some nice things to eat. She would like the family to have something nice at least one day.

### Chapter 23

Steinbeck is a great storyteller, he knows the joy of story telling and listening to them. Great stories are made great not only by the storyteller but also by the participation of keen listeners.

The migrant people love to hear stories. Scuttling for work and scabbling for food wear them out. They need something to divert them, something to amuse them, they love to listen to stories, stories that can fascinate them and help them forget their hunger for some time.

Steinbeck describes the story telling sessions in the evenings, when people gather under the sycamore trees to hear the gifted storyteller:

*"And the people listened, and their faces were quiet with listening. The storytellers, gathering attention into their tales, spoke in great rhythms, spoke in great words because the tales were great, and the listeners became great through them."*

The people love to hear stories of war, violence and 'injuns'. They love to go to the movies too. Sacrificing on food, men go to watch movies in Marysville or Tulare and relate what they have seen excitedly.

The common themes of the movies, the oft repeated beaten ones, are, the rich men wanting to live like poor men, rich men who are tired of their riches, of misunderstandings and mistaken identities. People enjoy these hackneyed themes and the moviemakers cash in on it. Escape from reality is what people want, by drinking, which takes you into a world where you are rich, have friends. There is no gap between joy and sorrow then, there is no gap between life and death. Music, playing harmonica or guitar can give that pleasure too. You can manufacture the pleasure yourself, play harmonica, guitar. Playing fiddle is difficult; it is rare, difficult to learn.

Music is followed by dancing, men and women, young and old forget themselves in the ecstasy of the rhythm, pleasure soaring high with the rising tempo.

Abandonment is not good for the soul of man. The preacher reminds people, lest they forget themselves in the sin of joy. *"Beside an irrigation ditch a preacher laboured and the people cried. And the preacher paced like a tiger, whipping the people with his voice, and they groveled and whined on the ground. He calculated them, gauges them, played on them, and when they were all squirming on the ground he stooped down and of his great strength he picked each one in his arms and shouted, take 'em' Christ! And threw each one in the water."*

### Chapter 24

Saturday night is the much-awaited night. The washtubs are crowded on Saturday mornings. The women wash dresses, the best they have and smoothen them straight, wrinkle free. The children have caught the fever and are more noisy than usual. They are scrubbed. Not used to clean clothes they feel miserable in the carefulness about them.

Great bustle of work can be seen at the dance platform. The committee is busy making arrangements, electric wires are being fixed; the means and money being meager, innovations for safety are invented. Bottlenecks are improvised as insulators. This Saturday is special the dance floor is going to be lighted for the first time.

Dinner is over early. Men and women bathed and have their best clothes on. Girls are ready in their printed dresses; the string band is practicing on the platform.

"Ezra Huston, the Chairman of the Committee is in meeting with five members, one member from each unit. They are lucky, he says, to have received the word they was gonna try to bust up the dance"

The Committee prepares itself for the challenge and decides to "squash the hell out of em' an' show em'"

Preparations for vigilance are made by posting boys on the fences so that nobody sneaks in. Willie Eaton, the Chairman of the Entertainment Committee, is also called for consultation. The committee draws out a plan warning their people that there should be no violence on the intruders. The Deputies are looking for an opportunity to barge into the camp and take some people in. Huston works out the strategy so that even if the intruders are hurt, they don't bleed," use no sticks or knives', he tells them, ' if you got to sock em' do it where they won't bleed."

Huston is like most of the migrants, bewildered at the attitude of the Deputies. The people wonder whether it is

because they wish to keep them down in the gutters, pinned down to the squalor, unable to raise their heads. Do they envy them the flush bathrooms and the hot water in the government camp or are they simply afraid of the so-called reds uniting and raising their heads in revolt.

The rich people grudge the migrants, the Okies, the facilities in the camp, because it is a drain on their resources. It is they who pay the taxes for these people to get their wages and subsidies.

Al is as usual looking for a girl. Sporting a tight fitting wool suit and a striped shirt, he tries to assess his profile before approaching girls on the dance platform. His eyes peeling for girls, he proposes a dance to a girl. He tries to lure her by his dance but is immediately thwarted by a fat woman, probably the girl's mother.

Tom is on the Committee, watching and guarding the camp. The gang, which had come to bust the dance, is ultimately nabbed by them and interrogated.

It is revealed that some of the poor migrants are being picked up by the police to break the unity of the people.

The chapter keeps in the readers view the other characters of the Joad family. Tom slowly becoming a part of the fighting squad and Rose of Sharon growing lonelier day-by-day.

## Chapter 25

California's richness is always richer in Spring. The spring is beautiful in California. The beauty of the valley is bewitching. California, Steinbeck's country, is described by him in all its glory.

*"Valleys in which fruits blossoms are fragrant, pink and white, waters in a shallow sea—The full green hills are round and soft as breasts—vegetable lands are the mile long rows of pale green lettuce"*

Steinbeck observes the sprouting of the seed, the coming of the leaves and the blossoming of the fruit, with a feeling of awe and gratitude. Nature's generosity in granting this abundance of grapes, pears, peaches and cherries and what have you, fills Steinbeck's heart with wonder. He marvels at nature, at the expedience of man in making the fruit, wholesome and free of disease. The agriculturists, the scientists and the men behind the fruitfulness and wealth of these vast orchards. Make it possible for the plants to resist the enemies, the insects, the rusts and the blights.

Steinbeck's admiration for these men, the men who have the skill to transform the world, the knowledge to fill the trees with the colourful produce, is a part of his admiration of any power that is beneficial to man.

The fruit hanging on the tree, the fruit that should have gone into the peoples' mouths, the fruit that should have given the people wages, is unfortunately made to decay. The orchard owners will not sell the fruit, they won't gather it, it is not giving enough profit, it is not economical to pluck and pack it. They, therefore, let the fruit decay.

The land of plenty, under this system of ownership and banking turns into a land of rotting and hunger. Fragrance of fruit turns into the foul smell of decay. The paradox of hunger in the land of plenty is, to Steinbeck, the saddest paradox of human suffering. He says:

*"There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange. And coroners must fill in the certificate—died of malnutrition—because the food must rot, must be forced to rot"*

The despair and the feeling of being stifled by the system, which represses and kills, is resulting into growing wrath in people. The chapter is important since in it we perceive the growing anger in the souls of the people, the wrath of grapes that shall slowly ferment and break loose.

## Chapter 26

The government camp is hard to leave for the Joads. There are good people around and the place is nice but there is no work. The family is again forced to think of moving. There are options, maybe Marysville or a place near Tulare, wherever they can get work. There is a hint at the change in the Joad family, Ma and Pa argue for the first time. Ma is getting tougher, she expects the male members to find work and keep up their courage. Pa resents that men be dictated by women. He says sarcastically, "Seems the time is changed—Time was when a man said what we'd do."

Seems like omen is telling now, seems like it's purty near time he get out a stick." Ma, who Tom observes earlier, is getting tougher and just boils up and retorts, "but you ain't doin your job, either a thinkin' or a workin'. If you was, why, you could use your stick—you're a fighter, cause I got a stick—out to."

Tom tries to calm Ma down, as usual tries to bring a reconciliation in the family. Ma has a deeper understanding with Tom than with anyone else in the family. He is more reliable, evenly balanced; he does not lose his cool. In one of the most direct statements she makes about Tom and her relationship, she says, "you got more sense Tom. I don't need to make you mad. I got to lean on you. Them others—they're kinda strangers, all but you. You won't give up Tom."

Tom sometimes gets tired of his own equanimity. He would sometimes like to get baffled and angry and drunk like Al, Pa and Uncle John. Ma who knows Tom better knows that he can't. She has known since he was a little kid that he was different. Unable to explain he puts her feelings as clearly as possible, "There's some folks that's just theirself and nothin'—you wasn't never like that—Everything you do is more'n you. When they sent you up to prison, I knowed it."

Rose of Sharon grows more and more disconsolate as time passes. Forlorn and lonely without Connie, she gets more and more concerned about the child. She herself sums up her feelings in the following words, "Got no husband! Got no milk."

The following scene between Ma and Rose of Sharon is of great intensity. Grieved over her daughter's condition, Ma wants to make her happy. She offers her a pair of golden earrings. When Rose of Sharon reminds her that her ears were not pierced, she sits down to pierce her daughter's ears with a needle and thread. She tries to reassure Rose of Sharon, "your baby gonna be a good baby. Very near let you have a baby without your ears was pierced. But you're safe now."

Al meets the blonde girl for the last time before the Joads leave. The juvenile lovers are immature, playful and moody. They make love more dramatically than Connie and Rose of Sharon, giggling and biting, instead of talking in whispers. Huston, the head and the manager of the committee come to bid farewell to the Joads. They are sad that the Joads are leaving but cannot help it. The Joads, are themselves unhappy to go but as Pa explains, they have got to eat.

Willie and Jule, the people in the committee, talk of ways and means to protect themselves. The police have not been able to pick up innocent people from the camp because of their unity and organization, 'working together' was the only way. The deputies can do nothing if the people stick together. The deputies are rendered powerless in front of a group; they only pick up on one man.

The wrath is fermenting in the hearts of the people. Hunger and steadily falling wages disturb and infuriate them. Other characters like Willie and Jule talk of their problems particularly their growing children.

Joads are sad to leave the camp. Never in their lives, they know, they are going to get a place like that. Early morning they load the truck and leave once again, for somewhere they don't know.

They go back the way they had come towards Bakersfield. By the time they reach the outskirts of the city daylight is breaking out.

Al stands in sharp contrast to Tom, whereas Tom is concerned about the entire family, Al wants to get away. He is heard saying irritably, "I'm goin out on my own purty soon. Fella can make his way lot easier if he ain't got a family."

The Joads move on till they come to the same Hooverville from they had moved. The Hooverville, which we know had been burnt, has been rebuilt. The migrants have become so used to being uprooted that they hide down the willows and then they come out and "build another weed shack". Some of them have been burnt down fifteen-twenty times. They have now got used to it. They don't get angry no more, they bear it just they bear bad whether.

Ma's mind is full of anxieties. She is particularly anxious about Winfield whose health has been deteriorating. She is also worried about Rose of Sharon.

They must have a house before winter, she tells Tom. It rains cats in the area, she has heard. It would be impossible to survive without shelter.

They have a flat tyre on the road, which Tom and Al try to fix. Even while talking of a spare tyre for the truck, Tom's mind wanders away to side meat and coffee.

Al and Tom are busy pumping the air into the tyre when they see a brown faced man dressed in a light gray business suit walking towards them. The man tells them that there was plenty of work at a place called Hooper ranch. The place was fifty miles from there and had a job of picking peaches.

Hopes are raised once again and the Joads decide to move to the ranch. Ma is most excited about work, since it is only work that can give them flour and coffee and may be some meat and baking powder too. The Joads watch the



richness of the country, the melons and the peaches. Overcome with happiness Al exclaims that he hadn't felt so good for a long time. Ma's mind is occupied with thoughts of having a house and she shares her dream of renting a house if she could pick plenty of peaches. Ma is already toying with the idea of getting some provisions on credit if the four men, Pa, Uncle John, Al and Tom get work.

Ahead of them the Joads see a line of motorcycles drawn up along a number of cars, queued up for their turn. Tom does not like being watched by the cops while they drive towards a group of men, yelling angrily with their fists shaking violently. The cars are urged by the policemen and the Joads see that they have reached a peach camp.

The peach-camp is the most matter of fact place, the Joads come across. There are fifty little flat roofed boxes, each with a door and window, there is a grocery store on the other side and two men armed with shotguns are standing as guards.

The Joads are allotted a box to stay and asked to start work immediately. The atmosphere of the place is not friendly and the Joads become fearful and a pall of gloom seems to fall on the children.

Records and ledgers are kept by the clerks. Wages are paid at a piece rate, five cents a box. The only care that they have to take is to see that the peaches are not bruised and that they create no trouble.

The first box of peaches is rejected, but soon the Joads start filling the boxes one after the other.

Tom starts counting the nickels, adding up to buy meat and coffee. The children start enthusiastically but not being used to this kind of work they soon start complaining of tiredness.

The company's store where things are given on credit to the workers is also set up to make more profit for the owners. The things available are stale and of poor quality. Knowing that the shortage of money will force people to buy there, the prices are also much higher than the market outside.

The storekeeper makes fun of Ma but when scolded by her, he tells her that he was doing that job, like many others were doing other dirty jobs just because he needed to earn. Later he pays ten cents from his own pocket to give sugar to Ma. Ma has learnt one thing in this lean period that she has gone through. Leaving the store, she tells the store manager, "I'm leaving one thing good—leaving it all a time every day. If you're in trouble or hurt or need—go to the poor people. They are the only ones that help, the only ones."

Tom, has, as he tells, Pa later, been distracted by the crowd gathered outside the gate. He wants to go and see what the whole fuss is about. Since no one else seems to be inclined to go, Tom decides to go alone. He has grown curious about it. Pa warns him not to tell Ma about it since it would unnecessarily worry her. The conditions in this camp stand in sharp contrast to those of the government camp. The Joads become the target of the guards jeers when Tom asks if there is hot water to bathe. The guards talk contemptuously of how migrants have been spoiled by government camps.

*"I bet that fella been in a gov'ment camp. We ain't gona have no peace till we wipe them camps out. They'll be wantin' clean sheets, first thing we know."*

With no work and no wages, things become difficult for the Joads day by day. They have no soap to wash, no food to eat and for what little cooking Ma does, they have to break the boxes for fire. The food that Ma is able to serve the family is meager. Two patties and a big potato and three slices of bread on each plate.

Tom is not yet full when he gets up after supper but Ma has no more, she can only hope that they will have enough for next supper. It is after supper that Tom walks stealthily and quietly towards the place where the cops had held back a crowd in the morning. Tom crosses the embankment, comes to the state road, from where he can see the wire gate in the starlight. Tom is stopped at the gate by a guard who tells him that going out of the gate was not being permitted that night because of the trouble that some reds had created. Since Tom is in no position to challenge this order, he quietly walks back. But Tom's curiosity is too great to subside and he takes a diversion to reach beyond the barbed wire. Coming up the highway he comes to the side of a bridge. It is by a stroke of good luck that Tom meets Casy who is hiding with three of his comrades in a tent beside the bridge.

Casy tells Joad about his experiences in the jail. Jail was to him a great teacher. The knowledge and realization that he had been looking for in the wilderness came to him in jail. Tom is happy to hear him talk. 'Casy' says Tom, "is such a great talker that he would be passing a day talking to the hangman if he were sent to the gallows."

Casy acts as the mouthpiece of Steinbeck again. He attributes the cause of all trouble to the needs of man. If one man yells his demands nobody listens to him but if many yell together for their needs, it becomes a movement and movements do yield results sooner or later.

The people who had collected that morning were the strikers, strikers who had united against the owners; Casy explains the situation to Tom. The owners, who are paying five cents to the new labour, were ready to pay only two and a half cents now. If they are able to bust the strike, they would pay the labour two and a half cents only. Casy tells Tom about the unjust rate of wages, which cannot even buy a square meal for the family.

The discussion reverts to the government camps where there are no cops and all of them agree that cops create more trouble than they stop. In the course of this conversation Casy cites examples of the French revolution and the fight of Abraham Lincoln against a cruel system. All these revolutions were opposed and suppressed by a section of society; the revolutionaries faced hostility and assault. In the long run however, Casy is convinced, revolutions always bear fruit.

The man sitting outside the gate gets a feeling that they are being watched. The man gets suspicious that he is hearing some voices. All of them become alert. But they have already been surrounded by cops. It is Casy that they have been looking for." That's him. That shiny bastard. That's him." Casy tries to reason it out with them but they have come determined to take him. The fat man hits Casy on the head with his prick handle and Casy falls down dead, with his head crushed. Tom is also given a blow but is able to escape through the thicket. Tom tries to assess the hurt. he touches his numb face and realizes that his nose has been crushed.

He manages to reach his house and asks Al not to whisper a word. Tom had in the confusion that followed Casy's chase by the cops clubbed one of the cops in the head. Tom's position, already precarious, since he is on parole, becomes all the more vulnerable. He tells his family how Casy had been killed by the cops simply because he was fighting for the strikers cause.

It is now inevitable that Tom will have to leave. Tom is forced not to go for work and Winfield and Ruthie are also taken into confidence. Tom again pleads to Al, not to leave his family since they needed him now more than ever. Tom is concerned about Ma, Pa and Rose of Sharon. But Al's mind is turned to other things. He wants to leave the family and pick up a job in a garage.

Ma doesn't have a good feeling bout the place. She wants to save some money on food and move from there. She wants Tom safe. Tom, however, realizes the danger of his presence to the family and wishes to go away. Ma's entire mind is focused on the safety of Tom. There is a heated altercation between Rose of Sharon and Tom since she has become too touchy about being displaced into uncertainty again. With the prolonged suffering, each member of the family is becoming more and more irritable. But Ma persists in her perseverance and the promise she has made to herself, the promise of keeping the family together. She is not able to hold it together for long though. Coming to a place where they find a signboard saying, "cotton croppers wanted", they decide to stop and look for work.

Tom goes to live separately, hiding himself till the wounds on his face get filled. He may be found out by the cops and may be identified. Tom hates to be hunted but he is destined to be hunted.

## Chapter 27

Joads are along with many other migrants waiting to pick the cotton. Like others they have seen the placards and orange coloured handbills and proceeded here.

The exploitation of the cotton pickers begins right away. They are asked to purchase a bag to fill in the cotton; they have to pay a dollar for each bag. In case they don't have a dollar, which is most likely, it can be adjusted against their wages. Steinbeck displays an amazing ability to describe the urgency of the owners to make profit, as well as the desperation of the migrants to work.

Work is always pleasant to Steinbeck. Men long to work, to use their muscles and mind. Fulfillment to Steinbeck comes through work. The women enjoy their work too. Talking and singing they cook, wash, raise their children and gather the cotton.

Gossiping and sharing stories is a good past time and all characters of Steinbeck indulge in it freely. Rarely does a character of Steinbeck keep things to himself, exceptions like Noah withstanding. Gradually the people become adept in their job, they can pick cotton with their eyes closed. Both sides can cheat, the owners by tampering with the scales, the pickers by putting rods in the sack. The owner wants the sack to weigh less, the pickers more. Cheating is common and natural too.

The migrants face competition from not only the machines but their own folks as well. Where there is work for fifty,

there are five hundred people to do the job, too many hands are available, they finish the job in no time. Rendered jobless again, they have to move or starve. Work means food to the people. Work means side meat and biscuits and a stomach full. Work has to be got, by snatching, pushing even trampling others.

## Chapter 28

The Joads are now part of a settlement that people have devised. The cars have been turned into living rooms, with their wheels removed, they stand like boxes, boxes that serve as houses. The Joads are happy to be parked there. Every day they have been picking cotton and every night they have been having meat. They have even bought a new stove and overalls for Al and Pa. Everybody has a new dress. Rose of Sharon will do with the best of Ma's right now because she is big now, buying a new dress for her is a waste. The settlement is complete with clotheslines and other small conveniences that the settlers have improvised for themselves.

The Joads are doing fine, earning enough for pork chops and a piece of meat of beef once in a while. Uncle John is happy too, working hard and sleeping well has given him a new spirit. He no longer suffers from hallucinations of sun. He even looks at fancy things with interest. Winfield and Ruthie are happy with their cracker jacks.

It is in this boxcar camp that Ruthie divulges in fit of rage that her brother Tom had murdered two people. Ruthie Winfield tells Ma had blurted it out during a fight she had with other children on the camp. Winfield relates in sequence what had happened between Ruthie and the other girl. How Ruthie provoked and challenged by the other girl had told her that her brother was hiding right then, from 'killin' a fella'.

Everybody in the family is now in panic. Ma goes to meet Tom at the culvert where he's been hiding. Ma is scared for Tom for the scar on his face and his crooked nose would easily give him away.

The last meeting between Tom and Ma is described with touching detail. Ma knows the danger to Tom's life and would not have him stay there. She offers Tom the seven dollars she has saved during the past few days. He refuses but is ultimately forced by Ma to accept. The last lines spoken by Tom are significant. They tell us about Tom's future course. Though he does not specifically say what he is going to do, it is implied in what he says:

*"Lookie Ma, I been all day and all night hidin' alone. Guess who I've been thinking about? Casy— how I been thinkin' what he said — says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul— Casy used to say that he realized that hi own soul was a part of the rest, of the whole. Tom had realized the truth of Casy's statement that a fella is no good if he's alone. Tom's mind is set to work with people, for the welfare of people against those who disrupt and spoil their happiness."*

Tom having understood the philosophy of Casy decides to carry on his work.

*"Then it don't matter. Then I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be everywhere—wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an' — I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build—why, I'll be there. See? God, I'm talkin' like Casy. Comes of thinkin' about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes."*

The Joad family is breaking fast. Grandpa and Grandma gone, Connie gone and now Tom, the son who stood above all others, gone.

In another box in the Car-box camp is Mr. Wainwright, with a wife and a daughter, Aggie, a young beautiful girl of sixteen. After the Wainwrights have become friendly with the Joads, Wainwright comes to them with Aggie's proposal for Al. Al as it is has been wooing Aggie ever since they met at this camp and the settlement makes him happy.

Pa the erstwhile head of the family is fast losing interest in things; he leaves it in the hands of Ma. Steinbeck sees women as pillars of strength, a unifying force, more constant, with a firmer head. The conversation between Ma and Pa gives us a clear insight into Steinbeck's views on the strengths and weaknesses of the two sexes.

If Casy is Steinbeck's spokesperson as far as religious and political views go, Ma is his picture of womanhood. Tom, the man, can be tough without being mean. Ma is the citadel of hope, of the spirit to fight, to live and the spirit of 'Never say Die'

*" Everything we do— seems to me is aimed right at goin' on. Seems that way to me. Even getti' hungry—even bein sick; some die, buit the rest is tougher. Jus' try to live the day, ju's the day."*

Al's decision to go and take up a job at a garage after he marries Aggie prepares the reader for yet another split in the family. The family is breaking up but not Ma.

The Joad's have a small party to celebrate Al's engagement with Aggie. The Joads and the Wainwrights move towards the twenty-acre farm for work but with all the people flocking there for work the farm cannot sustain them for too long. The end of the chapter with Rose of Sharon feeling weak prepares us for the child's birth in the next.

## Chapter 29

The clouds come menacingly to the Car-box people. The water level rises and slowly the lower parts of the car are immersed in water. The ignitions of the cars refuse to ignite, engines fail so as to render people immobile.

There is no work coming for the next months and people are frantically looking for means of survival. There is neither hope of wages nor any hope of relief from the government. Terror has crept to the faces of people. Children cry with hunger but there is no food.

The rains bring with them the spread of disease, pneumonia and measles. The rising water level poses another threat. The heavy rains fill the highways with water. The people in the tents try to clog water with rugs. They run for safety and pitch themselves wherever they find a high ground.

The authorities hate them for the nuisance they are creating. The Sheriffs find it difficult to give security to the rich, and the rich, who initially looked at the migrants with pity, now look at them with distaste.

Human life is worth nothing. Steinbeck talks ironically of human condition. Men are treated worse than animals.

These are times when men can break and if men break family's break, countries break. When men are angry and together in a group, the hope of survival builds again. Steinbeck resumes his talk about it; we had heard Steinbeck talking of the same when the croppers had initially been dislocated from their homes.

*" The women watched the men, watched to see whether the break had come at last. The women stood silently and watched. And where a number of men gathered together, the fear went from their faces, and anger took its place. And the women sighed with relief, for they knew it was alright – the break had not come; and the break would never come as long as fear could turn to wrath."*

Steinbeck sees hope for mankind in their spirit to fight, to unite and fight.

## Chapter 30

In the Boxcar camp the water rises slowly creeping up the banks. The men huddle together like a family trying to figure out what to do. Their spirits are damp with the fatigue of fear.

Rose of Sharon, is in her illness being looked after by Ma. The men are busy making plans to stop water from creeping into the cars Pa seeks Al's help but Al has already decided not to move with the family. He tells Pa that he and Aggie are going to stick together.

Ma and Mrs. Wainwright help Rose of Sharon deliver the baby. Aggie is assigned the charge of the kids whereas Ma and Mrs. Wainwright get busy arranging the light, closing the door and pacing Rose of Sharon for an easy delivery.

Winfield and Ruthie watch the whole thing curiously. Ruthie the older one also gets cleverer and directs Winfield to do what she would have him do.

Ma and Mrs. Wainwright work intently, exchanging suggestions and instructions throughout. The two women have their methods of comforting Rose of Sharon. While Ma tries to encourage her with words, Mrs. Wainwright slides a pair knife under the pillow. It is believed by their folks that it makes the delivery easier. Ma and Mrs. Wainwright help Rose of Sharon wait till they know that she is ready to deliver.

While the women are busy in the car, Pa is busy along with the other men in digging so that the water diverts into the

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ditch. The fury and zeal of the men working to stop the water, as well as the birth of the lifeless child are described by Steinbeck in vivid detail.

Men are relieved to have stopped the water from rising against the car when a tree suddenly falls on the mud wall that they have erected to keep the water away.

Steinbeck shows a growing feeling of kinship amongst the people who feel abandoned. The concept of a family grows larger with each set back. The people stand together, stranded, unable to move their vehicles. Uncle John's farewell to the child whom he's gone to bury is at once full of pathos and remorse.

*" And then he leened over and set the box in the stream and steadied it with his hand. He said fiercely, 'Go down an' tell em'. Go down in the street an' rot an' tell em' that way. That's the way you can talk. Don't even know if you was a boy or a girl. Ain't gonna find out. Go on down now, an' lay in the street maybe they'll know then."*

*The Joads keep fighting the rising water till it becomes impossible to be in the truck. The truck is almost immersed in water when Ma along with Pa, Uncle John, Rose of Sharon, Ruthie and Winfield decides to leave. Al finally stays back with Aggie, knowing that a separation from the family is now inevitable.*

It is after a long walk that the family sees a barn on a patch of land. The end episode of the novel speaks of the enormity of suffering that the migrants have faced. Inside the barn, the Joads see, a father and his young son, the father is slowly dying of starvation while his own son watches helplessly. The end of the novel, despite all the suffering that we see, infuses hope in the heart. Ma and Rose of Sharon, the two grown up women, are portrayed in the last scene as givers of sustenance and life. Rose of Sharon grows from a young woman suffering from the loss of her child into a mother figure. Looking at the wasted face of the man, she decides to help in the survival of life.

*" Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. " You got to", she said. She squirmed close and pulled his head close. " There!" she said. " There" Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously "*  
The eternal spirit of man to fight and of a woman to provide conquers, the hope is not lost.

## Important Topics

### Style and Image: John Steinbeck

#### *Steinbeck and Photography: Brian Railsback*

" If the life of an artist may be seen through the reflection of other artists, then John Steinbeck proves a very multifaceted author. Among his great contemporaries – William Faulkner, F Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, and even Ernest Hemingway—John Steinbeck was the greatest collaborator. He even went beyond the boundaries of the newspaper article, the short story, the essay, the novel and extended into film, plays, musicals and photo books. He worked with scientists; strike organizers, actors, directors, producers and photographers. He enjoyed gardening, gadgets and new technologies; had he lived long enough, I believe he would have beaten Stephen King as the first major novelist to sell a book online.

Steinbeck may be characterized as an artist who reaches outward, far beyond himself. His aim differs so much from his fellow writers that he is assured of greatness as well as misunderstanding. Unlike Thomas Wolfe, F. Scott Fitzgerald or even Ernest Hemingway, Steinbeck did not write solely centered on his personal experience.

Steinbeck's most successful writing style flows outward. In some of his strongest passages, he creates world images that work together like a well-framed photograph. Several scenes described in his work read as if they were made for the camera. For example, the first paragraph of ' In Dubious Battle:

*At last it was evening. The lights in the street outside came on, and the Neon restaurant sign in the corner jerked on and off, exploding its hard red light in the air. Into Jim Nolan's room the sign threw a soft red light. For two hours Jim had been sitting in a small, hard rocking chair, his feet upon the white bedspread. Now that it was quite dark, he brought his feet down to the floor and slapped the sleeping legs. For a moment he sat quietly while waves of itching rolled up and down his calves; then he stood up and reached for the unshaded*

*light. The furnished room lighted up- the big white bed with its chalk white spread, the golden- oak bureau, the clean red carpet worn through to a brown warp."*

Here is a fascination with detail and light, a half-century earlier this paragraph would have fit in neatly with the Impressionist writers of the age of realism. Similarly 'The Grapes of Wrath' opens with its famous paragraph that photographs the red and gray country of Oklahoma. Throughout the novel Steinbeck works like a photographer with the aperture of these glasses, at times focusing close-up on the Joads and at other times taking in the great panorama in the intercalary chapters. The author is after the whole picture.

### ***Myth in the Novels of John Steinbeck: Urbashi Barat***

Conventionally, of course, myth and novel might not have much in common: the former, with its archetypal, suprahuman figures, has little to do with the historical time, the temporal progress and the everyday world that are the hallmarks of the traditional novel, which is firmly based in space, time and social reality. Myth is, 'one extreme of literary design; naturalism [of the traditional novel] is the other.' Indeed the development of the novel in the West is closely linked to the loss of belief in the myths of the past, and its primary aim was, as fictional history, "to serve verisimilitude first of all: to deal with the truth of daily existence", as Leslie A. Fiddler puts it: "The turning of the modern novel from mythology to psychology, from a body of communal story to the mind of the individual is an enterprise typical of our times" But as Fiddler went on to observe, "Indeed, only in the mind, or more precisely in the sub-mind of a dreaming man can we discover images common to everyone in our multifarious culture; and these images common though not traditional mythology, are myth in the profoundest sense of the word."

As John Steinbeck remarked of the characteristically American myths of success in the essay, "Paradox and Dream": "It occurs to me that all dreams, waking and sleeping, are powerful and prominent memories of something real, of something that really happened." It is suggested that the world of the novel is born out of the conflict between the autonomy and integrity of myth, which endures through time, on the one hand, and the changing world of history and society on the other. To quote Zaraffa,

*"Every novel must have some myth to serve as a frame of reference and the question... is precisely one of knowing to what extent the particular myth is pertinent to the actual historical society and consequently can account for it."*

When, therefore, John Steinbeck noted in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech:

*"The ancient commission of the writer has not changed. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement. Furthermore, the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit - for courage, compassion and love."*

he was in fact reiterating his belief in the novelists moorings in myth, for him synonymous with dreams. He himself has been called the 'American dreamer', whose, "fiction has [always] described the interplay of dream and reality; his thought has followed the development of the American Dream" in its successive phases, a quest for and a dream about the meaning, the destiny, the promise of America, that themselves are the myths in which all American literature takes its origin; after all, as Northrop Frye puts it, "the central myth of literature, in its narrative aspect, is the quest-myth, through which all Steinbeck's novels examine the American dream by retelling, revisiting and revisioning the myths in which it originated.

Not surprisingly, then, the use of myth in Steinbeck's novels has almost invariably been noted and commented upon by most scholars and critics, some of whom have related him to Emersonian Transcendentalism, while others have suggested that the American novel itself as distinct from its European forebears, is especially indebted to myth because, "The American writer inhabits a country at once the dream of Europe and a fact of history; he lives on the last horizon of an endlessly retreating vision of innocence—on the 'frontier', which is to say, the margin where the theory of original goodness and the fact of original sin come face to face."

Steinbeck, however, argues that there is a saving grace in illusion because life without it may be insupportable.

### ***Steinbeck's Adaptation of Musical Techniques: Michael Meyer***

John Steinbeck also had an ear for music. In fact references to it abound in his canon as well as his letters to friends and acquaintances. Therefore, it is not unlikely that as he perfected his craft, he too became entranced by the sound of words and by their power to impact and even recreate human feelings. Ditsky in his essay, 'The Devil in Music' suggests that Steinbeck, like Hopkin's Lucifer, "sang his own song," a melody often tinged with dissonance: he also argues that much of Steinbeck's artistic output had to do with his struggle over his black angel over many a long night and even over the eventually splitting of his ego into twinned possibilities."

First of all, it is clear that Steinbeck was uniquely aware of the power of rhythm and that he employed it effectively throughout his canon. Ditsky calls attention to the inter-chapter of *The Grapes of Wrath* that features car salesman to illustrate his rhythmic sensitivity. Readers of this chapter almost feel as if they are listening to an auctioneer as the words bombard the car buyers at a pace that leaves them bewildered and vulnerable. Another illustration is the square dance scene at the Weed patch camp. Most readers will agree that this passage can hardly be read without a sense of swirling or movement in a circular pattern, of feet tapping and instruments playing.

The following sentences continue to depict the passion that grows as the dance continues, eventually associating the dancers' building sexual emotions with religious fervor—praying and conversion—a seemingly unconnected and perhaps even dissonant event.

But it is not only quick-paced prose that Steinbeck masters in *The Grapes of Wrath*. He is able to entrance his reader with slow restless images, like those that begin the novel. Steinbeck claimed that in writing the book he utilized, "the forms and Mathematics of music rather than prose". Consequently the work became symphonic, "in composition, in movement, in tone and in scope."

### ***Steinbeck and American Comic Muse: Syed Mashkoor Ali***

In bestowing its 1962 Nobel Prize for literature on John Steinbeck, the Swedish Academy aptly cited "his realistic as well as his imaginative writings distinguished by a sympathetic humour and a keen social perception" as the sources of Steinbeck's individuality.

Though Steinbeck never wanted to be known as a humourist his works are not devoid of brilliant and sparkling humour. All his novels show his unmistakable ties with the old tome folk comedy, with the southern humourists comic portrayals of shiftless poor whites and the perfect blending of his narrative and philosophical elements enlivened by his condescending humour towards pompous characters and inflexible institutions.

His 'The Pastures of Heaven' offers some of the ugliest and most repulsive characters. Gangling, big nosed and heavy jawed Pat "looked very much like Lincoln as a young man. His figure was as unfit for his clothes as Lincoln's was. His nostrils and ears were large and full of hair. They looked as though furry little animals were hiding in them." Johnny is also equally among the cast of repulsive characters in the story "Johnny Bear". He is true picture of deformity, almost a primordial monster.

But the most odd looking and clumsiest of them all is Noah Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*. This kind of dehumanization can further be seen in Steinbeck's use of vivid imagery and comic metaphors and similes, which are apparently the legacies of the earlier humour.

Steinbeck also draws heavily upon nature in depicting the beauty of his female characters: "Jelka had eyes as true as a doe's eye". "Katherine had the firmness of a new weed, and the bridling vigour of a mare" which "she lost as a flower does once it has received pollen" Steinbeck's extensive use of animal imagery and the imagery taken from nature is very much reminiscent of the colourful and vivid imagery employed by the southwestern humourists in describing the feminine beauty of their female characters.

Not only in appearance, Steinbeck's characters resemble southwestern prototypes in their behaviour also. Most of his protagonists are lazy, improvident and amoral, completely devoid of modesty, shame and family feeling. With his "little bright eyes" and a "lean excitable" and "cantankerous, complaining, mischievous, laughing face" Grandpa in *The Grapes of Wrath* seems to have come down directly from the early heroes of the Southwest.

Dealing with such kind of people often lacking in culture and refinement, Steinbeck made his characters reveal themselves, like southern or southwestern humourists, through speech which is often rough and vulgar and which can be called truly their own. Steinbeck's writings are based on factual incidents and information. Explaining that the characters and incidents presented in *The Grapes of Wrath* have a sense of authenticity, Steinbeck wrote, "I have tried to write this book the way lives are lived, not the way books are written."

The much-avowed 'historical truthfulness' of southwestern humourists made the reproduction of local speech and dialect obligatory for them. Almost all of them put in the mouths of their characters the local language, which unmistakably reveals their rusticity. No other writer, except Mark Twain seems to have been so acutely alive to different spoken dialects as Steinbeck. See how carefully and commendably well Steinbeck succeeds in recapturing the ordinary speech of illiterate and uncultivated migrant in the following anecdote which Tom Joad narrates to the one-eyed lumberman who regrets for the loss of his one eye because he can not "see stuff the way other fellas can":

*'Ya full a crap. Why, I knowed a one legged whore one time. Think she was takin' two bits in a alley? No, bu God! She's getting half a dollar extra. She says: "How many one -legged women you slep' with? None!" she says. "OK," she says, "You got somepin pretty special here' an' it's gonna cos' ya a,f buck extry" An' by God, she was getting em' too, an' the fellas comin' out thinkin' they's pretty lucky. She says she' a good luck'*

Tom Joad's joke about the hump-back man in *The Grapes of Wrath* is a good tall tale plot which he again narrates to the one-eyed lumberman:

*"An' I knowed a hump-back in—in a place I was. make his wholelivin' lettin' folks rub his hump or luck. Jesus Christ, an' all you in one eye gone"*

#### **Steinbeck's concept of Evil: Dr. Beena R. Zanver**

For a writer like Steinbeck it is not possible to uphold any one sided concept of evil. Evil, to him, assumes different forms, social, natural and human. The social system is largely responsible for human suffering. But it is also aggravated by the inherent weakness of human nature, human callousness and natural visitations, which often seem supernatural. In Steinbeck's novels evil is always present in all three forms.

In 'The Pearl', evil is manifested in the power of the rich set against the poor. The greed and jealousy inherent in human nature are depicted through the characters who try to cheat Kino. The evil in nature is also represented by the scorpion who stings the child.

The novel, 'In Dubious Battle', depicts the conflict between the workers and orchard owners during the Great Depression. In 'Of Men and Mice', that untamed part of human nature which loves violence and which gets the better of man every now and then is represented in Lennie. "The Moon is down" of course discusses evil in political context. A coastal town of a free, peace loving country is occupied by a foreign power. Its aim is of course exploitation. In 'The Grapes of Wrath', Steinbeck depicts evil in all its forms, social, natural and human.

The novel opens with a general picture of the ruinous conditions faced by the Oklahoma sharecropper; the drought, which has turned the earth to dust and ruined the crops, will lead to the great migration to California. Colossal dust storms blew in the United States of America across the common territory called the dust bowl for months together in 1935.

*"The dawn came but no day. In the grey sky a red sun reappeared, as dim red circle that gave little light, like dusk; and as that day advanced, the dusk slipped back towards darkness, and the wind cried and whimpered over the fallen corn"..... "Houses were shut tight and cloth wedged around doors and windows, but the dust came in so thinly that it could not be seen in the air, and it settled like pollen on the chairs and tables, on the dishes."*

Nature's indifference to human needs is described through the relentless dust storms and the sun flaring and the clouds turning their backs on the tenants. Then towards the end, rain beats incessantly making the already miserable lives of the migrants unbearable and more pathetic.

As if to supplement the evil that nature brought, the banks came in. Banks displaced farmers and took over their lands with the sole motive of profit. Human emotion, the feeling of belonging and oneness which farmers had for their land and helpless cries for more time had no effect on the banks:



John Steinbeck

*"The bank—the monster has to have profits all the time. It can't wait. It'll die. No, taxes must go on. When the monster stops growing, it dies. It can't stay one size."*

As the tenants are dispossessed, they have to find a place where they can go. They are told that California is the place where things are plentiful and where there is work all the year around. For going to California they look for vehicles, old cars that can be converted into little trucks. And these cars suddenly develop a booming market. Steinbeck portrays evil through the salesmen, the manner in which they deceive and exploit the poor tenants. They prefer to deal with tenants who know nothing about cars and sign promissory notes at high rates of interest.

Steinbeck's impression about commercialism, business and proficiency is aptly summed up in the following remark: *"Fella in business got to lie and cheat, but he calls it somepin' else. That's what's important. Ever 'time. I hear a business mean talking about business and service, I wonder who's getting' screwed. You go steal that tire an' you're a thief, but he tried to steal your dollars for a busted tyre. They call that sound business."*

Steinbeck describes the situation in California. The hatred and distaste the Californians have for the migrants is seen in the following words:

*"Well, Okie use ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means... you're a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you're scum."*

The *Grapes of Wrath* is a story of unending hardships and suffering of the migrants. And most of the suffering in Steinbeck's opinion is man-made. It is thus difficult to separate social evil from human evil. It is the human greed and callousness, which is at the root of both. It is human greed, which serves as an impulse for mechanization and industrialization of agriculture. It is again the human greed, which makes the big plantation owners destroy the smaller ones.

## Characters

### Tom Joad

The novel's protagonist, and Ma and Pa Joad's favorite son, Tom is good-natured and thoughtful and makes do with what life hands him. Even though he killed a man and has been separated from his family for four years, he does not waste his time with regrets. He lives fully for the present moment, which enables him to be a great source of vitality for the Joad family. A wise guide and fierce protector, Tom exhibits a moral certainty throughout the novel that imbues him with strength and resolve: he earns the awed respect of his family members as well as the workers he later organizes into unions. Tom is portrayed to be tough but not mean. He demands what is just and never eyes what is not rightfully his. While he is purposeful and focused towards the goals of life he retains his pleasant manners and at no stage does he lose his polite and considerate demeanor.

Tom begins the novel in possession of a practical sort of self-interest. Four years in prison, he claims, have molded him into someone who devotes his time and energies to the present moment. The future, which seems illusory and out of reach, does not concern him. He adopts this philosophy not because he is selfish but as a means of coping: he fears that by putting his life in a context larger than the present day, he will drive himself mad with anger and helplessness. He however, remains essentially a family man and his apprehension of being separated from his family is vividly described by Steinbeck when he returns from jail on parole only to find that his family has moved elsewhere and again during his days of hiding after the killing of Casy. Of course, Tom, who exhibits a rare strength, thoughtfulness, and moral certainty, is destined for more than mere day-to-day survival. Tom undergoes the most significant transformation in the novel as he sheds this *carpe diem* (seize the day) philosophy for a commitment to bettering the future.

During their journey west, Tom assumes the role of Jim Casy's reluctant disciple. The former preacher emphasizes that a human being, when acting alone, can have little effect on the world, and that one can achieve wholeness only by devoting oneself to one's fellow human beings. The hardship and hostility faced by the Joad family on their journey west serve to convert Tom to Casy's teachings. By the time Tom and Casy reunite at the cotton plantation, Tom realizes that he cannot stand by as a silent witness to the world's injustices; he cannot work for his own family's well being if it means taking bread from another family. At the plantation, Tom abandons the life of private thought that structures the lives of most of the novel's male characters including Pa Joad and Uncle John and sets out on a course of public action.

### Ma Joad

A determined and loving woman, Ma Joad emerges as the family's center of strength over the course of the novel as Pa Joad gradually becomes less effective as a leader and provider. Regardless of how bleak circumstances become, Ma Joad meets every obstacle unflinchingly. Time and again, Ma displays a startling capacity to keep herself together and to keep the family together in the face of great turmoil. The unity of the family is of prime importance to her and no compromise or adjustment is too big to keep the family united. However, she does become violent and impatient when the family suffers, and she can take her stand when confronted.

Ma Joad is a woman of great courage. She demonstrates this faculty best at the time of the deaths of Grandpa and Grandma. She even prepares Grandpa's body for burial and rides silently alongside Grandma's corpse so that the family can cross the check post and complete its treacherous journey. At the end of the episode, Ma's calm exterior cracks just slightly: she warns Tom not to touch her, saying that she can retain her calm only as long as he doesn't reach out to her. This ability to act decisively, and to act for the family's good, enables Ma to lead the Joads when Pa begins to falter and hesitate. Although she keeps her sorrows to herself, she is not an advocate of solitude. She consistently proves to be the novel's strongest supporter of family and togetherness. Indeed, the two tendencies are not in conflict but convene in a philosophy of selfless sacrifice. Ma articulates this best, perhaps, when she wordlessly directs her daughter to breast-feed the starving man in Chapter Thirty. With her indomitable nature, Ma Joad suggests that even the most horrible circumstances can be weathered with grace and dignity.

Ma forgets nobody. She plans meals and ensures that the family gets enough to eat even in times of acute shortage. She even sends food for Casy when he is waiting alone for Tom and Al to return after getting the car repaired.

Ma Joad is a good judge of people. She is fond of Casy and respects him for his values and his understanding of human nature. She can judge Tom's superiority to other members of the family.

In Ma Joad Steinbeck portrays a complete woman. A woman competent and able at managing family chores, a loving and caring daughter-in-law, a faithful and supportive wife and an indulgent and loving mother. She is a woman who has the capacity to look beyond the present. Ma is a woman who can forget personal sorrows and difficulties in times of desperation as is seen in the last chapter when she saves the life of a dying man.

### Pa Joad

Pa Joad is a good, thoughtful man, and he plans the family's trip to California with great care and consideration. The hardships faced by the Joads prove too great for him, however, and although he works hard to maintain his role as head of the family, he complains of muddled thoughts and finds himself in frequent quandaries. Until the very end, Pa exhibits a commitment to protecting his family. His determination to erect a dam is a moving testament to his love and singleness of purpose. When his efforts begin to fall short, however, Pa despairs. In California, his inability to find work forces him to retreat helplessly into his own thoughts. As a result, he becomes less and less effective in his role as family leader, and Ma points this out directly. Upon leaving the Weed patch camp, she boldly criticizes him for losing sight of his responsibility to support the family. By the end of the novel, further diminished by the failed attempt to prevent the family's shelter from flooding, he follows Ma as blindly and helplessly as a child. Pa's gradual breakdown serves as a sharp reminder that hardship does not always "build character." Though the challenges of the Joads' journey serve to strengthen Ma, Tom, and even Rose of Sharon, they weaken and eventually paralyze Pa.

Steinbeck also brings out Pa as an emotional person. He cannot hide his joy when Tom returns from jail nor can he hide his remorse for not giving Grandpa and Grandma a decent burial.

### Jim Casy

Steinbeck employs Jim Casy to articulate some of the novel's major themes. Casy is portrayed as an iconoclast and a philosopher. Most notably, the ex-preacher redefines the concept of holiness, suggesting that the most divine aspect of human experience is to be found on earth, among one's fellow humans, rather than amid the clouds. Casy renounces religion saying that 'he doesn't get the call anymore'. He expresses his loss of faith in religion by saying that 'he does not know what to pray for and whom to pray to.' Casy instead establishes a new religion a religion based on compassion

and love for mankind. He believes in no fanaticism and rejects the concept of sin.

As a radical philosopher, a motivator and unifier of men, and a martyr, Casy assumes a role akin to that of Jesus Christ with whom he also shares his initials. He holds radical views on vice and virtue. He is impatient of injustice and ultimately loses his life because of this.

Casy begins the novel uncertain of how to use his talents as a speaker and spiritual healer if not as the leader of a religious congregation. By the end of the novel, he has learned to apply them to his task of organizing the migrant workers. Indeed, Casy comes to believe so strongly in his mission to save the suffering laborers that he willingly gives his life for it. Here Steinbeck uses Casy to voice his political views and his leanings towards Marxism. Casy often quotes Lenin and Marx and talks of the French revolution. Casy's teachings prompt the novel's most dramatic character development, by catalyzing Tom Joad's transformation into a social activist and man of the people.

### **Rose of Sharon**

The oldest of Ma and Pa Joad's daughters, and Connie's wife, an impractical, petulant, and romantic young woman. Rose of Sharon begins the journey to California pregnant with her first child. She and Connie have grand notions of making a life for themselves in a city. The harsh realities of migrant life soon disabuse Rose of Sharon of these ideas however. Her husband abandons her, and her child is born dead. By the end of the novel, she matures considerably, and possesses, the reader learns with surprise, something of her mother's indomitable spirit and grace.

In creating the character of Rose of Sharon, Steinbeck relies heavily on stereotypes. Initially portrayed as a young protected girl having her own private dreams, she is shown to be aloof without much caring for her siblings. However, we read that pregnancy has transformed the girl from a "hoyden" a high-spirited and saucy girl into a secretive and mysterious woman. Time and again, Steinbeck alludes to the girl's silent self-containment and her impenetrable smile. This portrayal of pregnancy may initially seem to bespeak romanticism out of keeping with Steinbeck's characteristic realism. However, Steinbeck uses such seemingly trite details to prepare Rose of Sharon for the dramatic role she plays at the end of the novel. When she meets the starving man in the barn, she becomes saintly, otherworldly. Her capacity to sustain life, paired with her suffering and grief for her dead child, liken her to the Virgin Mother and suggest that there is hope to be found even in the bleakest of circumstances.

## **Important Questions**

### **400-450 Words**

1. The Grapes of Wrath as a proletarian novel
2. Steinbeck's apolitical stand in his novels with particular reference to Grapes of Wrath
3. The Grapes of Wrath as an Iliad of the dispossessed.
4. Family as a unit in The Grapes of Wrath.
5. Class war in Steinbeck's novels with particular reference to The Grapes of Wrath
6. Evil as it appears in The Grapes of Wrath
7. The appropriateness of the title.
8. The construction of social reality in The Grapes of Wrath
9. Imagery in The Grapes of Wrath
10. The power of women in The Grapes of Wrath.
11. Character sketch of Tom, Casy and Ma.

### **200-250 Words**

1. Children and Social conditions in The Grapes of Wrath
2. Steinbeck's ecological vision with reference to The Grapes of Wrath
3. The Joad's as a family.
4. Music and rhythm in Steinbeck's narrative with emphasis on music as a power in The Grapes of Wrath
5. The government camp as Steinbeck's Utopia.
6. The concept of friendship in The Grapes of Wrath.
7. Characters- Al, Uncle John, Pa Joad.

(Student should refer to "Summary with critical comments on plot, characterization and important issues" for answers to questions on the novel.

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## Unit VI

### Saul Bellow – Herzog

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#### The Writer and His Work

Saul Bellow has been called the most brilliant American novelist in the post-World War II period. He has also been considered the most resourceful writer in the American novel since William Faulkner in making fictional use of his historical situation. The son of Russian Jewish immigrants Bellow was born in the city of Montreal (Canada) in 1915. However, he was soon transplanted to Chicago (America). From Montreal to Chicago meant a significant structural shift in the intellectual environment of the boy. From the subculture of traditional orthodox Jewish upbringing he had been laid bare to the streets of Chicago, "that centre of brutal materialism." During the period between the wars (1920-1939), the Jewish intellectuals were searching for an alternative form to orthodox Judaism in which their faith was now lost. Most of them crossed over to the radical politics of Marxism or leftism. But Bellow had already felt a reaction against radicalism. He had joined the 1940's reaction from radical politics, even before his writing career began in earnest. He had also acquired close familiarity with the "great books" of European thought as well as the canon of great American literature as it had emerged in the 1940's.

Very early in life Bellow had developed the habit of playing with antithetical beliefs and philosophies, such as between orthodox Judaism and modern existentialism. He intensely responded equally to orthodox pieties as well as modern ideologies, without getting bound to either of the opposing thoughts or practices. In the capacious (roomy, spacious) prose of Saul Bellow, Plato and Plautinus, Marx and Freud, Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave, all jostle together with a ritual chanting of Jewish prayers in the background. The Chicago of Bellow's youth was highly uncondusive as an environment to cultural accomplishment. However, for Bellow as a writer, fully aware of contradictory possibilities, it was the key to the candy store. Right from his early manhood Bellow had been in the habit of thinking against prevailing doctrine. For instance, in his response to the massive pressure of the Chicago world, while in his prime years, he felt the following: "Before I was capable of thinking clearly, my resistance to its material weight took the form of obstinacy." No wonder he has made a great career out of his resistance to the strongest cultural force of the moment. For a beginner in the art of prose narrative it is usually the force of a regnant style. It is a style that dances out a culturally fashionable attitude. In Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man*, this force was Hemingway:

This is an era of hard-boiledness.... Do you have feelings? There are correct and incorrect ways of indicating them. Do you have emotions? Strangle them..... Most serious matters are closed to the hard-boiled. They are unpracticed in introspection, and therefore hardly equipped to deal with opponents whom they cannot shoot like big game or outdo in daring.

If you have difficulties, grapple with them silently, goes one of their commandments. To hell with that! I intend to talk about mine, and if I had as many mouths as Siva has arms and kept them going all the time, I still could not do myself justice.

Here is, in clear terms, a defiant assertion of the right to full emotional self-expression. It is one of the earliest instances of what critics later decided to define as a peculiar Jewish attitude.

In Bellow's second novel, *The Victim*, there is a minor character called Schlossberg, who makes a remarkable elaboration of a dialectical version of *menschlikeit* (in Yiddish culture there is a greater emotional permissibility, a greater readiness to welcome tears or laughter than in American culture):

You shut one eye and look at a thing, and it is one way to you. You shut the other one and it is different. I am as sure about greatness and beauty as you are about black and white. If a human life is a great thing to me, it is a great thing. Do you know better? I'm entitled as much as you. And why be measly? Do you have to be? Is somebody holding you by the neck? Have dignity, you understand me? Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down.

It is quite clear from his first two novels that Bellow had a method in which there was made a dialectical play of ideas. He also had a definite theme in these novels – the quest for a *modus vivendi* both ethically responsible and yet open to possibility. However, seen from the vantage point of Bellow's later novels, these two begin to seem somewhat

measly (meager), rather too well made, too responsive to cultural constraint: "I had good reason to fear that I would be put down as a foreigner, an interloper. It was made clear to me that when I studied literature in the university that as a Jew and the son of Russian Jews I should probably never have the right *feeling* for Anglo-Saxon traditions, for English words." Realizing this, he decided to work in relation to a formalist, Flaubertian perfection in these first two novels. The formalist tradition was bound to suppress his creative energy: "A writer should be able to express himself easily, naturally, copiously in form which frees his mind, his energies. Why should he hobble himself with formalities? With a borrowed sensibility?" With this fresh realization, Bellow made a breakthrough in his third novel, *The Adventures of Augie March*, in which he went out to expand in a novel length the emergent Yiddish-inflected voice, which Schlossberg had anticipated in *The Victim*. This voice is marked by its special interest in juxtaposing the contraries of Chicago world in which one grew up with Emerson as precept and Al Capone as example: "Give all to love," they read in Emerson. But in City Hall there were other ideas on giving, and we had to learn (if we could) how to reconcile high principles with low facts. In Bellow's novels, the reconciliation comes from style, structure, and play of ideas.

If we look into the nature of style and structure in *The Adventures of Augie March*, we shall see that both reflect the quirky, primarily self-educated perspective of Bellow's first-person narrator, Augie March, unlike his creator (Bellow), who studied at the university and rose to become Professor there, Augie remains a collage drop-out. As Bellow later recalled, the best part of his education was, however, only what he read at random, not his formal degree courses. As for Augie, his education is not only random but also illicit. During the two years he studied at the college, he was all the time stealing books, reading the more interesting ones before turning them over to his fence. Augie's one-time employer, named Einhorn, also adds to the hero's education by giving him a set of the Harvard classics. Einhorn had scorched these classics from a fire he had arranged in an attempted insurance fraud. Ironically, Augie's august values, or high principles, derive from texts he had acquired by low means. Seemingly rather uncommon and unusual, this haphazard mode of education also carries some advantage with it. The formally educated person is limited by his/her formal relation to ideas, the sense of their embeddedness in a bygone culture as well as in the ongoing culture of the academic establishment. No doubt, it enables the recipient a certain perspective, it attenuates (weakens) response in contrast to the self-educated person. For in the case of the latter, reading consists, not of subject matter, but of instruments of discovery and models of possibility. The self-educated person, in other words, does not "place" an idea or a person: rather, he reacts to them immediately as fresh voices, as guides to behaviour. Augie March reads the Harvard Classics in the same manner in which the Elizabethans read Plutarch. He finds highly reasonable Einhorn's casting of himself as a contemporary Socrates playing to Augie as the somewhat unreliable disciple Alcibiades.

We had title just as good as the chain mail English kings had to Brutus. If you want to pick your own ideal creature in the mirror coastal air and sharp leaves of ancient perfections and be at home where a great mankind was at home, I've never seen any reason why not. Though unable to go along one hundred percent with a man like Reverend Bucher telling his congregation, 'ye are as Gods, you are crystalline, your faces are radiant!' I'm not an optimist of that degree, from the actual faces, congregated or separate that I've seen; always admitting that the true vision of things is a gift, particularly in times of special disfigurement and worldwide Babylonishness, when plug-ugly macadam and volcanic peperino look commoner than crystal—to eyes with an ordinary amount of grace, anyhow—and when it appears like a good sensible policy to settle for medium-grade quartz. I wonder where in the creation there would be much of a double-take at the cry of 'Homo sum!'

This passage illustrates Augie's (and Bellow's) typical associative structure and stylistic juxtaposition. He raises an antithesis between formal and colloquial speech registers. Here, British mythology combines with the transcendentalism of Henry Ward Beecher. It is important to note here that even though Beecher was a nineteenth-century Unitarian minister, he is cited here as if his discourse belonged to yesterday's newspaper. Then Beecher is questioned by way of Spangler's concept of Babylonishness (a degenerate urban stage of history that disallows the crystalline look). Augie also perhaps makes an allusion to Jonathan Edward; Calvinist theory of perception that only those endowed with grace see the true beauty of the world. The sentence is concluded with the Calvinist riff, that juxtaposes the American colloquialism 'double-take' with a quotation from Terence (Roman playwright)—'Homo sum!' The meaning of the Roman playwright's quotation is that history collapses in a gallimaufry. It suggests the unquoted conclusion to

Terence's line—'I am a man. I think nothing human alien to me'. Similarly, Augie can compare his hapless mother to 'those women whom zeus got the better of in animal form and next had to take cover from his furious wife. Augie does, of course, qualify that he cannot envision her as the victim of such 'classy wrath.' Here, the vulgarity of 'classy' counterpoises the classical comparison.

One calls here Emerson's distinction between abstract philosophy and living thought. In the terminology of Emerson Augie is not a philosopher but man thinking. It seems quite clear that Augie is shaped in the Emersonian mode so far as his eclecticism is concerned. His associative logic, his variation of stylistic registers, too, are very much Emersonian. Bellow's novel seems to have been designed as a deliberate play on the tradition of American Adam romance, which consists in the evasion of fixated social identity. The very title of the novel is an obvious echo of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Like Mark Twain's hero, Augie is less the actor in his narrative than a reactor to the basic spectacle of a set of odd characters he encounters on his journey down the Mississippi. Bellow discovers a convention which is found to be central in most of his fiction from this novel onward. The convention is that the hero is made to encounter a series of characters who act as "reality instructors" (*Herzog*). These characters are powerful personalities who try to proselytize the protagonist to submit to their competing systems of "reality." Augie goes along with the schemes of "those Machiavellis of small street and neighbourhood" only to a point because though recognizing "there was something adoptional about me," he also has "opposition in me, and great desire to offer resistance and to say 'No!'" "Ultimately, he "never had accepted determination and would become what other people wanted to of make" of him.

It seems rather dubious that an identity or vocation can be discovered solely in evasion, but the fact remains that Augie shows a salient identity for the reader so long as he continues talking. In fact, Bellow's main characters acquire identity only to the extent their fluidity enables them, and that extent is in their reactions to persons, their ideas and events. In the last passage of *The Adventures of Augie March*, where we find implicitly rebutted the melancholy conclusion of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Augie firmly declines to accept the closure of disillusionment:

Look at me, going everywhere! Why, I am a sort of Columbus of those near at hand and believe you will come to them in this immediate *terra incognita* that spreads out in every gaze. I may well be a flop at the line of endeavor. Columbus too though he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. What he did not prove there was no America.

It seem Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* provided him with an agenda for his literary career. This agenda includes, for one thing, the refining on the obtrusively artificial "Spirit of Alternatives" of *Dangling Man* by the invention of reality instructors. This refining also works through the opening up of language and plot from the constraints of the well-made novel. It is an outstanding feature of Bellow's fiction that the author keeps working with the same themes from different angles in the wide spectrum of his novels. No less outstanding is the fact that each of his novels tends to respond dialectically to the preceding one. So *The Adventures of Augie March*, a brilliant free-form novel, is succeeded by Bellow's best-made novel, *Seize the Day*.

Tommy Wilhelm, the hero of *Seize the Day* (1956) is, indeed, so constricted that he has trouble breathing. As opposed to Augie's adventures in free negations to all that comes his way, Tommy remains throughout the novel rather congested and suffocated. His constant feeling is as if he is drowning, going down for the third time. In shaping the hero of *Seize the Day* Bellow seems to have borrowed from the psychoanalyst William Reich the concept of "character armour," who represses emotions showing in the process its physical manifestation in the constriction of the chest. We know how Tommy suffers from that very constriction. He is continuously oppressed by what one of Augie's Chicago friends calls *Moha*, "a Navajo word, and also Sanskrit, meaning opposition of the finite. It is the Bronx cheer of the conditioning forces. Love is the only answer to *Moha*, being infinite. I mean all the forms of love, eros, agape, libido, philia and ecstasy." We find that Tommy is doubly oppressed, making investments in, of all finite terms, lard in the commodities market. One can see that in this aspect of the novel Bellow is playing on Karl Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism in *Capital*. Marx's theory is that men mistakenly attribute autonomy to the market process of commodity exchange, which is their own collective invention, they lose sense of their own autonomy to such an extent that they retain value for themselves only insofar as they consider themselves commodities. Tommy, the hero of *Seize the Day*, has tried to be an actor. He has also tried to be a salesman. Both these attempts, in Marxian terms, are obvious instances of selling a commoditized image of self. He is trying to regain financial

independence and social recognition by investing in the very market world which has devalued him. Moreover, lard (a white greasy substance prepared from pig fat) is a poor investment for a man like Tommy who himself is drowning in his own fat. Finally, he is becoming aware of a return of the repressed spiritual needs. As a process of this regeneration of his spiritual life, he first recalls fragments of poems he once read in a college introduction to literature. These fragments include passages from Shelley, Keats and, most significantly, from Melton's "Lycidas," a poem in which a death by drowning leads to profound reflections on spiritual vocation and redemption. In Bellow's subtle sense of the comic, Tommy's financial and spiritual dilemma can be summed up in what at first glance is his reflection only on the former: "They had bought all that lard. It had to rise today."

Perhaps one of Bellow's most distressing novels, *Seize the Day* is also one of his most comic. In fact, it is its humour that makes its distress bearable. In this balancing of the dark sorrow by the light comedy, even vulgar expression offsets depression observation. Note, for instance, Tommy's expression of horror at the "cynicism of successful people":

Cynicism was bread and meat to everyone. And irony, too. Maybe it couldn't be helped. It was probably even necessary. Wilhelm, however, feared it intensely. Whenever at the end of a day he was unusually fatigued he attributed it to cynicism. Too much of the world's business done. Too much falsity. He had various words to express the effect this had on him. Chicken! Unclean! Congestion! He exclaimed in his heart. Retrace! Phony! Murder! Play the game! Buggers!

In style, if not in spirit, the passage strongly reminds us of the famous pity and irony" passage in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Of course, there the satire is directed against a modern literary craze. Here, too, it is about a craze, though in commercial rather than literary world. But the imitation of Hemingway's style, perhaps deliberate, is unmistakable. Tommy ends up a heartfelt prayer with "Let me out of this clutch and into a different life. For I am all balled up. Have mercy." The prayer, too, is in the same, mocking fashion as that of Bill in *The Sun Also Rises* where he is trying to have a dig at Mencken.

Like most of Bellow's novels, *Seize the Day* also equivocates about one central theme. Here it is: whether the hero's sorrow is mere masochistic self-indulgence in a misery predictably resulting from his consistently bad choices. The question is explicit.

But at the same time, since there were depths in Wilhelm not suspected by himself, he received a suggestion from some remote element in his thoughts that the business of life, the real business – to carry his peculiar burden, to feel shame and impotence, to taste these quelled fears—the only important business, the highest business was being alone. Maybe the making of mistakes expressed the very purpose of his life and the essence of his being here. Maybe he was supposed to make them and suffer from them here on this earth. And though he had raised himself above Mr. Perls and his father because they adored money, still they were called to act energetically and this was better than to yell and cry, prey and beg, poke and blunder, and go by fits and starts and fall upon the thorns of life. And finally sink beneath that watery floor—would that be tough luck, or would it be good riddance?

Tommy's thought process here can be viewed from two angles. From one, it is a pathological masochistic pattern deterministically working itself out. From another, it is a sign of the authenticity of suffering and of the needs of the heart denied by a cynical and materialistic culture. We find that this double coding, so to say, is heightened at the end where Tommy's chest armour dissolves into tears as he is caught up by a procession past the open coffin of a complete stranger. In his typical fashion, Bellow allows Tommy to project his masochistic self-pity, or, perhaps, to intuit the human community of suffering and death, never making clear whether one or the other is the case. He leaves to the reader to decide the nature and status of Tommy's suffering. Thus, a year before Malamud's *The Assistant*, a novel on the same theme of suffering, Bellow had skated a complete circle around the theme *menschlichkeit*. In his next novel, *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), Bellow seems to out-universalize even Malamud in generalizing *menschlichkeit* well beyond its Jewish sources. Though represented as an Anglo-Saxon of aristocratic origins, Henderson sounds as Jewish as any other Bellow protagonist. In fact, he sounds more Jewish than most of his protagonists. No doubt, Bellow quite often uses his characters didactically, as a sort of position papers. Yet in his other novels the didactic function of these characters is reinforced by their specific gravity as shrewdly observed, recognizable creatures of the big city, their Chicago or New York speech and manners as visible as stigmata. As for the Africans in the novel,



they appear purely literary inventions. Bellow does, of course, play his last best trick with Reich's ideas by inventing a royal African reality instructor, well educated in Europe, who attempts to cure Henderson's spiritual ills with ancient tribal wisdom but with Reichian therapy.

Among the most popular of Bellow's heroes is the title character of *Herzog* (1964). In fact, it will not be an exaggeration if it is said that Herzog in the Bellow canon holds the same position that Hamlet does in the Shakespeare canon. The similarities between the two heroes, as well as the works titled after them, have great many, which we shall take up later. Most Bellow critics seem to value *Herzog* more for its fresh narrative technique than for anything else, although there are aspects of greater value than technique which deserve more serious attention. A large part of the narrative is consumed by Herzog's imaginary letters to leading modern thinkers, both living and dead. The character has proved, like Hamlet, so fascinating that he has remained, in the period after the war, the most "adoptive" literary character since Holden Caulfield (the hero of the novel *Catcher in the Rye*). Herzog as a character has been called "too cuddlesome," and large part of the novel's popularity perhaps derives from its implicit appeal to the reader to indulge, just as we do in the case of Hamlet, the hero's masochistic narcissism. Although seemingly marked by several external differences, Herzog is essentially a reprise of Tommy. Some critics have argued that Tommy is a more convincing character. We may not quite agree to such an assertion, for, after all, the two are not very similar either. There remains, despite their intimate relationship, a fundamental difference between the two. In fact, the two, at bottom, represent two different types. As for the similar space between the two, the following description, which relates to Herzog, could as well apply to Tommy:

His face revealed what a beating he had taken. But he had asked to be beaten too, and had but no attackers strength. That brought him to consider his character. What sort of character was it? Well, in the modern vocabulary, it was narcissistic; it was masochistic; it was anachronistic. His clinical picture was depressive—not the severest type; not a manic depressive.

Readers do not tend to identify with Moses Herzog, as they tend to do for example, with Hamlet, so much as they wish to adopt him as the mascot of *mensch like it*: he suffers for our cynicisms. If the reader is wary of the sneaky attraction of narcissism mixed with masochism, this makes Tommy's characterization perhaps more interesting text of a reader. But the appeal of his character is greatly reduced by making him lardy in physique, constricted in the chest, vulgar in his language and banal in his circumstances. Decidedly, no reader would like to share with him all these deficiencies of health or behaviour. His spiritual quest, however, especially its spiritual meaning, does locate him closer to the common reader. On the contrary, the rare intellectual attainments of Herzog surely distance him from the common reader, far superior as he emerges to the average human being. Tommy struggles to conceive some possibility of community, "a larger body," in a seemingly Hobbesian world where each is against all and all against God.

The idea of this larger body had been planted in him a few days ago beneath Times Square, when he had gone down town to pick up tickets for the baseball game on Saturday. . . . He was going through an underground corridor, a place he had always hated and hated more than ever now. On the walls between the advertisements were words in chalk: 'Sin No More,' and 'Do Not Eat the Pig,' he had particularly noticed. And in the dark tunnel, in the haste, heat, and darkness which disfigure and make freaks and fragments of nose and eyes and teeth, all of a sudden, unsought, a general love for all these imperfect and lurid-looking people burst out in Wilhelm's breast. He loved them. One and all, he passionately loved them. They were his brothers and his sisters. He was imperfect and disfigured himself, but what difference did that make if he was united with them by this blaze of love? And as he walked by he began to say, 'Oh my brothers – my brothers and my sisters,' blessing them as well as himself.

This constitutes one pole of the dialectic; the other follows apace.

On that very same afternoon he did not hold so high an opinion of this same onrush of loving kindness. What did it come to? As they had the capacity and must use it once in a while, people were bound to have such involuntary feelings. It was only one of those subway things, like having a hard-on at random. But today, his day of reckoning, he consulted his memory again and again and thought. I must go back to that. That's the right clue and may do me the most good, something very big. Truth, like.

The same idea figures in *Herzog* also, but with the sort of dialectical play we see here, the play of turn and turn again. In the case of Herzog, one can see that his ideas are preformulated. They appear like the ideas of a philosopher rather than of man thinking (or in Tommy's case, of man searching for thought). There is no dearth of ideas in *Herzog*; in fact, they are plentiful. But they are not flexible, dramatic, or dialectical. The novel's opponents seem simplistic, melodramatic villains of modernism. On the contrary, their counterparts in *Seize the Day*, they are so convincingly them-selves that one has trouble remembering they are the creations of Bellow's imagination.

The main plot in *Herzog* reads uncomfortably like a *roman à clef* in which there is being made an attempt for taking a private revenge. The characters always seem in need of some external referent for completion. For instance, who really is Madeline, Herzog's wife? Is she really *that* dreadful? But these questions arise only when we view these characters as if they existed outside the world of Herzog's point of view, his world. No doubt, the character from whose point of view we are made to read the narrative will not be fair and impartial to all the other characters. But are we interested in reaching them from any other route? Is Hamlet or Lear fair to Gertrude or Reagan and Gorrille? Decidedly, they are not, nor do we expect them to be different from what they are. As Wayne Booth has remarked, Shakespeare or Bellow chose to write Hamlet's or Herzog's story, and we must read them as such. We should not try to ask for the story of Gertrude or Reagan and Gorrille. As Wayne Booth says, if they do not treat other fairly, who cares? It is equally unfair, as some critics have said, that the only or most convincing part of the novel is Herzog's letters, which reflect a running polemic against modernist dogma. Decidedly, the letters are quite interesting, but they are only as convincing as the character of Herzog and everything else in the novel. No part can, in fact, be separated for any special status in the novel. All parts are integral to the whole. It is inconceivable to view them apart from the character of the hero. Our interest in them emanates from our interest in his character. If they are found fascinating, it is because Herzog, who utters them, is fascinating. Outside of Herzog they are only scraps of paper having no relation with each other, and making no sense to the reader.

When we move on to the next novel, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, we find that the novel's hero is a reaction to the rather sentimentalized conception of Herzog. Rather devastated and angry, surely lacking Herzog's cuteness, Sammler is more convincing than his antagonists. Other characters (than Sammler) are, in fact, even more clearly men of straw (as well as women) than their counterparts in *Herzog*. The result is a strong but grudging, unpleasant book.

*Humboldt's Gift* (1975), Bellow's next novel, is more effectively dialectical and nuanced than its predecessor. The main question in the novel seems to have been formulated more concisely in a short story, "Looking for Mr. Green," which Bellow had written in 1951. The story relates to the depression years in America, when the protagonist, though well educated, can only find a job delivering cheques to a transient group of welfare recipients. He feels ethically committed to do his job, and becomes obsessed about finding out one elusive Mr. Green. At last his exasperated supervisor asks him a question typically Bellowian: "were you brought up tenderly, with permission to go and find out what were the last things that everything stands for while everybody else labors in the false world of appearances?" In the event, the protagonist compromises by delivering the cheque to a person who says she represents Mr. Green, even though he clearly knows that it is a dubious claim in the fallen world of appearances. Here, Bellow, in his typical fashion, plays with various ideas and beliefs, mixes Christian ('last things', 'fallen world') with Platonic (appearance and reality) concepts. The attempt is representative of Bellow's life-long search for an appropriate language of the spirit. The search is for a language that tries to apprehend the last thing everything else stands for in the fallen world of appearances. It is for this very reason that Bellow's novels have quest at the centre of their plot-structure. Journey motif is always prominent.

If we look back to his earlier novels, we shall see that Bellow formulates this quest in predominantly modernist secular intellectual vocabulary. However, by the time we reach his *Humboldt's Gift* we find that, despite there being the usual witty play with Alexandrian library of modern ideas, the earlier psychological vocabulary is fully replaced by a religious one. This shift in the nature of language actually becomes apparent from *Seize the Day* onward. Giving thought to the subject, Bellow says in an interview that it is no longer sex but spirituality which is repressed by our society.

Probably the place left vacant by the movement of the Freudian unconscious upward has been occupied by religion. It is certainly hard to see how modern man could survive on what he gets now from his

conscious life—especially now that there is a kind of veto against impermissible thoughts, the most impermissible being the notion that man might have spiritual life he's not conscious of

In *Humboldt's Gift*, such a serious theme of spirituality is negotiated with an engaging lightness of touch. The narrator-protagonist of the novel, Charlie Citrine is facing problems quite similar to those of Herzog. A malevolent ex-wife of Charlie is trying to destroy him financially. Also like Herzog, he is oppressed by modern life. Then there are the same reality-instructors who bully him. Finally, in Herzog's style, Charlie manages to float all these problems in a tone of speculative bemusement. As is generally the case in Bellow, the novel is based upon the principle of opposition, with the major conflict once again being between spiritual reality and the pressing weight of the material world. Very much like the persona in Shelley's "Adonais," Charlie finds himself "sunk in the glassy depths of life and groping, thrillingly and desperately, for sense, a person keenly aware of pointed veils, of Maya, of domes of many colored glass staining the white radiance of eternity, quivering in the intense inane and so on." The style here clearly reminds us that the hero is an erudite intellectual able to spin out stuff like this whenever necessary. At the same time, he is a type of person, like Augie March, for whom these ideas are immediate but also optional. Later, the same hero observes, "The pointed veil isn't what it used to be. The damn thing is wearing out. Like a rolled-towel in a Mexican men's room." Like most Bellow heroes, Charlie, too, largely speaks for Bellow himself. Like the author, Charlie has the habit of mind of "elevating . . . mean considerations to the theoretical level," as, when hearing the dial tone of a telephone, "I identified this interminable squalling with the anxiety level of the disengaged soul."

As we have already seen in *The Adventures of Augie March* and *Seize the Day*, there is here in *Humboldt's Gift* also a play against conceptual decorum which makes for a comedy inclusive of moral and spiritual intimations. As usual, the big city of Chicago, corrupt and brutal, presents an obvious obstacle to pure spirit, and yet it has marvels as the patrons of the Russian Bath who, "cast in antique form," are a vision of a gross materiality justified by its own irrefutable presence. Note, for instance, the following:

They have swelling buttocks and fatty breasts as yellow as butter-milk. They stand on thick pillar legs affected with a sort of creeping verdigris or blue-cheese mottling of the ankles. After steaming, these fellows eat enormous snacks of bread and salt herring or large ovals of salami and dripping skirt-steak and they drink schnapps. They could knock down walls with their hard stout old-fashioned bellies. Things are very elemental here. You feel that these people are almost conscious of obsolescence, of a line of evolution abandoned by nature and culture.

We find a more modernized representative of Chicago in the would-be Mafioso Rinaldo Cantabile who has carefully pounded every square inch of Charlie's Mercedes 280 – SL with a baseball bat. It is quite a moving narrative invention. In typical Bellow fashion, even this hoodlum, whom Charlie aptly describes as "smoky souled," is not without intellectual pretensions. He profusely cites from Robert Ardrey and Konrad Lorenz. His criminal violence is just his mode of responding to the "territorial imperative." As Charlie observes, "Nowadays the categories are grasped by those who belong to them and Cantabile, one of the new mental rabble of the wised-up world," has ideas that descend from thinkers like Sorel, who envisioned acts of exalted violence to shock the bourgeoisie: "Although he didn't know who Sorel was, these theories do get around and find people to exemplify them. . . ."

The reason why Cantabile wants to show up Charlie's idealism is partly because it attracts and threatens him. In a way, Charlie has invited the aggression. As he himself realizes, "It was only right that I should pay a price for coming on so innocent and expecting the protection of those less pure, of people completely at home in the fallen world. Where did I get off, laying the fallen world on everyone else!" Charlie's authorities for the world anterior to the fallen one are Plato, Shelley and, above all, Rudolph Steiner's anthroposophy—a blend of mysticism and spiritual philosophy. One of the reasons why Bellow uses Steiner is because he is an offbeat, unaccredited source, offering more possibilities for metaphorical development than some familiar, contextualized figure. It is the same advantage that Reich offered Bellow as opposed to Freud. Bellow's purpose is not parody or satire. Reich's concept of "character armour," is worked to reveal the character of Tommy Wilhelm in *Henderson the Rain King*. Also, Bellow has registered his praise for the ideas of Steiner. Bellow's typical method is apparent as Charlie explains Steiner's idea of our contact in sleep with supernatural beings.

Through the vibrations and echoes of what we have thought and felt and said we commune as we sleep with the beings of the hierarchy. But now, our daily monkeyshines are such, our preoccupations are so low, language has become so debased, the words so blunted and damaged, we've said such stupid and dull things, that the higher beings hear only babbling and grunting and TV commercials—the dog-fool level of things. This says nothing to them. What pleasures can these higher beings take in this kind of materialism, devoid of higher thought or poetry? As a result, all we can hear in sleep is matter creaking and hissing and washing, the nestling of plants, and the air-conditioning. So we are in-comprehensible to the higher beings. They can't influence us and they themselves suffer a corresponding privation.

This beautiful imaginative picture of higher beings interpenetrating the everyday world is an instance of the “lifelong intimation” that Charlie—and also Bellow—pursues. As Charlie recounts, it is true that another writer, Franz Kafka, hit Steiner on a bad day. Suffering from a bad cold Steiner “kept working his handkerchief deep into his nostrils with his fingers” as the ultra-fastidious Kafka, came in quest of a new articulation of his intimation of pure spirit. Bellow looks at contemporary world in horror and recounts anomalies of the spiritual quest in a material world. But, as Augie March would remind us, Bellow manages the equilibrium of *menschlikeit*, high idealism balanced against the comedy of the material life.

Thus, writing in the era of the years following World War II, which has now been named as the postmodern period, Bellow is one of the leading writers who responded to a world gone haywire comically rather than tragically, making the novel form a game playing (in his case) with ideas. His gigantic attempt to articulate a comprehensive description of the postmodern man and contemporary society, using all the resources of knowledge at his command, gives him a singular status. His rejection of modernist outlook and ethos, and going back to the Romantics in search of an alternate viable or workable set of values required to meet the challenges posed by the age of technology, is a heroic effort in the present context. Seeking spiritual life in the super-technological world, looking ridiculous in the process, his hero, novel after novel, offers a quest for the possibilities available to a man in the post-industrial world vulgarized to the core. Let us examine the case now of Bellow's relation with Romanticism as it emerges in the wide spectrum of his fictional world.

### **Bellow and Romanticism**

Saul Bellow, from the very beginning, was a voracious reader. Two writers that intrigued him most were Rudolf Steiner and Wilhelm Reich, although his fascination for modern ideas involved him in an extensive reading of philosophic writers. Since all his readings have found reflections in his fiction, he remains one of the most intellectual novelists to date. It has been quite a task for the critics to define and delineate his philosophic position as it emerges in his novels. One of the aspects of that position comes out in Bellow's repudiation of what he called the “wasteland outlook” of the modernist writers between the two world wars. The reverse side to his repudiation of the modernists is held by his allegiance to the English romanticism of the early nineteenth century. His deep debt to Romanticism has often been acknowledged by the critics, which we need to understand in order to get a grasp of the key emphases he makes in his novels. Of course, when we trace an influence we need not shut our eyes to either other influences or individual genius responsible for the shaping of a writer's work. What we need to do in the study of an influence is to examine the extent and force of that influence and place it in proper perspective with regard to its part in the functioning of the whole. With these parameters in mind, then, let us have a look at Bellow's understanding and absorption of the spirit and significance of romanticism as it gets reflected in his work.

Bellow himself has, of course, never stated that romanticism has been a seminal influence on his mind or work. Critics, too, have expressed doubt about his having made a deliberate adoption of the Romantic outlook on life. They only accept the possibility of his having instinctively turned to it when he became disgusted with the “victim literature” of modernism. It is, of course, always difficult to certify direct influence in case where influence gets so absorbed and transformed in a new idiom that it receives a new expression altogether. Some such thing seems to have happened in the case of Saul Bellow. No one can deny close similarity between his outlook on life and the Romantic philosophy, nor can any one certify the direct influence of the latter on the former. We can decidedly certify that Bellow's knowledge of the Romantic poets is enormous. We find in his novels frequent citations from these poets; not only do we come across quotations from their major works but even from the minor and little-known ones. Whatever be the case, we cannot find a better substitute expression for Bellow's outlook on life than the Romantic view of life.

Two facts about Bellow's fiction need to be added to the question of Romantic influence on his art. One of these is Bellow's tone of sardonic humour, which is something incompatible with the Romantic outlook. His tone, anti-romantic as it is, would modify his view of life. Another fact is that we do not see much influence from the Romantics in the early novels of Bellow; it is only in the later novels that it starts appearing and then remains on the ascendance. In his early phase he seems to be working more under the influence of the "wasteland outlook" than the Romantics. Another influence that seems evident in his early phase is that of Dostoevsky's fiction. These two influences are quite apparent in his "Two Morning Monologues" (1941), "The Mexican General" (1942), *Dangling Man* (1944), and *The Victim* (1947). However, at some point of time in the late 1940's Bellow became disgusted with the depressive temperament these works reflected. Hence, the novels that followed showed a distaste for Flaubertian aestheticism and pessimism. *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) and *Seize the Day* (1956) showed the difference. They mark a clear departure from the earlier mood, suggesting a willful rejection of the highly wrought and intricate form associated with modernism.

In clear contrast to his earlier emphases Bellow now high-lighted his faith in the worth of the ordinary individual and his everyday life. Like Wordsworth, he came to see virtue in the elementary emotions of men and their abiding power. Also like Wordsworth, he laid emphasis on the power of imagination to liberate the alienated individual coerced and corroded by customary mode of living, destroyed by the distraction of modern life, the drudgery of mechanical routine. In such a challenging situation threatening man's dignity and humanity, imagination, he came to realize, could expand awareness and make possible spiritual regeneration. In a variety of ways this affirmative romantic emphasis (stressing the humane and imaginative aspects of man's life, their abiding power) became the central concern of Bellow's later novels. Bellow seemed to have instinctively turned to Romantic affirmation after he felt something decadent in the aestheticism of Flaubert and his followers in the modernist movement all over the western world. Decidedly, it proved a major turning point in the life and art of this American Jewish novelist (Of course, he refused to be called a Jewish writer).

Bellow developed also a deep distaste for modernist pessimism, which, he thought, had assumed the status of a major movement and "classical" convention in the Anglo-American literature of the period after World War I. According to him, this convention springs from the rise of French realism in the middle of the nineteenth century. The danger that Bellow sensed in the modern movement initiated by Flaubert and others was that it "challenges the human significance of things." In this tradition, spearheaded by Pound and Eliot in the 1920's, the worth of individual and everyday life is made obsolete. No wonder the High Modernists launched a vicious attack on the Romantics to achieve their goal of obliterating the Renaissance-Romantic values of humanism. As Bellow himself puts it, modernism "is not satisfied simply to dismiss a romantic, outmoded conception of the self. In a spirit of deepest vengefulness it curses it. It hates it. It rends it, annihilates it." This movement since Flaubert has offered instead, in Bellow's own words, "a myth of the diminished man: Common labor and humble life had their brief decades of glorification at the beginning of the modern era. But after the Cotter and the Leech Gatherer came the Man in the Crowd. In its Western form, realism made the modern man extraordinarily limited-weak, sick, and paltry, subject to devouring illusion." In his view, the modernists did not really examine the ordinary individual. As he suggests, to probe the "souls" of "the baker's daughters" may allow us to see "revelations and miracles." Bellow's own intention is to discover "the extraordinary in the ordinary." In his view, it is imagination alone that can accomplish this task.

Bellow's quarrel with contemporary world is that it does not share his faith in the power of imagination. Since the society today is highly materialistic and hostile to those who affirm faith in the ways of knowing that cannot be scientifically explained or verified. This conflict with his age or milieu is clearly stated in an article entitled "A World Too Much with us," which Bellow published in 1975. The very source of his title (Wordsworth's sonnet) shows his reverence for the leading poet of the Romantic Movement. Bellow's suggestion in that piece is that the problem that Wordsworth worried about in 1807, that man squandered his natural powers in the dreary routines of daily life, has become worse in his own day (in our own time). By implication, the task of the imagination has become all the more difficult, but also all the more necessary. As Bellow puts it, "the imagination I take to be indispensable to truth." He attacks the dominant drive of the society in our time, which "greatly esteems action," technical and technological accomplishments, but "takes little stock in the imagination or in individual talent". In his view, by eliminating certain

kinds of knowledge and certain ways of knowing as illegitimate, we have created a "tedious rationality" that breeds boredom and other miseries. In the same article, Bellow recalls with admiration the British romantic poets with their faith in the human mind: "Two centuries ago, the early romantic poets assumed that their minds were free, that they could know the good, that they could independently interpret and judge the entire creation, but those who still believe that the imagination has such powers to penetrate and to know keep their belief to themselves. As we now understand knowledge, does the imagination know anything? At the moment the educated world does not think so." Earlier, in 1957, Bellow had suggested that while "no one knows where the power of imagination comes from or how much distraction it can cope with," its task was becoming increasingly difficult. Later, in 1967, he speculated, "I wonder whether there will ever be enough tranquility under modern circumstances to allow our contemporary Wordsworth to recollect anything." Since he finds the task of the imagination becoming increasingly darker during the course of his career. He does not, however, return or regress into the pessimism of his first two novels.

As asserted earlier in this essay, although the appearance of Bellow's romanticism can be seen in *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) and *Seize the Day* (1956), it actually blooms in *Henderson the Rain King* (1959). It is in this novel that Bellow treats in particularly romantic terms his themes of the power of imagination and spiritual regeneration. For the first time in his fiction Bellow makes important allusions and uses significant quotations from the poetical works of Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth and Coleridge. Bellow's novel seems to adopt from Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" the concept of spiritual growth. Interestingly, the novel also alludes to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Henderson makes a sort of Conradian quest in the African wasteland. In a way, it is Bellow's version of what one learns from a dive into the dark regions of the soul. The hero is, obviously, on his journey "to burst the spirit's sleep," a phrase he borrows from Shelley's dedication to *The Revolt of Islam*. He meets, on this journey, a parodic version of Conrad's Kurtz in the person of Dahfu. Bellow's Dahfu possesses a grandeur of mind that Kurtz is only reputed to possess. He does not, however, resemble Kurtz in his descent into the depths of degradation. When Henderson accepts Dahfu his spiritual mentor, he learns from the latter how to overcome his excessive anxiety over death. He further learns from Dahfu that his spiritual birth depends upon his acceptance of the powers of the imagination. Dahfu's celebration of the powers of imagination is significant: "Imagination, imagination, imagination! It converts to actual. It sustains, it alters, it redeems."

Like a typical Romantic work, Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* centers on its hero's journey, which is always symbolically spiritual. By the time, we reach the end of the novel, Henderson has come to burst his spirit's sleep, awakening to a universe redeemed by the imagination. His seemingly insatiable desire, "I want, I want," no longer haunts him. He is able to decide to end his wandering years and enter medical school to acquire a useful profession. He can also return to the woman he had abandoned. He can do that now because he feels he possesses "true feeling" for her, "call it love," though the word is full of bluff". Most important of all the developments in his character is that his quest from his profound alienation in a "meaningless world of death" has led to self-knowledge, which makes *him feel reconciled to a world radiant with life and hope. The novel's ending echoes yet another time Wordsworth's famous "Ode".* Now Henderson feels a strong solidarity with humanity, represented by his befriending, on his return home, of a Persian orphan: "As for this kid resting against me. . . . Why, he was still trailing his cloud of glory. God knows, I dragged mine on as long as I could till it got dingy, mere tatters of gray fog. However, I always knew what it was". Wordsworth's idea of spiritual growth, as expressed in the "Ode," comes alive in the closing scene of the novel. Although aging causes the loss of the radiant vision of the child, maturity offers its own compensations, such as increased capacity to love, and greater feeling for suffering as an inextricable component of human life. Also, the imagination can still capture the child's radiant perception. Thus, the novel ends on a positive note of affirmation. Bellow moves far away from Conrad's vision of man's self-destructive quest for power. Contrary to this vision, Bellow's vision is illustrated by Henderson's climactic awareness of man's nobility, largeness of heart, and power of mind.

Bellow's next novel, *Herzog* (1964), though not without touches of Wordsworthian humanism, appears rather dark compared to the sunny ending of *Henderson the Rain King*. The streak of sardonic humour seen in *Henderson the Rain King*, colouring at places the novel's clear comedy, becomes in *Herzog* a thick layer of clouds. The latter novel no longer remains a comedy. It turns instead into a mock-tragedy, echoing Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at every corner of the open-ended narrative. Bellow's ardent belief that "chaos doesn't run the whole show" is now fervently expressed (in *Herzog*). This fervour is apparently provoked by a ubiquitous pessimism the modernists feel towards the survival

of Western civilization and its humanist values. The romanticism of *Herzog* is meant to serve as an antidote to the "Wasteland outlook" of the modernists. Bellow finds the modernist outlook so pervasive and predominant in his own time that even those "who had never even read a book of metaphysics, were touting the Void as if it were so much salable real estate". Herzog, the novel's hero, is a university professor who teaches a course on "The Roots of Romanticism". He has nothing but disdain for "*the cheap mental stimulants of Alienation, the cant and rant of pipsqueaks about inauthenticity and Forlornness.*"

Herzog has gone through some shattering experiences of life. He has known real suffering, and has rightly grown suspicious of those who revel in alienation, anguish, and despair. He feels also disturbed by the bitter rejection and hatred of romantic humanism. At one point in the narrative he warns that one should not "sneer at the term Romantic." for romanticism, in his view, preserved "the most generous ideas of mankind, during the greatest and most rapid of transformations, the most accelerated phase of the modern scientific and technical transformation". The Wastelanders who occupy the world of *Herzog*, however, despise such "sentiments" as these. Their downright cynical animosity towards romanticism and its adherents is correctly represented in the novel by Herzog's discovering "a used sanitary napkin in a covered dish on his desk, where he kept bundle of notes for this Romantic studies". In short, the malice of the Wastelanders is literally brought home to him.

The problem that the hero of *Herzog* faces in the novel is how to survive in the hostile wasteland of contemporary western world. His idealism has already proved disastrous, putting both his private as well as professional life into total disarray. He is very much on the verge of a mental breakdown. As the novel opens, the very first sentence he utters is, "If I am out of my mind, it is all right with me". He is living in a society which considers his romantic humanist values entirely obsolete. This problem has for him both philosophic ramifications as well as personal. In one sense, the entire narrative of the novel is an elaborate meditation on man and his place in the universe. The professor probes the depths of his own psyche, examines all aspects of his life, past and present, public and private. He tries to put together, under great strain and stress, the disparate collected fragments of his grim life into some sort of coherent whole. Like *The Prelude*, the novel recalls the vital experiences of the hero's past life interspersed with happenings in the present. But unlike *The Prelude*, there is no integral growth of the protagonist's mind. While still in the process of trying to make sense of his fragmented life, he comes to realize that he need not abandon his beliefs altogether; they perhaps only require some modifications. The book Herzog proposes to write on romanticism reveals the sort of modified or improved romanticism will be required to cope with the life in contemporary world. "His study was supposed to have ended with a new angle on the modern condition, showing how life could be lived by renewing universal connections; overturning the last of the Romantic errors about the uniqueness of the self; revising the old Western, Faustian ideology; investigating the social meaning of Nothingness."

Of course, Herzog could never reach the stage of writing his proposed book on romanticism. But he does come to reveal in his description the relevance of romanticism to modern life. His suggestion in it is that mankind could overcome its excessive self-consciousness by achieving a marriage of mind and nature; that the worth of the individual could be affirmed but avoid at the same time the Faustian glorification of the self; and can lay foundation of a society based on brotherhood in place of the Hobbesian jungle that exists in today's society. The viability in the modern world of the modified romanticism just defined seems to be a strong belief with Saul Bellow. In his proposal for modification, romanticism has to be made tough-minded so that it can survive with success in the modern wasteland of our time. This belief comes out very clearly in Herzog's reflection on T.H. Hulme's attack on romanticism. Herzog is in agreement with Hulme so long as the latter expresses dislike for a romanticism that is vague, escapist, ethereal, utopian, excessively emotional, and soft-minded. But he stops at that and separates himself from Hulme, disapproving his "narrow repressiveness," his modernist notion of man as an extraordinarily limited animal. In Herzog's considered opinion, Hulme's view of romanticism is rather reductive. While it can be easily applied to second-rate works, such as Keats's *Endymion*, it cannot be applied to first-rate works, as Keats's Odes or Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey". By the time the novel ends, we find that Herzog has acquired a tough-minded romantic sensibility. It will enable him to survive in a harsh predatory society. He has left behind his earlier idealism which had rendered him vulnerable to exploitation. Now he is able to wholly repudiate the brutal "realism" of the Wastelanders. His mental journey, long and intense, has made him arrive at a Wordsworthian conclusion, that everyday life itself is the

highest good. As Bellow himself has asserted, "I think a good deal of *Herzog* can be explained simply by the implicit assumption that existence, quite apart from any of our judgments, has value".

Bellow's next novel that follows *Herzog* is *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, in which the protagonist is a septuagenarian humanist. He is quite often rather pompous, self-righteous, and posturing. In fact, Artur Sammler is perhaps the crankiest humanist Bellow has created in his fiction. Occasionally, his remarks verge on misogyny (hating women) and misanthropy (hating mankind). Sammler is a survivor of the Holocaust. Now, living in New York he finds himself engulfed in all sorts of distractions. He is waiting in utter anxiety for the imminent death of his benefactor, Dr. Elya Gruner. In this novel, the brand of romanticism is somewhat different from that of *Herzog* and the preceding works. Its hero, Sammler, experiences strong intimations of eternity. At one point, he also confesses, that only the *Bible* and the thirteenth-century German mystic writers alone make interesting reading for him. The mystical streak in Sammler, we can recall, was never there in Bellow's earlier works. But it makes a marked presence in this novel, and becomes more pronounced in his next novel. At the same time, the romanticism of this novel cannot be characterized mystical. Whatever be Sammler's reading preferences, the novel does not lay much emphasis on his mystical proclivity (tendency). As a matter of fact, the case of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is only a variation of the basic situation obtaining in *Herzog* and *Henderson the Rain King*. We find in Sammler an alienated and death-haunted romantic humanist. Not surprisingly, he is anxious that his values may make him vulnerable in a nihilistic Wasteland. In that anxiety he meditates upon the immediate past as well as the more distant past just as he attempts to create some sort of order out of chaos. *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is, in a sense, a version of the typical romantic genre of the discursive meditation. As is generally the case in a romantic poem, the novel focuses on capturing the process of the mind trying to come to terms with its anxiety as it recalls, meditates, and endows the past with order and meaning. Some critics have stressed the novel's affinity with romantic theme and style. One of these critics, Susan Glickman, contrasting *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and Norman Mailer's *An American Dream*, has asserted that "if Mailer's God is energy and his experience of God orgasm, Bellow's divinity is Mind, and his experience of it, thought." Another critic, Irvin Stock, surmises, "Bellow has a gift reminiscent of Wordsworth, for evoking in his very sentence rhythms, as well as in his words, the *experience* of thought, the drama of its emergence out of the life of the whole man."

As is clear from the cited statements, both these critics associate the romanticism of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* with the earth-bound romanticism of Wordsworth, not with the visionary or apocalyptic romanticism of Blake or Shelley. Sammler's own view is that, partly, the reason for the 'decline of the West' is its false or escapist romanticism. In his view of the world, the pioneering walk on the moon becomes a metaphor for modern man's escape from the problem of the age. When Gruner's irresponsible son, a cold-hearted "high-I Q moron," tells Sammler that he has a reservation with the airlines for a future excursion to the moon, he feels highly surprised when Sammler shows no interest whatsoever. Sammler's explanation for his lack of interest is, "I seem to be a death man rather than a height man. I do not personally care for the illimitable . . . I am content to sit here on the West side, and watch, and admire these gorgeous Faustian departures for the other worlds." He does, of course, feel impressed by the moon-walk, but his dedication to "his death-burdened, rotting, spoiled, sullied, exasperating, sinful earth" remains unshaken. That Sammler's affirmation of the common life on "this death-burdened" earth is different from the public's rejection of it becomes quite clear when he observes the Manhattan crowd on the street. "The conviction transmitted by this crowd seemed to be that reality was a terrible thing, and that the final truth about mankind was overwhelming and crushing." Sammler sees a clear evidence of this convention in modern man's penchant for especially extreme in the youth cult, as a pernicious and perverse distortion of the function of the imagination.

The histrionic bent of the mob symbolizes, for one thing, the rejection of humanism and the acceptance of nihilism. It also represents, for another, a kind of madness. We see almost all the characters with whom Sammler is associated are engaged in role-playing, including the licentious Angela, the irresponsible Wallace, and the eccentric Shula. The most destructive example of role playing is, however, Rumkowski, "the mad Jewish king of Lodz." His "play-acting" results in the murder of half a million people in World War II, when he helps the Nazis exterminate the Jews of Lodz. We find Sammler, at the end of the novel, praying for the soul of Elya Gruner, a man who did not engage in this "theatre of the soul." He remained true to the traditional humanist values as much as possibly one can in the wasteland of modern society. The novel's emphasis clearly falls on the great romantic values, to which man must be true if his



life is to be made purposeful. Sammler also suggests near the novel's end that each individual, by virtue of being human, has an intuitive awareness of transcendent reality. Of course, all are not loyal to this reality. It does, however, exist. "For that is the truth of it—that we all know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know," says Sammler in his prayer that ends the novel's narrative. The citation clearly echoes Keats's closing lines to his "Ode on a Grecian Urn"—Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty/That's all ye know.

The intimations of immortality that intrigue Artur Sammler appear in increased intensity in *Humboldt's Gift* (1975), which is Bellow's next novel. We find that the novel's hero, Charlie Citrine, spends all the time meditating on the anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner, which has been considered a great influence on the novel's moral purpose. Of course, nothing is so simple in the fictional world of Bellow's novels. No single influence is ever allowed to take away the novel. Here, too, Steiner's anthroposophy enjoys a similar status. We can see how Charlie is exuberant at times over the transcendentalism of Steiner. But we also see the same Charlie mocking Steiner for some of his far-fetched ideas. It is also important to note that Steiner's anthroposophy has its roots in English romanticism. When Bellow interviewed Owen Barfield, a Steiner apologist, "repeatedly and consistently," associated Steiner's ideas with those of the romantic poets. It can be said, in short, that the novel's central consciousness, as well as the source of both the vatic poet Humboldt and the ironic romantic writer Charlie, owe their primary debt to English romanticism.

As has been asserted earlier also, it is always a mistake to see in a Bellow novel any one ideology making the foundation of its texture of ideas. Yet with this qualification in mind, it can be said that the pervading sensibility in *Humboldt's Gift* is essentially romantic. We find Bellow, in various parts of the novel, taking recourse to citing various works of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. The entire wealth of these citations clearly suggests that the novel underlines a preference for the romantic sensibility to the gloomy modernist sensibility of contemporary society. Among the romantics cited in the novel Wordsworth seems to hold a special place in the novel's moral structure. It has been said that Bellow must have had Wordsworth's famous "Ode" in mind while designing the texture of his novel. Without indulging in such speculations, however, one can see the usefulness of the "Ode" in providing a key to the novel's experience. We can see the force of its relevance when we find the novelist depicting the spiritual regeneration of Charlie in terms similar to those of Wordsworth's poem. In fact, we find that the novel echoes the poem at almost all crucial moments in Charlie's story. Like the poem, the novel lays emphasis on the power of the imagination to regenerate the death-haunted individual who has lost the "visionary gleam." When Charlie meditates upon death, his mind turns to immortality. For instance, thinking about the premature death of his friend and mentor Von Humboldt Fleisher, a poet of immense promise, the idea of immortality is prompted by Charlie's anguish over his death. The failures of both Charlie and his mentor seem to support the view of the ubiquitous, Machiavellian "reality instructors," who contend that romantic poets are "not tough enough" to survive in a harsh society. Once again, very much like Herzog, Charlie feels that the cynical materialism of contemporary society cannot be acceptable to him, and wonders whether one could adhere to the higher values of the romantic poets in which Humboldt passionately believed.

One cannot help noticing an obvious similarity between Bellow's Charlie and his friendly poets John Berryman and Isaac Rosenfeld. Still closer affinity, however, seems to be between Charlie and Delmore Schwartz, another friendly poet who attempted to live up to the higher values of the romantic poets but failed to do so. Schwartz's Wordsworthian aspiration, which Bellow did eventually embrace, "was to transmit the ordinary into something luminous and enduring." However, at other times, Schwartz succumbed to the notion that "the self-immolating powers of imagination would lead him to some purer realm." Eventually, he went mad and met with premature death. Thus, Charlie's pondering of Humboldt's life and values enables him to achieve an altogether new awareness. Rather horrified by the "metaphysical assumptions about death everyone in the world has apparently reached everyone would be snatched, ravished by death, throttled, smothered." We see Charlie receiving his spiritual guidance from Humboldt through a posthumously delivered letter. It seems to constitute the turning point of the novel because it provides the impetus for his final decision to repudiate the materialism of the "reality-instructors" and to launch upon a new spiritual life. Making allusions to the various romantic poets and using certain citations from their works, the letter wants Charlie not to succumb to a materialistic existence but to lead the life of the imagination. This message is clearly conveyed by Humboldt's quotation from Blake's letter to Rev. Dr. John Trusler (August 23, 1799), which contains the sentence

"And I know that this World Is a World of Imagination & Vision". Not being happy with the contemporary ideological package of "one-shot mortality," Charlie realizes that he must preserve a sense of irony to face the prospect of becoming self-destructive, as did Humboldt when he immersed himself in his idealism to the point of absurdity. Humboldt's idealism had its source in Wordsworth's "Ode". Charlie, after the death of Humboldt, decides to carry on this idealism but in a modified form.

Charlie finds himself faced with a spiritual crisis, which is prompted by his obsession over death. It results in his disenchantment with the outside world. His life-journey in the novel is marked by his struggle to acquire a new consciousness and thereby gain "the faith that looks through death". His objective, obviously, is to recover the child's immortal soul within him and thereby look at the world with a child's sense of awe and wonder as well as with the inner light which illuminates a dark world. In the beginning of the novel, Charlie suggests that the process of regeneration is taking place: "I don't know how the child's soul had gotten back, but it was back." The path to regeneration is, of course, not a smooth one, and the inner light that Charlie needs to recover fades when a keen awareness of life's mortality manifests itself. We can recall here Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" where, we are told, the inner light that the child possesses dissipates as we grow older, but the imagination has the power to recover the child's soul within us. Through this process, we can achieve triumph over the anxiety of mortality, and view the world in all its radiance. Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift* reveals the same affirmative view as Wordsworth's "Ode". At the end of the novel, the author seems to imply that Charlie is on the right path to achieve "the faith that looks through death." The final sentence of the novel invokes, with its symbolic power, the possibility of spiritual rebirth. Although, it seems, Charlie can never again perceive the world in the permanent "celestial light" of the child, the child does survive within him. Decidedly, Bellow implies that his hero is ready to blow the "imagination's trumpet" and "look again with open eyes upon the whole shining earth".

In Bellow's *The Dean's December* (1982) there appears a different preoccupation with social problems. It was not before in this form. But his romanticism is not altogether absent even here. The novel's hero, Albert Corde states that in the current moral crisis of society "the first act of morality was to disinter (dig up) the reality, retrieve reality . . . represent it anew as art would represent it." Bellow once again seems to suggest that the imagination is the only force that can redeem reality from the "false consciousness" which has enveloped it and show man the way out of the contemporary morass. We find, yet another time, frequent allusions to romantic poets as well as frequent quotations from their works. Through these allusions and quotations Albert urges us to acquire a new form of perception so that we can liberate ourselves from the mind-forged manacles that enslave us. We can see implied Albert's radicalism all along Bellow's canon. Like Wordsworth, Bellow abandoned the role of political radical for the role of poetic radical with the goal of subverting false values. As M. H. Abrams aptly describes, Wordsworth's express purpose was to bring to his readers "absolute redemption by liberating their sensibilities from bondage to unnatural social aesthetic norms and so opening their eyes to his own imaginative vision of a new world, in which men who are equal in the dignity of their common humanity are at home in a nature, which, even in its humblest or most trivial aspect, is instinct with power and grandeur." This seems to accurately describe Bellow's task as well as Wordsworth's. Like the lake poet and his other romantic contemporaries Bellow calls for the liberation of the mind from the mountain of custom and the bondage of routine perception. Man needs a new kind of imaginative seeing free from prejudices, preconceptions, abstract theories, or multitudes of facts. As a "modern romantic," Bellow reveals in his novels a qualified hope that man will redeem himself and his world by the powers of the imagination and thus recover the great positive values of the Western past. Thus, Bellow becomes in our time a new force that takes us back to the values that the Renaissance Movement put forth and the Romantic Movement reinforced, offering an antidote to the poison of modernist pessimism embodied in the wasteland outlook.

### Freud and Herzog

Like many writers and intellectuals of the twentieth century, Saul Bellow, too, got to come to terms with Sigmund Freud's ideas concerning man's mind and its functioning. Bellow also came to be equally influenced by the ideas of another psychologist, Wilhelm Reich. "I've had all the psychiatry I can use," Moses Herzog tells Dr. Emmerich. Although a lot has been said about Bellow's switching over from Freud to Reich, the fact remains that his link with the utopian Reich was not a very serious affair. Decidedly, it was short-lived, leaving not a very deep impact on him. In

fact, Freud remained a more enduring presence in Bellow's fiction. Freud was, for sure, a great genius of psychoanalysis, and the therapeutic and ideational father. Bellow has remained in his fiction on a sort of love-hate relationship with Freud's theories. Although he had learned a good deal from Freud, Bellow generally opposes his theories, finding them much against his own understanding of man and life. And yet their relationship is of great significance for an appropriate understanding of Bellow's fiction. As has been aptly put, "few thinkers have had more to do with 'vision' than Freud, few novelists more to do with the meaning and emotional content of ideas than Bellow." We all know few Freuds viewed all systems of thought, including his own, as mythologies. We also know how the heroes of Bellow often breathe what Bellow, in his parody of Freud, has called an "environment of ideas." We also need to note that Bellow, like most writers, does not see in Freud an arcane (mysterious) scientist or an offbeat mind. On the contrary, he views his perceptions being in the heart of the twentieth century life. In other words, in Bellow's view, Freud offers a view of man which is modern, denuding and disillusioned, which is radically selective and iconoclastic. Bellow's differences with Freud begin on the terms that define these views. Bellow views Freud as a representative of modernism against which has been pitted the entire corpus of his fiction. Hence we find in his novels a sustained critique of the ideas and principles Freud contributed to the creation of the spirit of modernism. As Augie March, one of Bellow's heroes, declares, "I did not want to be what he [Freud] called determined." In Bellow's novels, there is no determinism. Here, in the case of the unconscious, Freud and Bellow seem to come quite close to each other. For Bellow, unconscious means the place that was first indicated by Freud in the final chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and made more emphatic in *The Ego and the Id* and *New Introductory Lectures*. In other words, it is dynamic unconscious which implies a function, not merely the descriptive which implies a quality. As Freud puts it, "the desire to murder is actually present in the unconscious." Bellow's heroes are familiar with this fact. In fact, one of the key subjects in Bellow's novels is the overcoming of that impulse, an impulse which is indicative of nihilism.

More than any other hero of Bellow, it is Prof Herzog who addresses himself to just this issue of the unconscious urges in man. As he waits in his dreary cell after his traffic accident, he meditates: "*If a primal crime is the origin of social order, as Freud, Roheim et cetra believe, the bond of brothers attacking and murdering the primal father, eating his body, gaining their freedom by a murder and united by a blood wrong, then there is some reason why jail should have these dark tones.*" The Professor's perception, however, seems fleeting: "*All that is nothing but metaphor. I can't truly feel I can attribute my blundering to this thick unconscious cloud. This primitive blood-daze.*" In the case of Herzog, whose actions are superior to violence and murder, it is not expected that he should commit such a blunder. This is why he writes in "cheerful eagerness." As against Freud's perception of the mind's unconscious, Bellow and Herzog see something other than murderous egotism in the deepest recesses of the unconscious, something which refuses to disappear. "*The dream of man's heart, however much we may distrust and resent it, is that life may complete itself in significant pattern.*" It is possible that Freud would agree on this in the last analysis, but not in the first, and there-in lies the big difference there is between the two of them. Herzog (or Bellow) is a congenital optimist, and as such he knows that "*you got one last chance to know justice. Truth.*" It is typical of Herzog (as well as of Bellow) that he puts things in traditional, moralistic terms. He does not deny the existence of the unconscious, but he cannot accept it in the terms in which Freud presents it.

The naturalistic view of man, implied in all the theories of Freud, thinks Bellow, reduces man to the level of animal, denying him the privilege of spirit or soul. Such a cynical view of man, although predominant in Western thought after Darwin, is just not palatable to Bellow. He takes such views as an affront to the dignity and status of man in this universe. He argues against such a view with all the force at his command. As he asserts, "the unconscious is anything that human beings don't know. Is there any reason why we have to accept Freud's account of what it is that we don't know? . . . Is it possible that what we don't know has a metaphysical character and not a Freudian, naturalistic character? I think that the unconscious is a concept that begs the question and simply returns us to our ignorance with an arrogant attitude of confidence, and that is why I am against it." Of course, Bellow does not offer here a positive unconscious. In his view, the unconscious is defined as that of which we are *ex-hypothesi* unaware. As such, therefore, nothing positive can be said about it. In a way, it is effectively nonexistent. However, one thing seems to be strongly suggested here, that as against Freud's naturalistic unconscious, Bellow's is metaphysical.

We can see how Bellow reverses the primary burden of the unknown. He chooses to make upward rather than downward comparisons. Also, he chooses to make outward rather than inward comparisons. Bellow demands feeling without symbols, whereas Freud could not do without symbols. Bellow's suspicion is that symbolic interpretation (of dream or sleep) may be an abrogation of free will. In this view, the unconscious can always tyrannize over consciousness. Similarly, the obscure motive can tyrannize over spontaneity. The result of such a view of man can be a sort of scholasticism, which infects not only the Freudian world but the literary world as well. Sensing such a threat Bellow once issued a warning: "Deep readers of the world beware. You may never again see common daylight." As has already been stated, more than any other hero of Bellow it is Herzog who offers full resistance to the Freudian unconscious. In him, it issues into an engaging insight. In a letter to Spinoza, he agrees with the philosopher that thoughts not causally connected may cause pain. "*It may interest you to know,*" Herzog writes to Spinoza, "*that in the twentieth century random association is believed to yield up the deepest secrets of the psyche.*" Herzog knows well both Spinoza and Freud, and he disagrees with them both. He also knows the rules of both, but he is not willing to play the game, "*believing that reason can make steady progress from disorder to harmony and that the conquest of chaos need not be begun anew everyday.*" It is characteristic of Herzog (as also of Bellow) to deeply yearn for moral clarity even more than the clarity itself. Herzog's prayer ("How I wish it! How I wish it were so! How Moses prayed for this!") for reason is, in fact, humanism in the defensive position.

In another letter (only drafted) to Spinoza, Herzog undermines the foundation of Freud's unconscious by rejecting outright its current neo-Freudian expression. In Freud's opinion, "what decides the purpose of life is simply the programme of the pleasure principle. This principle dominates the operation of the mental apparatus from the start." However, in place of happiness, it brings unhappiness through an elaborate sequence of repression and renunciation. The neo-Freudian removed the pain part of the process, giving the pleasure principle a new interpretation. Bellow finds both Freud and neo-Freudians dissatisfying in their accounts of the unconscious and its foundation. He rejects the two logical determinism of both by denying the cardinality of pleasure. He has to complain to Spinoza of all this, for there cannot be anyone better than him on this subject. Herzog knows it all: "*I subscribed at one time to the theory that it was pleasure and pleasure only that gave one the strength to be moral, that pleasure was fundamentally a question of health, and that the only possible source of goodness and happiness was instinctual gratification: I no longer believe this to be true.*" As he embraces Ramona he communicates with Spinoza. She bites his lip in ecstasy. "*This theory did me a lot of harm,*" he continues. Herzog's moralism is not dampened by the cruel comedy of contemporary life: "I think that John Stuart Mill was absolutely right: happiness cannot be a direct object. Must be a by-product." He loves Ramona but wouldn't marry her, for it would be an ideological misalliance. He firmly believes that self-directed purpose, not pleasure principle, ought to determine. Something close to this opposition can be found in Aristotle, who distinguished between pleasure as sensation and pleasure as activity. In the humanism of Bellow, it is the second that has more to do with happiness.

In Bellow's considered opinion, Freud's theory of the pleasure principle minimizes pure motive in such a way that it victimizes the Christian as well as the natural man. Herzog is seized of this matter. He writes to Edvig, "*as if it didn't have enough trouble in this day and age, will always be suspected of morbidity-sado-masochism, perversity of some sort. All higher or moral tendencies lie under suspicion of being vackets.*" Herzog is, in fact, angry with Edvig for the latter's indifference to his attempted *agape* (love for all) in dealing with Mady. It is an indifference which destroys an aspect of the Judeo-Christian tradition which Herzog takes to be real. "*If my soul, out of Season, out of place, experienced these higher emotions, I could get no credit for them anyway. Not from you with your attitude toward good intentions. I've read your stuff about the psychological realism of Calvin. I hope you don't mind my saying that it reveals a lousy, cringing, grudging conception of human nature. This is how I see your protestant Freudianism.*"

The differences between Bellow and Freud are equally serious over their interpretations of religion. To speak of religion in Bellow is to speak of it in a cultural predicament quite different from that of Freud. While Freud can be said to be slaying a dragon, Bellow's attempt seems to be to preserve a dinosaur. Bellow has, of course, no sympathy for ritual orthodoxy. Nor does he have any sympathy for Freud's view of religion as a universal obsessional neurosis. Herzog comes heavily just on this very term Freud uses for religion. Bellow does not equate superego with a usually

repressive society. Aware of the "harm done by people of high principles," Herzog nonetheless records his disapproval of the psychoanalytic view. "Insisted of laying the blame as Freud does on the excess of superego, I would say that the doing good relieves the poor burdened human soul." In Bellow's view, conscience remains intact as a means of individual assertion, in an age where many have mistaken it for pleasure. Bellow's grouse against psychoanalysis is that it undermines morality. As Herzog asserts, "God the Father, above the clouds. I don't believe in that." What he believes in is man's conscience, which is his own voice, but a voice with a transcendental yearning.

As a novelist whose favourite narrative is to attempt a self-definition partly through a recall of childhood experience. In this respect, Bellow's occupation parallels that of Freud. Both Freud and Herzog have their "personal histories, old tales from old times that may not be worth remembering." Indeed, both literature and psychology posit the primacy of emotion. To complement Bellow's humanism, Freud is more of a thinker than a scientist. He thought of himself, we are told, more as a humanist than as a physician. Some of Bellow's heroes read like case histories. Herzog, for example, does not mind thinking jauntily, "If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me." He is diagnosed as a "reactive-depressive." In fact, for Bellow's comic sense, certain psychological disarray seems essential. Moreover, there are times when we feel as if we were eavesdropping on an analytic session. Note, for instance, Herzog's reflection: "What I seem to do, thought Herzog, is to inflame myself voluptuously, aesthetically, until I reach a sexual climax. And that climax looks like a resolution and an answer to many 'higher' problems." Its added significance is that Herzog is talking to himself, not to a psychiatrist. He does, of course, have an analyst, whom he consults as and when necessary. But psychoanalysis has become a part of Herzog's life, a sort of personal style. In some of these analytical "sessions," Herzog invokes the master analyst (Freud), as when he records his guilt about being an apparition to Marco: "This particular sensitivity about meeting and parting had to be named. Such trembling sorrow—he tried to think what term Freud had for it: partial return of repressed traumatic material ultimately traceable to the death instinct?—should not be imparted to children, not that tremulous lifelong swoon of death. This same emotion, as Herzog the student was aware, was held to be the womb of cities, heavenly as well as earthly, mankind being unable to part with its beloved or its dead in this world or the next." However, to Herzog, holding his daughter, the emotion is "tyranny." The first of the idea here comes from Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," which Herzog actually mentions later in the novel, when he thinks that "the metabolic wastes of fatigue (he was fond of these physiological explanations; this one came from Freud's Mourning and Melancholia) made him temporarily light-hearted, even gay." We know Freud would not be responsive to seeking light through prayer, which Herzog at times contemplates, and is even tempted to take recourse to. But he, too, like Freud, seeks remedy by pursuing therapeutic line. Here, too, Herzog follows the master (Freud):

The depressive character is narcissistic. It fears the disappearance of the beloved. Above all terrors it places the terror of abandonment and naked solitude. So with secret hate it cuts off the deserters. Who then reappears within — introjected as you say in your jargon. Then the voice of the love slain speaks continually within, and the depressive abuses and criticizes himself. You say then that the depressive is often able to state the truth about himself quite reliably and accurately, though he often overstates the case, and you add — it must have been irresistible — that it is odd to think that insights should be the result of disease. Or, truthfulness is a consequence of disease. But my dear man, I am really very fond of that tart old man, let us go back a bit. Is it possible that some people are born with a greater metaphysical terror than others, with less sheath or with (less) power to apprehend the inhuman and the void? William James makes room in his system for such types, whom he calls "tender-minded" . . . however I am grateful to you for certain information, such as that the melancholic is abnormal in stripping his libido so rapidly from the deserting lover. Suffering from love yet intolerably cruel . . . have however some singular power that prevents me from laying my head docilely under your sober shade. One of these Moseses of whom you wrote — called meek.

Two things stand out in Herzog's attempts at clinical analysis and psychological conversations (mostly imaginary) that he (as well as Bellow) rejects a priori Freud's "radical determinism;" and that he resists the illusion of total explanation in the diagnosis. Whatever be the points of disagreement, however, one thing is clearly shown in *Herzog* that Bellow takes Freud rather seriously.

Summing up, it can be said that though not a Freudian, Bellow uses Freud as a reference point for his further explorations into the nature of man. Perhaps the most enduring instance of Freud's influence on Bellow is the latter's contempt for what is popularly called "grasshopper culture." However, for Bellow, the Freudian instinctual system does not offer a strong enough moral counter to the demands of this culture. There is a lack of autonomy. In Bellow's view, Freud wanted to preserve human nature from cultural determinism, but he does not want to substitute for it Freud's biological determinism. In a wise rabbinic commentary, it is suggested that God did not say "And it was good" after creating man, because man's nature was not determined. The poets of Genesis knew what Freud did not, the pull of moral indeterminacy. Bellow, surely, possesses this knowledge. And that has made all the difference to him. This knowledge has made him a humanist, wary of all systems and sciences when it comes to the definition of human nature. The gigantic exercise that Herzog undertakes in trying to formulate an adequate definition of self shows how serious Bellow is about this business of the definition and aware at the same time, how difficult. In accomplishing this gigantic task Herzog ransacks the entire stock of modern knowledge and finds bits and pieces of truth about human nature, but nowhere the whole truth. Hence he tries to piece together those bits to make a sense out of the chaos created by too much knowledge exploded by the formidable discovery of the biologists like Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, Stephen, and finally Freud. *Herzog's odyssey is arduous but, nonetheless, fascinating; it sucks the reader into its speculative exercise even more than Shakespeare's Hamlet does.*

### Herzog's Women

Saul Bellow has created marvelous characters of both sexes. His stories of men who become victims of women are remarkable. Herzog's story is the most fascinating of all these fictions. In his superb unrheterical style, wonderful for its immediacy and colour, Bellow has depicted in Herzog a speculative intelligence caught in sexual emotions like quicksand. Bellow depicts the plight of the man whose great family feelings are a sort of death to him, whose allegiances continuously bring him down. In fact, the recurring problem in Bellow's novels is involvement. The appeal of his heroes in general is the richness of reflection and interest they bring to a sense of sexual involvements as dangerous. Their stupendous intelligence offers the continual promise of a solution, although that promise is never fulfilled.

Bellow catches in his climactic novel *Herzog*, the hero falling apart from rage over his wife's betrayal of him with his best friend. In his unusual suffering, he feels impelled "to write letters, to explain, to have it out, to express, to set straight, to intervene, to put into perspective, to balance, to remedy, to justify, to confess, to atone." The catalogue of verbs here, Bellow's favourite device for desire's expression, is so comprehensive that it obscures how much Herzog uses his mind for very different purposes. He uses his intelligence as a tool against the turmoil of his personal life. The density of intellectual content and the immense charm of Herzog's sharpness about social philosophy tend to serve as a smoke screen for his personality which, at its core, is rather rigid and narcissistic—it can encompass no negative or critical idea of itself. Enshrining an adorable self-image in rather seductive abstractions, he allows his life to remain rigidly set on a course of self-destruction and disenchantment.

No doubt, Herzog, like King Lear, is "more sinned against than sinning." In the love-triangle, he is the wronged one, displaced by his best friend, not only in the love of his wife, but also in the affections of his child. The family values Herzog professes to feel time and again he only attaches to his mother and brothers, seldom to any of the families he himself forms as a man. It seems he wants only the family in which he was brought up; it is to be a son, not a father words. In Freudian terms, the tendency that this desire displays will be called regressive. Psychologically, it affords Herzog a great advantage. For not seeing or knowing himself permits him to think of himself as a man and yet derive the benefits of being a child. Bellow's power as a novelist makes real and fascinating the plight of the man who fears his own rage, who pays for his intellectual combativeness by his failure with women, the man who is his own adversary. Herzog is the typical victim as hero of the post-war period. The novel opens up the plight of the adult male character in a feminized world. Herzog's preoccupations, like others of his type, are curiously without the usual male obsessions with work, sports, etc. In olden times, or in the mythology, St. George had his dragon, Sir Galahad his Grail. Herzog and his like of the modern world have only women to structure their lives and define themselves as men. These prisoners of sex, so to say, never really revolt. They retreat from their rage. They try not to inflict the amount of suffering they know they can. But they wound through arousing and frustrating love. Thus, they are heroic not in a traditional sense, but in the magnitude of their submission to what they see as the unalterable facts of a world of women.

There are several women that enter Herzog's life. Most are slightly known, serving temporary functions as required by the hero's differing needs in changing situations. One is almost thoroughly examined by Herzog, for he is so obsessed of her personality. In the character of Madeleine, Herzog's second wife, a fascinating psychological study is offered. She is mainly described through Herzog's perception, seldom shown in direct demonstration of her person. And yet, she is a three-dimensional character, round and complex, not flat and simple. In his frantic attempt to be fair to all, including Madeleine, Herzog tries to view her objectively, although his "objectivity" may only reveal his enormous "subjectivity." We do, of course, receive in the process of Herzog's gigantic attempt to define her, a rather thorough portrait of this woman. Herzog as Madeleine's ex-husband, who narrates to us, through his enormously digressive ways, the story of his painful divorce with her whom he still loves, cannot, naturally, be wholly fair to her, however hard he may try to be so. We always get only his side of the case, generally perverting and distorting the real character of Madeleine. But the art of Bellow's narrative being as subtle as Browning's dramatic monologue, the other side of the case, Madeleine's side of their story, also gets revealed to us.

As we see her depicted in *Herzog*, Madeleine emerges as the most interesting and memorable female character in Bellow's canon. She is shown to be brilliant as well as beautiful, ambitious as well as aggressive, restless as well as outspoken. We find flashes of her image in the intermittent effusions of Herzog's descriptions of her character. Once he mentions, "Quite objectively, however, she was a beauty. . . . The bangs concealed a forehead of a considerable intellectual power." Another time, Herzog admires "the perfection of her self-control. She never hesitated. . . . It gave him a headache merely to look at her." This aspect of her personality (conventionally considered unusual, not desirable, for a woman) is both fascinating and fearful to Herzog. He admires it, but also appals it. "The will of a demon, or else outright mental disorder." She seems to possess all those qualities in which Herzog is abjectly deficient. She is not a moron, like him. She is not indecisive or in-capable of quick decision. She does not get lost in the sentimental sensations of events and affairs relating to her or others. She is full of life and shows full inclination to live it full-bloodedly. She has no aversion, as Herzog has, to the life of "gross" sensuality. She enjoys both a great sense of discrimination as well as of purpose. She is ambitious and has the necessary will and intelligence to achieve them.

Madeleine is shown to us, in order that we may get an objective view of her character, as much through the eyes of other characters in the novel as through those of Herzog. Her relations with other characters as well as what they say about her reveals her true character, not always endorsed or appreciated, at times not even apprehended, by Herzog. Significantly, most women characters in the novel admire Madeleine. Generally or conventionally, women are shown (at least by men) to be jealous of each other. Not so in Bellow's *Herzog*. It is a tribute to Madeleine that she is genuinely admired by those of her own sex. Geraldine Portnoy, one of these, says the following: "She is so vivacious, intelligent, and such a charmer. . . . It is extremely exciting to talk with her, she gives a sense of a significant encounter—with life—a beautiful, brilliant person with a fate of her own." Jonna Russ, another female character in the novel, says of Madeleine, that in general "a woman who competes with men, finally becomes—have we seen this figure before?—a bitch." Yes, we have men like Sandor Himmelsstein who do call her one, even as they admire her strength of character. He once tells Herzog that she is "a strong-minded bitch, terrifically attractive. Loves to make up her mind. Once decided, decided forever. What a will power. It's a type." He argues with Herzog that "she's less of a whore than most. We're all whores in this world, and don't you forget it." As a child, it comes out during the narrative, Madeleine had been sexually abused, which is put up as one of the explanations for her being rather sexually frigid towards Herzog. In Herzog's perverse view of her, this frigidity gets interpreted as "bitchiness" on her part. "She's built a wall of Russian books around herself. . . in my bed," he complains. He resentfully feels that her studies have invaded their most intimate privacy—their very conjugal bed. Herzog's male chauvinism (or prejudice) is evidenced by the fact that he does not consider his own studies (much more absorbing than Madeleine's) any obstruction in man-woman relationship. Similarly, his "frailty thy name is woman" attitude is equally unjust to women, if we place it side by side with his own fondness for sexual adventures. What he takes to be "adventures" in his own case he characterizes as sins in the case of his wife.

Like most modern, educated women, Madeleine, who has been a brilliant Radcliff graduate, finds rather unfulfilling her domestic life alone, making her feel an urge for further growth through a career job. As a woman, she is shown

going through a "crisis," "rethinking everything." Madeleine's struggle, in one sense, reflects the conflicts of genders in mid-century America. We can see how she has hard time after having made a mismatch by marrying a man she does not love, and whom she had tried to avoid. To begin with she had entertained some hope that Herzog, her husband, would make some room for her own interests as well. But Herzog, despite his vast knowledge of life and letters, men and matters, arts and sciences, sects and religions, races and classes, remains essentially a member of the male-dominated society. He leaves no room for her individual career or self. He demands of her to submit to his own interests, act his assistant in the preparation of his book on romanticism. And when she shows no inclination towards his proposal or project, he feels hurt, thwarted, cheated, and frustrated. He does not for a moment consider the question of her having an independent existence, ideas and aspirations. The question of gender or human equality does not occur to him. He is so full of himself, his emotions and aspirations, that he cannot entertain any idea outside of himself. As for abstractions, of course, nothing under the sun remains unscanned by his mind.

However, Madeleine is a person of independent mind. She ignores his calls for subordination and continues pursuing her own studies in Russian philosophy. When she takes her independent line, she has, for sure, ceased to view herself as a function of man's requirements. Showing utter inaptitude for understanding others, Herzog considers her Russian studies as something of an impediment between man-woman relationship. Obviously, he expects a woman to remain only as serving subordinate, having no business to take up anything not to the liking of her husband. His indifference to her interests comes out clearly when his friend, Shapiro, asks him about the subject of Madeleine's doctoral thesis. Herzog's casual response to his friend's question is that he doesn't know what precisely her research is about, and that he only vaguely remembers that it has something to do with "Slavonic languages," or "Russian religious history (I guess)." His indifference to her is also shown in his reaction to Shapiro's suggestion that the Herzogs should move to Chicago for Madeleine's studies. He just gets enraged on the very mention of the idea: "Fill your big mouth with herring, Shapiro! . . . and mind your own fucking business." This rather hostile attitude of Herzog to her studies makes Madeleine all the more determined to not only complete her studies but to do her best to produce an outstanding work. Herzog, obviously, does not take kindly to her spirit of competition:

I understand that Madeleine's ambition was to take my place in the learned world. To overcome me. She was reaching her final elevation, as queen of the intellectuals, the cast iron bluestocking. And your friend Herzog writhing under her sharp elegant heel. . . Madeleine, by the way, lured me out of the learned world, got in herself, slammed the door, and is still in there, gossiping about me.

Here is an instance of extreme jealousy where a husband treats his wife as an immediate and major rival as a scholar, as if there were only one place in the academic domain which he is occupying and she was trying to snatch from him. He feels threatened by her seriousness as a scholar, and would much rather keep her out of the donnish domain. He is not able to understand why a woman should have aspirations independent of her husband.

Some critics of Bellow have viewed Madeleine as unsympathetic, cold, unstable, even neurotic. In his famous book, *Love and Death in the America Novel*, Leslie Fiedler says that Madeleine "seems a nightmare projection bred by baffled malice, rather than a realized woman; and Herzog's passionate involvement with her remains, therefore, unconvincing." Although not altogether unfounded, Fiedler's view is, decidedly, exaggerated. The fact remains that Herzog's passion for Madeleine is the psychocenter of the novel, and her character does not exist outside the projected world of the hero's fantasy. No doubt, he is being unfair to her in many ways, but even the fact of his being unfair to her has to be seen through the same spectrum. The other accusations against Madeleine listed earlier, too, are not just. If we look at her in the novel's context, she emerges a woman of substance, having female charms, jest for life, intellectual ambition. It is the simplistic view of criticism that sets up an easy antithesis between body and mind, sense and sensibility. Madeleine's combination of these seemingly or supposedly antithetical elements is quite convincing: She has, so to say, a healthy mind in a healthy body. And it is in her attempt to maintain this happy balance that she is forced to seek separation from Herzog and choose another companion instead who seems to offer an opportunity for the simultaneous development of both. Herzog, we have seen, is threatening to curb her intellectual side, her mental development. When confronted by the psychiatrist with the fact of his perceived crisis in Madeleine's life, Herzog acknowledges that it is possible that it was caused by his contempt of her intellectual pursuits, that it is perhaps this contempt of his which has given her the feeling that he was "disrespectful of her rights as a person."



Herzog keeps persisting in describing Madeleine as a domineering and cruel woman. But the dramatic-monologue style of Bellow makes allowance for the reader's benefit of seeing behind Herzog's statement the real portrait of the woman. Although not a criminal like the Duke of Browning's poem, Herzog's attempt to make us see only the slanted picture of his ex-wife is very much in the manner of the Duke's presentation of his "last duchess." It is the beauty of the styles of both Bellow and Browning that we are allowed to see the real women in the portraits coloured by their husbands. Herzog, for instance, himself recalls that she describes him as a tyrant, and we are enabled to see that he has been just as cruel. We are also told about Madeleine's letter to Herzog in which she complains that when she was in a room with him, he "seemed to swallow and gulp up all the air and left nothing for her to breathe." We are also made familiar with the fact of Madeleine's resenting Herzog's adventures with other women. This fact is confirmed to us by Herzog's own conversation with Aunt Zelda, that her accusations were well-founded. Herzog's cruelty is not confined to Madeleine alone. He has been equally-cruel to other women as well. In his first wife Daisy, for instance, Herzog had a woman, who was more like his mother than his wife. He did not like her sheltering figure and hence left her: "I gave up the shelter of an orderly, purposeful, lawful existence because it bored me." Now, when Madeleine leaves him, she does it perhaps for the same reason he left Daisy. In a way, he has received from Madeleine the same treatment he himself had meted out to Daisy. It hurts him now because he is the one who has been abandoned, rather than the one abandoning. Herzog's treatment of his Japanese mistress has been no better. He had not allowed her to return to Japan much against the wishes of her parents. And yet, when she fell seriously ill and remained in that condition for a month he did not even care to pay her a visit. Herzog does, of course, come to realize that he is not the only one who has been a victim of his bedfellows, causing them unearned suffering. His bedfellows have also been the victims of his neglect, indifference, and unreasonable demands, with him being directly the cause of their suffering.

Madeleine is, of course, much different from other women who run into Herzog's life. She holds a different conception of woman from that by Daisy or Sona. Whenever Herzog tries to be patronizing, she does not like it. In fact, she resents such attitude:

So now we're going to hear how you SAVED me. Let's hear it again. What a frightened puppy I was. How I wasn't strong enough to face life. But you gave me LOVE, from your big heart, and rescued me from the priests. Yes, cured me of menstrual cramps by servicing me so good. You SAVED me. You SACRIFICED your freedom. I took you away from Daisy and your son, and your Japanese screw. Your important time and money and attention.

Here is, for sure, an outburst against an over-brandished favouring or patronizing attitude of Herzog. She has had enough of cramming down her throat that she should be grateful to him for his being her benefactor before the separation took place. Here is a flash point when she could not swallow any more of that stuff. So she bursts out in retaliation. Surely, Madeleine speaks now in her own voice. We can see how her sharp repartee, her witty dialogues, and arguments add an in-depth dimension to her characterization.

It can be recalled here that Madeleine got fascinated by the personality of her forty-year old professor when she was only twenty. One of the explanations (psychological) offered is that perhaps she saw in him a father figure who would replace her own father whom she had lost to the theatre. Her conversion to Catholicism can also be attributed to the same reason, seeing in the Monsignor a father-figure with whom she could freely converse and make confession. She seems to feel in both cases a closer relationship than she even felt with either of her parents. But we know Herzog responded to her need for a sort of catharsis through conversation. He only tricked her into thinking that he was listening to her, so that she would then help him with his research. Herzog not only disregarded Madeleine's intellectual pursuits but also accused her of neglecting her household duties in Ludeyville. She does not take such accusations lying down; rather, she retorts to say that it was not possible for her to cope with the vast housework in the large dilapidated mansion: "It needs four servants and you want me to do all the work." As she refuses to accept abject subordination to her domineering husband, he feels "like a broken down monarch of some kind". This kind of attitude to women seems typical of Bellow's various protagonists. At the same time, there is some bafflement in Bellow's heroes when it comes to defining a woman. For instance, Herzog regards them as lurid kinds of vampires and "will never understand what women want. What do they want? They eat green salad and drink human blood." In much the same vein we find the other heroes of Bellow defining women in lurid terms.

After two years of marriage, two things that emerge intolerable in the relationship are Herzog's domination and patronage. The divorce brings to the fore all the more clearly their differing approaches to the institution of marriage. Madeleine expresses in relief that the divorce was "the first time in her life she knew clearly what she was doing. Until now it was all confusion." In contrast to this sense of release (as if from a bondage), Herzog goes to pieces. The climax (perhaps in mock-heroic style, being reminiscent of *Hamlet*) of his struggle to overcome his passion takes place when he goes out to shoot Madeleine and her lover in Chicago. After reaching there, when he watches through the window only to see a peaceful domestic scene (Madeleine washing the dishes and cleaning the kitchen, and Valentine tenderly bathing Junie), a sudden change of attitude takes place. He did not find the monsters he had expected to be there. He immediately abandons his murderous intention, saying, "Let the child find life," and as to the lovers, "if, even in that embrace of lust and treason, they had life and nature on their side, he would step quietly aside." Decidedly, Herzog has come to realize by now that Madeleine did not really love him: "Madeleine refused to be married to him, and people's wishes have to be respected. Slavery is dead." One recalls here Hamlet's going to kill Claudius but abandoning the idea on finding him at prayer. The two situations have mock-heroic equation.

Although it takes quite a time, Herzog does at last succeed in rooting out Madeleine from his system. At this point of time, Phoebe asks him if he wants Madeleine back in his life. His answer at the time is noteworthy: "I wish her a busy, useful, pleasant, dramatic life. Including love. The best people fall in love, and she's one of the best." It is quite evident here that Herzog has finally succeeded in freeing himself of his obsession for Madeleine. In so doing, he has given us perhaps one of the best feminine portraits in Bellow's fiction. Madeleine emerges as a "new woman" who makes her own choices, who ultimately takes her destiny in her own hands. She stands up against the challenge of a patriarchal society. She comes up as a representative "free" woman, who accepts the challenge of growing independently and finding herself the path of life. The more Herzog represses, the bolder she becomes. She finally discovers for herself the life she wanted—freedom to work out her own career and a loving husband, a dear daughter.

Compared to Madeleine, Herzog's other woman, Ramona, with whom he gets involved after his separation from Madeleine, is quite different. She seems to embody the characteristics of the conventional Jewish wife. She is warm, gentle, loving, having genuine family feelings. Above all, she is a good cook. She also embodies the characteristics of a typical modern woman. She is independent, hard working, intellectual, and sexual. In Herzog's view, she is a "sexual masterpiece." It is not for nothing that he compares her to the Egyptian goddess of fecundity, calling her a "priestess of Isis." He is equally enthusiastic about her spirit of independence: "She struggled, she fought. . . . In this world, to be a woman who took matters into her own hands." She seems to have already arrived at the destination of her full personhood which Madeleine aspires to achieve. It seems she has already succeeded in structuring her life according to her own view of authenticity of self. Interestingly, Herzog goes all out to admire it, whereas in the case of Madeleine the same thing irritated him and made him hysterical. His admiration is perhaps limited to the extent her independence does not come in his way of handling her the way he likes. Her independence, so-called, at no stage in the novel is granted at his expense. Herzog admires Ramona also for her wisdom. In one of his mental letters, he acknowledges that she has done a great deal for him in trying to recover his self-confidence. In this context, Herzog writes: "Dear Ramona—very dear Ramona. I like you very much—dear to me, a true friend. . . . You have the complete wisdom.

Ramona's independence is evidenced by the fact that she owns a flower shop which she runs herself independently. She is said to have in her personality a "fragrant" quality. Thinking of her, Herzog admires her: "you're lovely, fragrant, sexual, good to touch—everything". At the same time, we cannot miss a mock-heroic note in his description of the elaborate way Ramona dresses up for their sexual encounters. She wears, he tells us, black lace underclothes and her alluring postures which make him think of Spanish dancer or "devodorada." He further tells us, she "entered a room provocatively, swaggering slightly, one hand touching her thigh, as though she carried a knife in her garter belt." One critic has interpreted the fact of her looking like carrying a knife as a sign of Herzog's regarding women as castrators. His contention is based upon his considering Herzog a traumatic husband whom Madeleine ruined by the assertion of her womanhood. In this critic's view, after that traumatic experience with Madeleine, Herzog seems to have developed this prejudiced view of women, including Ramona, whom, otherwise, he finds so much likeable. Typically, Herzog is also suspicious of her ideology. She is said to preach *mens sana in corpore sano*, "which means a healthy soul in a healthy body. She is also suspected of having absorbed the teachings of Marcuse, N.C. Brown, and

the Neo-Freudians who believed in body's being the instrument of the soul. She confirms Herzog's suspicion when she tells him that the art of love is one of the most sublime achievements of the soul. She also attempts to teach him how to renew the spirit through the flesh—"the true and only temple of the spirit." On the whole, however, Herzog finds Ramona delightful, who makes him speak out in admiration: "Bless the girl! What pleasure she gave him—by her ways satisfied him—her French—Russian—Argentine—Jewish ways." At the close of the novel, we find Herzog preparing a meal for Ramona and picking flowers for her. We can see how she has become someone special for him because he never did things for any one else.

It is interesting to note apparent contradictions in the stands both Herzog and Madeleine take with regard to the kitchen or household work. We know how Madeleine, when she is with Herzog, complains that she cannot cope with the household chores in Ludeyville. But the same Madeleine, when she is Valentine, washes dishes and feels happy doing it. Similarly, Herzog never entertains the idea of doing household work, for he seems to believe that it is the woman's duty. But in Ramona's apartment, he himself shows eagerness to wash the dishes after dinner. His reason for wishing to do this is that "there is something about washing dishes that calms me." At the end of the novel, we also find Herzog inviting Ramona to dinner in his own house where he has cooked a good meal for her. On this occasion, Herzog thinks: "she would help him with the dishes." Obviously, the implication of these contradictions is that it is not the household activities as such to which either men or women have any aversion. They do them happily when the going between them is good. But when the going has gone bad, the same very activities become matters of egocentred values of honour and prestige. In other words, nothing is good or bad, only man-woman relations make them so. If the relations are good, all activities are pleasant and joyful. But if the relations are bad, the same very activities become unpleasant and irritating. Examined closely, it is perhaps Madeleine's intellectual pursuit which makes the difference, for Ramona does not show any such indication—of being an intellectual or planning to pursue any project in the field of ideas. Hence Ramona does not pose any threat to Herzog's intellectual status which Madeleine seems to be doing. The clash of interests seems to arise only from their rivalry in the activity of research. As a man or don, Herzog is not able to tolerate woman as rival in the academic field. There being no such rivalry with Ramona, the two get harmonised as complementary parts. Keeping in view an apparent similarity between Herzog and Bellow, at least partly, we can conclude that the author is not wholly unbiased against women.

### **Function of the Pastoral in Herzog**

Owing to the predominance of the big city—Chicago or New York—as location of most Bellow's novels, he is invariably considered a city or urban novelist. Bellow also shows his masterly grasp of these two big American metropolises. He evokes the sights and sounds, people and places, industries and homes of these cities so meticulously that they come alive in the pages of his novels. We feel as if we were moving through the streets and are a part of the city's milieu. No other contemporary of Bellow can claim such a masterly depiction of his locale. No wonder that Bellow and the big city have become almost synonymous in the minds of his readers. At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that there is in each of his novels an important aspect of the pastoral. His heroes are found taking frequent excursions, physical or mental, into an environment which is wholly free from the clutter and chaos of the hero's city existence. If we scan through the plots of Bellow's novels, we shall discover a regular pattern which constitutes a cohesive motif in his fiction. In fact, it is the extent of the hero's own pastoral impulse that determines his confidence in facing the challenges of the everyday world. *Herzog* is among those of Bellow's novels which devote more space to the pastoral and allow the hero more freedom of movement. These novels, more so *Herzog*, express exuberance in almost every respect of its artistic wealth. However, all of these flights, Bellow clearly seems to imply, only help prepare the heroes to eventually return to their natural habitat, the city.

We cannot help recalling here the recurrence of such a pattern (alternating urban and rural settings) in the romantic literature as a whole. The Elizabethan dramatists, especially Shakespeare, had provided such a model to the subsequent writers. The comedies of Shakespeare show a regular recurrence of such a pattern, in which the play's action opens at the court, then the major players are moved to the rural setting, where they live for a while, and finally return to the court at the end of the play. Obviously, the pastoral contact the characters are allowed to enjoy regenerates and rejuvenates the city characters, cleansing them of the corrupting instincts and feelings which dominated them in the urban environment. Once so regenerated, purged of all undesirable temerities, these characters become better

courtiers and superior human beings, more mature to face the challenges of life. Surely, pastoral plays in this pattern the symbolic role of healing caused in the urban environment, restoring peace and harmony to the disturbed distracted souls. This standard Elizabethan or Shakespearean model can be traced in the works of the Romantics in the nineteenth century, as also in the works of such modern writers as Ernest Hemingway and Willa Cather, and further in the works of post-modern writers such as John Barth and Thomas Pynchon. Bellow and Malamud, among the American Jewish novelists, follow the Shakespearean model quite closely. Bellow, like Hemingway, comes closest to Shakespeare in the symbolic uses of the pastoral. Both attribute to the rural setting the same regenerative functions.

No doubt, cities remain among Bellow's most brilliant creations. Unlike the other novelists, where they will provide some sort of background, Bellow does more with them than simply reflect a vivid social or ethnic milieu, although that in itself is not without significance; he uses the urban milieu as a projection of his protagonist's fragmented life. His heroes express definite attitudes towards their environment which range from despair to acceptance; they identify with the chaos and clutter which they see around them. In an acute affectionate mood, for instance, Herzog drives around the Hyde Park area and describes "his Chicago-massive, clumsy, amorphous, smelling of mud and decay, dog turds; society facades, slabs of structural *nothing*." He muses that perhaps he is "as midwestern and unfocused as the same streets." This preoccupation with the city as symbolic of the hero's inner state is precisely what makes the pastoral episodes loom large in his mind. Similar to the chaos of city life, which mirrors the hero's personal fragmentation, is the function of the pastoral, which symbolizes just the opposite – wholeness of being, order and peace. Like the earlier writers of the pastoral, Bellow moves his characters away from their city abode to the simpler environment of the pastoral—or makes them pine for such a setting—so that they can, for a while, undergo a sort of learning experience. In *Herzog*, we find that while the primary setting of the novel remains the city of Chicago, the pastoral excursions of its hero emerge of great significance to the novel's pattern of meaning. The fact that these pastoral scenes are important is made clear by the author through the strategy of their placement in the narrative. We find that both the beginning and ending of the novel are in the pastoral setting of the crumbling house in Ludeyville, a rural town in the Berkshires. The short opening section of the novel shows Herzog in Ludeville, summarizing his frantic events that led to his sojourn there. It is these very events which are later developed in the novel. One of the major themes that Bellow explores in *Herzog* is the hero's early disenchantment with an escape into the pastoral as a remedy for his internal chaos. His choice, it is clear to him as well as to the reader, is owing to the pressures of urban life. However, when Herzog returns to the same setting finally at the end of the novel, we find that he does not make any attempt to seek solace in nature. Rather, we find that he is trying to transcend the natural world in order to commune with the spiritual which he believes the natural world represents. Initially, Herzog did, of course, get disillusioned with his withdrawal into the pastoral. The context at this time is his living with his second wife, Madeleine. In fact, it was on his wife's encouragement that he had invested the last of his inheritance from his father to buy this house in Ludeyville. The intention was that he would complete his scholarly work in the natural simplicity of Berkshires. What actually happened there was just the opposite of what had been intended. Instead, the idyllic setting brought only chaos. His proposed study could not be completed because all his time was spent on the renovation of the old house. His time was also wasted in writing articles (for magazines and news-papers) to pay for his wife's extravagant shopping. Here, we are naturally reminded of Fitzgerald and Zelda pair, where the novelist had to waste most of his time in doing popular magazine writing to pay for his wife's extravagant expenditure. As for his domestic happiness, which he had dreamed of, it is ruined by Madeleine's stormy pregnancy and, as he later comes to know, by her attraction to his friend Gersbach. As he glances back on the Ludeyville sojourn, he thinks of it, not in terms of the pastoral relief he had hoped for, but rather as the beginning of the dissolution of his marriage, his career, and his sanity. Thus, Herzog has no illusions that his return to Ludeyville will supply him with any permanent solution to his problems. He very well knows that the return to nature is also not free from its primitive aspects.

Herzog's reactions to various things in the house, major as well as minor, reveal his dilemma at Ludeyville. Attracted by an unusual odor in the bathroom, he raises the toilet bowl to find "the small beaked skulls and other remains of birds who had nested there after the water was drained, and then had been entombed by the falling lid. He looked grimly in, his heart aching somewhat at this accident." Herzog does not ignore in his pastoral house even the harshness of the human situation which will inevitably return to his life. In fact, he acknowledges that "the bitter cup would come round

again, by and by." For a while, however, he does experience the joy of his rural sojourn. On seeing his shabby estate at Ludeyville, his reaction is: "*Hineni!* Marvelously beautiful it is today. He stopped in the overgrown yard, shut his eyes in the sun, against flashes of crimson, and drew in the odors of catalpa-bells, soil, honeysuckle, wild onions, and herbs." His sense of personal fulfillment at the moment seems to correspond to the extent of beauty he sees spread around him. As he enters the house and opens the windows, "the sun and country air at once entered. He was surprised to feel such contentment ... contentment? Whom was he kidding, this was joy." He goes on musing about this new contentment as he sits in a lawn chair watching the setting sun and lightening to the birds. Giving a thought to his own physical mortality, Herzog thinks:

And inside-something, something, happiness... "Thou movest me." ... But this intensity, doesn't it mean anything? Is it an idiot joy that makes the animal, the most peculiar animal of all, exclaim something? And he has it in his breast? But I have no arguments to make about it. "Thou movest me."

Thus what Herzog seems to desire is not an escape into the natural world but a transcendence of it. The hero seems to attribute to nature a function higher than that of seeking solace in the lap of nature. This higher function elevates nature to a still higher level of transcendental reality of which he wishes to become a part. Bellow, too, seems to believe that nature is not just a non-human physical world but an aspect of higher reality for which it acts as a gateway. In his fiction, therefore, as we have seen here in *Herzog*, nature or the pastoral has both a material as well as a spiritual function to perform.

### Herzog and Judaism

As is the case with most philosophical thought, varying methodological approaches have been made to trace the progress of Jewish philosophy called Judaism. As is well-known, its basis is an ethical monotheism which is actually Bible-centred. Some interpreters of Judaism have preferred to call it a "purposeful philosophy," which is concerned not with First Causes or the origins of creation, but with the meaning of creation for man. As a result, it is fundamentally anthropocentric yielding reasons for man's existence, assuming and emphasizing "human confidence and sufficiency." In a sense, Judaism is a legalistic religion containing a set of beliefs, rituals, and ethics. As such, it sets forth the Jewish people apart from other nations, thereby assuring their own survival. The document in which these doctrines are set forth is called *Torah*, which are further developed in the form of both a moral and a written tradition which comprises the *Talmud*. The distinctive features of Judaism are its covenant (formal contract or agreement) with God, its humanism, and its emphasis on moral action.

In the history of Judaism, Abraham was the first philosopher. It is the set of his speculations concerning the universe which brought monotheism to the world. His purpose, however, cannot be called theoretical. His clear purpose was to establish a relationship between God and man. Unlike the ancient Jewish philosophers of Hellenism, called Talmudists, he did not involve himself in theosophical speculations. These had been considered mysteries beyond human comprehension. They just accepted the postulates presented in Scripture: God as creator and man as subservient. Their task remained confined to interpreting the meaning of the commandments, to the study of law and its application to everyday life, to establishing the moral structure of the world. Decidedly, they were traditionalists. The earliest Jewish humanist philosopher, Hellen, is said to have commanded, in the first century A. D., while standing on one foot all the time, "what is hateful to you do not unto your neighbour; this is the entire *Torah*. All the rest is commentary." Similarly, Rabbi Akiva, of the same century, made almost the same assertion when he suggested that the fundamental principle and complete teaching in the *Torah* is "Love thy neighbour as thyself."

When we come to the Middle Ages, we find that the Jewish philosophers are trying to reconcile the unsystematic values of the Bible with the traditionalist philosophical speculations of the times. Their works can actually be called a body of apologetica. The most prominent of these figures was Moses Maimonides, a "supreme rationalist." He was, in fact, an Aristotelian thinker, and by far the best exponent of Jewish thought. Unlike his predecessors, his approach was not apologetic. His concern with philosophy was actually a concern with truth, and was not at all interested in demonstrating the merits of the Jewish tradition. Moses always contended that Judaism is a fusion of philosophical spirituality and revealed law. His *Guide of the Perplexed* is a rationalistic account of Judaism and philosophical interpretation of the *Bible*. This book was translated from Hebrew into Latin in the thirteenth century.

and made a profound impact on the Christian scholasticism. When we reach the eighteenth century, we find that a new movement in Judaism has come up. Chasidism was the new philosophy of the time. As a matter of fact, it was a folk movement aimed at fulfilling the spiritual needs of the times. It was born, actually, a movement born in adversity. The thrust of Chasidism is mystic, kabalistic, and emotional. It did generate a mass appeal because it was non-intellectual and non-rationalistic. But it also gave birth to an opposing philosophy, the *Mitnagdimism*, headed by intellectuals and rationalists. It developed rapidly and continues to persist in the modern times.

When Hitler rose in Germany, his Nazi philosophy made Judaism a target of its attack. He launched a war against it, although he knew it would amount to war against humanism and humanity. After the holocaust of World War II, the Jewish philosophy has become more theosophic and thanatosophic. In the contemporary period, both humanists and theologians are trying to come to terms with the dichotomy of a God-centred universe and the Holocaust. To some scholars and writers of the period the Holocaust seemed to suggest a clear absence of God and the reign of nihilism. The growth of Holocaust literature has, of course, been burgeoning (growing rapidly). A bulk of diaries, testimonies, novels, and philosophic speculations has gathered over the years. It is, however, the work of Saul Bellow which seems to epitomize the moral outlook which is an integral part of the Jewish people. One of the striking contrasts between Bellow's philosophic position and that of his contemporaries is that whereas most of them nurture and agonize over a nihilistic outlook on life, Bellow alone offers a refreshingly optimistic view of life. It seems that this cleavage between them (Bellow and others) is caused in the main by Bellow's affinity with the Jewish philosophers. He seems to present a consistently Jewish philosophical view, which is all pervasive in his work. It appears in the form of ethical monotheism, essentially the ethical optimism of Leo Baeck. Baeck or any other Jewish philosopher of modern times can not, however, be considered a source or influence for Bellow's view. He seems to go back to the original source, the Bible. It is indicated by the fact that his optimism/monotheism is simplistic yet sublime, embodying the very essence of Jewish thought, indicating a loss in the historical–evolutionary process.

Coming as they do after Hitler's Holocaust and attempted obliteration of humanism, Bellow's works strive to reestablish the foundations of society by reaffirming the need for morality in life. That, he seems to suggest, is the only way to return to the humanism of Judaism. Bellow has always insisted upon the moral purpose of art. He asserted in an interview that ethical and moral questions are at the core of his works. His attitude to art is that of a twentieth century prophet, and his art is tinged with the self-evaluative Jewish humour. As he put it, he is only "a sort of medium" for his art. He makes a clear confession of his credo as an artist when he says, "I really believe... that the individual has some permanent balance within himself... that he knows right and wrong." It has been aptly remarked that Bellow's works are polemical tracts that follow certain definitive axial lives of Jewish thought, especially in the presentation of God, man, and the universe. Bellow's novels, with his ethical monotheism embodied in them, indicate that there is a belief in God, that God commands a way of life for man which is moral and humanistic.

Like the Jewish philosophers of ancient times, Bellow does not involve himself in the theosophic speculation. His novels, no doubt, are shaded by the spectre of Holocaust. His belief in God, however, remains central to his philosophical view. Of course, we do not find most Bellow's characters speculating about the nature of God. The only exception is Herzog, who acknowledges his own belief in God. Others make no attempt to prove his existence. As for Herzog, he does not hesitate even to argue with God. He acknowledges his life's contract with God. Implications of accepting the presence of God in the universe are: one. acceptance of his will; two, leading a good life, a virtuous life, an ethical life, a life in God's image as commanded in the *Torah*. One of the basic concepts of Judaism is that man is created in the image of God. An implication of this belief is that one must try to sanctify life to come up to God's expectations. If life is sacred, then existence is a moral obligation. Thus, one of the problematic qualities of the Jewish people is its ability to survive. They cling to life because life is viewed as a gift from God, which must be preserved at all costs. It is for this very reason that certain critics have considered Bellow's novels as a form of survivor literature, testimonials to life. His heroes always opt for life. Even though hounded by all sorts of torturers – reality instructors, bitchy women, black thieves, or WASP demons – they nevertheless overcome all these antagonisms and keep moving with their lives. Jewish philosophy is a system rooted in the temporal world of man. By and large, its concerns are for living life at its fullest, not as a "pyromaniac of the soul," nor an ascetic, but as one whose enjoyment of life would acknowledge God's presence in the world. Ecclesiastes states: "it is indeed God's gift to man, that he should eat and drink and be

happy as he toils." As we move through Bellow's novels from the earliest to the latest we find that all his heroes are ethical individuals. They are all social creatures. They love the company of people, and take solitude as an anathema. Since solitude is not a proper condition for man, Bellow's novels invariably end with the hero's reintegration, happily into society. Although the hero in *Herzog* retreats to Ludeyville, he is still looking forward to a visit from Ramona, his priestess of love. Also, even though most of Bellow's heroes belong to a fractured nuclear family, the family is nevertheless of great importance to them all. We find that Herzog, like all others, feels strong attachment to children, shows closeness to his brothers, and a reverence for the past, which each hero, through the course of the novel, attempts to reclaim for himself. It must also be accepted here that the greatness of Bellow's art is not wholly dependent on a system of philosophy. Even so, the philosophy of Judaism is part and parcel of the author's being. Also, Bellow freely acknowledges his growing up in the Orthodox Jewish home, his knowing Yiddish as his first language, his learning Hebrew in Cheder. He also mentions that "at a most susceptible time of my life I was wholly Jewish. That's gift, a piece of good fortune with which one does not quarrel. It is rather one of "the foundations that I draw from in my art. . . . Certainly it exists within me, even as the events of childhood are impressed in every artist, if I may include myself in this category." Although the corollary for Moses Herzog's plight is the biblical tale of Moses, Herzog's vying (carrying on rivalry, competing) with his enemies—Madeleine, Gersbach, and Western culture—and his prevailing, though scarred, humanism is an instance of the Jacob and the angel tale as well. There is in *Herzog* a clash of cultures, and Moses must accept his own uniqueness—himself as a Jew—prior to securing his rehabilitation. Herzog's realization that Ludeyville was "Herzog's folly! . . . Symbol of his Jewish struggle for a solid footing in white Anglo-Saxon Protestant America, "and that his sinister was" defying the Wasp. . . . What a struggle I waged—left handed but fierce" was puerile, leads to his eventual recovery.

Surely, *Herzog* is an outspoken expression of covenant Judaism as here man's life is viewed in terms of a contract with God, a contract which includes an attempt to reestablish the inter-relatedness of the community of man. In a sense, the novel can be viewed as a sort of testing of the Jewish definition of life and being, of purpose and death in the world—nothing else. The way it sets up an opposition between ancient belief and modernism in the person of Herzog shows the author's intention to this effect. As such *Herzog* can be characterised as an attempt at assimilation of the old and the new. The hero's very name Moses suggests the theme, having direct bearing on the subject of Jewish consciousness and freedom. The novel, in this sense, yields almost an allegorical meaning. Herzog's Moses' bid for freedom is a sort of release from the Egypt of the soul. During the most crucial phase of his life, where his life seems to be falling apart, when he comes to question the very purpose of existence, Moses makes the discovery that the ideas which he had accepted as a liberal intellectual, ideas that are the foundations of the twentieth-century thought, including the basic principles of Christianity and Romanticism, are actually detrimental to man because they seek transcendence of the human rather than ascendance within the human realm. As Herzog reflects, "I, a Jew, would never grasp the Christian and Faustian world idea, forever alien to me." At this point, it seems, he realizes the value of his own humanistic heritage. He clearly shows a firm belief in the essential value of the human being. He strongly feels that he cannot accept either the first fall of man or Heidegger's "second Fall of Man." Herzog feels deeply disturbed to see that he is living in "a society that was no community and devalued the person." He believes, on the contrary, that "brotherhood makes a man human." Herzog reflects, "When the preachers of dread tell you that others only distract you from metaphysical freedom then must turn away from them. The real and essential question is one of our employment by other human beings and their employment by us." Freedom, as Herzog sees it, is the same as it was for Joseph: it is not an abstraction. It is the freedom to make intelligent choices within a society. *Herzog*, like most other novels of Bellow, is the author's answer to the problems posed by the apocalyptic events of World War II. In a sense, the war severed the universal umbilical cord, signalling the loss of a social connectedness as well as a loss of those imperatives that govern a harmonious world. Bellow seems to seek in *Herzog* an amelioration of this trauma by reestablishing the nexus that binds men. Through language, thought, and action Herzog is trying to rid himself of the neutrality of science, so ruinous to world solidarity. What Herzog is trying to achieve instead is to recreate the bond of humanitarianism found in words such as "good," "humanity," "dignity," "responsibility." These words have evolved into what the European Jewish culture termed *menschlichkeit*. These words comprise much of the ethical optimism of Judaism. If not all of us, at least, the Jewish intellectuals have viewed Nazism, in its being

diametrically opposed to the humanism of the philosophy of Judaism, as an attempt to eradicate humanism as a world view. It may be recalled here that a Jewish child's first commandment from his parents is, "*Be a mensch*"—Be an ethical, caring human being!" Herzog, like most Bellow's heroes, is all that and more. He searches for an answer to the question, "How should a good man live?" yet Herzog is not a "good" man. As Bellow once remarked, "I don't think I've represented any really good men; no one is thoroughly admirable in any of my novels." Decidedly, Herzog, as well as the other heroes of Bellow, is an imperfect individual. He is, in fact, social, psychological, and emotional cripple, who tries, in the course of his life journey, to alleviate his condition. And it is precisely this very condition which makes him (and others) human and joins him with the human struggle for survival and meaningful existence.

Herzog, like other heroes of Bellow, is imbued with the ethical optimism (or monotheism). His heroism, in Bellow's view, lies in his being an intellectual, a sufferer, a struggler, a survivor, a believer. He is a humanist, seriously concerned with the question of human dignity (his own and others), humanity (or the lack of it), and community. Herzog is a true *mensch*. He is compassionate. He is concerned with the dignity of the individual. He has suffered much. But he knows that "the advocacy and praise of suffering takes us in the wrong direction. . . . Suffering breaks people, crushes them, and is simply unilluminating." We remember how in the novel's beginning Herzog describes himself as narcissistic, masochistic, anachronistic, depressive, jealous—all of these are life-negating qualities. However, his self-evaluating journey leads to the realization that life and death have meaning when seen in terms of a contract with God, whereby man is not "the principal but only on loan" to himself, whose task is to "complete his assignment whatever that was." One recalls here Shakespeare's analogy of life to the stage, where each comes to play an assigned role, and quits as the role is completed. Herzog may not have a better understanding of himself, but he has certainly come to acquire a clearer understanding of human existence. *Herzog* can be called Bellow's finest expression of ethical monotheism, of Judaism.

### Herzog as Novel of Character

Bellow strongly reacted against the anti-character view of writers like Alain Robbe-Grillet who insisted that "the novel character belongs entirely to the past, it describes a period: that which marked the apogee of the individual." Bellow's reaction to this pontification was: "there is no reason why a novelist should not drop 'character' if the strategy stimulates him. But it is nonsense to do it on the theoretical ground that the period which marked the apogee of the individual etc., is ended. We must not make bosses of our intellectuals. And we do them no good by letting them run the arts. Should they, when they read novels, find nothing in them but the endorsement of their own opinions? Are we here on earth to play such games?" Despite all the modernist (or post modernist) cant, character has remained central to the novel of, and the novel character has successfully survived all the onslaughts on it. Bellow is one of those novelists who are great champions of the novel of character. What can be called distinctly modern about character is neither its trivialization, conversion into words, death, nor diminishment but the concern for it. In this view, what has actually changed in the novel is that character has become a subject. It has come to be a subject in part, perhaps, because there is no longer any generally accepted synonymity between character and human life itself. One can no longer take, in our time, the existence of character for granted. Whatever be the cause, however, the tendency to make character a subject can already be found to have been extensively developed in Conrad's sustained meditations through his agent, Marlow, on figures like Kurtz and Lord Jim. No less important in the development of the novel in English is Henry James's contribution to the exploration of the human character, making character the subject of his novels. Isabel Archer alone, we can say with emphasis, is the subject of his *The Portrait of a Lady*. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are again the novels of character. We must not forget the fact in this context that Conrad, James, Woolf and Joyce were the pioneers of the modern novel in English. Bellow, for sure, holds as important a place in the history of the novel in English as any of those just mentioned. Rather than feel shy of writing the novels of character, Bellow is proud of his creations in that genre. His *Herzog* can, in fact, be called the novel of character par excellence. Like Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, *Herzog* can be seen as an epic of self, an exploration of character.

*Herzog* has all the appearances of an "ultra-modern" novel in its excessive subjectivity, its rambling, inconclusive internal argument. The novel's action (whatever action there is) takes place very little in the open space, but very much in the closed space of the hero's mind. Herzog's mental correspondence, which consists mainly of fragments of



letters, seems, in its very plenitude, far more hopelessly disjunctive than Joseph's diary (*Dangling Man*). It has led some critics to view *Herzog* as yet another improvisation on the same journal form Bellow began in *Dangling Man*. We must not, however, conclude that the mere fact of a novel's "interiority" is in itself an evidence of the dissolution of character, or of the novel itself. George Lukacs in his *The Theory of the Novel* asks for embedding this interiority in a sequence of events in the external world. *Herzog*, with all its steamy subjectivity, does fulfill Lukacs's demand for its externalization. The novel of Bellow is not without a plot. When we think of Bellow's *Herzog* in terms of plot, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* comes to mind (once again). For we do have in Bellow's novel the plot of the revenge play. The only modification Bellow has made in this classical or generic model is that he has made it comic (or mock-heroic). Also, plot and character in *Herzog* are inextricably interlinked with each other very much in the sense James views the relationship in *The Art of Fiction*. We can see how in *Herzog* the immediate pressure of the hero's emotions. Herzog's trip to Chicago for taking revenge, for example, is directly motivated by the things he sees and hears in the New York City Courthouse. The trial for a brutal child murder augments his fear for his daughter, while a host of grim details arouses his own nihilistic thoughts and suggests that anything (even murder) is permitted.

In Bellow's novel, character is made the subject of the narrative in such a way that it is not just the reader who is to interpret the expressive actions of Herzog, but the hero himself also who is on a quest of his own self. We find that all along the narrative Herzog reflects upon himself as he would upon a fictional character. Thus, even where the novel is confined to the interior of Herzog, the mind we see remains continually engaged in an effort to gain knowledge of itself by examining the acts it has a part in directing. Herzog has to pick up the gun, load it, go to Madeleine's house and sight Gersbach through the window before he knows for certain that he will not shoot him. As is always the case, the act (or non-act) is "in character" fitting, and, as always, it comes as a surprise. As Herzog himself notes, "it was worth the trip." The significant aspect of this scene is the vision of Gersbach that Herzog comes to have and that dissuades him from taking revenge. Herzog is surprised to see just the opposite of what he had imagined of his "enemy". Hamlet, we know, faces a similar situation. He, too, with his sword drawn, goes after Claudius to kill him (to take revenge), but he finds another Claudius – a Claudius praying, not plotting another murder. Hamlet decides against revenge at the moment, or for the time being.

With almost the force of a revelation, Herzog sees Gersbach washing his (Herzog's) child. He seems to see in his rival the same qualities of freedom, inviolability, and enigma that he is continually rediscovering in himself. The man who until now has been in Herzog's mind a caricature of the fixed, Bergsonian type is for a moment converted into the kind of free character we have been discussing in the novel through the various visions and revisions, reflections and refractions of Herzog's mind. Once Herzog has recognized Gersbach as such, he can no more impose his will on him than he can allow his various "reality instructors" to tell him who he is. The physical act, thus, of dominating another by one's will (in the present case, murder) is equated with the mental act of categorizing another according to one's own ideology. As Herzog knows, and we get to know, the latter is forerunner, a necessary preliminary of the former. Conversely, the recognition of inner mystery is a possible stay against the violence of authoritarianism.

Even that Gersbach, call him any name you like, charlatan, psychopath, with his hot phony eyes and his clumsy cheeks, with the folds. He was unknowable. And I myself, the same. But hard ruthless action taken against a man is the assertion by evil doers that he is fully knowable. They put me down, ergo they claimed final knowledge of Herzog. They *knew* me! And I hold with Spinoza (I hope he won't mind) that to demand what is impossible for any human being, to exercise power where it can't be exercised, is tyranny. Excuse me, therefore, sir and madam, but I reject your definition of me.

Thus, we see how character and character alone, with all the action flowing through his mind like a stream, is presented to us in the form of a novel. Bellow, of all the twentieth-century novelists, including Joyce, surpasses in this innovation of making character, the centre, the very form, the circumference of the novel.

The intensity of Bellow's interest in character—which is conceived as a nexus of passion, enigma, freedom, and form—is responsible for several of the flaws so often pointed out in his work. These faults can be listed here as sentimentality, fascination for suffering, sensationalism, repeated intellectual collapse. Generally, the types among his

heroes have been pronounced failures of one kind or another. However, what makes these characters the determinants of the novel's form is their high-voltage intellectualism, which is incessantly engaged in defining, describing, analysing, relating people to various categories and classes, moral, social, psychological, etc. This vast activity of intellectualization of life-experience overwhelms all characters, including the hero's own. The incidents, too, get drowned under the heavy weight placed on them of too much intellection brought to bear upon them. Consequently, there has been, in his novels, a diminishment of context in favour of character as the phenomenon of principal interest. Thus, Bellow, whose temperament and training as a novelist has been fed by a healthy opposition to the narrowness of American fiction, has made his own distinctive contribution to that very narrowness.

Another feature of his fictional contribution is that the intellection of his "intellectual" novels ultimately ends up by performing a negative role. In his *Paris Review* interview, Bellow described Herzog as a man who "comes to realize that what he considered his intellectual privilege has proved to be another form of bondage." No doubt, Herzog is invariably motivated by ideas. But much of his cogitation is a process of dealing "with the ideas in negative fashion. He needs to dismiss a great mass of irrelevancy and nonsense in order to survive." In this description of his work, interestingly (and with a certain ironic relish) Bellow appropriated the term *Bildungsroman*. As Bellow himself explains, "Any *Bildungsroman*—and Herzog is, to use that heavy German term, a *Bildungsroman*—concludes with the first step. The first *real* step. Any man who has rid himself of superfluous ideas in order to take that step has done something significant." This particular form under German name is specially adapted by Bellow to meet the requirements of his own mid-Atlantic variant of the species. It is a form required to meet the needs of an author under siege, who feels rather suffocated in a narrower, more acute way than his European predecessors, a threat to the self. It is a threat which derives from a perverse relationship to ideas.

It is for this very reason that most of the minor figures (all are minor except the protagonist) in *Herzog*, for all their seeming differences, represent the same basic disease. It is the "intellectuals" in the novel who are the worst offenders because they are the most pretentious of all. Epitomized by Herzog's intellectual wife, Madeleine, their activity of intellection is shown to have little to do with thought and much in the manner of religious fanatics. Most people around Herzog—his lawyer, psychiatrist, Ramona, etc.—are possessed by reigning ideas that they impose on reality. All of them stake claims on Herzog, defining him according to these reigning ideas. In such a situation Herzog has no choice but to wage a battle against the tyranny of ideas on two fronts, one within and the other without. Almost like *Huckleberry Finn*, *Herzog* is preeminently a novel of unlearning, a process of directing oneself of ideas in order to reach essential internal knowledge. Twain lays stress on the internal authority of the self, conforming to the Transcendentalist stream of American literature. In Bellow, there is no diminishment of this main stream of American literature. There is simply, an increasing sense of urgency which has actually led Bellow to make character the subject of his novel. Herzog's victory at the end of his journey, however precarious it may seem, lies in his having discovered his way back to his own essential self. In his country cabin, like Thoreau before him, at last he finds his destination in his own Being: "pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, as long as I may remain in occupancy." Thus Bellow's *Herzog* occupies in the postmodernist literature of the postwar period in America a unique position as a descendent of the American romantics, standing against the mad current of contemporary fiction, holding its lovely island against the echoing straits of "cheerful nihilism."

### **Herzog: Form and Technique**

A clear idea about the form of Bellow's *Herzog* can be obtained from a statement that figures in the novel itself. We are told, "Late in the spring Herzog had been overcome by the need to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends." This necessity has arisen because the hero of Bellow's novel, like several others of his type in the American fiction, in his struggle within a "compromised environment," finds that he has arrived at a condition of prone arrest. Of course, all the protagonists in the American novel do not do the same things in that common environment. Different characters take recourse to different things in their state of stillness. Some of them turn out to be surprisingly, and irresistibly, articulate. Herzog, being a unique character in many ways, is perhaps the more amazing than any other of these fellow sufferers. It is no secret to the readers of Bellow that much of Herzog's experience is that of the author himself. The reason for this autobiographical aspect of *Herzog* is that

Bellow is one of those American writers for whom their experience of life in America is so intense and primary that it seems supererogatory (superfluous) to invent new material. So, they prefer to use their craft of fiction for ordering and shaping the overall structure of their recollections. William Carlos Williams, an American poet of the modern period, gave this process the name of "fictionalized recall." *Herzog* is very much a recall ordered and shaped into a novel.

*Herzog* amounts to amazing monologues by its hero who is determined to "have it out" at whatever cost to the conventional novel's plot and pattern. He is determined to give reign to his self-obsession at whatever risk of solipsism. His mind is so scared of memories of speculations based on retrospection that they have slowed down or succumbed to a point of arrest in present time. In fact, Bellow is so given to "monologue" as a narrative device—that he has difficulty in moving beyond the monologue. Herzog's central problem is that he has been subjected to too much control, too much information, too many alien patterning of reality. His main desire remains to gain a measure of freedom from the conditioning forces, and some release (or immunity) from those hebaviourial and intellectual versions of reality, which has helped to bring him to his present state of the mobility. As Bellow said in 1968,

The modern writer specializes in grotesque facts, and he can not compete with the news, with 'life itself.' Perhaps he should begin to think of interesting himself in something other than the grotesque. There is good reason to think that absurdities are traveling in two directions, from art into life and from life into art. We cannot continue to ignore Oscar Wild's law, "Nature imitates art." Roth is right—and only if—fiction cannot leave current events without withering away.

Bellow is doing here what he has been doing all along, criticism of the sort of novel which manufactures monstrosities and conjures up grotesque images of evil and visions of apocalypse and doom. Bellow's disapproval and dislike of a writer like William Burroughs is quite apparent in the above statement. His answer to all writers like Roth is that fiction ought to be able to turn from current events without withering away.

One of the contentions in the critical opinions has been that the sort of "art" novel which turns away from ordinary life is a rather sterile and negative model for fiction which he deliberately abandoned after *The Victim*. Here is a problem created by Bellow for himself: can there be a kind of novel which turns away from "current events" and yet remains in live contact with "ordinary life?" In other words, can there be a fiction which rejects un-wholesome pressures without isolating itself from the ageless and shared truths of human experience? Bellow himself hinted in an earlier article how he wished to steer between two kinds of American novel available to him as models: the novel of information, which focuses on external life; and the novel of sensibility, in which "the intent of the writer is to pull us into an all-sufficient consciousness which he, the writer, governs absolutely." In yet another piece of criticism Bellow defines a problem for the American novelists: "American novelists are not ungenerous, far from it, but as their view of society is fairly shallow, their moral-indignation is nonspecific. What seems to be lacking is a firm sense of a common world, a coherent community, a genuine purpose in life. No one can will these things into being and establish them by fiat." The last observation of Bellow seems significant. The modern American writer is generally product of an anonymous urban environment which has not provided him with a sense of community. In the absence of an available community, the writer may turn back to the self and the experienced authenticity and relevance of its specific responses.

However, here again waits a paradox to be resolved by the writer of Bellow's dispensation: Because of what the environment has done to him, *Herzog* is trying to disburden himself of memories and thought which are "too much" with him; in fact, the weight of these accumulations is too heavy and paralyzing to carry on one's consciousness. But the same memories represent, on the other hand, their contacts with "externals," that experience of ordinary life which, even if did it not enrich community life, is all the reality he knows. Thus, Bellow's *Herzog* has, in its own way, something of this dual aspect of being at once desperate disencumbering and cherished re-evocations. Hence in *Herzog* memory becomes an ambiguous phenomenon, where the novelist seems to get rid of something (memories and thoughts) by getting hold of it.

In *Herzog*, it seems, Bellow is trying to combine what he saw as two separate strands in the American novel, by depicting a sensibility oppressed by too much information. Here, one recalls F.R. Leavis's analysis of the modern man (as he finds depicted in Eliot's "Prufrock") that he "is too much conscious and conscious of too much." In fact, one can find, if the comparison is explored, a good deal in common between *Herzog* and Prufrock. The problem

posed in the novel seems to be: how to triumph, as a single sensibility, over the explosion of information reaching you from all around. This explosion is unprecedented. One is expected to carry in a small wit-box (like the mobile-phone chip) personal problems and international information, environmental data and inventions of science, concerns of culture and patterns of philosophy, then all the past and all the present. Herzog's heroic effort in the novel seems to be to let the flood of information completely drown that past of his sensibility which is, in fact, the innermost core of the self. The instant result is that we find a man breaking down under this huge burden. The very opening line of the novel indicates Herzog's condition: "If I am out of mind, it's all right with me, thought Moses Herzog." Herzog's effort also includes, at the same time, his search to arrive at some form of new integration of a disintegrated self.

Herzog's effort to hold on against the winds of intellectual chaos is heroic, indeed. It is intellectual heroism as against the physical heroism of the classical epic, or the moral heroism of the Christian epic. The hero of Bellow's novel is obsessed by his preoccupation with systems and versions; he is equally aware of general dissolution and disintegration that surrounds him like sea does a fish—it is as much within as it is around him. His foreground speculations and retrospections take place against a background of entropy. As Tony Tanner has observed, "the fact that the book ends with Herzog having arrived at a state of total inertia (a stasis which is temporary in terms of Herzog's putative 'real life,' but terminal in relation to the book) is as equivocal as much else in the novel. It can appear as a capitulation to the entropic forces, or it may be seen as the beginning of a more truly human adjustment to the mysterious processes and rhythms of existence. As in other comedies, the possibilities of dual perspectives are allowed, indeed encouraged, to the end." No doubt, there is some tentativeness about the novel's ending, and Tanner makes a valid point here, but we cannot ignore at the same time the fact that the 'stasis' at the end also indicates an end of Herzog's spiritual journey, which finds its solace and soothing touch in the pastoral lap of the place where his old house is located. One cannot also ignore here the significance of the house, which seems as pertinent a symbol here as it does in the novels of James. However, while in James, house represents civilization; in Herzog, it represents the spiritual home of the Romantic abode. It is the sort of home Wordsworth speaks of in his "Immortality Ode". Viewed from that vantage point, the ending no longer remains that ambiguous, although tentativeness remains, which perhaps, is a part of Bellow's style, his peculiar mannerism. Otherwise, Herzog's return to Ludeyville is meant to be viewed as "return to nature," a familiar romantic plank against the world that is too much with us.

The nature of Herzog's quest and its status at the end can also be looked at from another angle available to us within the parameters of the novel itself. The hero's effort to establish some sort of coherence amidst the randomness and density which surround him and are unavoidable in the world in which he is living is almost the same as was experienced by Matthew Arnold, although in less hysterical stage than Herzog's. Writing to his friend and poet, Arthur Hugh Clug. in 1849, Arnold, criticizing Keats and Browning on the grounds that "they will not be patient neither to understand that they must begin with an Idea of the world in order to be prevailed over by the world's multitudinousness." Arnold's formulation applies very well to Herzog's heroic effort, for he is attempting to impose on the contemporary chaos the order of an Idea (a system). This order is meant to enable him to resist being prevailed over by the surrounding chaos. The only problem (and that is gigantic) that Herzog, however, faces is the availability of too many systems to choose from. It is also possible that the same plurality of systems is the most toxic (poisonous) part of the chaos which vexes Herzog's weary and inflamed consciousness. The problem of Herzog (or of the postmodern man) is: how to gain immunity from the vast world of unusable information which besets him; how to obtain some reprieve from those exhausting bouts of frantic mental gyrations characteristic of the postmodern mind which fails to find its proper employment? At this point, it seems pertinent to note that while Herzog's speculations are abstract which involve him into unending generalities; his memories are concrete which serve to bring his mind back to those specific and personal experiences which are unique to him. Here, once again, we cannot help recalling Wordsworth who, too, recalls his earlier experiences only to recover the lost integration of self. Herzog's recall also serves the same purpose. It helps him, first to find a temporary stay against the surrounding confusion, then to recover his lost composure. Herzog's memory of his own family serves as an antidote to the confusing chaos of systems; it provides the staying ground in the sea of ideas. A further problem that arises for Herzog is that any order or system must necessarily depend on patterns and categories. In other words, he has to rely upon the same very maternal which he has been trying to disburden himself of. He has been a man, he admits, "in pursuit of grand synthesis." However, keeping in mind his own habits of self-isolation and

detached observation, he comes to the ironic conclusion—“*what kind of a synthesis is a Separatist likely to come up with?*” Herzog’s recalled experiences convince him that “human life is far subtler than any of its models.” His insight applies also to his own model, he knows.

Faced with this irresolvable dilemma of ideas Herzog seeks shelter in the world of nature, which represents a stage before the civilization’s race for ideas began. His recall of earlier life has exorcised him of the “modern” disease, as Arnold calls it. Herzog comes to realize, it seems, that life not only confronts us with junk heaps, but also “sudden intrusions of beauty,” and that these too deserve to be heeded as evidence, signs. We know how Herzog likes to linger over trees and flowers, registering them intensely and gratefully. This reminder, (in the romantic vein) that things blossom as well as decay, is a major factor in Herzog’s recovery of calm. It is in this very context that the garden setting for the novel’s conclusion gains significance. His house—“Herzog’s folly”—rises out of a tangle of weeds, flowers, and blossoms. When he returns, he finds it in such a disorder that he decides not to impose any order on it. In saying “let be” to the jumbled profusion of his neglected garden, Herzog, it seems, is beginning to learn a similar lesson for handling the jungle of ideas in his mind. Just as he decides that he will not prune the garden nor attempt to put the house in order, so he will not try to re-establish a neat set of categories to contain the disheveled garden of his mind. In one of his later contemplations, Herzog seems to have got the realization that “*Everywhere on earth the model of natural creation seems to be the ocean.... what keeps these red brick houses from collapse on these billows is their inner staleness.... Otherwise the wrinkling of hills would make them crumble*” It is on the analogy of the natural world that Herzog, in his last note, reaches an acceptance of life as it is. At the end of the novel, we see Herzog picking up some flowers, lie down, and give up his “letters,” embracing silence and stillness. The book significantly ends up with “Not a single word.” One is reminded here of Buddha’s attainment of the highest spiritual position in “stillness,” which T.S.Eliot also embraces in his *Four Quartets*. Herzog (and Bellow) also seems to reach the same conclusion, that pleasure and joy can be achieved only in that position of stillness, of complete detachment, not from anxieties about ideas and affairs of those who are whole engrossed in the sea of material world. Matthew Arnold and T.S.Eliot got the idea from Buddha and *Bhagvad Gita*. Bellow, at least in *Herzog*, seems to accept the same idea as the only way out from the web of mind-based idea churned over the centuries.

Those committed to socialism or neo-realism may see an antisocial or non-social stance in Herzog’s (Bellow’s) resolution of his problem. That sort of criticism is the easiest to make, for every position will not include all the positions, so one can always point out what has not been included. By its very definition, no solution is panoramic, it is a choice of one among the many alternatives possible to respond to a situation. Spiritual and social aspects have always been mutually exclusive. It is not fair to ask for the combination of both.

The novel’s resolution, for some ambivalent or open-ended, for others problematic, is, decidedly, in keeping with the hero’s quest for spiritual solace after the long torment of intellectual combats. Leo Marx’s view that the pastoral cannot be extended into a way of life has been handy for some critics to declare the ending problematic. Marx’s contention is that pastoral can provide spiritual refreshment which may rejuvenate an individual for a fresh facing of the non-pastoral realities of life in the city. Finding Herzog rather unwilling to return to society they call it an escape or surrender and what not. They conveniently forget that one can take to spiritual path and renounce the world. The speaker in Eliot’s *Four Quartets* does it. In Spenser or Bunyan, the central character seeks similar solace in resigning from the material world. Why should it sound a surprise or an enigma in the case of Herzog? Having exhausted all alternatives, and having examined all philosophies, he finds that of “stillness,” or “detachment,” the only viable one. The ending is in keeping with the hero’s quest which looks back to the beginning and links up with the middle. The novel has its own coherence.

Thus, here is a new kind of novel in which character, the hero, provides the form to the novel. In other words, character is the form in *Herzog*. Herzog’s mental journey constitutes the novel’s action. The mental progress has its own beginning, middle and end. The journey, of course, is not straight; it moves through deviations and digressions, diversions and detours, but there is always the central thread never lost in the forest of forages undertaken on the intellectual journey of Herzog. That thread is the quest for the lost moral sense of man, of peace buried under the heap of tormenting tensions and anxieties caused by the mills of science and industry, speculations and surmises. The novel also achieves unity through Herzog’s own personality, making the novel as massive in form as is the vast

activity of his mind. Herzog–Madeleine relationship from premarital attraction to post-marriage pursuit, too, help bind the novel's material into a unified whole. The novel's narrative technique, too, is in keeping with its form. Although told in third person, the story is given to us from the point of view of Herzog. In fact, the narrative gets so interiorized into the thought process of the hero, that the reader gets sucked into the inner world of Herzog. The interiorisation is so powerful that the reader begins to see things from the inside of Herzog's mind. Such a single-minded concentration on the central character had never been achieved before Bellow's *Herzog*. The earlier psychological or stream-of-conscious novels look rather thin compared to the density of detail that flows from the inexhaustible resource of Herzog's mind. One, and perhaps the only, reason for this seems to be the intellectual apparatus of the hero; Herzog is like the British Museum's vast store house of books opening up before us volume by volume, never nearing any end of its large dimensions. Even Joyce's Stephen Dedelus pails before the gigantic learning of Herzog.

### Herzog and The University

No other writer in America has written about the university as much as Bellow has in his novels. Also, no other subject stirs Bellow as much as does the university. What the university does, of course, stir in Bellow is, not so much the pleasure or nostalgia, as rancour and resentment. His unhappiness with the university comes out as much in his novels and essays as in his talks and interviews. Besides, Bellow's almost a tirade against the university began quite early in his career as a writer. He may not have been very consistent, all along his career, in his criticism of the university, but he has been quite clear and categorical about it. He does know, of course, the importance of the university in our time, and he does not undermine that aspect of the institution of higher learning. He also knows that the American academic world is neither confined to the cities of Chicago and New York nor that America's intellectuals are not moulded on Grub Street or in Bohemia. They are, decidedly, moulded in the university, he acknowledges, with Bohemia itself now "relocated . . . near to university campuses." We can find in his attitude to the university familiar paradox. Like many American writers (novelists, dramatists, poets), Bellow remains rooted in academe while making it a frequent target of attack. He does refer to the fact of his being a university "professor" but never fails to make a complaint about there being no "special provision" for faculty. As some one has put it, where faculty privileges are concerned, Bellow shows a sort of cast mindedness, rather petulant, peevish, especially when he is inconvenienced. He expects, like Herzog, that someone should always be handy to assist him. What is serious about Bellow's criticism of the university is his blaming it for much of what is wrong with the culture in America, especially in the literary field. The blame he makes is as much against the university as an institution as against the faculty that dons the dominion.

Bellow's greatest rancor comes out when he reacts against the academic critics, especially those who have not been favourable reviewers of his novels. The nature and extent of this rancor can be gauged from what is now called the *Partisan Review* episode. Richard Poirier's revised review of *Herzog* in 1975 (the original review came out in 1965) stirred in Bellow the old animosities. In the opening paragraph of his review Poirier describes *Herzog* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* as "efforts to test out, to substantiate, to vitalize, and ultimately to propagate a kind of cultural conservatism which [Bellow] ultimately shares with the two aggrieved heroes of those novels, and to imagine that they are victims of the cultural debasements, as Bellow sees it, of the sixties." Bellow has not been one of those writers who would forget and forgive his detractors. He would rather hit back than take it lying down. Soon after Poirier's review of his two "great novels," Bellow used an interview to settle score with the academic critic:

People who stick labels on you are in the gumming business. . . . what good are these categories? They mean very little, especially when the people who apply them haven't had a new thought since they were undergraduates and now preside over a literary establishment that lectures to dentists and accountants who want to be filled in on the thrills. I think these are the reptiles of the literary establishment who are grazing on the last Mesozoic grasses of Romanticism. Americans in this respect are quite old-fashioned: they're quite willing to embrace stale–European ideas—they should be on 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue where the rest of the old importers used to be.

They think they know what writers should be and what writers should write, but who are these representatives who practice what Poirier preaches? They're for the most part spiritless, etiolated, and the liveliest of them are third-rate vaude villains. Is this literary life? I'd rather inspect gas mains in Chicago.

Bellow's tussle and settling of scores with his academic detractors apart, his novels provide a vivid picture of the university life in all its dimensions, more so on the faculty-side than on the student. In our immediate concern,

*Herzog*, Herzog himself is a Professor, who has been a senior faculty at Chicago. He represents a good deal of what it means to be a Professor of the university. Even more than that, we get to know indirectly about the academic life from what Herzog is not. Since he is more of a victim of the university than its representative, what is typical of the institution can be known (or inferred) from what Herzog is not or has failed to be. Here is one such glance in the novel:

His intellect would have been more effective if he had an aggressive paranoid character, eager for power. He was jealous but not exceptionally competitive, not a true paranoic. And what about his bearing? – He was obliged to admit, now, that he was not much of a professor, either. Oh, he was earnest, he had a certain large, immature sincerity, but he might never succeed in becoming systematic. He had made a brilliant start in his Ph. D. Thesis – *The State of Nature in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century English and French Political Philosophy*. He had to his credit also several articles and a book, *Romanticism and Christianity*. But the rest of his ambitious projects had dried up, one after another. On the strength of his early successes he had never had difficulty in finding jobs and obtaining research grants. The Narragansett Corporation had paid him fifteen thousand dollars over a number of years to continue his studies in Romanticism. The results lay in the closet, in an old valise-eight hundred pages of chaotic argument which had never found its focus. It was painful to think of it.

Here, there is a fairly detailed portrait of a professor who is partly representative of the university dons, but also largely a drop out of the system because he does not have these inferior human instincts and drives which alone can make you a success in the academic world. All in all, we get a fairly good idea about the university in America.

Herzog's sexual losses in competition with his friend Valentine Gersbach as well as his academic failures are meant, clearly, to give us an idea about what goes on in the dominion of the dons in America. Herzog in himself embodies the complex picture of the university: He is successful but not as much as many others; he is a failure but not entirely; he has sexual charms as much as intellectual, and yet fails to stand up in competition (which seems fierce in the universities in America) with a more charming colleague. Bellow's account of his life at the university, which keeps coming in the narrative in bits and pieces, is meant to draw a vivid picture of life at the university, its inside story. Here is another glance we are allowed into the life of Professor Herzog:

Herzog did not leave academic life because he was doing badly. On the contrary, his reputation was good. His thesis had been influential and was translated into French and German. His early book, not much noticed when it was published, was now on many reading lists, and the younger generation of historians accepted it as model of the new sort of history, "history that interests us" – personal, *engagee* – and looks at the past with an intense need for contemporary relevance. As long as Moses was married to Daisy, he had led the perfectly ordinary life of an assistant professor, respected and stable. His first work showed by objective research what Christianity was to Romanticism. In the second he was becoming tougher, more assertive, more ambitious. There was a great deal of ruggedness, actually, in his character. He had a strong will and a talent for polemics, a taste for the philosophy of history. In marrying Madeline and resigning from the university (because she thought he should), digging in at Ludeyville, he showed a taste and talent also for danger and extremism, for heterodoxy, for ordeals, a fatal attraction to the "City of Destruction." What he planned was a history which really took into account the revolutions and mass convulsions of the twentieth century, accepting, with de Tocqueville, the universal and durable development of the equality of conditions, the progress of democracy.

Here, as well as in the earlier citation, Bellow ironically mentions the research topics of the university dons, which are generally inconsequential and never without an avant-gardist touch of quaintness, which, in the academic circles, is taken to be a mark of genius. The gimmicks of academic intellectuals in phrasing their topics—history of philosophy or philosophy of history, Christianity of Romanticism or Romanticism of Christianity—are never mentioned by Bellow without the sharp touch of irony. The underpinning of irony is always done to undercut the academic aura which the dons wear, never knowing that none else in the outside world ever cares for their self-styled superiority of a sort-what sort remains among them a matter of controversy. Herzog's being driven out of the university by his second wife, his losing her later to another colleague, his illusory ideas about history and democracy, his talent for polemics, his ruggedness, are all meant to be representative of his brotherhood, and surely come for condemnation (in a subtle way) from the novelist.

Bellow is never tired of writing about the university and its allied activities of writing in journals and newspapers, seldom sparing his opponents in ideology or aesthetics. Here, for instance, is one such piece from *Herzog*, which shows Bellow hitting out at his detractors or ideological opponents as well as the intellectual practices in and outside the university. Writing a long letter to *New York Times*, Herzog continues:

*Ours is a bourgeois civilization. I am not using this term in the Marxian sense. Chicken! In the vocabularies of modern art and religion it is bourgeois to consider that the universe was made for our safe use and to give us comfort, ease, and support.... De Tocqueville considered the will toward well-being as one of the strongest impulses of a democratic society. He can't be blamed for underestimating the destructive powers generated by the same impulse. You must be out of your mind to write to the Times like this! There are millions of bitter Voltairean types whose souls are filled with angry satire and who keep looking for the keenest, most poisonous word. You could send in a poem instead, you nitwit. Why should you be more right out of sheer distraction than they are out of organization? You ride in their trains, don't you? Distraction did not build the railroad. Go on, write a poem, and kill them with bitterness. They print little poems as fillers on the editorial page. But he continued his letter, nevertheless.*

Herzog's keen dwelling on the subject of progressive writers and critics through the excuse provided by the word bourgeois is an obvious reference his detractors like Richard Poirior who continuously criticised his novels in their reviews. Bellow's deep dislike for the likes of Poirior is never concealed; in fact, he always creates an occasion to undermine their position, to ridicule their ideology as well as methodology.

Bellow's descriptions of universities, writings and reviews, are never exhausted, and never without a special flavour his having been a professor himself enables him to induct. Note, for instance, the following:

*Still, Shapiro was in the right this time. Shapiro, I should have written sooner to tell you... to apologize... to make amends... But I have a splendid excuse—trouble, sick-ness, disorder, afflictions. You've written a fine monograph. I hope that I made it clear in my review. My memory abandoned me complete in one place, and I was all wrong about Joachim da Floris. You and Joachim must both forgive me. I was in a terrible state. Having agreed to review Shapiro's study before the trouble broke, Herzog could not get out of it. He dragged the heavy volume with him all over Europe in his valise. It caused much pain in his side; he feared a hernia from it, and also ran up considerable overweight charges. Herzog kept reading away at it for the sake of the discipline, and under a growing burden of guilt. Abid in Belgrade, at the Melropol, with bottles of sherry juice, the trolley cars whizzing past in the frozen night. Finally, in Venice, I sat down and wrote my review.*

My excuse for the botch I made now follows:

*I assume, since he's at Madison, Wisconsin, you've heard that I blew up in Chicago last October. We left the house in Ludeyville some time ago. Madeleine wanted to finish her degree in Slavonic languages. She had about ten courses in linguistics to take, and she got interested also in Sanskrit. Perhaps you can guess how would work at things—her interests, passions. Do you remember that when you came to see us in the country two years ago, we discussed Chicago? Whether it would be safe to live in that slum.*

Here, there are no rancours, no derogations about the university or the faculty dons, or its courses and curricula. On the contrary, we have the sober professor in Herzog who, just for the sake of discipline carrying the heavy load of Shapiro's study with him, paying charges for overweight, risking hernia in the bargain, and finally doing his academic duty in all fairness to the writer under review. Besides, there is an evidence of intellectual integrity in Herzog's apology to the author wherever, he feels, he has not been just to him. Also, Madeleine's example of a serious scholar, doing her courses with passion, pursuing her interests in Slavonic languages, linguistics, and Sanskrit. Her commitment to the cause of learning leads to making sacrifice of all her comforts, including leaving Ludeyville only to resume her studies at Chicago. Ben Siegel does not, therefore, sound fair when he argues that Bellow's picture of the university is that of a "villain". What Siegel cites is, actually, all from outside Bellow's fiction. At least, no such negative attitude to the university can be found in Bellow's *Herzog*. The picture that emerges in the novel is that of a noble place of learning, with, of course, individuals having ambitions for power and privilege, carrying professional jealousies and rancours. All in all, the two sides placed together balance the image into a more realistic and objective one than rather than make an exclusive emphasis on either of the two.



## Herzog and History

In the era of the post-war western civilization there has been an evidence of an acute sense of history pervading all the disciplines of knowledge, including science, philosophy, history, culture, etc. The heroes in modern American novel, too, show a similar sense of history. In the case of an intellectual novelist like Bellow, this consciousness is found to be all the more acute. For some critics, however, this historical sense in Bellow's fiction is taken to mean a sense of transcendental reality. They find in his novels Platonic homeworlds, Steineresque meditations, and intimations of immortality. They see him as a writer more concerned with the spiritual and the universal than with the contingent and the particular. One of the more important opinions about Bellow's sense of history has come from Malcolm Bradbury. In his opinion, Bellow's novels encounter the chaos and contingency of the historical world, remaining all the time within the historical and experiential continuum. In other words, his novels do not express an urge to transcendence. Most other critics, however, hold a view just the opposite of this one. Their considered opinion asserts that Bellow in trying to discover the universal in the particular echoes the transcendental epistemological quest.

Tony Tanner, another important critic of Bellow, credits him with a sense of history, although he (Bellow) assigns it an ancillary position in relation to his fiction. Tanner is, of course, in sharp disagreement with those who insist upon Bellow's transcendentalism. As he puts it, "To be sure, by adroit and legitimate quotation one can find 'transcendental-type' statements in Bellow's work, but then whom has he not read, whom does he not quote?" Confirming his opinion, he says, "it is my own sense that in Bellow's writing the pained, hyperactive, omnivorous, all-remembering habit of perceiving the given world is more powerful and more convincing than the yearning... to assert the existence of some transcendental reality." For Tanner, Bellow's novels fail to incorporate an analytic sense of the dynamics of history. He offers transcendent glimpses as reprieve saving the heroes from trying to comprehend history. Hence, as Tanner sees them, they become either "victims," suffering history passively, or "survivors", evading history. In either case, there is on their part a failure to comprehend history. His conclusion is that even though Bellow shows an awareness of the problems of history, these problems "do not functionally enter his fiction."

As we have seen, from Bradbury to Tanner, in all the various shades of opinion on the subject of Bellow's sense of history, there is a categorical denial of such a sense being functionally present in the novels. All these views seem a little unfair to at least some of the novels of Bellow, certainly a novel like *Herzog*. Given a fair chance, *Herzog* shows that a sense of history does enter the novel functionally, organizing its structure, informing its texture. History in this great work of Bellow does not figure merely in the form of quotations coming from the novel's heroes. It pervades in all parts, giving the novel a unified form. One of the ways of looking at the historical sense in Bellow is to examine the overt tension established in his later novels between the timeless and the time-bound. Moving from the phase of his well made novels (*Dangling Man* and *The Victim*) Bellow comes to adopt the "loose and baggy" from which is in pursuance of the historical process. *Herzog* is, in fact, a scholar of history, who examines his own past and that of Western man. By so doing he tries to relate the personal to the public.

The hero as history professor habitually looks at everything not in the moment, isolating the person and the event from their historical context. On the contrary, his mind automatically travels into past and future relating the present to both. Note, for instance, the following:

*Living amid great ideas and concepts, insufficiently relevant to the present, day-by-day American conditions. You see, Monsignor, if you stand on television in the ancient albs and surplices of the Roman church there are at least enough Irishmen, Poles, Croats watching in saloons to understand you, lifting elegant arms to heaven and glancing your eyes like a silent movie star... But I a learned specialist in intellectual history, handicapped by emotional confusion... Resisting the argument that scientific thought has put into disorder all considerations based on value... Convinced that the extent of universal space does not destroy human value, that the realm of facts and that of values are not eternally separated. And the peculiar idea entered my (Jewish) mind that we'd see about this! My life would prove a different point altogether. Very tired of the modern form of historicism which sees in this civilization the defeat of the best hopes of Western religion and thought, what Heidegger calls the Second Fall of Man into the quotidian or ordinary. No philosopher knows what the ordinary is, has not fallen into it deeply enough. The question of ordinary human experience is the principal question of these modern centuries, as Montague and Pascal, otherwise in disagreement*

*both clearly saw – the strength of man's virtue or spiritual capacity measured by his ordinary life.*

One way or another the no doubt mad idea entered my mind that my own actions had historic importance, and this (fantasy?) made it appear that people who harmed me were interfering with an important experiment.

Well, here is a clear instance of how Herzog's mind works. The professor of intellectual history always thinks in terms of the continuum of history, in which past, present and future are inextricably related. It may be the contemporary society or the individual Herzog, he always views these realities in terms of their relation to past and future times. He takes even his own individual case as an experiment in the larger march of history, in which he hopes to prove by his individual example an important point about man and his civilization. It is important to note here that Herzog (and Bellow) categorically rejects the modern (and post-modern) idea of history as fragmented, not a stream, so does he reject equally forcefully the scientific view of man and human civilization as an expression of disorder and chaos. And since Herzog's mind itself determines the movement of the narrative, the novel is wholly pervaded, from beginning to end, by a keen sense of history, which governs as much the novel's material as it does the mind of Herzog.

We find all along the novel's narrative that Herzog attempts to take on his entire historical situation. His house at Ludeyville, which is (significantly) an inherited house, represents the chaos which is the result of taking on such a massive task. Herzog's nostalgia for his family's (and his race's) past corresponds to a negative Calvinistic view of history—decline from a golden age. As against the Calvinistic view, Herzog's belief in progress, his orientation to the future, clearly corresponds to a positive, Romantic creed. Also, it is not for nothing that the title of Herzog's ongoing research project is *Romanticism and Christianity*. The two creeds are questioned by an accident (of history) which disrupts his historical schemes. They coalesce in his relation to his daughter, June, the future and the month in which the novel ends. Herzog (as well as Bellow) explores different interpretations of history, analyses and examines the validity of each, finds each inadequate when tested against the truth of experience, of life unobstructed by these concepts, making finally an attempt to concretely relating himself to his child, his family, his race, and human civilization. Thus, it is only appropriate to conclude that in Bellow's most representative novel, *Herzog*, a keen concern with history is revealed both in its analytic sense of its dynamics as well as in its functionality controlling the novel's form.

### Books for Further Study

1. R. Alter. *After The Tradition: Essays on Modern Jewish Writing* (1969).
2. Malcolm Bradbury. *The Modern American Novel*. London: Oxford University Press, (1983).
3. J. Bryant. *The Open Decision: The Contemporary American Novel and its Intellectual Background* (1970).
4. D. Galloway. *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction*. Austen, 1970.
5. H.M. Harper. *Desperate Faith: A study of Bellow, Salinger, Mailer, Baldwin, and Updike*. Chapel Hill, 1976.
6. Tony Tanner. *City of Words*. London: Jonathan Cafe, 1970.
7. R. Wisse. *The Schlemiehl as Modern Hero*. Chicago, 1971.
8. T.D. Young (Ed). *Modern American Fiction: From and Function*. Baton Rouge, 1989.

### Question Bank

1. Discuss Saul Bellow as a Romantic Humanist.
2. Examine *Herzog* as a novel of ideas.
3. Is Bellow a "Jewish" writer?
4. Trace intertextual affinities between *Hamlet* and *Herzog*.
5. Discuss Bellow's treatment of women in *Herzog*.
6. Discuss Bellow's critique of the modern age in *Herzog*.
7. Examine the role of "pastoral" in *Herzog*.
8. Discuss Bellow as an "anti-Modernist."
9. Examine Bellow's view of Freud's theory of the human mind as it gets expressed in *Herzog*.

**AMERICAN LITERATURE**

**Paper-VII**

**Section C & D**

**M.A. English (Final)**

**Directorate of Distance Education  
Maharshi Dayanand University  
ROHTAK – 124 001**

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**M.A. English (Final)**  
**AMERICAN LITERATURE**  
**PAPER-VII**  
**Section C & D**

**Max. Marks : 100**  
**Time : 3 Hours**

*Note: Candidates will be required to attempt five questions in all. Questions I will be compulsory. This question shall be framed to test candidates comprehension of the texts prescribed. There will be one question on each of the units in all the four sections (in about 200 words each), one from each section. The other four questions will be based on the prescribed text with internal choice i.e. one question with internal choice on each of the units. The candidates will be required to attempt one question from each of the four sections.*

**SECTION C**  
**DRAMA**

- Unit VII** Eugene O'Neill - The Iceman Cometh  
**Unit VIII** Tennessee Williams: the The Glass Menagerie

**SECTION D**  
**PROSE**

- Unit IX** Emerson: "American Scholar", "Self Reliance"  
**Unit X** Thoreau : Walden ("Economy" and Where I Lived and What I Lived for")

# UNIT-VII Eugene O'Neill - The Iceman Cometh

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## INTRODUCTION

Eugene O'Neill is not only the first great but also perhaps the most prolific American dramatist. In fact, American drama came of age with him. He was hailed as the voice of America. In his thirty years of creative life, he completed drafts of sixty-two plays. Eleven other plays were destroyed. The variety and quality of his extant plays signal a rare creative energy, which lay in his need to find a pattern of explanation by which his life could be understood. This observation by Travis Bogard is not off the mark, because O'Neill's plays are an effort at self-understanding.

Indeed, O'Neill looked within himself and wrote. His was in part, a quest for identity: who am I? He had the habit of continually looking inwardly. He was by nature withdrawn. Lous Sheafter in his biography, *O'Neill, Son and Playwright*, records a conversation between O'Neill and his friend, George Cram Cook, who once remarked on O'Neill's habit of continually looking at himself in mirrors.

"You're the most concerted man I've ever known always looking at yourself."

O'Neill replied, "No, I just want to be sure I'm here."

O'Neill's was evidently an existential quest. More than his own, it was indeed, for the whole mankind. He could not rest without asking questions about human existence. His characters too raise questions concerning human lot in the world, particularly the pursuit of happiness. Questions concerning what happiness is, of course, are not easy to answer. O'Neill's drama, as a whole, problematises human happiness. His characters feel condemned as Larry in *The Iceman Cometh* does, to "see all sides of a question". As a result questions multiply until in the end "it's all questions and no answer." Like Larry and a host of his characters, O'Neill was a relentless sceptic, doubting whatever could be doubted in order to see what residue of certainty remained. What remained indubitable for O'Neill was not his egoistical self, his concerted self, but his essential self, his spiritual self. This spiritual life is not the life of action of dreaming present and future happiness, but a life freed from the pressure of the will to live in a state of will-lessness. Of course, there was no going beyond this horizon of existence. O'Neill could not have reached this bed-rock of truth that there is nothing beyond the horizon with experience from without, certainly not by the process of knowledge. Knowledge deals only with the outer aspects of experience. O'Neill therefore, looked within and found that he is nothing but a dreaming, hoping, expecting subject. We might call this self the will. All through his life, O'Neill was preoccupied with self-examination of this will, call it, as Schopenhaver did, the will-to-live. This explains why O'Neill used the stage as his mirror. The sum of his plays comprises an autobiography. As Bogar has put it: "In many of his plays, with the bold directness of his approach, he drew a figure whose face resembled his own, and whose exterior life barely concealed a passionate, questing inner existence. Around this figure, he grouped other characters who served as thin masks for members of his close family and for his friends and significant acquaintances. On the stage, their grouping forms a structure of relationships, through which O'Neill moved to discover what in his life gave him identity. The quest for identity, for belonging, has been the leit motif of O'Neill's drama. He searched for himself underneath others' skins - masks, asides, soliloquies and long monologues. These devices were evolved from his necessity to make his personal quest a theatrical reality. And he succeeded admirably, because an intensely subjective person alone knows what is it to be personal.

In his life, as in his plays, O'Neill was a lonely figure. But he was not anti-social. On the contrary, he found that it is much easier to love mankind in isolation than in society. The wise man must cultivate solitude in order to be social. He must cherish contemplation above all other things. In this way, he would transcend his own time and his own cultural period. O'Neill was that wise man; he, therefore, opposed all narrow allegiances, even at the cost of being misunderstood. He was self-composed, to the extent that he was self-engrossed. In his portrait of O'Neill, George Jean Nathan said that "in all the many years of our friendship, he betrayed a dislike of meeting people. Even with his few close friends he was generally so taciturn that it was sometimes necessary to go over and provoke him to make certain that he was neither asleep nor dead. He would sit glumly for hours without stir, brooding deeply for hours at a time, over some

concern which, upon ultimate revelation, turned out to be a worried speculation about life and death. He had a silent cast of mind. The way to lose O'Neill's friendship was to ask him for oral expression of opinion on anything, for he expressed himself in his plays alone.

O'Neill had naturally not many friends. His broodings over the sad spectacle of life kept him from out-door life. He went to a theatre every five years and that only in Europe because he had heard that some play of his was being done there in a language he could not understand. Nathan said: "I have known him on only one occasion really to admit that he had been to a theatre. That was when the Russian Taioff did *All God's Chillun* in Paris several years ago. He could understand the play whether done well or ill from its expression, O'Neill's is perhaps the first expressionist drama outside Europe, particularly Germany where the movement originated. He believed that it is by expression that a tragedy is beautiful. O'Neill's drama is both tragic and beautiful or pleasurable in this sense, because tragic events when placed in the context of the theatre, take a positive value and thus move, as it were, to a new plane. The moral, negative in itself, may then take on the character of a first term value and become positive.

In this way, O'Neill's tragic stories turn the evil into a good, we see in the tragic lesson Hickey, for example, not only learns but also propagates in *The Iceman Cometh*. We come to learn that it is always good to express the hidden and the disguised. It is something which makes Hickey and us better, something which points toward a possible and we hope, a realizable perfection. And in the transference of the negative value into something good we prepare the way for the event to be a source of pleasure. That is why in O'Neill the comic prevails in the end. The tragic elements are there but through their expressiveness they have been made into a thing of beauty.

O'Neill believed that all that one has to do was to put one's sincerest efforts in writing a play. Of *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, he said: "Well, I've got it done and I'm immensely pleased with it." Similarly, O'Neill said about *Desire under the Elms*: "It's poetical vision illuminating even the most sordid and mean blind alleys of life - that is my justification as a dramatist!"

### **O'Neill: Life and Works**

The third son of the celebrated actor James O'Neill, Eugene was born on October 16, 1888. James was of Irish lineage. He was an actor of old uninhibited school who played the lead in *The Count of Monte Cristo* some 6000 times. Eugene's childhood was spent in theatre wings. Therefore, theatre was in his blood, though not in narrow-bones. His father wanted Eugene also to become an actor like him, but he was, instead, destined to become a playwright. It was precisely because he was introvert. He did not want to imitate but to express himself through his characters. He was always a thinking sort, always gloomy. As we have noted earlier, he was always a tragedian, always thinking how to express human tragedy and thus turn the negative in life into positive. Even as a boy, he seemed to be looking right through the human heart - his own, as of others. He never said much and then spoke softly when he did speak. He was always reading books wherein, besides life, he searched for meaning of existence. He searched for a philosophy he could believe. He found one in George Santayana — the philosophy of critical realism, that a certain kind of life, the life of reason could be lived between dream and reality, between naturalism and what Santayana called Super-naturalism, between existences and essences. Man, as O'Neill thought, is hung between animal and spirit. While the animal is bound by the compulsions of his nature, human beings seek freedom from their compulsions and we realize our own potentialities.

O'Neill began his life by succumbing to animal compulsions. He started drinking heavily. He flunked all his final examinations at Princeton and was dropped from the class. His family was bitterly disappointed. His drinking deeply grieved both his mother and father. Henceforth, he just drifted. He drifted into marriage in 1909 with Kathleen Jerkins, a young girl he had met in New York, despite objections from both the families. Soon after the marriage, he left for gold-mining expedition for Spanish Honduras. At the end of six months he was 'invalided home,' with tropical malaria. Meanwhile his wife had borne a child. Their marriage was terminated by divorce in 1912.

Some months after his return, O'Neill went on a drinking spree in New York. His father got so frustrated that he charged Eugene with filial ingratitude, and wasting of precious opportunities. The young man left home on a Norwegian freighter to Buenos Aires, did odd jobs in various companies in order to earn his living, as his father had cut him off



from family funds. Eugene's real interest lay, as that of Hickey, in bumming around the water-fronts and drinking with men and women he met there. This kind of life later provided him with the scene and setting, theme and characters of *The Iceman Cometh*.

Eugene was proverbially a prodigal son. His father kept hoping of his return, and indeed, Eugene did return. To begin with, he worked as a reporter and rewrite man. He covered the waterfront, attended meetings, interviewed town leaders. He also wrote verses for *Laconics*, of course, all about dreams. Meanwhile, he also fell in love with Beatrice but she did not class with him. He caught tuberculosis and was admitted to Gaylord Farm Sanatorium. It was in the sanatorium that O'Neill, who liked composing poetry and had considered writing fiction, decided to be a playwright. At the end of May 1913, O'Neill was told that his TB was arrested and he was discharged.

In one of his introspective moments, O'Neill recalled :

I kept writing because I had such a love of it. I was highly introspective, intensely nervous and self-conscious. I was very tense, I drank to overcome my shyness.

He further wrote :

When I was writing I was alive. Writing for O'Neill was an existential question. It was a substitute for fate that he lost at 13 in a non-Catholic school. Thereafter he lived in a God-less world. He was no Nietzsche, nor was he meant to be, but he did suffer from guilt because he had not become a great man his father was, that his father regarded him as a crazy bum.

O'Neill on the other hand, did not see why he should act. He also suffered from the guilt that even when he had started writing plays, his father did not see why his son should write the kind of plays because there was no market for them.

O'Neill did eventually create a market for the kind of plays he wrote. It goes to his credit that he shaped the course of American drama in its most significant developmental period from 1915 to about 1930. His theatrical innovations were admired, but their initial reception proved in time detrimental to his reputation. We have already referred to O'Neill's use of masks. O'Neill used expressionistic technique to project his inside out so deftly that his drama achieved an objective correlative as good as in Eliot, and even better. And yet his plays retained lyricism which no other dramatist, not even excepting Strindberg, could achieve. His lyricism is the cry of the dramatist's heart, wanting to express itself as forcibly as possible. This made his theatre transparent. One could see the back-stage as one did the front-stage with foot-lights on.

These and other effects O'Neill achieved effortlessly as part of his thinking on life and the world. As he began to write, the theatre was in its infancy. It was dominated by superficial realism. It was, to say the least, not artistic i.e. it did not look at reality critically. O'Neill worked alone on the aesthetics of the theatre. He believed that since what is good or beautiful depends upon our desires, nothing in principle can be ruled out as a possible object of beauty. In this regard even tragedy is aesthetically pleasing. O'Neill was in a sense Aristotelian in considering the pleasure of learning as the function of tragedy.

The pleasure of learning in tragedy emerges in an O'Neill's play as, for example, in his first great play *Beyond the Horizon* (1920) from the basic question that O'Neill raised almost in all his plays : What is beyond the horizon? This play is the story of two brothers, a materialist and a dreamer, in love with the same girl. The materialist, who was about to embark on a sea voyage, loses out. The girl falls in love with him, but it is too late. People live, O'Neill concluded, by dreaming something beyond the horizon, something they can never attain. O'Neill's ideal lay between dream and reality, between fiction and fact. O'Neill had full faith in man's reason to help him shed his illusions. O'Neill thus always confirmed his faith in reason, in a rational view of life.

In the winter of 1921-22, O'Neill began rehearsals for *The Hairy Ape*. His third would-be-wife Carlotta Monterey played Mildred Douglas, the girl in white who calls out "oh, the filthy beast" on seeing Yang. *The Hairy Ape* once again raised the question regarding human dream to belong. The dramatist regarded communality a dream because when critically examined our desire to belong, to be communal is inauthentic at base. Authentic communality is better achieved in isolation than in togetherness, O'Neill believed.

By 1923, O'Neill had lost his mother and his brother. From then his plays tended to become more and more bleak and

with death. He looked at death once again, critically, not sentimentally. The theme of *The Great God Brown* is death. Like his plays to come, *The Great God Brown* brings upon the stage the two sides of the human mind — the side we speak out in carefully censored form and the inner truths or inner deceptions we keep to ourselves. Obviously, for what we keep to our self needs expression from behind masks in the form of soloquies, monologues, confessional utterances. Being the dramatist of spoken thought, O'Neill brought to bear on his play criticism of realism. He found no purpose in imitating the surface reality. Realism has never contented him. He knew things about men and women that could come out only haltingly through critical moments, in times of crisis. For his characters, it was never too late to mend. To drag things that lay hidden perhaps too long in the mind and put them freely and clearly on the stage has been, as Kenneth Mac-grown said, the obsessing problem of O'Neill's life as an artist.

O'Neill's next great play *Mourning Becomes Electra* was dedicated to Carlotta Monterey, now his wife after their wedding in 1929. Since his marriage, O'Neill's life had taken on a new pattern. He was kept apart from the world. She had helped provide the seclusion necessary for his creative work. The play was a trilogy. In *Mourning Becomes Electra* along with *Desire Under the Elms* O'Neill made use of Greek myths as a narrative base. Incidentally, he kept these two plays close to his chest. Both had a big subject comparable to the Greek and the Elizabethans. He wanted a dramatic language to express himself, not mere conversation. *Mourning Becomes Electra* is perhaps his first psychological approximation of Greek sense of fate. O'Neill set the Electra story in an American historical setting. The play was a success. Here, love is sinful and guilty — love of daughter for father, son for mother, brother for sister. The characters are contemporary, but the complex they suffer from is psychological. But O'Neill is not Freudian. His concerns were different. What O'Neill meant to say was that the incestuous prohibition must be expressed in order to purge it of its sinful and guilty aspects.

O'Neill talked about the transfiguring nobility of tragedy, in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives. He called himself a mystic, as he always tried to interpret life. He was conscious of the force behind, call it Fate, God, our biological past creating our present. This force must express itself. "And", as he put it, "my profound conviction is that this is the only subject worth writing about." This alone, according to O'Neill transfigure modern values and symbols in the theatre which may to some degree bring home to members of a modern audience their ennobling identity with the tragic figure on the stage. Of course, "this is very much a dream and the Greek dream in tragedy is the noblest ever!"

Clearly then, O'Neill had a purgative i.e. cathartic view of drama, as Aristotle had. That is the reason, his tragic sense is not tragic in the end. It is in this sense that he is Gracian in his dramaturgy.

In the spring of 1932 he wrote *Days Without End*. He was not satisfied with the new play. As a result, during 1932 itself, in September, to be precise, O'Neill wrote *Ah, Wilderness*. It was a tender little comedy of adolescence. It, however, marked the beginning of a new period of his life as a dramatist — the period, as Croswell Bowen said, of full manhood of the soul. This development was partly due to his marriage, for Carlotta Monterey had by now become a mother figure. O'Neill now was 44. *Days Without End* was about adultery. The heroine of the play is a woman married to her second husband to whom fidelity is of the utmost importance. She considers marriage a true sacrament. The hero has been unfaithful to her and the conflict of the play is concerned with the hero's attempt to resolve the problem of telling her and thus perhaps destroying their love. The hero takes this risk, as he finds that lies have become insufferable. He finds the expression or confession of lies peace-giving. It is thus that he finds some kind of spiritual peace. Most critic felt cheated that a votary of naturalism has changed his allegiance.

O'Neill denied the charge, saying that there was nothing anti-naturalist in his recognition of spirit, because spirit is not the life of lying but of willing to own one's lies. The Catholic Church refused to put the play on the White List. The Committee of Churchmen said that they would recognize the play as conforming to Catholic morality if O'Neill would insert a line in the play making it clear that the heroine's husband, whose infidelity had so upset her, was dead. The idea was not to the liking of the dramatist.

Shortly after *Days Without End*, O'Neill started working on his American Life Cycle of nine plays. In between he worked on three other plays, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, *A Touch of the Poet* and *Long Day's Journey into*

*Night*. In 1939, he wrote *The Iceman Cometh* about a waterfront saloon. O'Neill's life was upset by the war which forced him to close his house and move to San Francisco apartment. The invasion of France so distressed him that he stopped writing. So during the war, he accomplished nothing. He had a stroke, from which he recovered except for a palsy. A year before *The Iceman Cometh* opened he moved back to New York city.

### **The Iceman Cometh**

*The Iceman Cometh* is one of O'Neill's great plays, perhaps the greatest of his last phase. Crosswell Bowen recorded an interesting theory about the play advanced by John Mason Brown. Brown said that the play represents O'Neill's subconscious protest against those who have chaperoned and tidied-up their own recent living. - But it is a matter of individual conjecture. The play, of course, reflected O'Neill's own life of boozing about of his younger days. The people in that saloon, O'Neill said, were the best friends he had ever known. Their weakness was not an evil. It is a weakness found in all men. It is necessary perhaps, for without sin, redemption cannot be realized. O'Neill was of the view that vice and virtue cannot live side by side. It is the humiliation of a loving kiss that destroys evil. It is the furie within us that seek to destroy the evil in us.

### **Location of the Play**

*The Iceman Cometh* has its location in the Hell Hole where the Province town players drank. It was officially known as the Golden Swan. It stood at the southeast corner of Fourth Street and Sixth Avenue in Greenwich village, New Park. The Hell Hole was a Raines-Law Hotel. There were furnished rooms upstairs and that it furnished meals to travellers. The hostel stayed open all night. It was one of the principal models that O'Neill copied for Harry Hope's saloon in *The Iceman Cometh*. It was the grubbiest drinking parlour west of Bowery. In the play, it is the last resort of the rejects of society. Like most of his earlier plays, O'Neill wanted *The Iceman Cometh* also to be the end of the journey, whether it is the end of Brutus Jones of *The Emperor Jones* or of yang of *The Hairy Ape*. In all cases, O'Neill took mankind to the edge of confession after which there is nothing left but calm of mind all passions spent, as Milton would have it.

The Hell Hole is inhabited by lost men, men for the most part without women. These men, fourteen in all, with four tarts whom the dramatist regarded as ladies, belong to perhaps the lost generation of Hemingway's denomination. They are all, more or less, dreamers, living on some hope in the future. As O'Neill wrote, however, he came to see the need to dream as a universal one, shared by all men. The American dream is part of this universal greed O'Neill, therefore, did not write about the American dream in particular.

### **Outline of The Iceman Cometh**

#### **Act One :**

Divided in four acts, though, *The Iceman Cometh* remains unchanged as far as its place of action is concerned. It has the unity of place. The place of action is Harry Hope's Raines-Law Hotel. It is now a hotel in name, for those who live in it have not paid their rent for how long, only Harry knows. The First Act opens in the back room and a section of the bar, early morning in summer 1912. The location remains unchanged in the Second Act, except for the time; it is midnight of the same day. The Third Act sees the morning of the following day. The time for Act Four again changes, it is around 1.30 A.M. of the next day.

Harry Hope, as his name symbolizes, is the proprietor of the saloon and room house, serving cheap five-cent whiskey. Both in terms of the place and the whiskey served there, it is the last resort for those who have nowhere to go. The building is a narrow five-story structure of the taxament type. Hope lives on the second floor flat. Because people live in the rooms of this building, the establishment can legally be called a hotel. Hope serves liquour in the back room of the bar after closing hours and on Sundays, provided a meal is served with the liquour, thus making the back room legally a hotel restaurant. However, the food served is only an excuse because it consists of a sandwich of dust-laden bread and mummified ham or cheese which only the drunkard yokol ever taste. The innates of the hotel are no strangers or travellers; they are all friends. They are also O'Neill's friends, the best friends he ever had.

During the rehearsals of the play a puzzled actor asked, "was Hickey, the salesman, a good man?" "Raw emotion," O'Neill replied, "produces best and worst in people." He loved such bums, for they were the people capable of

expressing themselves. O'Neill introduces us to these friends in Act One, except Hickey who appears late in act, but whose arrival is eagerly awaited most ceremoniously. As we have seen, Harry Hope's is a dingy place - a dirty black curtain, for example, separates the backroom from the bar. The backroom is itself, crammed with round tables, and chairs placed so close together that it is a difficult squeeze to pass between them. The room is ill-fitted and ill-lighted. Around the tables sit Harry and Stugo Kalmar. The latter is a small man in his late fifties. He is one-time editor of Anarchist periodical. In fact, many of these personages are former radicals, including Harry. Harry is sixty. He is also one-time Syndicalist-Anarchist. He belonged to the Left Movement, but has for many years become disenchanted with the Movement. Other characters present in the hotel are Ed Mosher, Hope's brother-in-law and one-time circus man, Pat McGloin, one-time Police Lieutenant, Willie Oban, a Harvard Law-School alumnus, Joe Mott, one-time proprietor of Negro gambling house, Piet Wetjoen, one-time leader of a Boer Commando, Cecil Lewis, one-time Captain of British infantry, James Cameron, popularly called Jimmy Tomorrow, one-time Boer war correspondent, besides, Rocky Piozzi, night bartender. Another character, Don Paint, joins them. There are of course, for tarts of no good description. Harry Hope, like most other characters is an old man. He is sixty with white hair so thin that the description "bag of bones" was made for him. He is a little deaf. His sight is failing.

As the curtain rises, Rocky, the night bartender, comes from the bar through the curtain and stands looking over the back room. He finds all personages gone asleep over their tables, including Harry Hope. Larry first rises from his chair to look at Hope and nods to Rocky. Rocky takes the hints and brings a bottle of bar whisky and a glass. The play begins with Rocky asking Larry to gulp it down fast. The whole dialogue in the play is in vernacular. But writing about failed rebels in their lingo does not make O'Neill a rebel. He has no sympathies, whatever, with those who hope that someday the wheel of fortune would turn for the better. His representative character is Harry who mocks the idea of turning over a new leaf. Hope, as his name suggests, lives with tomorrow. He hopes to recover his rent from the roomers who promise to pay him tomorrow. In the process, Hope is being robbed of today. Harry also says that he would be glad to pay up tomorrow, a promise his fellow inmates make. But he knows that living with the hope of better future is like living in a fool's paradise. They like the persona of Philip Larkin's "Next Please" hopes that treasure-ships would anchor on his harbour someday, but the ship of death, instead, comes to his port.

Larry's reply to Rocky on the subject of hope strikes the key-note of the theme of the play. He mockingly comments on human credulity concerning tomorrow. About his friends he says: "It'll be a great day for them, tomorrow — the Feast of All Fools, with brass band playing! Their ships will come in, loaded to the gunwales with cancelled regrets and promises fulfilled and clean slates and new leases!"

Rocky agrees with Larry that tomorrow is an illusion, a pipe dream of a ton of hope. Nevertheless, Larry like O'Neill still feels that though hope is an illusion, it is true that truth has no bearing on anything. The lie of a pipe dream that gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober. And that is enough philosophic wisdom to give you for one drink of rob-gut.

It is not that Larry has not been a man of action. He did live for the Marxist cause, i.e. changing the world for the better. But he has realized the fallacy of such a dream. The dream that led him toward action, out and into open warfare with his world, has now changed, lost its power and became a form of memory as he turned weakly toward past illusion. However, he still finds that hope, though illusive, still sustains life. His now a waking dream. Hickey calls him an old Foolsopher, for whom pipe dreams are dead and buried behind him. What is before him is the comforting fact that "death is a fine long sleep and I'm damned tired, and it can't come too soon for me."

Larry is not for committing suicide to end life. He is for enduring it till death comes in its natural course. Meantime, he wants people to give up greed if they wish to be saved from themselves. But most of them are not prepared to pay that price, i.e. giving up greed. Saying this he shakes Hugo from sleep, who on waking, calls Larry a "capitalist swine! Bourgeois stool pigeon! Hugo too has been through the Movement, but while Larry knows that he has been done with it, Hugo does not know it.

Incidentally, the reference to Hickey comes up, as he is shortly to arrive to participate in the celebration of Hope's birthday. Before his appearance, characters present at Hope's hotel keep referring to Hickey. He generally comes a couple of days before Hope's birthday every year. In fact, all these friends make it a point to assemble on and around

this day. They wait for Hickey's arrival because, while talking he has the habit of springing the joke about the Iceman. Since the life of the inmates is depressing, they wish Hickey to come as early as possible. He is liked by them for another reason; he waves a big bankroll, and buys them drink for two weeks or so.

The only person who challenges Hickey in the whole company is, of course, Larry who knows Hickey too well. He calls Hickey a liar. Larry hates another person Don Parrit, who of late has come to lodge in the hotel. He is the son of a lady whom Larry befriended in the hey-days of the Movement. She is presently facing her trial. Parrit is her only child. Larry does not like Parrit, precisely because he does not wish to go back in memory lanes regarding his association with the Movement. For him, all hopes beguile, including those offered by Marxism and Socialism.

O'Neill called himself a realist, a naturalist and a materialist. He was willing to trust the explanations of science. However, he was also certain that human nature is capable of becoming conscious. O'Neill thus gave naturalistic explanation of the mind. He was also inclined to call expectations, hopes and wants as part of animal faith, as Santayana did. We are susceptible to hopes, but we are also capable of growing conscious of the lies on which our hopes are based. He did not believe in revolutions of whatever kind, Marxist in the main. Change, he felt, will come about gradually and it will be best promoted in an aristocratic system, rather than democratic. Joe, the only Negro character in the play defines an anarchist and a socialist thus : the former drinks but never buys, for he spends on bombs, whereas the latter splits his money with others. Larry praises Joe for having the beauty of human nature and the practical wisdom of the world.

Meanwhile Parrit joins them. He also asks about Hickey, when the latter's reference comes up. Larry tells Parrit that Hickey is a hardware drummer, that he is an old friend of Harry Hope and all the gang and that he is a grand guy. He further informs Parrit that Hickey comes here twice a year regularly on a periodical drunk and blows in all his money. We learn from Larry that Harry Hope's place is the best bet for those who are in some dumps like Parrit. Hope's is the "No chance Saloon", it's Bedrock Bar, The End of the Line Cafe, The Bottom of the Sea Rath-skeller ! These epithets further underline the fact that Harry Hope's place is the last resort for the disillusioned.

Hope's saloon is, therefore, the right place for those who are left with nothing to hope, except a few harmless pipe dreams. Larry is an exception, because he has not left with any dream. He also tells Parrit not to complain about the place, for one cannot find a better place for lying low. For Parrit, the place is right fit on another account; he has been searching for Larry and he found him here. Larry is one person who can understand Parrit, because he is a former friend, and a father-figure to the young man. Parrit has known Larry from his childhood days. Larry was the only friend of Parrit's mother. Parrit recalls how caring Larry was when others, even his mother, neglected him. Moreover Parrit had no father. Parrit even suspects Larry to be his father.

This meeting is part of the theme of the play that we are naturally drawn toward dreams of change in human lot. We believe that changes could be brought through political movements. Larry had been an ardent supporter of the Movement led by the mother of Parrit. But he got disillusioned, as he found that political revolutions too cannot bring happiness. Political power gained through revolutions is another kind of greed. It is what Larry calls "greedy madness". In his discussion with Parrit, Larry discloses that he left the Movement eleven years ago when Parrit was only seven. He had a quarrel with the lady, because he told her that he had "become convinced that the Movement was only a pipe dream".

Larry then gives his reasons for giving up the Movement :

... One was myself, and another was my comrades, and the last was the breed of swine called men in general. For myself, I was forced to admit, at the end of thirty years' devotion to the Cause, that I was never made for it. I was born condemned to be one of those who had to see all sides of a question.

Larry cannot accept for long anything uncritically. Criticism, Santayana, as for O'Neill, is all important. O'Neill subscribed to critical realism or naturalism. He cannot wear blinkers, and see only straight in front of him. When he looked at the Movement critically, he found it was nothing but mob-hysteria. He could not be part of the herd. This explains why he left the Movement. He thought that the material the ideal society is constructed from is men themselves and not material. Marxism is thoroughly materialistic

O'Neill's sympathies are aristocratic, the aristocracy of the spirit. Larry like O'Neill does not believe in the state either. He has refused to become a useful member of its society. He has been a philosophical bum and he is proud of it, for he believes as the German poet Heine did :

Lo, sleep is good; better is death; in south,  
The best of all were never to be born.

Parrit's, as of Larry's case is similar; both had to leave the cause. Hickey's too is not dissimilar, for he too gives up the dream of becoming good, despite the hope of his wife. He had to kill his wife, Evelyn (Evelyn Hope of Matthew Arnold's conception) in order to free himself from the pipe dream of becoming a good and loving husband. Larry and later Parrit dump the lady of the Movement, though Parrit does it for different reasons. He like Hickey has been going around tarts. That made his mother sore. He was interested in outside things and losing interest in the Movement. Like Larry, he could not go on believing for ever that the gang was going to change the world by "shorting off their loud traps on soapboxes and sneaking around blowing up a lousy building or a bridge ! I got wise it was all a crazy pipe dream !" Larry also thought the same.

Parrit asks Larry to further tell him about the other inmates of the Hell Hole. We learn about Captain Lewis and General Toen, both the heroes of the Boar War. Together they recall their days in the war in South Africa when they tried to murder each other. The third, Jimmy, also participated in the Boar War as a correspondent. Jimmy, unlike the two others, lives in the future. Larry calls him the leader of "our Tomorrow Movement." For this reason, he is nick-named Jimmy Tomorrow.

As to the question what do they do for a living, Larry replies : "As little as possible". O'Neill, as we know, pleaded for a life of inaction, of passivity, of inertia. He detested the idols of his contemporary society. He was the most poetic of American dramatist who can be described as a conscientious objector to the 20th century. The question whether he was a pessimist, can be debated. He loved the life of contemplation, rather than of action. The inmates of Harry Hope's saloon, for example, do nothing in particular, for a living. Once a while one of them makes a successful touch somewhere, and some of them get a few dollars a month from connections at home who pay it on condition that they would not come back. For the rest, they live on free lunch of their old friend, Harry Hope who does not give a damn what anyone does or does not do, as long he likes them. Parrit finds this to be a tough life, not Larry. He asks Parrit not to waste his pity, because they would not thank him for it. These inmates manage to get drunk by hook or crook, as the phrase goes, and keep their pipe dreams alive and that is all they ask of life. Larry for one, has never known more contented men : "It is n't often that men attain the true goal of their heart's desire. The same applies to Harry himself and two of his cronies his brother-in-law Ed Mosber who once worked for a circus and Pat McGloin, who was one-time lieutenant back in the flush time of corruption. But he got too greedy and was caught red-handed. Another inmate, Joe ran a coloured gambling house. That is the whole family circle of inmates, except the two barkeeps and their girls. Most of these people are betrayed by their respective ambitions, by their hope of tomorrow. The roomers promise to pay Harry tomorrow. Larry calls the Tomorrow Movement "a sad and beautiful thing".

Harry Hope, however, has no hope of recovering his money. In fact, he has lost his ambition after the death of his wife Bessie. Without her nothing seemed worth the trouble. He has allowed some of the inmates to occupy his bedroom upstairs. Since her death, he has not taken a walk around the saloon. It is twenty years now, and he has not set foot out of his house. And yet, like others, he has a lingering hope that he would turn over a new leaf of his life. He is sixty. Tomorrow is his birthday. He hopes that that would be the right time to turn over a new leaf. And he feels that that is not too old. Others sustain his hope. McGloin, for example, flatters him, saying, "It's the prime of life." Mosber joins to say, "Wonderful thing about you, Harry, you keep young as you ever was." The talk of hope infects Jimmy, nick-named Jimmy Tomorrow the most. He decides to get his things from laundry, make a good appearance and go to his former employer and even strike a bigger deal tomorrow.

But Hope knows that hope belies. With a condescending affectionate pity, he says : "Poor Jimmy's off on the pipe dream again. Bejees, he takes the cake. " But no one notices Hope's sardonic laugh, because every one excepting Larry is dreaming of better days. This company of dreams include Lewis, Wetjoen and Joe. All of them talk of better tomorrow dreamily, as they hope to stake their career. Hope blames it on Jimmy for starting the rest off smoking the same hope. But these — Lewis, Wetjoen and Joe, are finished; they close their eyes again in sleep or a drowse.

Larry is fed up with eruptions of hope in human heart. This big house, he says, will drive him mad. Harry Hope does not like Larry's philosophical outburst against people nursing hope and therefore asks Larry to pay his dues by tomorrow. It does not, however, mean anything. Hope is equally critical of Mosher and McGloin for being no better than Larry. Even his wife did not like them. However, both of them decide to re-establish themselves in their career. Mosher would go back to circus and McGloin to Police. But theirs are again pipe dreams and Harry Hope knows it. He hopes Hickey to turn up and relieve him of his gloom by telling funny stories. He would like to have a good laugh with old Hickey, particularly the gag the latter always pulls about his wife and the Iceman. He (Hickey) would make a cat laugh, says Harry Hope.

Meanwhile, Hickey's arrival is announced. He comes beaming; he is social and affectionate. He is fifty, a little under medium height, with a stout, roly-poly figure. His expression is fixed in a salesman's winning smile of self-confidence. He bears a hearty good fellowship for the gang. His eyes have the twinkle of a humour which delights in kidding others but can also enjoy equally a joke on himself. He exudes a friendly, generous personality that makes everyone like him on sight. O'Neill portrays Hickey as a different kind of salesman, one who sells peace. He shakes hands first with Hope and then with others or waves to them addressing each by name with an affectionate heartiness. His arrival obviously infuses new life in the company. He asks everyone to drink but he himself drinks water. This is the first noticeable change in Hickey. Then he wishes to grab a snooze, which he earlier never did. Hope is surprised over Hickey's change of attitude. He tells Hope that the change in him regarding drinking is not forced. He still feels that if one feels at peace by getting drunk, one should drink. But he now feels that one should face oneself and throw overboard the damned lying pipe dream. He has done it in his own case :

Well, I finally had the guts to face myself and throw overboard the damned lying pipe dream that'd been making him miserable, and do what I had to do for the happiness of all concerned — and then all at once I found I was at peace with myself and I didn't need booze any more. That's all there was to it.

Nevertheless, he assures Hope that he has not come to spoil their happiness. After all, he has come to help celebrate Hope's birthday that night. If at all he wishes to save them, it is not from booze, but from pipe dreams, because it is these dreams that trouble us — “they've the things that really poison and ruin a guy's life and keep him from finding any peace.” He further tells : “If you knew how free and contented I feel now. I'm like a new man. And the cure for them is so damned simple, once you have the nerve : Just the old dope of honesty is the best policy — honesty with yourself, I mean. Just stop lying about yourself and kidding yourself about tomorrow.”

Hickey was not merely sermonizing; he exemplified when he said. He asks Harry Hope not to live in the dream of talking a walk around the hotel tomorrow and the day after, but should face the eventuality without fear. There is, in fact, nothing to be scared about it. Saying this, Hickey winks at others. Similarly, he urges upon Jimmy Tomorrow “to try and get the old job back. And no tomorrow about it.”

His message is simply proverbial : Do not put it till tomorrow what you can do today. Larry appreciates Hickey's attempt to hit the nail on the head. It is by putting things off till tomorrow that our life becomes an endless pipe dream. It needs courage to seize the day or else we lie to ourselves and thus live in bad faith. Hickey appreciates Larry's gesture, but rebukes him for regarding life as a meaningless affair. He tells Larry that the latter is returned from circus and is waiting impatiently for the end — the good old long sleep. Hickey looks at life slightly differently, and that makes all the difference. What Larry calls “pipe dreams” are for Hickey “lying pipe dreams”. Dreams for Hickey are lies. Hickey has experienced relief and contentment after ridding himself off from one of such lying dreams. Therefore, he can safely tell those who are still labouring under such dreams how to get rid of them and find relief. His own experience speaks for what peace he has found. He feels sleepy now. He also does not feel the need for getting drunk. Sleeplessness and drunkenness are the two symptoms of a restless and discontented mind. He has been sick all these years since the death of his wife. He had murdered her. But he has been lying to the people and the police. This made his life hellish. He thought of telling the truth, but could not. He lacked courage to say that he had murdered his wife. And now that he has picked up courage to say, he feels a real peace. It is a grand feeling, he says, like “when you've sick and suffering like hell and the Doc gives you a shot in the arm, and the pain goes, and you drift off.” Then one rests in peace. “Not a single damned hope or dream”, that you would do it tomorrow or some other day” nags you”, says Hickey.

Harry Hope, as Jimmy and Larry, thinks that it must be one of Hickey's jokes, but still, as Jimmy feels, there is some sense in his nonsense. Jimmy takes courage to say: "It is time I got my job back..." Harry follows suit, "yes and I ought to take a walk around the ward." Both say that they do not need Hickey or anyone else to remind them. Larry is still cynical about their resolution, and even Harry feels that Hickey by his teetotalism will spoil the fun of his birthday party. So he asks all to drown themselves in booze and get drunk.

### Act Two :

Act one ends on the note that waking up from lies is difficult, if not impossible to achieve. However, the impact of what Hickey has said is not washed off altogether. In order to effect the cure more deeply, Hickey has elected himself to be boss of the birthday ceremony. He arranges sixty candles for the purpose. But others are still apprehensive of Hickey's remedy. Larry, of all the inmates, is dead set against Hickey, because he stands at the other pole, as far as the meaning of life is concerned. Larry, as we have known does not see any purpose in living, Hickey does, provided we give up lying to ourselves. Larry's defence on this account is that Hickey has so far kept the secret to himself. May be he reveals it at Harry's party. Still he has nothing to do with Hickey's revelation. Larry thinks that Hickey is dying tell the secret of his heart, but is afraid and if he is afraid, it explains why he is off booze.

Hickey tells Larry that the latter has got him all wrong. He is not afraid of anything particularly when he has decided not to live with the big lie he has ever lived with since the death of his wife. He further tells Larry that everyone has to find his own peace. All that he can do is to help Larry and the rest of the gang, by showing the way to find it. He makes his friend understand that it is no good pitying pipe dreamers. Larry is fond of pitying pipe dreamers. Hickey feels that Larry's attitude encourages some poor guy to go on kidding himself with a lie - "the kind that leaves the poor slot worse off because it makes him feel guiltier than ever — the kind makes his lying hopes nag at him and reproach him until he is a rotten slunk in his own eyes."

Pity and remorse are passive emotions; they weaken the moral fibre. It is not that Hickey has no pity for the miserable dreamers, but his sympathy does encourage the poor guy battle with himself, and find peace for the rest of his life. It is like a bitter medicine that cures. Hickey's persuasiveness is that of salesman but in effect he is a physician. Unlike Larry he enables the patient to face himself in the mirror with the old false whiskers off. Then he will not be scared of either life or death any more. But Larry still calls Hickey a liar. Hickey feels dismayed but not discouraged. He asks Larry to suspend judgement and give his view a chance, i.e. give those suffering from lying pipe dream the right kind of pity. Parrit, for example, needs this cure. The old cause may be nothing to Larry any more, but Parrit still believes in the Movement, though he lies that he has given it up. After all, he is the son of a mother who is facing the trial for anti-American activities. Hickey believes that even Larry lies as far as the cause is concerned, though he is the toughest to convince of all the gang. Therefore, Hickey would like to cure at least three people — Parrit, Larry and Jimmy Tomorrow, to begin with.

Hickey knows that both Larry and Parrit lie that they have given up the Movement because they did not believe in it any longer. In fact, they are driven away from it because of personal reasons. Both of them found the woman a whore rather than a mother or a wife. Even Parrit goads Larry to confess this. But, as we know, Larry is a hard nut to crack. He has given his personal failure a philosophical touch, as if it were an existential problem — sickness unto death. Hickey also knows that trouble with Jimmy was that he is sick of his wife because she hated him for getting drunk and he was damned relieved when she gave him such a good excuse. It was the same with Hickey himself.

Hickey celebrates Harry's birthday for two reasons — one for wishing Harry well, and secondly, for marking the beginning of a new life of peace and contentment where no pipe dreams can ever nag all of them again, including himself. Larry also hits at Hickey's trouble, that the latter learnt the great revelation of the evil habit of dreaming about tomorrow after he found his wife was sick of him. So far as the joke about the Iceman has been that Hickey's wife, Evelyn, fell for an iceman. Hickey now reveals that she is dead. He feels glad, for her sake, because she is at peace. He further discloses that that he was not a good husband. And yet she wanted to make him happy.

### Act Three :

Act Three furthers the revelation. Hickey's story affects them all. Parrit gets scared of Hickey, especially since he told them about the death of his wife. He had a queer feeling about his mother — as if she too were dead. He also



suspects Larry to be his father. He feels guilty that he left his mother for a whore. The two -- Parrit and Larry wonder whether former's mother would commit suicide, as they suspect Evelyn to have committed suicide. Parrit thinks that his mother, like Larry, would rather hang on to life. Larry, he thinks, is still in love with the Movement though he pretends he is not.

Hickey's presence makes all of them to face the truth of their lives, though each one of them resents it. Harry Hope has been pretending that he has never gone around the ward because of the grief over his wife's death. The last time he went out was to Bessie's funeral. Even now he does not feel like going out. It is as if he were doing wrong to her memory. Hickey forces Hope to face the fact, and not lie about it. He asks Larry also to spare his kind of pity for Hope, for it does more harm than good. As Hope and later Hugo go through the process of recovering themselves from their respective lies, they, despite booze do not feel drunk. Both go through a shock of their life.

Hickey has his own experience at his back to guide others through the process of meditation. This process involves the distinction between fact and fancy. Truth is sought just for the pleasure of knowing it. The pursuit of it is, as Arnold would say, a disinterested activity exercised for its own sake. One begins to feel free from the guilt as Harry Hope does -- free from, as Hickey says, lying hopes and be at peace with oneself.

At the end of Act Three, Hickey finds Harry Hope at the edge of facing the truth, but something is still holding up somewhere, he does not know why.

#### **Act Four :**

Chuck, a tart responds to Hickey's process of facing the truth first of all. Rocky comes next. He cannot get drunk. Larry, of all, cannot get away with his lies. Parrit knows that Larry still loves his (Parrit's) mother. Hickey has got aballed up. Parrit gives Larry a piece of his mind, telling that the latter is "a loud-mouthed faker", for he still believes in the Movement and Hickey is right. He has never sold anything unless it is wanted. Larry needs Hickey's medicine, as others do. But before making others finally face the truth of their lives, Hickey comes out with his truth, that he killed his wife : "She'd have died of grief and humiliation if I'd done that to her."

He further says :

You see, Evelyn loved me. And I loved her. That was the trouble. It would have been easy to find a way out if she hadn't loved me so much. Or if I hadn't loved her. But as it was, there was only one possible way. I had to kill her.

In this regard, there is, Hickey says, something common between Harry and him. Larry loved Parrit's mother and she loved him. It is now Jimmy's turn to face the truth :

It was all a stupid lie my nonsense about tomorrow. Naturally, they would never give me my position back. I would never dream of asking them. It would be hopeless. I didn't resign. I was fired for drunkenness. and it was absurd of me to excuse my drunkenness by pretending it was my wife's adultery that ruined my life. As Hickey guessed, I was a drunkard before that.

Jimmy comes out with the truth that he took to drinking, because living frightened him when he was sober. Marriage did not mean anything. He preferred drinking to being in bed with Marjorie. So, naturally, she was unfaithful. He was glad to be free -- even grateful to her, for giving him such a tragic excuse to drink as much as he damned well pleased. Hickey has already phoned the police. He tells the officer, Moran, who comes searching for him, that he was the son of a priest, but home was a jail, and so was school. The only place he liked was the pool rooms, where he could smoke and mop up a couple of bears. He hated everyone, but loved Evelyn, as she loved him even as a kid. This makes Parrit tell Larry that he also loved his mother and he still does. Continuing his story, Hickey tells that Evelyn would not believe the gossip that he was no good a person. She was stubborn. Even when he would confess things and ask her for forgiveness, she would make excuses for him and defend him against himself. She would kiss him and say that she knew he did not mean it and that he would not do it again. She was, indeed, "a sucker for a pipe dream."

He was, incorrigible. But he told her so. He told her to forget him because he was no good and shall never be. He still expressed his love for her and she said : "Then nothing else matters, Teddy, because nothing but death could stop my loving you. So I'll wait, and when you're ready you send for me and we'll be married..."

Harry Hope still thinks that Hickey married Evelyn, caught her cheating with the iceman, and then murdered her. But Hickey's confession reveals a different story. He had the knack of spotting others' pet pipe dreams. People started liking him, even trusting him. They liked to buy something to show their gratitude. Thus he earned enough to marry Evelyn. He sent for her and they got married. He wanted to reform and she believed he would. But he could not, he felt "a rotten stunk" — her always forgiving him, even his playing about with women, for instance. As a travelling salesman Arthur Miller's Willy Loman was, he could not help living lonely in hotel rooms, drinking and mixing with tarts. Evelyn knew all about his rotten life, but pretended not to know, telling herself that he could not help it, and they tempted him and so on. Still he lied and still she excused him, as if nothing had happened. He could not shake her faith in tomorrow. This made him feel all the more guilty. He hated himself. He felt such pity for her that it drove him crazy. He loved her, but hated her pipe dream about his reformation someday. Then there was a limit. He killed her for her sake, thinking she would never feel any pain, never wake up from her dream.

On hearing Hickey's confession, Parrit feels like confessing. He finds that it was no use lying any more. Addressing Larry, he says: you know, anyway. I didn't give a damn about the money. It was because I hated her." Hickey finds Parrit's confession as an obvious way of finding one's peace. Parrit agrees with Hickey that like Evelyn, his mother also suffered from the damned Old Movement pipe dream. The difference between the two cases is that Hickey loved Evelyn, whereas Parrit did not.

Hickey is taken away by the police, but since he talked about his crazy behaviour, the police officer suspected that the culprit could plead that he was insane when he committed the murder. His friends, Harry Hope and others, except Larry, vow to defend Hickey on the plea that he has always been mad. After Hickey's exit, Parrit feels that Hickey is not the only one who needs peace. He cannot feel sorry for Hickey. Hickey, indeed, is lucky, as he is through. It is all decided for Hickey. Parrit wishes the same to happen to him. He even wishes to be taken by the police. But that is not possible because she is still alive. But he feels as guilty as Hickey did, even guiltier. He confesses that he did a much worse murder. She is dead and yet she has to live. But she cannot live long in jail. She loves freedom too much and cannot kid herself like Hickey that his mother is at peace. As long as she lives, she will never be able to forget what he has done in her sleep. Parrit deserted her, as did Larry. Larry too is touched deeply by Hickey's courage. While Harry Hope and his companions drink and celebrate, a long-forgotten faith returns to Larry. For the first time in the play, he prays for the peace of Hickey's soul. He admits that his pity for those who still kept hoping was of the wrong kind, as Hickey said. There is, in fact, no hope, because hope is an illusion.

### Critical Commentary

O'Neill wrote the first draft of *The Iceman Cometh* between June 8 and November 26, 1939. In the year, France declared war on Germany. Throughout the end of the depression, O'Neill had worked on the cycle finishing drafts of *And Give Me Death*, *The Greed of the Meek* and *More Stately Mansions*. O'Neill's reaction to the war was predictable. At Tao House, he retreated further into himself, than he had ever gone before, as if the only understanding that could come in a world gone mad was the understanding of one's self. O'Neill wrote about *The Iceman Cometh* in a letter to Lawrence Langner on August 11, 1940:

There are moments in it that suddenly strip the secret soul of man stark naked, not in cruelty or moral superiority, but with an understanding compassion which sees him as a victim of the worries of life and of himself. Those moments are for me the depth of tragedy, with nothing more that can possibly be said.

### O'Neill's Tragic View of Life

*The Iceman Cometh* is a product not of the tragic times of World War II and the Great Depression, but of a tragic heart that found peace in resigning the will-to-hope or will-to-dream. O'Neill, like Santayana believed that man's spiritual life consists in escaping from sorrow and discouragement. We find this ideal of freedom and peace by resigning so far as possible the unique prerogatives which the will claims. This is achieved by conversion, i.e. a total change of attitude through the new frame of mind, O'Neill called stark nakedness. Nothing more can possibly be said about this nakedness. It, indeed, beggars description. The action of each of his last plays rests in a tale to be told, a tale that is essentially a confession made in the hope of absolution. O'Neill would call his last plays expressionist, because

*The Iceman Cometh* is largely plotless, nothing more than a cry of the heart, it is the way of reaching out in the dark, of finding pity long denied to old sorrow.

O'Neill has been accused of unmitigated gloom. Was he a pessimist? This question has often been raised. He never thought that he was a pessimist. He was rather tragic, but his conception of tragedy was not negative. He wrote : "To me, the tragic alone has the significant beauty which is truth. It is the meaning of life and the hope. The noblest is eternally the most tragic." The people", he said, "who succeed and do not push on to a greater failure are the spiritual middle classers. Their stopping at success is a proof of their compromising insignificance."

O'Neill's tragic vision is attainable through failures. He distinguished between two kinds of optimism — skin deep and higher optimism, not skin deep which is confused with pessimism. People with skin deep optimism continue to have their pretty dreams. For example, Harry Hope and some of the boozers will never wake from their lying pipe dreams. But howsoever pretty their dreams must have been, the man who pursues, said O'Neill, the mere attainable should be sentenced to get it — and keep it :

Let him rest on his laurels and enthrone him in a Morris chair, in which laurels and hero may wither away together. Only through the unattainable does man achieve a hope worth living and dying for — and so attain himself.

### **The Theme of Betrayal**

Such a man, as Hickey, for example, is nearest to O'Neill's ideal of the tragic hero. He is not tragic, not sad in the end. He was sad when he told lies, especially the lie about his wife falling for an iceman. It was a fiction he invented to keep the lid of lies on truth.

O'Neill's theatre is the theatre of voices, as is Anita Desai's novel. *The Iceman Cometh* is about voices that become action. There are not many moments in theatre comparable to the weaving of the narrative of betrayal, of Hickey's and Parrit's, toward the end of the play. Hickey's long monologue is interspersed with short echoing comments from Parrit telling Larry Slade of his own act of betrayal. Parrit and Hickey do not, really listen to the words that are said. that is to say, they do not understand one another. Rather, they move toward the same end. Every one is searching his soul without conscience inner-awareness, impelled by purely verbal concatenations, each developing the theme of betrayal as a sound in the air.

O'Neill in *The Iceman Cometh* explored the fatal effects of the "life-lie". The occasion for confessing or expressing this lie bears a strong resemblance to the Christian image of "The Last Supper". Such a parallel may be incidental, but it serves to give the play what the dramatist used to say that he was not concerned with the relation of between man and man, but between man and God. It is, thus, O'Neill felt that the playwright must dig at the roots of the sickness. the death of old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive instinct to find a meaning of life in, and to comfort its fears of death with. It seemed to him that anyone trying to do the big work now-a-days must have a big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays or novels, or he is merely scribbling around the surface of things and has no more real status than a parlour entertainer.

All great plays by O'Neill have a big subject — a sub-text at the back of what otherwise looks trivial. For this purpose, he used mythic structure, sometimes too explicitly, but often implicitly. The myth of betrayal of Christ betrayed by Judas is at the back of *The Iceman Cometh*. The main characters who gather at Harry Hope's place are twelve, including the host. Hickey, who resembles Christ is the thirteenth. All of them gather together on the occasion of the birthday of Harry Hope, i.e. it is a feast time. They have been except Parrit, meeting every year around Harry's birthday.

Such parallels are just and important and in part serve to explain why *The Iceman Cometh* now ranks among the most ambitious of O'Neill's plays and has received the most critical attention, argues Bogard. In its original production which marked the end of O'Neill's absence from the theatre, and in its 1956 revival in New York, a production that began the resurgence of interest in O'Neill's dramas, it held a special position in the canon. Cyrus Day's. "The Iceman and the Bridegroom", in *Modern Drama*, I, 1 May, 1958, pp.3-9, lists a number of parallels between Hope's party and The Last Supper, including the twelve disciples, waiting for Hickey, the Christ-figure. Not coincidental, it is time for drinking. It is also mid-night. These resemblences are also perhaps unimportant. What is of the central importance is the theme of self-betrayal. Hickey is not betrayed by Larry or Parrit, or any of the other character, but

by himself. He comes not as a reveler but as a savior. He is no stranger to the gang. He himself lived a deceitful life. He killed his wife and lied that she eloped with the iceman.

O'Neill was no devout Catholic. He had been born Catholic but he was not a religious man in the strict sense of the word. He, till the end, never thought of returning to religion. He wished no religious representation to be at his funeral. Still, the mythic part of Christianity reflected itself in his play, as did the Greek. He used Christ's Last Supper as an archetype for *The Iceman Cometh* and thus made the biblical theme of betrayal contemporaneous with the new age. So, the old myth of Christ's betrayal by Judas is dressed anew.

Hickey is the son of a priest, but hates the clergy. For one, he appears more like a salesman-cum-saviour. The commodity he sells is his new-found peace to those who have no need for it. He is conscious of the fact that his posture at the party is not right fit for the occasion. "Would that Hickey or death would come?" asks Willie Oban. He appears as a messiah of death, but his message, judged by its effects on the hearers, is closely parallel to O'Neill's other messiah, Lazarus of Bethany. In *Lazarus Laughed* as in *The Iceman Cometh*, a messianic figure appears preaching salvation to the world. In each play, the recipient of the message pose resistant to it, and when it is forced upon them, prove incapable of acting in accord with it. For example, the Harry Hope gang wish to save Hickey on the plea that he has ever been insane. Larry, all through the play, resists Hickey tooth and nail. Christ too was misunderstood, was hanged in his attempt to save others. Hickey, like Christ dies into, life, echoing St. Mathew, 10,39: "He who loses his life for my sake will find it."

Hickey's remedy for the ills of the world is equally cold. He refutes Larry's kind of remedy of pitying life's lie. It is more like the surgeon's scalpel that cuts in order to cure. Hickey offers this radical remedy after having tested it on himself. He comes to Harry Hope's haunt for the last time to drink with his erstwhile comrades of the booze. Like Christ's, his task is not easy. As Lazarus exhorts, so Hickey, by means of a series of long, brutal individual encounters in the rooms above the bar, forces the dreamers to give over their illusions, their hopes, which of course, sustain their life, though a life of lies — the sustaining pipe dreams of their worth as human beings. Their dreams hold at least an illusion of life's essence, but Hickey has come to tell them to deny them, for they are death dressed as life.

The world which the dreamers inhabit, as Bogard says, inhabit a fragile ecology of a tide pool; it is at the end of the world: The Bottom of the Sea Rathsskellar. The Imagery of drifting tidal life is pervasive. The Harry Hope gang enacts death in life and life in death. they live in a place where no one, not even police bother them. Existence at Harry Hope's is reduced to its lowest denominator, a hibernation of animals huddled together in dread of waking.

This state is symptomatic of the lowest ebb, requiring the second coming of Christ to save mankind. The dreamers, nay, liars, have come to Hope's because, ostensibly, they are failures in the outside world. Most of them are failed anarchists, who sought to change the world, but felt frustrated, as they saw no change forthcoming. In fact, their failure is more on account of personal rather than on account of social relationship.

Hickey's problem becomes manifold, as he has to save individuals, not a community. He believed that man is social in his solitude. One cannot belong by going back to the tribal. It was anthropomorphic for O'Neill. Yang in *The Hairy Ape* cannot go forward, and so, he goes backward. This is what his shaking hands with the gorilla meant. But said O'Neill, he cannot go back to "belonging" either. The gorilla kills him. The subject in *The Iceman Cometh* is the same ancient one that always was and always will be and that is man and his struggle with his own fate. This struggle used to be with gods, but is now with himself, his own past, his attempt to belong.

### **The Sense of Belonging**

The quest for belonging is an essential feature of O'Neill's drama. In the context of *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill suggested that to 'belong' himself, to his past is man's greatest need in the present times, as it used to be with gods in the past. In the absence of gods today, man has to wage a struggle against himself, i.e. his past, in order to free himself from his illusions. Harry Hope's world is godless Hell Hole. It is deprived of all that could have given some metaphysical support. The only support that the gang of twelve people needs is either Hickey or death. They wait for Hickey to come and crack his pet joke about the elopement of his wife with the Iceman. They have heard this joke many a time earlier also, but find it funny every time because they have for one reason or another betrayed the woman they

belonged. Hickey has murdered Evelyn, because her love was beyond betrayal. She loved Hickey so much that she was not prepared to believe that he was a lost case. She could not see what was behind Hickey's face, even when he forces her brutally to look upon it. He was an incorrigible drunkard and a debauch. And he told her in so many words and deeds that he was beyond redemption :

But there was no shaking Evelyn's belief in me, or her dreams about the future. After each letter of her's I'd be full of faith as she was.

However, Hickey would not give up his game, his playing around with women, for instance. It was a harmless good time to him. It did not mean anything. But he would not know what it meant to Evelyn. She would always try not to know. He had to do a lot of lying when he got home. She would do her best to make him believe that she fell for his lie how travelling men get things from drinking cups on trains.

In short, Evelyn's faith in Hickey was unshaken despite repeated rebuffs. He wished that she only had not been so damned good. He wished her betray him. Her counter-betrayal would have served him right. He would not mind. He would joke about her about her being in love with the iceman. She would have been hurt if he said it seriously.

Hickey, thus, would give suggestions, prompting her to betray him. Obviously, no woman would suffer as she did. It is not human for any woman to be so pitying and forgiving. The gang of his friends at Harry's would not believe such a woman living. It was, indeed, written all over her face, sweetness and love and pity and forgiveness. The blindness of her love would make Hickey live true to her dreams of him and fill him with guilt when he betrayed, just as Parrit and Larry felt guilty in their compulsive betrayal of Rosa. Betrayal is thus inevitable on both sides — of a woman who loves as Evelyn was, and also of a woman who like Rosa is not bound to a son or a lover : Rosa, as she emerges in the play is a woman committed to a cause but perhaps uncommitted to human relationships. She too loved Larry to a fault, but she loved the revolution more and was prepared to give up all sentiments. The two things — sentiments and revolution cannot go together. Parrit as a son could not suffer her relationship with others. Thus, both of them betrayed her to police.

The theme of betrayal in the play spills over the theme of belonging. O'Neill was perhaps of the view that neither materialism nor idealism can sustain human relationship. Man, according to O'Neill, must be authentic in his relation with others, but since it is not possible, he must live in solitude, for it is easier to love mankind in isolation than in society. In this regard he came closer to existentialism. There are no authentic relationships in O'Neill, people betray or are betrayed. The twelve people at Harry Hope's hotel are without spouses. There are of course, prostitutes in the place, but they form no relationship. Hickey's wife, Evelyn, is death, so is Harry Hope's, Rosa Parrit, Don Parrit's mother and Larry Slade's former mistress, has gone to the death of spirit her imprisonment will bring upon her. She is pictured as an independent, fierce-willed woman who had held possessively unto her son at the same time as she had refused his love. Parrit blames her for forcing him into the radical movement, not allowing him the freedom of mature judgement. At the same time, he makes clear that he wants her to be his mother and resents her flaunting with her lovers in the name of "free love". Her lover, Larry, had left her in anger, calling her whore, for much the same reason, so that a bond between Parrit and Larry exists. Larry, however, denies it and in fact wishes Parrit not to hang around him.

Both, nevertheless, feel guilty over having betrayed Rosa in order to be free of her rejection of their love. To love Rosa, a man must make no demand in return. Betrayal is a defensive movement of their individuality. This is what makes them not to belong to her and even each other, though Parrit longs for companionship as an orphan does.

On the other hand, Hickey's wife has made no demands on her husband. She was a gentle creature, the opposite of Rosa Parrit. But quest to belong has undone her. That man must belong to someone is a futile passion. O'Neill was of the view that man must force his loneliness, his all aloneness. He cannot go back to a homogeneous life; he must live heterogeneously.

### Essay-type Questions

- 1) Significance of the title
- 2) As an Expressionist Play or As a Confessional Play.
- 3) The theme of Lying Pipe-dreams
- 4) The Art of characterization.

### 1) Significance of the Title : The Iceman Cometh

The title *The Iceman Cometh* drawn from the story of the wise and foolish virgins in the Bible, Mathew 25:6, parodies the description of the coming of the Savior: "But at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom Cometh." The saviour who comes at Harry Hope's saloon is a strange messiah. He is Hickey, the old friend of Harry Hope. The occasion of his arrival is Hope's birthday. Hickey comes, nobody knows from where, to this place twice a year. He is, as the play opens, eagerly awaited, as the inmates wish to hear, among others, his gag about his wife falling for an iceman. Harry Hope and his gang enjoy this joke, at Hickey's own cost. The man has the capacity to laugh at himself. Nobody in his place would make fun of his own betrayal by his wife. Hickey's arrival, therefore, is being awaited, because he with his gag, will bring some fun on the occasion of Hope's birthday party. He is, like Larry Slade, regarded as a Foolosopher in the double sense of the word — the wise-fool. Both of them are wise in the sense that they do not fall for pipe dreams, but they love to participate the Feast of All Fools, i.e. Hope's birthday party.

Of the two Foolosophers, Hickey is considered to be funnier. Rocky, the bartender asks Larry to remember how Hickey comes out with the gag about his wife. When, for example, when he is crying over her picture, he would spring on the company all of a sudden his act of leaving her in the hay with the iceman. Saying so, Rocky laughs. He hopes Hickey would come soon as he is already late for the next day's party. He wonders what has happened to Hickey, because the latter always got there a couple of days before the party. Rocky feels that Hickey's presence will relieve the gloom of Harry's saloon: "Dis dump" he says, "is like de morgue .... all dese bums passed out."

Indeed, the place is like a morgue and its inmates are corpses. They are suspended between life and death. They are a ruined lot, living on nothing but dreams and drinks, doled out to them gratis, courtesy Harry Hope. They blurt as the effect of the booze wears out only to ask whether Hickey has come: "If Hickey didn't come", says Joe, "it's time Joe goes to sleep again. I was dreamin' Hickey came to the door, crackin' one of dem drummer's jokes, wavin' a big bankroll and we was all goin' be drunk for two weeks..."

Hickey is thus awaited by these bums, Willie, Joe, Lewis, Wetjoert, Jimmy *et al* for two things, his jokes, especially the joke about the iceman and his money which he spends on buying drink for these rotters. He thus, symbolizes life of dreams. Larry corroborates this view about Hickey when he tells Parrit, a new-comer to the place, that the latter is a hardware drummer, that he is an old friend of Harry Hope and all the gang, that he is a grand gag, comes as he does, twice a year regularly on a periodical drunk and blows all his money.

O'Neill puts emphasis on Hickey's delay in accordance with the original reference in the Bible: Mathew 25:5 — while the bridegroom tarried, they (virgins) slumbered and slept. Willie and Joe in the play slumbered, Larry and Parrit kept waking. The kingdom of heaven is likened in Mathews 25 unto ten virgins. And five of them were wise and five were foolish. The play has twelve characters waiting for Christ-figure Hickey of which some are foolish and some wise. For example, Larry is ironically called a Foolosopher. Paradoxically, the foolish welcome Hickey, while the wise like Larry do not feel enthused on his arrival.

Hickey's arrival is ostensibly delayed. Act One is fully underway when he turns up. By this time, even Harry Hope feels intrigued. He is sick of his hangers-on, especially of his brother-in-law Mosher. In a fit of irritation, he asks: "what the hell you thinks happened to Hickey? I hope he'll turn up. Always got a million funny stories. You and the other bums have begun to give me the graveyard fantods. I'd like a good laugh with old Hickey. (He chuckles at a memory) Remember that guy he always pulls about his wife and the iceman? He'd make a cat laugh".

Hickey, among other things, is chiefly remembered for his story about his wife's running away with the iceman. Hickey's story about the iceman has become a reference point for the inmates at Harry Hope's saloon, chuck, the day bartender at the saloon cracks a joke with Cora, a prostitute. He says that in marrying Cora, he would be under no illusion that he has married a virgin and he would feel cheated provided she does no cheating with the Iceman. The joke about the Iceman is thus not merely funny, but also painful, as it is associated with betrayal. Hickey invented this joke to hide his crime. He slurred it over with the joke about the Iceman who symbolizes nobody or the non-existent or the fabulous.

O'Neill played upon the Iceman symbolism in order to suggest that Christ or as bridegroom's coming in Mathews 25:6

saves the wise, not the foolish. The latter do not wish to be saved. Hickey with his gag of the Iceman symbolizes that Christ is likely to be betrayed by the foolish. It is, however, a different matter that Hickey himself telephones the police, informing that he is the murderer of his wife whom he killed and buried but rumoured that she had run with an iceman. This is the major change O'Neill made in the original. Christ was betrayed by Judas when he was supping with his twelve disciples. The play has analogously twelve people waiting for their savior to come to relieve them of their death-like existence. They hope that his healing touch will infuse life in them.

Ironically, though, Hickey comes to Harry Hope's saloon not to indulge with them in cracking jokes, including that of the iceman and boozing, but to awaken them from their lying pipe-dreams. The image of the iceman, suggestive of chill of the morogue, is, for example, interpreted by one of the characters, Willie Oban, as meaning death: "Would that Hickey or Death would come." Hickey, in his last coming is a messiah of the death of dreams.

On the face of it, Hickey is his same jovial self. His arrival wakes up Hugo out of his, to raise his head and blink through his spectacles with a welcoming giggle. Hickey is also in his comradie, beaming around them affectionately. Harry Hope hails Hickey by calling him: "you old bastard, its good to see you. However, the first change noticeable in him is his desire to grab a couple of hours good sleep, as he has not been able to sleep lately. Harry Hope finds Hickey changed, because it is the first time that he has ever heard Hickey worrying about sleep. It suggests that Hickey has of late gained a peace of mind which he never had earlier. Another change that the gang finds in Hickey pertains to his drinking habit. He used to be a heavy drunkard and though he joins his friends and cheers them presently, he has asked Rockey to serve him first chaser, a small alcoholic drink with little or no alcohol in it. Harry Hope calls this a new stunt. Hickey informs them that he is off the stuff. This makes Hope to ask sarcastically whether Hickey has joined the Salvation Army. He orders Rockey to take the bottle of hard drink from him. for they would not like to tempt Hickey into sin.

That Hickey is changed is unmistakable. He himself admits that he no longer needs booze. The inmates think it is perhaps Hickey's gag, like the one about the iceman. But Hickey has already disclosed his purpose of coming this time to Cora whom he met on the way to the saloon. Hope already has known from Cora what Hickey told the prostitute. Hope, therefore, makes fun of Hickey's intention that he has come to save them. Hickey is himself aware of the change that has come upon him, but he would wish his friends also to experience this kind of change in themselves. The only reason he has stopped drinking is that he finally had the guts to face himself and throw overboard the damned lying pipe dream that had been making him miserable. He would like to recommend the same therapy to his friends, and thus save them from drinking that they indulge in an attempt to shy away from facing themselves in all honesty. Once they face themselves their lying pipe dreams, they would not need booze any more.

This is all there is in his new role of a savior. In one sense he comes as an iceman bringing chill along; in another sense, this cold attitude would save his friends. The title of the play is significant on many levels. On the one level, Hickey's arrival is associated with his joke about the iceman. This is the comic part of it. But on the other level, it is serious and tragic. Hickey comes to put a damper on the much awaited hilarity of the spirit the inmates of the saloon would like to indulge in.

Hickey is conscious of his new role, and is indeed, apologetic about it. He tells his friends that he is no wet blanket. He is no "teetotal grouch" either, particularly at Harry's birthday party. But he is equally conscious of his new avatar, that he means to save them from pipe dreams, a remedy which has to be bitter. His remedy, though bitter and poisonous, is needed to cure poison, that is, the lying pipe dream, the poison which keeps him from finding any peace. That is why, Hickey does not recommend pity, the kind Larry prescribes, because pity keeps the dreams alive. In this regard, Hickey's prescription is cold, suggestive of the regions from where the iceman comes. His prescription, though apparently cold is inherently warm and it is "so damned simple", once the patient has the nerve to bear it. It is just the old dope of honesty is the best policy — honesty with oneself. He asks his friends — just stop lying about yourself, as he has done in his case, about tomorrow.

Since, lying dreams are warm, his friends resent Hickey's remedy. His prescription sounds like a damned sermon on the way to lead the good life. O'Neill wrote two plays on the subject, both with titles derived from the New Testament — *The Iceman Cometh* and *Lazarus Laughed*. In each of them a messianic figure appears preaching salvation to a world of lying bums. In each, the messiah is set free to follow his own path to martyrdom by the murder of his wife.

Hickey's message is simplified — give over the lying pipe dreams. It is in the figure of the messiah that Hickey echoes the title of the play — *The Bridegroom Cometh* — which O'Neill changed to *The Iceman Cometh*.

## 2) *The Iceman Cometh* as an Expressionist or Confessional Drama

Expressionism was a German movement in literature and other arts, especially visual arts. The movement began around 1910 and continued to hold its sway during the 1920's and 1930's. Its chief precursors were painters and artists who sought to depart from realistic depiction of life and the world in order to express the inner turmoil through symbols. Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin, to name the prominent among the painters, were responsible for giving expression to inner reality. They depicted in painting as did Stringberg and Beckett in drama, the cry of the heart. Prominent among those adopting expressionist technique among poets were poets like Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Dostoevsky, among the novelists, experimented with expressionism.

In effect, these artists, working through different genres, refused to imitate, because they believed that it makes no sense to repeat. They wanted, instead, to catch colour and tone of the essence of things rather than their outward appearance.

Outside Germany, however, expressionism as a movement was not understood properly. In France, for example, it failed to attract poets and dramatists. And even in America, its influence was restricted to drama. In fact, painting and drama, being visual arts, found in expressionism a fit medium to express what lies inside through, of course, distorted images. Arthur Miller initially titled his *Death of a Salesman* "Inside His Mind". The Play expressed Willy Loman's paradoxical desire to have best of both the worlds - agrarian and industrial.

O'Neill was by far the greatest artist in America to establish expressionism as a great vehicle of expression, believed as he did, that 'expression' even of the tragic, is beautiful. Writing on 'Stringberg and Our Theatre', O'Neill said that old "naturalism" or "realism" no longer applies. It represents our Fathers' daring aspirations toward self-recognition by holding the family Kodak up to ill-nature. But to us their old audacity is plague; we have taken to many snap-shots of each other in every graceless position; we have endured too much from banality of surfaces. O'Neill added: we have been sick with appearances and are convalescing, we wipe out and pass on to some as yet unrealized region where our souls, maddened by loveliness and the ignoble inarticulateness of flesh, are slowly evolving their new language of kinship. Stringberg knew and suffered with our struggle, years before many of us were born. He expressed it by intensifying the method of our time and by forshadowing both in context and form the method to come. All that is enduring in what we call "Expressionism" — all that is artistically valid and sound theatre — can be clearly traced back through Wedekind to Stringberg's *The Dream Play*, *There are Crimes and Crimes*, *The Spook Sonata*, etc.

O'Neill thus owed debt to the German dramatists, Stringberg, in the main. He found in Stringberg's *The Spook Sonata* the theatre of what O'Neill termed "behind life". It was a theatre meant to express, or better, interpret with insight and distinction our special task — or else we are not existing. This special task is to express truth. It was, O'Neill rightly felt, a difficult task, just as easy is the everlasting lie. From *Bound East for Cardiff* to *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, are great plays about truth which the dramatist expresses by rupturing the surface of what he called the everlasting lie. The irony of it is, that the everlasting lie cannot for long keep its lid on truth. O'Neill's first great play *Beyond the Horizon* unfolds the tragedy of a young, farm boy dreamer, whose true self yearns for the open sea, the world beyond the line of hills, but he instead falls in love, ironically on the night when he is to set sail for a three years' cruise around the world, with a girl next-door. Blinded by love, he decides to settle on the land. The truth of his self lies hid for sometimes and then pines for expression. Now his settled life with the girl lose charm. The woman grows drab, dull and sullen, and the man crawls, wasted by consumption, out of the house to die on the road he should have travelled, straining his eyes toward the hills he never crossed.

Similarly in *The Emperor Jones*, Brutus Jones, an American Negro, comes to an Island of West Indies, as chance would have it. In two years time, he becomes the emperor of the Island. The native hire a man to shoot him, but by chance the gun missed fire, whereupon Jones announced that he has a charm about him, that he cannot be killed except by a silver bullet. He thus plays a hoax on the gullible natives. He exploits the natives by imposing heavy taxes. Behaving that he cannot be killed except by a silver bullet of which they have no idea, the islanders decide to chase him and hack him to death. Jones runs for escape but is waylaid in the dim moonlight by the apparition of a negro he



killed back in the States. He spends all his bullets, except the fifth one, the silver bullet which he has reserved for himself, if by chance capture seems imminent. But the natives not only weave the web that captures Jones, the web of devil and they also melt coins to make a silver bullet in order to kill Jones. Jones' lie, what Smithers calls "bluff" is exposed. *The Emperor Jones* is looked upon as the first American drama in the expressionist mode, as the dramatist opens the surfaces to reveal the forces underlying the action of the play. It is easy to bluff people, but the lie cannot be hid long. Man is mortal, and immortality is a big lie. The exposure of his lie makes the play highly expressionist, as Jones, mighty and immortal, prays to God to save him.

*The Hairy Ape* is one of O'Neill's great expressionist dramas. Before the play opens, Yang, a stoker on a liner has for long believed in a lie that he belonged to the ship, but his dream, his lying pipe dream, to be precise, is shaken by Mildred, the daughter of the owner of the ship, who on seeing the dark figure of the negro cries "a filthy beast". Thus shaken out of his lying dream, he tries still to preserve the dream by wanting to belong to someone — a person or a race. When he finally fails to belong to the civilized world he goes back to his past, to the world of apes. But even the gorilla refuses to accept him, and throws Yang outside its cage.

O'Neill, through the expression of the inner truth thus exposed the surface lie. The subject here is the ancient one — the desire to belong, but the truth is and ever has been that one cannot belong. This idea gets across the audience straight, despite Yang's recognizable character. And this is the success of an expressionist play like *The Hairy Ape*. O'Neill experimented with this method in almost all his plays — *Desire Under the Elms*, *Lazarus Laughed*, *Morning Becomes Electra*, and last but not the least *The Iceman Cometh*. O'Neill's conception of a successful expressionist play is the one wherein nothing stands between the dramatist and the audience. *The Iceman Cometh* ably meets this requirement. Secondly, an expressionist play, turns it the evil of life into a good. The expressionist theatre is audience-oriented; we see in the tragic lesson something to be learnt, something which makes us better for it. Expressionism thus has to be tragic also, but since we leave something for the better for it, it prepares the event to be the source of pleasure. The tragic element becomes a thing of beauty. Howsoever painful be Hickey's expression of truth, it is in the end pleasurable, as the protagonist himself informs the police about his crime. The real contribution of an expressionist play, as *The Iceman Cometh* is, is the dynamic quality of action. Hickey is not the same person as his friends at Harry Hope's saloon expect him to be; he is a changed person. There is in him a growth and ripening, worked out from within himself. The truth that he has murdered his wife and covered the crime as in Stringberg's plays under a funny and irreverent lie that she had eloped with an iceman will not let him be at peace with himself.

So while she slept in peace for which he murdered her, he remained alive to suffer the pricks of conscience. The inmates for Hope's saloon do suffer from some lying pipe dream or the other, but their surface lies get so encrusted upon truth that they find it difficult to express what they feel like expressing. Hickey himself takes many years to confess his guilt. But once he confesses he is an altogether a different man. He celebrates Harry's birthday as if it were his own. It is not that others are immune to the pricks of conscience. Even Rocky, the bartender observes in Act Two that one has just to be honest with oneself and not kid oneself, and "have the guts to be what you are". But Hickey has no illusion that the inmates of the saloon will rise up to the occasion and 'save' themselves.

In this respect, O'Neill set himself against what we may call mock-enlightenment of the eighteenth century and against the rationality of his own time. The whole lot cannot be saved. The tendency of the evolution is to produce ever higher consciousness on the individual level. Hickey also explores this possibility among individuals of the group, beginning with Harry Hope, then Jimmy, and lastly Larry and Parrit.

Hickey knows that insofar as an individual is so fortunate as to be endowed with superior understanding, he can affirm that evolution is progress and that the end result is good. He knows from his own experience that the expression of truth separated from lies brings peace. Knowing this, he affirms truth. He can even affirm pain, imprisonment and even death, because pain is an ingredient in consciousness and a condition for the emergence of free intelligence.

*The Iceman Cometh* is an expressionist play *par excellence*, precisely because it separates truth from what O'Neill would call a 'life-lie'. Truth unfolds itself in some individuals and speeds up the process of cosmic development. But the expression of truth should not be taken to mean that mankind can revise the condition of human existence as a whole. Hickey is taken away for the trial, but those who are left behind relapse in the unconscious lies, except perhaps Larry and Parrit who realize that they have given up Rosa not for her revolutionary dream, but for her betrayal of love.

O'Neill defined an expressionistic play as the one opposite to the character play, for he believed that expressionism denies the value of characterization :

As I understand it, expressionism tries to minimize everything on the stage that stands between the author and the audience. It strives to get the author talking directly to the audience.

*The Iceman Cometh* is one such play wherein nothing obstructs the passage between the dramatist and the audience. We come to know right from the beginning what the play is about. Larry, who to begin, with hammers out the central issue, i.e. pipe dreams. When Hickey turns up, we come to know that pipe dreams are lying pipe dreams, since Hickey treats these dreams frontally, and not with Larry's pity, condoning them that after all they are part of the unconscious. In an expressionist drama, therefore, even a character is a medium, and not a personality which generally comes between the author and the audience. Hickey and Larry, as the rest of the cast, in *The Iceman Cometh* are not characters, but voices; they echo the same view, some more, others less. Characters in the play thus remain abstractions — one may recognize them, as O'Neil does, by their profession — Hickey, a hardware drummer, Larry, one-time Syndicalist Anarchist. Or alternatively we may call them by numbers — one, two three. The real contribution, O'Neil reiterated, has been in the dynamic qualities of plays. They express something, as *The Iceman Cometh* does, something in modern life better than did the old plays.

### 3) The Dream of Life-lie

In his talk with Crosswell Bower on the darkened stage of the Martin Beck Theatre where *The Iceman Cometh* was to open, O'Neill said "This American Dream stuff gives me pain." He further said, in telling the world about our American Dream ! I don't know what they mean. If it exists, as it does in the whole world, why don't we make it work in one small hamlet in the United States?" he asked. O'Neill then went on to equate the American Dream of fabulously growing rich overnight, a rag-to-riches romance, with human greed. Those who propagate this romance include some of America's national heroes. He wanted the portrait of such personages to be taken out and burnt. O'Neill thought as earlier Schopenhaver and Hegel did that the dreams are the products of the irrational will. But according to him the unconscious will that prompts dreams is not without its opposite, the Idea. Both will and Idea are the products of the unconscious. In the evolution of Idea or the conscious, the will, with all its dreams, essentially evil, becomes inevitable. The pessimism of O'Neil is as marked as that of Schopenhaver. The dream of human happiness is an illusion, Maya. Can there be any hope for happiness in the world? Can we look forward to real peace? Can we rely on progress? If these questions are answered negatively, what then is the end of our existence. O'Neill's pessimism differed from *Weltschmerz* of the romantics in that it was theoretically based and not merely an expression of frustrated hedonism. O'Neill did concede that we are tragic figures. All the inmates of Harry's saloon have reached the end of the world. They have given up all efforts to redeem themselves, except a little hope that some day they might turn over a new leaf of life. Larry condemns all pipe dreams, but is paradoxically sympathetic to people keeping their hopes of tomorrow, howsoever dimly, alive. O'Neill, and his spokesman Hickey makes fun of Larry and others who live by tomorrow, and refuse to throw their 'life-lie' off, because the life-lie of Larry for example, that he has deserted the revolutionary cause because he saw no future of its success, makes him a tragic figure, as it does Harry Hope, Jimmy Tomorrow, and even Hickey, whereas they are, in telling lies, are fit subject for comedy. Most of O'Neill's plays are comedies. His *The Hairy Ape* is sub-titled : A comedy of Ancient and Modern Life in Eight scenes. But only those artists are capable of transforming tragedy into comedy who are sufficiently detached.

O'Neill has been accused of unmitigated gloom. In "Damn The Optimists", he asked : "Is this a pessimistic view of life? He never thought that to show the tragic aspect is to be pessimistic. To him, the tragic alone has that significant beauty which is truth. It is the meaning of life — and the hope. Lying pipe dreams make people tragic, though they think that they are better off than facing the truth of their life. But that amounts to masking truth. Drama, especially O'Neill's drama, is the study of unmasking the life-lie. *The Iceman Cometh* pulls the rug out from under the structure of the whole life. It seems not like something written, like something that is happening. Although it is terrible in its comment on the need for lies to maintain life, it is equally comic. Some of the dialogues are quite funny. On the surface, all characters are comic, as they hide under their tragic pose what ought to be exposed and accepted. Even when they pose to be seriously hurt, as for example, Harry Hope's prolonged bereavement over the death of his wife and consequently his inability to take a round of the ward, all characters are comic, since they live in a world of befuddled fantasy and talk big to compensate for the puniness of their spirits. Life has become unbearable for them, it seems, only when they contrive not to look at the truth.

To get at the core of reality in *The Iceman Cometh* — which is also its artistic, its dramatic core — you have to cut away the rotten fruit of unreality around it. Despite long speeches which make the play too long, the core of the play is centred on the problem of lying pipe dreams. O'Neill sounded mystical. He said that the mystery of human life is a dream, and that we are, as Shakespeare would say, made of the stuff dreams are made of. Hence our life is rounded with a sleep. But, as O'Neill showed, we cling to our lies — deliberately holding back the truth. He tried to interpret "Life" in terms of lives, just never in terms of characters. It means that one has to experience the force of truth struggling to express itself not in one or a few but in all lives. Every one of the inmates feels like expressing it, though unlike Hickey they presently lack courage to do so. But later rather than sooner they would express themselves. They, for example, fail to get the kick out of liquor, though only temporarily. Dreams, sleep and drunkenness go with lies, not with truth.

O'Neill's drama, therefore, deals not with individual's illusion. *The Iceman Cometh* with its large number of characters represents the whole mankind, suffering as it does, from one illusion or the other. The dramatist believed that a Hickey here or a Larry there may attain consciousness of the illusion, but mankind as such is a long way from being able to make any proper use of consciousness. It is ironic that while Hickey achieves peace at the cost of his life. Hope and his fellows call him insane in order not merely to save him, but also to assure themselves that only a mad man grows conscious of what evil illusions are. The history of civilization is the record of elaborately cultivated dreams and illusions. Such consciousness as man has achieved scarcely has done more than make him aware of the evil of existence. Larry's Foolosopher has reached this stage and no further. Before the arrival of Hickey, he has reached a point of no return. He has given up believing in anything. He is disenchanted beyond recovery. He did work for the revolutionary cause but Rosa's faithlessness drove him to despair. He turned to the end harbour, to Harry Hope saloon, to spend his days before his death, which he longs for sooner than later. Experience of living has convinced him that "All is Vanity".

But he still labours under the illusion that he is disappointed by the failure of the revolution. In fact, he is defeated in his love for Rosa. That is why he still sympathizes with the dreams of the other inmates, calling these dreams, "harmless". Fortunately, however, in philosophical maturity represented by Hickey that man finds that when he has cast off illusion, the pain and disappointment of life are not intolerable. Hickey, for one, discovers that ego is not ultimately real and its desires are merely part of the primal urge. O'Neill always thought tragedy in the Greek sense of the word. It is only in the very act of understanding human desires that man is able to cut their nerves and dissipate their forces, while freeing himself for rational and aesthetic satisfactions. Few men like Hickey have reached this level. But O'Neill was aware that unless the whole race achieves it, history and civilization will not come to rest.

#### 4) O'Neill's Art of Characterization

Character in a dramatic situation whether in drama proper or novel is problematic; it is difficult to say whether the situation makes character or character creates situation. Aristotle was categorical on this point, that one can write a tragedy without character, i.e. with a persona who is yet to become a character. If Aristotle with his philosophy of action forming character could be categorical, Henry James could not. He said that the same novel could be called a novel of character action, particularly when one affronts one's destiny. It is difficult, therefore, to say whether character is destiny or destiny character.

However, it all depends upon the author's world-view. Like the Greek dramatists on which Aristotle based his *Poetics* O'Neill believed that poetry is more philosophic than history. And since poetry being philosophic deals with universals, with mankind in general, there is obviously no room for personages with peculiar personality traits in it. O'Neill was Greek in his view of drama, especially in his tragic view of life, with the difference that while the Greeks dramatized the conflict between man and his fate, O'Neill wished to enact this struggle between our desires, our dreams, and something in within us which prevents us from accomplishing what we dream and desire. This something is our moral principles which are innate but are inextricably mixed up with unconscious drives. O'Neill's thinking is that when people emerge from dreams and desires, there is then coming to consciousness of judgements which were subconsciously present all the time. O'Neill's world view is evolutionary : Still it is not the evolution of an individual's consciousness which is important, as is that of the human race.

Expressionism is also the expression of the racial consciousness. Since, the whole human race is far away from

extracting itself from the irrational unconscious, O'Neill had no hope in the near future for mankind to free itself from primal urges. It is for this reason that he had no political or social reforms to propagate. He believed that as we progress, we are always further than we can reach :

I suppose that is one reason why I have come to feel so indifferent toward political and social movements of all kinds. Time was when I was an active socialist, and after that, a philosophical anarchist. But today I can not feel that anything that really matters... man is much the same creature, with same primal emotions and ambitions and motives... when the Arya race started toward Europe from... the Himalayas.

However, the birth-cry of the higher men is always audible, but they will come by tinkering with externals or by legislative or social fiat. Hickey and in a lower-key, Larry, belongs to the species of 'higher men' but their call to consciousness is taken lightly. It is because they are only individuals, a Buddha here and a Christ there, Shaw's, as also Ibsen's, heroes and heroines have been such super-human beings, individual and singular, in essence, oddities for the common-run of humanity. The same can be said for the audience. Supermen like Hickey with their messianic figure wish to save mankind, but they soon lose touch with the ground reality, because mankind is still labouring under dreams of tomorrow. Such characters as Yang in *The Hairy Ape*, as also Hickey in *The Iceman Cometh* suppose that they can revise the conditions of human existence. Indeed, Hickey is conscious of his role as a savior and is even apologetic about it. Others also mock at his playing the messiah. Hope asks him whether he has joined the salvation Army. Hickey, as also Yang, sound propagandists. *The Hairy Ape*, O'Neill conceded, was propaganda in the sense that it was a symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature. The nascent thing, according to O'Neill, happening is the opposite of the character play. It is what he called the expressionistic play, for expressionism denies the value of characterization. As he understood it, expressionism tries to minimize everything on the stage that stands between the author and the audience. It strives to the author talking directly to the audience.

*The Iceman Cometh* is one of O'Neill's expressionistic play in which he focus is not so much on Hickey, but on the rest of the cast twelve men and four ladies. It is these sixteen people who represent humanity which still lives in the limbo of lying pipe dreams. There was no historical basis for believing that science or education or democratic government contributes anything to social harmony or to private happiness. Creation and history are a madman's tale which must be condemned in toto. But an individual's attempt to do so would not cut any ice till the whole race rises, what is a distant dream, perhaps beyond the horizon. We cannot be saved, as Hickey tries to do, by the practice of private asceticism and the denial of the will. We must rather run the race and fight a good battle, shoulder to shoulder with all else that lives and suffers. We must not only renounce vain hopes. We must immerge ourselves in suffering. We must not seek partial escape. We must accept it and welcome it and experience it to the fullest, for suffering is the instrument of our salvation and of the salvation of the whole world. Through it the conscious expiates the crime of willing to exist, and only by accepting our share of that suffering can we contribute our due to the oblation made by the unconscious for the sin of having become a world. When that oblation shall be complete and acceptable, then there will be no more consciousness, no more pain, no more existence and the conscious will enter once more into the bliss of Nirvana.

O'Neill is a mystic, as he claimed His art of characterization is based on his world- view that unless the whole human race realizes the futility of existence through suffering itself, there cannot be salvation. Therefore, individuals like Hickey or even Larry are freaks — one is a propagandist, the other Foolosopher. O'Neill's ideal characters are those who do not come between, the author and the audience, i.e. who are still slumbering and dreaming and suffering as the audience do. Harry Hope is such a character who did not like his nagging wife, but since her death, he has been living with her memories. Thus he has not been living honestly, lying to himself and others. But, as O'Neill said Harry hope and the gang are his best friends, because they are part of humanity at large. Harry Hope, for example, believed that he loved his wife. Larry also pretends that he has no complaint against Rosa. So does Parrit. It is perhaps the best possible world, as its inhabitants preserve the dream of loving and being loved. Even in murdering, Hickey his wife, he kept the lying dream intact. He said that he murdered her for her peace.

## UNIT VIII Tennessee Williams : The Glass Menagerie

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Tennessee Williams was a major Twentieth Century American dramatist who made dramatic history by achieving remarkable success for every play that he wrote after *The Glass Menagerie*. He was an artist who could understand appreciate and interpret the aspirations of his characters both in depth and detail. He was a poet of the American South and a dramatist of the lost souls. His reputation is enviable because in the entire history of twentieth century drama he stands comfortably in the company of the great dramatists like Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller.

Williams was a prolific writer. He wrote twenty-five full length plays, more than forty short plays, a dozen produced (and unproduced) screenplays and an opera libretto. Several of his plays have been rendered into different languages, including Hindi, Tamil and Marathi. In addition, he wrote two novels, one novella, and sixty three short stories, around one hundred poems, an autobiography, a published volume of letters, introductions to plays and books by others, review articles, rejoinders, explanations. He has also attracted remarkable critical attention with more than 2500 critical papers and several dissertations on his work.

Tennessee Williams was born on March 26, 1911 to Edwina and Charles Coffin Williams at Columbus. His real name was Thomas Lanier Williams and his paternal family was descended from French Huguenots and were the frontiersmen and cavaliers during the pioneer days in East Tennessee. The pride in the achievements of his family probably inspired young Tom to take on Tennessee as his name in 1939 in preference to Tom.

He was the second child of his parents, the first a sister Rose and third a brother Dakin. Tom's early life, was a sheltered one to a great extent and was spent at his maternal grandparent's house in successive Episcopal rectories. Tom's father who worked with a telephone company and travelled up and down on their behalf did not meet Edwina and his two children for months. The brother and sister grew in spacious houses and in an atmosphere of typical Southern elegance, sophistication, good manners, social graces and propriety. The South prized courtesy in ladies and gallantry in men. The black slaves were at hand for odd jobs. Tom and Rose too had an affectionate black servant Ozzie for their care as also other household chores. Life at home in his childhood was so comfortable and memorable that Tom kept thinking of it and drawing material out of it in different works that he created.

At the age of six, Tom suffered from a severe bout of diphtheria which left him weak and exhausted. He could not move around and could not go out to play normal boys' games. During this period he had his grandparents, Ozzie and numerous visitors to rectory for company. The grandparents told him stories from *The Bible*, Ozzie concocted and adapted fables from African folklore, while Edwina sang him ballads. The illness gave him the opportunity to acquire a fund of tales thus proving to be a blessing in disguise. As he recovered he visited the old and the sick in their beds with his grandfather and learnt about ailments and pain which became a perennial presence in his works.

On several occasions, when alone, young Tom was heard loudly making up bits of stories, in his room. That laid the foundation for the things to come. As he recovered he had only Sister Rose for company and the two shared boundless affection for each other.

When Tom was nearly seven, his father was promoted to the post of a sales manager with International Shoe Company. This meant a stable desk job for him in St. Louis, while it meant untold disaster for the rest of the family. Tom's father was a fun loving, strong-willed person with little interest in his family. He drank, cursed, screamed leading to the embarrassment of the minister (Tom's grandfather) and frightened his wife and children. The settled job meant that the wife and two children will now live with him in St. Louis, an industrial town in the North. While life in the South was gentle, ordered and stable, life up North was cruder, noisier with industrial atmosphere ill-suited to the family. Mother Edwina who was accustomed to gentler ways of life, enormous respect from men-folk, courtesy from neighbours and practically complete holiday from household chores, found St. Louis a terrible place to stand. The husband's ill-temper, bad habits and querulous ways became the cause of unending tension in the new house. There were fights everyday, and as a result, the mother trained in decent ways of life, had to be hospitalized eight times between 1918 and 1930, causing terror and anxiety to the children.

The ceaseless hostility between the parents wrecked both Rose and Tom psychologically, with Rose never able to recover. Each time the mother was taken ill, Rose was paralysed with fear. The sensitive little girl found the stress around her too much to cope with. Rose, whom Tom recalled as a very affectionate girl, an ideal playmate, and one with incredible imagination, became a pathetic misfit in St. Louis surroundings. Numerous efforts at having her started in music failed. Later enrolment at Rubicam Business College to learn stenography also ended unsuccessfully. Rose thereafter lived in her own inner world of darkness and despair, a world of sheer psychotic withdrawal. The student will notice these autobiographical details translated dramatically and imaginatively in *The Glass Menagerie*.

Tom also suffered the shift to St. Louis. His classmates (and a teacher) made fun of his Southern accent. He was tormented and teased for his manners and bullied as a "Sissy" intensifying his natural shyness to the point where it was agony for him to open up and talk. At home the general atmosphere was alarming. The mother was always emotionally upset and Sister Rose was nervous. The father never liked young Tom's remaining indoors, reading books. He began to call him "Miss Nancy," because Tom had stopped making connections with other boys. The gift of a typewriter on his eleventh birthday immediately became the refuge for young Tom. On this old typewriter he began to pound all his confusion and bitterness in the form of poems, beginning a life-long creative process.

During his impressionable year several females played a key role in his life. These included his grandmother, a sweet, generous and unselfish lady who provided refuge in moments of crises. Ozzie, the maidservant and nurse left an indelible imprint, especially through dramatic rendering of imagined yaris. Mother Edwina, also had a strong influence. The strong, aristocratic, Southern profile of several women characters he created was modelled after his mother. His Sister Rose was yet another person close to him. Williams wrote, "We were so close to each other, we had no need of others." The psychological affinity was almost symbiotic: when one was ill the other imagined to be ill, leading Ozzie to call them a couple, first happy in each others company. It was be noted here that no girl was more important to Williams in childhood or later life than sister Rose. Several of his plays recreate an affectionate image of Rose, leaving critics to conclude that Rose for him was a mystical symbol of love.

Williams began to publish at the age of 13. Soon he became a compulsive writer pouring forth short stories, poems and vignettes about St. Louis life with a remarkable frequency. He graduated in 1929 with average grade and entered the University of Missouri. At eighteen he proposed marriage to his friend Hazel Kramer, who gently turned it down saying that they both were too young for it. Later in life though he had lady friends but never came close to offering marriage to any one, remained a bachelor, and had several homosexual partners. When Hazel married three years after he had proposed to her, Tom suffered a nervous breakdown which required hospitalization for ten days. In his later creative output, his relationship with Hazel endowed him with rich sensitivity in creating fictional female characters.

William's stint in College was not very encouraging either. His father was utterly displeased with his performance and had him pulled out from College. He financed a quick course in typing and had him started out at the International Shoe Company as a typist-cum-clerk. The monotonous job required him to dust hundreds of pairs of shoes each morning, carrying heavy cases of them across to the town in the afternoon and typing digits. Tom the hero of *The Glass Menagerie*, is modelled after his own life in the shoe company. This period of life, which he detested as dull and boring became invaluable to him as a writer. It was at this work place that he had a colleague Stanley Kowalski to whom Tom was emotionally attracted and whom he immortalised as the hero of *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Success did not come to Tom that easily. He spent several hard days and nights before luck smiled on him. He tried several odd jobs, while continuing to write in the evenings or late in the night. "His evolving theme was the individual struggling for freedom against overwhelming and hopeless odds, of railing against the small craft warnings of life," as Richard Leavitt puts it.

After trying his hand at several odd jobs, he went to Hollywood to become a screen writer. He submitted the screenplay called *The Gentleman Caller* to MGM which was however turned down. Disgusted he wrote it as a stage play and called it *The Glass Menagerie*. He sent it to his agent Audrey Wood who had it accepted by Eddie Dowling, the famous actor, producer and director. At long last, the struggle of months and years paid off, making Tennessee Williams a celebrity in the world of theatre over night.

Tennessee Williams after his first success went on to write several famous and major plays which not only achieved

spectacular successes on Broadway and on off-Broadway but have been filmed, translated and played in theatres all over the world. The plays apart from *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Street Car Named Desire* include *Caution*, *One Hot Tin Roof*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *Summer and Smoke*, *Camino Real*, *Orpheus Descending*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Period of Adjustment*, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and a large number of one act plays. He also wrote short stories and a novella "*Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*."

Tennessee Williams died on the night of February 24, 1983. He had consumed liquor, cocaine and two second capsules before he slept. (He was a hypochondriac and carried several medicines with him). It was later reported by the New York examiner and pathologist that during the night he had probably used the barbiturate over cup as a spoon which had somehow lodged in his throat and choked him to death.

### **Tennessee Williams and His Age**

After a close look at his biography, it is pertinent that one casts a sideways glance also at the times in which he was born and grew up.

Tennessee Williams born in 1911 was born close to an eventful period in world history. A few years after his birth the World War I started and threw the world in a state of turmoil. While growing up he lived through the terrible period of Great Depression (1929) and later through the years of World War II (1939-1945). In other words, Tennessee Williams lived through the times when the world passed through the experience of anguish, loss, deprivation on the one hand and the rise of fascism and tyranny around the world.

When the World War I started, several millions of young men perished. America lost 50,000 with an equal number of men wounded. The society was divided over whether America should support and intervene in the war. The government of the day became intolerant of those who criticised it for taking part in the war. The fundamental rights were curbed, freedom of speech and of the press were taken away. The society was divided over yet other issues, the blacks led by W.E.B. DuBois enlisted in the army in support of the government. However, they found themselves segregated and even in fighting the enemy, they were assigned menial jobs. It was around 1920 that the infamous Ku Klux Klan was founded and began to perpetrate racist, anti-semitic (anti-Jews) anti-Catholic and generally xenophobic acts spreading a sense of insecurity among the non-white immigrants in the USA.

The 1920s were the high water mark of a revolution in consumer goods and that was the positive side of life. By the end of 1920s nearly half the nation's households had telephones, and an equal number had radios. A number of new magazines started and people were attracted to movie theatres. The cars were available and people began to buy new items of luxurious living.

However, this false sense of euphoria lasted only until 1929. The stock market crash of October 1929 brought a startling halt to the prosperity that had characterised the decade of 1920s. Although President Herbert Hoover moved more aggressively than any President before him to use federal power to address the economic crisis, yet by 1932 85,000 businesses had failed, and many others had cut back their operations. Hundreds of thousands of people (one out of four by 1933) had lost their jobs. The Great Depression was not fully resolved until the demands of production for World War II redefined the economy. The Depression novelist John Dos Passos (1896-1970) examined the problems of materialism in the lives of all Americans—rich and poor, new immigrant and established businessmen. American materialism, Dos Passos felt, creates class distinctions and encourages personal greed. In his later novels Dos Passos depicts the fragmentation of American society, caused by class divisions and by the Great Depression.

Tennessee Williams's writing talents began to blossom during World War II. It was the time when America sitting on the fence until 1941, gradually became a major supporter of the Allied powers which included Great Britain, the Soviet Union and France. When Japanese attacked the naval station at Pearl Harbour, America retaliated by bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The end of the war saw the United States and the Soviet Union emerging as global super powers. The U.S. government's role in the economy, strengthened during the New Deal Years, grew even stronger during the war. New job opportunities arose both for men and women and American economy began to bounce once again out of the dire straits.

Apart from the tumultuous events around him in the economic, political and social set up, Tennessee Williams's

personal life too had much to do with what he wrote. He was born to a mother who belonged to the South of the United States, had a rather sensitive character himself and responded to the events around himself in a way different from the others. The sick, defeated and the dying he met on visits to the parish with his grandfather gave him prototypes of characters he was later to dramatise in his works. His main characters generally are women belonging to the South: their genteel background, excessive emphasis on manners and the inability to adjust with the industrial life in the North becomes a metaphor for the maladjusted and the trapped sensitive creatures anywhere in the world in the clutches of hostile insensitive environment.

### Major Themes of Tennessee Williams

“At the age of fourteen,” Tennessee Williams wrote in the Foreword to *Sweet Bird of Youth*, “I discovered writing as an escape from a world of reality in which I felt acutely uncomfortable.” In the fifty odd years since that discovery, his writing can on one level be regarded as escape mechanism. While it has a therapeutic value for him as a writer, it has given him the international reputation as the leading American playwright since the World War II.

Although it is unfair to treat all the great and individual works of Tennessee Williams collectively in order to arrive at a single statement of themes, as if all the work comprised a piece, yet in Williams’s work some continuous and marked preoccupations are discernible. Some of them are outlined below.

One of the themes shows Tennessee Williams as the champion spokesman of the defeated and the lost. The playwright who was himself uncomfortable in the world of reality, showed his characters living a frustrated life. Even in the plays ending on a joyous note such as *The Rose Tattoo*, *Camino Real*, *Baby Doll* and *Period of Adjustment* there is enough bleakness to sour the lightest of moments.

The protagonists in the plays of Williams and many of the subsidiary characters are outsiders, unable or unwilling to conform to the dull and monotonous or cruel world in which they find themselves. One of the earliest plays by Tennessee Williams was called “*The Fugitive Kind*”, though never published, yet its title can easily lend meaning to the behaviour and eccentricities of many of his protagonists. Gerald Weales feels that the leading character of his plays is different from their neighbours, but there is variety in the differences “The one thing that all of them seem to have in common is the combination of sensitivity and imagination with corruption – physical, spiritual, sexual disability. From the beginning, the plays have suggested that the heroes are abnormal and that there is something vaguely damnable about normality. “Tom, for instance, in *The Glass Menagerie* describes Jim, the gentleman caller, as an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from.” Neither Tom, who is in many ways Williams himself, nor his creator, who calls Jim a “nice ordinary young man” seems aware that the gentleman caller is a much more important symbol than the pretentious “long delayed but always expected something that we live for.” In a manner of speaking, Williams’s world is crowded by Jims, the outsiders, who bring with them winds of refreshing outside world for the frustrated insiders.

Another recurrent feature in his plays is the sensitive temperament of his protagonists who are generally females Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*, Blanche in *A Street Car Named Desire*, Alma in *Summer and Smoke*, Lady in *Orpheus Descending* can all be grouped under this category. His characters generally belong to the South, are pathetic misfits in the industrial North and find the life and going very tough. The hostile and cramped living conditions make them nostalgic about the life they were always used to.

Sex also occurs in the plays of Tennessee Williams in a prominent way. One is struck by promiscuity, nymphomania, rape, homosexuality, voyeurism, and flagellation in his plays. Implicit in his creation of a gallery of sexual deviants is William’s conviction that human beings can make contact with one another only tentatively, momentarily and that even if the touch be agonising it is better than no communication at all. Blanche, on finding herself lost in a hostile world tries through promiscuity to reach out to others. Williams in comparison to several repressed women characters belonging to the South has created some remarkable Sicilian women characters whose uncomplicated sex lives present them in striking contrast with the others he created. Serafina in *The Rose Tattoo* and Lady in *Orpheus Descending* show that by not repressing their sexuality, they found the fulfillment others only lusted for but never achieved. Princess Kosmonopolis in *Sweet Bird of Youth* and Maxim Faulk in *The Night of the Iguana* are characters who hire gigolos and keep them as slaves for sexual fulfillment.



Violence and cruelty recur in the plays of Williams with a remarkable frequency. While Blanche has been cruel to her homosexual husband she encounters cruelty all around herself. Val Xavier in *Orpheus Descending* is torched to death even as racial bigotry leads to crimes in *Sweet Bird of Youth* and to the castration of the hero Chance Wayne. In *Suddenly Last Summer* the natives of Cabezo de Lobo turn into cannibals and eat up the hero Sebastian. There are other instances of a minor nature in other plays too.

Moral paralysis could be enumerated as yet another dominant concern of Williams in his creative work. Brick Pollitt in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* uses this phrase to describe both his personal tragedy and all those around him. Signi Falk aptly regards it as a phenomenon afflicting many of Williams protagonists and background characters. The moral fibre of his characters is generally flimsy and as a result they take shelter in liquor, permissive sex, homosexuality or dope. The hangers on in *Baby Doll* and *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and the protagonists of *A Milk Train* and *The Night of the Iguana* could be seen in this category.

The almost neurotic recurrence of the theme of loneliness in Williams would suggest that the writer is again imposing upon his characters his own personal state of mind. From the early Val Xavier in *Battles of Angels* who talks of peoples' imprisonment inside their skins and not getting to know anyone, to Mrs. Stone, the heroine of his novella which makes her have a special kind of loneliness in Rome, to Catharine Holly in *Suddenly Last Summer* who remains alone even while with her lover on vacation. It seems all the protagonists of Williams in all the poems, in all the short stories and in all the plays sing the same old refrain "nobody knows how lonesome. I am"—a song accompanied by appropriate off-stage mood music like mournful locomotive whistles or bird calls. Signi Falk is right when she comments that in his writing career Williams has created more lonely people than the sociologists have found in all the lonely crowds.

### Contribution and Literary Reputation

Tennessee Williams was a major American dramatist. In many ways he was close to Henrik Ibsen whom he admired and emulated and from whom he acquired the boldness to deal with controversial subjects. His plays made dramatic history not only through their phenomenal successes but also by leaving each succeeding audience shocked and bewildered at the treatment of taboo subjects. His handling of such themes as homosexuality, emasculation, drug addiction, venereal diseases and cannibalism kept the greatest of his admirers guessing about what he would deal with next. Williams always seemed to flout the social and moral code by rebelling against it. In his personal life he was more or less a hobo, always on the move. His own life and his frank confessions about it left his friends cold. On the positive side, he earned the enviable reputation of an artist who could know, understand and interpret the feminine sensibility and aspirations in a genuine way, something that none other had done as successfully. He was also, from yet another point of view, a poet of the American South, a dramatist of lost souls, an artist who explored the vacuum in the lives of the lonely individuals trapped by circumstances beyond their control. In yet another way, he inspired dramatists like Imamu Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jones) and Edward Albee to rebel against the taboos imposed on the American theatre. As a result they followed him with even harsher depictions of violence, sexuality and cruelty.

Although Williams has earned the ire of literary critics as writing cheap dramas and willfully pandering to the prurient interests of theatre goers, there is no substance in this harsh dismissal. He has earned literary acclaim not on the strength of the bizarre and the fantastic that he has created but on the count of filling his plays with fascinating characters, compelling dialogues and powerful plots. His plays are illuminated, even gilded by verbal, visual and sound symbolism that is intended to convey meanings beyond those possible in what Williams has termed "the exhausted theatre of realism."

At times in his plays, Williams has experimented with new techniques in drama. He employs an array of expressionistic literary and theatrical devices: special settings, musical themes, unusual sound and lighting effects—all as a means of leading his audience to see the truths that lurk beneath life's surface.

His characters and their actions are often exaggerated. They are made to resemble the characters and events of ancient myths. Certain character types recur frequently. Gerald Weales has listed some of them: they are the outsiders, an emotionally trapped individuals facing hostile circumstances, the physically and emotionally deformed creatures, the neurotic and the insane, real or would be artists, victims and victimizers and so on. Most of these have been discussed above. His characters generally speaking, are characters who are overwhelmed by one another. They live haunted by a

feeling that they are at the receiving end of a universe which is indifferent to their suffering and to them as individuals.

The canvas of Williams is truly global and the vision is panoramic. What is remarkable about Williams is that he portrays the different and multifaceted forms of human-life with equal finesse in his plays. His creativity and imagination has been an object of admiration of critics. He has created mothers, lovers and liberated women and transpersonal mothers in his plays with equal sympathy and objectivity. He has betrayed no biases or preferences as a creator, interested as he was in the Archetypal Feminine.

Many observers term Williams a poetic realist and his plays psychological tragedies in which he is most effective in evoking an atmosphere and recreating a state of mind or soul rather than simply constructing a plot. These dramas are works of psychic intensity, probing into the problems of frustrated personalities. His most memorable characters are emotionally displaced people who generally suffer from an inability to face reality or to come to terms with their environment. Through fantasy, alcohol or sexual promiscuity they seek escape from a world with which they are unable to cope.

Francis Donahue in *The Dramatic World of Tennessee Williams* sums up his contribution in an effective way. "All of Williams's major plays belong, in spirit and in dramatic technique, to this new poetic subjective theatre. His theatre is concerned with dramatizing the subjective experience of his characters. From his very first success with "The Glass Menagerie," Williams has been concerned with underscoring on the stage the hidden worlds in which his characters live, worlds which are usually sharply different from the real world which they physically inhabit. On more than one occasion Williams has stated his preference for this interior world of his characters, "I don't deal with social problems," he once stated, "because those are not the problems which move me," .... In dealing with sordid settings and debased characters, Williams is dealing with subject matter, which, however commonplace it had become in novels, short stories and the consulting room of a psychiatrist, had not previously been accepted in the theatre."

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# The Glass Menagerie - The Literary Reception

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Elsewhere we learnt about the life and times of Williams. We also came to know that *The Glass Menagerie* is largely based on the personal life and circumstances of the author's life. In addition we also noted that the climb to fame and success was not easy: it was an arduous journey accomplished through untiring and relentless labour.

When the curtain in Chicago's Civic Theatre went up on *The Glass Menagerie* the night after Christmas in 1944, a very small audience had arrived to watch the play. As the play progressed the play bewitched the audience in the hall. The story about a hapless girl, a miserable mother and a helpless brother captivated the audience through its tenderness and emotional appeal. A few days after the literary critics heaped the well-deserved accolades on the play and Williams became a celebrity. The sponsors had booked the theatre for a week but had to extend the show through the second week. The author and his sponsors were rewarded when they saw Chicagoans queuing up patiently to watch the new hit. The magic that the story wove on the audience and the emotional chord it struck brought up to the American theatre a new play, a new playwright and a successful theatrical experiment.

The reviews about the play during the Chicago opening were very encouraging. When the play moved to New York and opened at the Playhouse Theatre on March 31, 1945, none had expected that the play was out to create history of sorts. *The Glass Menagerie* ran for a year and a half on Broadway and clocked 563 performances. It won for the young playwright the New York Drama Critics's Circle Award as the best American play of the season. It also won the Sidney Howard Memorial Award, apart from several others.

New York reviewers found the play as Francis Donahue notes "eloquent," "touching," "unforgettable," etc. Celebrated critics gave rave reviews comparing Williams with other celebrated American playwrights. Stark Young wrote about Amanda's characterization in the following words:

*(Amanda is) both appalling and human, cold and loving. No role could be more realistically written than this... it has variety, suddenness, passion and freedom, almost unconscious freedom perhaps of true realism.*

Brooks Atkinson in an article written eleven years after the original performance classified *The Glass Menagerie* as the purest work to come from the pen of Williams. Commenting on the play he wrote:

*The material is also pure and simple. Nothing happens except that a mother makes an unsuccessful attempt to find a suitor for her daughter. But the writing is so tender, the sympathies are so merciful the insight into characters is so penetrating, the indifference of the great world outside is so skillfully suggested in the background that *The Glass Menagerie* mirrors human experience in depth and clarity. Although it is as fragile as the glass toys that the lonely daughter consoles herself with, it has the supple strength of truth. Nothing about it is false or contrived; nothing is obscure and irrelevant.*

The praise by the two critics is only representative of the critical opinion that the play earned. Other critics's eloquence made the play into an American classic.

## The Glass Menagerie: A Critical Summary

### The Background

The drama *The Glass Menagerie* comes to us through the recollections of Tom about his family. Tom left the family comprising his mother and sister long time ago and is living a guilt ridden life. He is on the deck of a ship in some far off place and is imagining life at home now with sister Laura and mother Amanda. The play is therefore a memory play, coming out from the memory of a fond brother who despite the fact that he joined Merchant Marine, deserted the family, yet has not been able to abandon the sister and the childhood they shared together.

*The Glass Menagerie* has four characters, the mother Amanda Wingfield, who is a fading lady hailing from the South, her daughter Laura, who is crippled in one leg having suffered a stroke of pleurisy in childhood (which has left her with one leg shorter than the other), her son Tom, an aspiring poet, who is frustrated with his routine job at the factory and the Gentleman Caller, Jim O'Connor. There is a fifth character too who never makes a physical appearance in the play but his absence is what has made life unbearable for the others. He is Amanda's husband whose photograph adorns the mantle-piece of the living room and whose absence is more strongly felt throughout. He is thus a constant, absent presence in the play.

As the story takes place in Tom's mind long after the events occurred, the play is accompanied by a haunting "Menagerie" music. As Tom takes on the role of the narrator, he announces that the "memory always seems to move in music." Between each episode the music underscores the emotion of nostalgia. In addition, because it is a memory play, and memory has a way of dimming out, the lighting of the play, in order not to appear realistic, is always kept dim. And as Donahue adds, "The setting is designed to capture the mood of gentle frustration and nostalgia experienced by the mother and the daughter." Tom announces to the audience (in fact throughout the play, he talks to the audience, narrating, commenting, fulminating, reasoning always keeping the audience informed about his state of mind) that he is not a stage magician. "He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth, I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion."

Another fact that has to be kept in mind before reading the play is the time and place in which *The Glass Menagerie* is located. The play is located in the Depression years, or the 1930s, when most of the businesses had collapsed, the youngsters had no jobs, the families had no food and the life for average American was at the brink of disaster. Tired or incapable of supporting his family of two growing up children the father deserted them and disappeared. Amanda, grown in the lap of luxury in the South and someone who had not seen any miseries in life suddenly had to take on the mantle of supporting herself, her children and the home itself. The location of the play is "an alley in St. Louis." St. Louis an industrial town in the state of Missouri on the Mississippi was different from the nature, colour, ambience and style of the South, where the mother belonged. Here the family lived in there "one of those vast hive like conglomerations of cellular living units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centres of lower middle-class population."

The house where the family lived was not only cramped for space, it had to be entered from the rear of the building. The location, the furniture the living conditions of the play thus describe a family living from hand to mouth in the depression years. Amanda earns a meagre living by selling subscriptions to women's magazines and by doing odd jobs. She is waiting for Tom to grow up and lend a hand in bearing the family expenses. The hopelessness of Amanda's existence is seen in her pathetic life. Living in such conditions, Amanda can only live nostalgically remembering the open, sophisticated surroundings of her parental home in the South and cursing her lot in the humble tenement environment of St. Louis.

The music was mentioned above. The play's music was composed by Paul Bowles. The music had to be such as to fit the fragile and tender atmosphere of the play. Bowles wrote a wispy, never never melody to be played on the violin. The music acts as the leit motif, or the recurring theme of the play, highlighting the heroine Laura and her glass animals. Whenever she retreats into her lonely world of glass animals, delicate as herself, this music is always heard in the background. This music is contrasted with the music from across the road heard from Paradise Dance Hall, blaring loudly, hot sexually exciting tunes and providing, a comparison with the cool, sedate sombre music of "The Glass Menagerie" theme. It is from a world that neither Amanda nor Laura knows, a world that Tom occasionally visits in abortive attempts at adventurism. The music not only provides comparison, it also shows how some drowned their worries by escaping into a world of loud music and sensuality, while others like Amanda bore the brunt of Depression years.

### **The Plot Outline**

The Wingfield family, consisting of Tom, Laura and mother Amanda lives in a small shabby tenement apartment in St. Louis. Tom's father, who worked for a telephone company has deserted the family, leaving Amanda to fend for herself and the growing children. Laura, older of the two is pleuritic and terribly shy. Brother Tom works in a warehouse and writes poetry in the times when he is not working or is not at the movies. Amanda herself does odd jobs including selling subscriptions to magazines from her home to supplement the family income. Her worry is finding a suitable match for Laura and marrying off the shy and crippled girl. For this she has enrolled Laura to learn typing in the Rubicam Business College.

At dinner, Amanda lectures Tom on his table manners and tells Laura she must stay fresh and pretty for the gentleman callers. When Laura tells the mother that she was not expecting any gentleman callers, Amanda goes into the memories of her own adolescent years when she was the most sought after beauty among the young and eligible sons of the plantations owners. Amanda recalls that when she was a young girl of Laura's age back in Blue Mountain in Mississippi, she once had seventeen gentlemen callers on one evening. The family could not accommodate them all and had to call for folding chairs from the church next door. Amanda then tells Laura to practise her typing and shorthand.

A few days later Amanda comes home shocked. She has been to Laura's business college and found out that Laura had not been attending classes there and has been spending time alone in the parks. The mother gets even more upset at Laura's single status, with no man paying attention to her. Unable to hear the anger and frustration of her mother Laura retreats into the world of her glass figurines, washing, shining, changing positions and talking to her little glass creatures. She listens to the old gramophone records on her old Victrola.

The mother decides to ask Tom to help her find a match for sister Laura. The bond between the two is very strong and Laura's pathetic condition worries Tom too. But Tom cannot bear constant badgering and grumbling of the mother. In one of the moments of anger he calls Amanda a witch which aggravates into a regular fight between mother and son. On Laura's intervention Tom apologises. Amanda asks her in turn to take on the family responsibility and show signs of maturity. Finding a gentleman caller for Laura would be one step in that direction. A few days later, Tom informs Amanda that he has asked a young man called Jim to visit them for dinner. Amanda swings into action making preparations for the gentleman caller.

The next night, Laura though looking beautiful and attractive is seen infinitely nervous on meeting a gentleman caller. One look at the man reveals that it is the same Jim who was her class fellow at high school. Amanda's constant talking makes Laura sick and she has to be excused from the dinner table.

Subsequently, Laura's shyness with the caller wears off and she begins to talk to Jim in a warm way. Jim is touched by the tender beauty of Laura and sits in a dark corner of the house talking on subjects such as how to overcome inferiority. He dances with her in his arms, kisses her affectionately but before leaving tells her the truth: that he is engaged, and that Tom invited him home without telling him that it was for the sister.

When Amanda discovers the truth, she reprimands Tom for playing a cruel joke on the family by behaving in an irresponsible way. He should have found out all about his friend before inviting him. In addition he had made the family lose a lot of money in preparations.

At the end of the play, Tom has deserted the family, like his father did leaving the two women to fend for themselves, to comfort each other with no one else to support or to help them out. Tom though far away from his mother and sister reminisces all that transpired during the time he was at home. He feels guilty of selfishness, dereliction of duty. But he is a sensitive person. He confesses he has not been able to forget his sister.

### **Detailed Critical Summary of *The Glass Menagerie***

The play is divided into two parts: Part I, consisting of the first five scenes is labelled "Preparation for a Gentleman Caller" and Part II, made up of scenes VI and VII, is called "The Gentleman Caller."

### **Part-I Scene-I**

The play opens with Tom entering the scene from the darkness addressing the audience directly. He is dressed as a merchant seaman and strolls casually across the stage toward the fire escape entrance of his remembered home. He is the narrator now, talking to the audience in violation of the realistic fourth wall tradition. He is going to tell us the story of his family he says, accompanied by all the trappings that go with the mood of dreamy reminiscences.

The narrator describes the social background of the play: the depression years of the thirties, the rampant poverty, misery and unemployment. He introduces the three other characters: his mother, Amanda, his sister Laura and a gentleman caller named Jim O'Connor. Referring to the latter, he explains that Jim is a symbol of "the long delayed but always expected something that we live for." He talks about his father who left them a long time ago. "He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances." His portrait as a dapper young man still adorns the mantle-piece of the house and is a constant reminder of his absence. His last picture postcard was post-marked Mexico and had a cryptic message "Hello-Good-bye!" with no return address. Tom takes after his father in looks. Amanda recalls her gallant husband when she compares Tom's face, "One thing your father had plenty of — was charm."

After introducing the characters, the interior of the Wingfield apartment lights up. Amanda is seen sitting with Laura at a drop leaf-table waiting for Tom to start the dinner.

Tom leaves his role of the narrator for a while and takes his place on the dining table and becomes a character in the action. At dinner, Amanda continues to give directions about table manners, admonishing Tom for hurrying through

his meals. Angry at her endless chatter, Tom leaves the table and clearly shows that the three individuals sharing the roof are actually lost in their own tensions. As the scene continues, the tension increases when Amanda reminds Laura to stay fresh and pretty for her gentlemen callers. Laura, who is crippled (suffering from a disease called pleurisy which has left her with one leg shorter than the other and held in a brace) politely tells her mother that she was not expecting any callers. Amanda exclaims "Not me gentleman caller? It can't be true! There must be a flood, there must have been a tornado." But she tells Laura not to worry as sometimes they came when least expected.

The reminiscences of Amanda however serve as 'exposition' to the play's basic motifs and hence a detailed look is necessary. When Amanda was young, she was a vivacious, charming and carefree young girl fond of jonquil flowers. She was admired by a large number of eligible young sons of plantation owners who courted her in true gentlemanly style. Once the whole horde of seventeen callers descended upon her house and chairs had to be called from the nearby rectory. The memory of her past glory has stuck to her middle aged years and provided a lot of sustenance and joy, especially in view of her drab present life. And praising herself for succeeding in keeping the attentions of the young men riveted upon herself, she recalls that girls in those days were excellent conversationalists "They knew how to entertain their gentlemen callers.... also needed to have a nimble wit and tongue to meet all occasions." Laura, is thus encouraged to emulate her mother, but ironically the whole episode ends with Laura feeling worse at not being as popular as her mother was in Blue Mountain. Tom utters a groan of despair, and the scene dims as Laura confesses that she will probably be an old maid.

### Scene-II

It is several days later, Laura seated in the living room is busy with her glass figurines when Amanda's footsteps are heard. Laura quickly hides her glass pieces and sits down studying the typewriter keyboard. Amanda tears the chart to pieces and stares hopelessly at Laura. Gradually she unfolds the cause of her distress which lies in her discovery of the truth about Laura not attending classes at Rubicam Business College where she had enrolled for secretarial course. Amanda's hope that her daughter might find a job or a suitor at College are shattered. She is desperate and accuses Laura of "deception".

Laura explains nervously that she became sick and almost fainted when the teacher at the school gave her a typing speed test. She confesses that she lied to her mother about going to school and instead whiled away her time in visiting the museums, movies or sitting idly in the parks. She admits that she could not confront the mother with the truth because, she says, "Mother, when you're disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus' mother in the museum."

The mother cautions her daughter to try and get married in good time and when she is young and attractive. If she continued to live in the world of fantasies with her glass animals, playing old phonograph records which her father left behind when he deserted them, she would end up a spinster. She cautions Laura that the lives of spinsters was the life of dependency and loneliness because they had no source of income of their own. "Little bird like women without any rest--eating the crust of humility all their life!"

In the next episode she asks Laura if she ever liked a boy ever. Laura remembers a boy in high school named Jim who was not only a singer but also a debating hero. Girls tried to get a close look at him while classes changed. When Laura returned after recovering from pleurosis he asked her about her long absence. When she mentioned that she was suffering from pleurosis, he understood it as blue roses. Later at school he always called her Blue Roses. She never met him after school.

Amanda feels that the only way out of Laura's desperate position is her marriage. Laura feels that she will probably not be able to get a husband because she is crippled. The mother forbids her against the use of that word in future because all that Laura suffered from was a minor defect, barely noticeable. She insists that Laura's charm will compensate for her defect and bring her a husband and happiness. Her words are no doubt reassuring for Laura.

### Scene-III

The scene begins with Tom's direct address to the audience, outlining the events that have taken place over the few months. The one such episode has to do with the fiasco at Rubicam Business College where Laura was enrolled. She dropped out, wasted the family's meagre resources, upset the mother more than ever before leading to Amanda's obsession for a husband for Laura. She frantically began to call customers to subscribe to the women's magazine so that with the extra money the house could be decorated to receive a gentleman caller.

After giving the information about the intervening period, Tom re-enters the playing arena as a character. He is severely admonished by the mother for wasting his time in movies, reading the novels by the "insane" D.H. Lawrence, which she says she has returned to the library, and not thinking of his sister Laura and her future. When Tom tries to run away, Amanda orders him to come back and listen to what she has to say.

A few words about Tom's sensitive temperament are necessary here. Tom is a young poet with a job in a shoe factory, a job that means intense hard labour, a mechanical life, not suited to his poetic temper. He dreams of being a great writer but is trapped by his job and finds escape in the fantasy world of novels and movies unavoidable. Amanda however doubts that he visits the theatre halls day after day and feels convinced that he is doing things which he should be ashamed of. This leads to an angry exchange of words and Tom gets up to go to the movies in sheer frustration. Amanda, unable to bear the insolent behaviour of her son, tries to stop him, but Tom leaves her after calling her "an ugly babbling old witch."

Seizing his over coat, he rushes to the door, but because of his anger his arm catches in the sleeve and he rips the coat off, hurling it across the room. It falls on the shelf where Laura keeps her collection of menagerie pieces and break several of her tiny glass animals. Laura who had been overhearing the angry exchange between the mother and the brother is terrified. Her glass menagerie represents her fragile world wherein she found escape, just as the brother found escape in the movies and the mother escaped into her past. The shattering of the glass pieces injures Laura deep down and she cries in agony and pain as if terribly wounded. But both the others are insensitive to her predicament: Tom is fuming with anger while the mother, who always regarded herself a Southern beauty, is too shocked for words at being called an "ugly witch"

Tom who is attached to his sister turns to her weakly in apology. He knows that he has hurt her by his rashness, and feels guilty. He falls on his knees, tries to gather her shattered glass pieces, wants to speak out but his emotion chokes him.

#### Scene-IV

It is five in the morning and "a deep voiced" bell of the nearby church booms to announce the break of dawn. Tom appears slightly intoxicated on the fire escape steps. Laura, who has been waiting for him all night rushes to open the door. Tom is back from an all-night movie show which showed Malvolio the magician performing bizarre tricks, but the one that Tom liked most was the way he got out of a sealed coffin without removing a nail. Tom's fascination for this trick is personal because even he wishes to get out of the coffin he is living in. He says "That is a trick that would come in handy for me- get me out of this 2-by-4 situation!" While in bed, Tom wonders how could one get out of a coffin and as if in answer the portrait of the father lights up. The scene dims out and immediately lights come up as Amanda enters with her usual morning chant of "Rise and Shine."

Tom struggles up at the exhortation but after the night's tiff, both the mother and son do not speak to each other. Amanda feels exasperated at his uncharitable remark and will not speak until Tom apologised. The mother and son face each other in awkward silence until Tom mumbles an apology making Amanda break down into tears. She tells Tom what he has known always: that theirs is a life of misery, unremitting poverty and that she has so far fought a solitary battle to keep the wolf of hunger from their door. She asks him to rise above selfishness and not fail her and the family at this juncture. It is his responsibility to support and see that Laura gets married. Making an emotional appeal she requests him not to follow the father and end up as a drunkard. She tells him that she knows that the shoe company cannot be his final destination; but like everyone in crisis, he too has to make some sacrifices. She has seen him applying in the Merchant Marine and fears that he too would one day desert them, but wants him to hold on till Laura is settled. He might go if he so wished, she adds, but not until they found somebody to take his place. As Tom gets ready to leave Amanda asks him to find a clean-living decent young man to dinner to meet Laura. He should be a non-drinking man suitable for the sister. Tom, to get away from the mother, blurts a hasty "yes" and exits. Amanda is reassured that the morning lecture will bear fruit for them all.

#### Scene-V

It is the evening of the same day and the Wingfields are all at home after supper. Tom rises and steps out onto the fire-escape from where he once again addresses the audience as narrator.

This time the address begins on the need of escape for everyone in those trying times. Across the alley stood the Paradise Dance Hall playing loud dance music. The orchestra relieved the tensions of the dancing couples through fast numbers of waltz or a tango, something that had a slow and sensuous rhythm. "Couples would come outside, to the relative privacy of the alley. You could see them kissing behind ash pits and telegraph poles." All around there was hot

swing music, liquor, dance halls, bars and movies and sex "that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief deceptive windows." In other words, people were drowning their insipid lives in escape routes while Tom only fantasised about it. So did Laura and Amanda, in their own ways, because the reality was too terrible to be tolerated. At the conclusion of his speech, Amanda comes out to sit beside him on the landing. There is a moon rising in the sky and they both watch it rising higher. Tom casually mentions to the mother that they were going to have a gentleman caller the next day for dinner. Amanda chides Tom for not informing her as soon as the friend accepted the invitation because that has left Amanda with little time to prepare for the arrival of the first gentleman caller. The windows have to be washed, fresh curtains put up and a score of other little things have to be attended before the arrival is announced. Tom tells his mother not to fuss over Jim but Amanda, in true Southern style, decides to work like a "Turk" to make the place look like a decent home. She asks him probing questions about his name which is Jim O'Connor, who does not drink and an optimistic cheerful person. Tom warns the mother that there are several gentlemen callers who meet the girls whom they do not marry and therefore the fuss was uncalled for. Amanda refuses to listen to reason and goes ahead with preparations. She is sure that Laura will be married soon. Laura is asked to come out and make her own wish from the rising moon. A non-plussed Laura asks her mother what should she wish for. Amanda says hopefully, "Happiness! Good fortune!"

### **Part-II Scene-VI**

Tom reappears as the narrator sharing background information what Jim O'Connor, whom he has known from high school, over six years ago. At that time Jim was the captain of the debating team, president of the senior class, and the glee club and he sang the male lead in the annual light operas. A hero to his class mates, he was voted the student most likely to succeed in life. But life has not doled out any special favours to Jim either, who six years after graduation, is holding a job in the same shoe factory where Tom is employed. He is no better than Tom. We also discover from this background information, that it was Jim who was Laura's favourite in school, and the one who called her "Blue Roses." The scene changes to the interior of the house where Amanda and Laura are awaiting the arrival of the gentleman caller. The house has been decorated all over again to welcome Jim and Amanda has indeed brought about a real transformation by adding a new floor lamp, curtains, covers and sofa pillows. Amanda adjusts the dress of Laura with a critical eye. While Amanda is excited, Laura is trembling with fear of the unknown. The terror enlarges into panic on discovering that her gentleman caller is no other than the same Jim O'Connor she knew and admired in high school. Panic drives her to extreme nervousness and she requests her mother to be excused from the dining table. She will not be able to sit, meet and talk with him. Amanda not realising the terror in the soul of a sensitive girl dismisses the fears and commands that she will open the door when they come.

When the doorbell rings, Laura hides behind the portieres and is literally ordered to open the door. Jim marvels that there were shy girls in that age, too, as the society had changed a lot. He and Tom discuss their hopes and dreams of the future. Jim has a dream just as Tom has his. Jim's burning desire is to succeed to the top post of an executive of an important company. To fulfil this aim in life he has been taking a night course in public speaking to acquire "social poise" and confidence. Tom confides that he too has his plans chalked out and that he might soon quit for Merchant Marine, and that he has paid the dues with the money that should have gone to pay the electricity bill. At this point Amanda appears in the room to meet Jim, wearing an old girlish frock of yellowed voile with a blue silk sash. This was the dress she had worn many years ago in Blue Mountain, Mississippi. She has her hair in ringlets and her girlish vivacity shocks both Jim and Tom. Jim however responds with confidence acquired from public speaking classes and talks about southern charm. Laura is invited to join them at the table. Laura has not at all overcome her fright of this unusual occasion. A storm rages outside and the curtains billow inward. Laura stumbles, supports herself with a chair and Tom rushes to help. Amanda apologises to Jim by saying that Laura has become ill by standing over a hot stone. As rain begins to fall outside, Tom returns to the table. They begin to eat without Laura on the table. All this while Laura, a bundle of nerves cuddles on the sofa, trying to hold back her tears.

### **Scene-VII**

This scene opens half an hour later and the three are seen finishing their dinner. Suddenly the lights in the apartment flicker and go out because of non-payment of the bill. Amanda tries to conceal her embarrassment and lights a candelabrum. She punishes Tom for not paying the bill by washing the dishes in the kitchen. Through this device, she creates an opportunity for Jim and Laura to sit together and talk. The rest of the scene takes place in dim light.



While the mother and the son leave for the kitchen, Jim moves with the candelabrum to the parlour where Laura is lying on the sofa. Jim sits by her side and begins to talk warmly. Jim soon discovers that Laura lacks self-confidence. Soon they discover that they were together in school and she was the same girl he called Blue Roses. Laura confesses that she could not talk to him because of her crippling shyness and self-consciousness about her physical condition, Jim reminds her that people all over the world had their problems and that she was not the only one. Life has a way of treating people and the one who fights and lives on his own terms is the only one who survives. He gives his own example of not succeeding enough to get all that he thought life would give him. And yet he has not thrown hands up in despair. He is still struggling taking lessons in public speaking and radio engineering to forge ahead in his career. In the company of Jim, Laura's shyness begins to fade. Jim asks her about her hobbies and how she spent her time. Laura very tenderly shows him her glass collection of animals, a unicorn which she adores as her favourite among them all. Unable to understand Laura, Jim changes the subject and opens the door to the fire escape. Music from across the alley wafts into the glum atmosphere of the Wingfields and Jim asks Laura to dance with him to the music. Laura is bewildered at the offer in view of her pleurisy. Jim gives her a strong lecture on what she suffers from – the inferiority complex – and from what she needs to come out of. He tells her to ignore the small defect in her leg and cultivate and concentrate on the talents and qualities she possesses. Laura, carried away by the proposal rises and gets ready to dance even as she protests that she has never danced before. Nevertheless Jim takes her into his arms and begins to dance, even though clumsily.

While dancing, they bump against the table where the glass unicorn stood. It falls on the floor and its horn is broken off. While Jim apologises for his mistake, Laura reassures him that it was not a major tragedy. "I'll just imagine, he had an operation. The horn was removed to make him feel less – freakish." She adds that while the unicorn with a horn on his forehead was different from the others, but now after the removal of horn he would feel at home with all the other horses. Thus Laura laughs away the loss of her favourite little unicorn. Jim holds her in his arms and kisses her gently on the mouth. This is Laura's first kiss ever from a man and she sits down dazed on the sofa with emotion of joy all over her.

Jim embarrassed by his own impulsive action, tells Laura about his own life. He confesses that he is engaged to be married to Betty and that he had hidden the news even from friends. He was unable to make any promises of a future visitor even a call though he would very much like to be close to her. Jim goes on to talk about the power of love and how the girl he is going to marry has changed his life. Laura realises to her dismay that her first gentleman caller was engaged to someone else. But it is here that the change is seen in her. Instead of being heart-broken or angry, she shows new found confidence. She takes the little glass unicorn and places it firmly in Jim's hand. She tells him she wants him to keep it as a memento from her for their meeting.

Amanda enters, talking gaily, carrying a pitcher of fruit punch and a plate of macaroons. Jim announces that he must leave and that he will not be able to call in future because he is engaged to a girl whom he admires. While Amanda is shocked, she quickly gathers herself and wishes Jim luck, success and happiness in future.

After Jim's departure, Amanda is furious with Tom for playing a cruel joke on them, by bringing home another girl's fiancée for his own sister. While Tom in a very apologetic tone tries to assuage the hurt by pleading ignorance about the engagement, the mother's angry outburst continues. Tom has no way but to run to the movies – his only escape.

Tom reappears as the narrator before the audience. While he talks, Amanda and Laura are inside the living room talking. Amanda seems to be confronting Laura for the disaster. The mother's anxiety ridden words can no longer be heard but the sweet smile of Laura trying to please her mother by rallying around and putting the embarrassment behind them.

Tom informs the audience that he has left home since that episode. Life at the shoe factory was unbearable – the atmosphere at home was extremely discomforting. He tried to pour forth his misery in the form of a poem written on the lid of a shoebox and was fired for it. He has tried to runaway from the coffin like existence without disturbing the nails as the magician did in the magic show. But he has escaped only physically. Mentally he continues to be with Laura, sharing her agony and frustration.

At the end of Tom's speech Laura rises from the sofa in the living room, picks up the candlebrum and blows the candles out, leaving herself and the mother in utter darkness. The ending is not only significant but also symbolic. You must have seen by now that it is an absorbing play. The most important part is its universality. All over the world the young men are restless, irresponsible, and all over the world the relationship between the mother and the daughter is full of mutual care, anxiety and a deep desire to see the other happy.

But this play is not so simple. It raises many questions which shall be handled in the next lessons.

# Critical Analysis of *The Glass Menagerie*

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After gaining acquaintance with the author and the text, we shall now pass on to the critical examination of the play, followed by critical questions that a student has to be well-versed with, when-preparing the text for examination. We shall begin with critical examination of each scene.

The significant point to be noted about *Scene I* and the rest of the play is how the dramatist has unfolded the story. He has "told" or narrated portions through a character which were either untheatrical or unimportant or which formed the background. On the other hand, he has "shown" or dramatised those which formed the crux of the plot, the crucial events, and how he (Tom, the narrator) went through them. In other words, the dramatist has experimented with several techniques that helped in enhancing the dramatic impact and still keeping intact the immediacy of appeal to the audience. By mixing the technique of telling and showing or narrating and dramatising, he has added a unique dimension to the handling of stagecraft.

Apart from this by making Tom both the narrator, as also the character, he has brought us into the guilt-ridden psyche of Tom: his guilt over deserting Laura in particular when probably she needed the brother to share the mounting anguish and tension of the mother. As a result, the play which appears to a lay reader or even a member of the theatre audience as a play about Amanda or about Laura, is in fact about Tom himself.

Another fact that should be noted is the autobiographical content in the play. Tennessee Williams lived his early years in a family which was passing through Depression years and where the father and the mother were perpetually at war. The effect of the harangues between the father and the mother had a traumatic effect on both the growing children. What he has poured forth in the play is the never ending tension that he experienced. The characters, their names and situations have been changed but the haunting effect on the audience is created through charged emotional intensity. Williams has captured not only the anxiety of the mother over her daughter's life but also the brother's bond of affection with his sister has been treated fictionally.

The play also recreates two talented and ambitious young men unable to carve a place for themselves in the society. They are frustrated over the routine life at home, lack of opportunities at place of work and a suffocating life all around. While the two talk of how the days are, there is another male whose photograph adorns the mantle-piece, the father of Tom, who abandoned the family and made good his escape from the family responsibilities. In all critical times, the worst sufferers are always the women, and this play too is a graphic presentation of the misery that the women pass through.

Another critical point that might have struck the student of play, is that every character of the Wingfield family is an escapist. While the father has quietly escaped without any address or information, the mother is constantly escaping into the past. The past provides her with a much sought after refuge, while the present dogs her steps with intolerable insults and difficulties. Laura, unable to bear the incessant instructions of the mother and the formidable world which she feels looks down upon invalids, escapes into the world of her glass pieces. She polishes them, changes their places, continues to talk to them when alone. The glass menagerie is her refuge. Tom, the fourth character, escapes into the world of poetry which he writes in his spare time at the shoe shop. He escapes into fantasy world of movies and theatre every night. Only Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller has been created as a foil character to all these escapists. He is pragmatic, honest, straightforward and optimistic.

The play has been conceived and designated as a memory play. By writing the play as such (i.e. memory play) the playwright has freed himself from all stage conventions, especially the illusion of the removal of the fourth wall. By fusing stage lights, dark here, bright there, blurred when the narrator is talking to the audience and resplendent when the action is going on, high beam on the face of Laura when Amanda is talking, to focus on the former's infinite nervousness, are some of the technical devices which have been used by the playwright to great advantage.

## Critical Commentary (Scene Wise)

Even though Act I Scene I is a short scene, the dramatist has carefully filled it with hints of most of the events which are to follow the scene. The nagging Amanda, the restless Tom, a shy Laura and a smiling father and the anxiously

awaited gentleman caller have all been created in this scene. The scene thus serves as an excellent exposition. In addition, it talks about the mother's anxiety over Laura's shorthand and prepares the reader/audience for the next scene, where Amanda discovers the deception played by the daughter upon the mother. The penury and the difficult circumstances in which the family lived have also been very well captured in the dialogues.

In his opening monologue Tom says that the play is different from the regular mode of playwriting. An ordinary playwright "gives you illusion that has the appearance of the truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion." It implies that ordinarily a dramatist creates a dramatic illusion on the stage which the audience believes to be the portrayal of truth. But this play, by the use of expressionist techniques offers itself as illusory. Williams does not assert that the play is the presentation of reality, instead, it appears to be a distant dramatisation of the truthful situations of life.

### Scene II

It is a direct sequel to the Scene I, where Laura had been told by the mother to stay fresh and pretty for the gentleman callers and to study her keyboard as also practice her shorthand lessons. As the Scene opens we see Laura rapidly hiding her glass figurines when she hears the footsteps of her mother on the stairs. Laura is apprehensive about the deception she has been playing on her mother. She has been leaving the house everyday to go to Rubicam Business College but unable to cope with the strains of work, she has dropped out and has been spending her time elsewhere. Laura is scared that one day the truth will be found out and that day would be disastrous.

Amanda, in this scene, while passing by the College dropped in to enquire how her daughter was doing. She was stunned to know that Laura never attended the College after the first few days. For Amanda it does not only mean loss of precious tuition money, but also of one more effort to see Laura settled as wasted. Amanda has seen how life is for spinsters who live on the mercy of a brother-in-law or a sister-in-law, always "encouraged by in-law to visit another.... little bird like women without any nest—eating the crust of humility all their life."

Amanda in this scene presents a pathetic situation as a concerned mother – concerned over the future of a daughter who is not attractive enough to find a match for herself, especially in the trying times that they live in, where men probably shy away from committing themselves to anyone, much less to a crippled girl with an overwhelming inferiority complex. A realisation that she as a mother will have to step in to find a suitable match for Laura now begins to take shape. The next scene is a direct sequel to the Scene II, where Amanda tells Tom to grow up.

### Scene III

The scene shows desperate Amanda as a player with grit and determination getting ready to solve the problem of Laura's marriage. A striking feature of Amanda's character is that she has remained unnerved in the face of hostile circumstances. Both her husband and her children lack this quality. She is the tough one and as the saying goes "when going gets tough, the tough get going." She seems to devote all her energy to the care of her family, continues to mother them (even though Laura is 27, Tom is 25) and as such when they do not need that much mothering.

Her mothering, therefore, seems smothering to her children. They find her constant anxiety as a perennial source of tension at home. Tom cannot stand his mother and runs away from the mother. Laura is probably the quiet sufferer. It seems logical to conclude that the father too had probably escaped because he could not bear the constant nagging and tongue-lashing from Amanda.

Thus we see Amanda in two profiles: one a doting mother worried about the future of her precious children, working hard to make both ends meet and two a person who is simply detested by her children.

The "over-mothering" of Amanda is seen in her constant instructions about table-manners, about chewing the food before gobbling it down, about reading (and not reading the novels by "the insane" D.H. Lawrence), about going to movies. The daily dose of do's and don'ts makes Tom edgy and he slips away to keep himself out of her range. Sometimes he spends his nights in "whole-night" theatre shows. The effect of excessive love has been deftly portrayed by Williams in this scene.

It is in this scene that Tom calls his mother an "ugly babbling – old – witch" and shouts at her for making life miserable for everyone. By calling her an "ugly babbling old witch" he has not only hurt her maternal feelings but also her self-respect as a Southern belle. She is stunned and stupefied by Tom's outburst and says, "I won't speak to you—until you apologize."

The scene brings the tension at home in the foreground. The goodness of the mother, Amanda feels has been wasted. She has been hurt and insulted by Tom's remark. And probably it is once only in the play that Tom has spoken out his mind about how he views his mother Amanda.

This scene is also significant from the point of view of understanding the deep bond of affection that Tom shares with Laura. When his coat thrown in a fit of anger hits the glass pieces of Laura, she "cries out as if wounded." While Tom cannot stand his mother, he cannot stand hurting his sister. His anger subsides in a minute and gets converted into infinite regret and guilt at having hurt Laura. "Tom stares at her stupidly for a moment. Then he crosses to the shelf. Drops awkwardly on his knees to collect the fallen glass, glancing at Laura as if he would speak but could not."

The scene reveals that the two regard themselves as the helpless victims of not only the situation that lies around them in the family set up, but also the situation of anxiety that the mother has created in the house. In their suffering they are together, and there exists a deep sense of attachment between Tom and Laura, which is some relief indeed. Tom's desire to apologise and to communicate, his frustration at the situation all around himself, is touching indeed. Inability to communicate becomes the major theme of the play. The three major characters are seen to have created their own worlds for themselves. Inability to come out of these into the world of reality is the crux of the play. Amanda lives in the world of her past youth with her numerous admirers. Laura lives with her glass figurines, as fragile as herself while Tom lives in the world beyond the crippling tensions of his immediate family, far away from the sentimental attachment for Laura and nauseating nostalgia of Amanda. The world of neither is real nor can they explain the hankering after the unreal in their lives.

Scene IV shows Tom's desire to pursue his goal of escape from the trap the mother has laid for him. Tom is a young poet, romantic at heart, bored with the humdrum existence around himself and desperately needing something he could live upon. The feat of the magician in the magic show last night he sat through, has provided him with a metaphor of his existence and also a way to get away from it. The magician's remarkable achievement lay in the trick that he had himself boxed inside the coffin in full view of the public and then escaped without disturbing a nail.

Tom sees his existence at home comparable with living suffocated inside the coffin. He is eager to make good his escape like the magician without hurting his family, his mother and his sister in particular. In this he wishes to follow in the footsteps of his father: get away and begin his life all over again, forget the worries of the family, anxieties about seeing the sister married and the mother well-provided. But at the end of the play though he follows the magician by performing the trick of disappearance, his conscience pricks him: he feels guilt over his selfishness, and feels sorry for his sister in particular.

Another noteworthy point in this scene is that while Tom wishes to escape by performing a trick, the mother wishes to keep him tied down by laying the sentimental trap on him. As soon as Tom apologises to his mother for calling her a "babbling old witch," she makes him feel even worse by showing how her devotion to the children had been mis-interpreted as nagging and harrasing by the latter. This had humiliated her as she appeared hateful to her children. Tom sits with down-cast eyes listening quietly to what Amanda says. She puts him in a double-bind situation in the name of Laura, family ties, her marriage, their poverty and to which he would not be contributing by planning to join the merchant marine.

The scene shows that Tom, the poet, has stars in his eyes, seeks life of love, adventure and romance in a far-away land, and not be destroyed by a cramped-up existence in the store and at his apartment. He wishes to follow what every young man would like to, the life of instincts, while she advises him to be more responsible, rational and devoted. She views instinct as bestial and vulgar. The debate between the mother and son thus proceeds on predictable lines: between instinct and duty, between base and the higher values of life.

The next scene shows that the mother's lecture has had the desired effect. Tom has asked one of his colleagues over dinner, without informing him about the fact that he was to meet the former's sister. The mother's head begins to buzz with plans for the gentleman caller, while it drives Laura to nervousness. In the frenzied excitement over the impending visit of a youngman, Amanda behaves as if all her wishes had been answered. She feels as if the most wished for, the marriage of Laura, was bound to happen soon. In her state of mind, she ignores Laura and her anxiety, making the young girl even more pathetic than before. Laura who has never had a male friend or a gentleman caller may be

because she was shy or inferiority complexed, needs reassurance from the mother in this hour of crisis – crisis because she views it as one. It is one situation where her mind and charms are going to be tested, her physique is going to be exposed. She fears rejection and a severe tongue lashing from the mother immediately after.

In the process of her preparation, Amanda ignores that the name Jim O'Connor means that the gentleman caller expected is an Irishman and a Roman Catholic. In the Southern genteel tradition, Protestants marrying Roman Catholics was not generally acceptable. Amanda however is more interested in the knowledge whether the prospective gentleman-caller consumed alcohol. This fear emanates from her personal life because her husband was a drunkard and if Jim was not an alcoholic, probably everything else could be ignored.

While Amanda turns a blind eye to Jim's Catholic origins she is just too keen to ignore the facts about her daughter's physical problems, and wishes that even the gentleman-caller would do so. When Tom refers to Laura as crippled, Amanda sharply defends her. Realistic evaluation of a situation or a person is not the mother's forte – she must see everything with her own coloured glasses. Tom's assessment here is more down to earth and pointed. He knows that Laura is not only un-attractive because of her physical handicap, she is a worse case because of her reclusive tendency. She avoids social contact, remains confined within her room and also within herself. She continues to play old phonograph records on her Victrola and remains busy with the little glass figurines she has collected. Her glass menagerie is not only her main preoccupation; it is also an apt metaphor for her mental condition. She is seen as fragile as the glass pieces, as lifeless and as vulnerable, needing protection and care all the time.

Part II Scene VI of the play is all about the fuss over the visit of the gentleman caller. Amanda works like a Turk – completely rejuvenated and bubbling with energy to renovate the house and deck it up for the momentous event. Tom tries to dissuade her and Laura seems to evade getting dragged into either the preparations or discussions about the gentleman-caller, Amanda's excitement knows no bounds. To Amanda, it appears to be an opportunity to pack off Laura finally and be free from the onerous responsibility, of having an unmarried handicapped daughter at home.

However in her excitement she does things which are inexplicable. The first such act is Amanda's confusion over how the gentleman caller is to be welcomed. While Laura goes to pieces out of nervous anxiety, Amanda dishes out from her box of clothes, the dress she wore when as a young girl she was surrounded by a large number of eligible bachelors, all her admirers. They brought her jonquils, the flowers she was fond of, and listened to her talk with gusto and vivacity. She was the cynosure of all eyes. The dress she wears now is the one she wore when she met her husband, Laura's father, and completes the picture by wearing a blue sash. She laughs girlishly and seems to be enjoying the idea of a gentleman-caller, quite forgetting the discomfiture of Laura, and also forgetting that the caller was for the daughter and not for herself. The scene vividly reveals Amanda's fixation on her glorious days of youth when she was so much sought after by admirers all around.

Because this scene precedes the most crucial scene of the encounter between Laura and Jim, the former's curiosity about the visitor is understandable. It is however casually mentioned that the visitor is Jim O'Connor, the boy Laura had a crush on in school. Laura wishes to be excused from meeting him but Amanda would not tolerate any such "silliness." She pushes two powder-puffs into her bra so that her figure looks attractive and orders her peremptorily that she shall open the door when the bell rings. Laura is a nervous wreck when she opens the door and then quickly limps back to her phonograph records. The scene shows that the mother is pushing Laura into a situation for which the daughter is not prepared. The shy, scared, inferiority-complexed Laura is happy to be where she is – in her own world which does not make demands upon her, the glass animals, the phonograph records rather than get into a world where her beauty, physique and her mind will all be on test. She is not prepared for any exposure.

Scene VII is the last scene of the play. The much awaited but always expected visitor has arrived, supped and departed. The details of the episode must be fresh in your mind from the previous lesson.

Amanda is at her ebullient best as a host. She so warmly welcomes the guest of honour that Jim feels embarrassed. She talks on trying to make the guest comfortable, cheers him up with a drink and indulges in small talk. She is so much in control of the entire situation that even when the lights go out suddenly she carries on without feeling distracted. In order to leave Jim alone with Laura, she calls Tom into the kitchen to lend her a helping hand.

The scene gives us a peep into the side of Laura for which we have not been prepared. A girl dismissed by the family

as shy and dependent, begins to respond to Jim in a matter of minutes. Her personality comes alive as an individual, warm, gentle, decent and affectionate. In comparison with her mother she stands out as a person capable of talking well and responding in an affable manner.

This scene, in fact, is overtly about the self-confident Jim O'Connor. But it is about Laura no less, because the focus all along is on her and her response to what Jim says. Having known Jim from school, she need not talk to him as she would to a stranger. They exchange pleasantries and soon begin to talk about school days where Jim was so bright that miracles were expected of him. She shows her glass menagerie with a lot of interest explaining fascination for the unicorn, an animal which had a horn on its forehead and was known for its reclusive nature and 'shyness'. Legends have it that a unicorn would inhabit thick forests and could be tamed only by a virgin, probably because it felt some sense of rapport with her. The hunters would then take it away as captive. Laura's love for the unicorn probably stems from the fact that she probably views the animal as a metaphor for her own predicament. Like the unicorn which is a freak creature because it has a horn on its forehead which no other animal has, Laura too is freakish, aloof, shy and lonely. She loves the unicorn also because it is delicate like herself and she keeps it with lot of care.

When Jim dances with Laura in order to revive her self-confidence, and to reassure her that she is as normal as any other girl, a small accident takes place in which the unicorn falls off from the table and its horn gets separated from its body. Laura utters a muffled scream as if she was hurt personally. Jim apologises profusely but the damage has been done. But a surprise is in store for the audience. Instead of crying over the loss of her favourite unicorn, Laura smiles and tells him, "It's no tragedy, Freckles. Glass breaks so easily. No matter how careful you are." (p.303) The meeting with Freckles (nickname of Jim in school) has been so overwhelming that Laura forgives him immediately and hands over her favourite piece to him as a souvenir. "I'll just imagine that he had an operation. The horn was removed to make him feel less freakish." The lines are not so much about the glass piece as about herself. After meeting Jim, a dance with him, an intimate and frank conversation and a kiss on the lips all go to make Laura feel dazed. She has never had an encounter with a man in the past. It appears that after this encounter she will come out of her crippling shyness, become less freakish, and begin to participate in life in a more forthright way.

The play concludes, with Tom's fond reminiscences of Laura and mother Amanda. He has boundless affection for the sister in particular and feels for her trapped predicament. After the father and Tom have left, Amanda's endless harangues would be enough to keep Laura in throes of perennial anxiety. He has deserted home much like the father did but Laura haunts him, "Oh Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be." He knows he has been selfish but he does not know a way out to salvage Laura from the life she has been leading. Unable to find a way out he says to his sister who is far away from him, to blow out her candles as there is no hope for her. The play seems to end on a terribly hopeless note.

But with the breakage of the unicorn's horn, the play seems to end on a symbolic note of hope that Laura will grow out of her freakish existence and become normal in the years to come.

# The Glass Menagerie

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After acquiring thorough familiarity with the text, it is appropriate that we move into the critical areas. In this lesson the emphasis shall be on the discussion of short answer questions based mainly on the textual information. It is advisable therefore to go through the previous lessons with an open mind to receive information so that the understanding of what follows is easier.

## I. Background of *The Glass Menagerie*

As to the physical location given by the playwright, the play takes place in "an alley in St. Louis," where the father had brought his family to settle down from down South. He was a genial, carefree man who worked for the telephone company while the family lived in a small house. Because the family was from the South, a predominantly agricultural area, their adjustment in the North, which is predominantly industrial, has been difficult. While they lived in open spaces in the South, the Wingfield apartment here is in the rear of the building," says the first sentence of the play. Instead of a regular front entrance, the apartment "is entered by a fire escape", which means back entrance. The location and setting of the play immediately makes the reader conscious of the poverty and low middle class status of the family. After the physical background, a look at the familial background is also needed.

In the house live three of the family now - Amanda, the mother is in her early fifties, Laura is 24 while Tom is 22. The father has already deserted the family. "He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distance." "He sent picture postcard from Mazatlan, Mexico, with two words A 'Hello - Goodbye". And that was the last the family heard from him. But his photograph adorns the mantelpiece – photograph of a smart smiling man.

Amanda has bravely taken up the challenge of earning for her growing children. The times are bad, the economic depression of 1930s does not give them a peaceful life.

The economic background of the play reveals that there was unemployment and as a result frustration among the youngsters. Life all around was such that it did not offer any cheer to anyone in the play.

## II. What is the role and the significance of the absent father in *The Glass Menagerie*

*The Glass Menagerie* has four characters who act upon the stage. These are Amanda, the mother, Laura her young eligible unmarried daughter, Tom her poet son and Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller. Apart from these four, a fifth character dominates the action ironically through his absence. He is Amanda's husband, who left the family in the lurch in the most trying times of the economic depression. He was a smart handsome man, who Amanda recalls, had a lot of charm about him. He worked for the telephone company and fell in love with long distance. He left the family without any address and the family had no way of looking out for him.

He was a handsome man and if one were to believe Amanda's account of her hey day when as a young beauty she was crowded around by numerous suitors (plantation owners mainly who carried her favourite jongsuls for her), it was this man she selected out of the crowd. She is now terribly hurt that he has deserted her and the family.

She misses him and her youthful days because whatever happiness she has known is a matter of past now. The husband's desertion among other things has also proved that she was no longer attractive so as to keep his flame of love alive. It has added misery to her life because growing children and the bad economic conditions have been an endless strain on her meagre resources. In addition to these is the factor of little fellow feeling in the industrialised St. Louis town while life in the agrarian South was full of fun, frolic and human warmth. The absent father is thus a constant source of emotional hurt and pain to Amanda, and a reminder that she has lost her youthful charm.

While she fell for a handsome man who did not have a settled aristocratic status that other gentleman callers who courted her had, she wants her daughter not to repeat her mother's mistake and choose her future carefully and realistically. The absent father thus indirectly motivates her to plan a sensible future for Laura. As a result, Amanda wants a practical and down-to-earth man for her daughter.

She is repeatedly upset by noticing the escapist tendencies in her son, which she believes, he has inherited from the father. Tom's dreamy poetic temperament and casual attitude towards life disturb her and she counsels him

to take life seriously and be responsible towards the family. The absent father stands as a model and she wants the son to be different from him.

Tom on the other hand, feels emotionally close to his runaway father. He has a feeling that the mother's habit of nagging at all times has driven him away. Tom revolts and runs away to escape from the mother's constant lectures and remonstrance, much like the father did probably. But while the father forgot all about his family once he left them, Tom is unable to forget them, especially his sister.

For Tom, the father does not represent irresponsibility – instead, he represents romance – adventure into new areas, and not getting trapped or bogged down by hurdles in life. Tom's final escape becomes like it was for the father, assertion of individuality and independence.

Laura however is the worst sufferer of the father's desertion. She has not only lost a parent's love and affection, she has, in addition, to suffer her mother's repressed sexuality, issuing forth in the form of constant harangues. While other characters in the play have a way to escape outward, Laura has to escape inward, into the bedroom, to the glass menagerie, to the victrola, to the life which offers no mitigation. The father's absence thus affects Laura's life, her present as also her future in the worst way. It appears she-out of all the Wingfields – will always be a constant sufferer of the wilful and irresponsible desertion by her father.

### **III. Comment briefly on the role and significance of Tom**

Tom's character needs to be understood at two levels – as a narrator, and as a character in the play. First, Tom as a narrator. Because the play comes to us from Tom's memory, the play shows the other characters, situations and conditions as seen or felt by him. The play shows that he like his father is a deserter, he too has run away from the family responsibility, and through the play he tries to justify his position. The play in other words dramatises his self defense. Through the play we gather that he was a sensitive young man trapped in unpleasant familial circumstances and had to get away to find a breathing space for himself.

As a narrator Tom introduces the characters, describes the location of the house, the drab interiors, the monotonous life, the obsessive nature of his mother and the pathetic condition of his sister. He has already escaped (run away) from his family, and has joined the Merchant Marine, but regrets that he has been unable to forget them whom he has deserted. In the play, therefore he stands at the fire escape, prepares us like the chorus, for what is to follow, then joins the action and later comments upon it. As a narrator, he takes liberties with time, turns the clock backwards at will and in place of realism, he gives only illusion of reality.

As a character, Tom is described as "a poet with a job in the warehouse". Because the job is incompatible with his poetic temperament, he feels suffocated. But life at home is also not conducive to his desires. If in order to escape the monotony, he reads novels by D.H. Lawrence, he gets a shout from the mother. If he goes to movies or theatre shows, his mother taunts him for being irresponsible. The mother's incessant babbling about table manners, social and family responsibilities, her own youthful days in Blue Mountain make him sick. He sympathises with Laura but does not know how to help her. At the end of the play he is full of guilt but feels he has done right by escaping from the trap of his mother and family. Tom, endowed with a rich poetic and romantic temperament needed to escape from the mundane life of home. The play dramatises his conflict between a life of his own choice away from St. Louis or remaining by the side of the family. He chooses to live his own life in his own style but knows that by spurning family responsibilities he has been selfish. The play ends on an ambiguous note, showing both his guilt at his desertion, his nostalgia for home and his futile attempt at justifying his action.

### **IV. Who do you think is the central character of *The Glass Menagerie*?**

There are three main characters around whom the play revolves. The gentleman caller is the outsider whose brief visit is a source of commotion and conflict in the play but he cannot be considered as the central character. The absent father too is out of consideration.

Laura can very easily be considered a fit case of the protagonist or the central character. 'She is the girl of the title - the glass menagerie which she owns and maintains and which is as fragile and sensitive as she herself is. Most of the action is concerned with her. Amanda is worried about her future and Tom at the end of the play is guilty at having deserted her. She is the one who suffers most from all the misery that befalls the family. She is crippled in one leg, is



unpopular among boys, has no friends and does not go out with anyone. She remains alone, at home with her glass figurines, alone at a park bench or a museum, not sharing her agony with anyone. Suffering from an inferiority complex because of her pleurisy, she remains confined within herself. She is aware that her mother is anxious about her. She gets love from none, and she showers her own on the glass pieces. She is a pathetic case, to whom everything happens. She does nothing herself.

At another level, the play's protagonist could be Amanda. It is she who is talking or in action most of the time. She is anxious about her children finding proper place in the society. She wants them to "rise and shine". She infuses higher values in Tom and tries to reassure Laura. She is herself brave and strong and never admits defeat in the worst of circumstances. After the husband's desertion she has bravely brought up the two children on meagre resources.

Tom, however, is a strong contender for the central character's position. It is he who controls the action as a narrator and participates in it as a character. We see the mother and the sister Laura from his point of view. The play is neither about Laura's pathetic condition nor about Amanda's domineering nature, it is about Tom's guilt, at not being able to rise to the situation and become the mainstay of the family. It is his guilt that makes him the hero of the play. But because he is too weak to be a hero, he can at best be described as the antihero – but he is the central character of the play.

### **V. Comment briefly on the theme of *The Glass Menagerie***

Though there are several themes of the play *The Glass Menagerie*, two however stand out prominently. The first is the destruction of beauty and innocence in an insensitive and cruel world. Almost all the characters fall into the category of the beautiful and the innocent. Tom is a poet whose dreams of a world full of romance and freshness make him sick of the surroundings in St. Louis. The family hails from the South which was known for its warmth in human relationships, while the North especially the industrialised St. Louis – lacks in fellow feeling. The theme of the play is the inability of the Southern family (representing fragile beauty) to cope with the strain of life imposed upon them by the economic conditions on the one hand and the social on the other. In this cruel world, creatures such as Laura need protection which is nowhere to be found.

The second theme of the play is the opposite of the first theme: how those who cannot cope with the reality escape into illusions. Amanda, for instance continues to live in the past when at Blue Mountain, she was the most desirable girl around. Her continuous reminiscences of one episode where seventeen gentleman callers called on her the same evening with her favourite jonquil flower bunches makes her giddy on the memory of her fabulous youthful days which she makes others sick. That her illusions become the part of her reality is seen when the gentleman caller Jim calls on Laura. To the amazement of all around, Amanda dresses up in her yellow voile frock and blue silk sash of the days when she was courted by her own gentleman callers. Tom too is a victim of his own illusions about success in the world of adventure and romance. He writes his poems on shoe boxes trying to escape the monotony of the warehouse, and while at home by reading novels or escaping to movies. The Merchant Marine is also his dream which he fulfils by running away from his responsibilities at home. As to Laura, she remains inside her house talking to her lonely glass figurines or at the park bench. Each character is lost in his or her illusions. Only Jim O'connor is rooted in reality. He provides a contrast. He is ambitious and is working hard to achieve his goals. He was a great success until high school but has not been able to find his level. But he has not given up. He takes lessons in public speaking and is determined to strike it big one day, somewhere. He is inspired by the ideals of American Dream.

The play shows the momentous importance of illusions in human life. Illusions are the ego defence mechanisms: when everything in the real life fails to provide support, the human being takes recourse to illusions. If illusions were not there to hold on to, the man would certainly fall to pieces.

### **VI. How does *The Glass Menagerie* comment on the American Dream**

To answer this question, it is well to begin with a brief note on American Dream. America is a land of immigrants where people arrived from all parts of the world but arrived empty handed with a resolve to succeed in the new land. The dream they all had was of success of making it big even when the pockets were empty and there was nothing to invest except what they had - native intelligence, unflagging enthusiasm, infinite self-confidence. The immigrants who succeeded had patience, perseverance and lots of luck. They rose from rags to riches, reached the top because that

is what their aim was. The American dream thus can be defined as a desire to succeed at whatever cost, it is the name of an attitude in which never-say-die is the most prominent motto. Among others who succeeded have been Horatio Alger, Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller and so on.

*The Glass Menagerie* is however a bitter comment on the American Dream. While the American Dream has its positive aspects, it has its negative side too. The first and foremost item to be lost in this mad race to succeed is the fellow feeling and human warmth. This reached its nadir, the lowest point, during the depression years. In their desire to succeed at whatever cost, nobody wanted to be saddled with the burden of the family - much less so if the family comprised a crippled marriageable girl. The father deserted the family and the son followed in his footsteps, leaving the family of mother and daughter to fend for themselves in those difficult times. The Great American dream makes people selfish and makes them think only in terms of money and power rather than human needs and relations. Jim in Scene 7, is also running after the American dream. He believes in himself, in his potential to rise and shine and be counted among the stars. It is about the positive aspects of the American Dream that he teaches Laura - self-confidence, positive outlook, dedication to a higher goal and not accepting defeat as the final end of all efforts.

The American dream thus has a double meaning in *The Glass Menagerie*. While it has a positive meaning for all those who are capable of striving, it puts unnecessary strain on those who lack potential because of either poverty or lack of opportunity. Laura and Amanda fall in the second category - that of victims of the American Dream while the other three (including the father) fall in the category of those who chase this myth.

### **VII. Portrayal of the Past and Present in *The Glass Menagerie***

*The Glass Menagerie* is a unique play in which the past constantly interferes with the present and is, at times, more powerful than the present.

Tom stands in the present, far away from home, and recalls his past life at home. After living a miserable life at home and a claustrophobic existence at the warehouse, he has escaped physically, joined the Merchant Marine, but has not been able to free himself of what he has done, and from those he has left behind. The entire play therefore takes place in his memory, and he is both a character and the narrator of the play.

Amanda is another, who unable to find anything valuable or attractive in the present, is fixated on the past. Though her husband, who worked with the telephone company, brought her from the predominantly agriculturist South to live in the industrialised city of St. Louis, she has not been able to forget her life back in the Blue Mountain. Life at the father's home laid a lot of emphasis on table manners, personal appearances, leading a staid quiet life in open green spaces, and accepting respect and admiration from gentlemen callers. Going to parties, and looking forward to the next ones, meeting and dancing with young men comprised the most exciting part of life for girls. Amanda selected her groom out of the bunch but life has not been what she wanted. Her husband has deserted her casting a question mark on her beauty and desirability. Her son works as a warehouse clerk at 65 dollars a week, while her daughter is not the typical desirable Southern belle, a girl who is too shy temperamentally and a cripple physically. Amanda herself leads a difficult life selling magazine subscriptions on telephone and has worked in departmental stores.

She tries to instill the values of South into her children and has to make compromises with the hard life at every turn. The worst compromise she makes without a whimper, is when she allows Jim O'Connor, an Irishman, a Catholic by religion, and a man who is spurred by the very same impersonal commercialism that Amanda despises, to come courting her daughter as first gentleman caller. She overlooks that he too like her son is a shipping clerk in the warehouse and not the scion of a genteel family or the son of a plantation farmer. Though she lives in her past all the time, she is aware that she is running away from it, trying to live in the present, but cannot. Her past is too strong a force to be silenced out of her mental existence.

### **VIII. *The Glass Menagerie* and the unicorn as symbols**

*The Glass Menagerie*, on the literal level is a collection of glass pieces or figurines that Laura has collected. These glass pieces with which she keeps herself occupied all the time, comprise animals fabricated in glass. She has a large collection of them. Whenever she is alone, she talks to these animals, keeps them out in the sun, so that they get their daily quota of sunshine, and changes their positions so that they do not get bored by staying in one place.

Among them, the unicorn is one animal she is extremely fond of. The unicorn is a mythological animal believed to

have existed in the forests of Europe. The animal was extremely shy and remained in the thickest parts of the forests, away from the eyesight of human and the animal world. It was much sought after by hunters and by the royal households. It is believed that it could not be tamed or captured by ordinary methods. In order to capture it a hunter had to take a young, beautiful maiden into the forest. The animal would then come out of the thick groves and lay its head in her lap and would be captured. The unicorn was thus a freak animal and led a reclusive life. Its behaviour is thus similar to that of Laura who remains isolated from the world at large. The glass menagerie represents the world of big and small creatures: whereas each one has a place for oneself, it is only the freaks who have no room in it. Laura is as fragile and sensitive and as freakish as her glass unicorn.

The play however shows a change in the unicorn at the end and it is there that the symbol becomes complicated. When Jim proposes to dance with Laura, his foot hits the table, and the unicorn's horn is gone the moment it falls off. The horn on its forehead made it a freak animal, and with the horn gone it looks like any other, not freakish at all. While critics have interpreted it as a disaster for Laura whose favourite piece is shattered meaning more misfortunes, I have a different opinion. Just as the unicorn after the fall looks less freakish, so Laura after her interaction with Jim, and encouragement regarding building self-confidence, will come out and face the world boldly. So at the end there is hope for Laura. Tennessee Williams has shown this ray of hope symbolically. The way Laura presses her favourite glass piece into the hands of Jim as a memento of their meeting that evening clearly shows that she will be able to take courage in both hands and restart her life. She says to Jim that the breakage of the horn is nothing to be sorry for. "It is no tragedy, Freckles." She calls him by his school nickname, rising and rises to the occasion and even takes his confession about his engagement to Betty sportingly. The change thus is evident in Laura's personality.

### IX. The Gentleman Caller as a Symbol

The gentleman caller serves as an important symbol in *The Glass Menagerie*. The term was common in the South of the United States where genteel, well-bred girls dressed up in their finery stayed at home and welcomed young men like perfect future ladies. The girls met the young men, out of the four walls of their house, only at parties or ball room dances where they impressed and charmed the eligible sons of the delta farmers. The boys later visited the girls at their homes. This was how the conservative Southern farmers allowed their daughters to accept the courtship of their admirers. Going out (or modern dating) was out of question. The girls improved upon their table manners, hair do, dresses and vied with girls of the neighbourhood for more and more attention. The number of boys who courted girls determined her popularity and gave her reassurance of her future life. Amanda was one such Southern belle who received attention from as many as seventeen gentlemen callers on one evening, and extra chairs had to be called in from the nearby rectory.

In comparison, Laura has had no gentleman caller, showing her unpopularity and lack of feminine charm. Every evening the mother reminds Laura to dress up for the gentleman callers. Tom as narrator tells us that the idea of getting a gentleman caller for Laura began to play a more and more important part in their household. The image of a gentleman caller haunted her, and a day rarely passed without some allusion to "this image, this spectre, this hope." The gentleman caller symbolises a much hoped for change, a relief, someone who will come and transform their fate. Someone who is always waited for but rarely comes down. When Jim O'Conner's arrival is announced there is a lot of preparation to be undertaken, which Amanda does with all the dexterity at her command. She has not forgotten how gentleman callers were welcomed in Blue Mountain. While Laura goes to pieces out of nervousness for the gentleman caller, Amanda is terribly excited and wears the yellow voile frock of her youthful days. She quite forgets that the gentleman caller is for Laura and not for herself. Her excitement at the arrival of a gentleman caller, so long after in her life, even as her husband has deserted her, seems to give her an explicable kick. She is on a high at the arrival of a gentleman caller in her house. It is a touching, comic-tragic situation, portrayed with compassion by Tennessee Williams.

### X. Handling of the Expressionist Technique in The Glass Menagerie

Expressionism as a movement began in arts in 1910 and influenced all branches of expression including literature. In expressionism, the emphasis is on expressing that which is inside us, it is "the subjective view of subjective reality."

Expressionist technique became popular after it was adopted by August Strindberg, a Swedish playwright. It entered the U.S. theatre with Eugene O'Neill's plays like *The Hairy Ape* and *Emperor Jones*.

Expressionist technique focuses on the inner reality of human beings, not the tip but the hidden part of the iceberg. The expressionist technique is thus close to uncovering the psychological layers of a character's role in order to arrive at the hidden truth. Expressionist technique shocks the audience and is different from the normal stage presentation. *The Glass Menagerie* is a play which makes use of the expressionist technique in a number of ways. The first and foremost is that because the play is said to be a memory play, taking place in the mind of Tom, the past and the present are fused, and often dislocated. Secondly, because the play comes to us from the memory of Tom, all that he hated or loved is exaggerated - nothing is real, all is brought forth from within. Amanda is therefore presented as a sweet mother now and a babbling witch awhile after. The reader is never sure which view is correct and final. The next point is the use of light and shades. Because the play is memory, everything is blurred; hence the play is not acted in full lights. Tom stands on the fire escape stairs in dimlight, and speaks to the audience. The lights go out when the gentleman-caller comes calling and at the end of the play Laura even blows out the candles. The fourth significant feature of the expressionist technique is the handling of the sound and music from the streets heard in the play. Throughout the day and night the noise from the dance hall across the street continues to resound in the house providing some relief and life in the dreamy, dull and silent house of Amanda. Another feature of expressionist technique is the use of contrasts, which is seen in the play. While Amanda is full of life and active almost all the time, Laura is shy, reserved and withdrawn. While Tom wastes his time in movies and theatres, Jim takes lessons in public speaking and has desires to make it big some day. While Tom hides his plans, Jim is open and forthright: he tells Laura that he is engaged and she should not expect to see him or hear from him in future. While each of them is a victim of their circumstances, Jim provides a sharp contrast to the Wingfield family as an optimist who is working hard and waiting for the right opportunity.

### **XI. Laura's Meeting with the Gentleman caller**

The gentleman caller is the most expected character in *The Glass Menagerie*. When he finally arrives several important changes take place. This answer can be divided into two parts: preparations before the arrival of the gentleman caller and events during his visit.

As soon as Tom informs his mother that he has asked a friend who works at the warehouse to dinner the next day, Amanda goes into a tizzy. Her first reaction is to find out whether he drinks, second his name, and third his job. Her next complaint is that Tom did not inform her telephonically the moment he accepted the invitation. She changes the curtains, the sofa covers and works "like a Turk" to give the house a new decor for the visit, first ever visit of a gentleman caller in years. Just before the arrival of the gentleman caller, she inserts two powder puffs into the bra of Laura because the latter is flat chested and she tells Laura that a high breast is more attractive. She calls the powder puffs "gay deceivers", meant to create illusion of beauty. It is quite another matter that Laura feels uncomfortable with them, as well as the idea of deceiving, and throws the powder puffs out when she goes to open the door for the gentleman caller. During the meeting with the gentleman caller, Laura excuses herself initially and withdraws into another room. While the mother is at her vivacious best, Laura is a nervous wreck. A little later she is invited to come out and talk to Jim. While Amanda asks Tom to help in the kitchen, Laura and Jim go into the living room with the candles. Laura surprisingly opens up and begins to talk without hesitation. She is no longer bashful or shy and knowing Jim was her class fellow in school whom she admired, she talks without any encumbrances. She shows him her glass menagerie, her victrola and offers her school book for Jim's autograph. When Jim asks her for a dance she hesitates for a while but soon submits to his wish. They dance for a while and during the dance the unicorn falls off. The unicorn has been Laura's favourite piece but she does not scream or sigh at the loss of its horn. She says that it would look like other horses as if it had undergone operation to remove the irksome horn on the forehead. It will be less freakish, she says, and "it is no tragedy, freckles." During this brief encounter Jim gives her some tips in building self confidence which she hears gratefully. It is her first encounter where a man is giving full attention to her as a person and responding to her psychological problems in a sympathetic way with understanding. When he tells her that he is engaged to Betty and would not call in future, she is not upset. She probably counts her blessings in that she at least met a man in the privacy of her house who addressed her most intimate problems.

During the encounter with the gentleman caller we get to see a more natural Laura, who is not shy and reserved all the time. We understand that it is because of the mother who dominates the house and all the situations, leaving no room for anyone else to grow or to interact, that Laura has not been able to develop into a confident person

## **XII. Amanda as a Mother**

Amanda as a mother in *The Glass Menagerie* has been a subject of discussion. The critics have not arrived at a consensus about her role in the life of the other characters in the play. She has been regarded on the one hand a loving and doting mother, selfless to the core, always anxious for the welfare of her family, home and children. On the other hand, she has been described as an over-anxious, nagging and domineering mother, responsible for driving everyone in the house crazy. It is because of her relentless nagging that her husband deserted the family and his job, Laura became a shy, withdrawn girl and Tom developed into a reckless escapist. Both the sides of Amanda need to be examined

Amanda, now in her fifties, belongs to the South of the United States and has grown up in the genteel tradition where women were highly respected and adored. After she married, her husband brought her and the two growing children to live in St. Louis, an industrial city. Amanda got busy looking after the household and the children.

However, when the husband deserted, Amanda probably was shocked out of her wits. This was one situation for which she was never prepared. However she immediately took up the responsibility of a single parent and prepared to meet the difficult times head on with all strength and courage. Eager to see her children grow up quickly and settle down, she began to encourage them to rise and shine, began to instill in them higher values of genteel life and inculcate in them the sense of family responsibility, moral courage and fellow feeling. She works with missionary zeal to promote these ideals in the members of her family. Seeing that her daughter is unlikely to get a match sitting at home, she has enrolled her in Rubicon Business College so that she learns typing and shorthand and can find herself a job. Disappointed by the daughter's dismal performance in the Business College she pleads with Tom to find a gentleman caller. When she learns that Jim would be coming to meet her she works overtime to prepare the house for his welcome. When at the end of the play, she learns that the gentleman caller was engaged she sits with Laura to assuage the hurt. All these and more show Amanda as a woman of grit and determination, an incarnation of love and dedication to the family.

On the other hand, side Amanda can be seen as, a overanxious woman who spreads anxiety and panic in everyone around her. By looking at the way she handles the life of Tom and Laura it is logical to conclude that she who was bubbling with vivacity and charm in her heyday, is a bundle of nerves in her middle age. Because times are bad, thanks to economic depression, she works with redoubled energy to cope with the trying situation and asks her family members also to join in. She constantly issues instructions, and at times snarls at those who do not listen. The first one unable to accept her overbearing demeanour is her husband, who left the family without any forwarding address. The next, constantly trying to put up with her, is Tom, but he too finds the coffin like existence unbearable. Laura is the silent sufferer at the end of the play. There is little hope for her.

## **XIII. Autobiographical Element in *The Glass Menagerie***

There has been no doubt regarding *The Glass Menagerie* being the personal biographical account of the dramatist Tennessee Williams himself. In fact some of the details of the play replicate the author's biographical to such an extent that it is difficult to separate fact from fiction. The following details will bear out this point. We shall take up the biography of Tennessee Williams first.

Thomas Lanier Williams (Tennessee Williams) was the son of a travelling salesman. His family comprising his wife and two children, Rose and Tom, lived with the wife's parents. Tom's grandfather was an Episcopal priest, a highly learned and respected man in Memphis, South U.S. The family lived in spacious rectory houses attached to the Church and was looked up by the neighbours as models of social behaviour. The genteel farmers and the ladies of the South visited them for advice. The father however was a boisterous drunkard and abusive man who kicked up a row every time he came to visit his family in the priest's home. When he got a promotion and a desk job, he moved the family North and then began the most terrible saga of their existence. Unable to adjust in the surroundings the brother and sister remained at home. Mother and father quarrelled and the mother had to be hospitalised. Sister Rose developed neurotic symptoms began to use abusive language and was lobotomized (brain operation). After that Rose

lost all energy and led a crippled existence all her life. The father broke Tom's relationship with his girl friend, pulled him out of College and put him into a warehouse as a clerk. Tom was soon found to be non-serious and was kicked out.

*The Glass Menagerie* dramatises some of the elements of the personal life of Tom in this drama. Tom's attachment to his sister Rose is dramatised in the feeling of guilt he has for deserting Laura. Amanda's genteel ways, constant nagging, restless energy and Southern style are all based on his own mother's behaviour with the children. The father who is absent in the play is a constant reminder to Amanda about the mistake she made in selecting him as her husband, despite his "charm". But for her daughter she would like a clean non-drinking man, in other words, a man unlike her own husband. Rose was lobotomised and became a cripple. Laura suffered from a stroke of pleurisy and became a cripple. The parallels from the author's own life are thus numerous and echo constantly throughout the play.

*The Glass Menagerie* is a profoundly autobiographical play with Laura Wingfield obviously created from the model of Rose Williams, Tennessee Williams' sister, who after her lobotomy had come to lead a vegetating life. The play, like many others to follow, dramatically 'acknowledged complicity and guilt in rendering Rose physically and mentally helpless through the surgeon's knife'. Benjamin Nelson is right in feeling that the play in general is marked by objectivity, only Laura's characterisation remains subjective. She is never lucidly drawn, remaining merely a shadowy figure who never emerges as a human being in her own right. Nelson says, "She and her plight are too close to the author's, and rather than probe her experience he makes statements about it." In place of mental disbalance he gives Laura a limp and an inferiority complex along with all the beauty and fragility of Rose. Whereas Rose could not adjust in the terrible environment created by their ever fighting parents, Laura is a victim of the mother's domineering drives and her awkward reminiscences of Blue Mountain days as also of the world's unsympathetic attitude towards the weak and the incapacitated.

## The Symbols in *The Glass Menagerie*

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The following lesson shall take up for discussion of some of the most important critical areas. Some of these have been referred to above briefly. An exhaustive discussion of the topics listed below shall help understand the depth and range of Williams with reference to *The Glass Menagerie*.

The following topics shall be discussed.

1. The Symbols in *The Glass Menagerie*
2. *The Glass Menagerie* as a Tragedy
3. Amanda, Laura and the Sick Family in *The Glass Menagerie*

When *The Glass Menagerie* appeared in 1944 in a theatre in Chicago it enthralled the audiences by its sheer magic and charm. It had the Depression years of the US economy as the backdrop and all around frustration as the motif. The audience could easily identify themselves with the play especially because of the symbolic content which brought out the play's essence in the most touching way.

Speaking broadly, symbolism is the use of one object to represent or suggest another thought, feeling or idea in literature and art. It is the most important device in the hands of an author to give depth and intensity to his work. Tennessee Williams has used several symbols in *The Glass Menagerie* which both complicate the play as also make it interesting and which make the play both profound and moving. John Gassner in 1948 dubbed Tennessee Williams the "dramatist of frustration," because Williams had captured with such skill the truncated lives of his characters caught in the world of their own illusions and unable to break out. Gassner was inclined to see the frustration of individuals as arising from their social circumstances. He opined that *The Glass Menagerie* is Williams' greatest play because it examines "not just the surface of frustration but the fullness of the catastrophic vision, a vision not only of individuals who fail to communicate with one another, nor of a society temporarily adrift in a depression, but of man abandoned in the universe." (*College English* (Oct 1948), p. 143). It may be noted here that the means Williams used to convey his vision are symbolic rather than literal. The play is not just about the man who came to dinner and failed to satisfy the expectations of two neurotic women but about the human predicament where one waits endlessly for something coveted but never gets it. It might be a wedding ring, but not necessarily the wedding ring.

Williams has conveyed the vision of frustration rampant in the American society through the use of symbols. It is because the literal is often inadequate to underscore the most intimate feelings. Roger B. Stein writes, "Like his dramatic forbear Chekhov, Williams is constantly faced with the yawning gap between the character's feelings and their ability to verbalize. In Williams's work this gap often threatens to become an abyss into which the play itself collapses. His critics have been quick to point out when he substitutes strident symbolism for effective dramatic situation." The gentleman caller who shall be discussed in detail in the following pages, is an important symbol through whom the full significance of waiting in the hopeless life of modern man is brought out. At most of the situations in life, all of us are seen waiting for one thing, person or event to happen to us, which will bring the much coveted relief or transformation. The gentleman caller "is the long delayed but always expected something that we live for." Tom tells us in the opening scene that the gentleman caller is a symbol whose anticipation always haunts the inmates of his house. Either he was mentioned directly or indirectly or else his absence was visible in the guilty appearance of Laura: guilty because she was not able to attract any one. Tom says that the gentleman caller became an obsession "Like some archetype of the universal unconscious, the image of the gentleman caller haunted our small apartment..... An evening at home rarely passed without some allusion to this image, this specter, this hope. Even when he was not mentioned, his presence hung in Mother's preoccupied look and in my sister's frightened, apologetic manner, hung like a sentence passed upon the Wingfields." The gentleman caller is thus the most important symbol in *The Glass Menagerie*. Stein adds a useful comment, "The pattern of allusion, the tightness of poetic texture, transforms the pathetic story of the Wingfield family into a calamity of immense proportions." In other words, the predicament of the Wingfield family in a symbolic way brings out the pathetic condition of all those who were poor, at the mercy of the economic vicissitudes and were trapped in the circumstances, which were in no way of their own making.

The second most striking symbol in the play is the glass menagerie itself. It is clearly the most obvious organising image in the play. The little glass animal figurines suggest the beauty and the fragility of Laura's world, that which needs care, attention, tenderness and that which stands in a precarious situation, given the circumstances. This dominant symbol shows how the sensitive and the gentle become pathetic misfits in the world inhabited by the insensitive. That the glass menagerie symbolises Laura herself is seen in the way the dramatist projects her and asks the audience to empathise with her predicament. Her love for the glass pieces, her tender care of them in her isolated existence, her talking to them, changing their places every once in a while, sometimes in the sun or shade, shows clearly that she is alienated from the world around. She has no one virtually to relate to, no friends, no companions. She lives, like the unicorn, her favourite, with a freakish horn on the forehead, on the margins of human existence. Just as the unicorn, as the myths have, it led an isolated existence in the thickets of the forest, away from the prying eyes of the animals around it, Laura spends her time, alone in the crowds, on the park bench, in the museum or at the Church. The world is too much for her to bear. Loneliness is much better and bearable than obtrusive and curious onlookers.

If the gentleman caller and Laura are symbols, Tom the brother has his unique symbolic position. He is both a character and the narrator of the play. Apart from the striking autobiographical elements which provide interesting parallels for reading into the author's own family, one discovers that Tom is another sensitive creature trapped in a humdrum life. He is endowed with a poetic temperament, uses his spare time in reading literary masterpieces and writing his heart out in the shape of poems. He laces the play with numerous poetic allusions and speaks to the audience in a poetic language. Tom is a poet of the warehouse, is nicknamed Shakespeare by friend Jim, the gentleman caller. Apart from this, one notices the romantic escapist tendencies in him. It is not only that he is a misfit in the warehouse job, he is a misfit at home too: at work to mitigate his boredom he writes poems on shoe boxes and at home to run away from the monotony he escapes to the theatres or magic shows. Escapism seems to him the best to get away from the mundane and the evanescent. Even at the end of the play he has escaped into the big world leaving his little home behind. But his guilt haunts him underscoring his poetic temper vividly "Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be!" More than the mother, his sister is his connection with the reality he is running away from.

Tom and his hankering for the unknown and the distant symbolises the unfulfilled aspirations of the young men of his age in the contemporary America. He tries to individuate, grow into himself, leaving the family he cannot put up with. In following the mythic American dream, get what you can at whatever cost, he is a typical young man of his times. He concludes the play with intense poetic words, "I didn't go to the moon, I went much further in for time is the longest distances between two places..... followed.... in my father's footsteps, attempting to find in motion, what was lost in space- I travelled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leaves, leaves that were brightly coloured but torn way from the branches." At the end of the play Tom too is cut off from the branch that nurtured him. He wants to be both away from it but remembers his days when the branch and the leaves were together. His wistful nostalgia gives a poetic dimension to the play through the use of symbols. The play which begins with Tom speaking to the audience from the steps of "the fire escape" has however selfishly escaped leaving the others trapped inside. The discussion also requires a close look at Amanda's world of illusions and what it symbolises in the case of Amanda. What the glass menagerie is for Laura, the movies for Tom, that is what Blue Mountain is for Amanda. It is her fantasy world, her retreat and the only respite in her drab and dreary existence in St. Louis. It represents all that she either had in the past or wished to have, a genteel life, numerous servants, a horde of admirers and jonquil flowers all around. The life in the industrial town offers no excitement or satisfaction, especially because her husband has deserted her and she has to fend for her two growing children, one of them, a cripple, and herself. It is because of this reason that she is a great mother at one point of time and a terrible mother at another. Her anxiety for her children issues forth from the bad economic times where there is little or no hope in sight. Her pathetic predicament is seen in the most embarrassing situation where she puts on her wrinkled yellow voile frock with a blue sash which she wore in Blue Mountain. In this scene she regresses into her fantasy land, quite forgetting that the gentleman caller she is receiving is not for her but for Laura. But her undying desire to hang on to her past symbolises how difficult the present must be for her and others like her. It would be appropriate to conclude that *The Glass Menagerie* is built upon the poignant plot of illusion and frustration in the times of the little people.



Finally, a look at the religious symbols in the play would help us understand another dimension of *The Glass Menagerie*. These symbols are not obtrusive and do not obscure the literal line of the story, yet touch upon several key situations of the play. The scene where Tom tells Amanda that a Gentleman caller would appear is entitled "Annunciation" which in The Bible refers to the announcement by archetypal Gabriel that Mother Mary will give birth to the son of God. At another point where, Laura dresses, it is described as "devout and ritualistic." During her scene with Jim she is described as lighted "inwardly with altar candles." Still later, when the gentleman caller informs her, the truth about himself and is preparing to withdraw after a kiss on the lips, which has left Laura dazed, the holy candles in the altar of Laura's face are reported to have been snuffed out. "There is a look of infinite desolation," on Laura's face. The play ends with Laura blowing out all candles. In churches, the candles are blown out when the Mass is over. Here it announces the end of all hopes.

The religious symbolism, though out of place in the play's design, seems to have been intended into seeing Amanda as mother Mary whose infinite suffering at the misfortunes of herself and her children is indeed deplorable. In scene two Laura's remarks, "Mother, when you're disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus' mother in the museum." Laura seems to be comparing the mother to Madonna. At another point in Scene Four, Tom apologises to his mother for calling her an "ugly- babbling old- witch," to the accompaniment of "Ave Maria" music. This dimension of the symbolism however remains weak because at no point does Amanda and her misery rise above the mundane to the spiritual heights. In other words, Amanda as a symbol of Virgin Mary does not hold water in the context of the play.

Williams, to conclude, has used a large number of symbols in the play and all of them contribute to its richness and density. The symbols are easy to recognise and understand, and through them he has succeeded in unravelling the complicated lives and conditions of the characters who inhabited the US in the 1930s and whose story *The Glass Menagerie* tells.

### **THE GLASS MENAGERIE AS A TRAGEDY**

*The Glass Menagerie* is a celebrated play focused around the frustration arising from the failure of the American dream. It is a play which shows the characters trapped in circumstances and situations they cannot wriggle out from. It is a profound tragedy of hopelessness, despair and failure of illusions because the reality all around is so perplexing and unbearable. All the major characters are caught in this whirlwind and emerge losers of one kind or another.

It should be amply clear to the reader here that modern drama is quite different from both the classical and the Shakespearean. Whereas man was invariably pitted against destiny or gods in classical tragedies, in Shakespeare however the tragedy resulted either from the intellectual errors made by the character, or from actions done in a fit of rage or on impulse. The characters everywhere however were either kings, princes, or people of blue blood. Tragedy had to show the fall of a person from the high pedestal to the low, with an aim of arousing emotions of pity and fear, pity for the character and fear for oneself and at the end feeling nobler and better after reading the tragedy.

Modern tragedy is quite different, as the action does not centre around a noble man or a king. Tragedy can and does befall ordinary people when their illusions are shattered, when their massive dreams remain unfulfilled, when their noble intentions go awry. Death or deaths were important to a Greek as also a Shakespearean tragedy. In fact the stage is said to be littered with dead bodies in *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Othello*. While death is a component of the modern tragedy too, but it is not the essential or unavoidable event: the life of the characters in *The Glass Menagerie* is so dismal and demeaning, that it is enough to arouse pity and fear. The father could have been shown as dead but he is instead shown as having deserted his wife and family. His photograph with a smile on his face is ironical because it is only he is smiling at the worse than death situation of its characters. The doom that he has spelt in the life of them all by his one line "Hello- Goodbye" from Mexico, with no forwarding address, is far more tragic than his death could have been. By his desertion he has made them wait endlessly for his return, he has shown to Amanda that she lacks physical charm to keep him tied down to her and the family and finally he has put the onus of running the household on Amanda, who as a Southern belle was never prepared for such a burden. The cascading effect of the father's irresponsible behaviour has cast an overwhelming gloom on the overall ambience as also the atmosphere of the play. It is this tragic atmosphere which is the subject of discussion here.

*The Glass Menagerie* is a devastating comment on all those who recklessly chased the mirage of American dream.

As noted earlier, the American dream is a myth associated with the settlers in the United States who indulged in fair or foul means to get ahead the next fellow, to succeed at whatever cost. There are numerous instances of those who became the models for the younger generations. Horatio Alger was one such youngman who with drive, initiative, hard work and perseverance succeeded in rising high from a scratch. The stories of those who entered the forests empty handed to emerge millionaires infused fresh blood into the youngsters of the day who started out with stars in their eyes, with only one mission in life and that was to succeed.

In their mad race to forge ahead they sacrificed their duty to the family and overlooked all bonds of humanity. One such glaring example was the father of Tom who left the home and hearth, his growing up children and his wife at the mercy of circumstances. He severed all connections with them without any prior notice or warning, wreaking havoc on the hapless crippled young Laura who was much in need of paternal affection and care. Amanda, used to a genteel life and spacious houses in the South had to eke out a meagre living by doing odd jobs. Tom in his early twenties had to give up studies to do a monotonous job in the warehouse of shoes. There was scarcity all around and a fear of tomorrow loomed large in the eyes of the members of the family at all hours. When Laura did not receive attentions from any gentleman caller, Amanda's anxieties multiplied and she worked "like a Turk" to "feather the nest" and "plume the bird" for the visit of a gentleman caller.

The entire family thus becomes the victim of the American dream. The worst however comes when the only hope of Amanda, her son Tom, also follows the father, in pursuit of the ego ideals, sacrificing his love, devotion and attachment with the family. The mother and the sister who needed him at this critical juncture see him gone in pursuit of greener pastures, but green for him only, not for the family as a whole. His irresponsibility is attributable to the terrible influence of the American dream. His selfishness is disastrous for those whom he leaves behind driving the neurotic duo on the verge of utter despair.

In order to escape from the tremendous shadow of desperation Amanda begins to regress into the golden days of her girlhood. Since she cannot face the reality that she was unable to hold her husband's love, a painful reminder of her fading beauty and charm, she indulges in memories of her past. Her unending repetitions of one supreme moment of her youth, the day when she received seventeen gentlemen callers on one single evening, all rich and successful sons of the famous planters of Blue Mountain, all carrying her favourite jonquils to please her, make her relive in the past because the present is terrible and unbearable. The dramatist describes Amanda as, "a little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place," who "having failed to establish contact with reality, continues to live vitally in her illusions."

Amanda, not willing to give up under the terrible sweep of circumstances is a tragic heroine suffering the consequences of the American dream both in her mind and body. She is a nervous wreck who infects all around her with her anxiety and fears. Removed into the past and needing to strengthen her endangered sense of self-worth, Amanda lapses into the days of her girlhood when as a Southern beauty she was admired by all around for her manners and genteel ways. All the men were chivalrous and women revelled in the respect, admiration and the adulation showered on them. Despite the terrible loss, Amanda continues to affect the pose of superiority which a Southern woman was always entitled to. The code of decency to women in the South guaranteed that a woman could attract, allure and flirt, giving a man hope of reward without committing herself. That Amanda has to live in these unbecoming illusions in the face of terrible reality is what makes her life pathetic.

Laura's tragedy among them all is the worst in its dimensions. Laura neither has a past to regress into nor a present to look forward to having suffered a stroke of pleurisy in her school days, she has one leg bit shorter than the other, has to wear a brace, walks with a limp and as a result is terribly self-conscious. She avoids public contact and voluntarily remains closeted with her glass figurines. Thus while Amanda has a past to fantasise about, Tom has a future to dream of, Laura's tragedy lies in the fact that she has nothing to fantasise or dream about. Her present has been dismal: lonely visits to the museums, parks or churches. She has not been able to cope with the stress of learning in the Business College where her mother enrolled her to learn typing and also possibly to meet a likeable youngman. She thus has kept herself protected from the harsh and judgemental world outside by making her own world out of old records and tiny glass pieces. Laura's retreat from the world of reality around her is a result of her belief that since

she is crippled, she is not desirable or lovable. With no gentleman caller paying court or even attention while her mother received so many in her heyday, Laura's feeling has degenerated into an inferiority complex. She feels unattractive, and scared of a situation in which her personal attractiveness would be directly tested, such as entertaining a man. Her self-consciousness makes her feel jittery when Jim O'Connor is about to arrive. It would be clear to the reader that her world view is distorted precisely because of the family atmosphere on the one hand and lack of social interaction on the other.

To conclude, *The Glass Menagerie* is a powerful psychological tragedy. The male characters are seen victims of a distant dream of success and chase it without any sense of responsibility. Their selfishness on the one hand, economic situation on the other, drives the dependent women characters into a state of fear and anxiety, making them feel unfit for any realistic situation. The women live cut off from the world of harsh reality in the world of illusions, desperately trying to catch at some straws that would support them. The tension in the play is unrelenting, and the atmosphere continues to be surcharged with endless gloom. The plays' ending does not provide any ray of hope to the characters.

### **AMANDA, LAURA AND THE SICK FAMILY IN *THE GLASS MENAGERIE***

Williams has created at least four pathological families and highlighted the relationship of the mothers with their 'children' in depth and detail. These families are those of Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*, Violet Venable in *Suddenly Last Summer*, Mrs. Winemiller in *Summer and Smoke* and Serafina in *The Rose Tattoo*. None of their children can be placed in the 'child' category (Laura is around 24, Sebastian is more than 40, Alma is in her late 20's, and Rosa in her teens but mature for her age), yet the mothers continue to care and mother them as if they were still infants. What effects compulsive mothering has on these grown up children shall be discussed here with reference to the mother-daughter relationship in one of these plays- *The Glass Menagerie*. In this analysis I will depend primarily upon insights provided by the Family psychological school.

Amanda, the heroine of *The Glass Menagerie* is a woman suffering from persona or role identification. It is common knowledge that during the course of one's psychological development it is necessary that ego and persona become differentiated. This means that one must become aware of oneself as an individual in spite of the role played in the familial and external collective. If the persona is allowed too much importance, or to become identical with the ego, the individual's personality comes to be bundled up with the role. Such an individual comes to cultivate a pseudo-ego which is not only rigid but also threatening to the psychic balance. It is accompanied by psychic dissociation where pseudo-ego assumes all the importance.

This applies to Amanda, because she seems to be possessed by the concept, notion and role of the mother. Her identity with the persona does not allow her to distinguish her own individual self from that of the mother. The mother complex, strongly constellated as it is, has infiltrated into her persona and consequently all her actions and speeches emanate from the identity with the persona. This is revealed in her incessant talking at her children, nagging, admonishing, and goading them by turns, without stopping to appreciate the need of a respite to her instructions. She never realises the need to stop when her adult son and daughter are tuned out or are not listening. She jabs Tom with instructions regarding table manners, food habits, smoking, saving money, reading, movie-going, etc. She wants him to cultivate ethical values, become superior to ordinary human beings by exhibiting exemplary selflessness. Like Willy Loman, Amanda stresses the need of good looks for success in life and wants Tom to take after his father at least in appearance and develop charm and vivacity.

Her endless nagging clearly shows her identification with the mother persona. She thinks it to be her privilege as *mater familias* to talk, reprimand or abuse the children. Any retaliation is taken as an affront by her. On such occasions she backs off with emotional outbursts, "I won't speak to you-until you apologise." (p.253) Her mother complexed persona is so compulsive that it has bundled and narrowed down her existence. Her mothering manifests itself through her compulsive talking riddled with cliches, pronouncements and prescriptions.

Her repeated recapitulations of the glorious past also need analysis. There is nothing wrong with the past because one learns experientially. But in terms of reality adaptation, one is absolutely obligated to update the past, otherwise one lives anachronistically. Amanda's regressive fixation on her past where a number of wealthy, refined and handsome

gentlemen callers paid court to her is an attempt at an escape from her pathological condition. She reminds one of the Old Testament myth, where Lot's wife, turned into a pillar of salt because she looked back as the city of Sodom was being destroyed. Looking back was tabooed for her but Lot's wife could not overcome her regressive fixation and suffered the curse.

For Amanda, too, speaking metaphorically, time has stopped moving forward. She looks back to derive psychic energy for going ahead in life. She is a woman who is living the intensity of one moment and not coping with the world of present day external reality. Her compulsive flights into the past give rise to the manic behaviour which make her live in a state of unnatural excitement. Psychologically speaking, her manic behaviour, lets her escape from her pathological condition—it is a disguise, a subterfuge, a defense-mechanism evolved by the pseudo-ego to escape the onset of a certain psychosis.

The alarming proportions of her fixation on her flamboyant girlish past can be seen when Jim is to visit the house. It is not only that she begins to “feather the nest and plume the bird”(p.248), and raise Laura's bosom by inserting powder-puffs because her chest is flat, she dresses herself in “a girlish frock of yellowed voile with a blue silk sash.” She carries a bunch of jonquils—“the legend of her youth... nearly revived”(p.276). Tom is distinctly shocked at her appearance and even Jim blinks a little. Amanda, thus, is not receiving a gentleman caller for her daughter, but for herself. She enters the arena alongwith Laura almost as a competitor. In other words, she can be seen here as a case of psychic dissociation: consciously she is receiving a caller for her daughter, but unconsciously the fixation on her glamorous past makes her bedeck herself also, as in the past for receiving a gentleman caller. She talks, giggles, jokes, and behaves as lightly as she might have done in her girlish days. Consequently, the shy Laura is eclipsed and shelters herself into her cocoon. She does not come out until the warmth of Jim draws her out from her protective shell. It is worth noting that Laura is not shocked at the disclosure of Jim's engagement elsewhere though Amanda is. It is not as much out of a feeling that Tom has befooled them all by bringing an engaged person to dinner or that Laura has been refused, but because some other woman has already arrested the affections of a gentleman caller, which as a matter of right should have come to Amanda, the girl.

Evaluated from the point of view of pathology, Amanda would be labelled as a borderline schizophrenic because there is no meaningful communication between different sub-personalities. On the one hand she is the driving, goading, hectoring, lecturing mother, on the other hand, there is the young girl surrogating for Laura before Jim.

The critics have hinted at her financial circumstances and problem of social adjustment as the root cause of her behaviour. But that does not sound convincing. The reason for her manic activity and excitement lies in her sexual deprivation and repression. Her inability to retain the love of her husband and stall his desertion of the family and resultant repression seems to be the root cause. Her repressed sexual energy issues forth as compulsive ceaseless chattering. Her repression and regression are in symbiotic relationship so that the libido cannot be freed to adapt itself to reality- nor can be used for making the contents of the deeper unconscious available. The result is seen in her schizophrenic behaviour.

Before we discuss Amanda's influence upon Laura in depth and detail, it would be rewarding to look at a few insights offered by the school of family psychologists. These insights are valuable for analysing Amanda-Laura relationship. In family psychology, as popularised by Virginia Satir, problems afflicting one member of the family are bound to have an effect on the other. As a result of the constant mutual interaction, the different members come to strike a balance. In psychological terms this balance is termed as “family homeostasis.” This concept of family homeostasis has arisen from observations that psychotherapeutic efforts with one member of the family might be hindered by the behaviour of other members, or that another member might begin to suffer as the member in treatment improved. This means that by mutual interaction with each other the family evolves an equilibrium. As a result, one of the members of the family is affected (if the affected member asserts, there is bound to be a loss in the equilibrium) resulting in dysfunctional relationship between members of the family.

Another operational concept, in Family psychology, is called “double bind”. This concept is grounded in our basic human conception about communication as the chief means of human interaction and influence:

*that in actual human communication a single and simple message never occurs, but the communication always and necessarily involves a multiplicity of messages, of different levels, at once.*

The essential meaning of “double bind” is, thus, to be understood properly as the relationships between related

messages are often complex. No two messages at different levels of communications can be the same, however, they may be similar or different, congruent or incongruent. Secondly, the concept of "double-bind" refers to a pattern of pairs or sets of messages, at different levels, which are closely related but sharply incongruent, occurring together with other messages which by concealment, denial or other means seriously hinder the recipient from clearly noticing the incongruence and handling it effectively, as by commenting on it. "Instead, he is influenced toward incompatible behavioural responses while enjoined not even to notice either influence or incompatibility." In such a case, within an important relationship, where messages cannot merely be ignored or avoided, the other member of the family, by experience and by conditioning begins to participate by accepting the incongruence without questioning. Such a behaviour gives rise to neurotic behaviour in the afflicted member and the family reaches a homeostasis, which is then maintained at the cost of that afflicted member.

Laura, as mentioned above, is a girl who can be studied through these concepts of family psychology. She is what she is because of the way her mother is. She is a poor little creature who has suffered the most because her mother has stolen what as a matter of right should have belonged to her. Amanda constantly springs double bind situations on her. She encourages her to talk but never allows her any opportunity, encourages her to be vivacious, while constantly badgering her with her own youthful charms. Amanda's garrulity, aggressiveness and buoyancy never give Laura any chance to take the stage. Whenever there is a mention of a gentleman caller for Laura, Amanda goes tangentially off about her own magnificent and glorious youth. She wants Laura to look attractive while jabbing her with the recapitulations of her own past. She violates her personality by such unwitting remarks as, "Girls in those days... they knew how to entertain their gentlemen callers", (p.237), and her such instructions to Laura as, "Stay fresh and pretty - It's almost time for our gentlemen callers to start arriving.:(p.239) By implication, she makes Laura aware of her lack of charms, lustre, gaiety in comparison to herself. A discerning reader would agree with this view that Laura does not talk because she is not afforded any opportunity. Once she gets it (as with Jim), she talks pleasantly, though still not confident of herself. By referring flippantly ("girlishly" p.239), to the gentlemen-callers, Amanda bludgeons the girl into a feeling of her unpopularity. it is no wonder that a girl of Laura's sensibility, gets to be affected by a traumatic inferiority complex, engendered through her pleurisy and augmented by the mother's constant domination of the stage and an unnaturally overblown anxiety over Laura's lot.

The result is Laura's withdrawal into herself. She tries to please the mother so that she does not become anxious over her destiny and does not pester her with neurotic reprovals. Laura's pathetic avowal is revealing of her attempts at maintaining the family homeostasis even when suffering herself at her mother's hands. "Mother when you're disappointed you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus mother in the museum."(p.245) Laura lets her take the stage, suffers the frenzied recapitulations of her glorious past all the time with an effort so that a pleased mother may spare her. When Amanda begins, the following dialogue takes place between the brother and sister:

*Tom : I know what's coming !*  
*Laura : Yes ! But let her tell it.*  
*Tom : Again.*  
*Laura : She loves to tell it. (p.237)*

Laura has heard it before but by letting Amanda repeat the glory of her past she is allowing another neurotic to give vent to her sickness, so that the homeostasis of the family is not disturbed.

The worst example of double-bind in Laura's case is seen to operate when slightly before the arrival of the gentleman caller, Amanda stuffs Laura's bosom with powder-puffs wrapped in handkerchiefs! Here she violates Laura's personality in more than one way. She, not only lays a trap for the gentleman caller, which Laura never appreciates, but she also makes the girl aware of the lack of an attractive figure. Precisely at the same moment she goes in to dress herself, to enter the stage as a grotesque rival to Laura. Whereas the arrival of the gentleman caller seems to have perturbed Laura, it seems to have revived the spirits of Amanda. She takes the stage as a ruthless competitor, dressed girlishly, talking airily, and laughing gaily, trying to steal the show in her own favour. The feeling of double bind seems to operate in Laura when she has to go before a gentleman caller, decked up with a false bosom, something which she does not

like, but concedes because the mother wants it, and at the same time becomes aware of the pain brought about by the lack of a winsome figure.

Stunned into silence, and badgered into withdrawal, Laura is a study in neurosis. She copes with this pathological problem by restricting life to her room, taking long walks in the park, trying to keep herself out of the unsympathetic and curious eye of the mother. She does not have the insight and the will to develop her reality principle. In Adlerian language, she is maladjusted, and in Gestalt language she is dysfunctional. In ordinary psychological parlance she is psychotic, because there is a complete hiatus between her conscious and unconscious personality. She has lost contact with reality and has retreated into a fantasy world, and suffers a marked inability to cope with inter-personal relationships. She lives in the bizarre fantasy world of her glass figurines because they do not bother her with the tirades of do's and don'ts. She has left the task of human interaction to her mother and thus maintains the equipoise or the homeostasis in the family. She has to pay a heavy price for this. The glass animals provide her with an escape, absorb her attention and time, but destroy her links with reality. She comes to identify herself with the brittle, fragile, transparent glass pieces and lives her life with them. One of her glass figurines- the unicorn, which is her favourite- is a freak among all others, with his one horn, just as Laura is a freak among all the normal people in the external collective. Laura's encounter with reality is signified through interaction with Jim, whose warmth, affection and sincere advice against thinking herself inferior to anybody help her come out. The accidental loss of the unicorn's horn makes it less freakish. It has to be seen symbolically as Laura's attempt in future to come out of her freakish existence. Jim's visit is her first encounter with the reality principle and it will have positive effects on her in the sense that she may come out into the reality- take a step at least- after this meeting. Towards the end of the play, Tom eludes the trap which the mother laid for him to stall his desertion like that done by the father. Laura remains behind to suffer in the claws of the "thespian witch." But there is hope for her, if William's symbols are rightly understood.

The excessive identification with the mother persona makes Amanda into a compulsive mother. Her overblown anxiety over Laura's fate, her unnecessary mothering and domination have crippling effects on Laura's psyche. Amanda had two victims in her strangle hold— Tom and Laura. Tom's attempt at breaking off are thwarted for sometime by strong moralistic doses injected into him daily in the name of Laura and family security. But he cannot bear the captivity for long and escapes. Laura remains behind to suffer, probably with redoubled severity- Amanda's ceaseless chatter, her unnatural excitement, and fixation at her glorious youthful past. She has volunteered in the past to be a willing captive in order to maintain the family homeostasis. Williams, however, shows a silver lining in her predicament, through the breaking off of the unicorn's horn. We may expect Laura not to care too strongly for family homeostasis and come out of her neurotic existence and participate in life more meaningfully.

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# UNIT IX - Emerson: American Scholar, Self Reliance

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## Life and Work

When Ralph Waldo Emerson delivered his famous address – “The American Scholar” – he not only described the ideal for the “man thinking” in America, but also the ideal by which he had patterned his own life. In his own words, to know Emerson, we have to “see him in his school, and consider him in reference to the main influences he received.” Upon Emerson, as well as the American scholar of his ideal, the first influence to be exerted was that of nature. In his view, the term nature includes not merely the sun and the stars, or wild nature, but human nature as well – the whole environment of man. Since Emerson was born in the big city of Boston, the human environment acted upon him first. The America in which he lived exerted the most significant influence upon both his life and his writing. Popularly, Emerson is considered one of the New England group of writers who flourished around the middle of the nineteenth century. No doubt, he was born to that group, but he grew beyond the bounds of New England. By experience and by sympathy, he became a citizen of a larger America. As Robert Lowell rightly declared, Lincoln and Emerson stood preeminent as products of American democracy. As James Truslow Adams recognized, “in no other author can we get so close to the whole of the American spirit” as in Emerson. A myth about Emerson has been that he was descended from seven generations of Puritan ministers. The first Emerson who came to New England in 1635 was a baker whose name was Thomas Emerson. Emerson’s own father, Reverend William Emerson, was a serving chaplain of the Massachusetts Senate. Ralph was born in 1802. The Boston in which he was born, was still a rural town, where in his youth he used to lead the family cow to pasture on the common. But he lived to see Boston become a modern city, and himself a leader in the change from an agriculture to an industrial America. As such, he did not take his tone from the conservative Yankee stock of the town.

Emerson grew to maturity in a new America. The War of 1812 found him in school, with Boston living in a perpetual fear of British invasion. After the war a new patriotism had developed. There also began during this period a wave of Western migration. At the age of nineteen he dedicated his Journal to “the spirit of America”, using all the high-flown phrases of youth, but expressing the sincerity of a deeply felt conviction. The local patriotism soon expanded to include in its horizon not only the state of Massachusetts, but also the new West that was then opening up. Emerson confronted in 1823 the problem of a frontier, with both its opportunities as well as dangers:

*The vast rapidity with which the deserts and forests of the interior of this country are peopled have led patriots to fear lest the nation grown too fast for its virtue and its peace .... Good men desire, and the great cause of human nature demands, that this abundant and overflowing richness wherewith God has blessed this country be not misapplied and made a course of .... How to effect the check proposed is an object of momentous importance. And in view of an object of such magnitude, I know not who he is, that can complain that motive is lacking in this latter age, whereby men should become great.*

Emerson was decidedly one of those who became great, and America supplied the motive for that greatness.

It was against the background of this enthusiasm for the new land that Emerson’s “American Scholar” was projected. He devoted his life-time to the study of the “rapidity” of the American momentum. No doubt, in his early youth he shared the conservative anxiety for a “check” upon the rapid expansion. However, as he grew up and began to think for himself, he realized that the best check on the thoughtless expansion lay in the application of the intelligence of American scholars to it. He came to believe that America could be saved, not by the halt of expansion and progress, but by guiding it well. “Hitch your wagon to a star.” The main theme of all of his essays remained the application of the scholarship, or wisdom of man, to the present-day problems. As he wrote in his Journal, “The dead sleep in their moonless night; my business is with the living.” The years between the time of his “The American Scholar” in 1837 and that of “The Young American” in 1844 were filled with new events and thoughts. The Anti-Slavery Society had been formed, and with Jackson’s election in 1828, problems of the West had gained focus in the 1830’s. His latter address indicates the shifting focus of his own attention as well. He emphasized in the second address the importance of the newly constructed railroads, by means of which “the nervous, rocky West is intruding a new and continental element into the national mind, and we shall yet have an American genius.”



In the 1840's, as the railroads pushed their way over the mountains, Emerson, too, expanded his area of activity. He followed them farther and farther West, delivering his lectures, first in Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, then in Chicago and Milwaukee, and finally across the Mississippi in Iowa. As he noted in his Journal in 1855, "I have crossed the Mississippi on foot three times." Later in 1871, at the age of 68, he traveled to California, delivering several lectures there. Thus, large part of Emerson's life was lived in the days of Westward expansion. It included the War of 1812, the Annexation of Texas, the Gold Rush, the Civil War, and the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad. He remained intensely aware of these events. Therefore, only in the light of these events can we arrive at the true significance of his writings. Before being a scholar, Emerson was first of all an American.

Generally, besides contemporary events, books are an important influence in the shaping of a human personality. For the writers like Emerson, however, books, or "the mind of the past" as he called them, should be of secondary importance in the training of the American Scholar. But the scholar must have leisure time to read books that he likes. "Books are for the scholar's idle times." Emerson always managed to have "idle times," and acquainted himself with a large number of authors, which included Aristophanes, Plato, Proclus, Plotinus, Aristotle, Virgil, Plutarch, Chancer, Dante, Rebelais, Montaigne, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Jonson, Ford, Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher, Bacon, Marwell, More, Milton, Moliere, Swedenborg, Gothe, etc. Although *The Bible* does not find mention in this list, Emerson was spiritually influenced by this old text. As he said in his "Divinity School Address," he was opposed to the fundamentalist interpretation of sacred literature, including *The Bible*. No wonder that many orthodox ministers accused him of ignorance of it. As he expressed, "the unique impression of Jesus upon mankind . . . is not so much written as ploughed into the history of the world. Thus, he was against the formal imposition of *The Bible* reading on the people. It should be read, like any other book, by choice, not by compulsion. As he records, in his own case "The regular course of studies, the years of academical and professional education have not yielded me better facts than same idle books under the bench at Latin School. What we do not call education is more precious than that which we call so." He shared with Thoreau and the British Romantics the distrust of books in general, preferring the life around for education. Among books, he preferred the "idle" to the "required."

Emerson read with greater interest the books his contemporaries in America and Europe were writing. He loved the novels of Walter Scott, the poetry of Scott, Byron, and Wordsworth, the essays of Carlyle and Coleridge. He himself started writing verse at an early age, the first being his celebration of the naval victories of the War of 1812, followed by a narrative poem entitled "Fortus." He even wrote his early letters in verse and pleased his friends with his rhymes. While leaving his school at Concord, he was made to read an ode of farewell. Then he took to regular verse writing as a sort of pleasure. His poetry as well as prose carry the mark of Plato – "the Bible of the learned for twenty-two hundred years." He was equally influenced by the neo-Platonists like Plotinus, who represented all that the average man would call "transcendental." The neo-Platonists helped Emerson fuse the intellectual philosophy of Plato with the religious thought of the Bible and of the ancient East. For better or for worse, Emerson had a streak of mysticism, and these books became part of him. No doubt, he was also influenced, through Coleridge, by the German philosophers of idealism. But these neo-Platonists influenced him more. His transcendental thought was derived from their writings. Even more than that, these books imparted him that length of perspective which most distinguished him from his contemporaries. Emerson's reading also included the moderns, although he read them out of school. Although not a component of his studies, he read the modern dramatists and poets, especially the Elizabethans. We find in his writings Shakespeare mentioned more often than any other author. If Plato provided Emerson with form, Shakespeare furnished him the substance. For him, Shakespeare expressed the beauty and colour of the world; he became "the poet." Although a sceptic by belief, Montaigne, the French essayist, also figured in Emerson's reading list. Thus, Plato and Plotinus at one end and Shakespeare and Montaigne at the other constituted the range of ideas to which Emerson exposed himself, and from which he assimilated the various strands of his thought.

The third important influence that shaped the mind and philosophy of Emerson was his "Domestic Life;" in fact, it had greater impact on him than even the influence of the American scene and the European writers. As Emerson himself states, "toil and want" were always present in his family, so that poverty was one of the driving forces of his life. However, alongside toil and want, "truth and mutual faith" were also present in his life in an unusual degree. The result of these factors was the gift to his character of the exceptional qualities of simplicity and sincerity. Thus, his

writings in verse and prose became, as in the case of Wordsworth, “true voice of feeling.” Being a poor boy, Emerson was not one of that class of true “Brahmins” of Boston to which Longfellow, Lowell and Holmes belonged. In 1854, he stated the difference between the position Longfellow held and his own position in his *Journal*: “If Socrates were here, we could and talk with him; but Longfellow, we cannot talk with; there is a palace, and servants, and a row of bottles of different coloured wines, and wine glasses, and fine coats.” Emerson’s family always remained poor. Also, even when he attained success in later life, he always avoided the luxuries of life. In his essay on Napoleon, he made a severe criticism of the “man of the world” as one who, when he had made all the money he needed, did not know what to do with it, and could find satisfaction only in making more money. Emerson had realized the value of poverty as a driving force, spurring the individual to his best efforts, and disciplining him in the school of “necessity and austerity.” Throughout his life Emerson practiced a self-reliant poverty. It is important to note here that he concluded his essay on “Self-Reliance,” saying: “So use all that is called Fortune. Most men gamble with her, and gain all, and lose all, as her wheel rolls. But do thou leave as unlawful these winnings, and deal with Cause and Effect, the chancellors of God.”

Emerson’s domestic life, together with poverty, trained him in the virtues of “truth and Mutual faith.” His long puritan ancestry inculcated in him the personal integrity which had always been their highest ideal. He always faced the facts of his life squarely, without making any attempt to evade them. His absolute honesty with himself and with the world is one of the outstanding qualities of his character. These qualities of his character – honesty, sincerity, simplicity, integrity – help to explain his optimism and his wisdom. His optimism was at variance with the pessimism of the “modern temper” of his time. As he writes in “Experience”:

*The fine young people despise life but ... I am thankful for small mercies. I compared notes with one of my friends who expects everything of the universe, and is disappointed when anything is less than the best, and I found that I began at the other extreme, expecting nothing, and am always full of thanks for moderate good.*

Thus, “expecting nothing from the universe” Emerson was always optimistic. Trained as he was to live simply, he remained easily contented. Also, since he knew his own faults as well as of others, he did not wish for too much. As he says, “Ask nothing of men, and, in the endless mutation, thou only firm column must presently appear the upholder of all that surround thee.” And no wonder that Emerson himself became one of the “firm columns” of the pantheon of American literature.

Emerson is one of those writers whose life was closely connected with his writing, so that the transition from one to the other is natural and inevitable. It is decidedly so in the field of religion where Emerson practiced most completely the theories that he preached. Like Tolstoi he held that “Religion ... is a life,” and the main purpose of his writing remains the application and illustration of religious truths in practical affairs. Although his religion was highly personal, his own, he used the forms of his time for expressing his ideas, lending these forms special significance. The words that we generally use in the context of Emerson and his age, such as “Calvinism,” “Unitarianism,” “Transcendentalism” are rather vague, and need description. The progress from the early Calvinism in America to the Transcendentalism of Emerson’s time represents a steady development from the theological to the practical. In other words, it is a progress from exclusive religion to the religious practice of common life. This change also went through several stages which can be briefly described with reference to the changing conceptions of God. Calvinism, which dominated New England until late in the eighteenth century, worshiped “God in three persons”, conceiving of God somewhat anthropomorphically, and of Jesus as divine. Then came Unitarianism, according to whose tenets Emerson was brought up, which broke away from this conception of God. It contended that there could be but one God, and that Jesus had not been divine, but rather the perfect “Son of Man”. Then followed Transcendentalism, which carried on the process to its logical conclusion. It denied the “personality” of God altogether, speaking of God simply as an impersonal force, which operated by means of “the moral law”. Thus, it abandoned the personal conception of God, and accepted the contemporary findings of science and idealistic philosophy. It based its belief in God on the fact that the world was governed by law. But, as Emerson conceived, there were two laws: “law for man, and law for thing,” or the “moral law” and “natural law.” However, Transcendentalism also differentiated itself from the mechanical Deism of the eighteenth century by laying special emphasis on the moral law, or the place of man in the universe. It

sought to discover moral law through the preliminary observation of natural law. Hence the term Transcendentalism, indicating a going beyond the natural law to a human or spiritual truth. Its chief interest was the laws of the soul. In that sense, it differed from modern psychology in its method, but not in its subject matter.

Emerson's essay "Over-Soul" affirms general truths, whereas William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* collects specific observations to illustrate the same principles. In opposition to the earlier theologians, both Emerson and James wrote impersonally of the laws of human nature as revealed in human experience, rather than as revealed *a priori* in the Biblical revelations of a personal God. To begin with Emerson was, of course, a Unitarian, and remained so until the age of twenty-nine. He studied in a Unitarian divinity school. In fact, for three years he preached successfully to one of the most important Unitarian congregations of Boston. Like his father, he became the chaplain of the State Senate. His sermons were universally accepted and admired. As a visiting preacher, he was, in fact, much in demand. But he resigned from his religious position because he saw, as he began to think things out for himself, that he could not continue to believe in its tenets. His position is made quite clear by a remark he made to a friend soon after he had resigned his position as chaplain: "Whoever would preach Christ in these times must say nothing about him." In other words, Emerson came to believe that the influence of the Church as a religious force was narrow. In the Church, one preached theology; outside the Church, one could proclaim the laws of human life. In the Church, people listened on Sunday; outside, they listened on all the days of the week. Emerson, therefore, sought to break down the distinction between the religious and the secular. Hence he abandoned the Church altogether. He had based his resignation on the objection to administering the bread and wine of the sacrament. In his view, as he said in his famous sermon "The Lord's Supper", the Lord's Supper had no justification in scripture or in practice. His declaration was that the Lord's Supper was not originally meant to be part of a Christian service.

Emerson's eminent break from the religion of his heritage was caused largely by his increasing preoccupation with the events and ideas of the present – his own time – especially the ideas of modern science. His contention was that the truths of the old religion must be testified by those of science. In his view, it was possible provided the forms of the old religion were modified. The year preceding his resignation from his ministry he read widely in science, especially in the astronomy of the time. Just a short while before he chose to resign he significantly wrote in his Journal: "The Religion that is afraid of science dishonours God and commits suicide." On his tour of Europe around the same time, he visited with interest museums of science, attended lectures on new ideas. While standing in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, he said to himself, "I am moved by strange sympathies; I say continually, 'I will be a naturalist'." He may not have executed his resolve to be a naturalist, but he continually read the rest of his life the new theories and discoveries of science. Such a reading was bound to influence his ideas and beliefs that he had inherited from his family and environment. The progress of his thought can be gauged from the wide difference in the position he held in the famous address to the Divinity School at Harvard in 1838 and the position he held earlier in his farewell sermon in 1832. The difference clearly comes out in confidence, in method, as well as in ideas. While in his 1832 address he had attacked the relatively minor institution of the Lord's Supper, in the 1838 address he attacked the whole structure of formalized Christianity. Emerson made, thus, his most powerful attack on the old order in his Divinity School Address of 1838. This affront to the most formidable instrument of the old order revealed the radicalism of his ideas in very clear terms. In its larger implications, it only restated the ideas which he had already expressed in his essays *Nature* and "The American Scholar." But they appeared dangerous in their application to the institution of religion. Now he had grown bold enough to deny the validity of preaching from tradition, or from Scriptural text. He came to believe that "It is the office of the true teacher to show us that God is, not was; that He speaketh, not spake." Thus, he opposed historical Christianity because it was historical – because it spake "as if God were dead." Emerson wanted men to live wholly in the present, and seek God in their daily life about them. As he said, "One mind is everywhere active, in each ray of the star, in each wavellet of the pool.... The old is for slaves. Whenever a man comes, there comes revolution." This preaching was decidedly dangerous. Emerson knew what he was doing. He was advocating the experimental way of life, which has always been recognized as radical. A clear implication of his preaching was that tradition was to be abandoned; the present was to be accepted as the only test of truth; and men must find truth for themselves by living experiments with it. Obviously, Emerson has come here very close to the spirit of science, as that can be applied to the realm of the moral law. He put this idea quite lucidly in his Journal: "All life is an experiment. The more experiment

you make the better. . . . What if you do fail, and get fairly rolled in the dirt once or twice? Up again, you shall never be so afraid of a tumble." Emerson thus developed, partly by reaction from the old religion, the new or scientific way of life. And this way of life finally led Emerson to the formulation of "Self-Reliance", his greatest essay.

Of course, Emerson's radicalism needed some qualification. His resignation from the religious portion and attack on the religious tradition had created an impression not quite to his liking. Hence he wrote his "The Over-Soul" as a clarification of his real status in relation to religion. Although it lacks the sharpness of the Divinity School Address, it has come to be accepted as the classical statement of his ideas on religion. It is written in a rather mystical terminology, but because of its individual quality, has survived the years. He did face in this essay the difficulty of describing an infinite God in finite words. This realization led him to abandon the attempt in his later writings, leaving the "Over-Soul" his last purely religious essay. If technically considered, the idea of the Over-Soul largely derives from the "emanation theory" of the Neo-Platonists, especially of Plotinus, coloured by the later writers, and by the "inner-light" of the Quakers. Here God is thought of as a sort of reservoir of spiritual energy – sometimes, the metaphor of "the divine water" is used, sometime that of an "ocean of light", sometimes that of a more subtle, radiant energy. Religion is conceived as the emanation of this energy from its divine source, and its influx into the individual life, which is thereby enriched and illumined. There is nothing new about this idea; it is as old as the hills, and as vague. Emerson recognizes it as much. It is for this reason that he asks how it can be applied, specifically: "The only answer to these questions of the senses is to forgo all low curiosity, and, accepting the idea of being which floats us into the secret of nature, work and live, and all unawares the advancing soul has built and forged for itself a new condition, and the question and the answer are one." This advice comes closer to modern pragmatism, although it is clothed in the language of mysticism. The special value of Emerson's religion of the Over-Soul lies in its emphasis on the spirit as opposed to the letter of the religious law. It also lies in its emphasis on personal experience rather than formal tradition as a means of discovering this law. Finally, it lies in its emphasis on education rather than prohibition as the means of administering it.

### **Emerson's Philosophy**

Emerson's philosophy grew out of his religion, both in practice and in theory. As has been stated earlier also, he was widely read in the philosophy of Plato and the neo-Platonists, and was familiar with subsequent philosophers in the Western tradition. His knowledge of philosophy extended to the oriental ideas of Hindu and Buddhist philosophers. After resigning his ministry in 1632, he especially devoted himself more than ever before to the reading of philosophers of the East as well as the West. His first attempt to make a coherent presentation of his own ideas was his essay *Nature*. His ideas in philosophy, however, were as independent of "schools", as his ideas in religion were independent of "creeds". He was too individualistic by temperament to make a blind commitment to any school or creed. It also kept him away from formulating any philosophic system. In his life time he had come to be known a philosopher, and after his death Harvard University named its new philosophy building after him. In the modern age, however, that title has been denied him by most analysts of his work. He himself, of course, never claimed to be a philosopher. He had several reasons to offer for his plea. As he writes, "I can very confidently announce one or another law, which throws itself into relief and form, but I am too young yet by some ages to compile a code." He was clear in his mind that he could not commit himself to any system, for human nature is too rich to be squeezed into an abstract frame of thought. As he insisted, "I cannot myself use that systematic form which is reckoned essential in treating the science of the mind. But if one can say so without arrogance, I might suggest that he who contents himself with dotting a fragmentary curve, recording only what facts he has observed, without attempting to arrange them within one outline, follows a system also." Thus, by insisting on "only what facts he has observed," Emerson inducted into the practice of philosophy the rules of science. As he declared, "My metaphysics are to the end of use. I wish to know the laws of this wonderful power, that I may domesticate it." Emerson's chief interest was to make his idealism practical, and then make its application on the life of his America. For doing this, he did not need any metaphysical system. Thus, he deliberately avoided any self-sufficient system.

Keeping in view the fact that he received religious training in his youth, and then devoted his time to the study of Plato, it was no surprise that he became an idealist. The term "idealism," however, need to be explained, for it has been used in several ways in the last two centuries. In the view of Emerson, human mind was more important than the physical nature or matter. He also believed that whatever is perceived receives certain colouring from the perceiver. Similarly, all things observed receives its colouring from the observer. But he was not the "idealist" of the type that denies the

existence of matter. For that very reason the doctrines of Christian Science were further from him. He once remarked, "Does the fact look crass and material, threatening to degrade the theory of spirit? Resist it not; it goes to refine and raise thy theory of matter just as much." In a way, he was not an absolutist. Taking into account the limitations of Emerson's "idealism," some critics have preferred to call him a "dualist" – one who believes in the parallel existence of mind and matter. One can find a good deal in Emerson's writings to prove such a case. For example, one could say that "dualism" gave form to his philosophy, and lies at the bottom of his Transcendentalism. The latter, too, implies that there are two planes of existence – the natural and the human – and that the second transcends, or develops out of the first. Emerson gave expression to the dual aspect of life most completely in his essay on Plato, where he contrasts "Unity and Variety," "the One and the Many," "East and West." It is, of course, true that whenever he touched upon one of these aspects of life, he always related it to its opposite. Even "Soul-reliance" he qualified by reliance upon the unity of the "Over-Soul". "Nature", too, implied an observer to see and to understand her. Similarly, "Fate" and "form" are to be understood only with reference to the "Power" which directs the currents of life through the preordained channel. Also, the "illusions," and moods, which seem to be "the lords of life," fall into perspective when seen as a whole by the mature mind of man. In Emerson, the "Experience" of the senses must be complemented by the spiritual experience:

*There are two laws discrete,  
Not reconciled, –  
Law for man, and law for thing;  
The last builds town and fleet,  
But it runs wild,  
And doth the man unking.*

It seems that, always parallel with this dualism, Emerson expressed his mystical belief in "the eternal ONE." Thus, it is by religion, not by philosophy, that Emerson is a monist, as "The Over-Soul" and "Brahma" poems bear witness. Of course, we do not find in his writings in verse and prose any explanation which is fully formulated of the unity which he seems to feel to underlie the dualism of life. However, the two theories which he adopted to his own usage go to show how he might have done so. One of the concepts which he developed for himself did prepare the way for later thinkers to do so. The first of these theories is that of "emanation", which seems to have been borrowed from Plotinus, and whose thrust is primarily religious. The second is his theory of "evolution", which had been in the air for fifty years before Darwin gave it scientific formulation.

"Emanation" can be defined as a sort of idealistic monism; and "evolution" as a materialistic monism. The first did not take long to adapt itself to the theory of the identity of energy and matter – energy continually emanating from God, and condensing itself, as it were, in the forms of the material world. The second, describing the gradual evolution of life from inanimate to animate matter, and from, lower to higher forms until it issues at last in the intelligence of man, also seemed to supply such a satisfactory monistic theory. This readily recommended itself especially to Emerson as confirming his idea of progress, or melioration. For example, in the verse motto of Nature he wrote:

*And, striving to be man, the worm  
Mounts through all the spires of form.*

This idea of evolution, which seems to have been borrowed from the Hindu philosophy, has a moral, not existential, basis, for it is related to one's moral or spiritual progress through numerous births and deaths. In Darwin, the evolution is purely existential, and has nothing to do with the moral or spiritual aspect of life. Emerson's organization of his book on *Nature*, beginning with the most materialistic aspect as "Commodity", and progressing to its most idealistic aspect as "Spirit", comes very close to the Hindu philosophy of reaching the human stage through millions of animal existences as a measure of spiritual evolution. Of course, Emerson never seems to have formulated either of these theories specifically. We do find in Emerson a suggestion for the solution to the problem of dualism in his original concept of "experience". It seems basic to his philosophy, as agreed by many a serious critic of his. His concept of experience, however, needs to be understood. He conceives of experience in inclusive terms. For him, experiences are of two types: the mystical and the sensuous. As he insists, both "spiritual facts" and "physical facts" are "facts". He comes very close to William James in his belief in theism so long as he basis it on the evidence of what he called "God the phenomenon."

In his essay "Experience", for instance, he describes life as "sensations and states of mind", unified by the consciousness of man. Thus, by considering experience both as objective and subjective, he is able to avoid both "absolutism", which denies the validity of the test of experience, as well as "empiricism", which denies the reality of human consciousness. In all of this Emerson seems to foreshadow the Pragmatism of later American thinkers, such as William James and John Dewey.

Defined in Emersonian terms experience becomes what James calls a "double-barreled" fact. As such, it includes within itself both the subjective and the objective: while the mystical experience emphasizes the subjective, the sensuous experience emphasizes the objective. However, unless there is a subject to perceive, there can be no experience either. Hence experience is a bridge between subject and object. Neither the soul, nor nature, can possess any reality separately. Only by an interaction of the two can the true meaning of life be discovered. As Emerson insists, "Power ceases in the instant of repose; it resides in the moment of transition from a part to a new state, in the shooting of the gulf, in the darting to an aim." Thus, reality lies in the fact of experience.

What causes problem in the comprehension of Emerson's philosophy is a certain obscurity which results from his habit of seldom using the same word more than once in the same context. What he is in the habit of doing is to vary his terminology. In the case of experience itself, for instance, he does not often speak of "experience" as such, seldom showing the ideas concerning it as self-evident. In order to show how the concept of "experience" dominated his thought, even while he was not mentioning the word, we may go into a brief analysis of his first book on *Nature*. Here, we find, that his theory of experience appears under the title "Discipline". After giving a general introduction, he successively wrote of three common uses, or aspects, of Nature. Still simpler and clearer is his discussion of "Commodity". That of "Beauty" is hardly less so. In this last, he describes the artistic or aesthetic aspects of nature. In Emerson's theory, it is language which carries the reader to the realm of the transcendental.

Emerson introduced a radically new idea in his essay "Discipline". His advertisement for the essay said: "In view of the significance of nature the world includes the preceding uses [Commodity, Beauty, and Language], as parts of itself." This theory of "discipline" was decidedly new. Its significance was also inclusive. Its meaning was not merely "discipline". It more broadly included "education through experience". It also points the way to *The Education of Henry Adams*, as well as Dewey's *Experience and Nature* – both American classics of the nineteenth century. Also, and most importantly, it leads the way to Emerson's Transcendentalism, as expressed in the last three chapters of his little book. It bridges the chasm between external nature and the soul. Emerson reaches his chapter on "Idealism" by means of this bridge:

*To this one end of Discipline, all parts of nature expire. A noble doubt perpetually suggests itself, – whether this end be not the Final Cause of the Universe; and whether nature outwardly exists.*

The question that arises here is: how does "experience" comport with "idealism". We can find an answer to this tangle in Emerson's essays "Experience" and "Illusions", as well as in William James's *The Will to Believe*. One thing common between Emerson and James is that both give primary place to the mystical experience. Their belief is that this comes first in the consciousness of man. At least to Emerson, mystical experience did not merely mean the supersensitive, visionary experience of religious enthusiasts; but rather that simple and universal experience of every common man with nature, which, unconsciously and irrationally, forces upon him the belief that "life is worth living". In Emerson's own words, "the universal impulse to believe... is the principal factor in the history of the globe." James, too, described this same experience at greater length as the "will" to believe, and gave it also the central place in his philosophy. It is from this simple, universal, mystical experience all others derive their meaning. The others are described by Emerson, in the language of the ancient East, as "illusions," or partial experiences. It is by illusion that man is educated by nature, giving content and specific meaning to the vague or mystical experience of "Pure Being". Thus, the mystical experience takes on the form by the process of everyday experience, and becomes "the sense of being something". The process leads to making life complex, giving the young mortal the feeling of having lost his way in the world, leaving him confused. But at long last the fundamental mystical experience reasserts itself, so that he is able to see once again "the gods sitting around him on their thrones, – they alone with him alone". In view of all this it may not be wrong to say that Emerson's philosophy is that of Pragmatic mysticism. For one thing, it is idealistic in that it puts the mystical experience first. It is also dualistic in that it looks both ways from its position on the bridge between the soul and nature. It is also monistic in that it maintains that this bridge between soul and nature is the only reality. But

it is also pragmatic in that it tests all truths (including the mystical belief in the value of life) by experience. It remains to suggest that this pragmatic mysticism is essentially the American philosophy, or, as it has been called, "The American Dream." The genesis of the American Dream relates to the irrational and mystical belief of its founders that the New World offered unlimited potentialities of life. The very Declaration of Independence was drafted by an idealist. Its principles were based on an act of faith. For him, as well as for others associated with him, liberty and equality were not less than transcendental ideas. They were fundamentally mystical ideas. As J.T. Adams says, "The American Dream was not a logical concept of thought. Like every great thought that has stirred and advanced humanity, it was a religious emotion, a great act of faith, a courageous leap into the dark unknown. As long as great dream persists to strengthen the heart of man, Emerson will remain one of its prophets." His Philosophy will keep inspiring the better minds of mankind.

### Emerson's Poetry:

Just in the theory and practice of philosophy, so in the theory and practice of poetry, Emerson derived several of his ideas from the literature of the past. But he always recreated there ideas into an original and modern formulation. It was his essay "The Poet" that sounded a call for an authentic American poet. This call was squarely answered by Walt Whitman. Emerson's theory of literature as expression remained influential for a long time in America. In his essay on "Beauty" he can be said to have foreshadowed the entire modern theory of art and architecture, making a flat declaration that "outside embellishment. . . . Our taste in building . . . refuses pilasters and columns that support nothing, and allows the real supporters of the house honestly to show themselves." By the same token he can be said to have preceded John Dewey's protest against the separation of the "fine arts" from the "useful arts": "Nothing merely ornamental can be beautiful". In almost every phase of his aesthetic theory, Emerson cleared the path that has been followed by the later practitioners.

Emerson's ideas concerning poetry are linked, as is the case with all great writers, with his whole philosophy of life. They constitute a component of his revolt against the past. This revolt he had announced in his essay "The American Scholar" in resounding words, applying it particularly to the realm of philosophy and intellect. Similarly, in his essay "The Poet" he had applied it to the field of creative writing. In this second piece, he divided the human endeavour into three representative fields: knowledge, action, and expression; represented respectively by philosopher, the man of action, and the poet. Having already specified in "The American Scholar" his ideal for the American intellectual, or philosopher, he now went on to describe his ideal for the American poet. Both his American Scholar and Poet were to express the thoughts and emotions common to humanity in all ages. However, they were to describe these thoughts and emotions as they appeared in the native life surrounding them. Also, to express these thoughts and emotions they were to use forms, appropriate to his new life.

To make a reading of Emerson's "The Poet" with Whitman's later practice of poetry in mind turns out to be an illuminating and rewarding experience. Emerson's first target of attack were "our poets" who put poetical finish before genuine inspiration. He declared that "it is not metres, but a metre—making argument that makes a poem" He bewailed the absence of the genuinely inspired poet in America, leading finally to describing the characteristics of this genuine American poet:

*The vocabulary... would embrace words and images excluded from polite conversation. What would be base, or even obscene, to the obscene, becomes illustrious spoken in a new connection of thought. [Even] bare lists of words are found suggestive to an imaginative and excited mind.*

Thus, following this belief, Emerson went on to celebrate "the factory village and the railway" as proper subjects for the American poet. Then, conducting a more general discussion of the theory of poetry, he arrived at the conclusion: "Yet America is a poem in our eyes. . . and it will not wait long for metres." As he declared, "Doubt not, O poet, but persist. Say 'It is in me, and shall out.'" We know how, following these exhortations, Whitman wrote in his "Song of Myself": "Walt you contain enough, why don't you let it out then?" He followed Emerson's dicta in letter and spirit, creating in his *Leaves of Grass* a unique epic of the New World. No wonder that Emerson welcomed him enthusiastically as a sort of the poet of his dreams.

The germs of Emerson's aesthetic theory were clearly there in his phrase "It is in me, and shall out". The implication of the phrase is that all great art is organic and necessary, being a functional part of human life. And if it is derived to

man, his soul dies. In the extreme form of the doctrine, expression is man's only spiritual necessity; "Expression is all we need, not knowledge, but vent". As Santayana sees it, it is key to Emerson's thought: "Imagination is his single theme. . . Emerson traces in every sphere the same spiritual laws of experience – compensation, continuity, the self-expression of the soul in the forms of Nature and of society." The guarantee of its sanity lies in the very centrality of the idea of self-expression. In Emerson's view, expression cannot be arbitrary or superficial, because it springs from the centre of human life. The merely ornamental is essentially false, because it is untrue to man's nature. For him, great art must be necessary, and unconscious. Contrary to Poe's concept of poetry, Emerson's view of composition demanded that the artist forget his means in the pursuit of his end. For Emerson, Poe was "the jingle man" because he lost sight of the functional necessity of beauty, in his preoccupation with the means of composition. On the contrary, Whitman was the true poet, because he subordinated the means of expression to the imaginative truth to be expressed. No doubt, Emerson's theory of the organic nature of art was essentially modern, but his practice of that theory was not always very successful. His own poetry could not completely free itself from the conventions of the past. It was Whitman actually who practiced Emerson's ideal better than Emerson himself. For instance, although Emerson always disparaged metres, he never abandoned it in his poems. Similarly, his language never embraced, though always demanded, "the factory village and the railway" in his poetry. He also seldom celebrated an American set free in his poetry, as he had done in his prose. His poetry does give the impression of threatening to escape from metre and rhyme, but it never quite does in actuality. He does take liberty with both metre and rhyme, but he never discards them as Whitman does. However, the liberty that he takes with these tools of poetic composition is, in fact, an integral part of his poetry. It often imparts to his poems their greatest power. Many of his poems do abandon wholly or partly the element of rhyme. Even when he does not abandon it altogether, he often distorts it. Imperfect rhymes and assonances appear quite often in his poems. He may have sounded conventional to his early critics, but after Dickinson and the modernists, he has begun to look a forerunner of these experimentalists. Although not many, in one or two instances, such as "Earth Song", Emerson skips about, making utterly free with both metre and rhyme, until finally the last quatrain closes without ceremony, in two different metres:

*When I heard the Earth – song,  
I was no longer brave;  
My avarice cooled  
Like lust in the chill of the grave.*

Similar irregularity in the use of metre can also be seen in poems like "Threnody", "The Sphinx", "Merlin", "Bacchus", and "Terminus".

The trouble with Emerson's poetry is that it is not even regularly irregular. His poems like "Brahma", "The Concord Hymn", and "The Rhodora" are as regular as clockwork. At the same time, these poems are no less typical of Emerson, and no less successful. If he had developed exclusively the technique of free verse, American poetry would have lost some of its most perfect compositions. As a poet, as well as a philosopher or essayist, Emerson followed his own law. He sometimes ascended to the heights as well as frequently rolled in the dust. But with all its imperfections his poetry has endured exceptionally well. Many of his contemporaries (like Bryant, Holmes, and Longfellow) sound rather flat and old. But he continues to remain of interest and significance to the readers. None but Whitman can be said to have surpassed Emerson in popularity as a poet.

### **"The American Scholar" as an Ideal**

Delivered as an oration before the PHI BETA KAPPA Society, at Cambridge on August 31, 1837, "The American Scholar" expresses an ideal for the men of letters of the New World of America, which of late has come to be known as "American Dream." That the essay is an elaborate expression of a hope and dream for the future of America is made clear in the very opening: "Perhaps the time is already come when it ought to be, and will be, something else: when the sluggish intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectations of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our days of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves, who can



doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now dwells near Zenith, astronomers announce, shall one day be the polar-star for a thousand years." Here is the vision of a new nation, a new world, the American Dream of a glorious future, in the realm of letters, of poetry.

Emerson begins with an ancient fable which speaks of there being One Man, who is only partially present in every man; that men to this Man are like fingers to a hand. However, Emerson laments, that human race has become to exist in a divided or social state "in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters, - a good finger, a neck, an elbow, but never a man." The result is: "Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things". In Emerson's view, the scholar, in the right state, is "Man Thinking". While in the generate state, a victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking. Emerson lists a number of influences go into the shaping of the scholar. The first of these both in time and importance is that of nature. How it influences the young mind and elevates the soul is best explained in Emerson's own words.

*He shall see that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it, part for part. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature then becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, "know thyself", and the modern precept "study nature", becomes at last one maxim.*

Here one can see an element of mysticism in Emerson's view of man's relation to nature. There is a certain ambiguity of thought in the relationship. How laws of nature and the beauty of nature are also the laws and beauty of man? Where do these laws and the beauty reside, and how do they get transferred from one to the other remains a mystery. It must have been felt by Emerson through his own experience with nature, but it does not become easily clear to us who are not so much sensitive to the beauty and laws of nature. He could have become in these moments, his soul, a transparent eyeball. But we are not gifted like him. Hence the problem because his theory or philosophy of nature is largely based on experience, not thought as such. Hence unless one has the capacity to experience nature at that very level, one cannot comprehend the true nature of the relationships between man and nature.

The second great influence that shapes the spirit of the scholar is the "mind of the poet". Its form can be literature, art, institutions, which inscribe his mind. Books, he thinks, are the best type of the influence of the past. As he says: "Books are the best things, well used; abused, among the worst.... The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. They look backward and not forward - that which looks forward: the eyes of man are set in forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his; - cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame." Emerson makes out a difference between the common reader, who slaves himself to the books he reads, and the genius or creative reader, who, through his creative response, makes the book luminous: "There is therefore reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labour and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion... The discerning will read, in his Plato or Shakespeare, only that least part, - only the authentic utterances of the oracle; - all the rest he rejects, were it never so many times Plato's and Shakespeare's." Here again the problem is the same - the experience of reading a book is presented as something mystical, nor is any distinction made between book and book. It is only the true scholar of his concepts of the world, *illuminate the book and hear only the oracles in the work, and nothing else. Decidedly, it is a mystical process.* No scientific criterion can be made out of his long argument on the subject.

The third thing that Emerson considers essential for the scholar is that he should be a man acting, just as he is man thinking. He debunks the conventional impression that the scholar must be a man of seclusion, incapable of action. He finds it rather offensive that "the so-called practical men should sneer at speculative men, as if, because they do not create or see, they could do nothing." Emerson finds it an unacceptable binary thinking that one can either act or think, that one cannot combine the two. In his view, "As far as this is true of studious classes, it is not just at all. Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it he is not yet man. Without it thought can never find truth. Whilst the world hangs before the eye as a cloud of beauty, we cannot even see its beauty. Inaction is a hindrance, but there can be no scholar without the heroic mind. The preamble of thought, the transition through which we pass from the unconscious to the conscious, is action. Only so much do I know, as I have lived. Instantly we are made of words and

loaded with life, and whose not." Action or an active commerce with the business of living, in Emerson's view, is essential for the writer even for gathering words which he needs for expressing his experience, his ideas and emotions: "If it were only for a vocabulary, the scholar would be covetous of action. Life is our dictionary. . . . Life lies behind us as the quarry from where we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made.

Still more important value of action for the scholar, in Emerson's view, is its being a "resource" for him. He considers it a better resource than books. In fact, in his conception of the scholar, thinking and acting are inseparable, for each reproduces the other. Whenever books become a weariness, the scholar "has always the resource *to live*." A scholar has to be a man of "character", which, to Emerson, "is higher than intellect". As he says, "Thinking is the function. Living is the functionary. The stream retreats to its source. A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think." Great writers (scholars) are born, not from books or libraries, but from the guts of life. "Not out of those on whom systems of education have exhausted their culture, comes the helpful giant to destroy the old or to build the new, but out of unhand-sold savage nature; out of terrible Druids and Berserkers come at last Alfred and Shakespeare." Thus, the function of the scholar, the poet, the writer, for Emerson, is public, not private; "He is to find consolation in exercising the highest functions of human nature. He is one who raises himself from private considerations and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts. He is the world's eye. He is the world's heart." The scholar of Emerson's conception has to be a fearless and brave person. He has to be a free thinker, not inhibited or intimidated by anything in life. He must be a man of supreme self-trust: "In self-trust all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be, — free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom, 'without any hinderance that does not arise out of his own constitution'. Brave; for fear is a thing which a scholar by his very function puts behind him." He is to be the seeker of truth, truth that lies behind the shining spectacle of material life. Common people get engrossed into the material world. The uncommon hero, the poet, the scholar, is like a seer who can see through the material world, transcend the contingent, and see the real reality behind it, and then show it to the common man, open his eyes to it. As Emerson puts it, "Men, such as they are, very naturally see money or power; and power because it is as good as money, — the 'spoils', so called 'of office'. And why not? For they aspire to the highest, and this, in their sleep-walking, they dream is highest. Wake them and they shall quit the false good and leap to the true, and leave governments to clerks and desks. This revolution is to be wrought by the gradual domestication of the idea of culture. The main enterprise of the world for splendour, for extent, is the upbuilding of a man. Here are the materials strewn along the ground. The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy, more formidable to its enemy, more sweet and serene in its influence to its friend, than any kingdom in history." Here is expressed the Hindu belief in the life of spirit, which lies behind and beyond the world of maya, what Emerson calls the world of sleep-walking — when the spirit or soul is asleep and the body alone functions, appetites of the body run for aggrandisement. The scholar's task is to "wake" up every individual, make him aware of "real reality", of "truth" darkened by the cloud of maya. It is the scholar's task to show how the cloud is transitory and temporary, how the truth lies behind it like the sun, always bright, and always the same, one unchanging light. Thus, Emerson's scholar is a seer, an inspired poet, an enlightened and awakened soul, gone far beyond the level of mundane life of everyday pursuits. He is, as Buddha tells his disciple, the "delivered" one. Now, he is to go and "deliver" others, "deliver" them from their bondage to material life, from their enslavement to the material world, detach them from it, so that they can see with their open, their awakened eyes, the real reality.

Thus defining the scholar in all his aspects, including his making and his functions, Emerson turns his attention "to the time and this country". Talking of times, of ages, of periods of history, of its epochs, Emerson dismisses the ideas of decline, like human race moving from the golden age to the silver to the iron, etc., or from the classic, to the romantic, to the critical, etc. He rejects the Hamlet-attitude to life where time is found out of joint. To Emerson, all times are the same. Only we need to face them aright; "This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it." Being a great optimist, Emerson always pins his hopes on the future. He believes in the idea of evolution, spiritual more than the material, one through the other, not one instead of the other. That is why "I read with the same joy of auspicious signs of the coming days, as they glimmer already through poetry and art, through philosophy and science, through church and state." One of these positive sings for a brighter, more glorious, future he sees in the rise of the lower and middle classes, in the rise of democracy:

*One of these signs is the fact that the same movement which effected the elevation of what was called the lowest class in the state, assumed in literature as very marked and as benign an aspect, was explored and poetized. That which had been negligently trodden under foot by those who were harnessing and provisioning themselves for long journeys into far countries, is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign poets. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride. It is a sign -- is it not? -- of new vigor when the extremities are made active, when the currents of warm life run into the hands and the feet. I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art or Provencal minstrelsy; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low*

This, decidedly, is a democratic manifesto for the literature of the new world. Wordsworth had given a call against the literature of decorum, but he confined his call to the language of poetry, not the subject of the poet, his primary concern. No doubt, he wrote about small people, about their small concerns, but soon returned to his own subjective, egotistical, sublime subject. Emerson's call is for a total revolution in the realm of letters, for poetizing the "unpoetical". Although acknowledging in this revolution a change in the essential character of literary writing of Goldsmith, Burns, Cowper, Goethe, Wordsworth and Carlyle, whose writing is "blood-warm" as against the "cold and pedantic style of Pope, Johnson and Gibbon, Emerson pays special tribute to Emanuel Swedenborg, "one man of genius who has done much for the philosophy of life". Emerson assigns him the highest place in this process of change from the literature of the powerful and the privileged to that of poor and unprivileged:

*The most imaginative of men, yet writing with the precision of a mathematician, he endeavored to engraft a purely philosophical Ethics on the popular Christianity of his time..... he saw and showed connection between nature and the affections of the soul. He pierced the emblematic or spiritual character of the visible, audible, tangible world. Especially did his shade loving muse hover over and interpret the lower parts of nature; he showed the mysterious bond that allies moral evil of the foul material forms, and has given in epical parables a theory of insanity, of beasts, of unclean and fearful things.*

Related to this change, Emerson finds, is the change in his time that has come about in the new importance given to the single person. The latter being a change in political movement has direct bearing on the change in the literary movement. The scholar of Emerson's vision has to embrace these changes; he has to become an embodiment of all these and give expression in his writings to the new world that emerges, the new hope that arises, from the changes taking place.

Returning to the role of a scholar in the changing world, Emerson emphasizes:

*The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another which should pierce his ear, it is, The world is nothing, the man is all -- in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sop ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all.*

Assigning the above task to his scholar, he returns in particular to the situation of his own country, the newly independent nation, eager to seek its separate and unique identity. Emerson shows the path for finding that identity, for forging it.

*"We have listened to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice makè the air we breathe the thick and fat. The scholar is decent, indolent, complaisant ..... It is not the chief digrace in the World, not to be an unit; - not to be reckoned one character; - not to yield that peculiar fruit which each man was created to bear but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand, of the party, the section, to which we belong.... we will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands, we will speak with our own minds.... A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men."*

With this inspiring rhetoric of nationalism and patriotism, which came natural to him from his earlier practice as Unitarian minister, Emerson closes his address to the American scholars, carving out for them a distinct and historical role of giving expression to the unique identity of a new nation, a democratic nation, a model nation for the new world, a hope for mankind, etc.

## Self-Reliance: Philosophy of Individualism

Emerson opens his famous essay "Self-Reliance" with a quotation from "Epilogue" to *Honest Man's Fortune*, a Jacobean play by Beaumont and Fletcher. The epigraph reads as under:

*"Man is his own star; and the soul that can  
Render an honest and a perfect man  
Commands all light, all influence, all fate;  
Nothing to him falls early or too late.  
Our acts our angels, or good or ill,  
Our fatal shadows that work by us still."*

Starting with the settled premise of the romantic philosophy, that the individual soul in solitude, in its pristine purity, is the universal soul, that the individual self in that pure state contains within itself all others, the entire cosmos, Emerson puts that Democritus's, Socratic, belief, of "know thyself" or "Look Within", in his own rhetorical style, making it highly inspiring for the individual, elating the individual self to its own godhood. The opening paragraph makes a powerful statement of the subject of the essay. Note, how it resounds in the individual ears:

*To believe our own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, – that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the utmost, and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment. Familiar as the voice of the mind is to each, the highest merit we ascribe to Moses, Plato and Milton is that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men, but what they thought. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great words of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored flexibility than most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else tomorrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another.*

Thus, the entire thrust of Emerson's argument is to teach every one to be himself, and no one imitator of others. Each man has a power of his own, gifted by nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. Emerson's contention is that we do not express ourselves fully, and are therefore "ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents." It is for this reason that man is happy and relaxed when he has put his heart into his work and done his best. It is because he has thus fully expresses himself. However, if what he has said or done otherwise, without having his heart in the word or deed, that will not give him any peace. In such a case, it is a deliverance which does not deliver. In this attempt of acting against his own grain, "his genius deserts him; no muse befriends; no invention, no hope."

Emerson's advice to each individual is "Trust Thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string." Riding the high tide of resounding rhetoric Emerson carries his call to the hypnotic heights, lifting his listeners above the earth, carrying them along on his ascendance to an airy abode of the American dream. Note, for instance, the power of his rhetoric and the flight of his imagination:

*Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the heighest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort and advancing on Chaos and Dark.*

In this theory of man's nature and his place in the universe, child has a special place. He is free, whereas the man becomes a prisoner. To become self-reliant, one has to become the child and attain the same freedom the child enjoys. As Emerson argues, "A boy is in the parlor what the pit is in the playhouse; independent, irresponsible—[he] to chamber himself never about consequences, about interests, he gives an independent, genuine verdict. You must court him; he does not court you. But the man is as it were clapped into jail by his consciousness. As soon as he has once been acted or spoken with éclat he is a committed person, watched by the sympathy or the hatred of hundreds, whose affections must now enter into his account. There is no Lethe for this. Ah, that he would pass again into his neutrality. The Self-Reliant person, the autonomous individual, will find himself at odds with society because society forces every individual to surrender his freedom to the larger organization. Emerson echoes in his thoughts here both Wordsworth and Rousseau. Wordsworth's view of the child's divinity, clouded in later life by the coverings of interests and Rousseau's view that man is born free but everywhere he finds himself in chains, are put together in the paragraph, from which combination Emerson formulates his theory of non-conformism:

*There are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most requests is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.*

This argument about the inherent antagonism of self and society leads Emerson to conclude, "Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist. . . . Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself and you shall have the suffrage of the world. . . . No law can be sacred to me but that of my culture. . . . the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong that is against it. A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition as if everything were titular and ephemeral but he."

Thus Emerson insists on the complete autonomy of the individual self, on its being a sacred, a law unto itself, a work by itself. He does not accept what are generally called good and bad. His contention is that good is whatever spontaneously springs from the self, bad whatever does not spring from within. Self must have its own free flow of self-expression, which is not possible in public, in the company of others: it requires solitude to feel free to reveal itself, to realize itself. Hence: "I shun father and mother and wife and brother when my genius calls me. I could write on the lintels of the door-post, Whim. . . . Expect me not to show why I seek or why I exclude company. In Emerson's view of self's solitude, it is not necessary to retire like the exile, to abandon society and live in utter isolation far removed from the society of your fellow beings. Emerson makes clear his meaning of solitude. "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude." Thus, solitude, for Emerson is a state of mind, autonomy of the self. One can be a slave even while living in an isolated place outside of society, if he is not free in his mind, if he lives in conformity with the society's norms and ideals. The great man is the self-reliant man, who follows the call of his own self, the call that comes from within, and does not lead a life which is other-directed.

Emerson's opposition to conformism has a sound reason behind it. Conforming to dead usages, he says, "scatters your force". It loses your time, and blurs the impression of your character. The examples of such a conformism include maintaining a dead church, contributing to a dead Bible-society, and voting with a great party. He says these activities do not reveal your true self. "But do your work, and I shall know you. Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself. A man must consider what a blind-man's-buff is this game of conformity." Emerson finds conformism of all forms a life of (what the existentialists have termed) "bad faith" — you do things, not because you like them to do, but because they are in conformity with others. "Well, most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief, and attached themselves to some one of these communities of opinion. This conformity makes them not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars." But nature works against such conformism. It equips us in "the prison-uniform" of the party to which we attach ourselves. Nature shows up its disapproval in our nervous expressions, our false and forced smiles. No doubt, the world whips us for nonconformity with its displeasure. "The bystanders look at nonconformists askance in the public street or in the friend's parlor." The rage of the cultivated classes may be brooked, but that of the multitude may turn brutal and devastating. Equally terrifying is our consistency

for our past act or word, which scares us from self-trust. Since others have no other date for comparing our orbit than our part acts, and we are loth to disappoint them, we continue acting against our own self, our own inner voice.

In Emerson's view, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has nothing to do.... Speak what you think now in hard words and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today." They will say you will be misunderstood. Emerson advises us not to worry about contradiction or misunderstanding. All great men have always been misunderstood. Examples of Pythagoras, Socrates, Jesus, Luther, Copernicus, Galileo, and, Newton, he says, are before us. They were misunderstood. "To be great is to be misunderstood." All the falsities we practice in life cannot change our nature, our innate character. As Emerson emphatically states,

*I suppose no man can violate his nature. All the sallies of his will are rounded in by the law of his being, as the inequalities of Andes and Himmaleh are insignificant in the curve of the sphere. Nor does it matter how you gauge and try him. A character is like an acrostic or Alexandrian stanza, – lead it forward, backward, or across, it still spells the same thing..... We pass for what we are. Character teaches about our wills. Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment.*

Thus, Emerson pleads for genuine action, not false conformism, which will explain itself and will explain one's other genuine actions. "Your conformity explains nothing." He encourages us to act singly, and what one has already done singly will justify him now. "Greatness appeals to the future." Hence Emerson insists: "Be it how it will, do right now. Always scorn appearances and you always may. The force of character is cumulative." Patiently giving familiar examples, showing that what we are in the mirror of our conscience, Emerson builds up an environment of the mind to finally command us to do his bidding. That is the way of great rhetorician, the arch-persuader.

"Let us affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times, and hurl in the face of custom and trade and office, the fact which is the upshot of all history. That there is a great responsible Thinker and Actor working wherever a man works; that a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the centre of all things. Where he is, there is nature. He measures you and all men and all events..... Every true man is a cause, a country, and an age; requires infinite spaces and numbers and time fully to accomplish his design..... An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man... and all history revolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons." Caesar and Christ are the examples of such persons. Thus, Emerson calls for a revolt against conformism, against mediocrity, custom and trade. He echoes Carlyle in reminding us of heroes of history, telling us that history is nothing but biographies of a few heroes. But heroes compel worship, and finally force us to conform to the new creed they cause to create. Common men will only adopt one conformism for another. But we must not forget that Emerson wants us all to follow the great and become great ourselves. What a world will it be then? It has never had, nor can it accommodate, so many great men. Can it?

Emerson's philosophy of self-trust or self-reliance finally hinges on "instinct" or "intuition". He gives us an elaborate account of how a personality authentically expresses itself through instinct or intuition alone:

*What is the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded? What is the nature and power of that science – baffled star, without parallax, without calculable elements, which shoots a ray of beauty even into trivial and impure actions, if the least mark of independence appear? The inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call 'Spontaneity or Instinct.' We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later techniques are tuitions. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin. For the sense of being which in calm hours arises, we know not how, from time, from man, but one with them and proceeds obviously from the same source whence their life and being also proceed. We first share the life by which things exist and afterwards see them as appearances in nature and forget that we have shared their cause. Here is the fountain of action and of thought. Here are the lungs of that inspiration which giveth man wisdom and which cannot be denied without impiety and atheism. We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us*

*receivers of its truth and organs of its activity. When we discern truth we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams. If we ask whence this comes if we seek to pry into the soul that causes, all philosophy is at fault. Its presence or its absence is all we can affirm. Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due. He may err the expression of them, but he knows that these things are so, like day and night, not to be disputed.*

Here, as elsewhere, comes Emerson's mysticism. He substitutes religion by this Wordsworthian sort of pantheism – a substitute faith not to be disputed, but only to be felt, and felt through intuition, imagination, instinct. You act just as a channel to transmit the light, the rays, of that "immense intelligence" (a substitute God), an immanent power. All reasoning, all questioning, stops here. You just feel it, see it, marvel at it, obey its commands spontaneously, instinctively, and live as a self-reliant person, obeying none else but this immanent presence that acts through you involuntarily, not consciously. You just get absorbed into it, assimilated into it, become one with it. Well, this is what we call mysticism. Wordsworth and Tagore preach the same. Emerson is one of such seers, the poet-prophet, the inspired bard.

Emerson, for formulating his theory of Self-Reliance, and, more so, for convincing the reader of it, takes a long route, touching upon all aspects of man's life, showing how man is of divine origin, has a divine soul, has a unique self, showing how all the divine aspects, mind and soul of man, are repressed and suppressed, by society, by customs, convictions, religions, other social institutions, by past, by books, etc., then commanding each and every individual soul to throw away the shackles, to return to himself, to divine power, and muster courage to stand on his own as man thinking, man acting, man living, and say "I am". At this stage in the essay, he speaks of the relation between the soul and the divine Spirit, which is so pure that it is profane to seek helps. "Whenever a mind is simple and receives a divine wisdom, old things pass away, – means, teachers, texts, temples fall; it lives now, and absorbs past and future into the present hour." Soul alone is the pure and true light. All else are constraints. They are conspirators against soul – history as well as church. Man has been degenerated by the centuries of slavery to these institutions – political, social, religious, philorophic, literary. Man has grown "timid and apologetic"; he is no longer upright", he dares not say "I think", "I am", but quotes "some saint or sage." In a Whiteman-like rhapsody Emerson writes of man that

*He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose. These roses under my window make no reference to former roses, or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God today. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence. Before a leaf-bud has burst, its whole life acts; in the full-blown flower there is no more, in the leafless root there is no less. Its nature is satisfied and it satisfies nature in all moments alike. But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past or, headless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy or strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time.*

The essence of the argument is a call for going back to nature, for becoming an object of nature, erasing history and tradition, philorophy and literature. The dilemma of this Romantic call is: how can you erase the growth of consciousness that has taken place in the human mind? How can a man become a rose or a blade of grass? Can he throw away his mind? Can he throw away his consciousness? Can he become just an object of nature, existing in the moment, unaware of past and future? Maybe this state of being can be reached in solitude through a life of meditation. But that will be an individual life in nature alone, not in human society? Emerson, like any other Romantic, wants to revolutionize man, and all men, but offers him an ideal of nature, not of society. How can we have a revolution in the world of man, if he is to be reduced to an object of the vegetable world? These are disquieting questions the present essay, like any other Romantic document, raises.

The Romantic love of solitude, and its acceptance as a necessary condition for the becoming of the individual soul, for even realizing its relationship with other souls, is another disquieting attitude. How can the individual self become a meaningful part of society, strike a relationship with the other selves, or society, remains problematic, although Emerson and the other Romantics see no dichotomy in that position. Note, for instance, the following:

*But now we are a mob. Man does not stand in awe of man, nor is his genius admonished to stay at*

*home, to put itself in communication with the internal ocean, but it goes abroad to beg a cup of water of the urns of other men. We must go alone. I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching. How far off, how cool, how chaste the persons look, begirt each one with a precinct or sanctuary! So let us always sit. Why should we assume the faults of our friend, or wife, or father, or child, because they sit around our hearth or are said to have the same blood? All men have my blood and I all men's. Not for that will I adopt their petulance or folly, even to the extent of being ashamed of it. But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation. At times the whole world seems to be in the conspiracy to importune you with emphatic trifles. Friend, client, child, sickness, fear, want, charity, all knock at once at thy closet door and say. - "Come out into us". But keep thy state; come not into their confusion,*

Here is a lyrical prose, pure poetry. And yet the argument is straight. Man must not become a part of the mob. He must stand alone. But his isolation is not to be mechanical, a physical separation from others. It has to be spiritual, an elevation. He must remain a part of the "internal ocean"; he must maintain communication with it. The whole world will be making effort to tempt him to trifles. That he must resist. He must not join the maddening crowd; but he must remain in spiritual union with them, even while he is staying physically separated from them. There must exist among men a democracy of souls, a union, a harmony, an ocean.

Like Buddha, Emerson wishes each individual to become a soldier of truth. He must not continue obeying others who live a false life, doing and uttering untruths just for the sake of conformism, for the sake of false harmony and solidarity. He must say goodbye to the life of falsehood. He must opt out of the world of falsehood. He must opt for truth. He must learn to live alone, away from his dear ones, and live with truth alone. Others are welcome to the new world of truth, new community of souls, of pure life. Henceforth, the soldier of truth must muster courage to say what he thinks and feels; and must have not seen the light of truth. Only he has. And he must follow that light. He must stay out of the vast darkness of ignorance and sham, of customs and conventions, laws and commands of the worldlings, who live by tradition, not by truth. Note, for instance, the following:

*Live no longer to the expectation of these deceived and deceiving people with whom we converse. Say to them, "O father, O mother, O wife, O brother, O friend, I have lived with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforward I am the truth's. Be it known unto you that henceforward I obey no law less than the eternal law. I will have no covenants but proximities. I shall endeavor to nourish my parents, to support my family, to be the chaste husband of one wife, - but these relations I must fill after a new and unprecedented way. I appeal from your customs. I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you, or you. If you can love me for what I am, we shall be the happier. If you cannot, I shall still seek to deserve that you should. I will not hide my tastes and aversions. I will so trust that what is deep is holy.... If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions.... I do this not selfishly but humble and truly. It is alike your interest, and mine, and all men's, however lone we have dwelt in lies, to live in truth. Does this sound harsh today? You will soon love what is dictated by your nature as well as mine, and if we follow the truth it will bring us out safe at last.*

Here are enlisted several steps for setting up the kingdom of truth. First, an individual, like Buddha or Gandhi, has to take a stand to be himself, to commit himself to the law of truth, and to no other law. Then, he has to start with his parents, his near-ones, with all those that come into contact with him. He would do it in all humility, not in arrogance. Even if his parents and near ones do not see the truth, do not like his separation in the path of truth, he will continue doing his duty towards them, but without deviating from the path of truth, without sharing their life of sham and falsehood. He would wait for the day when their nature will also come out for the truth, compel them to follow the path he is following today. Until then, he will continue the journey on the path of truth, not hurting others, but always hoping that finally they have to follow the same path, they have to join them in his pursuit and practice of truth.

This hope on the part of Emerson, that "nature" in each individual will assert itself and pull him out of the world of falsehood, has been a source of uneasiness even among his admirers. This hope is a mark of his pure optimism, of a dream and a vision, of a community of men, of a society, in which all will finally become pure souls, soldiers of truths,



and there will be none impure of soul, not in the service of truth. It is for this reason that Emerson has been called a "visionary" and a "mystic", for the belief in the essential purity of each individual, and his gradual but inevitable turning to good and truth, sounds rather other-worldly, having no relation with the realities of mankind as it has been through the entire history of the human race. Obviously, Emerson lacks the dimension of history. History for him has been a continuity of false institutions, a perpetuation of falsehood. Well, it has been. But, at the same time, is not that evidence enough to belie the vision of a "pure" society? One senses with serious uneasiness an utter lack of awareness on the part of Emerson of the evil in man, in human nature. After all whatever wickedness there has been in the world through the ages, where has it emanated from, if not from within man himself? It was this lack of awareness on his part that made his colleagues like Hawthorne and Melville withdraw from his illusory ideal and take refuge with the "power of evil" in the world.

However, to the extent that the ideal presented in the present essay, "Self-Reliance", can be practiced only through rare courage and conviction, Emerson is not entirely unaware of the ideal or utopian nature of his belief. The very fact that he acknowledges the fact of everybody not being capable of committing himself at once to the law of truth shows that he is not wholly unmindful of the impossibility of realizing his vision. But he also expresses an unwavering faith in the mystical inevitability of "nature" finally turning to itself, to truth, and truth alone:

*And truly it demands something godlike in him who has cast off the common motives of humanity, and has ventured to trust himself for a taskmaster. High be his heart, faithful his will, clear his sight, that he may in good earnest be doctrine, society, law, to himself, that a simple purpose may be to him as strong as iron necessity is to others!*

But simultaneously,

*It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work of revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their associations; in their property; in their speculative views.*

Such a sure and pure belief apart, Emerson is very convincing, and powerfully so, when he comes to argue against the false practices of people, their ill-founded institutions, their natural and supernatural pretensions, etc. See how vigorously he exposes and opposes the practice of prayer that people mindlessly pursue in the churches and the shrines:

*Prayer that craves a particular commodity, anything less than all good, is vicious. Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul. It is the spirit of God pronouncing his works good. But prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft. It supposes dualism and not unity in nature and consciousness. As soon as the man is at one with God, he will not beg. He will then see prayer in all action.*

Here there are no ambiguities, no vaguenesses, no visionary flights. Emerson is very concise and cogent, precise and forthright. He comes out forcefully against "dualism", against the vulgarity of using prayer as begging for worldly gains and goods. When doing this, the minister in Emerson is at his best. No less powerful a refutation Emerson makes of the practice of praying for regret or repentance. He feels enraged by any act of hypocrisy or sham. He just cannot stand any such falsehood. Note, how he tirades against such a practice:

*Another sort of false prayers are our regrets. Discontent is the want of self-reliance: it is impotence of will. Regret calamities if you can thereby help the sufferer; if not, attend your own work and already the evil begins to be repaired. Our sympathy is just as base. We come to them when they are foolishly and sit down and cry for company, instead of imparting to them truth and health in rough electric shocks, putting them once more in communication with our own reason. The secret of fortune is joy in our hands. Welcome evermore to gods and men is the self-helping man. For him all doors are flung wide; him all tongues greet, all honors crown, all eyes follow with desire. Our love goes out to him because he did not need it ....*

Once again, we can see how powerful Emerson is in his task of exposition. This negative activity is done with the strength of reason and rationalism. The sham is ruthlessly revealed. But the moment he comes to the positive, to the world of his vision, to what is to replace the present and the corrupt, then he becomes lyrical, pure poetry. Here the

italicized sentences, for example, show that weakness. One likes to get lulled by such lyricism. One does get hypnotized by the rhetoric of the visionary lore. But when you come out of the trance and see with wakened eyes, then the weakness of the vision, its wooliness, its cosiness comes off like padding falling off the hard surface that refuses to take it. In other words, there emerge two Emersons in the essay – one is the Unitarian minister attacking dualism, the other is the Transcendentalist Emerson going into the trance of his spiritual vision of a world of his heart's desire. Thus, the critic and the poet, the preacher and the prophet, the satirist and the seer travel together, sitting side by side, in a single seat, with an uneasy contact of contrary poles.

Emerson next takes up the inadequacies of systems, of man-made creeds and philosophies, that follow the appearance of every great mind, that compels its own following. The more creeds and philosophies appear, the more removed the individual becomes from his personal god, the god within him, his own true self, his own nature. Hence it becomes necessary for the individual to get free of all these man-made creeds and systems so that he can find his own self. In other words, in order that the individual may discover his own self, he has to lose all else he has accumulated during the long course of life. He must shed all aids, must abandon his crutches, he must stand on his own legs. In other words, he must be wholly self-reliant. Even traveling to gain knowledge is not approved by Emerson. For him, even that is a form of reliance on something outside of yourself. Note this plea on traveling:

*But this rage for traveling is a symptom of a deeper unsoundness affecting the whole intellectual action. The intellect is vagabond and our system of education fosters restlessness. Our minds travel when our bodies are forced to stay at home. We imitate; and what is imitation but the traveling of mind? Our houses are built with foreign taste; our shelves are garnished with foreign ornaments; our opinions, our tastes, our faculties lean, and follow the Past and the Distant. The soul created the arts wherever they have flourished. It was in his own mind that the artist sought his model. It was an application of his own thought to the thing to be done and the conditions to be observed. And why need we copy the Doric or the Gothic mode? ...*

Hence, the American artist must not imitate anyone. Emerson, in all his writings, seems to be guided by his express purpose of making every individual American, as well as the American nation, to be self-reliant, to learn to trust himself, to create a separate identity for himself. Thus, even his philosophy of self-reliance, which is essentially spiritual or ethical, is not free from that tinge of nationalism – his compelling thought as a poet-prophet of the new nation. Therefore, he must exhort his nation as well as his fellow American to

*Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another you have only an extemporaneous half possession. That which each can do best, none but his maker can teach him .... Shakespeare will never be made by the study of Shakespeare. Do that which is assigned you, and you can-not hope too much or dare too much ... Abide in the simple and the noble regions of thy life, obey thy heart, and thou shalt reproduce the Foreworld again.*

Thus, Emerson concludes his essay with the call for making an effort "to know thyself". One has to grow conscious of one's power that lies within him. "He who knows that power is inborn, that he is weak because he has looked for good out of him and elsewhere, and so perceiving, throws himself unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his links, works miracles; just as a man who stands on his feet is stronger than a man who stands on his head."

### Emerson's Transcendentalism

Emerson experienced personal suffering and loss of faith in the historic Christianity as he had received it. As a way out of this crisis he developed an alternate faith we call Transcendentalism. He himself generally named it "Idealism". For Emerson, it was a way of finding meaning in life once again, when it had seemed for a time that there was perhaps no meaning. Aware of this loss that saddened Longfellow and depressed Lowell – his contemporary poets – he set about the task of supplying a substitute for that loss. Emerson had made his mission to show that despite the loss of Biblical faith God most assuredly still governs.

The distinguishing feature of metaphysical idealism, historically considered, is its emphasis on "mind over matter".

The proposition, variously expressed, is that the knower somehow creates the known, that the conditions of perception determine the content of perception. But as Emerson tried to elaborate this proposition into a system, he discovered that his experience was too rich and varied to be contained in any neatly framed system. Refusing to ignore his contradictory insights, he found himself using terminology more and more loosely in an effort to express attitudes and meanings no doctrinal system could hold. Sacrificing consistency to new experience, logical coherence to growth, he contradicted himself more and more and did not care. Like Walt Whitman, he was ready to say, "Do I contradict myself?", and reply, "Yes, I do. I am large enough to contain contradictions." He rightly did not care because his most important insight was that life always burst the bonds of systematic thought. The clearest implication of his thought was that there could be no system about life.

Emerson's thought, at its deepest level of motivation, was not philosophic. It was rather emotive, and hence religious. A belief to be philosophic has to acquire the shape of a careful and precise thought, which it never did in the case of Emerson. His belief in Transcendentalism remained as much of an irrational belief as it is in the case of religious faith. His effort was not so much to clarify the nature of reality as to enable men to live in it under the new and terrifying conditions that depressed Lowell. As Emerson himself asserted, "the advantage of the ideal theory over the popular faith is this, that it presents the world in precisely that view which is most desirable to the mind." That is perhaps the ultimate reason why he could remain unconcerned about his own inconsistency. He did not care that there was, in his "idealism", an over-all lack of purely philosophic, or systematically rational, clarity. It is, therefore, not surprising that professional philosophers ordinarily do not take Emerson seriously. The fact remains that Emerson was not a philosopher, nor was he ever eager to become one. He was happy to be a prophet of a new way of life. He is, in fact, much closer to a mystic than to a philosopher. He remained a poet first and last, who solely relied on his rudimentary mystical experiences and preached what he perceived from those experiences.

Thus Emerson's Transcendentalism, like Existentialism, must be taken as a religious movement expressed in quasi-philosophic terms. It was an effort on his part to make us all dance "To the cadence of the whirling world which dances around the sun," as Emerson put it in a poem not published in his lifetime. As he himself put it in his essay "The Transcendentalist", it was a revolt of the young men against the religious authority of the past, in the name not of irreligion but of a deeper and truer religion. All its other aspects – economic, political, literary – sprang from this central core of purpose. To quote Emerson himself once again, Transcendentalism is what faith becomes in "Unitarian and Commercial times" – that is, in a culture which he saw as dryly rationalistic, moralistic, and utilitarian, a culture which, as Kierkegaard said of himself, professed faith but really had none. Rather than being faithless as its opponents charged, Emerson felt that Transcendentalism might more fairly be accused of being a "Saturnalia or excess of Faith". He may have had his tongue in the cheek when he said it, for we know how it was born out of his loss of faith. A son and inheritor of the Puritans, Emerson had first doubted all that the Puritan faith rested on, before he had found comfort in conceiving a different kind of loss of self from that envisaged by Edward Taylor. Although Emerson expressed his rebellion against his religious inheritance in very strong terms, his sense of his continuity with the religious tradition behind him often comes out in his letters and journals. It does not, of course, come out so clearly in his public assertions.

The rational justification for Emerson's "Saturnalia" was his conviction that "God Is, not Was". It is generally taken to mean a mere (and a skeptical) rejection of orthodoxy. But the statement affirms more than it denies. It is too emphatic to be skeptical. As Emerson puts it in his "Introduction" to Nature,

*The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?*

Here, Emerson clearly seems to imply that if God means to us only an ancient belief, then for us God is effectively dead. Revelation could not have ceased when the canon of Holy Writ was determined, nor could the reports of God be limited to one book. Revelation is continuous, universal and unmediated. To Emerson, it is the God Who exists and manifests Himself in "the eternal law" that matters, not the one who manifested in the remote past. To him, the forms of ancient belief and ritual have lost their power: they conceal God from us rather than reveal Him. A God who only "was" in Emerson's view, cannot matter to us today. "I draw from nature the lesson of an intimate divinity" says Emerson.

This can be said to be the central insight of Emerson's original Transcendentalism. As he grew older, he tried to deal with greater seriousness with the philosophic difficulties that came up when one asserted immediate and continuous revelation to every man. Questions like the following continuously arose; Why was the relation between experience and reality not clear? Why did so many men seem unaware of the revelation which nature continuously offers? What part does illusion play in experience? By the time Emerson came to write his *The conduct of life* his thought had grown more rationalistic, less intuitive, and less mystical. But even when he continuously qualified, he never really renounced his earlier position. Emerson's problem was that if the reports of ancient miracles were dubious, logical proofs of God are no less unavailing. The "method of nature" is the method of "ecstasy". Hence experience of transcendence requires no logical proof and scriptural authority; it is self-authenticating, as the heart knows. Thus, for Emerson, truest knowledge is revealed only to the depths of our being. However, it does not mean, in Emerson's view, that it is wholly subjective, something which can just be imagined, wished, or made up. The revelation available to us in experience can come only if we "open" ourselves to experience, "unlock our human doors", as Emerson says in "The Poet", and let the "tides of Being" flow through us. To find God in experience, he thought, we have to learn how to *look* for Him.

Emerson developed, fully though unsystematically, a method of transcendence by using vision as a metaphor for all sensuous experience. Seeing with transparent eyeballs, opening the doors of our being, we could see the eternal Beauty, the flowing Spirit, everywhere. Emerson's method of transcendence through a sharpened and expanded consciousness is related to the *via affirmativa* of the mystics, the "affirmation of images." This way to mystical awareness and union moves by means of the senses "through nature to God". Although its end is the reverse of that of the *via negativa*, the "negation of images", which moves downward into the darkness of the self instead of outward into the light of things. Emerson's reading of the Indian thought had revealed to him that God Is, that he is in every one; and that all things are nothing but shadows of Him. Emerson's problem arose when he entertained a recurring suspicion, that all experience may be an illusion. He came to have, in fact, even a deeper reason than this to feel disturbed about. His ability to experience nature, as his theory told him he should, grew less and less with the years, particularly after the death of his son Waldo in 1842. His faith had rested on the possibility of ecstatic revelations coming within and through experience, illuminations, epiphanies granted day by day. But if the illuminations did not come, then what? How could he go on being a Transcendentalist?

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, Emerson changed his thought in the direction of theistic, evolutionary humanism. This change becomes perceptible in his essay, *The Conduct of Life*, as well as in his poem "The Adirondacks". In his changed thought, Nature, which once had impressed him as a source of illumination, now got redefined as "limitation", another term for "fate". In this modified outlook, the Over-Soul became an emergent deity, and natural evil. What he had once described as merely private, — that is the absence of good, not ultimately Real in itself — was now the starting-point of his thought, as it becomes clear in his essay "Fate". The later modification in his Transcendentalism notwithstanding, the key ideas of Emerson's outlook on life (if philosophy is too heavy a word for it) still reside in his major essays of the early phase, the ones that followed his open revolt against the institutionalized religion, namely "Nature", "The Divinity School Address", "The American Scholar", "Self-Reliance", and "Over-Soul". Put together, these pieces constitute the entire scheme, if not system, of his new belief we call by the name of Transcendentalism. Let us briefly state these ideas as they appear in each of these pieces.

To begin with, the key passage in *Nature* articulates the essence of Emerson's Idealism (as he names his new belief, which we call Transcendentalism). In this passage, there occurs a sudden illumination to Emerson as he is "crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky." Losing himself, becoming as it were "nothing" while "seeing" all, letting "the currents of the Universal Being circulate through" him, he knew himself only as "part or parcel of God". Here, the loss of self was the "preparation" that brought instant "assurance" of "grace". He always preferred to say that "In the words we return to reason and faith". In his essay, "The Divinity School Address", resides the idea of God's immanence. If God is immanent and the old Scriptures no longer speak to us, Emerson guided, we shall have to learn to listen and look in a new way. "O taste and see, the Lord is good", wrote the Psalmist, not "listen to the voice of the ancient authorities". His idea of the continuous nature of revelation in his address to the Divinity School is essentially the same, that it is possible to find in our own experience sufficient assurance that "the fire and the rose are one".

In his third major essay, "The American Scholar", Emerson calls upon us to trust things, not words; to approach learning as though we had a life in which learning could play a vital role but was not the only value, or the only guide, to bring ideas to the test of action and action to the test of an eschatological vision. Emerson's views expressed here are later followed by many American writers including Frost. In the same vein, Emerson's "Self-Reliance" makes the central point emphasizing, not that we do not need to rely on anyone or anything beyond ourselves, but that in the last analysis there is nothing else to rely on, if our experience is to be our own and our decisions authentic. His contention is that unless we can love and trust ourselves, we shall not be able to love and trust anything or anyone, and shall be cut off from the springs of life. Similarly, in his essay "The Over-Soul", Emerson talks directly about his key religious convictions, such as the relation of centre to circumference. He also defines here his key concepts of "Unity", "Over-Soul", "One", "Law", "the Soul", etc. The following central, though long, passage explains it all in a succinct prose:

*...All goes to show that the soul in man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs; is not a function, like the power of memory, of calculation, of comparison, but uses these as hands and feet; is not a faculty, but a light; is not the intellect of the will, but the master of the intellect and the will; is the background of our being, in which they lie, – an immensity not possessed and thus cannot be possessed. From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all.*

*We distinguish the announcements of the soul, its manifestations of its own nature, by the term Revelation. These are always attended by the emotion of the sublime. For this communication is an influx of the Divine mind into our mind. It is an ebb of the individual rivulet before the flowing surges of the sea of life. Every distinct apprehension of this central commandment agitates men with awe and delight. A thrill passes through all men at the reception of new truth, or at the performance of a great action, which comes out of the heart of nature. In these communications the power to see is not separated from the will to do, but the insight proceeds from obedience, and the obedience proceeds from a joyful perception. Every moment when the individual feels himself invalid by it is memorable.*

All these ideas combine to clear our view of the Transcendentalists, including Emerson, as renegade Unitarians. Their chief weapon against Unitarian rationalism was to insist that all men have direct access to the deity. And they do not seem to have been, including Emerson, steady partakers in the divine experience they celebrate. None of them wrote diaries like those of many pious evangelicals, with their almost daily tributes of particular events to providence. Like the Unitarians, they, in fact, tended to discount such claims as superstitions, at best quaint, at worst delusive. They viewed spiritual fulfillment in terms of human, natural excellence rather than in terms of supernatural intervention. "Which is greater and more affecting?" asks Emerson, to see some wonderful bird descending out of the sky, or to see the rays of a heavenly majesty of the mind and the heart emitted from the countenance and port of a man? The true mystical experience, that is, is a transfiguration from within and not a message or thunderbolt from without. But even this sort of experience is rarely recorded by Emerson and others. Emerson gives us something like the real article in "Each and All" and the two anecdotes in the first chapter of *Nature* – crossing the common and becoming a transparent eyeball; but all three of these are literary elaborations of observations which are reported in a comparatively matter-of-fact way in his journal. The closest thing to a detailed account of an ecstatic experience in all his writings is the description of his illumination in Mount Auburn Cemetery in 1834.

Thus, as some critics have insisted, it seems probable that despite what the Emerson and others said about inspiration, they were nearly as Unitarian in their emotional restraint as they were in their distrust of particular providence. Emerson, for example, disliked the "restlessness and fever" of Fuller's religious enthusiasm. "He who trusts sudden flashes of good feeling and excitement follows no safe guide." In sum, Transcendentalism was not so much an antirational reaction to Unitarianism as it was "Unitarianism in the process of getting religion". Hence, it was a rational-intellectual, almost a hypothetical mysticism, more talked about than felt. It was not so much that Emerson and others of his tribe lacked the emotional capacity for such experience, but that they were too sophisticated to be uninhibited about it, and also too conscientious or unselfish to want to wall themselves up for even with God, without trying to communicate with others. "One must not seek to dwell always in contemplation of the Spirit", Emerson cautioned, lest one became indolent and helpless.

We may wind up the discussion of Emerson's transcendentalism by remembering that though his quasi-pantheistic and quasi-Unitarian belief in the immanent divinity is repeatedly advocated in his essays, it is not free from inconsistent and contradictory statements. With a mind like Emerson's or Wordsworth's it is but natural because neither had the philosophic discipline of a Coleridge or a Kant. If we have to understand Emerson or Wordsworth, we have to look for the spirit of their entire work, not the individual statements which cannot always stand the look of hard scrutiny.

### **Emerson: The Writer as Seer**

Going through Emerson's writings, it becomes clear that his objective as a man of letters was twofold: to combine the roles of the "sayer" and the "seer". While the seer is to supply the spiritual insight, the sayer is to provide the art of persuasion. In his "Divinity School Address", Emerson uses the image of the poet-priest, which reflects the ambivalence of the role he assigns himself as a writer. Like the ideal preacher, his "Poet" must be the "reconciler", perfect in both inspiration and utterance. In his *Representative Men*, Shakespeare and Swedenborg are presented as two poles. As Emerson puts it, "For executive faculty, for creation Shakespeare is unique"; his power of expression is incomparable. However, in Emerson's view, he had no conscious purpose beyond beauty and amusement. On the other hand, Swedenborg, for Emerson, was a seer with the vision of a great poet, but his mind was warped by its "theological determination", and so his work is often dull and ugly. In Emerson's view, as he concludes, what is needed is a "poet-priest, a reconciler, who shall not trifle with Shakespeare the player, nor shall grope in graves with Swedenborg the mourner; but who shall also see, speak and act, with equal inspiration." Not surprisingly, he looked in vain for the poet of his description.

Emerson's romanticist image of the poet-priest was generally accepted by others as the model for the role of the artist. For some, it became a life-style; for others, it was just a splendid ideal for idle moments. The literary among them naturally made more of it than the minister-reformer contingent. But even the latter adopted it at least to the extent of attaching great importance to inspiration and imagination in preaching. This was quite understandable. It followed from the central principle of Transcendentalism – the affirmation of man's ability to experience God firsthand. *The nature of doctrine demands that it is communicated by re-creation than by analysis. Since spiritual experience is inherently an irrational thing, indeed a denial in itself of reason and logic, it will not bear to be talked about for very long in the language of understanding.* Emerson knew it very well, and he noted it in his writings. To make it convincing requires all the resources of which language is capable. Sensing this, Emerson wisely combined his call for an original relation to the universe (*in Nature*) with a call for original use of language.

The foundation for Emerson's idea of the poet-priest was not merely his transcendentalism, it was, at least partly, temperamental also. In fact, the two seem so interlinked that it is difficult to say just where principles began and personality left off. Had Emerson not been given, in his youth, to dreams, he would not have become a man of letters. Emerson considered himself a poet, "in the sense of perceiver and dear lover of the harmonies that are in the soul and in the matter, and specially of the correspondences between these and those". This was decidedly an eloquent description of the relationship between his poetic and pietistic impulses, but it did not readily translate into a practical programme for making a living. In retrospect, it would appear that the Transcendentalist literati were in a doubly anomalous position, in relation to their times. On the one hand, they were in advance of their public in claiming more for the role of the poet than most of New England was prepared to admit. But on the other hand, they were also in a sense seeking to preserve the Puritan conception of the literary life in an era when that conception was fast disappearing. In picturing the role of the poet in essentially religious terms, the Transcendentalists sought, in effect, to subsume their aesthetic impulses within the traditional theocentric framework of New England culture. In other words, the sort of literary vocation Emerson and his colleagues had in mind could not be easily pigeonholed. In fact, they themselves were not very clear what they wanted. What they wanted was not simply aesthetic or spiritual but a combination of the two. The view of the artist's vocation as profoundly religious, for which the Unitarian movement had laid the foundation, was a liberating conception for them. If it helps account for their limitations, it is also a key to their power. All the attempts that Emerson made to describe how art is to be created and the impact which it should make upon its audience begin and end with the idea of inspiration. In some ways, the Transcendentalist view of the creative process resembles the view of the workings of grace in the convent ideology of the Puritans. In both the cases, the individual is theoretically powerless and the spirit does the work. Both the Poet and the Priest believe and delight in the absolute

sovereignty of God or the Muse as the case may be. Of course, the doctrine is hedged about with qualifications as to the importance of individual preparation. These qualifications were so muted that both the Puritans as well as the Transcendentalists were exposed to the charge of antinomianism, but distinct enough to allow both to repudiate. Inspiration did not mean for the Transcendentalists a great idea for a poem or story, so much as the experience of that Truth or Reality of which the finished work was to be the expression. It is important to remember this equation of creativity with spiritual or intellectual fulfillment for a proper understanding of not only the theoretical importance they attached to inspiration but also their practical attention to craftsmanship. Despite what Emerson said about inspiration he was nearly as Unitarian in his emotional restraint as he was in the distrust of particular providences.

Emerson's notion of art as inspiration is necessarily in "sharp opposition" to the idea of art as craftsmanship. His highmindedness, caring for Truth only, considering language only trivial if not employed in the service of Truth, prevented him, and other Transcendentalists even more, from grappling with the technical problems of craftsmanship as effectively as he might have done otherwise. He preferred to jump from the fact to the essence, from the nuts and bolts of technique to affirmations like "the true poem is not which the public read"; "Life is the Poem, Man is the Poet", and so forth. However, the point to recognise is that Emerson's idea of craftsmanship, howsoever vaguely articulated, is not a contradiction in terms. Although his theory of inspiration kept him from coping with the practical problems of his craft as clear-sightedly as he might otherwise have done, he interpreted the theory as explaining but not precluding literary labour. Although the kinds of expression which chiefly interested him emphasized message and tone at the expense of aesthetic symmetry and logical precision, he was by no means insensitive in his understanding and use of intricacies of those points of style best suited to his ends.

When it came to putting his literary theory into practice, Emerson naturally relied to a large extent on the models most readily available to him. Two such models were conversation and preaching. These forms of self-expression were more familiar to such provincial and aesthetically unsophisticated men and women as Emerson and his band of ministers. Generally speaking, he was a far more sensitive connoisseur of conversation and preaching than of fine arts. He naturally, therefore, tended to adapt the two forms for his own special purposes as seen in writer's garb. Of course, Emerson did not regard either conversation or preaching as an end in itself, elements of each recur continually in his essays and help to give it its special colouring. Tracing the Transcendentalist's awareness and use of these elements will give us a better idea of the complex relationship there exists between the aesthetic and didactic impulses in his work. As will be seen, he tends to inhibit the art of conversation by making it into an instrument of education, but tends to liberalize the sermon by luring it into art form.

Conversation as a literary tool suited the purposes of the writer-as-seer wonderfully well. Good talk, to Emerson, was perpetual discovery and improvisation. The inspired talker could also take more satisfaction in his performance than the writer because the formal requirements were less strict. In conversation one needed simply to express each thought as it came. The unfettered quality also appealed to a Transcendentalist like Emerson for the range and versatility it permitted. "The magic of liberty" in such moments, as Emerson put it, makes "the world like a ball in our hands". "All we have, all we can, all we know, is brought into play, and as the reproduction, in finer form, of all our havings." Then, too, conversation was an available art. It was by no means the property of an elite, like the education or connoisseurship of painting, but a universal ability. Of course, it did require special gifts. At the same time, conversational success was in reach of any thoughtful person, without exclusive training. Thus conversation appealed to Emerson and other Transcendentalists both as equalitarians of the spirit and as aesthetic amateurs, people of sensitive tastes with a largely untechnical interest in art.

Conversation also came closer than all other arts to realizing the Emerson the Transcendentalist's idea of the proper relation between art and life. He believed in the romanticist notion of sincerity as a test of literary merit, that the reader should be able to sense the man behind the work. Thus, Emerson liked Montaigne because "His sincerity and marrow of the man reaches to his sentences. . . . It is the language of conversation transferred to a book. Cut these words, and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive." From this point of view, as Emerson readily suggests, conversation could be thought of as superior to writing. If the end of writing is conveying the message, fulfilling the prophesy, if literature is essentially a conversation between speaking writer and listening reader, then how much more noble is the art of conversation itself. Emerson was not, of course, greatly enthusiastic about conversation, and a

much as, for instance, Alcott was. He sometimes wearied of Alcott's marathon capacity for talk, though he enjoyed his company as much as any man's. "Good as is discourse, silence is better and shames it", Emerson would say in such a mood. Interestingly, Alcott once declared that Emerson was better at conversation than lecturing. Be it as it may, this combination of individual talent and romanticist ideology made the talk or conversation a Transcendentalist institution. Individual differences and predilections notwithstanding, some facts about the Transcendentalist's device of conversation as a literary tool are evident. First of all, it was serious as an "organ of instruction". As Emerson, in his typical fashion, asked, "What avails any conversation but the sincere?" Geniality alone would not suffice. You had to be grave enough. Emerson and his friends did not use the club as a source of recreation. Their subjects of debate were highly serious: "Does the Species Advance beyond the Individual" and "Mysticism in Christianity". Other topics included: The Corporal Relations of the Soul, The Doctrine of the Godhead, Instinct, Behaviour, Private Life, etc. In fact, discussion of these subjects was not, in the ordinary sense, a matter of conversation. We better take them as seminars. In the long run, the Transcendentalists of Emerson's hue were quite unequivocal about the superiority of writing over conversation. As Emerson put it, "conversation is an evanescent relation – no more". On the other hand, he regarded conversation as a sort of model for the best literary works, like Montaigne's. He valued conversation less as an autonomous art form than as a quality in literature. To a degree, his prose reflects this quality. It helps him accomplish his purposes as a preacher better.

Preaching, the other tool available to Emerson from the tradition of the church he inherited, was all the more effective in accomplishing his objective as a seer. The rhetorical speech, the eloquent address, the emotional equation with the audience, the commanding voice, the oracular sermonizing, all came handy to Emerson when he composed his essays for the express purpose of spreading his message among the masses and convert them to his side. The radical nature of his message required equally powerful speech to sway his audience to his side, to pull them out of the conventional codes which they habitually obeyed as natural. They had to be jolted out of their complacency, the jammed windows of their minds were to be opened, and they were to be exhorted to take a leap into the unknown and unfamiliar territory of Transcendentalism. Hence an altogether new prose style had to be forged for effectively executing the radical agenda of challenging the deep-rooted church and carry the public out of the closed premises into the openness of nature. Emerson succeeded in adopting an appropriate prose style for executing his lofty plan.

### Emerson's Prose Style

Emerson's prose, like that of Arnold, is irresistibly led by the nature of their subject to the strongly poetic or rhetorical form of expression rather than to a relatively unadorned argument or exposition. It is interesting to investigate the ways in which the demands of vision and the demands of expression reinforce and qualify each other in Emerson's Transcendentalist writing. As an example of the dimensions of the problem, we may consider the following passage from Emerson's Divinity School Address:

*If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God; the safety of God, the immortality of God, the majesty of God do enter into that man with justice. If a man dissemble, he deceives himself, and goes out of acquaintance with his own being.*

To the conservatives among Emerson's readers, this was an outrageous sentence, as it seems to assert the identity of man with god. But does it really make such an assertion? Actually, it is quite unclear as to what is being advocated in this strange sentence. When we consider the qualifications which Emerson adds to his assertion, his statement becomes rather tame. It does not, in fact, remain a firm assertion. The just man partakes of the divine; the vicious man is alienated from his good self. Yet this reading is also not fair to Emerson. It deprives the passage of all its boldness. Another possibility can be, that perhaps Emerson himself was not sure of what he really meant. Emerson is, in fact, alleged to have admitted as much to his mentor, Henry Ware, Jr. Emerson's late writing would also seem to bear it out. In Emerson's "Self-Reliance", for example, changeableness in one's views of the nature of God is advanced as an argument in favour of inconsistency. In turn, this assertion suggests that perhaps Emerson did not care about the clarity of his statement. Since his chief aim was rhetorical, to move his readers, to stir them up, clarity was not so important an aspect as effect. The elegant balance of his sentences, with their paradoxes and antitheses, would seem to invite the suspicion. It is also likely that Emerson deliberately departed from sober truth for the sake of forging



aphorisms. Still, they cannot be regarded simply as rhetorical performance. Nor can we take them as a straightforward exposition of doctrine. Emerson's tone defies any such intention. The passage, then, stands somewhere between metaphor and metaphysics, between the word as message and the word as art. But if we try to consider either of the two and not both together, it does not remain intelligible. In that case, it sounds either as a case of utter confusion, or pure exhibitionism. But neither of the two characterizations would be fair to Emerson. We must see it from two angles at once. Emerson has a "truth" to communicate, which is not a mathematical demonstration but a feeling. Accordingly, he prefers to make a striking general impression rather than aim at exactness. To readers either casual or too exacting this method may seem careless or sentimental. The passage does have a nonchalance which is typical of Emerson. But in craftsmanship, if not in tone, the passage is anything but casual. Decidedly, much premeditation has gone into its composition. It is the work of a keen mind and able craftsman.

The only way to understand the style of any literary composition is to relate it to its vision. Also, the comparison must be placed in the context of literary convention or tradition to which it belongs. Literary Transcendentalism in America, which was headed by Emerson, was not an isolated phenomenon. It was a hybrid mixture of religion and rhetoric, which in turn had its origins in the cultural milieu from which the movement arose, namely Boston Unitarianism. This hybrid was also cross-fertilized by English Romantic thought and the antecedent tradition of Platonic mysticism. The literary tradition that Emerson inherited included the forms of oratory, the sermon, the highbrow-review, and the periodical essay. Emerson's notion of the style, in that tradition, was rather conservative, to the point that when he first discovered in himself a taste for the more desultory forms of journal-writing and seventeenth-century prose as a way of expressing his deepest thoughts he was somewhat apologetic about it. In fact, it seems that he never outgrew the suspicion that his writings were inferior because they were not elaborate and systematic.

The style of Emerson's essays, nonetheless, is actually a reaction against the finished evenness of the American Unitarian Association prose in the direction of a less formal, more fanciful and discontinuous, more "individualistic" style. It is better suited to express nuances of meaning and tone, and would also remain morally serious and intellectually tough. Emerson had learned from Coleridge and Carlyle, Plato and Plutarch, Metaphysics and Montaigne, the art of injecting a conversational note with moral discussion, the art of giving the impression of *obiter dicta* rather than treatise. Perhaps the best, and most striking, example of this aspect of their style is the Transcendentalists' fondness for aphorism. This element of aphorism is both a hallmark of good conversation and a condition to which analects and moral essays aspire. Emerson declared "composition", or "the science of omitting", a cardinal virtue of rhetoric. His advice was to read the composition aloud.

Another resemblance between conversation and Transcendentalist prose is its desultory, improvisational quality. As Alcott said of Emerson, "Its beauty consists in its suggestiveness, unexpectedness, saliency. It vaults the passes, flashes the whole of things upon the imagination at a glance, sets life and things anew for the moment." And it was for this very quality that Alcott chose to nickname Emerson "the Rhapsodist". The following passage from Emerson illustrates quite clearly the stylistic peculiarities we have been talking about in relation to the essays, such as "Self-Reliance" and "Nature":

*How many volumes of well-bred metre we must jingle through, before we can be filled, taught, renewed! We want the miraculous; the beauty which we can manufacture at no mill, - can give no account of; the beauty of which Chaucer and Chapman had the secret. The poetry of course is low and prosaic; only now and then, as in Wordsworth, conscientious; or in Byron, passionate; or in Tennyson, factitious. But if I should count the poets who have contributed to the Bible of existing England sentences of guidance and consolation which are still glowing and effective, - how few! Shall I find my heavenly bread in the reigning poets? Where is great design in modern English poetry?*

On the whole, it is quite a literary style, but it is not without the scattershot, staccato quality of lively talk. It can be seen in the sudden tonal shifts from amused impatience to high-minded yearning to hard-headed criticism to exasperated outburst. As ever in Emerson, there are gaps between the thoughts, as if the author were thinking them up and throwing them out off the top of his head. At least twice there comes a break in his syntax in the middle of the sentence. Finally, there is a kind of nonchalance mixed in with the precision and subtlety of detail: "jingle through", "heavenly bread" (to go with the Bible), the dismissal of all of modern English poetry - "of course" it is "low and prosaic", only sketchy epithet sufficing for each poet.

This kind of casualness is not unusual with Emerson. In fact, it is typical of him. The analogy between the style of conversation and that of Transcendentalist prose, however, has definite limits as the above passage suggests. Emerson's example of Socrates as a model of what he calls "the low style", which he asks the writers to cultivate, shows that the low he has in mind is actually high enough. It makes clear that Emerson and his circle nowhere comes near a truly popular prose style. The very manner in which they express their ambition refutes them. "I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low", Emerson effuses. It seems it was almost impossible to be earthy after being processed at Harvard by Professor Channing who had earned the reputation for producing great writers. It is well known that Channing discouraged the use of bombastic and illogical expressions, but he brought out the didactic, moralistic, and abstract and conventional elements in his young pupils. The greater ones among them did outgrow these habits, but always after a great deal of struggle. Emerson himself took ten years to do that.

Another reason, and perhaps more important, why Emerson and his band of Transcendentalists could not pursue the idea of writing as conversation as far as Lamb and Hazlitt did was their own intellectual seriousness. To imagine them as essentially conversationalists, in any accepted sense of the term, will be a misrepresentation of their being dilettantish, nonchalant patricians. Also, to imagine them as committed to a colloquial standard in writing will be to mistake their understandable endorsement of a romanticist cliché with democratic overtones for an indispensable doctrine. Actually, the same thing that attracted Emerson and his colleagues to conversation also limited its appeal. He was fascinated with the mystique of conversation, not so much for its own sake as an example of ordinary life, of the transmission of the living word from soul to soul. This vision, of an eloquence which, as Emerson put it, could "alter in a pair of hours, perhaps in a half hour's discourse, the convictions and habits of years", was the deepest basis of the Transcendentalist's admiration for great literature and oratory, as well as for conversation. It was also greatly responsible for the analogies they drew between literature, oratory, and conversation.

The ultimate value, therefore, of studying Emerson's conversation lies in calling attention to the importance of personal communication in Transcendentalist aesthetics: the idea of the seer, the prophet, speaking through his art to fulfil *himself and inspire other men*. When art is seen, as here in Emerson, as a process of communication, and not as a product, static elements like structural patterning automatically become less important in themselves than sheer impact or suggestiveness, though one may of course result from the other. Emerson's own dicta — that "there is a higher work for art than the arts"; "the poetic gift we want, as the health and supremacy of man — not rhymes and sonnetting" — make it quite clear. In judging or appreciating, therefore, Emerson's "conversational" prose one has to look for continuity rather than unity, provocativeness rather than precision, codification rather than elegance, and tone rather than exchange of words itself. It is not surprising that the most favoured of the literary forms with Emerson is the moral essay, which defies close specification. The special contexts in which Emerson altered the tradition of the Essay (descended from Montaigne and Bacon) are important factors than affinities with the tradition as a whole for our proper appreciation of the prose style.

The moral essay cannot be defined more narrowly than as a short, unsystematic meditation on a given abstract issue, often marked by curtness, lack of transition, and aphoristic statement. All of these qualities can be found in Emerson's prose essays. The manner in which Emerson approached moral issues becomes fully clear only when we see it as an outgrowth of their religious concerns and the conventions of religious discourse which he inherited and adapted, especially the sermon. There is an intermixture of high seriousness and apparent dilettantism which makes it so hard to compare the Transcendentalist Emerson either with his Puritan ancestors or with his more literary descendants. The fact is that the nature of his commitment to truth and beauty is simply different, because of its distrust of doctrine on the one hand and of fiction on the other. His literary allegiance, for sure, goes to the expression of noble and virtuous impulses on the philosophical rather than the dramatic or narrative level. However, it is expressed in such a way as to satisfy the aesthetic sense as well as the intellect, because he conceived of religious concepts mostly as metaphorically, not literally, true. Altogether, what Emerson was after was a sort of solemn but joyful spiritual ballet, a continuous improvisation around those few abiding central themes which constituted the core of belief. And in this respect, he can be considered a representative of his times. The sermons and other devotional writings of his contemporaries show the same qualities just described. "What is the office of a Christian minister?" asked the young Emerson. "His to show the beauty of the moral laws of the Universe. . . ., to see the creation with a new eye, to behold

what he thought unorganized. crystallize into form, to see the stupendous temple uplift its awful form, towers or towers into infinite space, echoing all with rapturous hymns.”

If the cited prose of Emerson sounds like the fantasy of a future poet, nevertheless it has a basis in the preaching of those who later rejected Emersonianism as heretical. In this tendency toward greater imagination and literary refinement in sermon writing during the nineteenth century, the Unitarians themselves were in the vanguard, being the least dogmatic and the most highly cultured of the American Protestant sects. There are important points of relationship between the Unitarian prose style and the Transcendentalist prose style of Emerson. One of these is the figurative approach to truth. The free and creative use the Unitarians made of scripture and doctrine was a significant legacy of the Transcendentalist style as well as thought. Their approach to the Bible was an almost anticipation of the Emersonian habit of interpreting its supernatural elements metaphorically. One of the chief weapons of the Unitarians against Orthodoxy was a strategy of redefinition by appealing to essence. Such tactics naturally led, in the next generation (of Emerson), to a conviction of the relativity of all doctrinal truth. “To be at perfect agreement with a man of most opposite conclusions”, Emerson said in 1832, “you have only to translate your language into his. The same thought which you can call *God* in his nomenclature is called *Christ*.” The movement from Unitarianism to Transcendentalism is best seen as a relatively gradual transition from a dogmatics to a poetics of religion. Emerson’s sermons show the process of transition. The figurative approach to doctrine led to the use of figurative style by literary ministers like Emerson, who developed his special rhetoric to make his readers and audience unmindful of the subtle undercuts he was making to demolish the Unitarian structure.

Emerson’s exploitation of paradox and metaphor in general is carried to the fullest in his essays. Meant for reading not listening, they are not restrained by the low threshold of understanding in oral communication. They are marked by a density which makes all but a few of Emerson’s lectures look thin by the contrast. Nor are they bound by the occasion of Sabbath. Here, the use of metaphor has got secularized. Of course, we must not mistake Emerson’s essays as simply warmed-over versions of his sermons, even though there are some close parallels. The characteristic movement of his mature essays from the level of commonsense to higher considerations is also a standard homiletical method. Another stylistic resemblance between the Unitarian sermon and the Transcendentalist discourse is the device of multiple statement or illustration. Unitarian preaching quite often exhibits a reiterative quality similar to that of Transcendentalist prose. On the primary level, the purpose of reiteration is to ensure that the audience received the point. Thus, any speech is bound to embody a good deal of repetition. But beyond this, the Unitarians’ unusual fondness for the device had to do with their idea that the truths of religion were simple and the job of preaching them was only to impress them on the minds of audience. From this it followed that their sermons at times became rather thin on the level of argument and copious on the level of demonstration. As in the Emerson essay, the originality and effect of the sermons, such as they are, consist, not in the doctrine, nor in the argument, but in the variety and novelty of the examples. It was just this characteristic, significantly, which led one of the Transcendentalists to consider Unitarian preaching as great.

Thus, from Unitarianism to Transcendentalism it was but a step to the range of reference and imagery as shown in Emerson’s essays. But Emerson makes significant stylistic departures from the Unitarian sermon. He seems almost to go out of his way to weaken his transitions, although in his early sermons he was as coherent as any of the Unitarians. His idea of the structure of truth changed as radically as his idea about the language of truth. The measure of how far he eventually deviated from his origins is his amazing reply to Henry Ware, Jr.’s request for proofs of his position in the Divinity School Address: “I do not know. . . what arguments mean in reference to any expression of a thought.” The kind of prose passages one normally comes across in Emerson, the eloquent marshalling of aphorisms, quite often occur in the Unitarian preaching, especially when the preacher dwells on the themes of the omnipresence of divine benevolence and the dignity of human nature. Such a mode of utterance, the chain of aphorisms or concentric circles method is well adapted to oral speech calculated to persuade. Oratory, like conversation, lends itself to nutshell manifestos. Since speaking is slower than reading, terseness and restatement are more helpful. A barrage of quick formulations is likely to be more effective than a complicated argument. Even though Emerson’s Transcendentalism was a revolt against the rationalism of Unitarianism, his writings are not free from the same rationalism. For its own cast is also markedly abstract and intellectual. In a typical Emerson paragraph, there is always a careful condensation

of thought – half a dozen bricks baked and stacked. In fact, it can be asserted without risking much exaggeration that Emerson fulfils the Unitarian ideal of preaching. Considering his essays as they have generally been considered, as a conglomeration of wise statements, they closely approach to the Unitarian ideal of moral inspiration.

There is also a risk in eschewing logic for the sake of inspired utterance; when inspiration fails, one is likely to become maudlin and flabby. In fact, it can even go worse: one can forfeit one's critical sense and slide into self-deception. Unfortunately, this too was a legacy of the Unitarians bequeathed to the Transcendentalists. They used rhetoric partly to fill the vacuum created by the erosion of orthodox theology. Logic gave way to leitmotif. Sentimentality and bombast replaced creeds and hard thinking. As Emerson says in the Divinity School Address, "The religious sentiment . . . is myrrh and storax, and chlorine and rosemary." The saccharine piety of such formulations looks like a wilful evasion of harsh reality or hard fact. It can turn most unpleasant when the subject seems to call out for a straightforward statement. One of the results of their rhetorical prose has been a certain fuzziness in the thinking. The root cause of the fuzzy thinking seems to be the speaker's intoxication with sublimity of his idea as opposed to its precision. This is not unexpected from the writers who always viewed themselves as preachers and made much of the role of "moral impression." Emerson's figurative approach to doctrine and language; multiplicity of demonstration, verging on catalogue rhetoric; and intermittent use of rhapsodic as opposed to logical ordering; all these aspects contributed toward making his prose vague and imprecise, even as it achieved excellence in passion and eloquence. All of the techniques mentioned above betray the writer's impulse to go beyond truth unadorned to celebrate the beauty of truth. No doubt, the high seriousness of the sermon remains in the essays of Emerson, but it gets mixed up with a sense of euphoria, vagueness, and evanescence.

It can now be safely concluded that the general quality of combining the interests of beauty and the interests of truth is the chief line of connection between Unitarian preaching and Transcendentalist prose. In the former, beauty is usually secondary; in the latter it is dominant. Beyond a certain point, the conventions of the sermon are too restrictive to hold it. Perhaps the best way to describe the change from Unitarian preaching to Transcendentalist prose is to view it as a movement from sermon to scripture. All the salient points of resemblance are also characteristic of the ancient scripture: figurative expression, reiteration, rhapsodic flow and vagueness, interfusion of poetic feeling and moral tone. One can recall here the book of Psalms or the Upanishads; and closely related bardic poetry. Once it had turned its back on the ministry, literary Transcendentalism did not look to the sermon as a literary ideal but to these. Emerson called upon the divinity students to write the new Bible. Trusting in the original relation to the universe, it was natural that Emerson should have set his sight so high. Sermons, however creative, must address themselves, in orderly and intelligent form, to the inculcation of dogmas or precepts shared between the speaker and his listeners. Scripture, on the other hand, is not the articulation of a accepted truth, but the record of the scribe's spiritual experience, of the word speaking through the communication of the ineffable, it is under no obligation to be precise, or coherent, or codified. The only crucial component of the poet or prophet is that he speak or scribe from direct experience, "from within", in "the tone of having", as Emerson put it. For the Transcendentalist like Emerson, who escaped the limitations of this form, the question was to find a substitute for it. The concept of scripture alone was not sufficient. Emerson had found the scripture as a fragmentary form so he instinctively turned to that which had gradually replaced historical Christianity as the chief locus of God's word, Nature. As a prophet, his responsibility was to rediscover the world for himself and to utter or "build" it anew for his reader.

In his aesthetics, Emerson heavily relied upon the analogy of nature whenever he went further than simple celebrations of inspiration and undertook to discuss style and form. We generally speak of apparent formlessness of Transcendentalist writing and the notorious vagueness of the idea of nature as an aesthetic model, especially related to the idea of structure. Emerson's attraction for metamorphosis, combined with his rather instinctive assurance that order must exist somewhere, runs him into difficulty on the question of literary form. Whereas Coleridge saw imagination as a synthesizer, Emerson sees it primarily as only a multiplier of images. Carried to its logical conclusion, this view deprives him of his "brake on the transmutation of form." Emerson's prose style is often cited as a staccato movement through a succession of analogies, a continuous process of statement and restatement until the topic seems finally exhausted. Emerson was aware of his weakness in the area of form. He regretfully admitted to Carlyle that his sentences were "infinitely repellent particles." As Emerson puts it in his journal, "It is much to write sentences; it is

more to add method, & write out the spirit of your life symmetrically .... To arrange many general reflections in their natural order so that I shall have one homogeneous piece, ... this continuity is for the great." As can be seen, here the key word is "natural." The arrangement of words in a sentence or of sentences in an essay must be in "natural order." They must express "the spirit of your life." Nothing insincere will do. Hence Emerson asserts that even though it is desirable to be more methodical than he has been able to, "the true speaker may dismiss all solicitude as to the proportion & congruency of the aggregate of his thoughts so long as he is a faithful reporter of particular impressions." Thus, for Emerson, honesty is the first requisite of authorship; form is important also, but only to the extent honesty permits. After all, it remains something to be imposed from outside, since it does not naturally flow from within.

Such declarations, in the context of Emerson's seemingly haphazard prose, have generally kept his readers from taking his philosophy of composition seriously, for it comes to nothing more than a confession of personal failure. He is generally accepted as a philosopher and poet of aphorisms and images, remaining weak in respect to structure. Just as each object in nature, (Emerson's most characteristic view of correspondence), epitomizes the whole order of nature, so must the work of art. As Emerson preferred to put the matter, the artist is he who sees the "integrity" of the landscape which other people see part by part. The artist has his "property" in the horizon, in the whole. In Emerson's view, the artist's individual images should take on universal significance and his work as a whole should articulate them together so that they "fall within the great order not less than the beehive of the spider's geometrical web." The kind of literary structure to which these metaphors point comes close to what Frye calls "encyclopedic form" – namely a structure which will be atomistic, discontinuous, yet comprehensive and essentially unified by the artist's vision of the cosmic order.

Emerson is known to be almost perversely casual about transitions, key words, topic sentences, and other such rhetorical signals. But to a large extent he converts this casualness into a stylistic virtue. The précis is sterile compared to the prose itself; one of the most distinctive and impressive features of Emersonian style in general is its unpredictable, vigorous fecundity. The simple point is that this quality is not without control in his writing, at least until 1860. Just as in good poetry there is always an interplay between an implied metrical pattern and continual deviations from the norm in individual lines, so in Emerson's essays there is generally an implicit framework, which is continually being blurred and defied by improvisation and diffuseness. This tension expresses both Emerson's metaphysical belief in a universe which is essentially purposeful but also continuously in the process of change, and also his aesthetic sophistication. As he writes in his journal, "if you desire to arrest attention, do not give me facts in the order of cause & effect, but drop one or two links in the chain, & give me with a cause, an effect two or three times removed." This is an excellent account of the method of his best essays, such as *Nature*, "Self-Reliance," and "The American Scholar."

Another important aspect of Emerson's Transcendentalist prose style responsible for its appearance of anarchy is called enumerative or catalogue rhetoric – that is, the reiteration of analogous images or statements in paratactic form, in prose or verse. Emerson, as well as Whitman, Thoreau as well as Alcott, habitually express themselves in a barrage of aphorisms. No doubt, it creates an impression of vigour and excitement, but it also creates an impression of rambling and redundancy. It seems to suggest that everything moves parallel, and that nothing moves forward. This suspicion is most strongly raised by the poetry of Whitman, who can not sing his "song of Occupations" without naming them all. Of course, he aims at, and also succeeds in, creating an impression of largeness, of epic scale, but at the cost of movement, for the narrative remains at a stand still. But in a composition where narrative is not the objective, where only an image or an idea is to be projected as if on a large screen, in a magnified form, then the device is not a defect of style. On the contrary, it proves the most effective tool in the hands of the master artist like Whitman or Emerson.

Historically, the catalogue is that aspect of grammar of Transcendentalism which most differentiates it from all the British Romantics except Blake. One reason for the device's popularity with the American writers is perhaps that catalogue rhetoric seems an inherently "democratic" device. As Whitman would say, it has vista. It suggests the vast sprawling, loose-knit country which America is. It also adheres to a sort of prosodic equalitarianism, in which each line or image is of equal weight in the ensemblage, each remaining a unit unto itself. The technique is, of course, as old as Homer, the earliest known poet in European literature. It is used also in the Book of Psalms. While the former used it for scope, the later use it for praise. Since then the epic as well as liturgical traditions have followed these examples.

In the nineteenth century America, the preachers used the catalogue device for both the purposes. The Transcendentalists borrowed it from the tradition, but made it the very instrument of their world-view.

In a way Transcendentalism is the natural religion of democracy, by virtue of its claim that divinity inheres in every human being and indeed in every object of nature, or every particle of the universe. Emerson insists, "Each particle is a microcosm"; "I swear I see now that every thing has an eternal soul," Whitman cries. These statements express a mystic awareness, a vision of cosmic unity-in-diversity. That is, in fact, the dominant impulse behind the catalogue rhetoric of Transcendentalism. It carries the sense of the underlying identity of all things in the universe as manifestations of the divine plenitude. In short, catalogue is the most natural literary form of expressing the Transcendentalists' most characteristic sense of the universal order. However, their fondness for catalogue should not be taken to mean their utter disregard for form. As Emerson insisted, "bare lists of words are found suggestive to an imaginative and excited mind." Raised to a slightly higher emotional pitch, Emerson's recognition of unity across different points of time, space, and perspective leads directly to the catalogue as a literary form. The following remarkable passage from Emerson's journal illustrates it very well:

*The metamorphic of Nature shows itself in nothing more than this that there is no word in our language that cannot become typical to us of nature by giving it emphasis. The world is a Dancer; it is a Rosary; it is a Torrent; it is a Boat; a Mist; a Spider's Snare; it is what you will; and the metaphor will hold, & it will give the imagination keen pleasure. Swifter than light the world converts itself into that thing you name.*

The only way Emerson can properly speak of the "metamorphosis of nature" seems to be in a series of images, a catalogue of natural objects, or particles of the world. The list of emblem constitutes the catalogue.

A good catalogue is unified as well as diverse, although the form in both cases may not be of a conventional sort. If its items are arranged in a rigid order of a rational discourse, then it would ring as false as Swedenborg's codifications of nature. Nor should it be without suggestion of an order altogether. The suggestiveness can be supplied in two ways: either by modulating from item to item through a process of association, or by giving to the whole a certain sense of shape. In the passage form Emerson quoted above, clearly there is a shape to the list in the catalogue. If we change the present order of the items, it would decidedly weaken the whole effect. As it is, they constitute a juxtaposition of images which, while arresting in themselves, are enhanced by the sense of relationship and totality, as well as by dissimilarity. Of course, Emerson's catalogues are not always as coherent as in the above passage. If we go further into the rest of the length of the same passage, the in-consistency becomes evident:

*There is nothing small or mean to the soul. It derives as grand a joy from symbolizing the Godhead or his Universe under the form of a moth or gnat as of a Lord of Hosts. Must I call the heaven & the earth a maypole & country fair with booths or an anthill or an old oat in order to give you the shock of pleasure which imagination loves and the sense of spiritual greatness? Call it a blossom, a rod, a wreath of parsley, a tamarisk-crown, a cock, a sparrow, the ear instantly hears & the spirit leaps to the trope.*

This second part of the same passage is not without merit. The fecundity of invention, the tone of excitement, the imagination reach in linking moth and gnat with Lord of Hosts; the modulations in the last sentence with the blossom/rod flowering into the vegetable, then the shrub, and then the two birds – all find a link in the cock's comb. But the piece as a whole is not as coordinated as the earlier sequence. However, as long as the catalogue moves a certain amount in the direction of unity upon a careful reading, that is all we should expect. If the quest for unity seems useless, or if it is too easy, then the catalogue can be said to be a failure. As Emerson sums it up, "A too rapid unity or unification and a too exclusive devotion to parts are the Scylla and Charybdis." His own philosophy leaned towards Scylla, and his rhetoric towards Charybdis, but surprisingly he often steers between.

Catalogue also offers as a disadvantage, if we single out merely the best lines and read them only. The tendency to single out such lines is encouraged by the catalogue having an appearance of mere reiteration, and also by its original dependence upon the power of its individual images or parts for its success. But this will amount to a misunderstanding of the Transcendentalist aesthetics. Emerson would not have agreed with F.W. Schlegel that "an aphorism ought to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world like a little work of art and complete in itself like a hedgehog." On the

contrary, for Emerson, "Power resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state, in the shooting of the gulf, in the darting to an aim." Also, in his view, "All thinking is analogizing, and it is the use of life to learn metonymy, or the inter-substitution of images for the same principle. Obviously, Emerson grounds his judgment in the nature of the universe, "the endless passing of one element into new forms, the incessant metamorphosis."

The discussion of the term catalogue so far has been based on a rather loose use of its meaning, which is to cover any passage in which enumeration is the main organizing principle. Within this general category, however, at least three basic types of catalogue rhetoric can be distinguished, depending upon the degree to which they depart from the sequential thought and syntax. These types might be called expository, illustrative, and symbolic. The first of these is the most common as well as the least radical. It consists of the development of a proposition by making overlapping statements in parallel form. Here, the technique is used primarily for the purpose of exhortation as an adjunct to expository prose. But in any case it is the prose that is irretrievably committed to the method of restatement. Here, half the statement may be essential to the point, and the rest only a repetition for emphasis.

The second type, the illustrative catalogue, consists of successive expressions of a general principle in the form of analogous exempla or images. The Emerson passage quoted above is of the latter sort, as are most of his catalogues, since most of his writing centres around abstract concepts. Some essays, like "Circles," could easily be described as one long illustrative catalogue. In his old age, Emerson arrived at the conclusion that "the way of Providence is a little rude. The habit of snake and spider, the snap of the tiger and other leapers and bloody jumpers, the crackle of the bones of his prey in the coil of the anaconda – these are in the system, and our habits are like theirs." Emerson is typical among the Transcendentalist that snakes and tigers are somehow "in the system." Here, Emerson demonstrates the potential of the catalogue to express chaos and terror. In terms of style, we can find as much coherence in these passages as in the catalogues discussed earlier. It is only in the projected vision that the two types of catalogue differ. The primary threat to the vision of an integrated universe for the Transcendentalist is not the instability of nature but the limitations of man. Such an awareness often imparts a note of frustration to an otherwise affirmative passage.

In Emerson's Transcendentalist prose, the form must always remain inchoate, because no man can live continuously in harmony with the universe. As Emerson insists, "We have had many harbingers and forerunners; but of a purely spiritual life, history has afforded no examples." And just as man is inconstant, nature herself is always changing: "As the bird alights on the bough, then plunges into the air again, so the thoughts of God pause but for a moment in any form." To live always according to the spirit would require a consciousness so supple and exquisitely sensitive that we can scarcely hope to do more than envision it in our best moments. Or so the aging Emerson had come to believe. Hence it is that in many Transcendentalist catalogues the dominant tone is either a reverential vagueness or a knowing detachment. As Emerson came to realize that nature could mean "fate" as well as "possibility," he adopted the posture of benign aloofness. In "New England Reformers" he assumes this pose at the expense of some of his erstwhile admirers:

*What a fertility of projects for the salvation of the world! One apostle thought all men should go to farming, and another that no man should buy or sell, that the use of money was the cardinal evil; another that the mischief was in our diet, that we eat and drink damnation. These made unleavened bread, and were foes to the death of fermentation .... Stop, dear Nature, these incessant advances of thine: let us scotch these ever-rolling wheels! Others attacked the system of agriculture, the use of animal manures in farming, and the tyranny of man over brute nature .... Even the insect world was to be defended ...*

The comic potential of the catalogue comes out in this passage. The chaos of the contemporary reform scene is evoked and yet at the same time kept at a distance by the mock-lament tone that Emerson adopts. It must also be noted that even as he reduces the material to absurdly, by moving progressively in the direction of the moral trivial, from farming to insect protection, he also organizes his material quite carefully. Emerson is, of course, more serious when dealing with illusion: Few have overheard the gods or surprised their secret. Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood. All is riddle, and the key to a riddle is another riddle. There are so many pillows of illusion as flakes in a snow-storm. We wake from one dream into another dream .... Everybody is drugged with his own frenzy, and the pageant marches at all hours, with music and banner and badge.

It can be seen how this passage moves from the more significant to the more trivial. As the idea gets rested, its dimensions get shrunk from divine mystery to moral message to intellectual puzzle to natural hallucination to fantasy

to degrading collage of mad house and childish game-playing. Although Emerson is here dealing with the same subject of metamorphosis that so excited him in the passage discussed earlier, and he uses the same reiterative method, the conclusion in the present case is just the opposite – the particularity of every perception instead of its inevitable truth. The irony in the case of the later Emerson seems to be a self-protective device, a way of preventing himself from getting demoralized by the uncontrollability of the fact of mutability in nature. Here Emerson's attempt seems to be to maintain an air of confidence by adopting a prose of aware detachment. If this impression sounds convincing, the reason simply is that the mysteries which he once sought in right earnest to solve are now quietly taken for granted. It can now be said at the end of our discussion that the vitality of the catalogue rhetoric in the Transcendentalist literature, especially the essay of Emerson, is not expressed in a haphazard manner. It has instead the analogical continuity and the sense of shape that nature itself had in the writer's vision. The catalogue device may not be the sole or even the most important device acting as the principle of ordering in Emerson's work, it remains perhaps the most characteristic structural device. Once its potential subtlety has been recognized, the range of tones and nuances of which it is capable, a deep understanding of the Transcendentalist sensibility is reached and is better appreciated for its ability to handle the form in more elaborate literary structures.

### Speaker or Persona in Emerson's Essays

Emerson, like any other Romantic or Transcendentalist writer, is viewed as a subjective artist, who expresses in his writings his individual self honestly and sincerely. However, if a careful attention is given to each individual essay, it will be found that Emerson is not all that subjective, that his work is not self-expression, or personal statement, or frank confession. On the contrary, it will be found that his essays, compared to say Thoreau's prose work, are diaphanous and impersonal. He seems to be speaking, not just an individual, but for the more genteel, and contemplative Transcendentalist, who is more representative as a type than an idiosyncratic individual. No doubt, his style is sufficiently idiosyncratic to the extent it gives a personal stamp to all his writings. However, originality with language is not the same thing as originality of character. However strongly we respond to Emerson the writer as a subtle intellect or original artist, it is very different to view his writings as personal discourses. With respect to his literary persona, Emerson is a generalized abstraction and always wished to be considered as such. He may offer idealized self-portraits, like the Scholar, the Poet, or the Self-Reliant, but he seldom makes direct self-revelations. No doubt, at times he does make references to personal experiences, but only for the sake of illustration. He himself is never the subject of his essay, in the manner in which Thoreau is a subject of his own writings.

Whether the traditional view of Emerson is based on facts or not is a matter for investigation. The best way seems to be to examine his method of transposing thoughts and experiences from life to diary to lecture to essay. In most cases, he seems to winnow away the circumstantial from the universal, to the point that it is not easy to tell that the passage has been derived from an actual experience. Consider, for example, the following sentence from *Nature*: "In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature." It is possible that this is only a cerebral improvisation, especially the image of the horizon as symbolic of the circumference of the soul. As it happens, the sentence is actually derived from a particular experience. The journal of August 12, 1836 records: "I went to Walden Pond this evening a little before sunset, and in the tranquil landscape I behold somewhat as beautiful as my own nature." As can be seen, in his revision of the journal sentence Emerson has eliminated the local detail. He has also added intellectual complexity in his use of the horizon metaphor. Thus, a purely personal experience has been turned into a general proposition. The end result is even more abstract than it needs to be – the rest of the passage in which it appears remains first person. In this process of transposing the passage gains in literary charm, but decidedly at the cost of some immediacy.

Now, if we look at the rest of the passage to which the cited sentence serves as conclusion, then we form a different impression altogether. The high points of the piece are its two instances of inspiration through nature, both reported by a persona. The metamorphosis into transparent eyeball and the sensation of joy upon crossing the common are these two instances. Between the two, the second is more generalized, taking place merely "in the woods", anytime, anywhere; Emerson attempts to recreate a sense of the infinite through the power of rhetoric. The first is localized, with its "bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky", and has greater reliance for impact on the imagery. Both passages are actually reworkings of journal antecedents. Interestingly, in the journal versions, there is not much difference between the two so far as the rhetorical level is concerned. For the purposes of publication, Emerson inflated the second and made more homely the first. Passage two originated with a feeling "as I walked in



the words" on March 19, 1835. On making a revision, Emerson softened the sense of specificity and added such ornamentation as the symbolic eyeball, which was not there in the journal. But the original version of the other passage simply reads "I rejoice in time. I do not cross the common without a wild poetic delight notwithstanding the prose of my demeanour." This is, decidedly, less personal, less anecdotal than the corresponding sentence in *Nature*. Contrary to what we normally expect from Emerson's strictures about the use of the subjective in art, he made a revision of this passage so as to increase the illusion of autobiography.

Emerson seldom makes his point overbearingly. On the contrary, he always takes pains to make his speaker represent our experiences too. For instance, the chapter opens as under:

*To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars.*

It need to be noted here that by alternating between "I" and "a man", and by making "I" the subject of a proposition we can easily accept, Emerson is able to persuade us that the first person is universal. The "I" could be easily changed to "one". In this sense, Emerson remains very much within the limits of his theory of subjectivity. However, what the theory leaves out, or underplays, is that the first person adds a special tone to the context. Although not autobiography, exactly, and yet the sense of a personal witness. The fact that the "I" represents himself only as a solitary writer adds to the impression that the author is speaking in his own person. When we follow the process Emerson adopts in transposing from journal to essay the circumstantial facts which are completely external to his message, such as the "charming landscape I saw this morning", it is quite clear that he has deliberately attempted to add such a colouring. Our impression is reinforced as we observe, now and then, more cases where an every passage is made more personal than its original. For instance, in "Self-Reliance", the reminiscences of the devil's child appear a pure fabrication.

It can, thus, be reasonably asserted that the chapter just discussed is not an isolated case. The personal element in Emerson's prose is a recurring phenomenon. In addition to *Nature*, from where we studied the passage in detail, perhaps the most significant instance is "Self-Reliance" and a few other essays. In all of these, the personal element is exploited far more than Emerson's reputation for impersonality would suggest. However, this element is not a single entity; it is rather a composite of two different first person forms, each of which has its own effect, even if they appear side by side. Both have already been seen in action. One is the voice of private feeling or opinion, as in "What right have I to write on Prudence, Whereof I have little?" other instances of such as voice include, "I confess to an extreme tenderness of nature on this point"; and "I do not find the religions of men at this moment very creditable to them." In all these cases, the speaker is, very clearly, aware of himself as separate from his audience. He is decidedly aware of possible disagreements or misunderstandings, compelling him to make confession or pontificate.

The second persona that we encounter in Emerson's prose does not display any such self-consciousness. It is either representative or exemplary; its expectation is that we take his utterance not as opinion but as axiom. For instance: "I am not solitary whilst I read and write"; "I am made immortal by apprehending my possession of incorruptible goods"; "I am always environed by myself". In these instances, the "I" in its most ambitious moments is "transcendental", as in "I can even with a mountainous aspiring say, I am God". This persona is pervasive in Emerson's writing. In other words, partly, it has a doctrinal basis, in the idea that the individual can speak for the universal. Emerson offers a clarification of the strategy in a rare bit of self-exegesis: "A great man is coming to eat at my house. I do not wish to please him; I wish that he should wish to please me. I will stand here for humanity, and though I would make it kind, I would make it true". It can be seen here that there are two clear voices side by side, just as in the journal passage quoted above—the private voice is seen explaining what the exemplary voice proclaims. The latter can be called the Emersonian counterpart to Whitman's speaker in "Song of Myself". In both the cases, the author's reply to the charge of egoism is that he is speaking according to the informing spirit, rather than as an individual.

In his critical writings, Emerson contends for the exemplary persona as the proper use of the subjective. As Emerson matures, we find that his preference increases for what was universal in a man's work, as against what was merely personal. However, when we turn from Emerson's criticism to his own style, we find a trend precisely antithetical to his professed credo. It is the voice of private opinion which finds more and more of expression; the essays tend to become more and more anecdotal; the speaker tends more and more to speak off the top of his head; we also begin more and more of fillers like, "Here is a lesson which I brought along with me in boyhood from the Latin School." The essays do not remain the same. His writings of the later period mark a return to the general idea type of essay, but

with the difference that can be best illustrated by the following samples respectively from "Manners" and "Behavior":

*I dislike a low sympathy of each with his neighbor's needs. Must we have a good understanding with one another's palates? as foolish people who have lived long together know when each wants salt or sugar. I pray my companion, if he wishes for bread, to ask me for bread, and if he wishes for sassafras or arsenic, to ask me for them, and not to hold out his plate as if I knew already.*

*Every hour will show a duty as paramount as that of my whim just now, and yet I will write it, — that there is one topic peremptorily forbidden to all well-bred, to all rational mortals, namely, their distempers. If you have not slept, or if you have slept, or if you have headache, or sciatica, or leprosy, or thunderstroke, I beseech you by all angels to hold your peace, and not pollute the morning, to which all the housemates bring serene and pleasant thoughts, by corruption and groans.*

It becomes very clear in both the pieces here that it is the private voice that speaks. The burden in both is just about the same — the speaker urges us, with a certain amount of impatience and sarcasm, for the maintenance of a certain decorum. However, between the two, the second piece makes a greater exposure of the speaker. The speaker in the first piece seems to know what he is about. He seems quite confident of his authority over his listener; the language he uses is quite crisp and peremptory. Compared to the first, the second speaker looks a little fuddled. In the very first sentence, he seems unsure as to whether his thought is worth the expression. In the next sentence, he becomes long-winded, so much so that his "beseeching" seems to suggest a certain importance, whereas the "I pray" in the other passage comes as a command. All in all, the Emerson of "Behavior" decidedly becomes garrulous, scolding old man, who runs on even when he is aware that he would be ignored. Thus the posture is more revealing: in "Manners" we are being commanded by someone who is not quite known to us; in "Behavior" the speaker gets exposed more than he intended.

Of not less importance with this development is what happens to the exemplary persona during the course of Emerson's career. We find that while it is frequently used and used to fine effect through *Essays, Second Series*, it seems to almost disappear after that: "In my daily work I incline to repeat my old steps. . . . But some Petrarch or Ariosto, filled with the new wine of his imagination. . . smiles and arouses me with his shrill tones, breaks up my whole chain of habits, and I open my eye on my own possibilities." This comes from Emerson's "Circles". But note how the same thought in "Illusions" becomes something else: "I, who have all my life heard any number of orations and debates, read poems and miscellaneous books, conversed with many geniuses, am still the victim of any new page." Without any doubt, the *intent* in both the pieces is the same, which is to illustrate the poet's power. But in the second, the "I" is given a biography. As a result, the statement comes out less like testimonial than soliloquy. It also seems equally common now for the exemplary persona to make way to an impersonal construction: "I can see my own vices without heat in the distant persons of Solomon, Alcibiades, and Catiline" becomes "every man in moments of deeper thought is apprised that he is repeating the experiences of the people in the streets of Thebes or Byzantium".

As is clear from the two pieces, the change taking place in the later Emerson is not surprising. It is quite understandable that the exemplary persona should fade even as the private persona gets stronger, for there is an opposing relation between the particular and the cosmic. Also, the more conscious one becomes of oneself as a limited, private person, the less likely one would be to identify oneself with Alcibiades. It can be seen that both these shifts are in complete consonance with Emerson's general drift towards conservatism in his later life. Just as it became more and more difficult for him to affirm the soul's ability to overcome the "not-me", it became more and more difficult for him to express in his rhetoric the persona as universal. He came to find more and more convenient now to assume the position of an observer. It seems that the basis for Emerson's reputation of false subjectivity, or his sense of limitations of individual self, was perhaps the very cause of his increasing adherence to it in his later writing. For instance, "Self — Reliance" had much less confessional air than "Experience". The latter essay takes a lower estate of man as the speaker admits to a greater disparity between self and self than he had supposed. The later Emerson had decidedly developed a talent for turning his own admissions of "inadequacy" to his own advantage, and with quite an effective use of the comic-ironic. In fact, he even shows himself capable of an urbanity in speaking of such a tender subject as the failure of inspiration. Note, for instance, the following:

*... I envy the abstraction of some scholars I have known: who could sit on a curbstone in State Street,*

*put up their back, and solve their problem. I have more womanly eyes. All the conditions must be right for my success, slight as that is. What untunes is as bad as what cripples or stuns me*

Once again we see that the apparent claims of envy and self-deprecation in some measure make way to the impression that the scholars in the State Street are rather crude and hasty, whereas he himself is exquisitely sensitive.

In Emerson's later prose, the persona becomes modest but knowing, comparatively anecdotal, quite witty, and even droll. In some measure, he seems to answer the complaint that the man hid himself behind his ideas. However, for the admirers of early Emerson, the later development may be disappointing because the later version is comparatively tame and evasive. The factors responsible for this change are surely more than one. First of all, despite its generalized nature, the exemplary persona does show a distinctive character of its own, and a far more vigorous one than the dominant voice of the later essays. It seems firm in its belief of its own universality; its imaginative reach seems tremendous, as in "I am God in nature; I am a weed by the wall". Or "I am always insincere, as always knowing there are other moods." Here, the character is decidedly hard-headed and uncompromising. When it appears, it certainly gives the sense of great emotional stake and commitment, as, for instance, in the following piece from "Friendship".

*I ought to be equal to every relation. It makes no difference how many friends I have and what content I can find in conversing with each, if there be one to whom I am not equal. If I have shrunk unequal from one contest, the joy I find in all the rest becomes mean and cowardly.*

Although Emerson partly takes back in the next paragraph of what he asserts here, it sounds quite impressive. The passage in substance is just one half of a rather nebulous equivocation about what can be expected of friendship, but the mode of expression in which the statement is made here gives it the force of a personal credo.

Secondly, in early Emerson, the private voice reinforces this tone, and thus imparts to it more concreteness. As became evident from the comparison of "Manners" and "Behavior", the private voice undergoes a change not merely in its frequency but also in character. For instance, many a time in the early essays it appears in the form of what could be called "disclaimers." In other words, the private voice in such cases points when Emerson surprisingly steps out of his train of thought and momentarily makes as if to throw it all aside. Note, for illustration, the following: "But I own there is something ungrateful in expending too curiously the particulars of . . . idealism"; or in "History": "Is there somewhat overweening in this claim? Then I reject all I have written;" Or, the best known, in "Circles": "Let me remind the reader that I am only an experimenter . . . an endless seeker with no Past at my back." We do not come across any such audacity in Emerson's later essays. But it remains very much characteristic of early Emerson. It also adds to the impression of a flesh and blood author who is prepared to back up with actions his most intransigent words about self-reliance.

Taking clue from Emerson's own statement, someone has called the Emersonian speaker an "experimental self". The usual speaker in the early essays seems to conform to the nineteenth century usage of the word "experimental" as a religious term, meaning "experiential", having to do, in this particular case, with religious experience. Undoubtedly, the speaker in the early essays is primarily an experimenter of the holy, prepared to take on the protean manifestations of the soul in nature. He is prepared to make himself equal to every relation, as well as to deny them all, if the spirit so demands. On the contrary, the speaker in Emerson's later essays is more of an observer. In this case, he is experimental in the sense that he is prepared to test out all possibilities but not prepared to embrace any of them. The distinction is, of course, not so hard and fast, but the shift in emphasis is more than clear. It can be seen clearly symbolized by the difference between the first chapter of Nature and the introduction to "Illusions". The second piece is quite a long-winded account of an expedition of Mammoth Cave. In the first piece, we find an expression of nature as possibility by someone who invites us to participate in his experience. In the second piece, possibility is shown as frustration by someone who is a talkative raconteur. In each case, the distinctive tone has its own appeal, but the first sounds far truer to the original notion of self-reliance, which stresses the potential authoritativeness of intuition, as opposed to its potential inaccuracy.

All in all, we find that Emerson's attitude toward subjectivity in writing seems fundamentally sound according to his own doctrine. It seems the Emersonian speaker is most himself when his pronouncements come across as universal laws. Of course, the enunciation of these laws seems to depend, for their full effect, on the sense of an experimenter.

As Emerson insists, "Though I prize my friends, I cannot afford to talk with them and study their visions, lest I lost my own." Obviously, it is much more telling in the first person than in the second, or the third. Emerson must have realized that, *else he would not have used a persona as often as he did, or retained as much circumstantial detail, or fabricated an occasional anecdote.* It seems Emerson disparaged talent, as opposed to genius, his own attention to craftsmanship and his dislike of its neglect in others notwithstanding. It seems he did take the matter for granted. In his method of composition, it becomes clear, the private experience was a given; it is where he started; the universal aspect was what he always attempted to achieve. While on the one hand he saw the danger of structural eccentricity in composing by collation of journal snippets, he also saw on the other that to base his essays on his daily experience might betray him into solipsism. On both the counts, he decidedly grew more sensitive as he grew older, because on both the counts his fears were borne out. Thus, a tracing of Emerson's development as an artist in terms of the change in the character of his persona throws significant light on the nature and character of his changing thought as well as the nature and characters of his essay in the process of dynamic change.

### Emerson's Vision of Self

As is generally said about the writers of the American Renaissance, each sings a "Song of Myself." Most of the works of the period are autobiographies. It is not difficult to know the reasons for the preoccupation of these writers with the self. First of all, the ideology of individualism automatically increases interest in the stories of single persons, especially those which re-enact such cultural myths as the American dream or the pioneer's conquest of nature. Another stimulus has been the tradition of Puritan self-examination, which produced countless diaries and journals of personal life. In the third place, the interest in self, in the age of Emerson, was quickened by the influence of Rousseau and Romanticism. It is for these reasons that the writings of Emerson and his contemporaries are oriented against tradition and towards experience and experiment. It was during this period of the Transcendentalist movement in American literature that the three traditions—democratic individualism, spiritual self-examination, and romantic self-consciousness—combined to make the self an all-important entity for Emerson and his colleagues. As Emerson put it, showing an acute consciousness of living in "the age of the first person singular", the poet is not content to see how 'Fair hangs the apple from the rock', 'What music a sunbeam awoke in the groves', nor of Hardiknute, how 'Stately stept he east the wa,/And stately stept the west', but he now revolves, what is the apple to me? And what the birds to me? And what is Hardiknute to me? And what am I?"

This reappraisal made by Emerson, and shared by the other Transcendentalists, led them to take greater interest in the literary representations of the self. As the German writer Schiller maxims it, whereas the "simple" or primitive poet merely imitates Nature, the "sentimental" or modern poet "*reflects* on the impression produced on him by objects; and it is only on this reflection that his poetic force is based." Emerson and Alcott agreed in 1838 that autobiography was the best kind of book. "Is not the poet bound to write his own biography?" Thoreau asked. "Writing is worthless except as the record of a life", declared Margaret Fuller. Although we find differences among Transcendentalists, such as Emerson and Thoreau, in terms of their personal tone, there is a common inhibition in them all about revealing themselves. We may not characterize this inhibition as a case of Victorian propriety, although that too entered in, but it was insisted upon as a matter of principle that though individual is potentially divine, his individual value is only in his universal aspects. Emerson maintained that "the soul's emphasis is always right", and that "the individual is always mistaken." This led to their strict self-censorship policy. "That which is individual & remains individual in my experience is of no value," he wrote in his journal. "What is fit to engage me & so engage others permanently, is what has put off its weeds of time & place & personal relation."

The Transcendentalists criterion of representativeness, however, did not prevent them from the appreciation and perennial practice of first person writings. Emerson made the most definitive observation on the distinction between true and false subjectivity. A writer's use of the "I", he says in his "Thoughts in Modern Literature," is to be welcomed or censured according to whether his work "leads us to Nature, or to the person of the writer. The great always introduce us to facts: small men introduce us always to themselves. The great man, even whilst he relates a private fact personal to him, is really leading us away from him to an universal experience." At the same time, even as Emerson deprecates subjective experience in favour of the universal truth it contains, he gives his enthusiastic approval

to the "subjectiveness" of modern literature as a positive sign, marking "the uprise of the soul." Thus, despite their deep distrust of egoism, Emerson relied heavily upon first person approach. Although his definition of the self was too pietistic to produce a full-blooded tradition of autobiography, the notion of the link (as well as discrepancy) between the personal "I" and the cosmic "I" did lead to some very interesting and significant first-person strategies, which became an essential part of the American literary heritage through *Nature*, *Walden* and *Leaves of Grass*.

As can be seen, the paradox of self-preoccupation versus self-transcendence was a direct result of the amalgamation of the three traditions of Democratic, Protestant, and Romantic thought. As in the case of the Romantics, so in the case of the Transcendentalists, "Subjectivity was not the program but the inescapable condition of romanticism," where it "becomes the subject of poems which *qua* poetry seek to transmute it." The basic faith implied in the Romantic-Transcendentalist philosophy is that if the writer looked inward deep enough, or integrated himself with the world soul through nature, he will reach the unconscious or universal. Thus for Emerson and Thoreau, as well as for Wordsworth and Coleridge, the sense of being spiritually isolated is tragic. The tradition of the Puritan confessional valued the subjective self even less than the Romantic. He did not attach any significance to individualism or originality. In fact, he viewed them as vanity. Similarly, Democratic individualism is also something of an oxymoron. It means collective rule as much as individual freedom. Thus, the hero in the American work represents the individual self only to the extent it represents America.

The paradoxical attitude of the Transcendentalist's towards self-consciousness cannot, in fact, be wholly explained in terms of the three traditions mentioned earlier. They do help us understand the paradox, but they do not explain the peculiarities it acquired in the style of its writings. Some of their peculiarities get explained if we consider Emerson's movement as "primarily" an inheritor of the tradition of spiritual self-examination. For example, Emerson differed from the Romantics in taking their notions more literally, such as the cult of sincerity. Emerson's main motive for introspection or self-examination was self-improvement, which came to him as an heir of the Puritans. The most obvious literary sign of this link was the diary. Emerson and his colleagues maintained diary or commonplace book. Also like the Puritans, they approached journal-writing as a solemn task. However, journalizing was a much more complex and difficult affair for Emerson and other Transcendentalists than for their ancestors. Compared to the Puritans' diaries, those of Emerson and others allied to him are more varied and miscellaneous both in subject and style. They are deficient in momentum, and are interesting only in patches, not in progressive unfolding.

As things stand between Emerson and his Puritan predecessors, it can be said that the shift in spiritual orientation made the element of self-consciousness in Transcendentalist writing more complex as well as more literary, but less intimate than the traditional spiritual autobiography. One vital difference is that the sense of self in Emerson's writings is more complex because the field of enquiry, in his case, is not restricted in a supernatural frame of reference. For instance, Emerson asks in his journal, "Nothing less than to look at every object in relation to myself." Of course, Emerson does not carry out this objective exhaustively. But we do see him moving in this direction. The movement we notice is from I-Thou relationship with Spirit to an I-nature relationship. And to the extent that they do, their inner life becomes more diffuse. In Emerson's case, spiritual health seems to consist in perceiving the divinity in as many different forms as possible, not in regular encounters in the closet of one's prayer. Every circumstance, every emotional nuance, is potentially of spiritual import for a Transcendentalist. In one sense, the same could be said to be true of the Puritans. However, the Transcendentalist like Emerson differed in two important ways. First, he came closer to believing that all phenomena were of equal importance. One can recall here Emerson's insistence that a gnat is as good a metaphor for God as a Lord of Hosts. Secondly, he felt actively compelled to seek out and perceive significance in phenomena. The sense of spiritual torpor which gave rise to much of the guilt feeling in Puritan self-examiners can be said to have its equivalent in Transcendentalist confessions of failure of perception. Note, for instance, Emerson's complaint for the spiritual diarist: "Set ten men to write their journal for one day, and nine of them will leave out their thought, or proper result, — that is, their net experience, — and lose themselves in misreporting the supposed experience of other people."

If we examine Emerson's journals, it will be found that they aspire to an encyclopedic quality, to encompass the whole range of human experience, which he, as well as others of his band, fail to do. The reason for their failure is their commitment to spontaneity, to recording their impressions moment by moment. In each case, we are left with the image of a somewhat nebulous, unformed soul. The nature of complaint Emerson and his contemporaries made point

to a much more literary interest in journalizing than had traditionally been the case. The characteristic Transcendentalist pattern of composition, which Emerson established and was followed by his colleagues, was of course a three-fold process of revision from journal to lecture to essay. The literary pretensions of their diaries help to explain why their journals are less intimate than those of their predecessors. As Alcott said of Emerson, Transcendentalist journals might better be called "commonplace books." These journals "are full of elegant sketches of life and nature. . . . He does not record the history of his facts, but idealizes whatsoever he observes and writes his thoughts in this general form. He works like an artist from his sketches and models."

Here, the interest is not to be explained only or even primarily in terms of the diarist's literary objectives. For the basic reason for this is religious. The entity of the self in traditional religious confessional is necessarily more particularized than in Transcendentalist writing. The reason is that while in the Puritan experience, the main subject of interest is the dealings of God with a particular so-and-so, in the case of the Transcendentalist the primary subject, on the contrary, is the relation of mankind, of which so-and-so is a representative, to the rest of the universe. The main difference also lies in the Transcendentalist's distrust of supernaturalism, such as providences and the doctrine of election. As democrats in the spiritual realm, they did not believe in any special relationship between an individual and a personal God. Even if they did, they felt it necessary to stress the universality of such an experience. Similarly, they would refuse to interpret phenomenon in the visible universe as having explicit reference to themselves and their community.

Emerson and his colleagues were also less liable to experience the overwhelming soul-struggles which make the traditional confessions look personal documents. The reason was their more liberal views on religion. No doubt, they do confess their feelings of spiritual malaise, but they largely exhibit a basic serenity or optimism about their spiritual state which keeps their vision centred on the design of the universe rather than their own alienation from it. It seems profitable here to relate Emerson's literary self-consciousness to the trend of increasing self-consciousness in western literature as a whole during the nineteenth century. During this period, we see the emergence of biography, autobiography, fictional characterization in lyric poetry in the modern senses. Thus, we can see Emerson's emphasis on self as a distinctive feature of the modern period. Essentially, self is the modern word for soul. Emerson started with the conception of the individual as unique, but his interest quickly shifted from phenomenon which evidenced personal uniqueness to that which evidenced the divinity or the universality of the individual. Emerson was deeply interested in converting the "I" from a fallible personality into an authoritative voice. Emerson prophesized of the reign of "self" in writings of the future.

### **Books for further Reading**

1. F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1941.
2. Perry Miller. *The Transcendentalists*. Harvard University Press, 1950.
3. Vernon L. Parrington. *The Romantic Revolution in America*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1928.
4. Henry D. Gray. *Emerson: A Statement of New England Transcendentalism*. Harvard University Press, 1952.
5. Stephen E. Whicher. *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Pennsylvania University Press, 1953.

### **Question Bank:**

1. Write a note on Emerson as a Transcendentalist.
2. Discuss the Prose style of Emerson.
3. Examine Emerson's philosophy of Nature.
4. Discuss Emerson's concept of Self.
5. What according to Emerson should be the qualities of an "American Scholar."? Discuss.
6. Enumerate Emerson's philosophy of "Self-Reliance."

# Walden ("Economy" and "Where I Lived and What I Lived for") THOREAU

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## UNIT X - Thoreau : Walden

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### 1. Life and work

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) is always named, with Ralph Waldo Emerson, as the founder of the native American literature, independent of the British tradition. Just as Wordsworth and Coleridge are always mentioned together as the founders of the British Romanticism, so are mentioned together Emerson and Thoreau as the founders of the American Romanticism or Transcendentalism. The two pairs were both friends in life and collaborators in letters. However, whereas Emerson theorized American transcendentalism as philosophy in words, Thoreau practiced it in life. Emerson defined and explained special kind of idealism that the winds and rocks of New England had suggested to him. Thoreau, on the other hand, first lived it as an experience and then recorded that experience in his famous *Journal*. No two men can be said to be more alike in what they thought man should do with his life in this world, nor two men were ever less alike personally, than Thoreau and Emerson. If the relationship between the two had been harmonious, as it was a logical outcome of their thinking, it could be called the relationship of master and disciple, or tutor and tyro. But to view it in that matrix would be to do injustice to the very principle of independence that Thoreau cherished above all. As a matter of fact, Thoreau was beholden to none, including Emerson; he was, in his ideal view, man alone and sufficient.

Just as we think of a hermit in his hut, so is it best to think of Thoreau in the same position. He lived in a hut on Walden Pond, just as Wordsworth lived in his Dove Cottage near Lake Windermere. Although Thoreau spent just a little over two years of his forty-five years of life on the Pond, this was the richest experience of his life that gave him vision of the transcendental reality. His feeling at the time was, that most men living in clusters of houses in towns and villages lived a life of quite desperation. So he decided to live 'far away from the madding crowd' in the lap of Nature; where, he thought, he would be able to live as deliberately as Nature itself; where he could spend his hours in fishing and drinking in the stream of time. In his view, if he wanted to be a poet, then he must act like a poet and make his life a poem. Even the building of the hut on the Pond was an experience, and so were the seasons that followed there. For him, it was not an adopted way of life, as it is for other people. Emerson had theorized about the doctrine of self-reliance. Thoreau experimented with it, finding out for himself the efficacy of the doctrine. He decided to put the doctrine to test, to just do it and see where he got by mere elimination of as many non-essentials as possible. Here one can recall Mahatma Gandhi, who was influenced by Thoreau. The Mahatma had preached and practiced the doctrine of 'travel light,' which means to live a life of bare necessities. In other words, to live the simplest life possible in the material world, resisting all temptations of comforts and luxuries that the 'vanity fair' offers in abundance, Thoreau's slogan, too, was: 'Live by dead reckoning. Simplify.'

Thoreau built his cottage on a small tract of woodland belonging to his friend Emerson, only a mile from Concord (a New England town). He could walk over his family's home – full of people and paying guests – and work on his cabin. He used to return in the evening to a substantial and warm meal at home. His family consisted of his mother, father, brother and sister, all of whom were closely knit in affection. However, Thoreau's inclination being towards solitude and contemplation, even these most loving people would sound intruding. So he hastened his departure from home for a solitary life on the Pond. He began to build in March 1845, and occupied the completed cottage on July 4<sup>th</sup> – the American Independence Day. The strategic position of his cottage gave him easy access to both solitude and society. He could choose at will his times to be alone or with people. The village was not far away. Thoreau's statement regarding life of the type he had decided to live is important:

*I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours*

At the end he returned to the village because he had worn a path from the cabin door to the pond; perhaps his mind was also beginning to travel a beaten path. "I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one."

It was perhaps not correct to say that he had learned a lesson which he could apply to these other lives to make them better. Undoubtedly, his Walden years were the highest point of his life. It can be called the most intense moment of living. There he was most himself, genuinely the poet in word and deed or letter and spirit. In one way or another, it was from this experience that his two great books came out. These books were *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) and *Walden* (1854). His other books were only collections of miscellaneous essays reprinted from his magazines, or passages from his voluminous journals. In these two books, we can say, lies the essence of Thoreau as a writer.

Although not of the original British stock, Thoreau was a native of Concord. His father's family was French of the Channel Islands, although English-speaking. His mother's family was American Scottish Tory. Actually, it is this sort of mixture that true America is made of, now as then. Thoreau's villagers looked at him as a queer sort of person. They found something strange and alien about this awkward and shy but vigorous boy with a slight "burr" to his talk. He was of a retiring temperament. Even during his years at Harvard University he made very few friends. His actions were apparently indolent, but actually energetic. His two passions were reading and walking. From his early childhood he sought the still unlearned woodlands about the village rather than the society of his fellows. Perhaps, he picked up silence by way of reaction to his mother, who had the reputation of being the greatest talker in Concord. It is also possible that he picked up directly from his taciturn father.

Reaching in his life the stage to make a choice of profession, Thoreau turned from those that were conventionally open to him as a Harvard graduate. These professions were ministry, law, medicine, and business. Ignoring all these opportunities he preferred to take up teaching at the school. We may recall here that Emerson, too, had made the same choice of school teaching as career. The "Concord Academy" that he and his beloved John launched invited much criticism, but it became immensely popular. John Dewey, the well-known American philosopher, should have been there, for the Academy offered practical education, learning by doing, exploring nature rather than books. The choice that Thoreau made was lecturing, which, if anything, becomes his career. He was not as effective as was Emerson. But he closely followed the Emersonian pattern of entering observations in the *Journals*, preparing a lecture from them, and then refining the lecture into an essay. We find in his even most formal writing a direct conversational tone. It is perhaps due to the presence in his mind or imagination of an audience.

It is important to know about Thoreau's *Journal*, because he was not the only one practicing this sort of writing. All his colleagues called Transcendentalists, including Emerson, wrote *Journals*. This was, in fact, a special feature of the Transcendentalist movement in America. Thoreau began his *Journal* in 1837, wherein originated all his writings, including *Walden*. His first words in the *Journal* were: "To be alone I find it necessary to escape the present. — I avoid myself." But he sought out his brother for the idling trip on the sluggish Concord which was to provide the frame for his "books of days". As has been noted, the early writings in his *Journal* are subjective — sort of romantic introspection — but with a hard core that prevents them from being sentimental. They only emphasize the necessity of being alone, more in the mood of the fireside than of the moor. In a way, these writings suggest, that he is already setting his house (his soul) in order with ironic and deliberate self-deception.

Thoreau's writings in his *Journal* clearly show that he knows well Brahma and Buddha as well as the Christian God; he talks of reading but mentions only a few books by name. But as one goes along one comes upon more specific comments about the details of nature. His walks become more and more important. It was at about this time that Thoreau went to Walden Pond. He had already assisted Emerson and Margaret Fuller with the *Dial* and had contributed many poems, essays, and reviews. He was sure by now of his being a writer. He did not, however, know then, nor did he ever know, how to make a conventional book, although his work had an inner form. He was indeed against writing books for sale, for which people were ready to pay for reading. In other words, he wrote for his own satisfaction, not for the satisfaction of the reader. They may take whatever he offered then or not, as they like. But he would not make any compromise on the expression of his soul. His *Walden* can be said to have a close parallel to Wordsworth's *Prelude*. Both relate to the writer's soul, and are not meant for any reader satisfaction.



There were only two books of Thoreau that got published during his lifetime, which were based on passages from these *Journals*. The frame of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), which he was writing during his residence in the hut on Walden Pond in 1845-47, tells of the trip with his brother John in a homemade dory painted blue and green up into New Hampshire. But the facts of his life serve only as an excuse for discursive essays on any subject that happened to appeal to the homespun philosopher-author. Thoreau's prose style was vigorously aphoristic, which managed to produce a large stock of quotable passage rather than a whole book. It was mainly because the genius that lifted *Walden* (1854) to the level of a masterwork had not yet fully developed.

Considered closely, the second work rewards it as a work of art. In his account of his bout with life's essentials Thoreau uses the same casual tone and takes his start from the solid earth of "economy" and ends with the stars rising, as Emerson said poetry should, "to paradise by the stairway of surprise." Compressing his two year at the Walden Pond into one, he asks his reader to spend the cycle of the seasons with him "as deliberately as Nature." Whether through the day he is "making the earth say beans instead of grass" or he is listening to the ice break on the pond of a winter night, somehow he manages to get our feet down "through the mush and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance", to "a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we call reality" then only is it possible to comprehend what is sublime and noble in each present moment. Here incidents and digressions are welded together by the intense heat of conviction and the narrative rises through almost imperceptible degree to an exalted final chapter of realized ideals.

After his experiments at the Walden Pond, Thoreau lived at the Emerson home while the master was busy lecturing in Europe. Lidian was kind to him, and his affections were awakened. Except for his unrequited early love for Ellen Sewall, this devoted friendship was the only break in his emotional singleness. Like many of his fellow Transcendentalists, Thoreau idealized the relationship of the sexes and attempted to intensify it by putting it on the Platonic level. Such friendships among members of the group were, in fact, very common, perfectionists as they were all of them. We know how Emerson's letters are full of them. But Thoreau lived at the Emerson house no more.

Thoreau's friendship with Emerson, as Wordsworth's with Coleridge, was as much intellectual as it was emotional. When Thoreau received a gift of oriental books from an English friend, he at once shared his treasure with Emerson. He also took up with Emerson the cause of John Brown when the slavery issue became too acute even for him. In this crisis, for the first time, both men turned thought into action of the more obvious kind and crusaded for the fanatic hero of Harpers Ferry. By this time remaining, as someone has put it, the "bachelor of Nature," he was now more an amateur botanist and geologist, a collector of specimens, than a dreamer and wit.

Here, we need to say a word about Thoreau's wit. It was indeed his wit that distinguished him among the Transcendentalists. Note, for instance, the following:

1. Museums are the catacombs of nature.
2. I have learned that the swift traveler is he that goes afoot.
3. A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can let alone.
4. Any man more right than his neighbor constitutes a majority of one already.
5. There is need for a society for the Diffusion of Ignorance.

Thus, as can be noted here, the reverse aphorism, which carries a sting as it provokes laughter, or at least a smile, is Thoreau's trademark. Ben Franklin nods to him across the years with a sympathetic twinkle in his eye.

Besides wit, there is also wisdom in the rugged and spiny prose that sets Thoreau, this man of Nature, apart from many of the Concord poets and philosophers. The tang of the Maine woods and of the sea is in his sentences, as well as the peace of his New England town. He displays the capacity to build, out of the common experience of streams and trees and fields of corn, figures of speech that reveal eternal truths. He can make a battle of ants and a conversation with a woodchuck seem like events in history. His woods move swiftly because his thought is clear and his emotion steady. The skepticism of all the dogma and faith in life, which he shared with Emerson, take in him a form more appealing to some readers because they are less theoretical, more closely tied to action. He could say with confidence, "Read not the Times. Read Eternities," and make it seem like the most practical advice anyone could give. He remained uncompromising in his war against materialism, opportunism, and hypocrisy, which he had discovered quite

early in his life as the most dangerous of pitfalls in a free society. He had the capacity to see the sandy bottom of the stream of time without failing in his job of fishing for eternities. It was because of his capacity to rejoice in and use well the freedom that was given him that he seems not only the harshest critic but the greatest lover of his land, that is America.

Thoreau's most influential essay is that of "Civil Disobedience," perhaps prompted by his night in Concord jail when on principle he had declined to pay his toll tax a few years before. We know very well how Gandhi ji derived his idea of non-cooperation with the British authorities from this very essay of Thoreau. Gandhi ji made of it a political philosophy of peaceful resistance against the unjust colonial regime. He used it as a weapon to win freedom for our nation. The Indian practical saint read this essay, its well-reasoned argument for passive resistance, and became an ardent admirer of the American prophet of individualism who in turn had gained so much inspiration from the Orient. Other people in other times and places have found Thoreau an immediate and practical guide through the thickets of circumstances to the open fields of thought and feeling which are always just beyond. The affirmative argument had reached in Thoreau the stage of demonstration; the spirit of independence had become a way of life. So it become with Gandhi ji.

## 2. American Transcendentalism

The movement of Transcendentalism in America during the early decades of the nineteenth century has been called by various names, including 'American Renaissance' and 'American Romanticism.' Like the Romantic movement in England, which came ahead of the American and became an inspiration for the latter, the Transcendentalist movement in America still remains the greatest period of the American literary history. It founded the New, altogether New, tradition of American literature, made as much deliberately as emerging naturally, different from the European. Emerson and Thoreau were the strongest pillars of this movement, the towering columns of the tall edifice. Let us therefore go into its origin and philosophy and see its relation to Thoreau and his writings which is our immediate interest. Most writing of the Transcendentalists in America falls into the category of non-fictional literature; it represents a mixture of piety poetry, and sentimentousness, which can be called neither art nor philosophy but a combination of both. Even todate there remains an ambivalence about the critical appreciation of this unique movement. For example, it is relatively easy to picture Emerson as a romanticised discordant of Jonathan Edwards or as a harbinger of America's literary independence, it is harder to explain how his combination of the roles of clergyman and poet distinguishes his work in his own right, because he did not realize either of these two roles in a profound or consistent way. By the same token, the Transcendentalist movement as a whole has appealed to scholars more as a symptom of New England's intellectual flowering than for its intrinsic merits as a body of literature or as a system of thought.

There is, for sure, a sense in which this scholarly consensus seems justified: undoubtedly, the American Transcendentalists have been more important for historical reasons than for the quality of their achievement in art, philosophy, or theology. As has been often indicated, however, the stature of Emerson, Thoreau and company increases when we consider them as "thinkers" or "prophets" rather than in terms of any particular individual discipline. We then begin to be caught up in the excitement of their Transcendental vision. Their very lack of discipline begins to seem a source of greatness. We obviously need to deviate from the conventional parameters of literary aesthetics to be able to measure the qualities of such work. It is only then that we can account for the impression of excellence their works convey and the powerful impact they make on the reader's mind. To be able to do all this we need to understand and appreciate the outline and evolution of the Transcendentalists' characteristic literary aims and approaches and the ways in which these express the writers' underlying principles or vision. In other words, the Transcendentalist movement demands for an adequate understanding an integrated approach, which should combine intellectual history, critical explication, and genre study.

Mostly, the word 'Transcendentalism' is used in a very general sense, and as such has remained rather vague. Vagueness was indeed what Transcendentalism chiefly connoted in its first popular usage in New England. As Le Corbusier (the man who gave us the city of Chandigarh, its architecture and design) has remarked of the term "abstract" in art criticism, *avante-garde movements always have ridiculous names, because they are baptized by their enemies.* Transcendentalism was no exception. The label first came to be applied rather in disparagement, to suggest outlandishness. *The implication of an organized school of thought was misleading; as a matter of fact, the Transcendentalists had no specific programme or common cause, and their beliefs were often in a state of flux. Some,*

therefore, refused to accept the rubric. Even those who did had different opinions when it came to interpreting the belief or theory of Transcendentalism. James Freeman Clarke called himself a Transcendentalist just because he did "not believe that man's senses tell him all he knows." For George Ripley the term meant, more specifically, a belief in "the supremacy of mind over matter." Christopher Cranch, however, considered Transcendentalism as nothing more than "that living and always new *spirit* of truth, which is ever going forth on its conquests into the world." Jonathan Saxon's claim was that "every man is a Transcendentalist." Emerson's argument was that there was no such thing as a "pure Transcendentalist." No wonder, then, that at one time or another studies of every major Transcendentalist have tried to dissociate their protagonist (writer) from the charge of Transcendentalism.

And yet, it cannot be overlooked that the term Transcendentalism does have an accepted core of meaning, which can be stated in unambiguous terms. Historically considered, New England Transcendentalism can be called as one of many instances of the widespread religious ferment which took place in America during the early decades of the nineteenth century. As a self-conscious movement, Transcendentalism served as an expression of radical discontent within the realms of American Unitarianism (which in turn was a liberal movement within Congregationalism). It arose from objections to Unitarian epistemology and the Lockean psychology upon which it was based. Locke's contention was that all human knowledge was derived empirically, through the experience of the senses. Accepting this as a premise, the Unitarians held that God and his laws are apprehended by rational reflection on the natural creation and the revelations of scripture, rather than by direct intuition. To the young Unitarian ministers like Emerson, considered radicals in 1820's and 30's, this position sounded rather oppressive, for it seemed to dissociate man from God. Stimulated the post-Kantian thought, as interpreted in literature by Goethe, Carlyle, and especially Coleridge, they began to contend around the end of the third decade that man possesses, in addition to his "understanding" or capacity for empirical reasoning, a higher mental faculty, or "Reason," which enables him to perceive spiritual truth through intuition. This distinction between Reason and Understanding the American Transcendentalists picked up from the writings of Coleridge, especially *Aids to Reflection* (1825).

Thus, the concept of a higher Reason is the heart of what came to be called Transcendentalism. Those who recognized such a faculty of the human mind called it by different names. Writers like Thoreau and Emerson use terms like "Spirit," "Mind," "Soul," etc. Not only that, they also differed in the meanings they attributed to this faculty of the human mind, the higher Reason. For instance, some Transcendentalists thought that it was merely an inner light or conscience. Certain others among them thought it was the voice of God. For still others, it was literally God himself immanent in man. Yet another set of Transcendentalists considered this faculty (higher Reason) as primarily an impersonal cosmic force. And there were a few more who continued to consider it in traditional anthropomorphic terms. Ecclesiastically, the Transcendentalists ranged widely in their radicalism: the so-called moderates among them, namely James Freeman Clarke, William H. Furness, and Convers Francis, eventually became pillars of the Unitarian establishment. Their differences with each other were, however, not as much as, say, between Kant and his German successors.

The vagueness surrounding the unifying principle among the Transcendentalists seems to pose a greater problem when we try to determine as to who was a Transcendentalist and who was not. At times, even the conservative Unitarians sounded quite Transcendental when, in reaction against Calvinism, they praised reason and the moral sentiment. The idea of the authority of spiritual intuition also comes up in many contexts outside the Transcendentalist movement. It is not unexpectedly, because mystical pietism was one of the most dynamic forces in the tradition of American evangelical Protestantism as a whole. Transcendentalism is to be thought of, therefore, as a state of mind originating in a specific matrix – the reaction against rationalism within Unitarian thought – but emanating outward to stimulate such people as Whitman and Melville, and arising coincidentally in a number of other places besides New England under similar intellectual conditions.

Certain writers are, however, central to the movement of Transcendentalism, while others are only peripheral. Among the more important ones during the most vigorous years of the movement (1835-1845) one would decidedly want to include, besides Emerson and Thoreau, Brason Alcott, W.H. Channing, James Clarke, Margaret Fuller, Theodore Parker, Elizabeth Peabody, George and Sophia Ripley. The majority of the movement members were born and brought up in the vicinity of Boston, the spiritual capital of America, the first abode of the pilgrim fathers. Also, almost all of them took to Transcendentalism by way of Unitarianism before they had attained the age of thirty. More than at

least half of them were formally trained for the Unitarian ministry. And almost all the male members among them studied at Harvard. Further, many of them came from wealthy and 'gentle' roots, though their immediate families were of widely varying means and status. And virtually all of them were of old New England stock, typically descending, on both sides, from ancestry who had sailed to America well before 1700. Almost all supported, with different degrees of involvement, the great moral reforms of the day – the temperance, antislavery and non-resistance movements – though most were rather disinclined to engage in organized social action, except in abolitionism during the decade before the Civil War. Finally, most of them were involved, with greater or smaller degree, in the arts, especially literature, though usually as amateurs rather than professionals. At least half of them produced significant amounts of poetry. Quite a few wrote literary criticism. Most maintained diaries for some period. And almost all, at one time or another, wrote essays, sermons or orations with some pretention to literary merit. This predilection for literary merit seems to have emanated from a variety of factors, both cultural and personal.

The famous historian of American thought, Perry Miller, once described Transcendentalism as an early instance of the recurring pattern of generational conflict in American society. In its liberal, upper-middle-class origins and in its colourful, though short-lived, exuberance, marked by insistence on personal freedom and spiritual reform, the Transcendentalist movement shows strong resemblance to the revolution of sensibility which was witnessed among educated people in America during the period of the 1950's and 60's. Thoreau may not have been the first *hippie*, but he is rightly cited as a precedent for "Consciousness III." The "relevance" of Transcendentalism is easy to exaggerate but useful to remember, for its style of aesthetics has as much contemporary significance as the style of life of its members. Various scholars of Transcendentalism have viewed the movement from different perspectives. Many of them, for example, have continued to emphasize the spiritual basis of the movement and its impact upon American thought and culture. One of these scholars is Perry Miller, who has regarded Transcendentalism as essentially a religious movement. He places it, therefore, in the context of the revivalism of the Second Awakening. William Hutchison has, on the other hand, viewed it as a reform movement within Congregationalism. Stanley Alkins, another important name in this area, has classified Transcendentalism (perhaps wrongly) as the species of northern bigotry which precipitated in the Civil War. But even as we take stock of the contributions of Transcendentalism to America's social and intellectual history, we cannot overlook the movement's strongly aesthetic cast, which was unprecedented in the annals of American religious movements. No one would disagree with Miller when he insists that "Transcendentalism was not primarily a literary phenomenon." At the same time no one would be ready to ignore the fact that the practitioners of the movement regarded "poetry [as] second only to religion," and often inseparable from it. What John Holloway has remarked about the Victorians is equally true of the Transcendentalists: they were not committed to the logical defence of particular positions of beliefs so much as to stimulating their audiences to a new perception of things by appeals "to imagination as well as intelligence."

A balanced view of Transcendentalist writings, therefore, must take into account its simultaneous commitment to beauty and truth, without scanting either. On the whole, the Transcendentalists were exceedingly weak in the genres most in favour in modern times (fiction, drama, poetry). But they had strong affinities with other genres and sub-genres about which not much is known and to which not much attention is paid. However, these less popular or important genres, when once defined, make the Transcendentalist literature more comprehensible and interesting. These genres are the conversation, the essay, the sermon, the literary travelogue or excursion, the catalogue, the diary, and the autobiography. A generic approach to any body of post-romantic expressivist writing, must of course, be applied with caution. Works like Thoreau's *Walden* and Emerson's *Nature* are to a large extent unique. In such cases, the problem of sorting out stylistic influences is insuperable. To call the former an autobiography and the latter a sermon is almost as simplistic as to call both these works poems. Such models must therefore be used only tentatively and in combination, to suggest a range of possibilities rather than to define within narrow limits. Each model has to be viewed as a cluster of motifs rather than as a fixed form.

One of the risks of generic approach is that it tends to make different, sometimes very different, authors look too much alike. Despite their own vociferous protestations, however, insisting that no two of them thought alike, the Transcendentalists, we know well enough, had a good deal in common, such as their pride in their own individuality. As for their aesthetics, it is possible to distinguish not only shared critical principles but also a definite Transcendentalist

rhetoric. Its leading characteristics are inchoate structure, prodigal imagery, wit, paradox, symbolism, aphoristic statement, paratactic syntax, and a manifesto-like tone. Thoreau's *Antislavery and Reform Papers* and parts of *Walden* are examples of these characteristics.

We must also remember that Transcendentalism was not an isolated phenomenon; its hybrid mixture of religion and rhetoric had its origins in the cultural milieu from which the movement arose, namely Boston Unitarianism, cross-fertilized by English Romantic thought and the antecedent tradition of Platonic mysticism. There is also a direct relationship between style and vision in the Transcendentalist aesthetic. This is also illustrated by its intellectual heritage we just mentioned. The Transcendentalists' situation as New Englanders seem to have also preconditioned their relative allegiance to vision and expression in literary art. This subject seems to have been less appreciated than one might expect. Generally, what we are offered is the heritage of Transcendentalism in panoramic terms as a legacy of the Puritans that suddenly resurfaced in reaction to Unitarianism, with the Romantic movement as a catalyst. No doubt the study of any movement, especially the intellectual, should begin with an account of the immediate context in which it arose. But the study of Boston Unitarianism, out of which grew Transcendentalism, remained until 1950s without a thorough examination of its tenets. It was only treated as something the Transcendentalists repudiated. Partly, the Transcendentalists themselves were responsible for the absence of a thorough examination of Boston Unitarianism. They themselves encouraged it by offering only caricatures of Unitarianism as "heartless" and "corpse-cold." Of late, however, both the intellectuals and church historians have shown that Unitarianism was considerably more complex and vital than had been supposed. Now it can be said that Transcendentalism, in all its aspects, including the aesthetic, is best seen not as a repudiation but an outgrowth of trends in Unitarian thought. This is, of course, not to deny the catalytic role of European influences.

Summing up our general introduction to Transcendentalism it can be said that the three most significant intellectual and literary concerns of the Transcendentalist movement were spirit, nature, and man. Broadly speaking, the writers of the movement sought to express spiritual truth in all forms of writing they undertook. They invariably made inquiries into the meaning of nature, and to that extent their writings are exploratory. In various ways, the style and structure of their writings express conceptions of natural order. The personae they used in their writings also reflect their conceptions of the divinity of the self. The main tendencies in Transcendentalist writings, especially of Thoreau and Emerson, are the impulses to prophesy, to create nature anew for oneself, and to speak in the first person singular. *And these very tendencies are found to be the dominant motifs in American literary history.* Thus, it clearly shows that the writings of Thoreau and Emerson became the foundation for the tradition of the American literature. While Wordsworth and Coleridge pioneered only the romantic movement in the early nineteenth-century England, Emerson and Thoreau laid the foundation of not merely the Transcendentalist literature but of the American literary tradition as a whole, as distinguished from the European or the British literary tradition.

### 3. Walden as Excursion

Generally speaking, most of Thoreau's works can be described as catalogues extended through time and space. His favourite literary form was the romantic excursion: a ramble (walking or trip or sojourn), which takes on overtones of a spiritual quest as the speaker proceeds. In the case of *Walden*, the form is sojourn. Thoreau's later journals have the same rhythm. Like the conversation, the sermon, and the essay, the excursion is also a potentially encyclopedic form. Although somewhat better controlled by the obligation to describe a particular setting, it tends to become, in effect, an account of the whole universe as it appears to the speaker, particularly in *Walden*. This comprehensiveness is due in large part to the extraordinary gift of microcosm which Emerson was the first to notice in Thoreau, the ability to infer the "universal law from the single fact." This very transcendental mode of perception gives rise to the fundamental movement of Thoreau's prose – from observation to speculation and back again – and to his breadth of allusion. Thoreau did not travel far in his life time, but his imagination ranged throughout the world.

Whereas Emerson composed his essays around concepts of universal order, Thoreau began with his environment and attempted to invest it with significance. Temporal continuity in his writing is usually more important than the continuity of abstract ideas which unifies Emerson's prose and characterizes most of the Transcendentalist literature. Thoreau's excursion, consequently, cannot be considered as typical of the movement to the same degree as the forms and

techniques used by Emerson, Alcott, etc. Still, the excursions can be called representative in the Emersonian sense, in that they attempt to carry out to practical fulfillment the spirit of the Transcendentalists' largely theoretical fascination with nature. Nearly all of Thoreau's adult life was devoted to proving the validity of correspondence in his own experience. Although not many of the Transcendentalists (except for the Concord group) took Thoreau's example very seriously, they most readily endorsed both the general principle of living close to nature and the romantic excursion as a literary form.

Thoreau's choice of excursion as a literary form reflected the prevailing taste of his age. Travel writing of various kinds had always been very popular in America: scientific expeditions (such as Darwin's *Voyage of a Naturalist Round the World*), records of exploration (such as Brackenridge's *Journal of a Voyage up the River Missouri*), shipwreck and captivity narratives (such as Melville's *Typee*), grand tours of foreign and domestic parts of literary gentleness (such as Goethe's *Italienische Reise*), and so forth. Indeed on both sides of the Atlantic, in the early years of the nineteenth century, it seemed to one reviewer that almost everybody who "happens once in his life to wander from the precincts of his own native village, thinks it is his duty to enlighten the publick with a narrative of his adventures." The *North American Review* regularly devoted two or three major articles each year to travel books. Thoreau is reputed to have read at least 146 of them, including all the works we listed a while ago.

There were several reasons for the vogue of travel writing, especially in America: the rise of romanticism; the largely unexplored condition of America; the self-consciousness and provincialism of the new nation, which stimulated fresh interest among Americans in European travelers' reports about them and in compatriots' report about Europe; and the didactic orientation of American aesthetic. Like Lyceum lectures (lectures in the ancient Greek academy), travel literature could be delightful without ceasing to be ostensibly instructive. Fascinating glimpses of exotic spots could be purveyed as "scientific information." Such works were also relatively easy to produce. "He must be dull indeed," one critic declared, "who cannot give a tolerably interesting account of very interesting places."

Thus, for all the reasons listed above, many of the prominent, serious as well as popular, writers in America during the nineteenth century, including the Transcendentalists, tried their hand at travel writing. Poe wrote two fictional narratives; Melville began as a travel romancer; Cooper's novels have a strong travel interest, as does Hawthorne's *Marble Faun*. Several other writers of the time wrote literary travelogues. Among the Transcendentalists, the roster of travel books includes not only Thoreau's work but also Emerson's *English Traits*, Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes and At Home and Abroad*, Bartol's *Pictures of Europe*, James Clarke's *Eleven Weeks in Europe*, and Ellery Channing's *Conversations in Rome*. Although these books varied widely in style and scope and quality, all shared a basically literary, rather than factual approach. To the extent that they make any claims on the readers' attention, then or now, it is as imaginative reinterpretations of their subject rather than as guidebooks or as compendia of information, although they do supply generous amounts of data and moral directive. All the Transcendentalist authors, especially those who traveled in Europe, were well aware that they were going over ground already covered many times before, and that their own contribution, such as it was, would consist in supplying new points of view – in deploying the resources of their wit, descriptive ability, capacity for original reflection, and eye for the out-of-the-way detail.

As the century progressed, the imaginative approach to travel writing continued to gain ground, not only because the Romantic movement encouraged an expressivist approach to writing and an idealized view of exotic places and life of adventure, but also in part because the sheer bulk of travel books had made it difficult to say anything distinctive about the usual watering places unless one was extremely creative, or else intimidatignly thorough. Gone were the days when "the mere circumstance of traveling" was thought sufficient to allow a gentleman "the right of forcing on the public an account of his breakfasts and nights' lodgnings." The gentleman amateur and his wilderness counterpart, the untutored explorer, were being replaced by two different kinds of reporters: the professional writer on the one hand and the professional historian, sociologist, geographer, naturalist, or archaeologist on the other. George William Curtis summed up the situation for the literary travelogue in 1855 when he declared that if the work is not "poetic" it will be "soon forgotten."

The center of literary interest in such writing, Curtis goes on to elaborate, is not what the traveler sees or the adventures he experiences, but the self-portrayal of the traveler himself. In this, as in several other respects, Curtis was the child of Transcendentalism. The Transcendentalists, in general, departed from the Unitarian line of travel-writing in the same way they did on other issues: by stressing the importance of the individual mind over that of empirical fact. Caleb Stetson, for example, in his review of Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes*, was pleased to find that

she "is much more occupied with what is passing in her own soul, than with the objective realities which present themselves to the senses." His only complaint was that "she does not let her thought or emotion write itself out sufficiently. Frederic Hedge, in the same vein, declared that what "we care to read about" in travel books is not paintings and churches and rivers and mountains, "but the reflection of these in genial and original minds. The most interesting travels are those that have the least to say about the very things which we go abroad to see. . . . For the same reason, we like travels at home better than travels abroad." Hedge's last sentence touches upon the essential idea of travel as expressed in Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and the "Conclusion" of Thoreau's *Walden*. True travel is spiritual travel, an exploration of one's own higher latitudes. Travel is inspired, in other words, in the same idealized way as the religious terminology. Actual travel is useless, in the Transcendentalist view of things. In fact, the chances are that it may prove even a stumbling block to spiritual advancement, like the doctrine of miracles. For example, Emerson's principal notion about travel, based on personal experience, was that in most cases it signifies a futile attempt at self-escape. He and other Transcendentalist travellers, especially Thoreau, therefore, hedged their reports with admonishment that home is best, that travel is merely a preparative to better living at home. "The traveller learns many precious lessons, but perhaps the most precious of them all, for which alone it is well worth one's while to take a long journey, as perhaps else it cannot be learned, is that the crown of life is in no change of place, but is to be in one's home," effused Bartol.

It is not that Bartol and other Transcendentalist travellers sought to deny the peripatetic impulse, however far from it. They simply desired to make it spiritually valid, or, in Thoreau's case, to make the best of their inability to gratify it fully. Such motives reinforced their natural literary predilection for the abstract and subjective dimension. Emerson talked about his experience in England in terms of the essence of the English character. Thoreau interspersed descriptive sketches with verse fragments, prose poetry, and quaint bits of historical lore. In both these cases, and other similar ones by other Transcendentalists, we become conscious of an interplay between the sequence of actual observations and the interests of a subjectively imposed mood or design. Neither dominates to the exclusion of the other; rather, the works oscillate between the two structural principles.

This sort of oscillation was one of the features of the genre which most perplexed the conservative critics. This oscillation can be found in many literary travelogues of the Romantic period as well as among the Transcendentalists. Edward Everett, for instance, enjoyed Irving's *A Tour of the Prairies*, but did not quite know what to make of it:

*To what class of compositions the present work belongs, we are hardly able to say. It can scarcely be called a book of travels, for there is too much painting of manners, and scenery, and too little statistics; – it is not a novel, for there is no story; and it is not a romance, for it is all true. It is a sort of sentimental journey, a romantic excursion, in which nearly all the elements of several different kinds of writing are beautifully and gaily blended into a production almost sui generis.*

Thoreau, for sure, had very little interest in the purely picturesque. His mode of writing, however, does resemble Irving's in most of the ways listed here – in its descriptive, peripatetic, and miscellaneous or hybrid character: part sketch, part information, part narrative, part wit, part philosophy. This resemblance need to be carefully noted as a sort of reminder that the *Thoreauvian excursion* is not a great deal more *sui generis* than Irving's actually was. The critical emphasis on structural excellence in *Walden* and other works by Thoreau, promoted by New Criticism, had been rather misleading. The fact of the matter is that none of Thoreau's books, not even *Walden*, is very lightly unified, nor probably designed to be, for the Romantic excursion is as much a record of events and impressions as it is a poem. Even in the course of so analytical a work as *Walden*, there are all sorts of meanderings and digressions: the song the speaker sings when chopping timber, the length of the diatribe against philanthropy, the inclusion of the "complemental verses," and so forth. We do not mean to say that these passages bear no relation to the overall drift of the book, but that their charm lies more in their heterogeneity and unpredictability than in their contribution to an overarching whole. Like the catalogue in Whitman's poetry, Thoreau's writing is to be appreciated more as a process than as a product, more for its irregular flow than for any patterns which can be abstracted from it, although the awareness of such patterns naturally enhances one's pleasure in the work.

In the New Critical tradition, there was also an overemphasis laid on symbolism in *Walden*, in fact, in all his writings. So much so that one has to make extra efforts to show that the work (*Walden*) has a factual level as well. Like all

literary travel narratives, *Walden* is an aesthetic mongrel, a mixture of the actual and the fictive, a report of real occurrences which have been reshaped, in different degrees, by the processes of selection, reflection, ordering, and mythologizing. These points are obvious enough to be sure. The problem is not so much with our responses to Thoreau as with our literary tools. It has been our second nature until recently to approach a work as literary construct unified by a certain theme or themes to which the individual parts are subordinate, whereas what Thoreau actually wrote is a somewhat different article. It may not change our critical preferences, but it should help to clarify the expectations we bring to Thoreau, if we see his work as one outgrowth or variant of a larger development in excursion – writing during the romantic period.

Putting together the conventions of the Romantic excursion in relation to literary Transcendentalism, we can say the following: So far as the method of construction or organization is concerned, most travelogues used one of the two models: the sequential, sometimes day-by-day, or the topical. Thoreau preferred the first of these two models in general. But in the case of *Walden* he used the second model. A literary book is never expected to have a very coherent structure. We do not go to it for its coherence on conventional principles. One of its pleasures, indeed, as James Russell Lowell said in his review of Thoreau's *A Week*, was in its "happy fortuity." The *sine qua non* of such a work as Thoreau's *Walden* is the writer's talent for observation, description, and, above all, reflection. The Romantic travel writers were expected to go beyond telling "what has happened to them," to "how they have happened to the universe." The words quoted here are Thoreau's own. We need not, however, interpret as a blank cheque to the writer's imagination: "To write a true work of fiction even, is only to take leisure and liberty to describe some thing more exactly as they are. A true account of the actual is the rarest poetry."

As the above-quoted remarks by Thoreau make clear, there were no special ground-rules for the order in which a travel writer should proceed. All would depend on the order of observation or reflection. Of course, no travel book was ever written without an unspoken commitment to totality. Thoreau, for example, demanded that the observer enter into a total relation with the thing observed. Emerson, even more transcendently, declared that true travel consists "in sounding all the stops of our instrument." Emerson elaborates how the idea of 'travel' for the Transcendentalists was more metaphoric than real:

*If I have had a good indignation and a good complacency with my brother, if I have had reverence & compassion, had fine weather good luck in my fishing excursion & profound thought in my studies at home, seen a disaster well through; and wrought well in my garden, nor failed my part at a banquet, then I have traveled, though all was within the limits of a mile from my house.*

Here, Emerson takes us at the heart of what the excursion meant for Thoreau, both in life and as a literary endeavour. It was a succession of confrontations with nature, from each of which the observer is expected to extract as much as he can, the mark of success being not so much in the planning of one's itinerary or imaginative rearrangement of events as in the way in which he runs the gamut of events as they occur. This is precisely what we look for in Thoreau's *Walden*.

In the light of what Emerson and Thoreau have said about the travel excursion, the question of *Walden*'s structural and poetic integrity seems less important than it is often represented as being. In fact, *Walden* as a whole seems less important relative to Thoreau's other works. Even when taken as a travelogue, *Walden* emerges as Thoreau's masterpiece. It not only carries the principle of significant travel as interior travel farther than any other Transcendentalist work, it is also more thorough and sophisticated on the level of observation than the rest of Thoreau's writing. Of course, we do not mean to say that *Walden* is, in generic terms, a class by itself. It is only a variant or extension of a form which all of Thoreau's works share loosely in common. Decidedly, *Walden* is more conducive to metaphorical interpretation as well as more cohesive than any other work by Thoreau. And it is for these very two reasons that *Walden* came to be considered the best of Thoreau's work. Understandably so, because these two qualities were most prized by the New Criticism which reigned supreme until about a quarter of a century.

There is a good deal similar between Thoreau and Whitman than between Thoreau and other Transcendentalists such as Fuller and Curtis. The difference between these two and others practicing popular excursion is, in addition to the



fact that their writing is simply more difficult, that they refuse to do no more than daydream; they must also prophesy, whereas Margaret Fuller is largely content to remain on the level of description and anecdote. This made Thoreau and Whitman less popular but truer to Transcendentalist ideal of art. As a praise for his kind of travel excursion, Thoreau in his "Conclusion" to *Walden* lays down the touchstones of "extravagance" and "obscurity." Thus, *Walden* as excursion is to be understood in the context of both the nineteenth-century tradition of travel literature as well as the tradition of Transcendentalism spearheaded by Emerson and Thoreau. Reading it out of context will only lead to misinterpretations of its various aspects. We must not apply to it the conventional generic parameters, in case we wish to know and appreciate its true meaning and merit as literary work.

#### 4. Walden's Craft

In his *Journal* of March 1861 Thoreau wrote:

*'You can't read any genuine history – as that of Herodotus or the Venerable Bede – without perceiving that our interest depends not on the subject but on the man, – on the manner in which he treats the subject and the importance he gives it. A feeble writer...must have what he thinks a great theme which we are already interested in through the accounts of others, but a genius – a Shakespeare for instance – would make the history of his parish more interesting than another's history of the world.'*

It is apparent from the above (a quotation actually from Coleridge) that the real test of whether Thoreau mastered organic form can hardly be made on the basis of accounting for the differences in body and flavour between his portrayal of the natural world and Emerson's, revelatory as these difference might be. It is generally believed that while Emerson was a master of the sentence, Thoreau was the master of the paragraph. It is also said that Thoreau was not able to move faster from the paragraph and attain 'the highest or structural achievements of form in a whole book.' The only way to know the efficacy of these statements is to examine the structure of *Walden* as a whole, that being the best book without any dispute. Let us see to what extent does it meet Coleridge's criterion of shaping, 'as it develops itself from within.'

On the surface level, we can say that *Walden* is the record of a personal experience. At the same time, it is not easy for us to ignore that this book does not go rightfully into the category of *Two Years Before the Mast* or *The Oregon Trail*. Why *Walden* presents a richer accumulation than either of those vigorous pieces of contemporary history is explained by its process of composition. Thoreau said that the bulk of the pages of *Walden* were written during his sojourn for two years at the Walden Pond (1845-7). But the book actually became ready for publication in 1854, after a gap of seven years. During these seven years Thoreau included a good deal of distillation from his journals over the whole period from 1838. The sequence of chapters in *Walden* is not without a design. The movement of the book is not at random, rambling through dissociated or unrelated subjects. The arrangement is a good deal more subtle here than in the *Week*. The reason may be that *Walden*'s subject constituted a more central symbol for Thoreau's accruing knowledge of life. He himself remarked that the pond itself was one of the earliest scenes in his recollection of his visit to the spot when he was only four. Since then "that woodland vision for a long time made the drapery of my dreams." In 1841, he declared that he would "go soon and live away by the pond." When his friends pressed him about the purpose of his visit, his counter question was: will it not be employment enough "to watch the progress of the seasons?" Also in 1841, he said, "I think I could write a poem to be called Concord. For argument I should have the River, the Woods, the Ponds, the Hills, the Fields, the Swamps and Meadows, the Streets and Buildings, and the Villages." In his completed 'poem' (*Walden*) these last elements had been pushed into the background. What came to occupy the foreground, and made the opening chapter, by far the longest of all, was the author's desire to record an experiment in "Economy" as an antidote to the "lives of quiet desperation" that he saw people leading in the towns. This essay on how he solved his basic needs of food and shelter might stand by itself, but also carries forward, quite naturally, to the more poignant condensation of the same theme in "Where I lived, and What I lived for," which reaches its conclusion in the passage on wedging down to reality.

We can see at play in *Walden* the skill with which Thoreau evolved his composition. There were two strong possibilities that could take over the drift of the book's writing. One was that it could follow the chronological outline; the other was that it could drift into being loosely topical. At first glance it would appear that the second possibility had taken over, that there is no real cogency in the order of the chapters. It is on the basis of such a facile look that Thoreau is

said to have “no artistic power such as controls a great work to the serene balance of completeness.” On a more concentrated reading one realizes that Thoreau shows a certain firmness with which he has bound his successive links that Thoreau settles himself as student and observer at the end of the second chapter. This status naturally leads the author into his discussion of “Reading,” which constitutes the third chapter of *Walden*. The chapter on Reading in turn gives way to the author’s concern with the more fundamental language, which all things speak. Hence the fourth chapter is on “Sounds.”

Then after the author-speaker has passed from the tantivy of wild pigeons to the whistle of the locomotive, he reflects that once the cars have gone by and the restless world with them, he is more alone than ever. One can recall here Leo Marx’s metaphors of the Machine and the Garden, how the former, representing technology, disrupts the latter, representing the pastoral dream or the American dream. Here the locomotive and cars serve the same purpose of causing disruption in the wild woods with pigeons, representing the American pastoral, the land of imagination, the utopian landscape of the Garden of Eden. The mythical American dream of the pastoral does arouse all these associations.

The fact that the author now feels more lonely leads to the next chapter on “Solitude,” in which the source of his joy is to live by himself in the midst of nature with his senses unimpaired. The next chapter on “Visitors” makes a natural contrast with the solitary soul. Thoreau opens this chapter by declaring how he believes he loves society as much as most. He is ready enough to bind himself “like a bloodsucker for the time to any full-blooded man” who comes his way. But after his enthusiastic talk about the French woodchopper and other welcome friends from the village he recalls the “restless committed men.” These self-styled reformers took it as their duty to give him advice. At this point of time Thoreau the narrator breaks away saying, “Meanwhile my beans . . . were impatient to be hoed.” Now, this opening carries him back to the earlier transition to the chapter on “Sounds”: “I did not read books the first summer; I hoed beans.”

The deliberate repetition here is meant to remind us of the time sequence that is knitting together all these chapters after the building of the cabin in the spring. From the chapter “The Bean Field” as the sphere of his main occupation, he moves on to the next chapter, “The Village.” Here, he has moved to his trolls for gossip, which, “taken in homeopathic doses, was really as refreshing in its way as the rustle of leaves and the peeping of frogs.” It may or may not be by design, this chapter is the shortest in the book. It leads to rambles even farther away from the community than *Walden*, to the chapter “The Ponds,” and then to the one on fishing beyond “Baker Farm.” As he is returning through the woods with his catch, and sees in the near dark a woodchuck stealing across his path, then comes the moment when he “felt a strange thrill of savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw.” Here, one recalls Dimmesdale’s similar return through the woods, experiencing both sacred and profane instincts. It only indicates the two sides of nature as well as of man – the spiritual and the wild. In the flash of his realization of his double instinct towards the spiritual and the wild, the author has the starting point for the next two contrasting chapters, “Higher Laws” and “Brute Neighbors.” In considering both these he follows his rule of going far enough to please his imagination.

From this point onward the structure of *Walden* becomes cyclical. The book becomes, as Thoreau had aspired to make, his poem of the seasons or myth of the year. Giving accounts of these varied excursions he has reached the day when he feels that he can no longer warm himself by the embers of the sun, which “summer, like a departed hunter, he felt.” Consequently, he sets about completing his cabin by putting up a chimney, and calls that act “House-Warming.” Then there follows in the next three chapters a solid block of winter, namely “Winter Visitors,” “Winter Animals,” and “The Pond in Winter.” The order of these chapters also suggests the way in which the radius of his experience contracts more and more to his surroundings. However, the concluding pages on the pond deal with the cutting of the ice. The chapter ends with that sudden extraordinary expansion of his thought which annihilates space and time.

In the cyclical structure of *Walden*, the last movement is the advance to “Spring.” The ice company’s activity in opening its large tracts has hastened the break-up of the rest of the pond. He recalls, listening to its booming, that one attraction that brought him to the woods was the opportunity and leisure to watch this renewal of the world. He has felt it for a long time that a day is an epitome of a year. And now he knows that a year is like-wise symbolical of life.

Thus, in presenting his experience by the pond, he foreshortens and condenses the twenty-six months to the interval from the start of one summer to the next. He, more than ever, feels in this melting season the mood of expanding promise. It is in this mood that he offers to the reader one of his most successful kinesthetic images, which serves to round out his cycle: "And so the seasons went rolling on into summer, as one rambles into higher and higher grass." To that he only adds a straight statement about his leaving the woods. And then follows the "Conclusion," which explains that he left the woods for a good reason as he had gone there. The realization that comes upon him is that he has other lives to live, and he knows now that he can find for himself "a solid bottom everywhere." That discovery gives him his final serene assurance that "There is more day to dawn." As a consequence, he is not to be disturbed by the "confused *tintinnabulum*" that sometimes reaches his midday repose. He recognizes it for the noise of his contemporaries.

As it becomes quite clear, the structuring of *Walden* has involved deliberate rearrangement of material. For instance, a single afternoon's return to the pond in the fall of 1852 was capable of furnishing details that are woven into half a dozen passages of the finished work, two of them separated by seventy pages. The chief hint about the transformation of mere records of experience into something else lies in Thoreau's extension of his remark that he did not believe himself to be "wholly involved in Nature." He goes on to say that in being aware of himself as a human entity, he was "sensible of a certain doubleness" that made him both participant and spectator in any event. This ability to stand "as remote from myself as from another" is the indispensable attribute of the dramatist. Thoreau makes the reader share in the excitement of his private scenes, for example, by the kind of generalized significance he can give to his purchase and demolition of an old shanty for its boards:

*I was informed treacherously by a young Patrick that neighbor Seeley, an Irishman, in the intervals of the carting, transferred the still tolerable, straight, and drivable nails, staples, and spikes to my pocket, and then stood when I came back to pass the time of day, and look freshly up, unconcerned, with spring thoughts, at the devastation; there being a dearth of work, as he said. He was there to represent spectatordom, and help make this seemingly insignificant event one with the removal of the gods of Troy.*

Thoreau's demands of great books are as well applicable to his own books, especially *Walden*: "They have no cause of their own to plead, but while they enlighten and sustain the reader his common sense will not refuse them." Thoreau is very clear in his mind that propaganda is not the source of the inner freedom they offer to the reader. It is possible because their relation to life is more inclusive than argument. As Thoreau described it, they are at once "intimate" and "universal." Undoubtedly, and unerringly, he aimed to reconcile these two extremes in his own writing. His experience can be described as fundamental in that it had emanated from his determination to start from obedience to the rudimentary needs of a man who wanted to be free. Thoreau's considered opinion was that by reducing life to its primitive conditions, he could reach the roots from which healthy art must flower. It was not just a figure of speech when he said that "Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere." The light touch of Thoreau's detachment allows the comparison of his small things with great. It enables him throughout the book to possess the universe at home.

In his full utilization of his immediate resources Thoreau was the kind of native craftsman who came to be recognized as the harbinger of power for arts. In this particular sense, craftsmanship involves the mastery of traditional modes and skills; it has been thought of more often in connection with Indian baskets than with so-called fine arts. What has been considered relevant for comprehending the craftsmanship of an American book like *Walden* are the artifacts of the cabinet maker, the potter and the founder, or whatever other utensils have been shaped patiently and devotedly for common service, which are likewise a testimony of what has been described as classic (American) art. Here, this must be clearly understood that this term (art) "has nothing to do with grandeur, that it cannot be copied or imported, but is the outgrowth of a special mode of life and feeling."

To understand and appreciate Thoreau's aesthetics, therefore, we must acknowledge his deep obligation to such traditional ways (of the artisans just mentioned), which gets obscured the moment we think of him as the extreme protestant. There should be no doubt that his revolt was bound up with a determination to do all he could to prevent the dignity of common labour from being regarded by the idle tastes of the rich. When he objected that "the mason who finishes the cornice of the palace returns at night perchance to a hut not so good as a wigwam," he showed the

identity of his social and aesthetic foundations. He always demanded a functional relationship between social and aesthetic aspects of arts, coarse or fine. What he responded to as beauty was the application of trained skill to the exigencies of existence. He made no arbitrary separation between arts, and admired the Indian's woodcraft or the farmer's thorough care in building a barn on the same grounds that he admired the workmanship of Homer. His ideals for fitness and beauty in writing were shaped, perhaps half unconsciously, by the modes of productive labour with which he was surrounded, or, in fact, by the work of his own hands in carpentry or pencil-making or gardening. As he put it, it was no good to practice writing "unless you feel strong in the knees." He also believed that he had learned an important lesson in design from the fidelity with which the operative in the textile-factory had woven his piece of cloth. One of the great critics of the "American Renaissance," F.O. Matthiessen, showering praise on the structure of *Walden*, has said the following:

*The structural wholeness of Walden makes it stand as the finest product in our literature of such life-giving analogies between the process of art and daily work. Moreover, Thoreau's very lack of invention brings him closer to the essential attributes of craftsmanship, if by that term we mean the strict, even spare, almost impersonal 'revelation of the object,' in contrast to the 'elaborated skill,' the combinations of more variegated resources that we describe as technique. This contrast of terms...can serve...to demonstrate why Thoreau's book possesses such solidity in contrast....*

The particular value of the organic principle for a provincial society thus comes into full relief. Thoreau's literal acceptance of Emerson's proposition that vital form "is only discovered and executed by the artist, not arbitrarily composed by him," impelled him to minute inspection of his own existence and of the intuitions that arose from it. No doubt, this restricted his art to provincial limits, to even the parochial, to the portrayal of man in terms merely of the immediate nature that drew him out. But his study of his interaction also brought him to fundamental human patterns. He succeeded in demonstrating what Emerson had merely observed, that the function of the artist in society is always to renew the primitive experience of the race, that he "still goes back for materials and begins again on the most advanced stage." Thoreau's scent for wildness ferreted beneath the merely conscious levels of cultivated man. It helped him to uncover and unite once more the chief sources for his own art. He had decidedly felt heartened by the seemingly inexhaustible validity of his battered character, "not despairing of life, but keeping the same rank and savage hold on it that his predecessors have for so many generations, while so many are sick and despairing." Thoreau went on, therefore, half playfully to speculate what it was that made this man excited, indeed inspired by the January freshest in the meadows:

*There are poets of all kinds and degrees, little known to each other. The Lake School is not the only or the principal one. They love various things. Some love beauty, and some love rum. Some go to Rome, and some go a-fishing, and are sent to the house of correction once a month...I meet these gods of the river and woods with sparkling faces (like Apollo's) late from the house of correction, it may be carrying whatever mystic and forbidden bottles or other vessels concealed, while the dull regular priests are steering their parish rafts in a prose mood. What care I to see natural living ones by an infinitely superior artist, without perspective tube? If you read the Rig Veda, oldest of books, as it were, describing a very primitive people and condition of things, you hear in their prayers of a still older, more primitive and aboriginal race in their midst and round about, warring on them and seizing their flocks, and herds, infesting their pastures. Thus it is in another sense in all communities, and hence the prisons and police.*

The rambling course of Thoreau's reflections here should not obliterate his full discovery that the uneradicated wildness of man is the anarchical basis both of all that is most dangerous and most valuable in him. That he could dig down deep to the very roots of primitive poetry without going a mile from Concord accounts for his ability to create "a true Homeric or Paphlagonian man" in the likeness of the French woodchopper. It also helps account for the fact

that by following to its uncompromising conclusion his belief that great art can grow from the center of the simplest life, he was able to be universal. He had attained a clear understanding that in the act of expression of man's whole being, and his natural and social background as well, function organically together. He had mastered a definition of art akin to the right ordering of the thing to be made, the right revelation of the material. His *Walden* is to be understood in view of Thoreau's emphasis on the kinship of art and craft, making and living or doing.

### 5. "Economy": A Critical Analysis

"Economy", being the first chapter of *Walden*, has to carry upon itself the burden of introducing, like any literary work, the principal theme or themes of the work, besides setting the tone, creating the atmosphere, and forging the style for the entire piece. Thoreau does it all very well. Note, how the chapter (and the book) opens:

*When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months. At present I am a sojourner in civilized life again.*

This opening paragraph gives a fairly clear idea of what the book is going to unfold before us. The ideal of life being followed by the author is clearly that of simple and spiritual life. Thoreau makes explicit why he chose to make himself the subject of his book, and what is it about him and his life which is so precious for mankind that it should take a serious note of it all. Here is what Thoreau has to say about the whole matter:

*In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. Moreover, I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men's lives; some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me.*

Although subjectivity was the central aspect of romantic literature in general, it acquired a still greater significance for the American writer of the Transcendentalist movement. From Emerson to Whitman, the literary persona acquired a distinct ring and character, representing everyman in his natural hue, also representing the American Adam, and representing the prophetic voice of the inspired bard who has brought the message of Nature to the mankind, which has been on retreat from Nature. Somehow, truth came to be identified with the protean, primal self, washed in the holy waters of Nature, washed of all the dust of the 'vanity fair.'

His theme announced, and clarification given for the choice of that theme, Thoreau turns to the worldly life which he has renounced, as he has opted for the natural life on primitive terms of subsistence by bare necessities. The "Economy" chapter now addresses the question of the author's rejection of worldly life and adoption of the natural, his rejection of the 'civilized' and adoption of the primitive. Why he has done so is elaborately explained, and his choice strongly defended. Here is a glimpse of what the chapter has to offer in its opening pages:

*Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be anything but machine. How can he remember well his ignorance which his growth requires – who has so often to use his knowledge? We should feed and clothe him gratuitously sometimes, and recruit him with our cordials, before we judge of him. The finest qualities of our*

*nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly.*

We can note here, as well as elsewhere in the book, that Thoreau makes it a point to address the "poor" reader in particular: "Perhaps these pages are more particularly addressed to poor students. As for the rest of my readers, they will accept such portions as apply to them. I trust that none will stretch the seams in putting on the coat, for it may do good service to him whom it fits." Thoreau's distrust and denouncement of the material life, which reduces man to a machine, which coarsens his moral fibre, which dries up his spiritual resources, can be seen all along the line in *Walden*. In Thoreau's view, "The mass of men lead lives of quite desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country . . . . A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things." We can see the author's unflinching commitment to truth. Life must be, as Emerson says, like a transparent ball. No coverings are to be accepted, no deviations and digressions from the path of purity.

Truth for Thoreau is a matter of personal experience. Romantics in general trusted their own perceptions. They accepted nothing as a matter of tradition or convention. Their method of knowing and accepting truth was a sort of sensuous empiricism. As Keats said, nothing can be accepted as true unless it has been felt on the poet's pulses. Thoreau puts forth a similar plea: "No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof. What everybody echoes or in silence passes by as true today may turn out to be falsehood tomorrow, mere smoke of opinion, which some had trusted for a cloud that would sprinkle fertilizing rain on their fields. What old people say you cannot do you try and find that you can. Old deeds for old people, and new deeds for new." What Thoreau is trying to emphasize here is also the unlimited potential in human nature which always remains unexploited to its full capacity. The very tedium and ennui which presume to have exhausted the variety and the joys of life are as old as Adam. But man's capacities, in his view, have never been measured; nor are we to judge of what he can do by any precedents, so little has been tried. His conclusion on this point is that Nature and human life are as various as our several constitutions. Thoreau also questions, in this chapter, the conventionality of our attitudes. We continue living by whatever 'good' and 'bad' is handed over to us by our parents and the social milieu surrounding us. As he says, "The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior." What he believes most is the authenticity of one's own self. All the Transcendentalists affirmed their faith in the purity and truth of this individual self. Hence the concepts of good and bad are not to be borrowed, but have to issue from within. Also, in his view, change is the law of nature, whereas man tries to see it as something static, "is a miracle to contemplate; but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant."

Then, Thoreau comes to the issue of the chapter, the issue of economy, what we mean by it, and what it amounts to in real life. In his true and typical style he begins by addressing the basics. Here, the basics are: how to live; what necessities one requires for that style of living; and how can one derive maximum joy of life by being himself. In other words, economy, for him, is a matter of relating materials to life, the one remaining at its minimum so that the other can flow at its maximum. The first thing first, however. The first thing is what kind of life is the best or the most appropriate for man? Here is the answer:

*It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization, if only to learn what are the gross necessities of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them; or even to look over the old day-books of the merchants, to see what it was that men most commonly bought at the stores, what they stored, that is, what are the grossest groceries. For the improvement of ages have had but little influence on the essential laws of man's existence: as our skeletons, probably, are not to be distinguished from those of our ancestors.*

Taking up the *necessary of life*, Thoreau settles upon only the bare minimum that a man requires, upon what is only *necessary*. In his view, the bare minimum that man has invented as his necessities are "Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel."

By emphasizing the need to live at the bottom line of life necessities Thoreau, of course, does not plead for a return to primitivism. On the contrary, he is for the highest cultivation of the human mind, for reaching the highest point of consciousness. Therefore, his ideal is “to combine the hardiness of these savages with the intellectualness of the civilized man.”

Coming to working out details of the necessities and the allied implements Thoreau argues, “Fuel, except to cook his Food, is then unnecessary; the sun is his fire, and many of the fruits are sufficiently cooked by its rays: while Food generally is more various, and more easily obtained, and Clothing and Shelter are wholly or half unnecessary. At the present day, and in this country, as I find by my own experience, a few implements, a knife, an axe, a spade, a wheelbarrow, etc., and for the studious, lamplight, stationery, and access to a few books, rank next to necessities and can all be obtained at a trifling cost.” What Thoreau dislikes most is man’s hunger for material goods, for the possessions of this earth, for the accumulation of these possessions, and accumulations to no limits. Most men, he thinks, work day and night, spending their precious life, in the service of the non-living. It is for this reason that he comes heavily on man’s craze for luxuries of life. As he says, “Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hinderances to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meager life than the poor. As models of simple living and high thinking, Thoreau gives the examples of the “ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindoo, Persian, and Greek.”

After one has ensured the “necessaries” of life, one can go ahead either for a life of luxuries, of multiplying his “necessaries,” or for a life of adventure. Thoreau naturally opts for the second, for while the former suppresses life, the latter expresses it. Note how clearly he carves out his option:

When a man is warned by the several modes which I have described, what does he want next? Surely not more warmth of the same kind, as more and richer food, larger and more splendid houses, finer and more abundant clothing, more numerous incessant and hotter fires, and the like. When he has obtained those things which are necessary to life, there is another alternative than to obtain the superfluities; and that is, to adventure on life now, his vacation from humbler toil having commenced.

Thoreau’s ideal of life, after the necessities of life, the bare minimum, have been met, is to enjoy the beauties of Nature that are so plentiful. In order to practically live a simple life and contemplate high thinking, Thoreau settles in a cottage at the Walden Pond, for life in civilized habitation (town) tends to go out of hand, so to say. Here is the author’s account of his choice to live in Nature, not in town: “My purpose in going to Walden Pond was not to live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles; to be hindered from accomplishing which for want of a little common sense, a little enterprise and business talent, appeared not so sad as foolish.”

Moving to the next stage of his exploration of life, Thoreau lays emphasis on “business habits,” which, he says, man naturally has. In a sense, it is now that he comes upon the real subject of the chapter – economy. Until now, he was only dwelling upon the background to the subject of economy, and rightly so, for, after all, economy comes when the business of living begins. It was, therefore, imperative for the author to first determine the manner of living which ensures minimum spending (of life) and maximum saving or enjoying (of life). Once that is described and defended, he can now launch upon the “economy” aspect of that living. Note how elaborately Thoreau goes about this aspect.

*I have always endeavoured to acquire strict business habits. They are indispensable to every man. If your trade is with the Celestial Empire, then some small counting house on the coast, in some Salem harbor, will be fixture enough. You will export such articles as the country affords, pure, native products, much ice and pine timber and a little granite, always in native bottoms. These will be good ventures. To oversee all the details yourself in person...*

I have thought that Walden Pond would be a good place for business, not solely on account of the railroad and the ice trade...

Obviously, Thoreau, in these above-quoted lines, is talking about the “business” of life, of living at the bottom line, not that is what he is going to experiment with on the Pond. Always making a critique of the kind of life he sees around him in America, he offers an alternative of authentic life, which gives priority to man rather than material, austerity rather than affluence, integrity rather than interests. While determining the use of material goods, he looks for those that protect life, not those that make it pompous; his preference is for those that express the inner self, not for those

that cover the real self. Some of his observations in this regard deserve special attention:

*As for Clothing, to come at once to the practical part of the question, perhaps we are led oftener by the love of novelty and a regard for the opinions of men, in procuring it, than by a true utility. Let him who has work to do recollect that the object of clothing is, first, to retain the vital heat, and secondly, in this state of society, to cover nakedness, and he may judge how much of any necessary or important work may be accomplished without adding to his wardrobe. Kings and queens who wear a suit but once, though made by some tailor or dressmaker to their majesties, cannot know the comfort of wearing a suit that fits. They are no better than wooden horses to hang the clean clothes on. Everyday our garments become assimilated to ourselves, receiving the impress of the wearer's character, until we hesitate to lay them aside, without such delay and medical appliances and some such solemnity even as our bodies. No man ever stood the lower in my estimation for having a patch in clothes; yet I am sure that there is greater anxiety, commonly, to have fashionable, or at least clean and unpatched clothes, than to have a sound conscience.*

In Thoreau's view, most men today are known by the clothes they wear than by what they actually are. Their status in society is determined by their clothes. As he puts it, "It is an interesting question how far men would retain their relative rank if they were divested of their clothes. Could you, in such a case, tell surely of any company of civilized men which belonged to the most respected class?" As we all know, and Thoreau knew even better, we try to make clothes symbols of our wealth and position. "Even in our democratic New England towns the accidental possession of wealth, and its manifestation in dress and equipage alone, obtain for the possessor almost universal respect. But they who yield such respect, numerous as they are, are so far heathen, and need to have a missionary sent to them. Beside, clothes introduced sewing, a kind of work which you may call endless; a woman's dress, at least, is never done." Thoreau's point is that garments should be functional rather than ornamental, and one could buy those that would cost him only as much as he could easily afford. And there would be, he hopes, enough wise men to respect him for his honest earnings and spendings.

Thoreau's views on houses or shelter is very much similar. He admits that shelter is necessary, but he insists that shelter should be simple and hence cheap: "As for Shelter, I will not deny that this is now a necessary of life, though there are instances of men having done without it for long periods in colder countries than this." Continuing his discourse on shelter he comments later, "While civilization has been improving our houses, it has not equally improved the men who are to inhabit them. It has created palaces, but it was not so easy to create noblemen and kings. And if the civilized man's pursuits are no worthier than the savage's, if he is employed the greater part of his life in obtaining gross necessaries and comforts merely, why should we have a better dwelling than the former?" Once again, Thoreau views a man's necessary from the philosophic viewpoint of its actual usefulness, especially in relation to the spiritual status of the owner or possessor of that necessary, a house or a garment. In other words, he is offering a moral and spiritual critique of contemporary society as a stage in the history of civilization. Time and again, he points out how even as civilization progresses in material improvement, it regresses in spiritual growth: "I had three pieces of limestone on my desk, but I was terrified to find that they required to be dusted daily, when the furniture of my mind was all undusted still, and I threw them out the window in disgust. How, then, could I have a furnished house? I would rather sit in the open air, for no dust gathers on the grass, unless where man has broken ground." The same argument holds good for the choice of all other articles of use man has to make: "I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself than be crowded on a velvet cushion. I would rather ride on earth in an ox cart, with a free circulation, than go to heaven in the fancy car of an excursion train and breathe a *malaria* all the way."

All along this lengthy discourse of Thoreau in the chapter called "Economy" of *Walden*, the emphasis remains two-fold: one, how to live simply and spiritually; two, how to make life pleasurable rather than miserable. His long discourse on building a house, the pleasure or pain involved in the act of building, the cheap or expensive way of building it, runs on these very lines. The following long paragraph brings out all of his various emphases he makes in different sections of the chapter on 'Economy':

*It would be worth the while to build still more deliberately than I did, considering, for instance,*



*what foundation a door, a window, a cellar, a garret, have in the nature of man, and perchance never raising any superstructure until we found a better reason for it than our temporal necessities even. There is some of the same fitness in a man's building his own house that there is in a bird's building his own nest. Who knows but if men constructed their dwellings with their own hands, and provided food for themselves and families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be universally developed, as birds universally sing when they are so engaged? But alas! We do like cowbirds and cuckoos, which lay their eggs in nests which other birds have built, and cheer no traveller with their chattering and unmusical notes. Shall we forever resign the pleasure of construction to the carpenter? What does architecture amount to in the experience of the mass of men? I never in all my walks came across a man engaged in so simple and natural an occupation as building his house. We belong to the community. It is not the tailor alone who is the ninth part of a man; it is as much the preacher, and the merchant, and the farmer. Where is this division of labor to end? And what object does it finally serve? No doubt another may also think for me, but it is not therefore desirable that he should do so to the exclusion of my thinking for myself.*

As with Thoreau, nothing gets said as way of precept without at the same time being corroborated by a personal practice. House, or clothes, or food, all necessities of life Thoreau talks about, he tells us how the strictly necessary and utterly useful these articles need to be made, both for the sake of economy as well as for the sake of spiritual health; also, how every necessary article need to be produced with one's own hands, followed by the author's own experience of having produced one. Here is an account, in all respects, of the house (actually a hut) Thoreau made for himself on Walden Pond:

*I have thus a tight shingled and plastered house, ten feet wide by fifteen long, and eight-feet high with a darter and a closet, a large window on each side, two trap doors, one door at the end, and a brick fireplace opposite. The exact cost of my house, paying the usual price for such materials as I used, but not counting the work, all of which was done for myself, was as follows; and I give the details because very few are able to tell exactly what their houses cost, and fewer still, if any, the separate cost of the various material which compose them:—*

<i>Boards .....</i>	<i>\$8 03½, mostly shanty boards</i>
<i>Refuse shingles for roof and sides ...</i>	<i>4 00</i>
<i>Laths .....</i>	<i>1 25</i>
<i>Two second-hand old brick .....</i>	<i>4 00</i>
<i>Two casks of lime .....</i>	<i>2 40 that was high.</i>
<i>Hair .....</i>	<i>0 31 more than I needed.</i>
<i>Mantle-tree iron.....</i>	<i>0 15</i>
<i>Nails .....</i>	<i>3 90</i>
<i>Hinges and screws .....</i>	<i>0 14</i>
<i>Latch.....</i>	<i>0 10</i>
<i>Chalk.....</i>	<i>0 01</i>
<i>Transportation.....</i>	<i>1 40 I carried a good part on my back.</i>

*In all .....* *\$28 12½*  
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Thus, Thoreau offers an example from his own life, a hermit's life on the Pond, and, like Whitman, hopes that the reader would do as he has done. As he says, "I thus found that the student who wishes for a shelter can obtain one for a lifetime at an expense not greater than the rent which he now pays annually. If I seem to boast more than is becoming, my excuse is that I brag for humanity rather than for myself; and my shortcomings and inconsistencies do

not affect the truth of my statement." Once again, we are reminded of Whitman who, too, speaks on behalf of humanity, and if he contradicts himself or runs into inconsistencies, he knows that they would be there because he is as large as the humanity itself, which consists of contradictions and inconsistencies.

After discussing in detail the nature of necessities and the manner of acquiring them, making the process an experience of life, Thoreau turns to the question of student education, its nature and economy. His basic principles of life – self-help or self-reliance, bare necessities, simple and natural material, economical spendings, joy of making an art of living, etc. – his discussion of the subject of education is carried on the same lines:

*The mode of founding a college is, commonly, to get up a subscription of dollars and cents, and then following blindly the principles of a division of labor to its extreme, a principle which should never be followed but with circumspection, – to call in a contractor who makes this a subject of speculation, and he employs Irishmen or other operatives actually to lay the foundation, while the students that are to be are said to be fitting themselves of it; and for these oversights successive generations have to pay. I think that it would be better than this, for the students, or those who desire to be benefited by it, even to lay the foundation themselves. The student who secures his coveted leisure and retirement by systematically shirking any labor necessary to man obtains but an ignoble and unprofitable leisure, defrauding himself of the experience which alone can make leisure fruitful. "But," says one, "you do not mean that the students should go to work with their hands instead of their heads?" I do not mean that exactly, but I mean something which he might think a good deal like that; I mean that they should not play life, or study it merely, while the community supports them at this expensive game, but earnestly live it from beginning to end.... If I wished a boy to something about the arts and sciences, for instance, I would not pursue the common course, which is merely to send him into the neighborhood of some professor, where anything is professed and practiced but the art of life; – to survey the world through a telescope or a microscope, and never with his natural eye; to study chemistry, and not learn how his bread is made, or mechanics, and not learn how it is earned; to discover new satellites to Neptune, and not detect the motes in eyes, or to what vagabond he is a satellite himself; or to be devoured by the monsters that swarm all around him, while contemplating the monsters in a drop of vinegar.*

Obviously, Thoreau's philosophy of education lays emphasis more on the practical knowledge than on the theoretical. It lays emphasis as well on the dignity of labour, and on the *living* of life, than on its *study* or playing with it. He emphatically disapproves of scientific knowledge without spiritual goals. In other words, he is ready to accept material sciences as means, not an end of life. The end or goal, for Thoreau, must be spiritual, not material. No wonder that he decries man's craze for discoveries and inventions for their own sake, never bothering to think as to their human implications. Thoreau, thus, comes out, in his view on education, as a staunch humanist and spiritualist. It is a similar kind of view of education that a little later in India Gandhi Ji and Tagore adopted. It is another matter that in our own time of technology and information, all those ideas stand ignored.

Thoreau's experiments with life remind us of the Brooke Farm Experiment made by the Transcendentalists, of which Thoreau, too, was a member. The idea was to live or earn by the sweat of one's brow and yet do the writing of literature in leisure time as a part-time activity, which was to include the serious aspect of reflection on life, reflection after observation. Here, too, he emphasizes the same combination of simple life and high thinking, of dignity of labour and integrity of mind, of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Note, for instance, the following:

*The next year I did better still, for I spaded up all the land which I required, about a third of an acre, and I learned from the experience of both years... that if one could live simply and eat only the crop which he raised, and raise no more than he ate, and not exchange it for an insufficient quantity of more luxurious and expensive things, he would need to cultivate only a few rods of ground, and that it would be cheaper to spade up that than use oxen to plough it.... I was more independent than any farmer in Concord, for I was not anchored to a house or farm, but could follow the bent of my genius, which is a very crooked one, every moment...*

Being a firm believer in simplicity and self-sufficiency Thoreau decries man's reliance on animal or machine arguing that it makes man slave to the animal or the machine: "Man thus not only works for the animal within him, but, for a symbol of this, he works for the animal without him."

Coming to discuss the towns and their architecture, their houses for men and animals, Thoreau says, "It should not be by their architecture, but why not even by their power of abstract thought, that nations should seek to commemorate themselves? *How much more admirable the Bhagvat-Geeta than all the ruins of the East!* Towers and temples are the luxury of princes. A simple and independent mind does not toil at the bidding of any prince. Genius is not a retainer to any emperor, nor is its material silver, or gold, or marble, except to a trifling extent. To what end, pray, is so much stone hammered? In Arcadia, when I was there, I did not see any hammering stone. Nations are possessed with an insane ambition to perpetuate the memory of themselves by the amount of hammered stone they leave. What if equal pains were taken to smooth polish their manners? One piece of good sense would be more memorable than any monument as high as the moon." Thus, whatever subject Thoreau chooses to discuss, the emphasis always falls on the primacy of inner or spiritual life, on independence of mind and soul, on simple and self-contented life. Conversely, he always condemns the life of appetites and greeds, of luxury and licence.

When Thoreau comes to discuss the 'economy' of his food, the emphasis once again falls on simplicity and inexpensiveness of his meals. Note how careful he was in reducing his physical needs of food and shelter and clothes to the bare minimum. "It appears from the above estimate, that my food alone cost me in money about twenty-seven cents a week. It was, for nearly two years after this, rye and Indian meal without yeast, potatoes, rice, a very little salt port, molasses, and salt; and my drink, water. It was fit that I should live on rice, mainly, who loved so well the philosophy of India." To reduce one's needs to the bare minimum is not merely a matter of economy, it is, more so, a matter of philosophy of life. Living on the natural plane of elemental existence keeps one uncorrupted by the world of 'vanity fair'; it keeps one spiritually transparent, dusted and washed of all the coverings one gathers living in the contingent world of material pursuits. For us Indians, the philosophy of "asceticism" is familiar enough; for the Americans, it must have sounded esoteric.

Thoreau, as a measure of simplicity, not only practised eating less, but also only vegetables and cereals. People around him, being so far removed from the realities of life, from the natural way of existence, find hard to believe that one could survive on a vegetarian diet – on rice rather than meat, water rather than wine. Thoreau feels amused to hear a woman say "that her son lost his life because he took to drinking water only." As he puts it, "Yet men have come to such a pass that they frequently starve, not for want of necessaries, but for want of luxuries." Too much given to the unnatural and artificial way of life man, as Thoreau found him in the America of his time, has lost all contact with the elemental level of existence: "Yet so far are we from simplicity and independence that in Concord, fresh and sweet meal is rarely sold in the shops, and homing and corn in a still coarser form are hardly used by any." Living the hermit's way of austere and ascetic life Thoreau finds himself an odd man out among those who have lost all contact with nature and the natural way of living. He narrates an interesting situation that he faces so often:

*There is a certain class of unbelievers who sometimes ask me questions as, if I think that I can live on vegetable food alone; and to strike at the root of the matter at once, – for the root is faith. I am accustomed to answer such, that I can live on board nails. If they cannot understand that, they cannot understand much that I have to say.*

Thoreau applies the same yardstick of simplicity to his need for furniture that he applies to the needs of food, shelter, and clothes. He maintains the bare minimum of furniture, only the items he cannot do without, and that too, as in the case of other necessaries, prepared with his own hands. His idea of sound economy, as we have been observing, includes not merely the use of the minimum, the use of the simple, but also the use of the self-made articles. Note the following about furniture

*My furniture, part of which I made myself, and the rest cost me nothing of which I have not rendered an account, consisted of a bed, a table, a desk, three chairs, a looking-glass three inches in diameter, a pair of tongs and andirons, a kettle, a skiller, and a frying-pan, a dipper a wash-bowl, two knives and forks, three plates, one cup, one spoon, a jug for oil, a jug for molasses, and a japanned lamp. None is so poor that he need sit on a pumpkin. This is*

*shiftlessness.... Furniture! Thank God, I can sit and I can stand without the aid of a furniture warehouse.... Indeed, the more you have of such things the poorer you are.*

For in Indian, who has known much simpler way of life than even the one described here by Thoreau, articles like knives and forks would look superfluous. We have been used to doing with our hands what an American would do with fork and knife. Such small details of difference, however, notwithstanding, Thoreau's idea of simplicity owes much to the Indian way of life. No wonder that time and again he keeps reverting to examples of simplicity from India and cite them as models for the Americans, although he still calls us a "savage nation."

Thoreau's scathing criticism of the expensive habits that man keeps acquiring as the civilization progresses is aimed at showing how these habits works towards removing man from his spiritual moorings. His effort is to rescue the natural man, the soul of man, from being contaminated by the rusting matters he keeps covering himself with. Even curtains is a part of that effort – hiding from Nature his unnatural self. Note what Thoreau has to say about curtains:

*I would observe by the way, that it costs me nothing for curtains, for I have no gazers to shut out but the sun and moon, and I am willing that they should look in. The moon will not sour milk nor taint meat of mine, nor will the sun injure my furniture or fade my carpet; and it is sometimes too warm a friend, I find it still better economy to retreat behind some curtain which nature has provided, than to add a single item to the details of housekeeping.*

Our race against nature goes on. Even today, in fact, more so, we keep creating an alternate, artificial world of our own, which contains 'nature' also, but made of machine. For instance, we keep plants and flowers in the sitting room or bedroom made of plastic, never fading, but also never smelling. We ward off the sun by putting curtains, and then we put on lights to create a lighted world of outdoor. We put on the A.C. and then use a blanket to feel warm. It is tendencies like these that Thoreau hits hard only to remind man that in the process of 'civilizing' himself, actually he has made himself the most artificial, devoid of all natural resources, emotional and spiritual, that nature endowed him with.

Nearing the conclusion of the chapter 'Economy' Thoreau remarks, "For more than five years I maintained myself thus solely by the labor of my hands, and I found, that by working about six weeks in a year, I could meet all the expenses of living. The whole of my winters, as well as most of my summers, I had free and clear for study." When it came to choosing a profession, or work for livelihood, Thoreau was not satisfied with most of the popular ones we always look for. Note what he has to tell us from his experience in this regard:

*I have thoroughly tried school-keeping, and found that my expenses were in proportion, or rather out of proportion, to my income, for I was obliged to dress and train, not to say think and believe, accordingly, and I lost my time into the bargain. As I did not teach for the good of my fellow-men, but simply for a livelihood, this was a failure. I have tried trade; but I found that it would take ten years to get under way in that, and that then I should probably be on my way to the devil.*

Thus, practicing the ideal of simple and straight life, of pure and peaceful thoughts, denying himself the luxuries of material goods, enjoying the pleasures of nature and natural life, he offers a model of 'simple living and high thinking.' Here Gandhi Ji's idea of 'travel light' can be seen in practice. It is a rich expression, a metaphor, for a simple and pure life of an ascetic, of a hermit, of a spiritual man, which carries no luggage of the material world, no wool of borrowed ideas on the mind, no coverings of the artificial life on soul.

Like the other Transcendentalists, such as Emerson and Whitman, Thoreau, too, is a staunch believer in individual liberty. Any kind of imposition on anyone is an affront to one's independence. The idea of the autonomous self, the free self, carries a certain sanctity with these writers. In fact, this has been one of the central traits of the American thought as it gets reflected in the masterpieces or major works of its literary effort. Note what Thoreau has to say in this regard:

*One young man of my acquaintance, who has inherited some acres, told me that he thought he should live as I did, if he had the means. I would not have any one adopt my mode of living on my account; for, beside that before he has fairly learned it I may have found out another for myself, I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each*

*one be very careful to find out and pursue his own way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead. The youth may build or plant or sail, only let him not be hindered from doing that which he tells me he would like to do.*

As for the "good" he could do to his fellow-men, Thoreau, once again, does not endorse the usual belief in preaching to others, this being a part of his belief in individual independence and autonomy. Let us see what he has to say in this regard:

*What good, I do, in the common sense of that word, must be aside from my main path, and for the most part wholly unintended. Men say, practically, Begin where you are and such as you are, without aiming mainly to become of more worth, and with kindness aforethought go about doing good. If I were to preach at all in this strain, I should say rather, Set about being good. As if the sun should stop when he had kindled his fires up to the splendor of a moon or a star of the sixth magnitude, and go about like a Robin Goodfellow, peeping in at every cottage window, inspiring lunatics, and tainting meats, and making darkness visible, instead of steadily increasing his genial heat and beneficence till he is of such brightness that no mortal can look in the face, and then, and in the meanwhile too, going about the true philosophy has discovered, the world going about him getting good.*

Decidedly, he is against preaching, even by the greatest among us. He considers it rather presumptuous on anyone's part to consider others as fools, or wanting wisdom. Besides, to do so would violate the very fundamental belief of individual freedom. In his view, let each try to be as good as he can, the rest will follow. The sun is an example. It does good to all. But it is not out to do good to any. It keeps its own course. It shines. And that in itself is good, and does good to others. Thoreau closes his chapter with a poem by Thomas Carew, one of the British cavalier poets of the seventeenth century. The poem is titled "The Pretensions of Poverty." But he precedes this poem, his last paragraph in the chapter on 'Economy,' with a piece of wisdom from Iraq. It sounds ironic in the present-day world, in the context of what America has done to Iraq, but that is where literature stands apart and stands above all other kinds of writing - historical or political, or sociological, etc. As we have seen all along the chapter, Thoreau's wisdom is derived, in large part, from the Eastern sources. The last para in question runs as under:

*I read in the Gulistan, or Flower Garden, of Sheik Sadi or Shiraz, that "They asked a wise man, saying: "Of the many celebrated trees which the Most high God has created lofty and umbrageous, they call none azad, or free, excepting the cypress, which bears no fruit; what mystery is there in this? He replied: Each has its appropriate produce, and appointed season, during the continuance of which it is fresh and blooming, and during their absence dry and withered; to neither of which states is the cypress exposed, being always flourishing; and of this nature are the azads, or religious independents. — Fix not thy heart on that which is transitory; for the Dijlah, or Tigris, with continues to flow through Bagdad after the race of caliphs is extinct: if thy hand has plenty, be liberal as the date tree; if it affords nothing to give away, be an azad, or free man, like the cypress."*

Thus, studded all along with the sacred wisdom of the East, mostly Indian, Thoreau's chapter on "Economy" summarises the Indian philosophy of simple and pure life, free from evil and appetite. The ascetic ideal of living physically at the bottom line so that one can attain the spiritual height, informs the entire chapter. The spirit of 'simple living and high thinking,' of simple, self-reliant, free and noble life, permeates all through the chapter, enlivening every page and para of the major portion of *Walden*. Rooted in the Vedic thought of our ancient philosophy, Thoreau forged a philosophy and a way of life which came back to us in modern terms through the writings of Gandhi Ji, whose ideas of 'travel light,' 'civil disobedience,' and peaceful or non-violent resistance to the authority are directly derived from the American scholar or saint. It is interesting to note how wisdom travels from East to West to East, circulating all over the earth like the cycle of seasons. One can see how nations, too, have their seasons - springs of hope and winters of discontent, summers of maturity or flowering and autumns of decline and degeneration. The cycle goes on, and so does life and literature. We need to acknowledge it as a fact of life. 'Ripeness is all!'

## 6. Where I Lived and What I Lived For: A Critical Analysis

Although the subject and title of *Walden's* first chapter was "Economy," which is seemingly objective and personal, all illustration in the chapter's texts, as we saw, came from the author's personal life and experience. The book's second chapter, our present concern, is downright personal in both theme and title. "Where I Lived, and What I Lived for" suggests biographical account in very intimate and personal terms. In Thoreauvean aesthetics, however, while personal account is preceded or followed by inductive or deductive generalisations or impersonalisation, an impersonal statement is always preceded or followed by personal account. The method or technique, quite common in the entire range of Thoreau's writings, is amply illustrated by the very opening of *Walden's* second chapter. Here are the opening lines:

*At a certain season of our life we are accustomed to consider every spot as the possible site of a house. I have thus surveyed the country on every side within a dozen miles of where I live. In imagination I have bought all the farms in succession, for all were to be bought, and I knew their price.*

As it turns out, the author-narrator in *Walden* is an imaginary buyer and seller of farms, for in actual practice he cannot buy anything because he has not enough money in his pocket to buy a farm. An essential aspect of Romantic prose, as we know, is its imaginary talk or walk, scene or situation, which has a pleasure of its own, carrying an added charm. A little later, Thoreau himself lays bare his actual position at the time:

*Now, to speak the truth, I had but ten cents, in the world, and it surpassed my arithmetic to tell, if I was the man who had ten cents, or who had a farm, or ten dollars, or all together.... I found thus that I had been a rich man without any damage to my poverty.... With respect to landscapes,—*

*"I am monarch of all I survey,  
My right there is none to dispute."*

Such imaginary "possessions" of wealth and property, or scenic beauty and loving landscape, are a common feature of Romantic writing. One recalls here Frost's poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," which has striking parallel to Thoreau's prose musings in the present context. Let us place extracts from both side by side and see how they compare with each other. First, the lines from Frost's poem:

*Whose woods these are I think I know,  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.*

Now compare these with what follows from Thoreau:

*I have frequently seen a poet withdraw, having enjoyed the most valuable part of a farm, while the crusty farmer supposed that he had got a few wild apples only. Why, the owner does not know it for many years when a poet has put his farm in rhyme, the most admirable kind of invisible fence, has fairly impounded it, milked it, skimmed it, and got all the cream, and left the farmer only the skimmed milk.*

Here, the subject being the scenic beauty of the Hollowell farm and the house thereupon, purely aesthetic, not economic, Thoreau's prose goes lyrical; it becomes poetic prose with all the literary embellishments pressed into service. Note, for example, the following:

*When first I took up my abode in the woods, that is, began to spend my nights as well as days there,... my house was not finished for winter, but was merely a defence against the rain, without plastering or chimney, the walls being of rough weather-stained boards, with wide chinks, which made it cool at night. The upright white hewn studs and freshly planed door and window casings gave it a clean and airy look, especially in the morning, when its timbers were saturated with dew, so that I fancied that by noon some sweet gum would exude from them. To my imagination it retained throughout the day more or less of this auroral character, reminding me of a certain house on a mountain which I had visited a year before. This was an airy and unplastered cabin, fit to entertain a traveling god, and where a goddess might trail her garments. The winds which passed-over my*

*dwelling were such as sweep over the ridges of mountains, hearing the broken strains, or celestial parts only, or terrestrial music. The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted, but few are the ears that hear it. Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere.*

Here, there is pure poetry, with not an iota of 'thought', reminiscent of Spenser and Keats. A pure descriptive prose with enchanting alliteration matches the densely descriptive passages in the narrative poems of Spenser and Keats. Here, for once, Thoreau sounds Heathen, not Puritan, nor even Transcendentalist.

Interestingly, even in passages like those in the present chapter, which are purely descriptive, and have nothing to do with any philosophy, Thoreau's mind travels to India for support. In the midst of his long description of his abode he invokes Harivansa's comment on the subject. Note the passage in question: "I did not need to go outdoors to take the air, for the atmosphere within had lost none of its freshness. It was not so much within doors as behind a door where I sat, even in the rainiest weather. The Harivansa says, 'An abode without birds is like a meat without seasoning.' Such was not my abode, for I found myself suddenly neighbor to the birds. . . ." A little later in this very long description of "where he lived," Thoreau, for the second time, uses another Indian source for comparison. Here is the reference in question:

*Though the view from my door was still more contracted, I did not feel crowded or confined in the least. There was pasture enough for my imagination. The low shrub-oak plateau to which the opposite shore arose, stretched away toward the prairies of the West and the steppes of Tartary affording ample room for all the roving families of men. "There are none happy in the world but beings who enjoy freely a vast horizon," — said Damodara, when his herds required new and larger pastures*

These sprinklings of Indian reference add to Thoreau's book the pagan dimension, which, in fact, is more important to the book's structure of ideas than the Christian.

Thoreau's references to the pagan Greeks and the oriental Chinese are no less. Once again, when one comes upon these references, one naturally thinks of Christian references which, in comparison to others, are very few. Note, for instance, the following lines where there are together references to the Greeks as well as the Chinese:

*Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself. I have been as sincere a worshiper of Aurora as the Greeks. I got up early and bathed in the pond that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did. They say the characters were engraven on the bathing tub of King Tching-thang to this effect: "Renew thyself completely each day, do it again, and forever again." I can understand that. Morning brings back the heroic ages.*

These reference to the non-Christian literature and philosophy, these running allusions, constitute the central fabric of thought of Thoreau's *Walden*. It is this fabric which constitutes the very message of the book. It makes a clear choice for a quiet, withdrawn life, of asceticism, as practised in the East by Hindoo, Buddhist, and Chinese hermits as a matter of tradition, which continues to be in vogue even today.

Thoreau's grounding in Indian thought was so strong, and his attraction for the Indian way of life so intense, that he puts across most of his ideas and practices by citing analogies and parallels from the Indian sources. In this chapter, because of its thematic affinity with the Indian thought, there are more references to Indian sources than in any other chapter of *Walden*. Note, for instance, the following:

*The man who does not believe that each day contains an earlier, more sacred, and auroral hour than he has yet profaned, has despaired of life, and is pursuing a descending and darkening way. After a partial cessation of his sensuous life, the soul of man, or its organs rather, are reinvigorated each day, and his Genius tries again what noble life it can make. All memorable events, I should say transpire in morning time and in a morning atmosphere. The Vedas say, "All intelligences awake with the morning." Poetry and art, and the fairest and most memorable of the actions of men, date from such an hour. All poets and heroes, like Memnon, are the children of Aurora, and emit their music at sunrise. To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual*

*morning. It matters not what the clocks say or the attitudes and labors of men. Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep.... The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?*

As is obvious from their uses in the context here, words like 'awake,' 'sleep,' 'morning,' 'sun,' etc., are used metaphorically, not literally. And what the passage explains is nothing but the Indian concept of *CHETNA*, which gives a man an awareness "outtopping knowledge," and makes him a prophet or a poet. A Shakespeare and a Buddha are created by that *CHETNA*, by that awakening of one's soul or spirit. Thoreau expresses his belief here in several stages of awareness, of different levels of awakening.

After elaborately describing the abode where Thoreau lived ('where I lived') he takes up the next question, indicated in the title, 'What I lived for.' Like the epic poet, Thoreau follows the convention of announcing his theme in a direct statement at the very outset. The later part of the chapter in hand Thoreau begins as follows:

*I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him for ever."*

For sure, life, for Thoreau, is not a matter of orthodox belief, or an unexamined conventional practise; life, for him, is a matter of experience. Like an Indian sage, he carves out the course to be followed from the first stage of renouncing the everyday world of material pursuits to reaching the stage of becoming an awakened soul, that is to reach the stage of stasis, of equilibrium from where he can oversee life as a detached soul. Arnold's Shakespeare attains that "still centre" of Buddhist philosophy. That is why "others abide our question/Thou smilest and smilest."

Thoreau's description of common people's life is very much the same we come across in the Indian scriptures. The analogy of ants for those engrossed in the material world is familiar enough to the Indian students. Thoreau uses the same analogy, and evokes, as he usually does, the Indian spiritual tradition of hermitage and its underlying philosophy. Note, for instance, the following:

*Still we live mainly, like ants: though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men: like pygmies we fight with cranes; it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness. Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb nail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds. Simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion. Our life is like a German Confederacy, made up of petty states, with its boundary forever fluctuating,*



*so that even a German cannot tell you how it is bounded at any moment. The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvements, which, by the way are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the only cure for it as for them is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose.*

Here is a picture drawn of an ever-expanding web of life, full of ever-increasing complications. The more complicated it becomes, the more restless the man becomes. Thoreau's use of 'sea' imagery here reminds us of Hamlet's 'sea of troubles.' That is what life is as we have made it. Hence the familiar remedy for the disease called life - simplify, simplify. Simplicity is to be imposed like stringent economy, on every aspect of life. Thoreau's insistence on one food instead of usual three echoes the Indian prescription for saints and hermits. The whole idea seems to flow from the same Indian source of the Vedas.

Thoreau's condemnation of modern man's craziness for fast life, which is always being made faster, and the corresponding want of noble or spiritual goal, reminds us of Arnold's description of modern life as full of "sick hurry and divided aims" (*Dover Beach*). Note how harsh Thoreau is on this "sick-hurry" aspect of our life:

*Hardly a man takes a half hour's nap after dinner, but when he wakes he holds up his head and asks, 'What's the news?' as if the rest of mankind had stood his sentinels. Some give directions to be waked every half hour, doubtless for no other purpose, and then, to pay for it, they tell what they have dreamed. After a night's sleep the news is as indispensable as the breakfast. "Pray tell me anything new that has happened to a man anywhere on this globe,"— and he reads it over his coffee and rolls, that a man has had his eyes gouged out this morning on the Wachito River; never dreaming the while that he lives in the dark unfathomed mammoth cave of this world, and has but the rudiment of an eye himself.*

Thoreau, like Arnold, takes this craziness for news as a symptom of a spiritual sickness. Since life of most men remains entangled in the web of the vanity fair, they can see but only with the physical eye. Their spiritual eye, or their mind's eye, as Wordsworth called it, remains closed forever, as they are not 'awakened.' He uses the image of mammoth cave for the world in which men are living with "only the rudiment of an eye." It all points to spiritual darkness, as the soul of man stands buried under the concrete towers of big city, under his own coarse concerns.

Thoreau is equally harsh on modern man's craze for communication, for which he keeps creating new and newer means through scientific inventions. It is another system of the same spiritual sickness, for the same divided hurry. He takes man's business in these petty interests as delusion, which, for sure, is his English word for what the Indian scriptures call *maya*. When Thoreau comes to describe these activities, he uses words that readily evoke the Indian view of life, of simplicity, of austerity, of asceticism, of spirituality. Note, for instance, the following:

*Same and delusions are esteemed for soundest truths while reality is fabulous. If men would steadily observe realities only, and not allow themselves to be deluded, life, to compare it with such things as we know, would be like a fairy tale and the Arabian Nights' Entertainments.... When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence, that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of reality. This is always exhilarating and sublime. By closing the eyes and slumbering, and consenting to be deceived by shows, men establish and confirm their daily life of routine and habit everywhere, which still is built on purely illusory foundations. Children, who play life, discern its true law and relations more clearly than men, who fail to live it worthily, but who think that they are wiser by experience, that is, by failure. I have read in a Hindoo book, that "there was a king's son, who, being expelled in infancy from his native city was brought up by a forester, and, growing up to maturity in that state, imagined himself to belong to the barbarous race with which he lived. One of his father's ministers having discovered him, revealed*

*to him what he was, and the misconception of his character was removed, and he knew himself to be a prince. "So soul," continues the Hindoo philosopher, "from the circumstances in which it is placed, mistakes its own character, until the truth is revealed to it by some holy teacher, and then it knows itself to be Brahme." I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. We think that that is which appears to be.*

Here is the familiar theme of ancient Indian philosophy (of the Vedas) relating to appearance (*maya*) and reality (*satya*). Thoreau uses the familiar words of "delusion," "realities," "shadow," "absolute existence," "closing eyes," "sleeping or slumbering," "waking," etc., which echo the Indian thought. Finally, Thoreau reveals his source and cites a parable used by a Hindoo philosopher, which explains the whole concept of *maya* and *truth*, how one hides the other. Coming to conclude his case about his philosophy of life, Thoreau makes his position clear about the subject of truth or reality. As usual, he begins by putting forth the general people's belief on the subject, points out its contradictions or untenability in actual life, and then finally states his own position, marshalling support from, mostly, Indian and other Oriental sources, including the Chinese and the Arabic. Here is the relevant passage on the last page of his chapter entitled "Where I lived and what I live for":

*Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man. In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us. The universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions; whether we travel fast or slow, the track is laid for us. Let us spend our lives in conceiving then. The poet or the artist never yet had so fair and noble a design but some of his posterity at least could accomplish it.*

Here is the hermit's preoccupation with eternity. Thoreau wants every man to focus his life on eternity, not on the contingency. For him, as for the Hindoo sage he cites, truth is not remote, in the outskirts of the system; rather, it is here, there, and everywhere. It is in every moment. It is for the individual to apprehend that truth and eternity in the movement. Finally, Thoreau goes, as he always does, to explain the method of experiencing truth or eternity. For, after all, truth for Thoreau or any other Transcendentalist is a matter, not of knowing, but of experiencing. It is also an aspect of Indian mysticism, that the ultimate reality, call it eternity or God, can only be felt or experienced; it cannot be known or understood the way we do a philosophic concept or scientific fact. Here is the description of that method:

*Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails. Let us rise early and fast, or break fast, gently and without perturbation; let company come and let company go, let the bells ring and the children cry,—determined to make a day of it.... Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through church and state, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality, and say, this is, and no mistake; and then begin, having a point d'appui, below freshest and frost and fire, a place where you might find a wall or a state, or set a lamp-post safely, or perhaps a gauge, not Nilometer, but a Realometer, that future ages might know how deep a freshet of shams and appearances had gathered from time to time.... Be it life or death, we crave only reality.*

Thus, wading through the slush and mud of the worldly traditions and opinions we must steer clear of all the coverings of appearances and sail at last to the shore or the bottom where truth lies. He draws a distinction between the shams and delusions of society and the reality and the truth of eternity. And it is, decidedly, the latter which is the goal of our life, our spiritual life.

Thoreau concludes his chapter, the second, of *Walden*, by expressing his view of Time: "Time is but the stream I go

a-fishing in. I drink it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I cannot count one— I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was born. The intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way into the secret of things. . . . I felt all my faculties concentrated in it. My instinct tells me that my head is an organ for burrowing, as some creatures use their snout and fore-paws, and with it I would mine and burrow my way through these hills. I think that the richest vein is somewhere hereabouts; so by the divining rod and thin rising vapors I judge; and here I will begin to mine."

Here, Time is a stream, without end, without beginning. It is an image of eternity. With man's soul awakened, made a "transparent eyeball," as Emerson calls it, one can have a dip into the stream and be a part of it. Intellect to Thoreau, or any mystic, is only matter, just like the fore-paws, and can be used only for handling material objects. As for the absolute reality, only the soul, which is like a drop of the stream of eternity (Emerson calls it "Oversoul"), can experience that Reality, the real reality. Since the soul of man is not matter, and is a spirit, a part of eternity, it can merge with its like, though larger, Eternity.

## 7. Language and Style

Thoreau's view of language was as fresh as his view of life in general. He, along with Emerson, cleansed English language in America of all its colonial coverings, dusted and washed it, and made it as fresh and clean as pebbles in a stream. The following lines from his *Journal* clarify his position with regard to language:

*Talk about learning our letters and being literate! Why, the roots of letters are things. Natural objects and phenomena are the original symbols or types which express our thoughts and feelings, and yet American scholars, having little or no root in the soil, commonly strive with all their might to confine themselves to the imported symbols alone. All the true growth and experience, the laws, speech, they would fain reject as 'Americanisms.'*"

Margaret Fuller, one of Thoreau's fellow Transcendentalists, found the essay of which the cited passage is a part "rich in thoughts," but protested that these thoughts were "so out of their natural order" that it could not be read without pain. Although Thoreau had left out this essay, never sending it for print along with his other essays, it remains a seminal piece, containing the very process by which Thoreau had found what he wanted to do with language. As this essay clearly shows, Thoreau's first conviction about the artist was that his words should speak not to the mind alone but whole being. He made himself more explicit in this distinction between the thinker and the artist: "Poetry implies the whole truth. Philosophy expresses a particle of it." We can hear in these words an echo of Aristotle's contention that poetry combines both philosophy and history, both general and specific. He also said in the *Week* that "a true account of the actual is the rarest poetry, for common sense always takes a hasty and superficial view." The remark looks forward to the strictness upon which modern poets later insisted.

While still at college Thoreau had noted that the Greek poets had an "appetite for visible images" in contrast to the tendency of the northern imagination to "the dark and mysterious" and its consequent "neglect of the material." His admiration continued to develop for the type of writer who "was satisfied with giving an exact description of things as they appeared to him, and their effect upon him." He found this ability in ample measure in Homer, in the way he could convey the physical sensation of action. As he put it, "If his [Homer's] messengers repair but to the tent of Achilles, we do not wonder how they got there but accompany them step by step along the shore of the resounding sea." Thoreau's strong conviction was that both language and rhythm have a physical basis. His theory of language, in so far as he has stated one, seems at first sight to approximate Emerson's. His view was that the origin of words is in nature and that they are symbols of the spiritual. He also spoke of the difficulty in finding in word that will exactly name and so release the thing. He did, however, have a more dogged respect for the thing than any of his colleagues, and limitless tenacity in waiting to find the word.

Thoreau very well knew that the farmer's lingo surpassed the scholar's laboured sentences. He also had a relish for old sayings, and for rural slang, and set down many fragments of conversation with his friends the woodchoppers and

the farmers. He had contempt for writers who did not speak out of a full experience but used "torpid words, wooden or lifeless words. such words as 'humanitary,' which have a paralysis in their tails." From the very beginning of his career Thoreau had insisted that there is social foundation to each language. As he put it, "What men say is so sifted and obliged to approve itself as answering to a common want, that nothing absolutely frivolous obtains currency. . . . The analogies of words are never whimsical and meaningless, but stand for real likenesses. Only the ethics of mankind, and not of any particular man, give point and vigor to our speech."

While discussing the primitive sense of words Thoreau made a remark that suggests what carried his practice such a considerable distance from Emerson's. As he put it, "We reason from our hands to our head." He was not inclined to rate language as superior to other mediums of expression on the ground that it was produced solely by the mind and thence could share more directly in the ideal. On the contrary, he insisted upon its double parentage: "A word which may be translated into every dialect, and suggests a truth to every mind, is the most perfect work of human art; and as it may be breathed and taken on our lips, and, as it were, become the product of our physical organs, as its sense is of our intellectual, it is the nearest to life itself."

As Channing remarked, in much that Thoreau wrote "there was a *philosophical side*,— this needs to be thoughtfully considered." He was, decidedly, always eager to probe roots and etymologies, and in some passages we can find him doing something more dynamic than that ordinarily amounts to. Even in a few notes on Latin terminations he dwelt on their closeness to physical life and revealed the kind of movement he wanted to catch in his own writing. What separates Thoreau most from Emerson is his interest in the varied play of all his senses, not merely of the eye, which remains a crucial factor in accounting for the greater density of Thoreau's style. One thinks, first of all, of his Indian accuracy of sight which could measure distances like his surveyor's instrument. But Thoreau never thought that sight alone was enough: "we do not learn with the eyes; they introduce us and we learn after by converse with things." He believed that scent was "a more primitive inquisition, more oracular and trustworthy." Taste meant less to him. He always became ecstatic when he talked about touch: "My body is all sentiment. As I go here or there, I am ticked by this or that I come in contact with, as if I touched the wires of a battery." He gave his most rapt attention to sounds. These alone among his sense impressions were to have a chapter devoted to them in *Walden*.

Thoreau can hardly find verbs of action to describe what the sounds do to him. As he listens to the sounds and songs of birds, it seems to take him out of himself: he leaves his body in a trance and has the freedom of all nature. After such an experience he can say, measuring his words, "The contact of sound with a human ear whose hearing is pure and unimpaired is coincident with an ecstasy." It is no wonder, therefore, that he failed to convey what it meant to him. One of his earliest essays, parts of which he used in the closing pages of the *Week*, was on "Sound and Silence." In this essay, Thoreau makes an impossible effort to catch the evanescent rippling of the one into the other, and added the Carlylean reflection that so the most excellent speech finally falls away into the perfect stillness that it has disturbed and intensified. He has much to say about the good cheap music of nature, the hum of insects, the booming of ice, the fall of a distant tree, or the voice of a neighbor singing. He recounts the endless excitement that the humming of the telegraph wire brought him. It is his Aeolian harp, and reminds him of Anacreon and will make him read the Greek poets again. It is the poetry of the railroad, the heroic thoughts that the Irishmen had at their toil now given expression. His prose style is determined by these aspects of his commitment to the life of senses. Like the American Adam (Whitman is another) he looks at life as if for the first time on earth, and names things with all the wonder and excitement a child would experience on seeing new things surrounding him.

Thoreau himself had no doubts on this score, either for his life or for his art: "Men commonly exaggerate the theme. . . . The theme is nothing, the life is everything. All that interests the reader is the depth and intensity of the life excited." He was therefore intent to study the exact evidence of his senses, since he believed that only through their concrete reports could he project his inner life. The poetic knowledge he wanted would come only through something like

Wordsworth's "relaxed attention," only if he was not a scientific naturalist," not prying, nor inquisitive, not bent upon seeing things." He described his desired attitude towards nature by calling it one of indirection, by repeating frequently that the most fruitful perception was "with the unknown sides of your eye." Thus, nonchalantly, almost unconsciously, Thoreau could catch the most familiar scene in new perspective, with possibilities hitherto untold his direct scrutiny and with a wholeness of impression that could give it composition in writing.

In Thoreau, what one notices is a double suggestion of the need for clarified perception and of the vision into which it could lead him. This double vision brings out the mystical element that always remained part of his experience. Yet even when he was swept beyond his moments of physical sensation he did not forget his debt to them. The triumphant strains in his prose were nothing but the imaginative transformation of a rhythm he had actually heard and which he was trying to symbolise in words.

*In our lonely chamber at night we are thrilled by some far-off serenade within the mind and seem to hear the clarion sound and clang of corselet and buckler from many a silent hamlet of the soul though actually it may be but the rattling of some farmer's wagon rolling to market against the morrow*

The checkrein of his senses was what held even such a passage from gliding away into a romantic reverie of escape. Their vigilance constituted his chief asset as an artist. It brought his pages out of the fog into the sunlight in which he wanted them to be read. He came near to defining his own style when he objected to De Quincey's as too diffuse and flowing in detail, not sufficiently "concentrated and nutty." What he wanted to see and written were "sentences which suggest far more than they say, which have an atmosphere about them, which do not merely report an old, but make a new, impression; sentences which suggest as many things and are as durable as a Roman quædus." If Thoreau at his best achieved weight and balance and permanence, it was because he was always being called back from thoughts to the miracle of surfaces, because he lived upto his resolve:

*Whatever things I perceive with my entire man, those let me record, and it will be poetry. The sounds which I hear with the consent and coincidence of all my senses, these are significant and musical; at least, they only are heard.*

His remarks about music we reported earlier only lead to this point. He is never really talking about the art of music as such because he knew nothing about it. What he is talking about is the co-ordination, which alone made men feel that his pulse was beating in unison with the pulse of nature and that he could therefore reproduce it in words.

By this analogy of the pulses he also emphasized the fact that resilient rhythm comes from restfulness. And so he preached a gospel of leisure to Yankees, telling them that "that truly efficient laborer will not crowd his day with work, but will saunter to his task, surrounded by a wide halo of ease." Agreeing with Emerson that the poet's work needs "a frolic health," he understood much more intimately how style is based on physical aplomb. He had learned by the time he was twenty-two that "the wise man... abides there where he is, as some walker actually rest the whole body to each step, while others never relax the muscles of the leg till the accumulated fatigue obliges them to stop short." Thus, in his prose style Thoreau could combine the beauties of fresh observation and deep feeling, of clear and clean words with mystical overtones, of music of the flowing stream with the steadiness of the solid rock. We find in his prose the solid world of nature that comes from a naturalist, combined with the strange world of the mystic that comes from a visionary. He also combines in his seemingly simple prose the profound sense of the philosopher and the penetrating peep of the poet. The child-like excitement and the sage-like steadiness, too, get combined in his wonderful prose. Thoreau, along with Emerson, did to American prose what Wordsworth, along with Coleridge, had done to English poetry. The emphasis in both cases remains on cleansing the language of all the impurities that idle speculation and artificial wit had added to it. What they gave to the reader remains the cleanest, clearest, concreatest and contemplating prose.

**Books for Further Reading**

1. Francis Bowen, "Lock and Transcendentalism," *Christian Examiner* 23 (1837), 170-94.
2. Charles R. Anderson, *The Magic Circle of Walden* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968).
3. Charles Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).
4. Wendell Glick (ed.), *The Recognition of Henry David Thoreau* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).
5. F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941).
6. Ethel Seyhold, *Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951).
7. Canby, *Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939).
8. H.S. Salt, *The Life of Henry David Thoreau* (London: Richard Bentley, 1890).

**Question Bank**

1. Discuss Thoreau as a Transcendentalist.
2. Trace the influence of Indian thought on Thoreau's *Walden*.
3. Summarise Thoreau's thoughts on "economy."
4. "How I lived and What I Lived for" gives us a glimpse into Thoreau's philosophy of life. Discuss.
5. Discuss the prose style of Thoreau's *Walden*.
6. Trace the major symbols Thoreau uses in the first two chapters of *Walden*.