

# POINTS OF VIEW

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# POINTS OF VIEW

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# POINTS OF VIEW

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## SRI AUROBINDO ON SHAKESPEARE

R.S. Pathak

Sri Aurobindo is undoubtedly one of the most outstanding figures in Indian English literature. We value him even today as a poet of great power and versatility and a critic of life and literature of considerable significance. It is surprising, however, that some critics and editors have failed to appreciate Sri Aurobindo's poetry and poetics properly. P. Lal and Raghavendra Rao, for example, have denounced what they called the "greasy, weak-spined and purple adjectived 'spiritual poetry' and the blurbed and rubbery sentiments of... Sri Aurobindo."<sup>1</sup> Any one who rates Aurobindo very high, says Nissim Ezekiel, "has no feeling for the English language."<sup>2</sup> He finds *Savitri* "embarrassingly bad," which not only suffers from an inflated emotionality and conceptual confusion but is also "dated in language." Ezekiel particularly denigrates Aurobindo for giving us "that peculiarly vapid and windy idiom which intoxicates" rather than elucidates.<sup>3</sup> Even a sensible poet-critic like R. Parthasarathy tends to hold similar views. According to him, *Savitri* fails as a poem because Aurobindo's "talent and resourcefulness in the use of English were limited."<sup>4</sup> For a proper appraisal of Aurobindo's poetry, a right type of sensibility is absolutely essential. *The Times Literary Supplement*, as we know, had complained about his want of music, which of course depends on the kind of ears one has. Such critical pitfalls can be warded off if Aurobindo's poetry is evaluated on the basis of his own pronouncements and not in terms of readymade critical yardsticks.

Sri Aurobindo, it may be recalled, was not happy with the state of affairs in Indian English criticism. The very first line of the opening chapter of *The Future Poetry* reads as follows:

It is not often that we see published in India literary criticism which is of the first order, at once discerning and suggestive, criticism which forces us both to see and think.<sup>5</sup>

It would be worthwhile to evaluate Aurobindo's comments on Shakespeare, another myriad-minded genius, whom he regarded as "the sovereign dramatic poet" endowed with "an abundant inner vision of life" (204). Not unlike Shakespeare, Aurobindo is "the Poet Creator whose words are worlds,"<sup>6</sup> and whose contributions are characterised by "breadth of outlook and sanity of judgment."<sup>7</sup> Iyengar has rightly called

Sri Aurobindo "the creative critic." He says: "Considered merely as a poet and critic of poetry, Sri Aurobindo would still rank among the supreme masters of our time."<sup>8</sup> Aurobindo's critical views can be chiefly found in *The Future Poetry* and his letters, specially the third series of his letters. *The Future Poetry* is, to M.K. Naik, "a bright rare exception" to the dearth of perceptive Indian English criticism.<sup>9</sup>

Aurobindo's critical pronouncements are guided by a poetics of his own, which considers poetry to be a rhythmic voyage of self-discovery. He defines poetry as "a supreme way ... a thing of harmony and joy and illumination" (240-41) and looks upon it as a step in evolution of consciousness, a process of "the outbreak of the Godhead in man." Poetry to him could suggest a way of sorting out life's problems, which, as the first chapter of *The Life Divine* tells us, "are essentially problems of harmony." It is not surprising therefore that Aurobindo aimed at attaining

A fourth dimension of aesthetic sense,  
Where all is in ourselves and ourselves in all.

This is a very great ideal of poetry, indeed. In his upward journey, the poet, in Aurobindonian sense,

... crosses the boundaries of the unseen  
And passes over the edge of mortal sight  
To a new vision of himself and things.  
He is a spirit in an unfinished world  
That knows him not and cannot know itself.  
The surface symbol of his goalless quest  
Takes deeper meanings in his inner view:  
His is a search of darkness for the light,  
Of mortal life for immortality.

Poetry, according to Aurobindo, is nothing less than "a self-expressive power of the spirit ... where the soul of things is most revealed" through the rhythmic word" (216-17). The highest kind of poetry, to Aurobindo, is mantric poetry, a "rhythmic speech which rises at once from the heart of the seer and from the distant home of truth." A poet in the Indian tradition is a seer and *kavi* (from *ku* 'to say') (cf. Bhatta Tauta: *nāṅṣiḥ kavirityuktaḥ ṛṣistu kil darśanāt*), and Aurobindo, both in his theory and practice, follows this ideal faithfully. The poet's business, for Mallarmé, is to purify the dialect of the tribe. Aurobindo, going further, aims at purifying the consciousness of the tribe.

Sri Aurobindo's assessment of Shakespeare's art and mind is of considerable interest. Writing on Shakespeare about half a century ago, Walter Raleigh said that "Every age has its own difficulties in the appreciation of Shakespeare" and that "To judge Shakespeare it is necessary to include his thoughts in ours."<sup>10</sup> This would explain writers like Ben Jonson honouring the great master's memory 'on this side [of] idolatry' on the one hand and others like Bernard Shaw denigrating and 'entirely' despising him on the other. Different people have approached Shakespeare's work from different points of view, which have yielded different results. As Hardin Craig points out, "Whether Shakespeare likes it or not, he must be compelled to mean something, must be subjected to research, explained by hypotheses, and demonstrated to the last detail."<sup>11</sup> It is in this light that Sri Aurobindo's views on Shakespeare should be considered.

Sri Aurobindo, as we have seen, had a very high regard for Shakespeare. Shakespeare's plays present him as the greatest practitioner of dramatic poetry, which Sri Aurobindo highly valued. He believes that this kind of poetry cannot live by mere presentation of life, its actions and passions and that "the true movement and result is psychological" (67). Even the psychological aspect is not the limit to Aurobindo and he goes on to assert that "drama is the poet's vision of some part of the world-act in the life of human soul" (67). The ideal of drama being so high, the conditions of its success are bound to be equally onerous. Referring to Shakespeare's "spontaneous creation," he remarks :

Dramatic poetry ... must have to begin with, as the fount of its creation or in its heart an interpretative vision and in that vision an explicit or implicit idea of life and the human being; the vital presentation which is its outward instrument, must arise out of that harmoniously ...(68).

The best of Shakespeare's plays, Aurobindo thinks, fulfil these qualifications. The two most remarkable points about them are their writer's creativity and vision.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare declares that with the help of his imagination, the poet gives to 'airy nothings' 'a local habitation and a name'. Shakespeare's creations however, says Aurobindo, are not merely "charming airy nothings ... but significant figures and creations" (212). Taking cognizance of Shakespeare's creativity, he says :

More than any other poet Shakespeare has accomplished mentally the

legendary feat of the imperious sage Viswamitra; his power of vision has created a Shakespearean world of his own (72).

Drama has very often been defined as an imitation of an action from life, and Shakespeare himself used the phrase 'holding up the mirror to Nature'. But it cannot be a mere replica of life and its happenings. "The aim of poetry," writes Sri Aurobindo, "as of all true art, is neither a photographic or otherwise realistic imitation of Nature, nor a romantic furbishing and painting or idealistic improvement of her image" (25). He further writes: "The reader who sees in Falstaff, Macbeth, Lear or Hamlet imitations of Nature, has either no inner eye of the soul or has been hypnotized by a formula."<sup>12</sup> Aurobindo's views on this issue are in line with those of Abhinavagupta, who called drama 'a re-enactment of sentiments' (*natyam bhavanukirtanam*).

Sri Aurobindo also subscribes to the traditional Indian belief that poetic expression, arising out of the heart of the seer, reflects the uniqueness and individuality of the personal consciousness of the poet on the one hand and universality of the experience on the other. He is convinced that "the great poet interprets to man his present or reinterprets for him his past but can also point him to his future and in all three reveal to him the face of the Eternal" (203). The poetic vision, Aurobindo adds, follows necessarily the evolution of human and moves in accordance with the spirit of the age and environment; "it has its levels, its ascents and descents and its returns" (35). To him, "The work of the poet depends not only on himself and his age but on the mentality of the nation to which he belongs and the spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic tradition and environment which it creates for him"(38). These views are applicable to Shakespeare also and would explain the presence of all those elements in his plays which he introduced as a concession to the popular demand. Sri Aurobindo's thinking in this respect is not much different from that of Dr. Johnson and L.C. Knights.

Shakespeare, however, transcends all bounds of commonality, and populates his world with highly original characters. Shakespeare's world, Sri Aurobindo reminds us, abounds in "an ultranatural play of beauty, curiosity and amplitude;" notwithstanding its realistic elements, his is "a romantic world" in the true sense of the word, "a world of the wonder and free power of life and not of its mere external realities" (72). In this respect, Shakespeare is with Homer and Valmiki. He could accomplish this feat on account of his "supreme imaginative originality, supreme poetic gift, widest scope and supreme creative

genius"(521). Sri Aurobindo further elaborates:

He (Shakespeare) is not primarily an artist, a political thinker or anything else of the kind, but a great vital creator and intensely, though within marked limits, a seer of life. His art itself is life arranging its forms in its own urge and excitement ...(71).

Shakespeare's world, according to Aurobindo, is his own, for it is an enlargement and amplification of certain crucial aspects of life. He is different both from Chaucer and his own contemporaries. Chaucer, says Aurobindo, is a poet of physical consciousness and is "not moved to interpret life," his only "business" being "a clear and happy presentation" of the various aspects of life (61). Shakespeare's contemporaries resemble him only in externals. Even the later romantic dramatists, despite their eagerness to imitate him, just take hold of life, string together its unusual effects, and make it look "out of the way, brilliant, coloured, conspicuous." Shakespeare, on the contrary, "does not need to lay violent hands on life and turn it into romantic pyrotechnics" (70-71). Significantly enough, Aurobindo, like Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot, does not speak highly of the British Romantic poets. Shelley and Keats died prematurely, and Wordsworth "petered out like a motor car with insufficient petrol." The piecemeal vision of life they present circumscribes their poetry. Aurobindo says:"... although their best work is as fine poetry as any written but they have written nothing on a larger scale which would place them among the greatest creators" like Shakespeare (521-22).

A great work presents the verisimilitude to life and is characterized by authenticity. For Aurobindo, however, the truth of poetry is not the truth of philosophy, science or religion; "it is another way of self-expression of infinite Truth" and is "so distinct that it appears to give quite another face of things and reveal quite another side of experience" (212). Sri Aurobindo is not in favour of presenting the great master as a great philosopher, for doing so would only 'imperil his high repute' (548). He would also not like to ascribe Shakespeare's vision of life to any mysticism. He writes:

It can be said that Blake as a mystic poet achieved things beyond Shakespeare's measure--for Shakespeare had not the mystic's vision; but as a poet of the play of life Shakespeare is everywhere and Blake nowhere (480).

Shakespeare, says Aurobindo, got in touch with the Overmind on the vital plane, not on the mental plane. "There is often more thoughts," says

Sri Aurobindo, "in a short essay of Bacon's than in a whole play of Shakespeare's," although "not even hundred cryptograms can make him [Bacon] the author of dramas"(30). What distinguishes Shakespeare from these authors is his vision of life, which arises out of his first-hand and multi-faceted response to life. In this respect, he has an edge over even Milton, despite the latter's cultural credentials:

Shakespeare's poetry ... is that of a man with a vivid and many-sided responses to life; it gives the impression of a multifarious knowledge of things but it was a knowledge picked up from life as he went: Milton gets a certain colour from his studies and learning;... there is a certain turn or colouring in Milton which would not have been there otherwise and which is not there in Shakespeare (485).

Shakespeare, according to Aurobindo, is unique --'unique in his spirit, method and quality' (70). His vision of life does not owe itself to any temporal facts but to eternal and universal verities of life. Although the outward form of his plays comprises "a surge of emotion and passion and thought and act and event arising out of character at ferment in the yeast of feeling and passion," it is their "living interpretation of the truth and powers of the life-soul of man" that are primarily responsible for their greatness, without which they would just be reduced to a portrayal of "a vain brute turmoil" (226). Of the two levels of conflict in his plays--the external and the internal--Shakespeare, Aurobindo feels, is far more interested in the inward drama of the soul rather than the outward actions or events, the latter being "less essential, reducible even to the minimum" (68). These remarks of Aurobindo can be placed along with those of great Shakespearean critics like A.C. Bradley.

One of the most remarkable qualities of Shakespeare's plays is that his personal beliefs and creeds have not been allowed to interfere with his presentation of life, which seriously affects works of several dramatists and poets. Sri Aurobindo's aesthetics heavily banks upon his concept of Overmind, which "knows the One as the support, essence, fundamental power of all things, but in the dynamic play proper to it lays emphasis on the divisional power of multiplicity."<sup>13</sup> It is the function of the Overmind, says he, "to give to every possibility its full potential, its own separate kingdom", and, more importantly, to unite "separated things" and reconcile "opposites".<sup>14</sup> Sri Aurobindo seems to be replicating here what Coleridge said in his treatment of Imagination. His views explain the secret of Shakespeare's 'Negative Capability', extolled by Keats, which is, in fact, the capability of remaining in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching out to facts and reason.

Sri Aruobindo, like T.S. Eliot, subscribes to the theory of impersonality in poetry, as is clear from the following extract:

A poet or artist may be a medium for creative force which uses him as a channel and is concerned only with expression in art and not with the man's personality or his inner or outer life. He is a medium for the creative force which acts through him; it uses or picks up anything stored up in his mind from his inner life or his memories or impressions of outer life and things, anything it can and cares to make use of and this it moulds and turns to its purpose (328).

Aurobindo's views regarding the nature of poetry thus bear a notable similarity with those of Eliot, who maintains that poetry is not the expression of personality but an escape from it. The extinction of the poet's personality and his ego is made possible by his moving from the outer to the inner reality:

The one thing needful is that he [the poet] should be able to go beyond the word or image he uses or the form of thing he sees, not be limited by them. ... At the highest he himself disappears into sight; the personality of the seer is lost in the eternity of the vision, and the Spirit of all seems alone to be there speaking out sovereignly its own secrets (35).

Aurobindo thus took off from where T.S. Eliot left, and his views are definitely more mature and convincing; nor does he waver or recant like Eliot. Sri Aurobindo rightly recognizes the double personality of the poet, who is a normal man who thinks and feels and acts like others, and the seer into the life of things, the super-soul, who is in touch with the impersonal and eternal fountains of joy and beauty, and who "transmutes by his alchemy all experience into a form of the spirits of Ananda" (241).

Delight is, of course, one of the primary purposes of all art, including poetry. The poet aims at conveying the joy of a multiple poetic vision of life and vital creation with the life-power at its centre. "It is this sheer creative Ananda of the life-spirit which is Shakespeare," asserts Sri Aurobindo (71). But, he hastens to add, the external pleasures arising out of sensuous descriptions and even the inner imaginative pleasures are only the 'first elements', only the 'channels and instruments' of Ananda as conceived by him; 'the true creator, the true hearer is the soul' (11). Poetry would fail to perform its highest function unless it has transmuted the 'physical' pleasure into the deeper delight of the soul:

A divine Ananda, a delight interpretative, creative, revealing, formative....-- such spiritual joy is that which the soul of the poet feels and which he succeeds in pouring also into all those who are prepared to receive it. And this delight is not a godlike pastime; it is a great formative and illuminative power (10).

Shakespeare's work communicates this very creative delight of the life-spirit. It is this quality which might have attracted Sri Aurobindo towards him. Sri Aurobindo's standpoint is in line with the Taittiriya Upanisad's oft-quoted statement *raso vai sah* and the Indian aestheticians' concept of *rasa*, which calls poetic delectation *brahmanandasadahodara*.<sup>15</sup> Aurobindo looks upon poetry as a significant step in evolution of consciousness, and his theory of evolution-- from Physical to Vital to Mental to Suprapsychic planes -- is based on the Vedantic concept of *sat-chit-ananda*. Shakespeare's creative voyage, from "Readiness is all" to "Ripeness is all", can be analysed in terms of Aurobindonian archetypes. Murray W. Bundy rightly points out that it is "the traditional aim of self-knowledge" and "not the modern idea of self-realisation" that underlies his treatment of characters in his tragedies.<sup>16</sup> The process will culminate in what Aurobindo calls the 'sheer creative Ananda'.

A defence of poetry is a defence of creativity. Outlining poetic process, Sri Aurobindo says that "The mind of the poet sees by intuition and direct perception and brings out what they give him by a formative stress on the total image ... of the life that inspires it" (214). Great poetry, he holds, enshrines "a vision of inmost things" and reveals "by the inspired rhythmic word the God who is the self of all things and beings" (240-41). Poetry like that of Shakespeare takes a leap into the infinite and has a tendency of becoming revelatory on the intuitive and Overmind planes. To Aurobindo,

The greatest poets have been those in whom ... moments of a high intensity and of intuitive inspired speech have been of a frequent occurrence and in one or two, as in Shakespeare, of a miraculous abundance (277).

The Vedas, Upanisads and the *Gita* present the finest specimens of revelatory poetry born of intensity of the highest kind. Shakespeare's best poetry is characterised by the same qualities.

Sri Aurobindo is not so much interested in technical matters pertaining to poetry. In all arts, he maintains, "good technique is the first step towards perfection," but "even a deficient correctness of execution will not prevent an intense and gifted soul from creating good poetry" (11). Technique, he adds, however indispensable it may be, occupies less important position in poetry than in any other art. Sri Aurobindo talks of 'the heightened and fearless style of poetry' and is convinced that poetic power "soars beyond the province of any laws of mechanical construction" (12). Centuries before him Mammata had regarded poetry

and poets as far above the laws of Nature (*niyatikṛtaniyamarahitam*). The few remarks that we have from Aurobindo about Shakespeare's style are not without interest.

As Wittgenstein says, to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life. Aurobindo, as said earlier, expresses unqualified praise for Shakespeare's 'spontaneous creation', the spontaneity resulting from "a successful weaving of interdependent relations of soul to soul, of speech to speech, of action to action" (68). Even Kalidas and Bhavabhuti, says Aurobindo, were 'laboured' as compared to Shakespeare and lacked his spontaneity. Of five styles postulated by Aurobindo--Adequate, Rhetorical or Effective, Illuminating, Revelatory, and Inevitable or Mantric --,Chaucer represents the grace and lucidity of the Adequate style and Shakespeare the Revelatory. The Inevitable or Mantric style is the most exalted form of poetic expression. "From the highest intensity of the revelatory poetic word... the Mantra starts," says Aurobindo (277). Shakespeare has intensity in his best works but lacks 'symmetry'; "symmetry here there is none" (71). The dramatist presents in his own inimitable style life's "many loose movements, in mobile perspectives, a succession of crowded but successful and satisfying vistas" (71). Shakespeare's constant violation of unities and other conventions was due to his efforts to be true to life.

Shakespeare did not stick to any particular style; his method can be best described as eclectic. We find in his plays an orchestration of different styles, and his poetry "coruscates with a play of the hues of imagination".<sup>17</sup> Shakespeare is a great master of the imaged style, which Sri Aurobindo places at a much higher level than other styles. For him it is this that makes Shakespeare so great. To an ordinary person, he adds, poetry may look "as if it were nothing more than an aesthetic pleasure of the imagination, the intellect and the ear, a sort of elevated pastime" (9), but to a great poet like Shakespeare it is an image-making activity *par excellence*. Caroline Spurgeon and Clemens have clearly shown how Shakespeare's imagery displays a rare flight of imagination, wide range of experience and an intense capability of transforming sensations into word pictures, and has a deeper functional purpose in his work. Shakespeare, according to Aurobindo, uses language "as a scarcely felt vaulting board for a leap into the Infinite" (25). Shakespeare was one of the greatest makers of the English language, and with the help of his language he conceived and populated his world.

Sri Aurobindo has thus thought deeply on the general problems of

literature and poetry. To use Aurobindo's own words about himself, "He explores the ceaseless miracle of himself." His criticism is a byproduct of this exploration of the self. He regarded poetry as a combination of forces, a synergy, demanded by the development of man. The immense variety and depth of his knowledge, his luminous perceptions, acute discernments and, above all, his intuitive critical vision and a well-integrated spiritual consciousness go to make Sri Aurobindo a poet and critic of considerable worth. He makes of the art of criticism a fully creative literary activity. We may not agree with everything he has to say about poetry or Shakespeare, but the sanity and balance of his thinking are the most desirable virtues in the context of a nebulous haze of criticism surrounding Shakespeare. His views cannot be applied to all kinds of poetry, but we get through them an intimate peep into his own poetry. Sri Aurobindo is, on the whole, respectful to Shakespeare, but, as Coleridge points out, "that criticism of Shakespeare will alone be genial which is reverential."<sup>18</sup> Although Aurobindo's views are generally in consonance with the traditional Indian thinking on the various issues, yet they also compare well with those of established western critics. By amalgamating Indian and western viewpoints, Sri Aurobindo has given us a comprehensive parameter to analyse and evaluate poetry.

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<sup>3</sup>Nissim Ezekiel, "Sri Aurobindo on poetry," *The Times of India*, 23 July 1972, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>R. Parthasarathy (ed.), *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets* (Delhi : OUP, 1976), pp. 2-3.

<sup>5</sup>*The Future Poetry* (Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), Vol.9, p. 3.

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<sup>6</sup>K.D. Sethna, *Sri Aurobindo -- The Poet* (Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo Centre, 1970), p. 206.

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<sup>8</sup>K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (Delhi : Sterling Publishers, 1987), p. 153.

<sup>9</sup>M.K. Naik, *Studies in Indian English Literature* (Delhi : Sterling, 1987), p. 158.

<sup>10</sup>Walter Raleigh, *Shakespeare* (London : Macmillan, 1961), pp. 1, 5.

<sup>11</sup>Hardin Craig, *Shakespeare Survey* No. 2, p. 111.

<sup>12</sup>"The Hour of God," BCL No.17, p. 96.

Talking about the poet's creative freedom Anandavardhana remarks:  
 apare kavyasamsare kavirekah prajapatih/  
 yathasmat rocate visvam tathedam parivartate/  
 Dhvanyaloka 3/41 Parikara.

<sup>13</sup>Letters on Yoga I, BCL No. 22, p. 244.

<sup>14</sup>Letters on Savitri, *Savitri* (Pondicherry : Sri Aurobindo International Press, 1981 rpt.),p. 812.

<sup>15</sup>Visvanatha, *Sahityadarpana*, 3/2-3.

<sup>16</sup>Murray W.Bundy, *Shakespeare Survey* No. 29, p.81.

<sup>17</sup>Letters on Savitri, *Savitri*, p. 807.

<sup>18</sup>S.T. Coleridge, *Poetry and Prose*, ed. Kathleen Raina (Penguin, 1985),p.237.

# SHELLEY'S RADICAL HUMANISM

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## I

Matthew Arnold sums up his evaluation of Shelley as a man and a poet by remarking : "The Shelley of actual life is a vision of beauty and radiance, indeed, but availing nothing, effecting nothing. And in poetry, no less than in life, he is a 'beautiful *and ineffectual* angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain'."<sup>1</sup> Little did the famous Victorian critic realize that if by "ineffectual" he meant Shelley's inability or futility to effect his vision of life in reality, most of the great philosophers and poets would fall in the same category. Poets, as Shelley remarked, are "the unacknowledged *legislators* of the world."<sup>2</sup> They show the way of life needed for the uplift of the mankind and inspire them to realize it in practice for their own welfare. It is not for the poets but for the people, politicians and men of action to be guided by the path shown by them and implement their valuable ideas in practice for freedom, equality and universal brotherhood of humanity. Like the skylark, the poet sings of love and glory of men, to which they ultimately respond :

Like a poet hidden  
In the light of thought;  
Singing hymns unbidden  
Till the world is wrought  
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, Shelley was a born rebel and philanthropist. It will be more appropriate to say that he was a rebel because he was a philanthropist. He was by nature a doubter and rebel, one who questioned authority and felt deeply concerned about the welfare and happiness of his fellow human beings. So ardent was his sympathy with mankind and so intense was his love for freedom, justice and equality for them that he abhorred from the bottom of his heart all those powers and institutions, political or religious, which tyrannized over men and held them in thralldom.

Shelley was, however, not a visionary chasing a mirage or a Quixote tilting at windmills. He knew the limitations of man. If in *Prometheus Unbound* he envisions the reign of love in which "thrones,

altars, judgment seats, and prisons" (p.194) are things of the past and man remains

Sceptreless, free uncircumscribed, but man  
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king  
Over himself, just gentle, wise, but man. (p.195)

he is not oblivious of the fact :

The good want power, but to weep barren tears,  
The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.  
The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom,  
And all best things are thus confused to ill. (p.172)

Shelley was also conscious of the fact that the just social order could not be achieved in a day. In *An Address to the Irish People*, he cautioned people against any false hope of realizing the dream of future just state based on freedom and equality in the immediate future.<sup>4</sup> He also remarked: "I will not insult commonsense by insisting on the doctrine of the natural equality of man. The question is not concerning its desirableness,, but its practicability: so far as it is practicable, it is desirable."<sup>5</sup>

Like a practical political thinker Shelley also believed that the proper public opinion had to be created before a demand for universal adult franchise could be included in a political programme. In *A Proposal for putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom*, he wrote : "With respect to universal suffrage, I confess I consider its adoption in the present unprepared state of public knowledge and feeling a measure fraught with peril."<sup>6</sup> Shelley also hated violence and bloodshed. Like Tolstoy and Mahatma Gandhi he stressed the need of non-violent non-resistance. In a letter of November 20, 1816, to Lord Byron, Shelley reiterated his hope that if reform came, it would be gradual and without bloodshed. In *The Masque of Anarchy*, he exhorts people to rise against the tyrants, but at the same time he also asks them to remain non-violent :

"Stand ye calm and resolute,  
Like a forest close and mute,  
With folded arms, and looks which are  
Weapons of an unvanquished war." (p.345)

In *The Revolt of Islam* also, he preaches the efficacy of love in winning over cruelty :

"If blood be shed, 'tis but a change and choice  
Of bonds -- from slavery to cowardice,  
A wretched fall ! -- uplift thy charmed voice,  
Pour on those evil men the love that lies  
Hovering within those spirit -- soothing eyes." (p.89)

He prefers freedom acquired through love :

And I among them, went in joy -- a nation  
Made free by love. (p.93)

Shelley was thus not a visionary but an optimist who in spite of all depression and disillusionment never lost the hope that the day was to come when man would be free and a just social order based on freedom, equality and justice for humanity would emerge :

Be thou my lips to awakened earth  
The trumpet of prophecy ! O Wind,  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind ? (p.363)

## II

No poet has been more fiercely argued about, for and against, as Shelley. He has been violently denigrated, contemptuously ignored, and praised -- almost canonised -- quite apart from his poetry as philosopher and saint. The terms used for him in affection or reproach were "Ariel", "the snake", "mad Shelley", "atheist", and "the devil". An old Italian boatman thought he was like Jesus Christ, and Bernard Shaw, who did not care much for poetry, found him an acute reasoner on politics and sociology.<sup>7</sup> Mary Shelley who knew her husband better than any one else wrote in a note to *Queen Mab* about his great love for men and devotion to the cause of their freedom:

He was animated to greater zeal by compassion for his fellow creatures. His sympathy was excited by the misery with which the world is burning. He witnessed the sufferings of the poor, and was aware of the evils of ignorance. He desired to induce every rich man to despoil himself of superfluity, and to create a brotherhood of property and service, and was ready to be the first to lay down the advantages of his birth.... He saw, in a fervent call on his fellow-creatures to share alike the blessings of the creation, to love and serve each other, the noblest work that life and time permitted him.<sup>8</sup>

Shelley had the first taste of the cruelty of the world when at the age of ten he went to study as a boarder at Sion House. To his astonishment and rage, the boys bullied him. At Eton he found the life still more miserable. Fagging by students and flogging by teachers were common features there. Students called him "the mad Shelley" and

they organized a "Shelley-baiting society". Their savage attack would throw him into a passion of fury, but they could not crush him. His will was unbreakable. Dr. Keate, the headmaster of Eton, was as cruel as students. He gives a vision of his school days in the "Dedication" of *The Revolt of Islam* :

...a fresh May-dawn it was  
 When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,  
 And wept. I knew not why; until there rose  
 From the near schoolroom voices, that, alas,  
 Were but one echo from a world of woes --  
 The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and foes. (p.54)

Soon his boy's mind will begin to cherish the longing to combat it by all means in his power :

I will be wise  
 And just, and free, and mild, if in n.e lies  
 Such power; for I grow weary to behold  
 The selfish and the strong still tyrannise  
 Without reproach or check. (p.55)

Shelley felt deep sympathy for the sufferings of the fellow human beings both in their personal and public life. His wish that no living thing should suffer pain made him elope with and marry Harriet Westbrook, a friend of his sisters at the school, to rescue her from the tyranny of her crude father. Ten years after Shelley was again drawn towards another damsel in distress, beautiful Emilia Viviani, who was confined by her mother in a convent, a circumstance quite enough by itself to arouse Shelley's indignation and sympathy as expressed in his adoration for her in *Epipsychidion*. During his Oxford stay he fought for the cause of freedom of speech and pleaded the case of Peter Finnerty, the journalist imprisoned by the government for libel and not allowed to prove the truth of the charges for which he was prosecuted. He praised Leigh Hunt and his brother for their bold criticism of the Government tyranny and suggested to them the project of forming a well-organised society to uphold the cause of the sufferers and resist the coalition of the enemies of liberty. It was the same love for men and justice to them that impelled Shelley to write *Adonais*, the elegy on the death of Keats who, he believed, died early because of the unjust attack on his poems by the Reviewers belonging to the politically conservative camp. The suffering of any living creature was unendurable to Shelley's acutely emotional and humanitarian soul.

As a mere boy of nineteen Shelley threw himself into the cause of Irish freedom and called upon the Irish to unite in the cause of national independence and offer passive resistance against their rulers. In *An Address to the Irish People*, he wrote : "Are you slaves, or are you men? If slaves, then crouch to the rod and lick the feet of your oppressors; glory in your shame; it will become you, if brutes, to act according to your nature. But you are men; a real man is free, so far as circumstances will permit him. Then firmly and quietly resist."<sup>9</sup> Shelley taught the poor people of Ireland and England that their interests were the same. The British people gained nothing from colonial wars. Opposing the British colonial conquest of India, he wrote :

Is war necessary to your happiness and safety ? The interests of the poor gain nothing from the wealth or extension of boundaries; they gain nothing from glory, a word that has often served as a cloak to the ambition or avarice of statesmen. The barren victories of Spain, gained on behalf of a bigoted and tyrannical government, are nothing to them. The conquest in India, by which England has gained glory, but a glory which is not more honourable than that of Bonaparte, are nothing to them. The poor purchase this glory and this wealth at the expense of their blood and labour and happiness and virtue. They die in battle for this infernal cause.<sup>10</sup>

Very few people saw so clearly through the wickedness of the colonial subjugation of other countries by imperialists.

Shelley did not only condemn the English support to "the barren victories of Spain", gained on behalf of a bigoted and tyrannical government, but also supported the Greek people's struggle for independence from the Turks and hoped for the revolution in Germany against the oppressors. He advocated the unity of all the oppressed people against their oppressors. In the "Preface" to *Hellas*, a drama portraying the struggle of the Greeks for their liberation from the Turks, he criticized in eloquent words the English rulers for sympathising with the Turkish tyrant.<sup>11</sup>

Shelley's humanism was not confined only to European countries; he looked forward to the regeneration of the peoples of Asia also : "The great monarchies of Asia cannot, let us confidently hope, remain unshaken by the earthquake which shatters to dust the 'mountainous strongholds' of the tyrants of the western world."<sup>12</sup> Expressing his approval of the Wahabi movement of the Muslims, he wrote : "In Syria and Arabia the spirit of human intellect has roused a sect of people

called Wahabees, who maintain the unity of God, and the equality of man, and their enthusiasm must go on 'conquering and to conquer' even if it must be repressed in its present shape."<sup>13</sup>

Shelley was opposed to British colonialism in India. He considered complete political and social freedom of India necessary for the full development of its culture. He wanted Indian society to undergo healthy influence under the doctrines of equality and human brotherhood of Christ through British missionaries ; but otherwise he wished India to be free to develop its own art and literature:

Many native Indians have acquired, it is said, a competent knowledge in the arts and philosophy of Europe, and Locke and Hume and Rousseau are familiarly talked of in Brahmanical society. But the thing to be sought is that they, as they would if they were free, attain to a system of arts and literature of their own.<sup>14</sup>

No other English poet had such a historical and international outlook on the world situation of his times as Shelley had.

### III

Shelley's radical humanism was based on his clear, sound, rational, and well-reasoned philosophical and political thinking. He derived his ideas from the extraordinary range of his reading. Intellectually he was a great prodigy and had read and assimilated much in the fields of poetry, history, science and philosophy. He devoted himself to the incessant study of the torchbearers of hope for mankind, the poets, scientists and philosophers from Plato to Humphrey Davy and Sir William Drummond. He cites the exertions made by philosophers like Plato, Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau, Godwin, Spinoza, Bentham, Adam Smith, Shaftsbury, Butler, Paine and their other disciples in favour of the oppressed and deluded humanity. He also refers to the great contribution made by world poets and artists for the moral and spiritual upliftment of human life :

But it exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world if neither Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Calderon, Bacon, nor Milton had ever existed; if Raphael and Michael Angelo had never been born, if the Hebrew poetry had never been translated; if a revival of the study of Greek literature had never taken place; if no monument of ancient sculpture had been handed down to us; and if the poetry of the religion of the ancient world had been extinguished together with its belief.<sup>15</sup>

Shelley was most of all concerned with the evils from which man suffers, political and social evils and the evils of individual selfishness. His views on all forms and systems of human activity -- religious, ethical, social, political, economic and literary -- were oriented by his deep concern for the welfare of mankind. He had little interest in abstract learning of any kind; what he cared for was how far new ideals or discovery contributed to the happiness of man. With this objective in view he tried to reach a stable and consistent belief from diverse and contradictory ingredients of his complex philosophical interests -- science, materialism, humanitarianism, idealism and mysticism.

In his religious views Shelley never was Christian but he had a profound admiration for the character and social teachings of Jesus. In *An Address to The Irish People*, he said: "all religions are good which make man good."<sup>16</sup> He was opposed to Christianity because instead of making men good, it subjected them to cruelty. In this connection, he referred to bloody wars fostered by Christianity and to the priestcraft's unholy alliance with kings and dictators to keep the people in ignorance and subjection. In *An Address to the Irish People*, he said: "anything short of unlimited toleration and complete charity with all men, on which you will recollect Jesus Christ principally insisted, is wrong."<sup>17</sup> In his *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists*, Shelley maintained that a union of church and state was "contrary to the principles and practice of Jesus, contrary to the equality which he fruitlessly endeavoured to teach mankind."<sup>18</sup> In an important Note to the line "I will beget a son" in *Queen Mab*, he wrote that Jesus "stands in the foremost list of those true heroes who have died in the glorious martyrdom of liberty and have braved torture, contempt, and poverty in the cause of suffering humanity."<sup>19</sup> He, however, did not think that Jesus was divine, superhuman or supernatural, and hence did not believe in the miraculous birth or death or mission of Jesus. In his view, Christianity in its infancy was based upon the teachings of Jesus, which were primarily socialistic and humanitarian. These doctrines were later distorted by his disciples for their own selfish and evil purposes.

Shelley attributed great importance to moral values in human life and paid special attention to the ethical basis of the state, the church and social customs such as matrimony. He believed the inculcation of sound moral principles to be the highest good to which any man could

aspire. Poetry, in his view, should be subordinate to the inculcated moral and "a pleasing vehicle for useful and momentous instruction."<sup>20</sup> Shelley considered 'love' to be the great secret of morals and 'imagination' to be their great instrument, for the 'sympathy' aroused by it is the mainspring to action. In *A Defence of Poetry*, he wrote : "A man to be greatly good must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own."<sup>21</sup> For Shelley the key stones of all righteous living are love, sympathy, justice, benevolence, virtue, and disinterested motives. He considered marriage to be very despotic and hateful. Later, however, he felt that until considerable improvement in morals was brought about, it would be advisable to maintain the institution of matrimony. He, however, advocated liberal divorce laws for where love was flown, it would be the vilest tyranny to compel two people to remain united.

Shelley was very enthusiastic about politics. He maintained that politics and morals should be integrated, for a government could rise no higher than the morals of a nation. His greatest concern was how the state could best contribute to the happiness of the people as whole. He was a determined republican and felt deeply concerned about the corruption everywhere evident in the existing English government. He hated the government which could not look after the welfare of its people. In *An Address to the Irish People*, he remarked :

The benefit of the governed is the origin and meaning of government.... The goodness of government consists in the happiness of the governed.... Government is an evil; it is only the thoughtlessness and vices of men that make it a necessary evil. When all men are good and wise, government will of itself decay.<sup>22</sup>

Emphasizing the happiness of people as the necessary and fundamental principle of government, he again wrote in *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists* :

Man becomes a subject of government, not that he may be in a better state than that of unorganized society. The strength of government is the happiness of the governed. All government existing for the happiness of others is just only so far as it exists by their consent and useful only so far as it operates to their well being. Constitution is to government what government is to law.<sup>23</sup>

Shelley believed in a sane and peaceful way to reform the government before a revolution overthrew the whole structure. In *An Address to the Irish People*, he remarked : "In no case employ violence; the

way to liberty and happiness is never to transgress the rules of virtue and justice. Liberty and happiness are founded upon virtue and justice."<sup>24</sup> He advised the method of peaceful resistance and of slow, gradual reform. The people were, however, to be educated in the ways of proper political action through the societies similar to those that existed in America and France before revolutions there. Shelley wanted to limit suffrage also until the electorate were better educated politically. He, however, warned the government not to compel people to revolt to establish a truly representative assembly in defiance of the existing government, for it might lead to a bloody revolution. The most significant fact about the politics of this radical reformer is its utter practicality.

Shelley considered inequality to be the main cause of evils in society. Like Rousseau he believed that all men were born equal but the selfish and designing men had destroyed that equality. In a letter of July 25, 1811, Shelley wrote to Miss Hitchener : "No one has yet been found resolute enough in dogmatizing to deny that Nature made man equal, that society has destroyed this equality is truth not more incontrovertible."<sup>25</sup> He further added :

The noble has too much, therefore, he is wretched and wicked, the peasant has too little.... Are not then the consequences the same from causes which nothing but equality can annihilate.<sup>26</sup>

Shelley's views on political economy were very sound. In the 'Notes' to *Queen Mab*, he wrote: "There is no real wealth but the labour of man." Shelley was then only eighteen, younger than the Marx of the *Communist Manifesto*. In class society, he pointed out, labour falls to the lot of the people and all the advantages of leisure are enjoyed by men of property. He therefore placed before the people the prospect of a society where labour and leisure would be shared by all the members of the society.<sup>27</sup> Shelley was opposed to property as possessed by feudal aristocracy, for it does not acquire it by its labour or skill. He pointed out how vast masses of property were accumulated by the ruling class in England :

They were either grants from the feudal sovereigns whose right to what they granted was founded upon conquest or oppression, both a denial of all right or they were the lands of the ancient Catholic clergy which according to the most acknowledged principles of public justice, reverted to the nation at their suppression, or they were the products of patents and monopolies, an exercise of sovereignty most pernicious that did direct violence to the interests of a commercial nation; or in later times such property has been accumulated by

dishonourable cunning and the taking advantage of a fictitious paper currency to obtain an unfair power over labour and fruits of labour.<sup>28</sup>

Shelley was also not ignorant about the exploitation of the labour class by the newly emerging commercial-cum-industrial aristocracy as different from the landowning aristocracy : "The consequences of this transaction have been the establishment of a new aristocracy, which has its basis in fraud as the old one has its basis in force."<sup>29</sup> The domestic affections of this class were weak and the relations with others were based on selfish motives. Owing to the prominence of this double aristocracy, the labour class is exploited very inhumanely : "They eat less bread, wear worse clothes, are more ignorant, immoral, miserable, and desperate."<sup>30</sup> Very few scholars of political economy have given such a brilliant analysis of property owned by different classes. In his *Essay on Christianity*, Shelley advocated Jesus's socialistic scheme for the distribution of wealth.<sup>31</sup>

Shelley's views on poetry were also characterized by his humanism. Though he described didactic poetry as his "abhorrence", yet he believed that poetry should have a moral foundation. In the Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, he pointed out that a poet "would only awaken the feelings, so that the reader should see the beauty of true virtue."<sup>32</sup> Since poetry awakens our sense of love and beauty, and since "the great secret of morals is love...and since the great instrument of moral good is the imagination"<sup>33</sup> of which poetry is the expression, the poets become great moral leaders, "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Love or sympathy for one's fellows was, for Shelley, the basis of moral life, and imagination the civilizing force in society.

#### IV

Shelley's radical humanism, as reflected in his prose writings, is also the dominant theme of his poetry. *Queen Mab* (1813), which Shelley wrote at the age of eighteen, expresses his social and political ideals with gusto and enthusiasm natural to a young man. The poem is dedicated to Harriet

Whose eyes have I gazed fondly on,  
And loved mankind the more. (p.1)

The fairy Queen Mab shows to the spirit of the maiden Ianthe the past history of the world and tells her how people became miserable :

Once peace and freedom blest  
 The cultivated plain :  
 But wealth, the curse of man,  
 Blighted the bud of its prosperity:  
 Virtue and wisdom, truth and liberty  
 Fled, to return not until men shall know  
 That they alone can give the bliss  
 Worthy a soul that chains  
 Its kindred with eternity. (p.7)

Describing how kings acquired power and wealth, she remarks :

Whence thinkest thou, kings and parasites arose ?  
 Whence that unnatural line of drones, who heap  
 Toil and unvanquishable penury  
 On those who build their palaces, and bring  
 Their daily bread ? -- From vice, black loathsome vice,  
 From rapine, madness, treachery, and wrong  
 From all that genders misery, and makes  
 Of earth this thorny wilderness; from lust  
 Revenge and murder. (p.10)

Then Queen Mab inveighs against kings, statesmen and priests for bringing misery to people and perpetuating war :

Kings, priests and statesmen blast the human flower  
 Even in its tender bud; their influence darts  
 Like subtle poison through the bloodless veins  
 Of desolate society....  
 War is the statesman's game, the priest's delight. (pp.13-4)

The Fairy Queen, however, visualizes the state of regenerate world, when reason's voice will grow powerful and kingly glare will lose its power to dazzle :

-- And when reason's voice  
 Loud as the voice of nature, shall have waked  
 The nations; and mankind perceive that vice  
 Is discord, war, and misery; that virtue  
 Is peace, and happiness, and harmony;  
 When man's maturer nature shall disdain,  
 The playthings of its childhood; -- kingly glare  
 will lose its power to dazzle; its authority  
 Will silently pass by; (p.10)

The earth will then become "paradise of peace":

O happy Earth ! reality of Heaven ! (p.32)

In *Alastor : Or, The Spirit of Solitude* (1810), Shelley, described as "visionary" by the misguided critics, condemns self-centred ideal-

ism. In its Preface, Shelley Writes :

Those who love not their fellow-beings, live unfruitful lives, and prepare for their old age a miserable grave. (p.37)

The *Revolt of Islam* (1818) was written at a time when the reaction that followed the fall of Napoleon had brought much misery among the poorer classes, and had stirred Shelley's revolutionary instincts. In the "Preface" to the poem Shelley wrote that it was written with a view to "kindling within the bosoms of my readers, a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind."<sup>34</sup> It is a symbolic tale, "illustrating", in Shelley's own words, "the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence and devoted to the love of mankind", and "its impatience at all the oppressions that are done under the sun."<sup>35</sup> In this poem Shelley, pleading for the freedom of women, writes :

"Can man be free if woman be a slave ?" (p.76)

For him "justice" is guided by love and not by revenge or terror:

--- the chastened will  
Of virtue sees that justice is the light  
Of love, and not revenge, and terror and despite (p.97)

When people are free,

Our toil from thought all glorious forms shall cull,  
To make this earth, our home, more beautiful,  
And Science, and her sister Poesy,  
Shall clothe in light the fields and cities of the free ! (p.102)

The startling cry of liberty, "like earth's own voice lifted unconquerably" (p.129), makes the tyrants and oppressors tremble:

The Princes and the Priests were pale with terror;  
The monstrous faith wherewith they ruled mankind  
Fell, like a shaft loosed by the bowman's error. (p.140)

And

.... Man alone  
Remains, whose will has power when all beside is gone. (p.125)

In the lyrical drama, *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), Shelley describes how Prometheus, the champion of mankind, is chained to a

rock and subjected to perpetual torture. He is "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends."<sup>36</sup> Characterized by "courage, majesty, and a firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, and exempt from the taints of ambition, envy and revenge",<sup>37</sup> instinct also with the spirit of love, he remains unyielding to the threats of Jupiter, the spirit of evil and hate. He is supported by earth his mother, and thought of Asia, his bride, the spirit of Nature. Demogorgon, the Primal Power of the world, drives Jupiter from his throne and Prometheus is released by Hercules, typifying strength. The reign of love follows thereafter. At the end of the drama Shelley makes through Demogorgon the prophetic assurance that mankind can achieve the good life only by the wedding of knowledge and love or human sympathy :

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite ;  
 To forgive wrongs darker than death for night;  
 To defy power, which seems omnipotent ;  
 To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates  
 From its own wreck the thing it contemplates  
 Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;  
 This, like the glory, Titan ! is to be  
 Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
 This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory ! (p.205)

*The Cenci* (1819) is the drama depicting a daughter's revolt against a wicked and cruel father. It shows how after a life of wickedness and debauchery Count Francesco Cenci, the head of one of the noblest and richest families in Rome, conceives an implacable hatred against his children, taking the form of an incestuous passion towards one daughter Beatrice. Beatrice, after vain attempts to escape from her miserable situation, plots with her step-mother Lucretia and her brother Bernardo, the murder of their common tyrant. It is done by two hired assassins. On the plot being disclosed Beatrice, her step-mother, and the brother are executed by the order of the Pope in spite of the confession made by them of their lamentable tale. Shelley exposes the hollowness of the religion which considers the most atrocious villain Count Cenci the rigidly devout without any shock to established faith. Describing power as a cruel beast Beatrice remarks:

She fears that power is as a beast which grasps  
 And loosens not; a snake whose loci transmutes  
 All things to guilt, which is its nutriment. (p.239)

She knows that man is wicked :

Cruel, cold, formal man; righteous in words  
In deeds a Cain. (p.249)

Another drama of Shelley, *Hellas* (1822), is inspired by the Greek proclamation of independence, followed by the war of liberation from the rule of the Turkish tyrants. It is full of his admiration for Greece which to him was the home of freedom and the fountain-head of European civilization. Condemning the tyrants Shelley says :

Let the tyrants rule the desert they have made;  
Let the free possess the paradise they claim;  
Be the fortune of our fierce oppressors weighed  
With our ruin, our resistance, and our name ! (p.269)

With the freedom of Greece

The world's great age begins anew,  
The golden years return.  
The earth doth like a snake renew  
Her winter weeds outworn :  
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam  
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream. (p.270)

In the concluding lines of the drama, the poet expresses his sincere desire that hatred and violence may cease forever.

Shelley wrote *The Mask of Anarchy* to express his indignation at the brutal attack on the workers at Manchester. The cruel incident came to be known as Manchester Massacre. Shelley in this poem exhorts people to revolt against the tyrants :

"Rise, like lions after slumber,  
In unvanquishable number,  
Shake your chains to earth like dew,  
Which in sleep had fallen on you :  
Ye are many, they are few." (p.343)

He, however, asks the insurgents to remain non-violent and non-resistant, for their calm and peaceful attitude will make the cruel marauders feel ashamed of themselves :

"Then they will return with shame,  
To the place from which they came,  
And the blood thus shed will speak  
In hot blushes on their cheek." (p.346)

He wants some place in England for the fearless and the free :

"Let a great assembly be  
Of the fearless and the free,

On some spot of English proud  
Where the plains stretch wide around." (p.345)

In the song "To The Men of England", Shelley rouses the workmen of England not to allow the rich to appropriate the fruits of their labour :

Sow seed, -- but let no tyrant reap;  
Find wealth -- let no imposter heap;  
Weave robes, -- let not the idle wear;  
Forge arms, -- in your defence to bear. (p.359)

In "Ode to Liberty", Shelley traces the history of social evolution from the time when there was war among birds and beasts and tyranny among men. Then Athens arose. In Time's fleeting river its image trembles but it cannot die. The poetry of Greece sings of the message of freedom to Shelley:

"The voices of thy bards and sages thunder  
With an earth awakening blast  
Through the caverns of the past;  
Religion veils her eyes; Oppression shrinks aghast." (p.377)

Shelley's anger against the British rulers, who had deprived him of his children, found a passionate and eloquent expression in the poem addressed to William Shelley :

Fear not the tyrants will rule forever,  
Or the priests of the evil faith;  
They stand on the brink of that raging river,  
Whose waves they have tainted with death  
It is fed from the depth of a thousand dells,  
Around them it foams and rages and swells;  
And their swords and their sceptres I floating see,  
Like wrecks on the surge of eternity.

In "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" Shelley remarks how he "vowed" to dedicate his powers to Intellectual Beauty or literary pursuits born of it and how he kept the vow hoping that it would help to free the world from slavery :

They know that never joy illumined my brow  
Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free  
The world from its dark slavery, (p.291)

He worshipped Intellectual Beauty and

... every form containing thee,  
Whom Spirit fair, thy spells did bind

To fear himself, and love all mankind. (pp.290-91)

In a word, the hatred of slavery and the love of all mankind have been the key-notes of Shelley's every thought and deed.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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<sup>2</sup>P. B. Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry", *Shelley's Prose or the Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. David Lee Clark (Albuquerque : The University of New Mexico Press, 1954), p.297.

<sup>3</sup>Percy Bysshe Shelley, "To A Skylark", *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London : Ward, Lock & Co. Limited, n.d.), p.375. All subsequent references to Shelley's poems are from this edition of his poetical works.

<sup>4</sup>*Shelley's Prose or the Trumpet of a Prophecy*, pp.50-1.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Ram Bilas Sharma, *Studies in Nineteenth Century English Poetry* (Agra: Pustak Bhavan, 1961), p.116.

<sup>6</sup>*Shelley's Prose*, p.161.

<sup>7</sup>Aubrey De Selincourt, *Six Great Poets* (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1960), p.126.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in Ram Bilas Sharma, pp.114-15.

<sup>9</sup>*Shelley's Prose*, p.54.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p.55.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.332-33.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p.238.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p.239.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p.238.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.292-93.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p.63.

<sup>19</sup>Quoted in David Lee Clark, "Introduction", *Shelley's Prose or the Trumpet of a Prophecy*, p.14.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted by Carl Grabo from Shelley's Letter of June 6, 1811 to Elizabeth Hitchener in *The Magic Plant : The Growth of Shelley's Thought* (Chapel Hill : The University of North Carolina, 1936), p.42.

<sup>21</sup>*Shelley's Prose*, p.283.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.48 & 51.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p.64.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>25</sup>Quoted by Carl Grabo from Shelley's letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, dated 25 July, 1811 in *The Magic Plant*, p.46.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>Quoted in Ram Bilas Sharma, p.115.

<sup>28</sup>*Shelley's Prose*, p.251.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p.244.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p.246.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p.208.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p.315.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.282-83.

<sup>34</sup>*The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p.49.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p.159.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

# THE ONTOLOGY OF BEAUTY, TRUTH AND LIFE : A READING OF KEATS' "ODE ON A GRECIAN URN"

Bhagwat S. Goyal

Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" engages itself in an ontological discourse on the unified interrelationships between Beauty, Truth and Life. The law of being of Beauty expresses itself as the law of being of Truth, while each individually and as a unified entity becomes the law of Life's being. Keats, whose almost hedonistic passion for the intensities of life and art earned for him sobriquets like "a seer of the fleshly school of poetry" and "a sensuous mystic", was acutely aware of the temporal materiality and material temporality of life's physical pleasures and of the eternal spirituality and spiritual eternity of man's imaginative and aesthetic experience as revealed in art. He was as much a joyous singer of life as a seer of art. His acute consciousness of the brevity and imperfection of man's physical desires and dreams made him look for the eternal pleasures of creative imagination that not only overcame life's imperfections as revealed in its gross physicality but also made him a master of a spiritual world that was far superior in the quality of enjoyment. This is nowhere better expressed than in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn". A critically explicatory commentary is given below to substantiate this argument.

The poet views a Grecian Urn as a ravishing piece of sculptured beauty, full of a unique, aesthetic life. The Urn evokes in him paradoxical feelings, giving rise to an orchestration of contradictory emotions. She looks like an 'unravished bride' in her pristine beauty. She is married to 'quietness' but her groom has not yet ravished or possessed her, suggesting that she has not been reduced completely to a state of muteness or absolute silence of inviolate solitude. On the other hand, the bride has an eloquence which makes her a historian of the legendary Greek past. As a piece of marble she is inanimate, but the marble has been turned into a piece of glorious art by the unknown Greek artist. The artistic imagination has conferred upon the marble Urn a kind of life full of vivid action. The Urn

cannot breathe itself, but the artist has breathed into it a life that is beyond the chilling confines of mortality.

From the human association of the Urn as a bride, the poet pictures her as a 'foster child' of 'silence and slow time.' She is so called because Time has not yet left its corrosive marks on it. The Urn is still undamaged. The thought of Time makes the poet think of the Urn as an 'historian'. As a 'Sylvan historian,' the Urn tells us of the Greek past with its manifold myths and legends. History is also the art of story telling. But the Urn tells us stories of the Greek past through pictures and we know that visual stories are more fascinating than the verbal ones. That is why the poet feels that the Urn 'can' express 'A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme.' The 'flowery tale' makes the poet curious to know about the 'contents' of this pictorial history. The statements about the human status of the Urn yield place to a series of questions. What legend of the Greek civilization 'haunts' this Sylvan historian within its fringe of leaves? The legend may have as its subject-matter 'deities' or 'mortals' or 'both'. The earlier thought-current of 'Time' and 'History' flows naturally into the realms of mortality and immortality, which too are time-bound and time-free concepts. What is the location for the enactment of the legend -- is it Tempe, the beautiful valley in Thessaly, or the valley of Arcadia famed in pastoral poetry?

The poet now wants a closer scrutiny of the materials of history. "What men or gods are these?", he wants to know. As he has a clearer view of the legend, he finds it representing various facets of the Greek social life. He discovers that like the chaste Urn-bride, the maidens carved on it are also coy, shy and unwilling to be kissed. But the young men pursuing them are engaged in a hot chase. There seems to be a love battle, going on between the Dionysian men and Diana-like maidens. These love games are being played out to the music of 'pipes and timbrels,' ultimately leading to the excitement of 'wild ecstasy.'

The ecstatic scenes of love-pursuit and the musical notes of pipes and timbrels lead the poet to meditate on the nature and medium of music. "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Are sweeter." Musical notes are based on the fragmentation of time between sounds and silences. The temporal rhythm of music has an

enchancing sweetness. But the toneless music created by our imagination is far sweeter. Just as the silent music of pictorial history is sweeter than the audible music of "our rhyme", the ever-fresh music conceived by our imagination is sweeter than the sweetest music actually heard by us. The poet, therefore, asks the 'soft pipes' to 'play on', but not to "the sensual ear," because it may actually result in the degradation of their spiritual quality just as the chaste maidens' acceptance of sensual love may degrade them physically. Let the pipes play "to the spirit ditties of no tone." This soundless music of the imagination will be more dear to the listener's spirit.

The poet begins to meditate further on the relationship between the spiritual and the physical, the immortal and the mortal. The "Fair Youth" playing pipes beneath the trees cannot leave his song, "nor ever can those trees be bare." The handsome young musician has been caught for ever in the act of playing music. Similarly, the trees beneath which he is playing his music will never shed their leaves. They are beyond the laws of nature. The bold lover hotly pursuing his shy beloved shall never be able to kiss her in spite of all his boldness, however close to his goal he may be. The poet, however, feels inclined to console the grieving, disappointed lover. He tells him that he should be grateful for the unfading beauty of his beloved, because she too is beyond the confines of time. She will retain her beauty, the unfading music of her face, though the lover would not be able to enjoy the bliss of physical fulfilment of love. His unfulfilled love, however, will keep him in a state of perpetual willingness to love her, and his beloved in a state of perpetual beauty.

Dwelling on the same ideas, the poet continues to build a series of exclamatory expressions in the third stanza, which is the central stanza or act in this five-act drama. Speaking of the trees that can never be bare, he says: "Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed/your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu." The iteration of the word 'happy' suggests the imagined joy of the leaves at their ever-green status in the world of art. As objects of art the green branches evoke in the viewers 'happy' thoughts, because they will never bid adieu to the spring. They act as symbols of happiness in contrast to the imagined sadness of the autumnal trees. Similarly, the "Fair Youth" that cannot leave his song, is a "happy melodist, unwearied;/For ever piping songs for ever new." This music-maker will never tire of

his music and will continue to pipe songs that are ever fresh and ever new because he is not playing ditties to the 'sensual ear' but 'to the spirit'.

In the same vein, the poet dwells upon the quality of love shared by the lovers carved on the Urn. The long iteration of the word 'happy' in "More happy love; more happy, happy love!" suggests the poet's concern with the delicate and even fragile relationship between love and happiness and their relative value in life and in the imaginative realms of art. The love of the lovers carved on the Urn is thrice happier than that of the lovers in real life because it is "For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,/For ever panting and for ever young." In what sense is this love "warm," "panting" and "young" while the lovers themselves are the eternal prisoners of cold marble? Since these lovers represent the unfulfilled love like that of an "unravished bride", they suggest a quality of love that is beyond the limits of gross physicality. Love as a spiritual feeling, as a finer product of creative imagination, is found by the poet to be superior to gross, earthly love. The love of the lovers on the Urn is far above "All breathing human passion" and clearly belongs to the ethereal realms of spirituality and divinity. The consummation of bodily love "leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,/ A burning forehead, and a parching tongue." The gross sensuality and feverish excitement involved in the merging of the bodies of lovers is seen here as something leading to the debasement of the spiritual quality of love.

In the fourth stanza, the poet's eyes take in another scene carved on the Urn-- the scene of the preparations for a ritual sacrifice. In keeping with the spiritual and imaginative quality of unheard melodies and unfulfilled love of the earlier scenes, the present scene takes us to the as yet unenacted scene of a religious ritual involving a holy sacrifice. The poet is once again unsure about the identity of the participants in the sacrifice and therefore he once more uses the interrogative mode. The poet asks: "To what green altar, o mysterious priest,/Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,/And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?" It is an unknown altar of turf to which an unknown priest is leading an unwilling heifer. The heifer's 'silken' sides are decorated with garlands because he is going to be offered as a sacrifice to the gods and goddesses. But the heifer is as much unwilling to be sacrificed at the holy altar as the maidens of

the first stanza are unwilling to be sacrificed at the altar of love.

The setting of the earlier scenes was imagined by the poet to be either the valley of Thessaly or Arcadia. The poet tries to identify the setting for this religious ritual also: "What little town by river or sea-shore, / or mountain-built with peaceful citadel / Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?" The poet imagines the small town that has been emptied of its folk on this sacred morning. The streets of this little town will always remain silent and desolate, because the processionists in the holy ritual will never return to them and nobody will be able to tell the reason why the little town wears a desolate look. Just as the Urn as an object of art had eternized the happy boughs, happy melodist and happy lover, it has also eternized emptiness. If art confers immortality on the 'presences', it also perpetuates 'absences'. If our creative imagination confers a higher spiritual status on unravished brides, unkissed maidens, unheard melodies, unfalling leaves and unfading youth, what does it do to the unsacrificed heifer and unpeopled town? The imagined desolation of the little town is a counterpart to the invisible communal gathering at the scene of ritual sacrifice. However, the thought that the poet appears to miss here is precisely what he has been emphasizing so far. The earlier figures of maidens, melodist, lovers and branches of trees have been frozen in a posture of timelessness; they are the prisoners of unchanging history. Similarly, the heifer should deem itself lucky that though it is being led to the scene of sacrifice, it will never be sacrificed actually. It will continue to make its complaint to the heavens and remain dressed for the sacrificial offering. But the poet does not seem to think of the fate of the heifer, as he does of the empty little town. If the physical fulfilment is a sign of gross satiety, what spiritual import is there in the sparing of the life of the heifer? The poet may be suggesting that the unenacted sacrifice may be spiritually more uplifting than the actual slaughter of an innocent animal, whatever the sacred or pious associations with the act of brutality. The 'unsacrificed' heifer thus belongs to the same category to which the earlier personages belong-- the unravished bride, the unkissed maidens, the unheard melodies, the unfalling leaves, and the unfading youth, etc. It may be significant to note here that the heifer is also dressed like a bride.

From the minute details of the Urn, visible and invisible, the

poet's attention once again focusses on the Urn in its totality. This is the final act of this five-act drama. The human associations of the Urn, like bride, foster-child and historian, now give place to it as a piece of sculpture, as a work of art. Now it is an "Attic shape" and "Fair attitude". The fact that the Urn represents aspects of Athenian culture places it in a definite historical and socio-cultural milieu. The Urn in its resemblance to feminine form represents the classical model of art developed in ancient Greece. It has a striking grace in its formal appearance. Its body reveals the carvings of 'men and maidens' in the dense medium of marble. Besides forest branches, the poet also sees trodden weed which did not figure earlier. The weed is trodden obviously by the men and maidens engaged in 'mad pursuit' and 'wild ecstasy.' The "unravished bride of quietness," though a "silent form", is provocative enough to "tease us out of thought/As doth eternity." It suggests that 'thought' or human logic is unable to comprehend the meaning of the Urn. It is unable to break the code of the 'silent form' or force her to reveal her inner, virginal mystery. The Urn may perhaps respond only to sensation or imaginative comprehension.

The poet has thus far been contemplating only the joys of eternity in the realm of art. But now the same eternity becomes a big mark of interrogation as it presents insoluble puzzles to the human imagination. In a timebound frame of thinking, it is inconceivable to think of eternity. Though the form of the Urn is silent, its shape is very eloquent and articulate. The unravished bride and sylvan historian now appear to the poet as "cold pastoral." As a historian of the dead past, the Urn appears to be something 'cold' or lifeless. But as an object of art, as a breeding ground of man's creative imagination, it is a "friend to man." The marble men and maidens may themselves be cold, but their enactment of the vital aspects of life like music and love spurs our creative imagination and makes us realize the true significance of the works of art, the value of which lies not in their medium but in their message.

The meaning of "cold pastoral" can be interpreted in another manner also. Keats is perhaps using the epithet "cold" in the same sense in which he has used it in the lines--"Do not all charms fly/At the mere touch of cold philosophy?" Philosophy, which is based on logic, reason and wisdom, is 'cold' in contrast to the 'warmth' of the

sensuous joys and charms of life as well as of the intense imaginative excitement of the poet or the artist. Therefore, 'cold pastoral' may mean "a philosopher of the pastoral life." The poet's imagination beautifully links the "sylvan historian" with the "cold pastoral" making the Urn both a historian and a philosopher of the truth and beauty of Greek culture. Philosophy makes statements by moving from the particular to the general or the universal. The Urn also turns into a philosopher of the pastoral from being a historian of the Greek legends. It speaks for the universal truth of art which is an expression of beauty.

After addressing the Urn as "cold pastoral," the poet again thinks of the mysterious relationship between 'time' and 'eternity', between life and art. The present 'generation' of mortals will be 'wasted' by 'old age', but the Urn as a work of art will continue to exist even in the midst of new generations with new sorrows and anxieties. As a 'friend to man' the unravished bride of quietness will be able to utter the silent message about the relationship between Beauty and Truth, Life and Art, Sensation and Thought and Transitoriness and Permanence. She will become a silent voice of Prophecy: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty. That is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." This somewhat cryptic-sounding message of the Urn can be understood by referring to Keats' views about the identity of Beauty and Truth elsewhere: "What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth, whether it existed before or not,"<sup>1</sup> and "The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth."<sup>2</sup>

Beauty represents the principle of harmony in everything-- harmony of parts within a whole in the matter of form and harmony of ideas and ideals in the matter of substance. Similarly, Truth represents the principle of harmony at the level of human ethics. It does not reside in the abstract realms of some incomprehensible Absolute. Therefore, when Keats equates Beauty with Truth and Truth with Beauty, he holds out the identity of harmonious principles in meaningful life and purposive art. Far from being a so-called 'pure' poet, Keats expresses his awareness that art is not a substitute for life but only an aid to life, "a friend to man." The message of all great art is that Beauty and Truth cannot be separated. Both must co-exist in a state of indivisible unity in life as well as in art. The

beauty of art can make the disagreeables of life evaporate, whereas the limitations of art can be overcome by the vitality of the real-life experience. Art is as much a re-creation and extension of life as life is the source and origin of all art. Life nourishes art, and art enriches life. Beauty and Truth also stand respectively for art and science. While beauty is the essential principle of all art, truth is the fundamental principle and aim of science. The identity of beauty and truth thus suggests the harmonious relationship between art and science.

Finally, this equation of beauty and truth is the only piece of knowledge which man can acquire on this earth. All that the earth-bound man needs to know is the ultimate wisdom contained in the Urn and propagated by it as a representative of both life and art. The message of the Urn is 'friendly' because it is intended to throw light on the riddle of the relationship between life and art, between time and eternity, between beauty and truth, between earth and heaven, between matter and spirit, between poetry and science, between sensation and thought, between fleeting charms and cold philosophy.

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<sup>2</sup>"Letter to George and Thomas Keats, Sunday, 21 December, 1817," *Letters of John Keats*, p.68.

**FROM MYOPIA TO VISION: A STUDY OF  
IRIS MURDOCH'S *THE TIME OF THE ANGELS*  
(1966) AND *HENRY AND CATO* (1976)**

**D.S. Dalal**

This study concentrates on the processes of self-realisation of the individual through exigencies of intense experience. Realisation or vision in the context of the individual almost always has its beginning in myopia -- untutored ego. The total process of self-realisation is circuit-like -- Ego -- Suffering -- Vision. This, at once objective and particular pattern of learning, is perceptible in almost all the twenty two novels of Iris Murdoch. To certain evaluators of Iris Murdoch, including Erich Auerbach, A.S. Byatt, Elizabeth Dipple, Gerald Graff, Linda Kaehl, Richard Todd, and Peter Wolfe, the process of realisation fructifying into vision looks comparable with the very essential form of existentialism. In a strictly specific form it is not; but, in an unrestricted broad way, the creative method of Murdoch seems to come quite close to it. Inasmuch as existentialism is (1) concerned with man's being whose (2) reason is insufficient to understand the mysteries of the universe, and (3) anguish in man's life is a universal phenomenon beside that (4) morality has validity only when there is positive participation, Iris Murdoch's pattern becomes quite comparable with the processes of Existentialism. In essential terms, Murdoch depicts man's dilemma in the total Post-Modernist context as the individual experiences a psychic muddle -- mental inertia, illusion, ego -- in regard to choice of avocation, and profession, as also in interpersonal relationships, followed by anguish on physical and psychic levels until he develops a clear view of things --, and an objective vision.

Inasmuch as certain self-intruding, though not unoften disturbing, phenomena of contemporary life form the immediate basis of Murdoch's total context, it seems essential to comprehend her mode of realism which is rooted in Post- Modernism. In the comprehensive context wherein moral moorings are gone in consequence of the loss of faith, Post-Modernism comprises four characteristic features. First, man, otherwise the crown of creation, has come to be held in the grip of a superficial, trivial, trifling, and cob-webby view of himself. In fact, the Post-Modernist man is left with, to quote Murdoch, "far too shal-

low and flimsy an idea of human personality." Such a changed vision about basic things in life has corrupted man's vision with "hyper-rationality"<sup>2</sup> and hence he is governed by a diaphanous view of himself regarding such significant aspects of life as moral, political, and cultural. Secondly, owing to man's low conception of personality, reality for him is not a given whole but only a point of "respect for the contingent".<sup>3</sup> Broadly, the contemporary man has suffered a general loss of concepts and therefore his inner life is identified through his unwitting acts and choices. As against 'the ironic vision of disconnection and disjunction' as a basic feature of modernism, Post-Modernism derives from a vision of randomness, multiplicity, and contingency. Thirdly, since reality (in terms of man's comprehension) is incomplete, art in the Post-Modernist context is an experience where all human endeavour (including art) is failure. Because of the failure of the traditional interpretive authority of art, the new sensibility refuses to take "art to a set of intellectual abstractions."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, art and literature inhere a deep sense of irony and scepticism toward art's commitment to truth and profundity of meaning. Lastly, after the final breakdown of Christianity so to say, "our religious culture ... is dead",<sup>5</sup> and consequently man has come to be ego-perverted. Objectively seen, the Post-Modernist man is definable as myopic and we are just helpless in solving the problems of human personality. Inasmuch as he is self-centred, it is almost impossible to make him conscious of his limitations and lapses unless he comes to terms with himself through experience and self-realisation.

Though this is the contemporary composite phenomenon, yet the themes of Murdoch's novels are not limited by what is just contemporary. Her themes are universal in their implications even in virtue of the fact that Post-Modernism is "a qualitative rather than a chronological term."<sup>6</sup> The central point of discussion in this article involves the odyssey of the Post-Modernist initially "untranscended beings"<sup>7</sup> who move from a state of illusion, self-contradicting desires and the pursuit of mirages to a realisation of the essential self through an unavoidable struggle and self-discipline. As against elaborate explanatory discussions, Joyce Carol Qates suggests that Plato's myth of the cave is "central to an understanding of Murdoch's essential theme."<sup>8</sup> The myth of the cave and the image of the Sun are detailed out in the *Republic* with reference to the journey of the pilgrim. All this

### Murdoch has explained aesthetically:

The prisoners in the Cave (myopic and ignorant person) are at first chained to face the back wall where all they can see are shadows, cast by a fire which is behind them, of themselves and of objects which are carried between them and the fire. Later they manage to turn round and see the fire and the objects which cast the shadows. Later still they escape from the Cave, see the outside world in the light of the Sun, and finally the Sun itself. The Sun represents the Form of the Good in whose light the truth is seen."<sup>9</sup>

The foregoing preliminary discussion implicitly points to the basic issue in Murdoch's novels how the individual has "that willed tendency to approximate reality through glimmer of light following on disturbing darkness of the cave."<sup>10</sup> In case of *The Time of the Angels*, the onward movement of characters takes effect "through concerns of love, morality, and ideal of goodness."<sup>11</sup> In this novel such concerns find exemplification through characters including Carel Fisher, Marcus, Elizabeth, Muriel, Pattie O Driscoll, Norah Shadox Brown and the Anglican Bishop. Murdoch's central concern is with "the central knot of being"<sup>12</sup>, and therefore necessarily shows the characters confronted with a moral dilemma which is usually caused by the irrationality of faulty ideologies. It is for this peculiarity of character that a Murdochian character has been called "the isolated untranscended man."<sup>13</sup> To a great extent, it seems that a person so caught cannot easily come out of his shell. In the terminology of Gindin, this typical dilemma of a Murdochian Character reflects his "unsuccessful effort to define himself."<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, a character entangled under the net is hard put to discover a solution and succeeds in his efforts to find sustaining values and some positive avenue in life.

*The Time of the Angels* shows how the Post-Modernist man lands himself in cages manufactured in his own favourite smithy. In virtue of this irrational act he gets entangled in the dark world of multiple myopia. Glicksberg pertinently evaluates *The Time of the Angels* as a "devastating picture of the decline of the moral values."<sup>15</sup> Inasmuch as this novel presents problems of good and evil, the elements of illusion and reality appear and continue in a cloaked form till the moment of disillusionment arrives. Carel Fisher, though a rector, is an arch deceiver. He is a big bluffer and a masterly manipulator. He seeks to befool everyone around by "The deception of appearance,"<sup>16</sup> claiming to be God, though in reality he has fallen a prey to the forces of darkness. By creating a make-believe world around him, Carel misuses

Pattie O' Driscoll, a faith-loving black servant girl. Pattie wants redemption and Carel makes a false promise to that effect only if she believes and behaves the way he suggests. In the same way, he misuses his illegitimate daughter Elizabeth for his fantasy game. Pattie, as Carel avers, turns into his "dark angel"<sup>17</sup> and Elizabeth into his "swan princess".<sup>18</sup> He goes on to commit incest with Elizabeth, rejects his real daughter Muriel, and hold Pattie in sexual slavery. With all this knowledge Marcus exposes him as a priest of God saying: "So you are going to go on with that farce, with all those things inside you."<sup>19</sup> And Carel goes on since he can make Pattie believe that her master represents God and because "divine hands created her,"<sup>20</sup> he had the right to keep her the way he needed her. Similarly, Carel causes Elizabeth to live in a dream-like trance divorced from reality "in her mind far away."<sup>21</sup> Still further, Leo Peshkov, who lives close to Carel's world, has no morals and since values to him are only relative, he asserts: "I want to train myself in immorality."<sup>22</sup> In the same way, Marcus goes deeper and deeper in his obsession for Elizabeth and stoops to a comical level.

Before the dawn of new consciousness, self-limiting factors both internal and external--illusions and hostile circumstances-- continue vexing and misleading Murdoch's characters. However, a stage comes when they seek to break through the self-created veil by way of a struggle with one's own self and with outer circumstances. Like Elizabeth and Muriel, the black servant girl is a caged personality, but she never suspects that she is held in immoral enthrallment by Carel. At that stage, Carel Fisher signifies to her "the whole world"<sup>23</sup> and has the stature of God who holds out the temptation to redeem her. He has also promised to marry her after the death of his wife Clara. However, Pattie is shocked when Carel does not fulfil the promise after the demise of his wife. After all that experience of deception and humiliation at the hands of Carel, Pattie is gripped by a sense of guilt but now she chooses to fight on. She is rooted into the moral ethical question of respecting freedom for herself and for others including Elizabeth, Muriel, Marcus and even Carel himself. Eventually, Carel with all his devilish tricks remains secluded and continues undeterred until his elimination by suicide. In her own case Pattie had thought of leaving Carel earlier but that remained a dream because she had the tempta-

tion to become "Sister Patricia, perhaps Saint Patricia."<sup>24</sup> Ironically, Pattie's dream of escape earlier was like that of prisoner trying to escape the prison by becoming a bird and flying over the wall. This time she subjugates everything to objectivity and corporate love.

In the final crucial stage, the initially untranscended being moves from a state of self-conflicting desires and pursuit of mirages to a realisation of the essential self. Here realisation or vision means an acceptance of urgencies of contingency or the ability to "embody contingency"<sup>25</sup> against the pressure of the ego, and comprehending of the status of the self in the total context. The one significant work central to an understanding of Murdoch's essential theme and pattern in this regard is Plato's myth of the cave. According to the myth, the individual moves out of the dark shadows of the world of existential reality and moves out to experience the Sun which signifies ultimate reality and stands for vision. This process involving the individual's journey from myopia to vision is evident in the roles of Carel Fisher, Pattie, Elizabeth, Muriel, and Marcus. Carel forces incestuous relations on Elizabeth and condemns Muriel to a life of dreadful seclusion. Muriel is stricken with a feeling that she is "condemned... until the end of the world."<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, Carel has deified himself and hardly any one understands the reality about him. Ultimately he gets exposed--Muriel comes to know that "she had loved only her father and that Elizabeth had always intervened."<sup>27</sup>

The person worst affected by Carel's designs is Pattie O' Driscoll whom he always flatters saying that she is his "dark angel."<sup>28</sup> She ultimately comes to know rather sadly that Carel has no power to redeem her. Eventually, Pattie takes no time to reject Carel who has no option but to commit suicide and also to resolve to serve in a refugee camp and then take to the path of sainthood through service. Breaking the platinum shackles of the absurdities of life and finding some channel to realisation has been qualified by Murdoch as "love, freedom, and morality."<sup>29</sup> In this context, the refugee camp represents, for Pattie, the real place of work which she has longed for from the early stages of her life. The eventual realisation or vision is that life is not a game and it should not be taken as a joke. Life is sacred and something serious. Deductively, those who participate in life as though they were mere role players are evil, and are lost like Carel and Marcus. But those who, like Pattie, care to throw off the self-deceiving fantasies

eventually see things clearly and objectively. It is here that myopia ends and vision begins.

The history of ideas testifies to the fact that man has perpetually been caught up in the meshes woven by the individual self and the corporate circumstances. In this regard, human beings can be existentially compared with birds in the cage. The meshes and cages may be psychic, emotional, intellectual or physical in form and nature. The mesh quite often confronts the individual with a crisis, the necessity of choice. And, ironically, more often than not, the act of choice involves him deeper in the mesh. Choice thus becomes a dilemma more than a certainty, and freedom an illusion rather than a fact. The greater the effort to choose and dominate, the tighter the hold around. The circle grows vicious. In any case, man feels thrown out of gear and he comes to stand face to face with an experience of rootlessness, alienation, utter confusion and consequent anguish and despair.

The self in search of identity and the puzzling difficulties of understanding the self and the circumstance is the central theme of this eighteenth novel of Murdoch. However, co-contextual with this theme are some such issues as gansterism, madness and suffering which are inalienable perspectives of the contemporary social chaos. Whatever the details of narration, the crucial aspect of the novel relates to showing the isolated man who is caged in his own circumstances and the compulsion of his basic personality. Here the theme is carried through Cato Forbes and Henry Marshalsen. These two persons come from two neighbouring families in Laxlinden. They have been close friends from their school days, though their paths diverge in later life. Victims of their infirmities and unapprovable proclivities, they make certain strange rather dangerous choices in life as a result of which they get caged and suffer in the course of life. In the natural course of events, "these over confident though naive persons get trapped into the plots hatched by more pragmatic individuals. In situations of this kind, Murdoch's interest is neither to humiliate the plotters nor to sympathise with the victims, but to show that human affairs "have to be taken serious"<sup>30</sup> even if they are not apparently serious. Cato and Henry studied together at school. Both suffered some disappointments due to the treatment meted out to them by their families in early life, and both gradually developed an inferiority complex. In Cato's case, the father moved in successful intellectual circles overshadowing

Cato in his intellectual possibilities. Henry was overshadowed by the more practical and hefty elder brother, Alexander Sandy who was supported by the tyrannical father. Both Cato and Henry suffer from flaws peculiar to them. In Henry's case the flaw is the obsession with his childhood neglect and injury. In Cato's case it is more serious, a pathological weakness, for he is by nature an abnormal person. Even in Henry's case, his intention to shower his love on a flabby and uncouth Char woman is out of a feeling of similar suffering emanating from being neglected and bullied by his elder brother Sandy. This triangular relationship in a small university town governed by traditional norms is shockingly licentious, though in Henry's case it is but a sort of unwitting escape from his obsession with neglect which still continues to torment his mind.

As Cato suffers from a complex against his father, he takes to a curious experiment in the slums just out of spite towards his father. Many of his fellow Catholic priests such as Brendan Craddock go their way happily without feeling any strain in the mind. However, in the case of Cato the strain is there not merely due to the feeling of inferiority, but also and mainly due to the fear of failure to come upto expectations. These two situations he knows, but what he does not know is that inbuilt infirmity for homosexual attachment with beautiful Joe, a slum kid who is taking fast to serious gangster methods. In contrast to this fixation, it comes to be revealed that Cato's initial love for and joy in the religious life is comparable with the joy of a child at play. The priest-convert Cato thus suffers from spiritual flaws and moral lapses. As a matter of fact, his "life has consisted of one blunder after another" (p.31). Brendan Craddock, his friend, warns him frequently that he should desist from mixing with Joe because that is the only way to save his conscience from perturbation but Cato, somehow, like Michael Meade of *The Bell* (1985) can never control his morbid weakness.

With the passage of time Cato loses his faith in religion, and even good pieces of advice fail against his illicit and absorbing love for the delinquent beautiful Joe. Initially he avoids meeting Brendan, but then wishes to contact him in the wild hope of receiving permission to keep both the delights--belief in God and the attachment with the mission boy. By any measure Cato is a selfish and self-glorifying type of person who suffers from illusions. To sum up Cato's character suc-

cinctly and comprehensively, it can be said that "he had made a cage of purposes and was caught in it" (p.32). The nature of Cato's relationship with beautiful Joe is an open secret, but he says he is close with Joe in order to be helpful to him. Brendan Craddock, his priest and well-wisher, warns him and frequently tells him coolly that he knows his game and that he is only deceiving himself:

You are being totally frivolous and self-indulgent. It's a dream, Cato, you are only saving him in a dream (p. 155).

However, Cato is in the grip of a neurosis. As in the case of *The Bell*, here also in the case of Cato Murdoch "explores the labyrinth of sexuality and spirituality whose subtle interactions are so confusing and often so damaging."<sup>33</sup> Since Cato is homosexually involved with Joe, he maintains the naive egoistic belief that he is the only person in the world who can 'save' Joe. Brendan is convinced that Cato lacks humility and because of his being in love with Cato, he comes to realise that being in love is automatically a powerfully egotistical condition. Cato's egotistical feeling of being free from discipline and the danger he has incurred thereby is symbolically depicted through the swoop of the brown bird Kestrel (symbol of Holy Ghost) on him as its victim:

The brown bird was hovering, a still portent...Cato looked at it, aware suddenly of nothing else. Then as he looked, holding his breath, the bird swooped. It came down, with almost slow casual ease to the ground, then rose again and flew away over Cato's head. As he turned, shading his eyes, he could see the tiny dark form in its beak. (p. 34).

The swoop of the bird on its victim presents a nice parallel to Cato's original conversion, but what his mind cannot yet comprehend is the final doom of the religious life. Evidently, he has a limited perception but the worst he has come to do is to stop thinking and start concocting this about God.

Henry Marshalsen is another of the characters in this novel who suffers from enormous egotism, and together with Cato he represents the childish fragility of the human kind. In the case of Henry, the problem is surely one of infantile feelings of negligence and even maltreatment. His brother Sandy appears to have been preferred by the parents particularly by the mother. Besides, the father is rather violent and tyrannical. Henry carries this infantile grievance well beyond adolescence. So, at one level Henry is caged by this psychic situation, and at another level he is a prisoner of his pretences and cunning

and socio-moral inadequacies. In public he makes abnormal movements, but before the mirror and in privacy he describes himself as "fox like Henry" (p.35). The childhood wound in the self and the obsession that is unwanted never allows him to find harmony within the family and this complex drives him to migrate to America. He goes there to undertake higher studies in Stanford University, and settle down in some obscure village in St. Louis. However, his elder brother Sandy dies in a car accident and he succeeds to the property of Laxlinden Hall. His grievance against his parents and the elder brother is understandable, but his real myopic and downright selfish nature and callousness come to light through his feelings, actions, and visualizations even after the death of Sandy and still more after he has assumed property rights as an heir. Even as Henry is on his way home he is ruminating on his plans to handle his property and his mother.

Henry's anger against the mother is quite natural since she has openly thrown herself as a barrier between him and his elder brother and between her person as a mother and her affection which he deserves to receive. She has also unwittingly acted as an obstacle in his normal growth and happiness. However, Henry's real nature is revealed when he humiliates her and reduces her to a very inferior position in the house. His decision and practice to this effect is another trapdoor which lands him in a very uncomfortable cage. He is so terribly caged in his anger and in his unhealthy feelings toward his mother that he does not hesitate to be harsh on his mother even to the point of asking immodest questions about her friendship with an old helpless poet Lucius. He callously reduces her to a weak dependent on him. He is doing all this out of a narrow feeling of revenge of which he himself is a victim. Essentially he is all the more a prisoner of his own feelings and actions, since he is blind to the adverse effect of such negative elements on him. In a rare moment of self-revelation, he makes this point clear to his mother :

"You're smart mother, may be. My confidence was broken before I was six. Everybody-combined to put me down.... You could have protected me. All right, you much preferred Sandy, but you could have stopped father from crushing me. You didn't--you were his ally and his agent.... You both waged war on me....I spent my childhood concealing my misery, concealing my tears. No wonder, I've never wanted to do anything since except turn and hide" (pp. 312-13).

Henry may be somewhat justified in his feelings of revolt against the father, but he is in no way justified in harassing and humiliating her

mother and in nursing uncharitable feelings for his dead brother. His obsession with such negative feelings and practices amply shows that he is a caged personality.

Self-limiting factors, both internal and external -- illusions, misconceptions and hostile circumstances--, continue vexing and misleading the Murdochian man. However, a stage comes when he seeks to break through the self-created veil. At that stage he feels impelled out and to discover himself, and in pursuit thereof adopts a rational, objective and acceptable set of values and principles. The consciousness and discovery of new principles is preceded by a struggle with one's own self and with outer circumstances including evil as a fact and force of life. The struggle eventually leads to the transcendence of the self and to the recognition and acceptance of God. The effort in this direction may thus be called the struggle for freedom. The medium is experience and the knowledge thus gained is then used in various situations for self-transcendence and freedom from the cage. Before actually taking to "retreat from the mental and spatial enclosures"<sup>37</sup>, Cato Forbes, like Henry Marshalson, another important character in the novel, is caged in a dilemma. Cato's predicament includes his obsession with the physically attractive boy called Beautiful Joe and his doubts regarding his position in Heaven after the accidental killing of Joe. His intractable difficulty is his extreme temptation to retain the best of both the worlds -- his "belief in God and the delightful physical contact with Joe."<sup>38</sup> As a perceptive priest, Brendan detects Cato's pride in his ability to reform Joe and make him happy as the one big difficulty in the course of his freedom.

Before Cato cultivates humility and develops belief in powers that could be beyond his ken, Brendan has to explain to him that "we have to suffer for God in the intellect" and even then "we can never be altogether in the truth."<sup>39</sup> Cato has to struggle a lot before he succeeds in working his way out of his appalling ego, since he has been vastly lost in doing the strong man wrestling act which is like a self-proclaimed death sentence. In the course of his struggle Cato behaves like an infant incapable of differentiating from the outside world and commonly seeing others as "extensions of himself".<sup>40</sup> Brendan analyses the ultimate state of things to Cato by explaining the fact of man's insignificance in the total context:

We are absurdities, comic characters in the dream of life... But in reality there are no insults because there is nobody to be insulted. And when you say 'there

is no one there' perhaps you are on the brink of an important truth."<sup>41</sup>

Should we generalize this issue beyond the limited context of Cato, we are likely to be convinced, like Elizabeth Dipple, that "Murdoch sees this (example of Cato's dilemma) as truth-telling beyond a fictional plot."<sup>42</sup> In this second stage of his difficult, though inescapable, journey toward self-realisation and vision, Cato is, in fact, involved in a riddling situation in which "he does not understand the game he has been playing."<sup>43</sup> In this context, Cato's most disturbing dilemma is that he cannot fully appreciate his cowardice and self-centredness, and therefore it persists. He is in the grip of a neurosis which he cannot easily shed.

Further, in his struggle for freedom, Cato's letter to Henry Marshelson, his school-time friend, helps immensely in the understanding of his personality. The letter reveals that Cato had been kidnapped by a gang of juvenile delinquents among whom was his spiritual son Joe. Quite like Cato, Joe is involved in a double trap. Ideationally he has revolted against Cato, but as a pragmatist he has wanted immediate temporal gains. Of late he has grown over-possessive about Colette, Cato's sister. A situation arises when Beautiful Joe gets killed by Cato, since a violent attempt is necessary to save Colette. Ever after Cato is never tired of seeing himself as a damned being and consequently realizes that "morality is nothing but self-esteem."<sup>44</sup> Cato is, thus, caught in a suffocating complex guilt. His chief obsession ever after is the guilt caused by the murder of the righteous and the loved one. In fact, Cato's struggle is born out of a complex ethical ambiguity and is supplemented by the confounding tussle between mutually antagonistic forces like good and evil, altruism and selfishness, crippling myopia and comprehensive vision. This puzzling situation constitutes Cato's giant riddle. And in Brendan's judgement, the answer to the riddle is: the ego must be broken by the loss of even the best in it. Murdoch is at her impassioned best in such truth-telling passages:

You say you've been years in the game. It seems to me you don't know what the game is.... Falling in love is egoism....It's the greatest pain and the greatest paradox of all that personal love has to break at some point, the ego has to break."<sup>45</sup>

Yet another dimension to Cato's struggle for freedom relates to his fear of God's wrath first for his losing faith to religion and secondly for his murder of Joe, however accidental. Brendan Craddock signifi-

cantly points to the fact that there are limitations to human knowledge and, therefore, man can never know God's responses to temporal occurrences. As such, he points out that "everything that we concoct about God is an illusion."<sup>46</sup> In this context, "the ultimate moral division in Murdoch's novels is not between merging and separating, but between those who allow themselves to be absorbed and those who absorb others."<sup>47</sup>

After passing through a long-drawn-out struggle, the initially naive and self-absorbed individuals come to evolve some means to be free from the platinum shackles of the so-called absurdities of life. Eventually they find some channel through which the individual self could attain to "the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real which Murdoch variously calls "love, freedom, and morality."<sup>48</sup> In essential terms the secret of their freedom is the realization that truth is greater than the self. Subsequently, they develop the capability to look within, perceive their limitation, and move on the way to objective understanding. Alternatively, the realisation of the essential self means accepting the urgencies of contingency or the ability to "embody contingency"<sup>49</sup> against the pressures of the ego, comprehending the status of the self in the total context.

Against this background and in this context *Henry and Cato* (1976) deals with the ceaseless spiritual odyssey of Cato Forbes who moves continually in quest of the meaning, significance and eventual direction of life as to how it moves and where it takes man. In the course of Cato's spiritual journey, Murdoch interweaves characters and incidents to help the reader conceive "good and evil, compassion and pity, egoism and sacrifice, besides duty and violence."<sup>50</sup> Cato, who has a rich academic family background, does everything within his power to discover a way to transcend his urges. However, any effort within the traditional network of values only leads to a grotesque experience and a depressing end.

In point of fact, Cato suffers from self-glorifying illusions, and insufferable spiritual flaws. In his case, the end proves the beginning because all through he occupies the "false position".<sup>51</sup> In essential terms, Cato's ego is compounded of four diverse complexes--self-glorifying illusions, moral and spiritual flaws, extreme neurosis, and unwitting violence. No positive and forward growth is possible unless his resistant ego breaks down. This sort of guilt is further aggravated by his "guilt of vanity".<sup>52</sup> Evidently, he suffers from fixity of ideas

besides a wrong approach to the basic issues of life. However, with a view to boosting his image and to seek self-justification, Cato tries a religious experiment by joining a catholic mission in a London slum. Quite soon he finds that there is no possibility of finding an outlet for the self even there. He becomes increasingly sure that the sense of achievement and peace of mind could never be possible in those circumstances. The absence of both a comfortable physical environment and the lack of means for undertaking a more meaningful programme only add to Cato's suffering.

Evidently enough, both Cato Forbes and Henry Marshalson suffer from flawed psyches. Cato remains almost exactly as he had begun, but Henry eventually surrenders himself to the traditional norms. He abandons his plan to sell Laxlinden Hall and moves to America. He pleads for the love of Colette, Cato's sister, and she readily agrees to the proposal. The person who used to stand before God "to pray daily for his brother's death"<sup>53</sup> now prays that Joe may have as much money as he needs if he changes his ways and devotes himself to studies. Meanwhile, Cato renounces priesthood. The act pleases his father who says: "I hated you in the black robe. Now you look like a man again."<sup>54</sup> All put together, Cato's main tragedy lies in not being able to transcend the self and to evolve an objective standard for him. It is attributable to his lack of planning, want of sincerity and aversion to serious thinking. For example, his conversion to Catholicism is not the sudden outburst of a deeply felt emotion or deep scholarship, but a temptation as people have for "the ritual, the drama, the power."<sup>55</sup> At one significant point of time Cato goes to Brendan Craddock who interprets Plato for his benefit in words which Murdoch also uses in *The Fire and the Sun*: "Human affairs are not serious, but they have to be taken seriously."<sup>56</sup> Cato could never use serious thinking, which is "a way of keeping near the truth,"<sup>57</sup> as a panacea for his difficulties, and necessarily therefore remains in the cave. Another instance of Plato's inadequacy in this regard relates to his failure to practice the advice of his early spiritual advisor, Father Milson: "your task is love, and love is your teacher."<sup>58</sup> This message Cato could neither fully understand nor ever wholly translate into actuality. By the end of the novel it becomes clear that Cato is beyond reform and redemption. In the Indian philosophic context, we can say that one's commitment to existence is valued and measured in terms of one's commitment to open-ended thinking of a transcendental reality which is rendered only in the words: "Not this, not this." Living is wonderful only through com-

mitment to something beyond the acts of living. In this context, Cato holds little promise. He remains in the cave, and his realisation never moves beyond his consciousness that there is a wondrous life outside it.

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## **SAMUEL BECKETT AND THE NOVEL OF THE ABSURD**

**M.K. Choudhury**

The category of the post-modern novel known as the absurdist novel or the novel of the absurd originated with Albert Camus, but as a term it came into application mainly with reference to the American novels of the 60's, those of Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Donald-Barthleme and others, some of whom have been considerably influenced by Samuel Beckett.<sup>1</sup> The novel of the absurd is a product of the consciousness of chaos, and highlights the damnation of existence in the contemporary hell of a complex modern milieu which has deprived man of all certainties and has reduced him into a nonentity. Distinguishing the novel of Beckett generation from the earlier one, B.S. Johnson writes:

Present-day reality is markedly different from, say, nineteenth century reality. Then it was possible to believe in pattern and eternity, but today what characterizes our reality is the probability that chaos is the most likely explanation; while at the same time recognising that even to seek an explanation represents a denial of chaos.<sup>2</sup>

Samuel Beckett, according of Johnson, is most worth-reading because of his concern with this issue.

For Camus, "the absurd is essentially a divorce"<sup>3</sup> between man's persistent appetite for unity (nostalgia) and the chaos that contemporary man encounters. The modern complex scientific and technological civilization, a civilization of organised chaos, has caused decay of traditional religion as a unifying force in the life of man and thereby has deprived him of his belief in the pattern and meaning of life which has consequently intensified his awareness of being an alien in an unfamiliar world. Camus says, "A world that can be explained even with bad reason is a familiar world."<sup>4</sup> The factors responsible for the widespread presence of the absurd sensitivity in modern age, Camus points out, are man's loss of faith in eternal values or supernatural consolations since they are based on bad reason, his acute awareness of the paradoxical relationship of a God who is all-powerful amid all-knowing to the evil and suffering that exist on earth, and his awareness of the 'absurd wall', i.e. death. Face to face with a disordered universe that no longer makes sense, man in vain uses all old explanations provided by religion and humanism in order to be assured of order and

unity. Out of this confrontation is born the question "Why?", leading man to challenge the ideological construct and value systems constituting the "essence", as they are found to be sadly inadequate to meet the challenge of existence marked by facticity and contingency. The novel, according to Camus, is an ideal form for mirroring and confirming man's confrontation with an absurd universe.

The central concern of the novel of the absurd is the metaphysical anguish, the nausea, caused by the knowledge of the absurdity at the heart of the universe, of both world and existence devoid of secret dimensions. The humanist's belief, Sartre explains, in a man-centered world is nullified by the awareness of the world as the other, refusing to be understood and comprehended in human terms. The arbitrary nature of relationships imposed by man on reality to find meaning is labelled by Sartre as absurd. The world and its objects, like the root of the chestnut tree, as Roquentin experiences, becomes 'unnamable.'<sup>5</sup> The cognitive self dies the moment man is invaded by nothingness due to his failure to name objects, which Roquentin tries to withstand, "It is I, it is I who pull myself from nothingness to which I aspire : hatred and disgust for existence are just so many ways of *making me* exist, of thrusting me into existence."<sup>6</sup> He finally realizes that the 'key to existence' lies in the awareness of nothingness, and not in explanations and reasons. Both Roquentin and Mersault illustrate that the absurd man's endeavour to come to terms with the world moves from the historical context in which he lives to the ultimate reality of his condition. Both reject systems and values based on bad faith and face naked reality-- nothingness -- with lucidity.

The novel of the absurd places man in a 'limit situation' of life, a situation in which existence founders or is shattered. Karl Jaspers sees 'limit situations' of life as "those situations where we come against a wall, as it were: the human resources are exhausted and a 'shattering' or foundering' takes place,"<sup>7</sup> the point where the question of individual existence passes to wider questions of being and reality. It is the situation where Mersault moves after killing the Arab. Kafka has made the most dramatic use of enigmatic limit situations of life in which the fantastic overwhelms the real, in which logic is reversed. Milan Kundera explains the case of Joseph K's trial with reference to depersonalization of the individual in a totalitarian society: "The person punished does not know the reason for punishment. The absurdity of punishment is so unbearable that to find peace the accused needs to

find a justification for his penalty: *the punishment seeks the offence.*"<sup>8</sup> Kundera adds that the Kafkan "represents one fundamental possibility of man and his world, a possibility that is not historically determined and that accompanies man more or less eternally."<sup>9</sup> The novel of the absurd explores the fundamental possibility of man in the religious/theological (Kierkegaard, Kafka) or the existentialist (Camus, Sartre) sense of the absurd.

Camus uses the term 'absurd' for a work that describes man's suffering in a meaningless universe and his struggle to assert freedom and dignity. He gives a detailed account of 'Absurd Creation' that is to reveal not only in its content but also in its form the absurdity of life. In terms of the above, within the novel of the absurd two categories can be seen: one that deals with the absurd without disrupting the traditional narrative apparatus and language, and the other in which the form is informed by the notion of the absurd. Sartre's *Nausea* belongs to the former category, Beckett's *The Trilogy* to the latter, and Camus's *The Outsider* stands in between. David Hesla aptly remarks: "The absurd is impervious to human Logos, to human speech and reason. Hence the writer's dilemma : his task is to discourse on the unintelligible, to name the unnamable."<sup>10</sup> In the Beckettian type of the absurd novel, rational devices and discursive thought are abandoned. The awareness of 'Surd', i.e. out of harmony or failure of reason to make meaning of existence, invades the medium -- form and language both-- transmuting a form that admits of chaos and a language that reflects its devaluation.

Concern with the absurd has led the post-modernist fiction to a deep involvement with the problem of discourse specified by Camus as 'Absurd Creation' and by Michel Foucault as "the other side of discourse."<sup>11</sup> Foucault asks us to make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be "a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy."<sup>12</sup> He uses an extract from Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* to hint at the nature and direction of such discourse. As a writer of the absurdist novel *per se*, Beckett not only highlights the absurdity of existence but also challenges the absurd reasoning of the novel as an art form by bringing into exercise the other side of discourse in narrating 'existence off the ladder.'

Art as an absurd phenomenon, including the absurdity inherent in the act of creation, is one of the perplexing concerns of the post-mod-

ernist literature. Albert Camus refutes Nietzsche's idea of art as a shelter from truth -- "We have art in order not to die of truth" -- and argues that art itself being an absurd phenomenon cannot be a refuge for the absurd. According to Camus, the 'difficult wisdom', the absurd thought sanctions, or the 'sterile secret' that the artist possesses is that he works and creates for nothing, that his creation has no future, and that fundamentally his creation "has no more importance than building for centuries."<sup>13</sup> The way open to the absurd creator is to negate on the one hand, and magnify the void and give it colours on the other. Artist as a negative thinker and art as an expression of negative thought may be said to have its basis in the importance attached to negative thinking in existential philosophy. Kierkegaard argues in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that since "the negative is present in existence, is present everywhere (for existence is constant becoming), the only salvation, when confronted with it, lies in the constant awareness of the negative."<sup>14</sup> Hence Camu's proposition. "Art can never be so well served as by negative thought."<sup>15</sup>

The two-fold task enjoined by Camus on the absurd creator is carried out with ruthless fidelity by Samuel Beckett in his novels. Camu's idea of art as an absurd phenomenon finds a more radical expression in Beckett's fiction of the void which explores the dimensions of negative thought capsuled in the phrase, "Nothing is more real than nothing,"<sup>16</sup> which serves as a motto of Beckett's art of different order. His aesthetic of negation is founded on the awareness that "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."<sup>17</sup> According to S.F.Gontarski, "nothing to express" is an active phrase since "what remains to be expressed is nothingness, even though that needs to be done with the faulty system of language."<sup>18</sup> Self is not a coherent unity but itself an absence, and hence there is nothing from which to express. This negative thought regarding self and art generates Beckett's creative process, and finds its full elaboration in his novels which celebrate "the blessedness of absence" (*Malone Dies*, p.60). In search of the core of being, Beckett's narrator characters confront non-being. For them, writing or life becomes an endless, purposeless, meaningless speech, a ceaseless exercise to enclose silence in words.

Beckett's novel swings between two extremities -- the prenatal being in the form of foetus on the one hand, and death on the other.

Beckett takes us to the farthest end of the line either way to a limit situation in which man is reduced to the point of zero. His preoccupation with the definition of self and its cognitive structure results on the one hand in an increasing distance from the objective world till it is fully excluded, and on the other a gradual enlargement of the inner space to the point where self confronts itself as a void. The turning inward process initiated by modernist fiction meets its horrifying end in Beckett's novels. The narrative act faces simultaneously a similar limit situation in which it gets denuded of all its elements, properties and tools, its generic character and identity, and becomes a featureless novel. "But my notes have a curious tendency," despairs Malone, "as I realize at last, to annihilate all they purport to record" (*Malone Dies*, p. 107). He forces us to see his novel not as a narrative composition but a narrative decomposition. As a novelist, Beckett's basic preoccupation seems to direct our attention to the absurdity of the novel as an art form and its utter failure to give substance, form and meaning to self and the world. His subservise art undermines the very basis of the novel and its assumptions, convictions and conventions. He records the deformation of consciousness and speech to the point of their dissolution. The narrative act becomes a desperate quest for means to abolish fiction. Unnamable describes this quest :

On : starts things moving without a thought of how to stop them. In order to speak, one starts speaking as if it were possible to stop at will. It is better so. The search of means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue. No, I must not try to think, simply utter. Method or no method I shall have to banish them in the end, the beings, the things, shapes, sounds and lights which my haste to speak has encumbered this place. In the frenzy of utterance the concern with truth. Hence the interest of a possible deliverance by means of encounter.<sup>19</sup>

Beckett's reductive art, more peculiarly in his later fiction, in a stoical manner uses the weapon of lessness. The following passage from *Worstward Ho* is an illustration of his use of very short sentences as an aspect of his art of minimalism:

Less. Less seen. Less seeing. Less seen and seeing when with words than when not. When somehow than when nohow. Stare by words dimmed. Shades dimmed. All there as when no words. As when nohow. Only all dimmed. Till blank again. No words again. Nohow again. Then all undimmed. Stare undimmed. That words had dimmed.<sup>20</sup>

Beckett's heroes seek freedom from two most important elements of mankind -- consciousness and speech -- since they prevent attainment

of the bliss of absence and silence. Yet for the narrator, writing or speech is the only mode of existence -- "This exercise book is my life," says Malone -- and hence his existential obligation to write.

Beckett's heroes perpetually aspire to know the void. Hence they long for a womb - tomb state. Malone's self-imposed task of 'finish dying' is expressive of the assumption that death offers the happiness of the void. Belacqua, Beckett's first fictional protagonist, the hero of his unpublished "Dream of Fair to Middling Woman", fails to make his 'mind a blank'. The effort is renewed by Murphy with a dogged determination. He rejects the big world so as to live in the little world, the world of mind. He adopts a strange method of seeking liberation from body existence. Sitting in his rocking chair tied with seven scarves, he rocks up and down till his body gets tired and appeased, "For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in mind.... And life in mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word."<sup>21</sup> Freedom from physical being is possible only through severance from the outer world by becoming "all centre and no circumference." The big world is characterized by '*Quid pro quo*:' (Something for something) where "the kick that the physical Murphy received, the mental Murphy gave" (p. 79), its representative people being Celia, Miss Counihem, Neary and others. Murphy aspires to ascend from body (light) to mind (half-light) to the void or psychic coma (dark). He discovers that Magdalen Mercy Seat, an asylum, is a world free from the Newtonian law, a sanctuary from 'the colossal fiasco' of existence. The blessings of outer reality consisting of prerogatives "to wander, love, hate, desire, rejoice and howl in a reasonable balanced manner" (p. 123) appear revolting to him. Murphy casts his vote for Microcosmos, it being free from the big world's precocious ejaculations of thought, word and deed, self-sufficient and impermeable to the vicissitudes of the body. In the higher schizoids Murphy finds a kindred race due to their absolute impassiveness to the big world. The padded cells meant for them is described by him as 'indoor bowers of life'. It is a windowless slightly concave padded compartment, resembling a monad, in which the system of ventilation does not dispel "the illusion of repairable vacuum"(p.125). Murphy feels drawn to a schizophrenic of the most amiable variety, Mr. Endon, who has freed himself from all emotion and has achieved "immunity from seeing anything but himself" (p.171). During a game of chess with Mr. Endon, Murphy tastes for a brief moment the blessedness of absence when, while looking intensely at Mr. Endon, his sight becomes free of the perceived object

and Murphy begins to see nothing, or sucks in "the accidentless one--and--only, conveniently called Nothing" (p. 168). Murphy enjoys a temporary escape into the void from the body-mind division.

Experiencing the void and describing it in language are two inter-related concerns constituting the theme of Beckett's second novel *Watt*. Watt is a creature of macrocosm familiar of existence on a ladder governed by a logical and organised relation between one thing and other, between one step and another. It allows an up and down movement. But existence in Mr. Knott's house is an "existence off the ladder", marked by isolation, non-relation, negation, elimination, an existence not on the plain but in the hollow, in womb-tomb, a being "as the being of nothing" as Arsene says.<sup>22</sup> Joining service in Mr. Knott's house, Watt undergoes a "reversed metamorphosis" (p. 42). Watt is an ordinary language man; Mr. Knott the incomprehensible ever changing reality. When the latter moved in the house, in the garden, "with him moved, dimming all, dulling all, stilling all, numbling all, where he passed" (p. 200). Watt is "a fair linguist". He suffers from the need of 'semantic succor'. He can control reality only with the help of language. In Knott's house, Watt's faculties of logic and language suffer a total collapse. But he stubbornly persists in his ceaseless effort to establish logical relationship between things in causal and temporal terms. He can know a thing only by naming it. He discovers to his dismay that in the negative, non-rational, non-sensorial world of Mr. Knott's house, things "do not consent to be named with the time honored names". Looking at a pot, one of Mr. Knott's possessions, Watt discovers the disjunction/disassociation of the word and the thing it tries to represent:

For Watt now found himself in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance.... Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot...it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot. Well, perhaps not quite in vain, but very nearly.... It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted....And it was just this hairbreadth departure that so excruciated Watt. (p. 78)

Another article forming a part and parcel of Mr. Knott's establishment through which the same disturbing disjunction is projected is the picture in Erskine's room of a circle broken at its lower point and a dot outside it. Unable to ascertain what the artist intended to represent, Watt indulges in a series of conjectures till he exhausts all propositions and breaks down in tears. Failing to understand the non-rela-

tional world of Mr. Knott's house, he thinks of a number of possibilities inherent in a given situation like the ritual of preparation and service of Mr. Knott's food, of Erskine's frequent trips up and down stair, of the practice of giving a dog the left-overs of Mr. Knott's food and forms them into a series. But the propositions cancel out each other by contradicting each other. Thus in spite of the apparent motion of thought and language, the narration does not overcome stasis since the initial situation remains unchanged. Logic and language create a pattern without revealing the meaning. Watt's dilemma is caused by his eagerness for the whatness of events and objects. Language can reveal only appearance and surface meaning; it cannot paint featureless void.

Mr. Knott, being the source of naught, eludes Watt's comprehension. Mr. Knott not only continually changes the arrangement of furniture in his room, but also appears in new guises baffling Watt. Watt has nothing to say about Mr. Knott's appearance, for he daily changes "in carriage, expression, shape and size," and in physical features. The idea of Mr. Knott is not available to human senses and intellect. Both Mr. Knott and his ambience undergo continually changing forms defying Watt's attempt to give it a shape and meaning in verbal terms. His quest for Mr. Knott results in his experiencing uncertainty and emptiness. Losing hold and reality, Watt turns mad.

Watt's attempt to embody his experience of existence off the ladder in verbal form results in a complete reversion of written language (aphasia) and logical order. In the asylum to which he moves after completing his term in Mr. Knott's house, he tells his experiences to another ward named Sam, the narrator of the story of Watt. The way Watt disrupts the chronological order is put by Sam :

*As Watt told the beginning of his story, not first, but second, so not fourth, but third, now he told his end. Two, one, four, three, that was the order in which Watt told his story. (p. 214)*

It is not an even back to front movement, the characteristic mode of Watt's walking. Watt tells Sam his experiences in an inverted manner by using an aphasic speech which is expressive of his psychic phenomenon:

*Watt spoke also with scant regard for grammar, for syntax, for pronunciation, for enunciation, and very likely, if the truth was known, for spelling too, as these were generally received. (p. 154)*

Watt uses eight variations of inversion of language which are various kinds of rearrangements of the components of sentences and words. Given below is the sixth variation:

Lit yad mac, ot og. Ton taw, ton tonk. (p. 165)

In this speech both the words and sentences are required to be read back to front. Though in the beginning Sam fails to understand Watt's manner of speech, he gradually comes to grasp its systems of distortion and displacements. Jacqueline Hoefor rightly comments: "Ironically, Watt is making a last desperate application of logical method : he semi-systematically rearranges the elements of language, the letters of words, the order of the sentence, into new combination. The irrational effect is achieved by a rational method."<sup>23</sup> This proves that however aphasic the language may be, it can at the most disturb the system but not dispel it. Language is thus pushed to an extreme in order to enclose nothingness in words. Watt's language is expressive of his 'reversed metamorphosis'. The reluctance to abandon himself to Knott totally is revealed in his reluctance to give up logical system and use a non-verbal form of expression. Watt registers the inadequacy of the rational tool of language in communicating the irrational.

Beckett's *The Trilogy* is an expression in narrative terms of his aesthetic of void. Its central situation is the artist in the act of creation--Molloy, Malone, the Unnamable--afflicted by the awareness of the 'insuperable indigence' of art in representing self and world, in identifying the perceiver and the perceived. He is seen engaged in writing texts for nothing. The crucial awareness of Beckett's narrator characters regarding the futility of the task of comprehending self and reality and shaping it in organic form with narrative resources, of defining and naming objects by means of language, issues from his idea of being and consciousness. One of the agonized voices in *Texts for Nothing* murmurs, "Ah yes, we seem to be more than one, all deaf, gathered together for life."<sup>24</sup> The apprehension or comprehension of reality by a self is not reliable because self is not one fixed being as being is in the constant process of becoming. Each individual is composed of heterogeneous and temporal series of selves. The way one self sees the world at a point in time appears to be illusory to another self of the same consciousness at a different point in time. It results in an endless process of one's view of reality, one's explanation of the Universe contradicted by the other 'One' of the same consciousness.

The heterogeneous selves within the same consciousness fail to reach a consensus regarding their perception of reality, and thus the attempt to give reality an intelligible structure in art is undermined. One of Beckett's later fiction is suggestively titled *Ill Seen, Ill Said*.

This fatal awareness infuses in Molloy the futility of his efforts to describe persons or scenes. He says in innuendo, "But to tell the truth (to tell the truth!)" (*The Trilogy*, p. 31). He makes us doubt the connection between the account of his adventures and those adventures as they really happened. He warns us that the "limpid language" he now uses expresses nothing more than his "merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace. For what really happened was quite different" (*The Trilogy*, p. 81). Molloy the participant in action and Molloy the narrator of action are different because, as he explains, "simply somewhere something changed, so that I too had to change, or the world too had to change, in order for nothing to be changed" (*The Trilogy*, p. 81). Whatever Molloy tries to say, define or describe appears to be incorrect. He cannot name the night he spent in the fields on his way to his mother's house, "I say that night, but there was more than one perhaps. The lie, the lie, to lying thought" (*The Trilogy*, p. 13).

The interesting inner drama of *Molloy* is constituted of the collision between the experiencing self and the remembering self. They look identical, but they are not so and are as unlike as the two crosses joined by a bar (a knife rest which Molloy stole from Mrs. Louse's house)-- an upper with its opening above and the lower with its opening below -- Moran - Molloy, Macnan - Malone, Mahood- the Worm. The dilemma that Molloy as a story teller faces issues from his inability to locate his identity, a single perceiving, knowing and operative self. This results in the disappearance of a stable and definite perspective. 'Here' and 'there', 'now' and 'then' and persons all get mixed up, and thus time, place and objects, when represented in art, are necessarily deprived of features and dimensions.

Beckett's narrators are acutely aware of the failure of language to express the being, convey meaning or represent object. Reality is captive of language as soon as it begins to speak. Molloy describes words as "sounds unencumbered by precise meaning", "pure sounds, free of all meaning" (*The Trilogy*, p. 47). He finds it impossible to express his sense of identity through words. When he tries to represent objects in words, the object becomes a thingless name and the world dies when

"fouly named". The substance of knowledge and character being words, both become insubstantial and empty. Speaking (writing) becomes filling the void with meaningless sounds.

Malone painfully admits, "The forms are many in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness" (*Malone Dies*, p. 29). While engaged in 'finish dying', lying immobile in his bed, Malone creates a myriad of forms of beings and speech--Lamberts, Saposcat, Lemuel, Macmann and others-- all fictions resisting to admit that his head or skull is a vacuum. The realization of self being non-existent makes Beckett's characters dread speaking of themselves. To avoid the painful task of admitting himself as void, the Unnamable tells stories which are inventions, lies--stories of Murphy, Molloy, Moran, Basil, Mahood, Worm and others. All Beckett's narrator characters experience and articulate the act of story-telling as 'Rhetoric' of lies and obscurities, an endless speech composed of "affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered" (*The Trilogy*, p. 267). Molloy experiences story-telling as a "senseless, speechless, issueless misery" of this ceaseless and unproductive dialectic of 'yes' and 'no', what the 'calmative' voice in *Texts for Nothing* describes as "no's knife in yes's wound" :

And whose the shame, at every mute micro-millisyllable, and unshakable infinite of remorse delving ever deeper in its bite, at having to hear, having to say, fainter than the faintest murmur, so many lies, so many times the same lie lying denied, whose the screaming silence of no's knife in the yes's wound, it wonders (p. 63).

For Beckett, writing is a process of shedding illusions regarding the possibility of ascertaining the identity of self and its relation to the world or creating meaning through form. It is journeying towards non-being and non-meaning, a quest for freedom from the elements of mankind-- consciousness and speech. Both Molloy's journey to his mother's house and his narration of the same are directed to this end, a back to front journey to the womb-tomb, to the state of foetus in mother's womb, to the state of beyond knowing, beyond speaking. Beckett's novels demonstrate the novel's sense of an ending in the dark silence of the prenatal or the postmortem state of non-existence.

Beckett's fiction projects two opposing realizations. The first is the shattering truth about the treachery of words. This agony is further intensified by the author's awareness that the artist deals in second hand perceptions. The artist says in despair: "The Sky, I've heard-- the

sky and earth; I've heard great accounts of them, now that's pure word for word."<sup>25</sup> This twin awareness induces in Beckett's narrators a sense of despair and guilt. Their attempt to convey in words the "extravagant meaning" of life is seen by all of them as absurd, since it is an indulgence in the act of lying. As a result of this mistake, they lie imprisoned in the cell of art. One of Beckett's narrators cries out in agony: "But who can I have offended so grievously, to be punished in this inexplicable way...."<sup>26</sup> *Texts for Nothing* contains a trial scene (Section V) which reminds one of Mersault's trial in Camus's *The Outsider* in its situation and implications. The scene describes a court room where the soul of the narrator is accused of a guilt of which he is unaware. The narrator's soul is condemned to stay in the dark cell of art before it is finally executed. In metaphorical terms it is the execution of the artist by art. Beckett's fiction thus puts both the artist and art on trial adding a new dimension to the Kafkan and Camusian dilemma.

The second and positive realization is that art is anti-life. The artist's soul is condemned for the act of murdering life in art. This realization forces the artist to reject art in favour of life. Imprisoned in the dark cell of art, Beckett's narrator longs to see the sky again, to "be free again to come and go, in such sunshine and in rain...."<sup>27</sup> Unnamable speaks of "one or two manifestations the meaning of which escapes me."<sup>28</sup> But the narrator of *Texts for Nothing*, which brings *The Trilogy* to its finale, is fully aware that the crime lies in his attempt to tell a story for himself and his diversion to story from life: "...that's the mistake I made, one of the mistakes, to have wanted a story for myself, whereas life alone is enough."<sup>29</sup> He finally resolves to dispense with story-telling and turn to life as to experience, like Mersault, the immediacy and beauty of the natural world. The heart of the matter of Beckett's fiction, thus, is the paradoxical awareness that through its phoenix death fiction can effect the resurrection of life.

An intense examination of life and art from the perspective of the absurd has turned Beckett's fiction into a speculative mode of discourse directed at a ruthless enquiry into the very basis of existence and the authenticity of the novel as an art form. In the process while on the one hand the conventional values and orthodox systems of both life and art are challenged, on the other life enhancing alternatives and an art of a new order and a new morality are created affirming afresh the meaning of existence and the dignity and freedom of the individual founded on the inwardness of passion.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>The use of the label "the Novel of the Absurd" came into currency in the seventies. See Ihab Hassan, *Contemporary American Literature 1945-1972*. (New York : Frederick Ungar Publication , 1973); and David Galloway, *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction* (Austin : University of Texas, 1970).

<sup>2</sup>B.S.Johnson, "Aren't You Rather Young to be writing your Memoir", *The Novel Today*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (Fontana/Collins, 1977), p. 156.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O' brien (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1955), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Jean Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1965), p. 186.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.145.

<sup>7</sup>John Macquarrie, *Existentialism* (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1973), p. 37.

<sup>8</sup>Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher (London : Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 103.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p.106.

<sup>10</sup>David H. Hesla, *The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett* (Minneapolis : The University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 8.

<sup>11</sup>Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," *Untying the Text : A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London and New York : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 51.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 92.

<sup>14</sup>As quoted in Martin Esslin (ed.), *Samuel Beckett : A Collection of Critical Essay* (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd.,1980),p. 7.

<sup>15</sup>Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup>Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies* (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1970), p. 22. All quotations from *Malone Dies* are from this edition; page numbers are given in the text. A.J. Leventhal has traced the source of this proposition to Gorgias of Lentini, a Sicilian rhetorician and sophist of the fourth century B.C. See *Samuel Beckett : A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Esslin, p. 46.

<sup>17</sup>Samuel Beckett, *Proust: Three Dialogues* (London : John Calder, 1969), p. 103.

<sup>18</sup>S.E. Gontarski, "A Survey of Issues : An Editor's preface," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, Spring 1983, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup>Samuel Beckett, *The Beckett Trilogy. Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London : Picador, 1976), pp. 274-275. All quotations from *The Beckett Trilogy* are from this edition; page numbers are given in the text.

<sup>20</sup>Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (London : Hohn Calder, 1983), p. 39.

<sup>21</sup>Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (London : Calder and Boyars, 1969), p. 6. All subsequent references to *Murphy* are to this edition; page numbers are given in the text.

<sup>22</sup>Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (London : Pan Books, 1988), p. 39.

<sup>23</sup>Jacqueline Hofer, "Watt", *Samuel Beckett : A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup>Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing* (London : Calder and Boyars, 1974), p. 7. Subsequent quotations from this book are from this edition.

<sup>25</sup>*Texts for Nothing*, p. 27.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>28</sup>*The Trilogy*, p. 269.

<sup>29</sup>*Texts for Nothing*, p. 24.

## HAMARTIA IN ARTHUR MILLER'S DEATH OF A SALESMAN

B.D. Sharma

The critics who have studied *Death of a Salesman* as a tragedy can be grouped into two broad categories, namely the critics who hold that the protagonist of the drama undergoes suffering primarily because there is something wrong with the society of which he is a member, and the critics who hold that the protagonist undergoes suffering because he himself commits errors. To the first category belong critics like Steinberg, and to the second critics like Eric Mottram. Some of the critics, who believe that in this play Miller is finding fault with the social system, have gone to the extent of describing the play, as Ronald Hayman puts it, "as a time bomb set by communists to blow up the country."<sup>1</sup> However, if Miller had written the play only to deride the capitalist system of America, he would not have portrayed Charley, the noblest character in the play<sup>2</sup>, as a capitalist.

What is even more significant in this context is that the protagonist in this tragic play is shown to have been guilty of having committed an act of infidelity to his wife when he is found in the company of a tart in a Boston hotel. If Miller had been aiming at evincing that there was something wrong only with the society, he would not have shown his protagonist to have been guilty. The fact that Willy Loman is guilty evidences that Arthur Miller, too, considers him responsible for the suffering he undergoes. Moreover, when Miller was interviewed by Richard I. Evans, the former maintained that he believed Willy's ways, too, to be responsible for his tragic end.<sup>3</sup> However, the question in hand at the moment is as to, even if Willy Loman suffers for his own faults, what is his flaw that proves fatal and results in the tragic end of his life?

The question has been answered variously. For instance, Harold Clurman holds that Willy has committed the mistake of dreaming to be a success in the ways which are alien to him and not having remained in the field where he belongs,<sup>4</sup> Eric Mottram believes Willy Loman to have been a "victim of the vulgar idea of success,"<sup>5</sup> and Brian Parker too makes an attempt to arrive at Willy Loman's tragic flaw when he observes : "... Willy's plight is shown to be at least partly the result of his own character; he fails not only because of the pressure of the competitive system, but also because of the incorrigible inability to tell the truth even to himself, his emotional, non-logical mode of thought,

which allows him flatly to contradict himself, and of which schizophrenia is merely an intensification; where once he confused reality and wish-fulfillment he now confuses reality and an idealized past."<sup>6</sup> In an essay Arthur Miller himself discusses the question and asserts that Willy's flaw is his failure in business when he observes : "... Willy Loman has broken a law without whose protection life is insupportable if not incomprehensible to him and to many others; it is the law which says that a failure in society and in business has no right to live. Unlike the law against incest, the law of success is not administered by statute or church, but it is very nearly as powerful in its grip upon men. The confusion increases because, while it is a law, it is by no means a wholly agreeable one even as it is slavishly obeyed, for to fail is no longer to belong to society, in his estimate. Therefore, the path is opened for those who wish to call Willy merely a foolish man even as they themselves are living in obedience to the same law that killed him."<sup>7</sup> But the failure is the effect of the flaw rather than the flaw itself, and a critic is expected to try to identify the cause rather than remain content with the effect.

In order to be able to identify Willy Loman's fatal flaw, one should first identify his errors of commission and omission which are the causes of his suffering and death, and then move on to the flaw that lies at the root of them as such a flaw alone can be called fatal. Suffering comes to Willy Loman in the form of want of money : his employer terminates his services without making any provision of old age pension and since his son, Biff is not earning adequate amount of money, Willy resolves to commit suicide so that Biff may have twenty thousand dollars-- an amount for which his life has been insured. He has been compelled to commit suicide chiefly because his son Biff, who is in his thirties, has not been able to get even a tolerably good job and still works as a ranchman. If we go into the roots of Biff's not having been able to settle, we find that there lies an error committed by Willy : it is Willy's act of adultery that makes Biff a maladjusted person. The dramatist says so through Bernard when the latter asks Willy: " 'I've often thought of how strange it was that I knew he'd given up his life. What happened in Boston, Willy?' "<sup>8</sup> Just as in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* it is the mother's guilt that disturbs the son and causes the tragedy, in Miller's play it is the father's guilt that disturbs the son and causes the tragedy. In the play the dramatist shows that Willy is aware of this fact as he recollects not only that Biff found a tart in his room in the hotel but also that there came a sudden change for the worse in Biff immediately after that. All this

amounts to saying that Willy's most serious error of commission is his act of adultery. Even Benjamin Nelson admits that it is the recollection of Willy Loman's adultery that is quite significant as he says: "Emerging out of 1928, the watershed year of Willy's life, each flashback sequence moves us deeper into Willy's consciousness and leads finally to the scene involving Biff's discovery of his adultery, the episode that would understandably issue last out of Willy's recollections since it is the one memory he has tried hardest to repress."<sup>9</sup> He regards Willy's infidelity as the central incident in Willy's life as he says: "Both sets of flashbacks culminate in the one involving Willy's infidelity -- the fact and symbol of his final degradation, the revelation of his insecurity and failure, and the verification of his bleak loneliness and alienation. Ultimately each event dredged out of his past makes the same point about Willy Loman: his life is caught in an unresolvable dichotomy between fact and fancy. He is unable to separate his individuality from his conception of himself as a supersalesman because he cannot truly differentiate between the two."<sup>10</sup>

The question that logically follows this is as to what does make Willy commit this and like errors and what aspect of his personality must be his fatal flaw? And the answer is that Willy Loman's attaching importance to the demands of the physique even at the cost of those of the mind and the spirit makes him commit most of his errors. The fact is evidenced by not only his going into the arms of a tart but also by his asking his sons to develop their physiques and become good players at the cost of their studies, and to acquire goods even by committing theft. The following piece of conversation evidences it:

WILLY, to Happy: jumping rope is good too.

BIFF: Did you see the new football I got?

WILLY, examining the ball: Where's you get a new ball?

BIFF: The coach told me to practice my passing.

WILLY: That so? And he gave you the ball, heh?

BIFF: Well, I borrowed it from the locker room. *He laughs confidentially.*

WILLY: *laughing with him at the theft ...*<sup>11</sup>

Also, this is evident from his remark: "That's why I thank Almighty God you've both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want."<sup>12</sup> Even his desire to make Biff's teacher manipulate his examination result proves that Willy cares a naught for morality. It is this approach of Willy that makes him " 'a fake' "<sup>13</sup> and his sons immoral in their ways.

Willy's act of adultery had very far-reaching repercussions as Biff's coming to know of it marks a turning point in his career and marks his losing all regard for his father. Before Biff has come to know of his father's guilt he has a high opinion of his father and feels that his father is influential enough to make the Mathematics teacher change his examination-result and declare him successful. The fact becomes evident when we read the following request of the son to the father in the Boston hotel : "Birnbaum refused absolutely. I begged him, Pop, but he won't give me those points. You gotta talk to him before they close the school. Because if he saw the kind of man you are, and you just talked to him in your own way, I'm sure he'd come through for me. The class came right before practice, see and I didn't go enough. Would you talk to him ? He'd like you Pop. You know the way you could talk'."<sup>14</sup> But when he comes to know of his father's guilt, his views about his father change completely and he says to the latter : " 'You fake ! You phoney little fake : You fake!' "<sup>15</sup> The way he shouts at his father reminds one of how Hamlet shouts at his mother in Shakespeare's play :

[You have gone] Such an act  
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,  
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose  
From the fair forehead of an innocent love  
And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows  
As false as dicers' oaths -- (*Hamlet* III, iv, 40-45)

The father's guilt disturbs Biff so violently that he loses his mental equilibrium and forgets all about his career as a student or as a football player. How disturbed he is at that time becomes evident from the following account of his behaviour given by Bernard: "Well, just that when he came back-- I'll never forget this, it always mystifies me. Because I'd thought so well of Biff, even though he'd always taken advantage of me. I loved him, Willy, y'know ? And he came back after that month and took his sneakers --remember those sneakers with 'University of Virginia' printed on them? He was so proud of those, wore them every day. And he took them down in the cellar, and burned them up in the furnace. We had a fist fight. It lasted at least half an hour. Just the two of us, punching each other down in the cellar, and crying right through it. I've often thought of how strange it was that I knew he'd given up his life'."<sup>16</sup> This is the external manifestation of the feeling of disgust which is aroused in Biff's heart. Though Biff does not talk of punishing his father, his discontinuing his studies, his undertaking menial jobs like herding people's cattle and trying to become a lazy

truant are the marks of his rising in revolt against his father.

One may say that when Willy goes into the arms of a tart, he does so in order to gratify his emotional needs as he tells Biff: " 'She's nothing to me, Biff, I was lonely, I was terribly lonely.' " <sup>17</sup> But in giving this explanation Willy is trying to find an excuse for his illicit pleasure-seeking and to justify the unjustifiable as this part of his behaviour has evidenced his infidelity as a husband and his having broken his marriage vow to remain true to his wife. Biff's reply--" 'You- You gave her mama's stockings' " <sup>18</sup> -- also signifies that he believes his father to have been unjust as a husband. What is significant here is that Linda, as portrayed by Arthur Miller in the drama, is a very virtuous wife because not only she is herself devoted to her husband but also she wants her children to remain devoted to him as she says to them : " 'I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person'." <sup>19</sup> This devotion is a clear proof of the fact that Willy has no justification for his faithlessness to Linda.

How much disgust is aroused in Biff's heart at his father's infidelity comes to light when one studies Biff's behaviour after the Boston incident. First of all, he incites his mother against him, even though he does not reveal his infidelity to her, and tries to bring it home to her that his father has been unjust to her : " 'Stop making excuses for him. He always, always wiped the floor with you. Never had an ounce of respect for you'." <sup>20</sup> He goes to the extent of revealing to her : " 'he's got no character ....' " <sup>21</sup> Nay, there comes at least one occasion when he is on the point of assaulting his father, as the playwright records in the stage-direction : "Biff starts for Willy, but is blocked by Happy. In his fury, Biff seems on the edge of attacking his father." <sup>22</sup> This is so in spite of the fact that the father has been not only sympathetic and affectionate towards him but also full of worries about his getting settled in business, or getting a well-paid job. If Willy had not been guilty of having been faithless to his wife, Biff would have continued to be respectful and loving.

In the play the dramatist rests a great deal on the consequences of the father's guilt, and also shows that the son's changed behaviour tells

upon the behaviour of the father too. First, we find William upset to see that Biff has not been able to get even a tolerably decent job upto the age of thirty-four, as he says to his wife : "' How can he find himself on a farm? Is that a life ? A farmhand ? In the beginning, when he was young, I thought, well, a young man, it's good for him to tramp around, take a lot of different jobs. But it's more than ten years now and he has yet to make thirty-five dollars a week.' "23 Secondly, we find that Willy no longer remains a figure of authority in his family because he, instead of being able to discipline others, finds himself being disciplined as when he tries to make his wife desist from intervening, Biff starts intervening more and more defiantly. The following piece of conversation fully illustrates it :

LINDA : Oliver always thought the highest of him --

WILLY : Will you let me talk ?

BIFF : Don't yell at her, Pop, will ya ?

WILLY : *angrily* : I was talking, wasn't I ?

BIFF : I don't like you yelling at her all the time, and I'm tellin' you, that's all.

WILLY : What're you, takin' over this house ?

LINDA : Willy --

WILLY : *turning on her* : Don't take his side all the time, goddammit.

BIFF : *furiously* : Stop yelling at her.

WILLY, *suddenly pulling on his cheek, beaten down, guilt-ridden* : Give my best to Bill Oliver -- he may remember me. *He exits through the living-room doorway.*<sup>24</sup>

If Willy had not been guilt - ridden, he would not have felt "beaten down". The playwright's describing him as "guilt-ridden" signifies that he considers Willy's guilt to be responsible for his defeat in this quarrel. Thirdly, we find him in a situation in which he, in order to realize his end, viz.-- to make his son be well - off--, is left with no option but that of, as has been pointed out, committing suicide knowingly. If Willy had not been guilty, he would not have felt the need of committing suicide and would have had other options open to realise his end. Thus even though it takes several years, it is at last this moral lapse that kills Willy Loman. The outcome of the guilt here satisfies the needs of poetic justice much better than the outcome of the guilt in *Hamlet* does, for here none else but the guilty, namely Willy Loman, loses his life and there is no ruin on a mass scale unlike the ruin in *Hamlet* in which the persons who have to lose their lives along with the guilty include Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Hamlet. If Willy had died soon after the Boston incident, the period of ten years in Biff's career would not have been wasted, and if Willy had continued to live

and justify his misdeed, Biff would not have regained normalcy as he does, and as the stage direction in the 'Requiem' that he "lifts his mother to her feet and moves out upright with her in his arms"<sup>25</sup> symbolizes.

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- <sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.
- <sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 103-04.
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- <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 190.
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- <sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.
- <sup>11</sup>*Arthur Miller's Collected Plays*, p. 144.
- <sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 146.
- <sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 164.
- <sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 206.
- <sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p 208.
- <sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 189-90.
- <sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 208.
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- <sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 217.
- <sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 134.
- <sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 169.
- <sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 222.

## ART AND REALITY: THE CORE OF TAGORE'S AESTHETIC PHILOSOPHY

K.K. Sharma

Like Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Croce, Joyce Cary and many Indian thinkers, Tagore has made numerous, definite pronouncements on the relationship of art with reality, and like every one of them, he has his own unique approach to the subject. He emphasizes that the nature of all arts is to provide us with 'the taste of reality through freedom of mind.' The mind finds freedom in comprehending and transmitting to others the essential and immortal truths, and therefore the aim of art is to accomplish this also. Truth, Joy and Beauty become synonymous when they serve the same purpose for the artist, i.e. to impart the artist the freedom of mind to enable him to apprehend and enjoy reality. Tagore expresses his views on the treatment of aesthetic reality and philosophical reality in art, demonstrating that the latter kind of reality is the essence of great art.

Tagore denounces those who defend the loud and lurid element in art by asserting that realism must not be avoided even if it smells foul. He points out that ragged and evil-smelling realism is not desirable in great art, though it may be indispensable to science. He brings out the distinction between realism and reality, and avers that the latter is the essence of art, while the former is more or less redundant. Speaking of healthy aesthetic reality permitting a good deal of curtailment of unwholesome realistic facts, as different from startling appearance approximating to unreality, Tagore remarks:

In its own wide perspective of normal environment, disease is a reality which has to be acknowledged in literature. But disease in a hospital is realism fit for the use of science. It is an abstraction which, if allowed to haunt literature, may assume a startling appearance because of its unreality. Such vagrant specters do not have a proper modulation in a normal surrounding; and they offer false proportions in their features because the proportion of their environment is tampered with. Such a curtailment of the essential is not art, but a trick which exploits mutilation in order to assert a false claim to reality.... Very likely, owing to the lack of leisure, such persons are growing in number and the dark cellars of sex-psychology and drugstores of moral virulence are burgled to give them the stimulus which they wish to believe to be the stimulus of aesthetic reality.<sup>1</sup>

Tagore holds that to say that art has to do with only personal truths does not mean that it excludes philosophical ideas which are abstract.

As a matter of fact, abstract philosophical thoughts are an integral part of art, for they are inseparably fused into "the fibres of our personal nature."<sup>2</sup> This is particularly true of Indian art. To the Indian artist, any particular idea of life has not been simply a logical deduction, but something as real as the air to the bird. He considers it an absolutely essential aspect of the infinite. This is the reason why an idea of life, which is merely an abstraction to one who has a limited sense of reality, becomes an illuminating reality for another who has a vast range of sensibility. This also explains why the Indian mind has been termed as metaphysical by the Western critics--it is metaphysical because it is easily capable of soaring the realm of the infinite. What is remarkable about India is that to her the infinite is not merely a philosophical abstract, but a reality very much like the sunlight. No wonder the infinite is so abundantly present in Indian art. To the Indian mind, the universal presence of the infinite is as much a reality as the earth under the feet of a man.

Inevitably, Indian art is strikingly and mainly religious because of the simple fact that God to the Indians is not a distant reality, but an essential aspect of homes and temples. The Indians feel His nearness in all the human relationships of love and affection and in all the festivities in which they so frequently participate. God is present in flowers, fruits, seasons and all the objects of man's worship. He is present in woman who is good, in man who is true, in children, in love songs, and in all the festivities and ceremonies. Indian art and literature, being inseparably related to the Infinite Reality, endeavour to reveal the depth of the mystery pervading the universe and make it human and living. No wonder Tagore asserts: "My religious life and my poetical life have followed the same mysterious line of growth. Somehow they are wedded to each other."<sup>3</sup>

What Tagore stresses is that the reality delineated in a work of art is different from conventional and customary reality. Thus the record of a domestic incident in the life of a great businessman in some newspaper may create a sensation in the society, but such a newspaper account cannot emulate a work of art, and if placed beside a great poem, it will simply look trash. The treatment of a domestic incident of a husband's jealousy pertaining to his wife, as portrayed by Shakespeare in *Othello*, is a remarkable act of artistic creation, the like of which is not to be traceable in Manu's delineation of the code of conduct, etc. "For when facts are looked upon as mere facts, having their chain of

consequences in the world of facts, they are rejected by art."<sup>4</sup> Since art deals with aspects of life in their complete truth, the simple description of a great battle may be an indispensable historic fact, but it cannot serve the purpose of art. On the contrary, the depiction of the effect of that battle on the life of a single individual, alienated from his near and dear and thus from the main current of his life, is a subject of art which is inseparable from reality. In a word, art deals with complete truth, the universal reality of life, and not with customary facts.

Art has nothing to do with mere abstraction because it kills 'human reality', the 'feeling humanity', and 'the mystery of life' which is the very life of art. Reality is manifest in the emotional and imaginative background of our life, and thus we can directly feel it, know it or talk about it; it is an integral part of human existence. It defines the infinite as the truth related to the human in the universe:

Reality is human; it is what we are conscious of, by which we are affected, that which we express. When we are intensely aware of it, we are aware of ourselves and it gives us delight. We live in it, we always widen its limits.<sup>5</sup>

Patently, the reality with which art deals is 'the eternal mystery of Being', 'the response of man's creative soul to the Real,' and as the Eternal is shrouded with mystery, the reality in art is also a kind of mystery, not clearly knowable. This accounts for Tagore's assertion that "Art cannot be explained."<sup>6</sup> Thus art creates its own world which appears to be definite in its exterior form, but is infinite inasmuch as it is centred upon man's personality. Apropos of this, Tagore affirms:

In these large tracts of nebulosity Art is creating its stars,--stars that are definite in their forms but infinite in their personality. Art is calling us the "children of the immortal," and proclaiming our right to dwell in the heavenly worlds.<sup>7</sup>

Evidently, art is very close to the Infinite Reality, the Supreme Person. Man, despite his consistent awareness of his mortality, asserts his immortality because of the deeper unity and ultimate mystery existing in him and with the help of which he is able to transcend the bounds of body, place and time. The deeper unity and ultimate mystery in man forms his personality which imparts him 'inexhaustible abundance' and makes him aware of the presence of the Everlasting in him as well as in the universe, thus making him an integral, inseparable part of the infinite. Art always concentrates on man's personality revealing him the beauty and truth of the Eternal Being present in the world, which

otherwise appears to be made of dead, abstract facts :

And this consciousness of the infinite, in the personal man, ever strives to make its expressions immortal and to make the whole world its own. In Art the Person in us is sending its answers to the Supreme Person, who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across the lightless world of facts.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the true, primary function of art is to create and recreate man's true world, "the living world of truth and beauty."<sup>9</sup>

Tagore finds science unsatisfactory because, unlike art, it doubts the artist's sanity and rejects outright the "paradox of the infinite assuming finitude."<sup>10</sup> The fact is that this paradox is very old and true, and thus science, which aims at the knowledge of finite for its own sake, cannot grasp truth. This kind of knowledge, pursued by science, is an insurmountable obstacle in the way of comprehending the beyond, the Infinite; it is simply an accumulation of concrete facts and does not enlighten and stimulate man. "It is like a lamp without its light, a violin without its music."<sup>11</sup> But if the knowledge of the finite lacks in the essence of the universe, though it is something concrete, the absolute infinite without the touch of the finite is merely emptiness, leading man to a deeper darkness. This is the reason why the Eternal combines the finite and the infinite, and the artist also does the same. Accentuating the absolute necessity of the fusion of the infinite and the finite, Tagore writes:

The infinite and the finite are one as song and singing are one. The singing is incomplete; by a continual process of death it gives up the song which is complete. The absolute infinite is like a music which is devoid of all definite times and therefore meaningless.

The absolute eternal is timelessness, and that has no meaning at all,--it is merely a word. The reality of the eternal is there, where it contains all times in itself.<sup>12</sup>

Tagore derives his idea of the amalgam of the infinite and the finite from the *Upanishads* wherein it is reiterated that it is necessary for man to acquire the knowledge of both the finite and infinite, for the former helps him to go beyond death and the latter enables him to attain immortality. This leads him to infer that man's (particularly the artist's) personality is not merely individual, but also universal, and a true work of art embodies such a personality in which the individual and the infinite become one. The concrete things, with their varied forms and changes, do not possess absolute reality; their reality exists in our personality which makes these things real, and not abstract. With the

change of human mind in time and space, the reality of the forms of things also changes. Thus the world, in Tagore's view, is the world of personality and it is this which is presented in art. This relational world of personality is both individual and universal; it is the artist's personal world, and yet it is not absolutely different from the world of many others. Hence Tagore's assertion about the essential nature of reality: "...it is not in my own individual personality that this reality is contained, but in an infinite personality."<sup>13</sup>

Tagore asserts that life inexhaustibly abounds in creativeness; it is a ceaseless act of creation. But the artist grasps this truth of living life only when he realises its fusion with the infinite, resulting in its full growth and richness. As soon as it is confined to itself and is cut off from the cosmos, it is nothing but simply a heap of deadness. The artist renounces himself to become one with the Everlasting, and the resultant joy of love that he thus experiences is the source of his creative impulse and activities. The moment he becomes one with the Infinite, the latter gives Himself out through the finitude, and it is through this process that the meaning of all reality is laid bare to him. It is in this way that the artist lives in his world of personality which enables him to comprehend and communicate the reality of the universe. The artist's personality and his world centred upon it are, in Tagore's view, all important for him, and these can not be understood by means of science and logic which resort to the method of dissection and decomposition resulting in the collapse and dissolution of the universe:

Reality is the expression of personality, like a poem, like a work of art. The Supreme Being is giving himself in his world and I am making it mine, like a poem which I realize by finding myself in it. If my own personality leaves the centre of my world, then in a moment it loses all its attributes. From this I know that my world exists in relation to me, and I know that it has been given to the personal *me* by a personal being. The process of the giving can be classified and generalized by science, but not the gift. For the gift is the soul unto the soul, therefore it can only be realized by the soul in joy, not analysed by the reason in logic.<sup>14</sup>

This is the reason why the artist who, of all men, is the most personal man, has always ceaselessly striven to know the Supreme Person. He perceives His touch of personality in all the things in the universe, and it is this which he intends to realise himself and to communicate it to others through his creative acts. Obviously, the artist's feelings of the touch of personality "has given the centrifugal impulse in man's heart to break out in a ceaseless flow of reaction, in songs and pictures and

poems, in images and temples and festivities."<sup>15</sup> The Reality and joy, thus grasped by the artist, are harmonious whole, free from any kind of contradictions, and hence ineffable. In fact, the essence of all reality is in the Eternal Person, and not in any kind of law, phenomenon or substance. If the universe is not the incarnation of the Supreme Person, it is nothing but a baseless fabric and illusion. The artist, like the Supreme Being, has the deathless personality which finds expression in all his deeds. In support of his assertion, Tagore refers to the *Isha Upanishad* and puts his ideas on the subject thus :

From the dawn of our history the poets and artists have been infusing the colours and music of their soul into the structure of existence. And from this I have known certainly that the earth and the sky are woven with the fibres of man's mind, which is the universal mind at the same time. If this were not true, then poetry would be false and music a delusion, and the mute world would compel man's heart into utter silence. The Great Master plays; the breath is his own, but the instrument is our mind through which he brings out his songs of creation, and therefore I know that I am not a mere stranger resting in the wayside inn of this earth on my voyage of existence, but I live in a world whose life is bound up with mine. The poet has known that the reality of this world is personal....<sup>16</sup>

Art, according to Tagore, is inseparable from the Reality apprehended by the artist in the profound realisation of love. Man achieves complete harmony when different personalities combine in love. Man experiences the feeling of perfection in love, which is an awareness of the perfect oneness, of the perfect harmony. Nothing is more important than this unique awareness because it

opens for us the gate of the world of the Infinite One, who is revealed in the unity of all personalities; who gives truth to sacrifice of self, to death which leads to a larger life, and to loss which leads to a greater gain; who turns the emptiness of renunciation into fulfilment by his own fullness. Here we come to the realm of the greatest division in us, -- the division of the finite and the infinite. In this we become conscious of the relationship between what is in us and what is beyond us; between what is in the moment and what is ever to come.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, it is the One--man's relation of love with the Infinite--that expresses itself in all creative activities, and all those objects which are opposed to it only reveal the perfection of unity. Man, and particularly the artist, discerns immensity in his personality simply because it makes him conscious of a spirit of unity within himself. And it is this joy of unity within himself which "seeking expression, becomes creative."<sup>18</sup>

Tagore stresses that creative imagination, impulse and activity are the common truths in both the Eternal and man, and consequently they

permeate the entire existence. True, "the rhythm of cosmic motion produces in our mind the emotion which is creative."<sup>19</sup> The creative impulse, pervading the universe, is behind every artistic activity. It is this which unifies the diverse, divergent and contradictory aspects and elements of the cosmos. This creative unity in the universe flows from the One, the Supreme Creator, Who also reveals Himself in us. Tagore elucidates his concept of the function of art by referring to the green-room having the stagecraft and the drama getting a real meaning from the cohesive union of parts with one another:

The function of poetry and the arts is to remind us that the greenroom is the greyest by illusions, and the reality is the drama presented before us, all its paint and tinsel, masks and pageantry, made one in art. The ropes and wheels perish, the stage is changed; but the dream which is drama remains true, for there remains the Eternal Dreamer.<sup>20</sup>

Tagore illustrates from Shelley's work his conviction that the artist's creative faculty approaches Truth only through its joy in creative activity.<sup>21</sup> It is through creative activity that he gives vent to his truth, and in doing so he also apprehends truth in its wholeness. His very belief in the Eternal is, in essence, creative.<sup>22</sup> Shelley, in Tagore's opinion, realised the vision of the Infinite in his perception of the Spirit of Beauty in his view of the world. The artist in man clearly sees that creative act is reality, gushing from his faith in him and the Infinite that is creative. Summing up his ideas on the subject, Tagore states:

This great world, where it is a creation, an expression of the infinite--where its morning sings of joy to the newly awakened life, and its evening stars sing to the traveller, weary and worn, of the triumph of life in a new birth across death--, has its call for us. The call has ever roused the creator in man, and urged him to reveal the truth, to reveal the Infinite in himself. It is ever claiming from us, in our own creations, co-operation with God, reminding us of our divine nature, which finds itself in freedom of spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Art must, according to Tagore, enlarge and expand the scope of man's awareness of the Eternal, the Great Sublime, for man can realise the reality of the universe only by attaining 'world-consciousness' which is possible only when there is a fusion of his feeling and the 'all-pervasive infinite feeling'. Tagore underlines the immense value of this in these words:

All our poetry, philosophy, science, art, and religion are serving to extend the scope of our consciousness towards higher and larger spheres. Man does not acquire rights through occupation of larger space, nor through external conduct, but his rights extend only so far as he is real, and his reality is measured by the

scope of his consciousness.<sup>24</sup>

For Tagore, art and religion spring from the one and the same source; both stem from the unknown, mysterious inspiration. In this attitude towards art and religion, Tagore follows the great Indian tradition of saint-poets, for whom religion and art were inalienable from each other, and were merged into one because the two emanated from the same source. This kind of concept of art is not commonly seen in the twentieth century Indian and European artists. It is this fusion of the deep religious zeal and the artistic urge that makes a creative genius produce something really thrilling and captivating. Such an artist comes close to God, the greatest creative artist, about whose wonderful artistic power and impact Tagore writes as follows:

I know not how thou singest, my master! I ever listen in silent amagement.  
The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.<sup>25</sup>

Tagore's diverse artistic activities have some sort of fundamental unity simply because he believes in 'religious experience' as the common, surest reality and the inspiration of all creative works. Such a common inspiration is bound to impart unifying effect to an artist, howsoever versatile he may be. Speaking of himself, Tagore asserts that it is 'religious experience' which is the common source of all his creative works, thus imparting them a unique commonness, unity and reality.

Tagore thinks that it is man's imagination, given to him by birth, which makes him realise his free spirit untethered to the animal self--free spirit which alone establishes his close relationship with God, the great reality for the artist. The creative freedom of spirit thus given to him by his imagination enables him to express the infinite, to lay bare the endless and to attain a kind of perfect harmony with some basic ideal of truth. This also leads him to elevate his individual self and merge it into the glory of 'the ideal Man', transcending his dissatisfaction with his natural limitations. In fact, all the monumental achievements of man in all the spheres of life--in arts, science, philosophy, ethics, etc.--are the consequence of his realisation of 'the greater Man' in him. About this, Tagore writes:

For they are the outcome of the consciousness of the greater Man in the individual men of the race. This consciousness finds its manifestation in science, philosophy and the arts, in social ethics, in all things that carry their ultimate

value in themselves. These are truly spiritual and they should all be consciously co-ordinated in one great religion of Man, representing his ceaseless endeavour to reach the perfect in great thoughts and deeds and dreams, in immortal symbols of art, revealing his aspiration for rising in dignity of being.<sup>26</sup>

The realism in man consists of the animal in him, whose life is measured only in terms of the duration of time; but his reality lies in the human in him and it has an eternal life. The creative ideal of man is the ideal of Man the divine. Inevitably, all arts are primarily pre-occupied with the ideal of the Everlasting Man or the Eternal in man. Even music, which is founded on mere facts of sound, according to Tagore,

... represents the infinite. It is for man to produce the music of the spirit with all the notes which he has in his psychology and which, through inattention or perversity, can easily be translated into a frightful noise. In music man is revealed, and not in a noise.<sup>27</sup>

Reality, which all arts focus on, is seen in the imaginative and emotional background of human mind. Man knows it because he directly feels it, and not because he can think of it. Thus, it may be discarded by man's rational mind, but human consciousness cannot be oblivious of it. Reality as an incident may be useful or harmful, but as a revelation it is invaluable because it offers man an experience through imagination or emotion; in its latter form it enables man to have a unique realisation. Howsoever gruesome and sordid reality may be, if it arouses in us feelings, even of profound fear and sorrow, unaccompanied by physical or moral risk, it fills man with enjoyment and great realisation. "This is the reason," says Tagore, "of our enjoyment of tragic dramas, in which the feeling of pain rouses our consciousness to a white heat of intensity."<sup>28</sup>

Tagore repeatedly affirms that art, as well as literature, is the result of man's natural urge to know and reveal the Eternal Being. Naturally, art and literature show us the universal reality of the cosmos. As a matter of fact, they are created under the impact of the eternal mind. To quote Tagore's own words:

Our impulse to give expression to Universal Man produces arts and literature. They in their cadence of lines, colours, movements, words, thoughts, express vastly more than what they appear to be on the surface. They open the windows of our mind to the eternal reality of man. They are the superfluity of wealth of which we claim our common inheritance whatever may be the country and time to which we belong; for they are inspired by the universal mind.<sup>29</sup>

In short, art is deeply concerned with reality which, in Tagore's

view, consists of 'Man the Eternal, the Creator.' Reality, which is central to all art, is the reality of Man, who is universal and eternal. The artist reveals the eternal mystery of being, which is the actual reality in the universe, and makes others realise it every where. Thus "the only evidence of truth in art", asserts Tagore, "exists when it compels us to say, 'I see.'"<sup>30</sup> Great art deals with the relationship existing between the infinite being and the finite self of man. Tagore refers to the *Upanishad* which explains the relationship with the help of the parable of two birds sitting on the same bough, one of which feeds while the other only looks on. Tagore points out that both the birds exist in man, the objective one absorbed in life's business and the subjective one immersed in detached delight of vision. The joy of vision is greater than any thing else, and the artist is primarily concerned with it. Art embodies man's recognition of a reality, an illumination which is much higher and greater than the objective reality or the dull happenings of daily life. The realisation of the higher reality illumines the world and enables us to feel it with our soul. That is why, Tagore defines art as "the response of man's creative soul to the call of the Real."<sup>31</sup> In other words, it may be said that art, whatever its kind or variety may be--whether it is music, or painting, or architecture or sculpture or poetry-- "is for evoking in our mind the deep sense of reality in its richest aspect."<sup>32</sup>

Tagore refers to the ancient Indian prayer "Lead us from the unreal to Reality", and believes that this is also the aim of art. Art makes man free from the web of self-interest, and thus enables him to attain the vision of unity and the real which is a source of perennial joy. In fact, the realisation of the unified reality and disinterested joy is the ultimate aim of art which is possible only when man is able to gain freedom from the ego.<sup>33</sup> Art is indispensable for us not because it may help us to achieve in our life all that we deeply want, but because it enables us to grasp our own being in the surrounding world and the reality which may have nothing to do with our factual day-to-day experiences but which unfailingly fills us with profound joy as it is true to us. Art emancipates our awareness from narrow selfishness, from the isolation of self and things which overpower us with the sense of possession. Thus art makes man attain a vision of unity and reality inescapably steeped in permanent truth and perennial joy. Tagore avers that art "is to bring us, with its creations, into immediate touch with reality. These need not resemble actual facts of our experience, and yet they do delight our heart because they are made true to us. In the world of art, our consciousness being freed from the tangle of self-interest, we gain an unobstructed

vision of unity, the incarnation of the real, which is a joy for ever."<sup>34</sup>

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## ARUN JOSHI'S *THE CITY AND THE RIVER* : A LEAP INTO ETERNITY

O.P. Mathur

Arun Joshi died too early, when he was perhaps at the threshold of a new and interesting phase of his career, passing from a direct portrayal of men and society to allegory, fantasy, prophecy and experimentation with a portrayal of the phenomenon of time by an artistic mingling of the contemporary and the cosmic, resulting not only in an ironic commentary on the present but also elevating it into a projection of certain archetypal patterns of characters and events which tend to repeat themselves over and over again in the long and limitless span of time. Two of the three eternal realities of 'Traitrvad' are embodied in the City and the River of the novel which bears this title. The River is also the eternal river of time which engulfs humanity whenever it becomes too sinful and vicious, only to recede and allow the start of a new experiment. In this novel Arun Joshi seems to have graduated from the affirmations of a worldly vision into a metaphysical overview of creation and destruction, 'srishti', and 'pralaya.' He was apparently attaining the "greater maturity" as desired by M.K. Naik<sup>1</sup>, and this last work of his, one of his "attempts towards a better understanding of the world and of myself,"<sup>2</sup> to quote his own earlier remarks, seems to go beyond Camus and Gandhi and come still closer to the eternal vision of the *Gita*<sup>3</sup> than his earlier works did. Facing such religious issues, the problems of an essentially Hindu mind<sup>4</sup>, Arun Joshi in this novel converts the challenge of reality into a cosmic overview and a prophecy, a leap from life into eternity so sadly true of his own self also.

The protagonists of the earlier novels of Arun Joshi arrive at a realization that there are higher values than the merely materialistic and, except for Billy Biswas whose instinctive gravitation for an authentic life in a primitive society leads him to martyrdom, move on from agnosticism or even negation to faith and redemption.<sup>5</sup> Sindi Oberoi, the existentialist protagonist of *The Foreigner*, becomes at the end a sort of Karmayogi, endeavouring to reduce the miseries of his fellow beings. In *The Apprentice*, Ratan Rathor evolves from a simple, unsophisticated youth into a ruthless materialist, but an emotional jolt makes him seek redemption through humility, penance and confession. The protagonist of *The Last Labyrinth*, Som Bhaskar, em-

bodying a quality of sensuality and reason, progresses from agnostic materialism to faith, marked by an atmosphere replete with suggestive religious symbols

*The City and the River* <sup>6</sup> also is an affirmative novel, and its affirmations are more forceful and fundamental, for they broaden out, projecting the relation of man with other men, with nature and with God, the ordering of loyalties towards God, the nature of the struggle of good against evil for its very survival, and the progress of mankind through spirals of time operating through 'utpatti' and 'pralaya', creation and disintegration. It is a novel that explores the very foundations of faith and right action. In it Arun Joshi goes beyond his suggestion that "life's meaning lies not in the glossy surface of our pretensions but in those dark mossy labyrinths of the soul that languish for ever, hidden from the dazzling light of the sun," which can be applied to his earlier novels. In *The City and the River* he works on a much vaster canvas which encompasses within its range time, God, man and nature through an allegorical strategy.

The narrative framework of the novel is mythical. Great Yogeshwara narrates the events of the last cycle to the Nameless - One who is "the illegitimate child" sent on a raft into the unknown at the end of that cycle. He is now thirty year old and the Great Yogeshwara is preparing him to enter another similar world as another Hermit of the Mountain. In the end of the last cycle was the beginning of a new one like the snake eating its own tail. A prophecy, mainly forecasting the return of the king to his kingdom, is given in the beginning of the novel and referred to in it more than once. The prophecy, like most such pronouncements, is obscure and ambiguous. This suggests the incomprehensibility of the universe. But at the same time, it leaves the interpretation to each individual, underlining his importance and also the fact that there is nothing final about the fate of the city and its people can mould it in their own way. In the unending debate about predestination and free will, the novelist seems to say that nobody can know for certain what is destined and that he can shape the future by his actions. The world, of which the city of the novel is a microcosm, can also improve if "this endless repetition" (p.262) is converted through moral upliftment from a repetitive cycle into a spiral and then stopped altogether. The initiative lies with man.

The world of the previous cycle as delineated by the Great Yogeshwara in the corpus of the novel is recognisably contemporary. There

are shopping arcades, cigars, newspapers, lottery-stalls, card-clubs, radio-waves and conveyors run on electricity. The weapons of war consist of self-loading rifles, tanks, helicopters and lasers. But, as in our world, all the modern scientific advancement exists alongwith the traditional and the individual ambitions and manoeuvrings for power alongwith a solid crust of community-life and class divisions. This co-existence of different ways of life, of different centuries, as it were, is reflected in a comprehensive geographical background which includes both a huge untamed river and shopping arcades, crude boats and sophisticated helicopters, pyramids and snow-capped peaks. Not unoften the novel seems to have transcended the limitations of space and time.

The Indian political scenario of the Emergency period is in many respects paralleled in the novel. The country has a dictatorship, though there is a facade of democracy at the top where the dictator (Grand Master) is supposed to be elected by a few. There is no legislative body and hardly any judiciary. There is just a coterie of persons at the top and a police force to maintain law and order. The Indian Emergency had legislatures and judiciary, though these bodies were fast becoming subservient to the chief of the executive, thus losing their identity. In many other respects the similarities are more obvious on account of imaginary threats from within and without. "The Era of Ultimate Greatness" (p. 23) is declared followed by "The way of the Three Beatitudes" or "The Triple Way" (p. 177) which suggests the Twenty-Point Programme, and the enforcement of discipline and a new food for thought provided by strict control of the media including that of the satellite (e.g. pp. 173, 109-10). Misleading euphemistic expressions like "the law of compassionate righteousness" (p. 18) for ruthless punishment are used. There is a Rallies Master, an important member of the government, who has jurisdiction over the youth. He controls the shock brigades of students and teachers and provides "cheer leaders" (pp. 99-100) at public meetings. There are references to money power (p.90), hoarding (p.93) and adulteration of oil (p.152). A whimsical and stupid straightening of roads is done by the use of bulldozers resulting in the levelling down of the houses of hundreds of people who have nowhere to go and have therefore to be allowed to live and carry on all their normal activities in the same open place as though their houses were still there--the place, now being called "Avenue Asthough". The Grand Master orders an impractical family planning only for the "Boatmen", "one, and only one, child to a mother

and two to a home" (p.18), the implications of which the people cannot understand. Even the air is said to be privately owned (pp.122-23). This "Era of Ultimate Greatness" has natural corollaries in the loss of individual freedom, arbitrary arrests and a reign of terror with innocent people being condemned to a life of suffering and torture in a vast underground labyrinthine prison euphemistically called, after its old and outdated use, the Gold Mines. They are sent to prison without even a semblance of trial and, in fact, when the Grand Master, to project a clean image, orders the release of all prisoners not found guilty. The authorities without, of course, any real intention, have forgotten how to frame charges and so ask the prisoners to prove their innocence (p.172). The Grand Master follows the way of all dictators, first to elevate himself by becoming the king and then to ensure the succession of his son to the throne through his sycophants who plead the supremacy of heredity and the natural superiority of the higher castes (p. 212). The ugly nakedness of the system (pp.124 et passim) and the extinction of the soul under it are suggested through the parables of the king without his clothes and of the mirrors which reflect the reality of men without their insides (pp.133-35).

The "Era of Ultimate Greatness" is not only a satire on the Emergency but it is also a parable of evil drunk with power attempting to encroach upon the traditional primitive culture of the Boatmen who worship the River and are now forced to take an oath of allegiance to the Grand Master and to salute him in place of the river :

All their lives, for ages beyond memory, boatmen had saluted the great river, and only the great river, who was their mother. They saluted her morning and evening by taking from her a handful of water and letting it run down from their close-cropped heads. They did not know how to salute a man, be he a Grand Master. (p.90)

This and such other decrees which interfere with tradition make the Boatmen revolt under the leadership of their Headman, a woman, who, by uniting the male and the female principles, becomes a divine instrument, as also do Master Bhoma or Bhumiputra and the simple old Professor. When the limit of ruthless cruelty is reached, the mighty river, an embodiment of time (p.120), of the Divine Mother (p.139), starts rising and becoming almost "the primordial sea" engulfs the whole city and everybody in it (pp.257 ff.). The Eternal or Divine reasserts itself and wipes out everything to start a new experiment afresh. The politics in the novel is an allegory not only of the

Emergency, but it broadens out first into the generalities of politics which, as is often said, consists of the art of attaining power and the craft of retaining it, and then into the higher ethical and metaphysical dimensions.

The theme of the novel is multilateral, spanning its political, sociological and mythical dimensions in a world which transcends its contemporaneity and contains characters who are archetypes rather than recognisable human beings with individual characteristics. The novel embodies the eternal conflict between allegiance to man and allegiance to God. Any attempt to usurp the souls of men is stupid and is doomed to failure but not without much avoidable suffering, death and destruction. The novel seeks to answer the question how to prevent its periodic recurrence. The solution suggested seems to have been inspired by both the *Gita* and Gandhi. Its embodiment is a typically Gandhian character the Nameless-one, who appears as the Hermit of the Mountain. The first step is to cast off the fear of rulers, which is really the fear of death and suffering. The Hermit of the Mountain does not incite anybody to armed rebellion but tries to persuade them to stand for the truth so as to convert the hearts of the rulers as advised by the Great Yogeshwara :

God resides as much in a Grand Master as in you and me. Is not, therefore, always, room for hope? We never know when the soul of a Grand Master is touched and in that hour his life is transformed. (p.263)

Yogeshwara affirms the supremacy of the mind over the body. "It is what you are inside that governs how you read the outside". There is a prophecy, no doubt, but it is ambiguous: "the prophecy by itself said nothing that was inexorable. How one read it was all that mattered". The Hermit also makes it clear to the Minister for Trade, "There is nothing inevitable about the prophecy. The hand that made it believes, above all, in man's capacity to change his fate. So even if it speaks of the coming of a king, men can so conduct themselves, so choose, that the king does not come, or the king that comes is of the right kind" (p.68). As the Hermit says, even God is a king and the prophecy of the return of the king to his kingdom may be a reference to it, i.e. the return of the spiritual values to a selfish and materialistic society. For this purpose efforts at self-purification are necessary, the shedding off of "egoism, selfishness, stupidity" (p.263). Thus any upliftment of society must start at the level of individuals. And once the world has purified itself, the "endless repetition", the "periodic disintegration" will

be prevented and a stable society, a Gandhian Ramarajya or a Christian Kingdom of God will be established. This message of the salvation of mankind seems to be the message of the novel conveyed not only in words but also through characters like the Hermit, Bhumiputra, the Professor and the Headman, and through events like the Boatmen's rebellion and the universal destruction which form the corpus of the novel and highlight the centrality of individual effort at self-purification and attempt to convert the hearts of the opponents through resistance and service. The Hermit's advice to the Minister for Trade is: "The Truth for you is what destroys falsehood at its very roots, which leaves all men free to choose as they will" (p.112). He, therefore, asks the Minister to defy the Grand Master and tell the city what he really thinks of the Grand Master (p.112). And, in case the Minister wants to be the Grand Master himself, the Hermit's advice is: "A man aspiring to rule this city must first learn to be the slave of this city. (p.113).

The inspiration for these affirmations is also provided by beliefs based on Indian scriptures, especially the *Gita* which had influenced Arun Joshi's earlier works too. The one who watches the recurrence of this cycle, this 'leela', this "charade" or "joke" (p.262) is Yogeshwara, obviously named after the appellation given to Lord Krishna in the concluding shloka of the *Gita*. The Nameless-One, though somewhat hesitant, is provided some enlightenment by Yogeshwara and sent into the world of the next cycle. The similarity with Lord Krishna and Arjuna is strongly suggested. Though in the novel both Yogeshwara and the Nameless-One are said to be "instruments of the great God in the highest heaven who is the Master of the Universe" (p.264), it may be pointed out that once the Lord chooses to enter into His own world, He makes himself subject to its Laws and assumes a human role distinct from the divine.

In fact, an enveloping cosmic vision, which is close to that of the *Gita*, pervades the novel. The *Gita* speaks of the brevity of human life and the eternity of the soul. Man is being constantly born and is constantly dying (The *Gita*, II, 26). Master Bhoma in the novel inspires the Boatmen with a similar message :

"The guns can kill your bodies, yes. Are you, then, afraid to die?".... What is man, howsoever powerful, that he so fills you with dread, that you let him come between you and your understanding. What is a Grand Master if not a wisp of the morning mist that for a moment dances upon the river's deep waters. What do you choose, then, this wisp of the mist or the great river herself ?" (p.146)

The brevity of human life as contrasted to the timelessness of the eternal is also mentioned in the *Gita*. (The *Gita*, II, 28). Master Bhoma's words about the importance of clear understanding similar to the mind, "steadfast and firm in meditation", mentioned in the *Gita* (II, 53), seem to embody the message of the novel : the supremacy of the individual's pure, unclouded, stable understanding.

Another point to be noticed is the repeated reference to music at the crucial moments of destruction and recreation. When the City is being submerged under the swirling waters of the river,

The music, rising to a shattering volume, fills the four quarters of the sky. The notes leap from one pole to the other, awesome yet playful. To the melody now other notes are added, and the sound of the drums and instruments of which man has no knowledge. And, now, another wind rises and there is the sound of dancing whirling feet and of laughter. (p.251).

Similarly, in the night in which the Nameless-One is going to leave for the new world, he hears the sound of music which is a sign that he is in tune with the cosmic forces :

And when he had drained the cup the Nameless-One felt as vast as the sky and as tall as the mountain, and there came into his ears, as though from beyond the stars, the sound of a melody played on a one-string. The music rose and fell and grew in volume and was joined by the sound of dancing feet. And, presently, the music and the dancing filled the infinite spaces of the cosmic night. (p.11)

At the actual moment of his departure also, the Nameless-One hears "the same haunting melody of the previous night" which had such an "utter sweetness" that he was "certain that a god was descending", and which "was so close that he thought he could surely hug it to his chest" (p.264). All these references to music and dancing have a wide range of suggestivity including the lute of Lord Krishna, the dance of Shiva and the all-enveloping music of the spheres.

In any case, all these references make the reader aware of the universal stage on which the recurring action of the novel is played out and thus make him transcend the contemporary into the cosmic, the transient into the timeless. The conflict between the City and the River in the novel is a conflict between two opposing world-views--the one evil, self-centred and materialistic, and the other purified, selfless and cosmic. The final disappearance of the City under the primordial waters of the river can be said to stand for the merger of the weak, fleeting, flawed creation into the powerful, eternal and

supremely good. In brief, the political, cultural, mythical and metaphysical features of the novel merge into the spectrum of a microcosm of the universe in which men can attain salvation and conquer the recurrent cycles of birth and death, creation and disintegration, through self-purification to be attained through suffering and sacrifice.

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<sup>6</sup>Arun Joshi, *The City and the River* (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1990). All references to the novel have been given in parentheses in the text of the paper.

<sup>7</sup>Arun Joshi, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (New Delhi: Hind Pocket Books, 1971), p.8.

## THREE SHAKESPEARE NOTES

S. Viswanathan

### 'THE LADY OF THE STRACHY' YET ONCE MORE

Malvolio : There's example for't the Lady  
of the Strachy married the yeoman  
of the wardrobe.

*Twelfth Night*, II, v, 36-38.

Two possibilities as regards the as yet not quite satisfactorily identified allusion to the Lady of the Strachey may be suggested.

The example of a noble lady who married beneath her implied in the passage is likely to have been one which some if not many in the play's audience would have recognized as an item of court gossip or recent local history. It is possible that the reference is to Lady Leovine, the Dowager Countess of Leicester who married Sir Christopher Blount, the holder of the horse to the Earl of Leicester, an upper servant in her household, after Leicester's death in 1588. It could be that Shakespeare wrote 'the Lady of the Strand', as a circumlocution for the Countess of Leicester since Leicester House stood in the Strand as a well known landmark. Though it had later by the time of *Twelfth Night* become Essex House, Lady Leovine had earlier been married to the Earl of Essex.<sup>1</sup> The First Folio Compositor E in Charlton Hinman's identification of compositional hands, who probably set *Twelfth Night*, could have misread 'the Strand' as 'the Strachy'. Perhaps as an apprentice compositor, E misidentified the expression.<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing of *Twelfth Night*, Essex House in the Strand was much in the news, as it were, on account of the Essex rebellion, and the Lady Leovine was still living there, her husband Blount having been executed as an active participant in the rebellion. Incidentally, the Strand was beginning then to be regarded as a posh location. What is more, in one of the letters of a contemporary Philip Gawdy, dated 1602, there is an intriguing, hitherto not discussed, reference to a rumour that the Lady of Leovine had married one of the boy actors of the Children of the Royal Chapel.

I will wryte you no neues: but tis sayde my Lady of Lester hath marryed one of the playing boyes of the Chappell.<sup>3</sup>

Possibly, Shakespeare was referring to the boy actor of marriageable age as yeoman denoting his rank, and associated him with the Wardrobe in the Blackfriars area where the Chapel Children's theatre the Blackfriars was located (and in which area Shakespeare had perhaps already started living by 1602). The reference could then be to the already well known marriage of Lady Leovine with Blount or to her recent marriage with an actor, the lady of the Strand married the yeoman of the Wardrobe. The phrase 'the yeoman of the wardrobe' need not necessarily have been meant to be a specific reference to the Yeoman of the Queen's wardrobe.

The second possibility I would suggest is that the 'Lady of the Strachy' may be a compositorial misreading of Shakespeare's phrase the 'Lady of the Eresby' which would mean the Duchess of Suffolk, Catharine Bertie, who was born in the house of the Eresby as the only child of William Willoughby, eighth Lord Willoughby de Eresby. Catharine Bertie, the Duchess of Suffolk, married in the early 1650's Richard Bertie, again, the master of the horse in her household. She was fairly known as a champion, and sufferer in the cause, of the Reformation, and her story was featured in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and Holinshed's *History* (1587 edn., vol II., pp.1143-45) reproduced the Book of Martyrs' account of her tribulations, and there were several other accounts including Thomas Deloney's ballad 'The Dutchesses of Suffolkes Calamities'<sup>4</sup>, besides the play Thomas Drue's *The Duches of Suffolk* which came later in 1624.

Though the Bertie couple and their activities such as their adventurous escape into and journeys in the continent during the prosecutions of the Mary Tudor regime because part of the legend lore of the Reformation, there does seem to have been talk in the court circles in Queen Elizabeth's time about the unequalness of the marriage. The Earl of Arundel evidently remarked on it, provoking Richard Bertie to respond saying in a letter to the Lord Chancellor Burghley

My lord of A. told the Queen 'I was no gentleman...(I am) no whit ashamed of my parents being free English, neither villeins nor traitors... ..<sup>5</sup>

thus, more or less, acknowledging, and taking pride in, his yeoman birth. Richard Bertie was in the retinue of Queen Elizabeth when she visited Oxford in 1571 (*DNB*), and he earlier held a position in the household of Sir Thomas Wriothesley, lord chancellor and earl of Southampton. These factors might have served as Shakespeare's basis

for referring to him indirectly as 'yeoman of the wardrobe,' a phrase which imports the position of an upper servant. Could it be that whatever association young Shakespeare as poet might have had with the Southampton household and the Earl of Southampton, Sir Henry Wriothesley, to whom he dedicated his *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, made it possible for him to be privy to certain details regarding Catherine and Richard Bertie by way of gossip?

Whether the reference is to be taken either as to the 'Lady of the Strand', Lady Leovine, the Dowager Countess of Leicester or as to the 'Lady of Eresby', the Duchess of Suffolk, in either case an emendation of 'Strachy' will have to be proposed. The compositorial misreading of 'Eresby' as 'Strachy' is perhaps more in accordance with the traces of the letters in the old Secretary hand. However, graphic considerations apart, given the implicit concern in *Twelfth Night* with the problems of marriage-choices of the higher aristocrats like Olivia, of the upper middle class representatives like Viola and Sebastian and of a middle class functionary like Malvolio, especially one with dreams and ambitions of marrying above his rank, the example which the playwright makes Malvolio allude to could be the then more recent one of Lady Leovine and her marriage either with Blount, the keeper of the horses after Leicester's death in 1588, or with a boy-actor after Blount's death by execution and before 1602.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See the DNB entry on Lady Leovine. Essex house is called Leicester House in John Norden's map of London (1593). See Henry B. Wheatley, "London and the Life of the Town", *Shakespeare's England*, Vol.II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), p.161 on the house.

<sup>2</sup>Charlton Hinman, ed. *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, The Norton Facsimile Edition (New York: Norton, 1968), Introduction, p.xix.

<sup>3</sup>*Letter of Philip Gawdy*, ed. I.H. Jeays (London: J.B. Nicols and sons, 1906), p.117.

<sup>4</sup>F.O. Mann, ed. *The Works of Thomas Deloney* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912), pp. 389-393.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted from A.L. Rowse, *The England of Elizabeth* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p.245.

## A SPENSER REMINISCENCE AT ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA (IV, xiv, 47)

The half-soliloquising speech of Antony in response to the false news of Cleopatra's death, in which he reaccentuates his resolve to take his life, has a line which is a strong reminiscence of Spenser's lines for one of the powerful exhortations of Despair to the Red-Cross Knight (*The Faerie Queene*, Bk I, Canto 9, stanzas 43 and 44). Shakespeare's line affords an illustration of the working of literary memory and intertextuality. Antony's utterance

I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and  
Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now  
All length is torture; since the torch is out,  
Lie down and stray no farther....(IV, xiv, 44-49)<sup>1</sup>

contains, besides the odd, Spenserian, proximity of the near-homonymous 'torture' and 'torch', odd despite the ironic anticipation of the ensuing lingering process of Antony's death the collocation suggests, the somewhat strange abjuration to himself

Lie down and stray no farther....

The implicit metaphor is that of the traveller having to halt his way-faring abruptly and to lie down and rest, since the torch, the light, has gone out and the metaphor is in line with Antony's earlier

... the long day's task is done,  
And we must sleep (IV, xiv, 35-36)

sleep' suggesting its near-identical topological twin 'death'. Echoes in Shakespeare's mind of Spenser's lines would seem to operate in the lines the playwright wrote for Antony. Spenser's Despair argues with Red-Cross.

The lenger life, I wote the greater sin,  
The greater sin, the greater punishment:  
... ..  
... ..  
Is not enough thy evil life forespent ?  
For he, that once hath missed the right way,  
The further he doth goe, the further he doth stray.  
Then do no further goe, no further stray,  
But here lie downe, and to thy rest betake. <sup>2</sup>

thus trying to entice the knight. particularly in the lines I have underlined, the ones which Shakespeare seems to have remembered, into

suicide there and then. Also, Spenser makes Despair use, at an earlier point in his argument, the motif of the traveller engaged in the difficult journey of life requiring to be helped across to 'easeful death' (stanzas 39 and 40). The self-exhortation of Antony to die after the high Roman fashion, though not entirely in despair as he hopes to find in Elysium a fine and public place for himself and Cleopatra as a 'pair so famous' as to outdo Dido and Aeneas, incorporate a fairly sustained if slightly parodic echo of Despair's counsel to Red-Cross.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I quote from the new Arden edition of the play.

<sup>2</sup>I quote from the Penguin edition of the poem by Thomas P. Roche, Jr.

## THE FOLIO READING 'ANTHONY', ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA (V, ii, 87)

'Autumn', Thirlby's conjecture and Theobald's independent emendation for the F *Anthony*, in

....For his bounty  
There was no winter in't; an autumn it was  
That grew the more by reaping . . . .

has, happily, been almost universally adopted. As the play's new Arden editor M.R. Ridley put it, there can be little doubt that *Automne* is what Shakespeare wrote. Yet the possible logic, the why and how, of Compositor E's (in Charlton Hinman's identification of the Folio compositors) setting of the word as *Anthony*, would seem worth exploring. Compositor E who started as a somewhat bungling apprentice and had to be an understudy of other compositors in the early stages of the printing of the Folio, later graduated into setting several whole plays (*Twelfth Night*, *Timon of Athens*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Cymbeline*) on his own.<sup>1</sup> The F page (p.873 in the Norton Facsimile edited by Hinman) on which the passage in question appears was the first page in the quire, the last quire 2z in the play, and set by the compositor last, in the sequence of pages in the quire in the 'casting off' printing practice, a F page which as Hinman points out<sup>2</sup> is a classic instance of the crowding and the probable dropping of words due to

'casting off' (in this case perhaps a s.d. regarding the taking of Cleopatra by Proculeius among other Caesar's men). For one thing, Composer E must have been troubled by this problem while setting the page. For another, the occurrence of *Anthony* in a slightly earlier line of Cleopatra's

I dreamt there was an Emperor *Anthony* (V, ii, 76)

and in a slightly later line

... yet t' imagine

An *Anthony* were nature's piece 'gainst fancy (V,ii, 98-99)

might have caused a confusion due to eyeskip. Thirdly, cross-associations given rise to in Composer E's mind by Cleopatra's vision of an Antony of macrocosmic stature, dimensions and grandeur may have suggested to the composer the portraiture of Christ as Pantocrat, and/or the paintings portraying the apparitions which appeared to St. Anthony, paintings which were familiar enough in the Renaissance. Alternatively, the composer's attention could have got distracted and diverted by the association of 'bounty' or generosity with St. Anthony of Padua who was well known as a miracle working saint and restorer of stolen goods but who was also regarded as a generous feeder of the poor. This last possibility cannot be ruled out, given the pattern of the fading and at the same time the persistence of saint-cults in early seventeenth-century England.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Charlton Hinman, *The First Folio of Shakespeare : The Norton Facsimile* (New York: Norton, 1968), Introduction, p.xix

<sup>2</sup>Charlton Hinman, p.xvii.

## "THE WASTE LAND" AS AN ADVENTURE OF CREED AND TECHNIQUE : A NOTE

Narayan Sharma

In his essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Eliot remarks that poetry "is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" and that "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the man who creates." But later he defines the mature poet as one who "out of intense and personal experience is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, to make it a general symbol." The faculty to do this is at the root of Eliot's great success. He has never wavered from his insistence that poetry is art, not "self-expression"; "not our feelings, but the pattern we make of our feelings is the centre of value." But his art has always communicated "intense and personal experience." His poetry, indeed, in spite of all its obliquities and disguises that he adopts to "distance" his experience, forms a spiritual autobiography, which speaks to all sensitive readers of their own emotions and conflicts. But behind the mask of impersonality, the drama, in his poems, is deeply human and individual and its conflicts are those which are common in some degree to all, and have been common in some degree to all in all ages. This is one of the reasons that the younger generation of readers respond so warmly to his poetry, though his contemporaries dismissed it as ugly and unintelligible.

What is the picture of the world which Eliot's poetry projects with such sharpness ? In his review of Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1923, he writes of "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." Whether or not this is a just description of the modern world, it is certainly the picture of it which emerges from the poetry of Eliot. The ugliness and squalor of the modern city life is seen to come with bold relief at many places in his poetry, especially in "The Waste Land". The characters or persons that move about and inherit this world suffer from an impoverishment of emotional vitality. They either live by the "formulated phrases" of an empty social convention and a decadent culture, or their lives are purely sordid and sensual.

In "The Waste Land", "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history," is juxtaposed with the timeless values of myth and religion. The personal element is strongly felt, though it is covered under disguises. In fact, one of the great difficul-

ties of the poem is the sense of struggle behind it to transmute personal and private experience into the universal and the impersonal. Eliot's method is to evoke the emotional barrenness and the spiritual failure of communal and personal living in his contemporary civilization and to set it against reminders of the myths and faiths of the past and the literature inspired by those faiths. This involves a labyrinth of allusions, images and symbols. It is questionable whether a poem, which needs so much reference to outside sources unknown to the common readers and such elaborate and complicated annotation and interpretation, is a poetic success or not. To start with, the reader has to spend more time in detective work rather than in enjoying the poem. But in spite of all this, the poem has established itself as the literary symbol of the social, psychic and religious disintegration of the present age. The agonies of the shadowy hero arise from his horror and disgust at the life he sees around him and from his incapacity to surrender himself to the active and self-creative elements in his own being. He is torn between the desire for rebirth and the desire to drift.

But in their effort to uphold "The Waste Land" as a modernistic criticism of the contemporary life, or to regard it as a symbol of the disintegrated culture and the disjointed personal and social life of the contemporary age, the critics have unwittingly failed to keep their minds awake to Eliot's observations quoted above, i.e. the mature poet is one who out of personal experience is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his experience, he makes it a general symbol. This particularity is to be transcended and transformed not only on the individual and personal plane but also on the temporal plane. "The Waste Land" does achieve this multiplaner transcendence and transformation. It is a symbol not of the contemporary civilization alone, but of some particular aspects of the dilemma of human existence that have robbed the human race of its peace in all ages. "A great poem," according to I.A. Richards, is "a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight. "The Waste Land" is a great poem, and the 'foreverness' of its applicability and validity extends back into the past and rolls forth into the future too.

It would be advisable to examine briefly the philosophical and intellectual imperatives under which Eliot laboured and that left him with no alternative except to write in the peculiar disjointed, elliptical, allusive, ambivalent, ambiguous and obscure yet verbally bright and charming style that has now come to mark a turning point in the

history of English poetry. How he transformed his personal and commonplace readings, studies and experiences into impersonal and general patterns of literary creation and symbols of multiplaner meaning has also to be noted carefully. The Houghton library at Harvard contains an unpublished doctoral dissertation "Experience and the Objects of Knowledge in the Philosophy of Bradley" written by T.S.Eliot. The intellectual world of Bradley occupied Eliot's close attention for a fairly long period. One very important deposit of Bradleyism in Eliot's sensibility is visible in the disarmingly hesitant and fragmentary way in which he makes a point or expresses a conviction, doubting that he is quite the man to undertake the job in hand or that the job in hand is in fact the right job to be in his hand. These are some unmistakable influences derivable from Bradley's famous philosophical treatise, *Appearance and Reality*. What I mean to point out is that the apparent obscurity or disjointed structure of "The Waste Land", in place of being a reflection of the disintegration of his surrounding world, may actually be a part of his attitude towards external experience and internal awareness necessitated by this philosophy.

This faithfulness to doubt is actually the main alchemic power that gives shape to his early poetry, specially "The Waste Land." This is specially noticeable in his use of epigraphs before some of his important poems. These epigraphs confront the reader with a quizzical interrogation just before he sets out to read the poem. These epigraphs invest the very start of the poem with dubiousness that may appear to us as intellectual romanticism but may all the same be subtle metaphysical strategy. The Bradleyan metaphysics influenced Eliot's poetic craftsmanship in another way also. Bradley believed that the world-view of the human race would continue to change even though the world itself might remain unchanged. We cannot deny that the diagrammatic view of the world does not work even though we have a tendency to cling to it. Impelled and encouraged by Bradleyan philosophy, Eliot had the intellectual honesty to recognize and accept the disorderly and the uncertain, the indefinite and the unpredictable scheme of affairs and had also the artistic courage and skill to design his poetry according to the designlessness of life's drama. "The Waste Land" especially has to be studied in the light of this philosophic bias of its writer.

Three books have come to be intimately related to "The Waste Land". They are: Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, Frazer's

*The Golden Bough* and *My Past* by Countess Marie Larisch. The most material and literal influences is of the last book and this has been very convincingly brought out by George L.K. Morris. Events, characters and the mystery of Death by water and drowning, etc., have been literally lifted out of this book. The association of the two other books with "The Waste Land" is too well-known. Only this much is again sought to be pointed out that in this context, too, we should pay fair heed to Eliot's creative creed that the genuine poet transforms the personal and the particular into the impersonal and the general. The events, characters, rituals, names and symbols might have been taken from these books or any other source even; but they have emerged as independent and universal symbols laden with their own meaning, invested with their own function and all capable of multiplaner interpretations.

Eliot uses the contemporary world as a symbol of the humanity's insensitiveness or indifference to the realities behind the old symbols and myths of its literary and religious tradition. The central symbol of the fragmentariness, the moral ugliness and the boredom of the contemporary scene is the modern city. It represents the lack of fertility and communion between man and man and between man and God. Tiresias, though he does not appear until the Third Part of the poem, is yet a key symbol of the poet's approach or his quest for a unified synthesis of the individualities and particularities of the apparently irreconcilable diversities of the manifested creation.

While engaged in arranging his metaphysical threads in an orderly shape, Eliot has consistently maintained his commitment to redesigning and restructuring the pattern of poetic creation. His style, diction and brilliant versification lend charm to "The Waste Land", thus making it the symbol, the ideal and also the awe of modern poetry. Obviously, the poem is impregnated with a deep, earnest and timely message. It is the sermon of surrender to God's higher Wisdom and Justice and Love and to an Unshakable Faith in His nearness to, and even presence with, us.

## A NOTE ON THE THEME OF EXILE IN T. S. ELIOT'S *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL*

Monika Gupta

Eliot's central preoccupation in *Murder in the Cathedral* is with the exploration and exposition of the theme of exile. The will of a martyr to sacrifice himself for the will of the Almighty is generally considered the main theme of the play. It is true that the play highlights the endeavour of the great saint, Thomas, to submit himself entirely to the realisation of the Supersensible Being. Also, it is often stated that the play is Christian in spirit. But the fact is that the play, besides dealing with faith, religion and spiritualism, is primarily centred upon the theme of exile. In fact, exile and its vociferous impacts on both the plot and the presentation contribute immensely to Eliot's dramaturgy.

Eliot, as is clear from *Four Quartets*, was fathomlessly attached to America, his homeland. Then, his marriage with Vivienne Heigwood was not in tune with his temperament, and was rather a forcible affair under pressing circumstances. He loved America more than Vivienne and England. Thus, he was never at home in England, and felt himself estranged in an entirely different environment of an alien land. His conversion in 1926-27 was more diplomatic than personal; he had to opt for British citizenship because there was no way out for him to accommodate himself in England. The two unamicable events of his conversion and citizenship were due to his need, and not willingness, and so neither of them could bring about a change of heart in him; in fact, they created a situation which alienated him from English as well as American life. His biographical facts also evince that his later life was confined to loneliness that brought him philosophical richness, but not personal happiness. The truth is that Eliot took himself to be in exile for all his life and he could never reconcile with his lost memories. No wonder, then, if the basic theme of his works is either exile or estrangement.

Let us examine *Murder in the Cathedral* in the light of the above assertion. Prima Facie, Thomas appears to be a Christian martyr, sacrificing himself for the sake of Christian sainthood. He enumerates the conceptual redeeming of religious gospel on purely given conditions of Christian faith. But the intellectual trait of Thomas, projected through his philosophical speeches, brings him nearer to Eliot's own self. Whether we take him to be a Christian saint, or a philosophic thinker,

or a saviour of "divine life against scientific order,"<sup>1</sup> he carries propensity of alienation, deeming himself to be separated from the existing order. Spiritually, he regards himself as the part of the Almighty to have come upon the journey of the earth by virtue of the incidence of birth. The earth which is an abode of his temporal existence and which he also considers to be an "insolvable misery,"<sup>2</sup> is transitory, and hence an exile for a certain number of years to be passed in it. Once again he evinces that his mission is to restore himself to heaven. It is because of this principle that his stay on earth, including the social order he has been confined to, is an estrangement in the real sense of the term. He talks of the agent, the suffering, and the chain of births and deaths. This implies that even as an Archbishop, virtually serving the masses, he still feels alienated from every kind of society or people. Both the Priests and the Chorus, "welcoming him home from exile,"<sup>3</sup> do not understand his meaning because his approach has been paradoxical, if not elusive, to the common people. Whether he is spiritual or earthly is not meaningful; what actually matters is the difficulty in his being correctly understood by the audience. His escape into the Cathedral, awaiting his murder by the Knights, only points to his exile into a separate world of loneliness.

Thomas's estrangement, overpowering him with the sense of separation and aloofness, is disseminated by the playwright from his own life. Eliot did not like England, though it enabled him to live a life of fame and prosperity. In fact, he was so deeply attached to his native land that he would never prefer to settle down in England where he always felt himself in an exile. All the issues of his conversion, from Protestantism to Catholicism, from an American to a British citizen, from a poet to a dramatist, and the arresting of the "timeless moment",<sup>4</sup> as he often said of it, exhibit the constraints of his professional life, and these events naturally alienated him from his parents and country more than before. His family life was soaked in alienation as a result of his failure in love and marriage. His social life was, too, a part of his personal life of continual efforts of making adjustment with the alien adversaries. A close look at the varied modes of his exile shows that Eliot took his life in England as an exile and never enjoyed it on account of his irreconcilable heart. It was until his death that the powerful sense of estrangement was ceaselessly accompanied by the memories of his homeland. Even during the War years, he could write *Four Quartets* in memory of his childhood days as passed in his dear, unforgettable America, and not anything about British involvements in the World War. Then, his desire

to be buried in his ancestral village laid bare the intense load of his alienated being.

Whereas the Chorus in a Greek play serves the multipurpose of delineating a scene, a situation and an atmosphere in a very effective way, and also acquainting the audience with the coming set of horrible consequences, Eliot has treated it in a more meaningful manner by making it highlight the central theme of exile also. Besides, the Chorus is used for the purpose of depicting Thomas' greatness as a "supplementary action"<sup>5</sup> both over himself and his atmosphere. Of course, the experience of greatness has been projected through Thomas' alienation from himself. In other words, the Chorus has also been used by Eliot for separating Thomas from his surroundings. Once Thomas talks of martyrdom and sacrifice, it exhibits his elevation from the physical to the divine. The following two utterances of the Chorus finely bring out his state of elevation from the inferior to the superior by means of a comparison between two situations, i.e. life with Thomas and life without Thomas:

Here is no continuing city, here is no abiding stay.

Ill the wind, ill the time, uncertain the profit, certain the danger.

O late late late, late is the time, late too late, and rotten the year;

Evil the wind, and bitter the sea, and grey the sky, grey grey grey.

O Thomas, return, Archbishop, return, return to France.

Return, Quickly, Quickly, Leave us to perish in quiet.

You come with applause, you come with rejoicing, but you come bringing death into Canterbury.

A doom on the house, a doom on yourself, a doom on the world.<sup>6</sup>

and

Emptiness, absence, separation from God;

The horror of the effortless journey, to the empty land.

Which is no land, only emptiness, absence, the void,

Where those who were men can no longer turn the mind.

To distraction, delusion, escape into dream, pretence.

Where the soul is no longer deceived, for there are no objects, no tones.<sup>7</sup>

Eliot has worked upon mainly two ideals of exile which ultimately pave the way for fruition in the real world. First, life in the contemporary world is a waste land where horror, darkness, suffering and the trauma of death prove worse than the effects of temporal pains. Death, on a plane of oneness with God, merges into the light of the Holy Ghost. The Chorus, representing life on our planet, symbolises the physical exile, different from the one lived by Thomas. He meets death giving a

different meaning to the priests and the women of Canterbury. He treats himself in exile because the physical world is dreaded to infect him with its creed of lust and greed. He prefers glorification to his murder in the exile. While the sense of exile reveals this optimism, it at the same time evinces the pessimistic trait of the Chorus. Secondly, Thomas' exile is philosophical, and this makes the autobiographical element in the play explicit. Like a Christian theologian, he believes that an individual comes on the earth individually and in this way his life becomes an individual responsibility. Man's permanent abode is heaven and the earth is only a place for his transitory stay. The speech of Thomas explicitly expresses that man's concern, whether social or personal, is damnable. When he says that sin "grows with doing good," he explains his point of view that the earthly relations should have no meaning for the individual other than restoring himself back to heaven. The right action is to seek redemption from the earthly bondage, and likewise inaction must lead one to involve oneself deeply in this world. The meaning of exile is extended to further investigation the moment Eliot incorporates his own experience in Thomas' self. Once again Eliot's American memories and his mental detachment from English life bring Thomas' exile into sharp focus.

Throughout his literary career, Eliot's whole effort seems to have been on a hunt for something lost in his memory. His exile into England, and its uncompromising winds, transpire his search for balance from the waste/exile to the miserable lot of the Tempters and the Priests. Thomas, in his speech,

To say: seven years were my people without  
 My presence; seven years of misery and pain  
 Seven years a mendicant on foreign charity  
 I lingered abroad: seven years is no brevity.  
 I shall not get those seven years back again.  
 Never again, you must make no doubt,  
 Shall the sea run between the shepherd and his fold. <sup>9</sup>

establishes that the physical exile has been only the cause of woe to the Tempters. However, he understands that internally he is in the spiritual trance to which neither the Tempters nor the Priests give any thought. The Tempters as well as the Knights feel that his exile of some seven years has broken him and his followers. It is only for him to realise that his whole duration of stay on earth has been an exile, and the concluding line, "Shall the sea run between the shepherd and his fold," manifests his view of compromise and elevation. Thomas, like Hardy, believes

that life is a suffering on account of its alienation, and so the compromise with the physical could be the only gratifying edifice. Exile, whether of the playwright in England, or of Thomas on the earth, exemplifies the belief that the attainment/redemption is possible only by reconciling with the temporal. If man's freedom has to be secular from an interference which "impede his pursuit of salvation,"<sup>10</sup> perfection must be the goal of the spiritual being, and any kind of exile would engender his concern in getting transpired to the superior plane. The state of exile, in view of his sainthood, is not an estrangement from the materialistic luxuries of the temporal world, but a state of trance which Thomas has achieved through great meditation, sacrifice and concentration.

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- <sup>3</sup>Robert Speaight, "With Becket in *Murder in the Cathedral*," *The Sewanee Review*, Vo. 74 (1966), p.178.
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- <sup>7</sup>Ibid, p.71.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p.52.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p.58.
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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Tuncer CUCENOGLU, *Poor Women*. Trans. Lâle EREN  
(Ankara: Ministry of Culture, 1993), pp.ix + 84.**

**Rashmi Gaur**

Tuncer CUCENOGLU's *Poor Women*, translated by Lale EREN, is an aesthetic reproduction of the humdrum life of a brothel, seemingly devoid of any artistic interest. The play, with its well-knit plot, is capable of keeping the audience in rapt attention, despite its shoddy language at places. Superficially, it can be read as a story of a brother's revenge, interwoven with a passive yet pungent social criticism. But to do justice to the play it should be read/viewed as an expression of the playwright's anguish at human suffering, his awareness that so often there is no escape from the dead - ends people find themselves in. With a kaleidoscopic vision Tuncer CUCENOGLU has drawn our attention to various social evils and taboos-- viz. problems of illiteracy, unemployment, lure of settling in a foreign country and earning easy money, yearning to lead a lavish life, and self - abuse, unquestioning submission of women to the myth of male superiority, etc.

Against the agonising scenes of poverty, contumely, reckless cruelty and emotional solitude of an Ankara brothel, several characters are presented to us through situations which are sometimes amusing, sometimes comic or mundane, but often steeped in a dark negative humour which compels us to think in terms of positive social restructuring. The main female characters are Mehtap, Neriman and Inci-- prostitutes of different age groups. The plot of the play revolves round their daily routine, underlining their destitute, miserable life, their abject surroundings, and the ugliness and hidden cruelty of their aimless existence, thus reinforcing the irrationality of social customs and superficiality of taboos accepted by them unquestioningly. These women accept their abominable existence mutely, surrendering to the chauvenistic male superiority. As the play opens, Neriman's conversation with the servant Apo brings this attitude into a sharp focus, "Good or bad, this fucking fellow is a man, after all..." (p.3). This dejection and passive acceptance of their being social outcasts, and a fatal lack of vindictiveness is curiously apparent in all the women in the play.

The male characters, on the other hand, are active, assertive, energetic and possess at least some shreds of dreams to support them in their emotional trauma. Thus Apo wants to go to Libya to be able to purchase a 'fideo', Sitki intends to protect his family's name by killing his sister, Shiny is zealous, and even the old guard Rustu has his principles. But the women do not have any dream except that of procuring a lover and holding him permanently. Why? Does it indicate the playwright's bias? Is it a subconscious assessment of a prostitute's mental-emotional calibre by an educated man? Whatever the reason is, this lack of any imaginative vision has reduced the women characters of this play to an almost animal existence. Their only instinct is self-preservation. Their conversation is a meaningless prattle. The oldest of the trio, Methap, is fighting a lost battle to keep her place in the brothel. Like a wild animal she has sensed the impending doom, yet at a conscious level she is postponing its realization. Her attempt to save Inci and Neriman's final repudiation of her lover are the desperate gestures of decrepit souls, and not an indication of their moral strength.

Inci, whose life-history is interwoven with the theme of the play and with whose murder the story ends, is a young, vivacious girl, whose burgeoning wish to live has been cruelly denied. Her fears are never taken seriously, for people are more engrossed with the daily problems of actual living. Shiny's attempt to put a phone call to the Director of Prisons is delineated with a burlesque undertone. Sitki's attempt on Inci also conforms to a traditional value-system. With his swift and brutal killing of Inci the play ends, but on a characteristically oriental note of cyclical life, since the new girl enters the brothel immediately after the murder.

What is significant, then, in this play? While depicting the lowest strata of a society immersed in traditions, Tuncer CUCENOGLU has been successful in describing the emotional trauma of his characters without any maudlin indulgence. The scenes which could become sickly emotional are presented with clarity, precision and detachment. The oblique sarcasm and subdued morbidity of such scenes impart them an emotive depth, while bringing them closer to the felt life. The scene of Mehtap's farewell and Apo's meticulous answer to Neriman's suggestions make it clear that every man must fend for himself.

The characterization, nonetheless, is powerful, but the language, though aptly reflects the type of the society depicted in the play, is at times unseemly. Some more attention should have been paid to proofs also. But overall the play has a well-knit plot, capable of holding the reader's interest. The story is full of seemingly amusing situations. But the undercurrent of pathos and deeply felt emotions gives rise to an overpowering gloom. The burlesque element and the dark humour recede into the background and what we visualize is the naked human soul, shorn of all 'cultural' finesse, trying to live through antagonistic circumstances with a tenacity and perseverance, without the advantage of any creative cathartic outlet, and is forced to face the real life-drama mutely as it unfolds gradually. And as we realize this universality of forlorn souls, we unconsciously and unwillingly begin to sympathize with the characters who seem rather commonplace and repugnant to us at the beginning.

But what is our uppermost reaction after finishing the play? We are shown a picture of a Hobbesian world without any protective screen, without any suppression of internal struggle itself. The picture moves us strongly and compels us to reassess many problems which, despite a lot of available propaganda, have never been evaluated objectively. The play presents a critique of a society which encourages ignorance, blatant discrimination and a fatal submission to taboos, universalizes this perspective, and makes us think anew of social restructuring, and, in fact, herein lies the real value of the play.

**Bhagwat S. Goyal (ed.), *R.K. Narayan's India:  
Myth & Reality***

(New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1993), pp. 182, Rs. 240.

**Kajali Sharma**

R.K. Narayan's India is a typical blend of myth and reality and the contributors to this volume in their distinctive styles reveal this very fruitfully and effectively. 14 critical essays, dealing mainly with two of the quintessential Narayan novels-- *The Financial Expert* and *The Guide*--, make interesting reading. In Prabhat Mathur's view, the novels of Narayan "treat Indian philosophy and legends ambiguously, leaving the implication that traditional wisdom is still true, although its truth is revealed more through absurdities than the strict application of traditional formulas to modern life." What Mathur perceives here as Narayan's ambiguity has baffled many a critic, including Mathur himself. Therefore, Mathur says about *The Guide* that it reflects the confusion of modern Indian life, particularly the difficulty in separating the true from the false. His bafflement reaches such an extreme as he observes: "Indian culture is so chaotic that rational understanding seems to be an absurd joke!" He sums up his basic premise when he says that by treating the myth, spiritualism and traditional values in the modern world, Narayan has shown the modern relevance of Indian culture.

S.P. Bharadwaj in his essay on Narayan's working women examines some 'modernised' women characters like Shanti Bai, Shanti, Rosie and Daisy, and finds that they are "like an ill-punctuated script only with a mark of exclamation at the end." However, they serve as an emblem of the efficacy and permanence of Indian culture and values. Gyan Verma in her article on Narayan in the context of ELT has made an effort to examine the short stories of R.K. Narayan for the purpose of course materials for teaching English to Indian students. She discovers that the lexico-semantic equation that is mentally established because of psychological and socio-cultural identification becomes the entry-behaviour of the learner in terms of linguistic competence.

Prof. K.K. Sharma in his comprehensive essay on Narayan's

Malgudi begins with some insightful theoretical formulations of local colour narrative and the regional novel. He holds the view that it is not fair to place Malgudi fiction in the category of local colour literature, nor can the definition of the regional novel, in a strict sense, be applied to Narayan's Malgudi novels. He, however, thinks that the sense of place in fiction is very important, particularly so, in Narayan's novels. He avers that "The place in the fictional writings of a writer, howsoever artistically and tactfully disguised or concealed, is usually the real one." Referring to Narayan's Malgudi, he says that it stands for Lalgudi in Trichinopoly district. Prof. Sharma then provides a detailed picture of Malgudi that emerges from his novels. He says that Malgudi is a progressive, dynamic town. It is "a typical Indian town, deeply-rooted in the past and ancient culture and at the same time leaping forward towards modernisation." He further observes that Malgudi represents the entire country with growing individualism, lust for wealth, and Western ways breaking the traditional joint family system. In a perceptive summing up of his point of view, he says : "Narayan's Malgudi, like Hardy's Wessex, serves as a special and useful background for the characters and episodes, and helps us to understand fully the actions of the characters inhabiting it."

Virendra K. Roy presents a new and provocatively refreshing point of view in his essay on Narayan. He holds that Narayan is a literary broker of Indian culture and exposes its hollowness and superficialities providing sufficient entertainment to his readers. He forcefully argues that *The Guide* does not reflect Indian culture in its depth, nor does it deal with the spiritual elevation of its protagonist. Rather, it is "a diatribe against ignorant people's credulousness and gullibility, who fall an easy prey to the hoax of spiritual potentiality of fake saints and saviours who, as social parasites, lead a life of luxury and comfort. But on a deeper level the novel is a study in the evils of acquisitiveness, sensuality and lustfulness and excessive self-gratification which destroy the harmony of life."

J.P. Savita in his article, "What Price Swamihood?", draws parallels between *The Guide* and a Jain folk tale and Lawrence's "The Woman Who Rode Away". He thinks that in *The Guide* Narayan, like his hero, slips into a situation from which it is very difficult to extricate. Hari P. Sahai, on the other hand, thinks that in the *The Guide* "the society with the Chinese maid's shoe morality" is the villain. In an interesting but insufficiently worked out attempt, Suneet Kumar

endeavours to discover the existential echoes in *The Financial Expert*. This novel reminds him of Camus' play *Misunderstanding*. In his view, the concept of absurdity, on the personal and mundane level, which finds expression in Camus' play, is displayed in *The Financial Expert* also. When, however, he analyses the novel, he is unable to provide suitable and convincing examples of the sense of absurdity and alienation, so typical of existentialism, in *The Financial Expert*.

Susan E. Croft's "Interview with R.K. Narayan" is simply brilliant and reveals the contradictions and paradoxes in Narayan's personality and writings very effectively. The very opening sentence, "I just want to be left alone ! R.K. Narayan does not like interviews, but this plea came after an hour's fruitful conversation," reveals this. Croft remains unconvinced by Narayan's insistence that "A book ought to stand alone" or "The author himself is irrelevant," because she finds his unwillingness to be understood as an individual at variance with his creation of "dominating central characters." About his characters, Narayan said that "they usually grew out of real people, but never in totality." Croft also found plenty of autobiographical material in Narayan's novels. But Narayan insisted that even when "the author assumes the role of a character, he remains personally detached." Trying to understand the reason of Narayan's attitude to the individual's insignificance in the cosmic scheme of things, Croft wonders: "Is his own individuality, as well as that of his characters, however detailed and fascinating, unimportant when seen in the universal context ?" Citing close parallels between the views of some characters of his novels and Narayan's own statements in his non-fictional works Croft asked Narayan if he subscribed to such views, particularly, "if he was opposed to the English system of education?" Narayan reproved her for this identity confusion and said: "I'm opposed to the system of just cramming and examination and all the grading." Narayan told Croft that "Even if I were an illiterate person, I would still be fascinated by the possibilities of the English language", and yet he found a writer like James Joyce "quite impossible to get through" because in his view Joyce's novels were "glimmicky like abstract paintings." Regarding his own style, Narayan said that style should be such as it is not noticed : "I'm aware of this style which is one that abolishes style." About Malgudi Narayan said that it "just happened" in his head. "An imaginary town like that has great possibilities !" When Croft remarked perceptively to Narayan that "none of his characters acts heroically--he simply muddles along

as best as he can, sometimes fortunately sometimes unfortunately (e.g., Savitri in *The Dark Room*), Narayan said: "That seems to be my nature." Finally, the interviewer found that "the man behind the novels is very much at one with himself and his creations."

G.L. Gautam in his article argues that Margayya's character is almost an incarnation of the Hobbesian concept of man-- man as a selfish animal, pursuing his own personal good, regardless of the interests of others. Ranjana Kumari avers in her article on the *The Guide* that through the character of Raju, the novelist presents an inverted image of the recluse or the holy man by placing him against the conventional concept of a recluse.

Bhagwat S. Goyal in his comprehensive review of Narayan's eleven novels from *Swami and Friends* to the *The Painter of Signs* traces the protagonist's quest for identity in a world of bewildering contradictions. He discovers a typical aesthetic pattern in his novels which corresponds at thematic level with certain philosophico-cultural assumptions of Narayan.

Taking it all in all, a stimulating collection of articles on Narayan, the book is, I am sure, a significant contribution to the Narayan criticism.

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