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Iffat Ara

The Concept of Nature in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Shakespeare's insight into human nature is reflected in his knowledge that human beings lack 'inward compass'[1] and are therefore swayed by passions. They are self-deceivers and this self-deception is betrayed in many forms. But the process of achieving self-knowledge does not turn the characters in this play into tragic figures. They provoke laughter at their own expense when they passionately fall in love and show themselves insensitive to it at the same time. The irrational love they exhibit is indeed fantastic:

> And therefore is love said to be a child,
> Because in choice he is so oft beguil'd
> (Act I, Sc 1, 208-209)

The conscious and unconscious segments of human personality interact: the former controls rational behaviour and the latter has its roots in individual passions. Human beings are likely to be led astray if the will is not allowed to conform to the dictates of reason.

Shakespeare's portrayal of characters is significant, as they contribute to the development of the theme of love in this play. Theseus and Hippolyta

are in love like the young Athenians but they are not self-involved. Their role is both natural and graceful. They recognize the truth that the claims of society weigh heavier than one's duty to oneself. Hence one should be realistic in one's approach to life. If one is required to follow the natural course, it neither implies repression nor license but a balancing of natural urges. Hippolyta grows impatient with the follies of love, for her own temperance does not approve of them. She hates artificiality in all its forms and likes to behave like her own true self. Theseus is also possessed of natural vigour and royal grace and combines wisdom with kindly feelings. He is a specimen of the Renaissance culture, for he has 'the good manners of a gentleman'.

The young Athenian lovers fall victims to irrational passions and their conduct is unnatural. Hence it leads to disorder and bitter disillusionment. They are like pieces on a chess-board whose movements are controlled by others. Lysander turns fickle-minded due to the spell of magic but Demetrius is ill-natured and has to undergo penance. Hermia and Helena are faintly drawn and hence seem to lack the maturity and level-headedness of Portia, Rosalind and Viola.

Oberon may not be very attractive on the face of it but his art is instrumental in exposing the artifice of the lovers. It is the flower called love-in-idleness that deludes the senses but it is the same herb that rationalizes love. Hence Demetrius exclaims;

> But, like in sickness, did I loath this food;
> But, as in health, come to my natural taste.
> (Act IV. Sc.1, ll. 173-74).

Titania, the fairy Queen, loves beautiful things in nature. She, however, lacks 'higher intellectual capacities of human nature' and is lured by the physical. Her sympathy with the mortals brings her close to them. Despite being at cross-purposes Oberon and Titania do not let their ugly nature be exposed and are never undignified. Titania confesses without inhibition:

> I am a spirit of no common rate;
> The summer still doth tend upon my state:
> (Act III, Sc.1, ll. 145-46)

Bottom and the artisans emerge on the scene for a specific purpose. While Bottom is an artist endowed with a rich imagination, the others remain shallow and dull. Both as an artist and later transformed into an ass Bottom rises to the occasion. He is able to do so because he is an enthusiastic participant in active life. He also makes occasional witty remarks that help one overlook his comic appearance. His greatest achievement is the presentation of a play that parodies romantic love. It reflects the true picture of the extravagant lovers and they are made to mock at the tragedy of young love. Thus Bottom holds a mirror up to nature and helps the lovers to return to the world

of common experience. Towards the end, when Theseus and Hippolyta appear on the scene, reality dawns upon these mere dreamers. They come to be bound in the bond of marriage and return to the obligations of the normal world which they had abandoned earlier.

Nature imagery in the play derives from the moon, birds and animals. It reflects coming to terms with experience at various levels. The moon symbolizes constancy and she is the 'governess of floods'. She is also believed to control the raging motions of the blood that lead to love-sickness:

> But I might see young cupid's fiery shaft
> Quench'd in the chaste beams of the Wat'ry moon;
> (Act II, Sc.1 ll. 161-62).

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare reflects upon irrational love. He also highlights contrary attitudes to love: one that baffles reason and the other that conforms to it. Towards the end marriage is equated with a sort of social adjustment which is nevertheless rooted in nature. Theseus wishes the lovers to accept the fact that emotional involvement is something natural and healthy but one ought always to be guided by the centrality of reason.

The love of Theseus and Hippolyta is not superficial, for it is 'a marriage of true minds'. They are true to their natural instincts and do not indulge in mere sexual passion. These civilized beings turn

passion into something good and potent. Theseus recalls his past ignorance when he practiced violence in order to win Hippolyta's love:

> Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword,
> And won thy love, doing thee injuries.
> (Act I, Sc.1 ll. 16-17)

This indicates that love is often spoiled and damaged by irrationality. Theseus learns that one's maturity helps one unite 'this vital impulse' with 'social adjustment:'

> I will wed thee in another key,
> With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling.
> (Act I, Sc.1 ll. 16-17)

The 'operations of passion' are viewed from various angles before marriage is solemnized. The lonely exiles seeking refuge in the wood sacrifice the safety and comfort available to them in known surroundings in order to be able to pursue their desired ends.

Theseus's return to sanity is followed by the entrance of Egeus who is vexed because his own blood revolts against him. He condemns Hermia's frank confession of love for Lysander and equates it with 'feigning'; and the unnatural 'love-tokens' further reveal her unnatural 'cunning'. He demands 'filial obedience'[2] and this persuades the lovers to indulge in irrational love as their habitual mode of behaviour.

Despite Theseus's sympathy for Hermia, he is a man of the world who cannot ignore the Athenian law and favours the enforcement of parental authority. The 'natural dependence' of children on parents forms the basis of an ordered society. The reasonable man ought not to be a dreamer. He asks Hermia either to be submissive or accept death. She has to choose between death or an unnatural renunciation of love. Being the 'voice of reason and natural law', it is his duty to convert the raging passions into the 'social channels'. Hermia, like Desdemona in *Othello* and Miranda in *The Tempest*, laments her father's lack of sympathy and indifference to her deep and tender feelings of love. She is ready to defy the social taboos, which have constrained her to surrender her freedom of will. She points out that the Athenian code of conduct deprives one of all rights to lead a happy life. She registers her protest against all this and upholds that as a member of the social community she has an exclusive right to satisfy her own impulses and desires. The playwright does not favour Egeus who is equally obdurate in his demands. Shakespeare's aim is to highlight various attitudes to love and their ultimate synthesis rather than insist on a choice to be made among them.

Theseus warns Hermia against obduracy: otherwise, she will be faced with a difficult choice. She has to make up her mind, whether she would like to exercise self-renunciation like a nun or get married to a man of Egeus's choice which should be her natural

target. Theseus is aware of the fact that a life of total abstinence is the privilege of a selected few. Hence he tells her that 'thrice-blessed' are those:

> that master so their blood,
> To undergo such maiden pilgrimage.
> (Act I, Sc.1. ll. 74-75)

But for those who follow the natural way of living the case is different:

> Earthlier happy is the rose distill'd,
> Than that which, withering on the virgin thorn
> Grows, lives, and dies, in single blessedness.
> (Act I, Sc.1. ll. 74-75)

Theseus thus sets the norm of natural living that should be acceptable. He is a mature person who neither rejects this life of exclusiveness nor ignores the naturally human style of living.

Lysander and Hermia who are motivated by instincts lack wisdom and experience that make life worth living. Theseus passes judgment upon them and leaves them alone to ponder over the nature of love. Things remain vague, for they are not acute or perceptive in their evaluation of love. Love's truth is known only to those who are capable of penetrating the appearances. In love-making one tends to be partial and therefore unreasonable. Hence Lysander and Hermia refuse to be subdued by one whom they do not consider honest. To them it is;

Hell to choose love by another's eye.

(Act I, Sc.1. l. 140)

They finally decide to shut their eyes to reality. Lysander's advice to leave Athens in acceptable. It exhibits the dual nature of passion that combines simplicity and deception.

The simplicity of love is reflected in Helena's devotion to Demetrius who gains her confidence and then becomes indifferent to her. Hermia has sparks of reason left in her when she reviews the transforming power of love and says:

Before the time I did Lysander see,
Seem'd Athens a paradise to me:
O' then, what graces in my love do dwell,
That he hath turn'd a heaven into hell.

(Act I, Sc. I ll.204-207).

Even Helena is aware of the strength and weakness of love that are likely to transform reality into its opposite and the victims of love are swayed to and fro:

Things base and vile, holding no quality,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.

(Act I, Sc. 1, ll. 232-33)

The lovers in this play illustrate this truth by their 'unreasoning choices'. Theseus compares lovers to lunatics and poets who are alike, for they grasp only the outward appearance of things. They are confident of themselves and consider their attitude reasonable

even though others may condemn it as 'the silliest stuff'.

The Fairies represent the mystery of the sub-human world and the fairy-world very often conceals what is irrational. They also help expose the unreal and the grotesque. Oberon who is different from a traditional fairy king is also put on trial. Even in the fairy realm passion brings disorder in its wake. The Queen favours mortals and is close to nature. Oberon is haughty and impressive; he is possessed of an extraordinary perceptiveness that enables him to notice those things, which other characters tend to ignore. He depends upon this insight into human nature. His artful manipulation of music and magic are worth appreciation. He appears to be jealous by nature. He wishes the page boy to join his train of followers who range the wild forests and thus be serviceable. He is also possessed of mature, practical sense and is inclined to help the lovers. He has certain human traits, too. He is more human and less fairy- like in his contact with mortals.

The Queen lacks judgment and commonsense. She wants to subdue the page boy by force, crowns him with flowers and tends to Bottom who is transformed into an ass. The ass's head symbolizes man as he really is—a fool absolutely devoid of reason. Oberon sticks to his word, for he wants Titania to come up to his level instead of him stooping down to hers. Titania refers to the chaos in nature which results from

her quarrel with Oberon. The unnaturalness in the phenomenal world is hinted at thus:

> The spring, the summer,
> There chiding autumn, angry winter change
> Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world,
> By their increase, now knows not which is which.
> And this same progeny of evil comes
> From our debate, from our dissention:
> (Act II, Sc.1, ll. 111-116).

The winds cause disturbance in the natural order and the seasons suffer dislocation. Infact dissention in love causes disharmony in Nature. King Oberon invites his Queen to make amends and to set things right but she refuses to do so. Like the Athenian lovers she needs proper education. Titania and all those who are undergoing some change are exposed to the power of magic. The fairies are close to Nature and possess knowledge of her secrets. Oberon uses the magic flower which changes colour from 'white to red: from chastity to intensity of love'. It is known as love-in-idleness that is 'love wasting itself unprofitably'[3]. Hence it exposes the follies of love. Titania is vague about everything and will madly fall in love with the first object she casts her eyes on. The object of her love will be Bottom in the garb of an ass. Oberon also knows how to disenchant her with another herb after getting the desired possession of her page boy.

Helena engaged herself in the vain pursuit of Demetrius who is ready to defy her. This exhibits love's

excess and very well accords with Titania's peevish nature. Demetrius condemns Helena in the following way:

> I am sick when I do look on thee.
>
> (Act II, Sc. 1. II. 213)

Hence true love suffers at the hands of those who remove themselves from the court to the woods. Lysander and Hermia who enter the wood after a weary drive also exhibit an awareness of the obstacles in the way of true love. Hermia therefore tells Lysander to 'lie further off'.

Oberon has occasion to enter the world of mortals and cast a spell of magic to effect the shape of things. But Puck makes a mistake in taking Lysander for Demetrius and squeezes the juice on Lysander's eyes and utters a magic formula. Hence Lysander wakes up to find Helena and becomes infatuated with her. He swears by reason though he himself presents a foolish figure:

> The will of man is by his reason sway'd,
> And reason says you are the worthier maid.
>
> (Act II, Sc. ii, II. 115-116)

The situation indicates that the will of man is here directed by irrational impulses. Helena is not happy, for she thinks that she is exposed to keen mockery. What is required is a sane attitude to love. Meanwhile

Hermia wakes up from her frightful dream and is faced with bitter disillusionment. In her dream she plucks from her bosom a crawling serpent that gnaws her within her heart—the seat of love. The dream as in Keats's poem 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' is a terrifying revelation of the wasteful power of sexual passion. Hermia misses Lysander when she is awake. He leaves her alone in the darkness of the wood.

The wood offers the picture of a world that is benevolent, mysterious as well as romantically beautiful. The incongruities of love are evident in the Bottom—Titania relationship as well. Titania exhibits the follies and excesses that are rooted in irrational love. Bottom has the good sense to say what he does not practise:

> Reason and love keep little company now-a-days.
> (Act III, Sc.i., ll. 136).

He himself is placed in a funny situation but remains unaware of it. The wood is not a permanent home for the Athenian lovers. They will have to take up the responsibilities of social life when they are disciplined. Hence this short stay in the wood helps them rejoin the broken links between 'nature' and 'civilization'.

The 'spirit' and 'flesh', the fairy world and the mortal world, irrationality and the proximity to nature are juxtaposed. What is required is the cultivation of

both nature and refinement. The follies of love reflect upon alienation from one's true self. If they are given up return to normalcy is almost certain.

Helena argues that lack of response to moral or inward beauty leads to chaos. She adds further that under the spell of magic love and friendship also suffer loss. In the civilizing human world Hermia and Helena loved each other:

> So we grew together,
> Like ot a double cherry, seeming parted,
> But yet an union in partition.
> (Act III, Sc. ii, ll. 208-210)

The 'discord' is to be set right by uniting the 'sounds of nature' with those of 'human sociability'. Lysander confesses his fault and accepts that he has been pursuing wrong ends. Demetrius also abhors the state of fury into which he had fallen. Egeus reappears to demand justice. It is an important moment, for medicine has been provided for the hurt souls who accept their responsibilities and reject all false notions. Theseus over-rules the will of Egeus and uses sober judgment in order to introduce concord where chaos had prevailed earlier. He orders celebrations to take place in Athens. As the false vision disappears, they all awaken to reality and regain their lost identity. On this follows an immediate apprehension of a new life and this is done through the unique and transforming power of love.

Theseus is able to uproot excesses of love. Bottom also makes a contribution because the Pyramus Play that he presents before the audience highlights the truth that love can turn into folly and yet survive through human contrivance. The play opens and closes in the civilizing Athenian atmosphere for human beings are most like their natural selves in this setting. If mortals follow their whimsical notions and let themselves be deluded by the chimeras of beauty and love they tend to behave in an unnatural way.

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Notes and References

1. All references and quotations in this article are from the following edition:
   The New Clarendon Shakespeare A Midsummer Night's Dream ed. F.C. Horwood, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1951), p. 104.

2. Derek Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare Vol. I Henry VI to Twelfth Night*, (Hollis and Carter London, 1968), p. 142

3. E.C. Pettet, *Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition*, (Staples Press, 1949), p. 111.

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Anis Ahmad

The Ethnic Context in the Novels of Bernard Malamud

With the publication of his first two novels—*The Natural*[1] in 1952 and *The Assistant*[2] in 1957 – Bernard Malamud established himself as a noticeable American novelist of remarkable promise. Though his critics differed on the question of the grounds of appeal in his works, they broadly acknowledged his artistic merit and the quality of his emerging vision which centred on his ethnic context. For Sydney Richman the "hub of the problem is precisely his (Malamud's) Jewishness".[3] Some other critics echo this view when they assert that the centre of interest in Malamud is not art as much as it is the subject and this subject is broadly the Jew. Malamud's own statement in this regard is significant because he says that he writes of Jewish material "because I know it".[4] Regarding his characters being Jews, he further explains that they constitute the very stuff of his drama. As such while important Jewish writers like Saul Bellow, and Philip Roth, etc., and Malamud himself have found "signal inspiration in the life of American Jews",[5] others like Hanvey Swados and Norman Mailer, J. D. Salinger and Herbert Gold have asserted that the "Jew is a particularly dramatic symbol for man's struggle in the modern world".[6] This rendering of the Jew as a powerful symbol of man's grim and tragic struggle imparts him universality and the status of "Everyman".

Malamud proclaims his stance rather categorically, saying that, "I handle the Jew as a symbol of the tragic experience of man existentially. I try to see the Jew as a Universal man. Every man is a Jew, though he may not know it."[7] Malamud is not interested in the superficialities of Jewish life; he tries to capture its spirit as also the spirit of the moral experience through suffering the compassion. Initiating with this essential ethos of the Jewish experience, Malamud moves on to probe the human misery in general, because for him the struggle of the Jew could be the struggle of any man in the twentieth century. Malamud has himself spoken about this in no uncertain terms.

> I am an American, I'm a Jew, and I write for all men . . . I write about Jews when I write about Jews, because they set my imagination going. I know something about their history, the quality of their experience and belief, and of their literature, though not as much as I would like . . . the point . . . is that I was born in America and I respond in American life, more than Jewish experience . . . .[8]

As such, Malamud's heroes become the symbol of struggling humanity partaking in its ambiguous fate. Everyone becomes a Jew in tasting the bitterness of life. This seems to be his basic idea which he wanted to convey through his popular statement: "All men are Jews",[9] or as one of his characters elsewhere says,"Believe me, there are Jews everywhere".[10] To Malamud, according to Podhoretz, "the Jew is humanity seen under the twin aspects of suffering and moral

aspirations. Therefore, any man who suffers greatly and also longs to be better than he is, can be called a Jew". Commenting upon the same aspect, Robert Alter and Theodore Salotaroff have also pointed out that Jewishness to Malamud is an ethical symbol, a moral stance or a kind of metaphor "for the tragic human condition and for the code of personal morality".[11]

As such, Jew has come to be regarded as special symbol of the entire humanity. "From the hated, feared or ridiculed figure he was transformed into a "Man Who Suffered, Everyman".[12] With the change of times, racial amity "no longer remained a myth which so many writers yearned for in the past".[13] It was precisely at this time that Malamud developed a basic set of characters who reflected the changes in American attitudes.[14] The best of Malamud's novels "willfully cultivate attitudes and backgrounds which are as specifically Jewish as the author can make it...".[15] Sandy Cohen has rightly pointed out that Malamud's Jewish protagonists attempt "to become a part of, and identify with, the essentially gentile world of America to symbolize Everyman's quest for self-determination in ... too often hostile society".[16]

There are, however, other critics who do not approve of Malamud's Jewishness. Leslie Field had described a Jew as only a "marginal" being. According to him Malamud, as also some other Jewish American writers have been corrupted by "assimilationist tendencies" and the movement towards universal humanism. These tendencies, according

to him can destroy that which is distinctively Jewish in their works:

> Malamud's roots are Jewish roots. The original soil nurtures the writer in such a way that in any age his writing is immersed in that which concerns Jews most directly. Transplanted the writer may become a hybrid. His Jew of the Torah, the Law, and the rabbinical teachings may become the Jew of general humanism, of universalism. In fact, his Jew may become indistinguishable from the non-Jew as he becomes homogenized in a larger, non-Jewish world. He may emerge as Everyman as his identification with his own peoples' overriding concerns become peripheral or marginal.[17]

At this point, a brief look at the history of Jewish immigration to America would be helpful. The Jews started migrating from Europe to America as early as the seventeenth century, and settled in large numbers in Boston, Chicago and New York. They generally remained isolated from the life around them which gave them a feeling of belonging and a sense of identity within their own community. This isolation, however, could not continue for long as they started interacting with the majority community which resulted in various problems related to religion, culture and language. Commenting on this aspect, Poppy Ayyar says:

> The gradual assimilation of the Jews into the mainstream of American life led to more problems for the Jew. He was now an American who lived not in the ghettos but with the others, who sent his children to the same schools and who spoke the same language and this led to a curious dichotomy in the Jewish sensibility.[18]

Lionel Trilling has observed that anti-Semitism was a kind of advantage as it was "against this social antagonism we could define ourselves *and* our society; we could discover who we were and who we wished to be. It helped to give life the look of reality".[19] With the falling down of the ethnic barriers between the two communities, and Jewish people as a whole becoming more Americanized, the Jewish intellectual could not fall back on his Jewishness anymore. He was no longer certain of what it meant to be a Jew. The basic question, "I am a Jew. What is the meaning of all the sufferings and prosecution I have to undergo?" has now emerged as a bigger universal problem, "I do not know what I am. What is the meaning of life?" With this essential change in attitude over a considerable period of time, the Jewish communal identity could no longer remain the same. It was not the question of shedding one identity and acquiring another, but of carrying out a niche, a definite identity absorbing and assimilating the waves and shocks of a larger society around.

The earlier Jewish writers, therefore, emphasized upon the Jewish suffering mainly while the later writers grappled with the question of identity, not of a Jew as a Jew but as a human being in a given historical context. The novels of Malamud create a slightly different pattern. He presents a Jew as a symbol of alienation, a victim, who is always in "conflict with his environment... and so affords the writer a perspective from which the evils of society can be observed and condemned. He is thus an ideal subject, one that is

practically guaranteed to reach an audience, but to attain the widest possible significance as a symbol".[20]

It would be worthwhile to trace here as to how the image of the Jew has undergone a change in America. This is the only community which identifies itself with its older cultural traditions. Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions*, Chaim Potok's *The Chosen* and Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Slave* take up the Jewish issues in unmistakable terms. The question of suffering and the problems of identity find powerful creative expressions in metaphoric terms of Hitler, Auschwitz and Dachau in Chaim Potok. Singer bases his novel on the concept that the ethics of a religion count far more than its ritual, and that the "love and mercy for one's fellow human beings is the highest form of religion".[21] By this time the Jew had come a long way from the position of passive suffering. He had now started to think positively and act strongly. He was to be identified as an American. Though lost in the confusion and chaos of the contemporary situation, he was constantly in search of values. His process of assimilation, however, was not an easy one. On the one hand he gradually drifted away from his Jewish identity as well as from his Jewish past, while on the other he suffered a state of dilemma in the larger American society along with other immigrant groups.

Some critics have also alluded to the miserable history of the Jews — the horrendous blood-bath in the Germany, the holocaust, the pogroms in Russia, the tortures of Auschwitz and Dachau and their religious persecution in several other countries. The second and third generations

of Jews, however, were not much affected with the past events. In the 1930s, the Jewish intellectuals had apparently become impatient with the orthodox attitude towards religion and culture. Consequently, they adopted a broader outlook which reflected in their taking more interest in the social progress and cultural humanism. They started looking for modern values. Lionel Trilling, himself a Jew, has thrown some light on the situation of Jews in the America of 1930s:

> This has nothing to do with religion; we were not religious. It had nothing to do with Zionism; we were inclined to be skeptical about Zionism and even opposed to it and during the violence that flared up in 1929 some of us were on principle pro-Arab. Chiefly our concern with Jewishness was about what is now called authenticity.[22]

Thus the Jew who had come to America in order to escape persecutions and in search of a new home, was surprised to find himself becoming more of an American than a Jew. He now had:

> ... a new set of values and a new outlook on life. Government took no special stand against him and his neighbours were often willing to accept him as one of them.... Not surprisingly, acculturation and assimilation occurred rapidly, especially among the second generation Americans ... The second generation were becoming Jewish Americans rather than merely Jews living in America.[23]

It was at this point of time that Malamud was creating a space for himself. Leslie Field's article, "Bernard Malamud

and the Marginal Jew", begins with one-and-a half page conversation between Morris Bober and Frank Alpine in *The Assistant*, snippets from which are frequently quoted by critics, in the context of Malamud's Jewishness. Field further states that "Malamud's work reveals that Jewishness and the Jewish milieu are central to it",[24] and names several major characters of his novels who, according to him, are involved in things unmistakably Jewish. But there are critics who believe that Malamud is not concerned solely with the Jews and that Malamud's elements of Jewishness do no constitute all of Jewishness. Malamud himself has shown dissatisfaction with the expression "Jewish-American writer". In an interview with Leslie and Joyce Field, Malamud had defined the term "Jewish-American writer" as "schematic and reductive" and had opined that "if the scholar needs the term he can have it, but it won't be doing him any good if he limits his interpretation of a writer to fit a label he applies".[25]

The fact, however, is that Malamud's fiction is full of Jewish characters (except Frank Alpine, who by the end of the novel converts himself to Jewish faith) although quite often it does not matter if they are, or they are not, Jews. For example, *The Natural*, Malamud's first novel, characterizes its protagonist Roy Hobbs' struggle for material success in a baseball career. Only at one occasion we come to know that he was a Jew. Similarly, S. Levin in a *NewLife*,[26] Harry Lesser in *The Tenants*,[27] William Dubin in *Dubin's Lives*,[28] and Calvin Cohn in Malamud's last novel *God's Grace*,[29] are all namesake Jews. And, in spite of Malamud assertion that

"Jews are absolutely the very stuff of drama", his portrayal of a Jew has not been that of an authentic Jew.[30] Philip Roth has complained that Malamud's works do not show "specific interest in the anxieties and dilemmas and corruptions of the modern American Jew, the Jew we think of as characteristic of our times...".[31] Thus, we find that Malamud's works are not quite authentic portrayals of Jewish life and setting, since this is not his mainstay. Instead, his characters, despite most of them being Jews, stand as a symbol for everyman. Everyman becomes a Jew in his struggle and in confronting the odds of life. This is what gives a universal significance to Malamud's Jews.

There have been several debates and discussions to find a definition of a Jew, the element of Jewishness and Jewish literature. But these attempts have quite often hovered around the Nazi holocaust and the birth of Israel. Leslie Field points out that it is generally accepted that "someone who has Jewish forefathers and whose writing seems to be immersed in something called the Jewish heritage or Judaism, or the special burden of Jewish history, and who is living and writing in the United States — this someone is a Jewish-American writer...".[32] But Leslie Field does not approve of this. According to him when a writer is "assimilated or integrated into the predominant white Anglo-Saxon Protestant American society", and "no longer recognizes himself as a minority person", and when his "subject and style cannot be distinguished from ... mainstream American then he cannot be considered as

distinct or separate or separate or belonging to the hyphenated group".[33]

Judaism for Malamud is a source of humanism. He wrote to Sidney Richman: "I consider Judaism, once I got to know about it through reading, as another source of humanism."[34] Malamud had shown his concern for the degradation of human dignity in the modern world. In his speech at the time of accepting the National Book Award for his book, *The Magic Barrel*, Malamud expressed his anguish thus:

> I am quite tired of the colossally deceitful devaluation of man in this day; for whatever explanation; that life is cheap amid a prevalence of wars... his fall from grace in his eyes is betrayed in the words he has invented to describe himself, as he is now: fragmented, abbreviated, other-directed, organizational, anonymous man, a victim, in the words that are used to describe him of a kind of synecdochic irony, the part for the whole The devaluation exists because he accepts it without protest.[35]

It is now clear that Malamud is not using his Jewish background as also his frequent portrayals of Jewish characters to project an exclusively Jewish framework of life. Instead, his outlook tends to be broader and more secular. Robert Alter's observation is thus justifiable that "the Jewish tradition", as Malamud depicts it . . . "is essentially heterodox and secular, divorced from its source in orthodox Judaism and the European situation that conditioned it, and no longer appropriate in an open liberal social system".[36] Hershinow has also pointed out:

> Malamud is a secular Jew whose Jewishness is an ethnic identity and moral perspective far more than it is a religious persuasion. What infuse his writing are the aspirations, struggles and indignities of an ethnic and cultural subgroup ... Jewish theology and ritual per se are not the focus ... Malamud is sometimes criticized by Jewish publications for failing to include specifically Jewish religious content in his work.[37]

Leslie and Joyce Field have considered Malamud's Jewishness as a compound of "such universal human virtues as moral obligation to fellow man and the community; one's acceptance of responsibility; being involved in the suffering of others, and learning from one's own suffering".[38]

Malamud is essentially a humanist who views man affirmatively and explores the possibilities of man's triumph over hostile circumstances, and also man's capacity to recognize and overcome the difficulties and dangers of being a human being in an inhuman world. As such, Malamud explores the role of Judaism as an ethnic metaphor for universal humanism and a Jew as a symbol of struggle to achieve this humanism in the modern world. It is in this context that the long conversation between Morris Bober and Frank Alpine becomes important. Malamud has made Morris Bober explain the essence of Jewishness to Frank Alpine:

> Nobody will tell me that I am not Jewish because I put in my mouth once in a while, when my tongue is dry, a piece of ham. But they will tell me, and I will believe them, if I forget the Law. This means to do what is

> right, to be honest, to be good. This means to other people. Our life is hard enough, why would we hurt somebody else? For everybody should be the best, not only for you or me. We ain't animals. This is why we need the law. This is what a Jew believes. (pp. 112-13)

This statement shows that "Malamud's characters are not practicing Jews, nor are they nourished by a strong sense of community ... they possess instinctive dignity and inbred humanitarianism".[39]

> Malamud uses Jewishness as an ethical symbol. In his works the Jew becomes a metaphor for the good man striving to withstand the dehumanizing pressures of the modern world. His characters hold their ethical stances out of a sense of humanity, and this humanity is only indirectly linked to their religious heritage.[40]

This good man's striving against the pressures of the modern world automatically exposes him to suffering. In *The Assistant*, Frank Alpine is especially interested in the Jewish suffering. He had read something of the Jewish history, "...about the ghettos, where the half-starved bearded prisoners spent their lives trying to figure it out why they were the Chosen People" (p.170). When Frank asks Morris why the Jews suffer so much, Morris tells him that they suffer because they are Jews. And when Frank points out that the Jews suffer more than they have to, Morris says that suffering is a necessary condition for living. Some people suffer more, some less, but not because they want. However, a Jew must suffer for the sake of Law because if a Jew does not suffer for the Law, he will suffer for nothing. Frank, still

unconvinced with these generalities, asks Morris as to why he suffers. Morris replies, "I suffer for you" (p.113). Later, in the conversation Morris tells Frank: If a Jew forgets the Law ... he is not a good man" (p.113). There is yet another definition of a Jew which runs through the novel. At the time of Morris' funeral the rabbi says: When a Jew dies, who asks if he is a Jew? He is a Jew, we don't ask. There are many ways to be a Jew. So if somebody comes to me and says, "Rabbi, shall we call such a man Jewish who lived and worked among the gentiles and sold them pig meat ... that we don't eat it, and not once in twenty years comes inside a synagogue, is such a man a Jew, rabbi?" To him I will say, "Yes, Morris Bober was to me a true Jew because he lived in the Jewish experiences, which he remembered, and with the Jewish heart". May be not to our formal tradition — for this I don't excuse him — to want for others that which he wants also for himself (p.203). This wish for others, which he wished for himself, is based on the concept of humanity. And this is the essence of Jewishness in Malamud.

Another book in which the Jewish identity emerges more importantly is *The Fixer*.[41] Its protagonist, Yakov Bok, is also a Jew. However, unlike Morris Bober who accepts his predicament as a Jew, Bok tries to pass as a gentile. He poses himself as a Christian and even goes to work for an outspoken anti-Semite. The reason for this, he thought, was that "being born a Jew meant being vulnerable to history, including its worst errors" (p.141). At one point he thinks: "what was being a Jew but an everlasting curse? He was

sick of their history, destiny, blood guilt" (p.206). However, when a Christian boy is murdered and Bok is arrested on charge of his murder, a gradual change in his ideas manifests. This change does not occur through insight but through his father-in-law, Shmuel's arguments which were ground in traditional Jewish thought. Josephine Knopp has written that Yakov begins to grasp the truth of his father-in-law's message "whose real meaning lies not so much in theological argument but rather in the example set by Shmuel's life, by his unfailing adherence to the code of Mentschlekhkayt".[42] Yakov realizes that his suffering is not without meaning and that "if I must suffer let it be for something. Let it be for Shmuel" (p.245). His recognition of his Jewishness lead him to believe in Jews' "right to be Jews and live in the world like men (p. 246). Richard Tuerk has observed that Yakov Bok "consistently refusing to acknowledge the faith in the God of the Jews... finds himself labeled a Jew, and... realizes that he cannot escape from his Jewishness".[43] Murray Roston has also noted that:

> The self-centered, uncharitable Bok, who at the beginning of the book has callously cast off his barren wife and deserted both the Jewish community and its God for self-betterment, is singled out by fate for special torment as the falsely accused murderer of a Christian child. Through the agony of his imprisonment he finds his way back to commitment, both Jewish and Universal.[44]

Towards the end of the novel Bok thinks: "One thing I've learned, he thought, there's no such thing as an unpolitical

man, especially a Jew. You can't be one without the other. You can't sit still and see yourself destroyed" (p.299).

Yakov Bok had finally awakened to the fact of the universality of suffering and hence committed himself to the cause of the entire race of the Jews. Similarly, in the first episode, "The Last Mohican" in Malamud's *Pictures of Fidelman,*[45] the protagonist, Arthur Fidelman, is seen running away from his Jewishness and also from his responsibility towards a fellow Jew, Shimon Susskind. It is much later that he is forced to acknowledge his relation to his fellow Jews, and also to accept his responsibility.

Sheldon Norman Grebstein has extensively discussed Malamud's Jewishness in his essay "Bernard Malamud and the Jewish movement". He has focused on three main elements of Jewishness in Malamud: first, the theme of meaningful suffering; second, the use of Jewish humour; and third, the use of a distinctive Jewish voice.

Earl Rovit does not see Malamud as a teller of tales in the traditional manner, although according to him "Malamud captures the elusive tones and shadows of the traditional Yiddish tale...".[46] Rovit adds that Malamud's "people are drawn from the intensely assimilated lives of New York City first and second-generation American Jews".[47]

Robert Alter has noted that Malamud has not touched the Jewish milieu in his works. He has observed that "although most of his protagonists are avowedly Jewish, he has never really written about Jews... that nowhere does he attempt to represent a Jewish milieu, that a Jewish

community never enters into his books, except as the shadow of a vestige of a specter".[48] In his opinion, Malamud's protagonists have been modeled after the Jewish folk-figure of "Schlemiel, the well-meaning bungler, compounded with the Schlimazel, the hapless soul who is invariably at the wrong end of the bungling", and Malamud's perfect handling of these ill-starred protagonists "illuminates his whole artistic relationship to his Jewishness".[49] This Schlemiel figure for Malamud is not merely a comic one, but it is interchangeable with the idea of being a Jew, which in Malamud's world means a blunderer and a victim. Malamud's main protagonists, namely, Roy Hobbs, Morris Bober, Frank Alpine, Seymour Levin, Yakov Bok, Harry Lesser, Arthur Fidelman, William Dubin and Calvin Cohn are all either the blunderers or the victims. In Malamud's fiction the only opposite alternative stand of the Schlemiel is that of the manipulator. Thus, we have Gus the Gambler in *The Natural*, Karp, the flourishing liquor store owner, in *The Assistant*; Gerald Gilley in *A New Life*; the anti-Semitic authorities of Tzarist Russia in *The Fixer*; Willie Spearmint in *The Tenants*; the gang of the criminals in *Pictures of Fidelman* and Buz and Esau, the apes, in *God's Grace*. These characters take a sharply instrumental view of humanity and manage to stay on top of circumstances and people in order to use them. What all these manipulators share is moral withdrawal. In contrast to these manipulators the protagonists, in exposing themselves to the world and committing to accept the consequences of their own acts, reach the inevitable Schlemiel's fate — Roy's baseball career

abruptly comes to an end and when he finally re-enters the arena he was to forced to give way to a younger player. Failing in his pursuit of Memo Paris, he settles with Iris Lemon who was a "grandmother"; Morris Bober could never achieve anything in life. He lived in a prison and died in it. Frank Alpine readily accepts the Jewish fate, converts himself to Jewish faith and takes over Morris' prison. Seymour Levin had to leave his job and take on the burden of a family including a woman whom he loved only as a matter or principle. Arthur Fidelman undergoes the humiliation of cleaning and sweeping for a prostitute and even becoming a lover of a man.

It has been observed by many a critic that Malamud's protagonists merely change one "prison" for another, even though there are no actual walls surrounding them. Robert Alter has written that "Malamud's central metaphor for Jewishness is imprisonment...",[50] and has pointed out that the idea of Jewishness, as imprisonment, occurs in *The Assistant*. He has written that the Assistant "is suffused with images of claustrophobic containment, and Morris Bober's grocery, which is the symbolic locus of being a Jew with all the hard responsibilities entailed thereby, is frequently referred to as a prison".[51] "What kind of man did you have to be", Frank Alpine wonders at one point in the novel, "to be born to shut yourself in an overgrown coffin?"..."you had to be a Jew. They were born prisoners" (p.79). Later in the novel, Frank becomes a Jew and topples into the "overgrown coffin". The same idea of imprisonment occurs frequently in Malamud's other works too. In *The Fixer*, Yakov

Bok is virtually confined in a real prison and it was here that he recognized, and later accepted, his Jewishness. Arthur Fidelman, from the captivity of sexual bewitchment, falls further into the imprisonment of the gangsters. Harry Lesser begins in confinement in the old tenement and remains there until death releases him. Thus, we can see that Malamud's Jews are not as much literal as metaphoric, and the imagery of imprisonment in his novels is the symbolic representation of a symbolic state of being.

Another critic, Samuel I. Bellman, also, does not place Malamud in a Jewish tradition. Unlike Grebstein, who has focused on suffering, comedy, and style - the three elements of Jewishness in Malamud — Bellman sees "three basic and equally important themes running through Malamud's work: conversion (universalizing the Jewish problem); a decaying and rotting world; and a new life".[52] Bellman writes:

> There is a charming academicism in equating Malamud's submerged Jewish *miserables* with the majority of humanity, which is more fortunate because it is less vulnerable to the besetting horrors of oppression, poverty, and privation. Jews and non-Jews both, it appears, can observe their common humanity in Malamud's fictions; since there is such a heavy Jewish cast in the various novels and stories, we move outward from the 'Jewish problem' to the universal human problem, which is not very different after all.[53]

Bellman has examined Malamud's "partial judaisation of society". He has referred to Milton R. Stern's review of *Idiots First*[54] and noted that Stern develops a reductivist view

which encompasses the whole of society, not merely special catergories such as converts, new borns and number of other particular types. Bellman says that what Stern implies is that Malamud brings all men down to a specified, i.e., Jewish-condition:

> Malamud's compelling force as one of our major talents comes from his ability to evoke the sense of helplessness, anonymity and dislocation that besets the modern psyche. It is precisely in this sense that he identifies his Jews as Modern everyman.[55]

Bellman has marked another idea, developed by Leslie Fiedler, which is similar to that of Stern's. Fiedler's view is that American culture itself is becoming quite Jewish and that Americans as Americans are the Jews of the present-age. He has further noted that: "At the moment that young Europeans everywhere (even, at last, in England) become imaginary Americans, the American is becoming an imaginary Jew."[56]

Cynthia Ozick has discussed Malamud's depiction of a grotesque Jewish context in her article "Literary Blacks and Jews" and has traced the changes in Malamud's thinking from his story "Angel Levine" to *The Tenants*, quoting the last lines of *The Tenants* "each, thought the writer, feels the anguish of the other" (p.173). Ozick has opined that "The anguish of the other is a Malamudic assumption, endemic in his fiction. The interior of many of Malamud's fables resounds with the injunction that for the sake of moral aspiration one must *undergo*".[57] To substantiate her opinion,

she has put forth the example of Yakov Bok of *The Fixer*, an ordinary man, born a Jew but still not an accountable Jew until he experiences the terrible Jewish fate. Similarly, Frank Alpine in *The Assistant*, who began as a hold-up man, later becomes a Jew, takes on the obligations of the Jew and even undergoes painful but "inspiring" circumcision. Ozick concludes by classifying *The Tenants* as "a claustrophobic fable: its theme is pogrom. It remarks the minutiae of a single-handed pogrom so closely that the outer world is shut out.[58]

The study and evaluation of Jewishness in Malamud varies from critic to critic. These are sometimes based on the experiences of the second and third generation of American Jews in the pluralistic society, sometimes on the immigrant past, and sometimes on the examination of various aspects like satire, humour, religion, myth, ritual and folklore. There are critics who impart enough importance to the element of Jewishness in Malamud, while there are others who do not consider it worthwhile.

Leslie Field has focused extensively on his conversation with Mayer Levin. Regarding Malamud's Jewishness, Levin said that:

> [Malamud is] a peculiar case ... *The Assistant* was written out of love .... It is a Jewish book ... His stories afterward ... bear the flavour of Yiddish literature transplanted here... They have a slight dust over them. I feel as if I am reading a good Jewish writer whose work has been translated into the American scene. So he has not allowed himself to really confront the things that might be more important to him except when he tried it in ... *The Tenants* ... Malamud has been perhaps

> *timid* about approaching the American Jewish or Jewish scene....[59]

What Levin seems to suggest is that Malamud is a Jewish writer, who has really written about many aspects of Jewishness, but at the same time has ignored the real concerns of the present-day Jews. What is implied in this view is that Malamud's Jews are not the real flesh and blood Jews but only the marginal Jews.

It is important to note at this juncture that Leslie and Joyce Field, who at one time placed Malamud "squarely at the centre of Jewish tradition", believing that "the Bobers, Boks, Lessers and many other Malamud characters were ultimately revealed as people who became positively involved in the Jewish milieu", and insisting that "Malamud's major characters stepped out of a nebulous history into a Judaic tradition of Abraham, Isaac Jacob — and the covenant with God",[60] later changed their views. These later views are more appropriate:

> ... Jewish-American writers are really writing about the fringes of the Jewish Milieu or at least they write about Jews and the Jewish milieu while at the same time ignoring a good deal that seems to be significant about the Jew today ... they haven't tapped and revealed important elements of Jewishness in the fictional worlds they have created.[61]

However, it cannot be denied, and as most of the critics who have written on the Jewishness or on the Jewish American writers, have necessarily mentioned, that the two

events in the history of Jewish people have essentially effected the thinking and feelings of the Jewish American writers – the first being the European Holocaust in which six million Jews were exterminated and, second, the birth of Israel. Max F. Schulz has also expressed similar views:

> ... historical forces seem to have been at work since the end of World War II to account for the concerted appearance of so many first-rate Jewish American writers ... the viability of Israel after the Holocaust of Europe in the 1940s has renewed the Jew's pride in his Jewishness....[62]

That these events compose and constitute Malamud's fiction has been denied by many a critic. According to Lawrence L. Langer, "Malamud's involvement with the Holocaust has been minimal, possibly because he realized how uncongenial its atrocities were with his impatience at the modern devaluation of man."[63]

It can thus be concluded that Malamud is a Jewish-American writer. Leslie Field has opined that, "within the lose tradition of that special breed of hyphenated Jewish writer", and like his contemporary intellectual and literary Jews, he had also "left the shtetle and traditional Judaism to reach out into the world. They rejected the confines of their past as they accepted "enlightenment". In so doing, they, as people, and the characters they gave us, all took on the qualities of marginality as these writers ignored, skirted, homogenized, or rejected important concerns of the Jewish people".[64] The essential concerns of Malamud are, however, clear. All his views in this regard dispel doubts in certain

terms. Inspite of all the arguments in favour of against his commitments, Malamud lends himself profitably to a rigorous critical examination concerning his ethnic context. More importantly, his stance does not speak of him only; it also illustrates the Jewish American stance as a whole. Malamud, therefore, stands up as much for his own self as for a community of a writer in a given socio-cultural context.

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The Evolving Concept of 'Indian Women' in the Novels of Four Indian Women Novelists in English

The assertion for a discrimination-free existence for women has been a major concern with the Indian women novelists in English. This consciousness for feminist related issues found its first creative construct in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938). He used the form of 'Sthalpurana' –the legendary history of a village caught up in the Gandhian Movement as told by an old woman. The use of a woman narrator with its woman centred recital of India, its accent on women's activities, the patriarchal containment of women, its attempt at harnessing women power, 'makes it one of the earliest feminist Indian English novel!'[1]

Over the years Indian women novelists have become increasingly conscious of the 'marginalised' self of women and have come forward to give voice to women's experiences through their writings. These women writers are not mere chroniclers interested in documenting facts or social reformers hopeful of improving the society and country, but are also trying to depict individuals (read woman in this context) groping towards self realization. This is in keeping with the trend of Indian English fiction. Since 1950, majority of the Indian writers in English have turned attention to the more private and personal concerns of the individual. If the fiction of pre-independence era had found a goal outside the individual' (Indian struggle for freedom) — the focussing turned 'inwards', towards individual sensibility and psyche

in the post independence period. Thus the writing became introspective in nature and the individual's quest for a personal meaning in life, a theme of vital interest for the Indian English novelists—more so in the case of women writers. Centrality of women and issues related to feminism were of major concern to the Indian women writers. Indian English writings are intimately related with the traditional Indian psyche. Idealistically a woman is deified but in reality she is exploited both socially and sexually. Thus it became the endeavour of the women novelists of today to combat the 'metaphorical decimalization of women's role.'[2]

Feminism is a struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist oppression. It attempts to abolish the persisting gender discrimination in all its manifestations:

> By feminism we mean both the awareness of women's position in society as one of disadvantage or inequality compared with that of men and also a desire to remove these disadvantages.[3]

The place of woman in the patriarchal, male dominated, Indian society has been unenviable. But the emergence of Indian women writers has considerably influenced Indian life and society. They have tried to identify the deep-rooted causes leading to woman's oppression—mental, emotional and psychological. They have tried to encapsulate the dilemma of the Indian women in their writings. These novelists attempt to expose the tradition bound entrenched belief in the male superiority of man over woman. They are concerned with the recognition of woman as a 'being'—in

quest of her own identity. The urge to scrutinize dogmas, supremacy of social hierarchy, the stress and strain of living in an urban setting, confrontation of one's own gender status, joint family system, marital relationships, emergence of the individual, duty to family and personal fulfilment – are all issues of significance probed by these women writers from the feminist angle.

In this paper,[4] I venture to present a perspective on the concept of Indian woman as she evolves in the hands of four leading women novelists on the Indian literary horizon namely – Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande. These women writers have tried to conceptualize the role/identity of woman in their works. Their writings are full of promises and possibilities in the context of the women question.

The Indian sensibility of these women writers has enabled them to grasp realistically the plight of the women characters. They are convincing in the depiction of the Indian women as well as of the Indian tradition while recording the temporal and secular changes in India. The endeavour is to see how the image of the Indian woman emerges within the family set up, as well as outside the family in the novels of these writers.

Kamala Markandaya:

A recurrent image that frequently emerges in Kamala Markandaya's novels is that women's tradition bound experiences are not only applauded but also treated artistically – Rukmani (*Nectar in thae Sieve*), Premala (*Some*

Inner Fury), Saroja (*Two Virgins*). Markandaya's earliest novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), while depicting the reality of rural India, introduces us to the fiercely independent and heroic woman Rukmani—wife of the gentle peasant Nathan. Through her eyes we watch the disintegration of Nathan's family and at last his death. Constantly burdened by poverty and hunger (the lot of the Indian farmer) with great resilience and fortitude Rukmani along with Nathan faces the adversities of life. Premala in *Some Inner Fury* (1955) conforms to the idealized Indian womanhood. Moving in the orbit of the 'pativratas', Premala derives strength from service and sacrifice, she believes in right action than happiness. In *Two Virgins* (1973), Lalitha's quest for independence compels her to embrace a non-conventional way of living, as a result she gets bogged/lost in the urban wasteland. Whereas her sister Saroja, selects the traditional (rural) mode of existence and gets rewarded. Cast in the tradition of Indian myth and ancient Indian Literature—Sita, Savitri, Shakuntala, these women resolve to make most of their lives through good times and bad. Genuine feminine experiences and expressions—birth of girl child (*Nectar in a Sieve*), neglected wife (*Some Inner Fury, Golden Honeycomb*) childless women (*Some Inner Fury*)— become reflections of the social injustices, indignities and psychological confinements rendered on women. Kamala Markandaya camouflages the genuine impulse to protest against the patriarchal system by making her women follow the norms of ancient precepts.

However in almost all her novels, she portrays the women as more important, more decisive and more powerful persons whether it is Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve*, Mohini in *The Golden Honeycomb*, Sarojini in *Silence of Desire*, Saroja in *Two Virgins*. Central to the plot, they reinforce the concept of the strong woman. Kamala Markandaya's novels seem to operate on a paradox. Her women often appear to be the prototypes of the Sati-Savitri image – (Rukmani, Premala, Saroja) yet it is through them that she endorses her concept of the woman of substance. These women have the inner strength and resilience to fight against societal injustices and indignities. Silently she applauds them for their innate heroism and courage, which can help them to emerge independent once they decide to do so. Roshan in *Some Inner Fury*, Mohini in *Golden Honeycomb*, Sarojini in *Silence of Desire* are examples of the women who are aware of their individuality and want to realize their freedom. Kamala Markandaya never openly challenges the gender bias except through a subtle delineation of her Indian woman, wherein she expresses her strong urge to project the concept of the modern, independent woman. She is content to hold the artistic mirror to society from the realistic and moral point of view and permits the readers to draw their own conclusions.

Nayantara Sahgal:

Detailing specific female experiences, Nayantara Sahgal has tried in her novels to present the status of women in twentieth century India. Her novels *This Time of Morning*

(Rashmi), *Storm in Chandigarh* (Saroj), *The Day in Shadow* (Simrit), *Rich Like Us* (Sonali)—have women's question at their centre. While society and the cause of women's upliftment are themes of Sahgal's novels, her focus is on the characters of women who grow in strength to take initiative and change. They have a deep-rooted sense of values and make conscious efforts to maintain their self esteem as society imposes its will on them. Saroj (*Storm in Chandigarh*) comes out as the 'new woman' in the post-independent India—the novel celebrates the triumph of her spirit under every adversity. Simirit's decision in *The Day in Shadow* to leave Som is not so much an assertion of equality or a quest for freedom, as it is an act for survival. She is no rebel. What she rejects is a certain kind of man (Som, her husband) who embodies certain kind of values.

To say that Nayantara Sahgal's earlier women—Rashmi, Saroj, Simrit are 'mere drifters' in comparison to Sonali (*Rich Like Us*) would be incorrect. As pointed out by Jasbir Jain, what we are witnessing in the course of her writing is a gradual evolution of the woman from the earlier to the later one. Sonali is in fact a type of Rashmi, Saroj and Simrit, having similar kind of values but with the difference of being more self aware and self-assured. In the significant novel *Rich Like Us*, we find a clear articulation of her concept of woman and opinions on women's issues. Pankaj K. Singh argues that Nayantara Sahgal in this novel has moved to a recognizable feminist position:

> Unlike *The Day in Shadow*, which almost naturalizes the arbitrary power dimension between the genders, *Rich Like Us* firmly rejects the arbitrary distribution of power, be it on the purely political level as it was during the Emergency or on the interpersonal and familial level as in the gender roles in society.[5]

Thus in *Rich Like Us*, Sahgal's handling of the women's question is both insightful and socially relevant. Sonali fights against the system and survives. As the 'marginalized' protagonist, she challenges the hegemony of the State and its official version of public events. Campaign against women related violence grows out of the larger fight against forms of state oppression and brutality. There is a 'sati' incident (of Ranade's grandmother), reports of rape, burning and torture. In writing about themes like sati (*Rich Like Us*), child marriage, female infanticide (*Mistaken Identity*) Sahgal has highlighted that society has not changed substantially in modern India.

Nayantara Sahgal continues to write of political high life in her novels, and her endeavour is to free women from the stifling, oppressive mould of existence. The above analysis helps to reinforce Sahgal's injunction that women should join forces and refuse to become victims of sacrifice, oppression and rape. The truly independent woman is not the product of India but is of her own making (like Sonali).

Anita Desai:

Anita Desai has written by and large about woman (urban, middle class) and most of her novels revolve around the woman characters. It is in her novels that the feminist

spirit is brought centre stage for the first time. In an informal interview to Sucheta Mukerjee (4 April 1991) – Anita Desai expressed her belief:

> The characters who go against the grain of society, who try to establish as individual, I think these are the people that interest me or excite my admiration. Most of them fight against the norm, against what is expected of them. That is why a great many of them stumble and also fail. I do not think the failure is so important. It is the fight they pitch in that is important.[6]

Confrontation of one's gender status becomes a major concern in Anita Desai's novels. In *Cry, the Peacock* (1963); *Voices in the City* (1965); *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975); *Fire on the Mountain* (1977); – the usual stereotype woman as an ideal wife, mother, grandmother is clearly rejected. The failure of Maya (*Cry, the Peacock*) to lead a meaningful life is not so much determined by her childless condition than by her frustrations in a loveless marriage. In this novel, Anita Desai has tried to present a woman's fight for individuality and freedom. Maya's struggle is against a sense of loneliness and the mundane domesticity of her monotonous life. She refuses to compromise. Her hypersensitive nature leaves her emotionally strung up. Over-wrought by the physical and psychological vacuum of her existence she becomes mentally unhinged. In a neurotic state she kills her husband. The novel ends with her death, as she topples from the roof of the house.

Monisha (*Voices in the City*), like Maya, is childless and suffers because of marital incompatibility. However, Monisha as a person is different from Maya. Her docile nature seals her fate. As a wife in the true Indian tradition, she lacks the courage to oppose her husband. Furthermore, her craving for her husband's attention and company leaves her smothered and depressed. In Monisha, the writer has portrayed the psyche of a sensitive, intellectual woman who suffers in the uncongenial atmosphere of her in-law's house (joint-family system). The misery of her life makes her choose death (suicide) as a means of escape. It is to Amla (her assertive and outspoken younger sister) that Monisha gives her last instruction, 'Amla always go in opposite direction."[7] This is not only Monisha's way of revolt against the society 'but also a request to change and frame a particular consciousness and ethic she had failed to do.'[8]

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Sita is shown as a highly-strung inefficient housewife protesting against her fifth pregnancy. She seems to rebel against the urban ugliness and the stifling world around her. However, at the end we find her giving into her husband's persuasion that for women the safe way is to stay within the norms of the society. Nanda Kaul, the aged mother and grandmother in *Fire on the Mountain* is portrayed having enough confidence to fend for herself and be self-sufficient. She resists the traditionally romantic image of a woman (mother, grandmother).

Anita Desai in *Clear Light of Day* (1980) demonstrates a definite change in determining the role of woman. The novel deals with the heroic struggle of Bim, its admirable

protagonist to establish her identity. After her parents' death, Bim assumes the role of a mother-figure (tradition-bound) by taking care of her brother and sister. For all her sacrifices she gets nothing but bitterness in return. However, she honestly executes her familial responsibilities and also emerges as an independent figure (unlike Mira Masi of the same novel), having established her identity as a college teacher. In *Fasting and Feasting* (2000), the focus is on the sad plight of women where they are entrapped in the cross current of the continual paradox of marriage and career. Due to the so-called ambiguities of tradition, religion and family honour, Uma suffers self-denial and inner fragmentation. However, it is religion which eventually sustains her in the moments of crisis. In this novel, Anita Desai carefully upholds the value of the spiritual tradition in India. Like Shashi Deshpande we find her trying to wed tradition with modernity.

Thus despite the contemporary confining attitudes, a slight shift towards a search for identity and freedom can be perceived in Desai's women characters. She is moving cautiously in the creation of self-conscious women. She does negate the age-old values celebrated in the Indian patriarchal set-up, albeit hesitatingly. Bound by the dictates of realism she tries to create probable characters.

Shashi Deshpande:

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are women struggling to find their own voice-Saru (Sarita) in the *Dark*

Holds No Terrors (1980), Indu in *Roots and Shadows* (1983), Jaya in *That Long Silence* (1988) and Urmi in *The Binding Vine* (1992). They are continually in a search to define themselves. Indu wonders whether in trying to please her husband, 'she has become fluid with no shape or form of her own.'[9] Jaya struggles between being Jaya herself and Suhasini (the soft, placid, smiling mother). Shashi Deshpande thus concerns herself with the dilemma of the modern Indian woman, trying to understand herself, her striving to preserve her identity as a wife, mother and above all as an individual. This recognition of the woman as a 'being' is realized by the protagonist through the process of self-analysis. The quest for one's own identity forms the theme of all her novels. She deals with the inner working of the female psyche.

The novels of Shashi Deshpande are very close and similar to one another. The basic theme revolves around a middle class, educated woman, caught between traditional practices and modern trends. The first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, analyses the complex relationship between a successful doctor Sarita and her professionally frustrated husband (Manu). The tension between them subsequently leads to their separation. However, the novel ends on a note of hope. Saru waits for her husband to come to take her back and start life anew. In *Roots and Shadows*, Indu a young ambitious girl working for a woman's magazine is confused about her concept of love, marriage and her own life. She struggles to understand the cause that is destroying her married life. She thinks her confidence and assurance is being

destroyed by Jayant, who never bothers to understand her feelings and what she really wants. She decides to leave him. But in the end we see her going back to Jayant, with the hope that things will change.

The basic point that gets highlighted in Shashi Deshpande's novels, is that though her women begin by questioning the social mores, brooding over their fates and searching for their identity, finally at the end try to conform to their surroundings, due to their emotional pull towards tradition. This tendency is best exemplified in the character of Jaya (*That Long Silence*), as she comes to term with her own self. She decides to end her seventeen years of silence as a silent and passive partner to Mohan, and assert herself as an individual and also as a woman and wife. She chooses to remain in the family:

> I am not afraid anymore. The panic has gone. I am Mohan's wife, I had thought, and cut off the bits of me that had refused to be Mohan's wife. Now I know that kind of fragmentation is not possible.[10]

The novelist shows Jaya's decision as a sensible compromise between conformity and non-conformity. She looks for happiness and fulfilment within the family itself, and moves beyond the cultural stereotypes with the firm conviction that life has always to be made possible.

Similarly, *The Binding Vine* is about Urmila's (narrator) acceptance of life on its own terms. Dominant within the narrative discourse are significant feminine experiences of pregnancy, birth and motherhood. They are

interwoven with the experiences of three mothers Urmi—Mira—Shankuntai. The diverse experiences in the form of Mira's life-story (her mother-in-law) and Shakuntai—Kalpana's episode within the narrative design become a context for Urmi to acquire an awareness, a realization, a binding together of the multiple and contrary identities that a woman possesses—of a daughter, a wife and a mother. Urmi realizes that these identities transcend gender division; she arrives at a psychological understanding and achieves a state of consonance out of dissonance.

Shashi Deshpande touches the chord of every woman's problem in her novels. She has not tried to make her women stronger than they are in real life. Her woman is intellectually free and independent but emotionally responsive to traditions. The urge is to find herself, create space for herself and to grow on her own. Her protagonists find freedom not in the western sense but in conformity with the society. Emphasis is not on change but on a new understanding achieved. Like Jaya they seem to listen to *Bhagvadgita*: 'I have given you knowledge. Now you make the choice. The choice is yours. Do as you desire.'[11] And so they make their choice. Shashi Deshpande desires the women to offer resistance and emerge as strong willed individuals to face life, to share responsibilities and not to escape from them. For her, feminism need not be anti-man. For breaking the bonds of family would result in loneliness and disintegration of the social set-up.

Thus by exploring the way these four women writers have treated the concept of women in their works we can

see the emerging of a new hope for Indian women. According to M. Adhikari, the fiction of the modern women novelists of today is one of the subtlest and complex means of 'ethical interrogation and utterance'– restructuring crucial feminine issues through the framework of recent changes in the moral indignation.

These women writers have attempted to give 'voice' to the modern Indian woman. They have tried to dismantle the patriarchal norms in a subtle manner. In their writings the woman has evolved through the traditional to the realistic image, where her sense of frustration, oppression and loneliness have been realized. Kamala Markandaya portrays women as having the strength and capability to emerge as strong individuals; Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai project then as moving towards self-consciousness and having the will to resist. In Shashi Deshpande, we find them emerging as strong-willed individuals to face life and to share responsibilities. The move is towards personal fulfilment of desires as well as consciousness of the significance of traditional values. The social context has a great deal to do with the role of women as we observe them. These women writers present a viewpoint that is coming from 'within a woman' and that is what gives credibility and authenticity to the feminine form created by them.

This is an attempt to trace the concept of Indian women as it has slowly evolved in the transitional society of India from the traditional 'Sita' to the contemporary modern woman. The image that finally emerges is quite unique in neither representing the old, orthodox image nor a modern

westernized one. She is the every woman of the Indian society – essentially Indian in sensibility. The women have yet to traverse a long way to their goal of taking position alongside men on terms of perfect equality in a changed society. In order to achieve this, the Indian women novelists have to provide the feminine paradigm and positive construct for the Indian women through their writings.

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Imperial Attitudes in W.Somerset Maugham's *Up at the Villa*

Of all genres of literature novel, undoubtedly, is the most inclusive. There is rarely any subject which is beyond the scope of novel. The vast range of subjects and details that a novelist has to handle makes it imperative that he or she selects his/her material with care. Equally important is the novelist's skill in not selecting some details. John Fowles believes that 'leaving out is a major part of the skill of a writer – that is persuading readers to supply what is not said. This applies all the way down the line from major ideas to minor description of characters....Hints are better, not exact mimesis; dots, which readers must join up to make the picture.'[1]

Fowles's observation about this skill of the novelist is relevant in the case of William Somerset Maugham's short novel *Up at the Villa* (1941), which came out at a very turbulent period in world history. Though, unlike Fowles, Maugham was writing before the advent of reader-response theories which accorded a central position to readers in the act of making sense of a literary work, his story telling in this book leaves quite a bit for the readers. Apparently a simple story of different attitudes to love and marriage, the novel gains richness if placed in its historical context though the novelist keeps away from giving too many historical details in the story. In fact, the novel is full of hints and dots which the reader must join up to complete a picture of some

of the imperialist notions of the time. Set in an old style renaissance villa, high in the hills above the city of Florence, the entire action of the story is spread over no more than three days. But in those three days one single incident, Karl's shooting himself in the villa after his feeling of intense humiliation, defines characters and also indirectly provides Maugham an opportunity to ironically treat issues relating to the socio-cultural facade of the Empire and the conflicting perceptions regarding the grandeur attached to the Empire-builders. There is little doubt about the fact that India, the most precious jewel in the British Crown, was an integral part of British consciousness. In this novel it is always present in the consciousness of the characters. All characters in the novel think of India in colonial terms. The positions enjoyed by the Indian civil servants — most of them Englishmen — are looked upon with envy. It is especially the position of the viceroy, or for that matter, that of the governor of Bengal that evokes the envy and admiration of the middle and upper class Englishmen. Edgar covets this job because 'it means a lot of work and a lot of responsibility.'[2] Putting it in a typical British understatement he tells Mary: 'The Governor of Bengal lives in a good deal of state and I don't mind telling you that that somewhat appeals to me. It's a fine house he lives in too, almost a palace. I shall have to do a lot of entertaining' (p.7). Colonel Grace Trail finds the position 'a damned nice job to get' (p.19). On her part Mary too is almost swept off her feet to receive the marriage proposal from Edgar who is offered the governorship of Bengal. 'It would be thrilling to be the wife of the Governor of Bengal and

very nice to be grand and to have A.D.C.s running about to do one's bidding' (p.9).It is not only the British but also an upper class American, the Princess San Ferdinando, the widow of a Roman prince —she had lived in Italy for forty years —who does not imagine anything better 'than to be the Vicereine of India' (p.19).

Sir Edgar Swift, K.C.S.I., an Indian civil servant, has already acted as the governor of North West Provinces 'during a period of great unrest'(p.3). The great unrest about which Maugham remains silent in the story is the tumultuous period before the independence of India. This was the phase of the second Civil Disobedience Movement led by Gandhi. All sections of Indian society, which included a sizable number of women and students, openly protested against British rule in different parts of India. It was also the period of the growth of socialist ideas as also the growth of communal forces in Indian politics.[3] The reference in the novel to an actual historical personage, Lord Willingdon, who acted as the viceroy of India from 1931 to 1936, further throws some light on that phase of great unrest in colonial India. His government dealt with the Congress in a very ruthless manner which further increased the dissatisfaction of the people with the foreign rule. Edgar is thrilled to know that because of his good work as the governor of North West Provinces he is likely to be made the governor of Bengal, a position which is certainly more prestigious than that of the governor of North West Provinces as it is just a step away from the office of the viceroy, the top most office in India. Calcutta remained a very important symbol of British

presence and power even though the seat of the central government had been shifted to Delhi in 1911.The Indian Nationalist Movement drew its main force from Bengal. Owing to the high level of Nationalist sentiment in Bengal (it had been very effectively demonstrated during the movement against the Partition of Bengal), the popular British perception of Bengal was that of a very volatile place, amenable to the reception of subversive ideas. The imperialist perception of Bengal of around this period is aptly summed up by Katherine Mayo: "'Bengal is the seat of bitterest political unrest—the producer of India's main crop of anarchists, bomb-throwers and assassins. Bengal is also among the most sexually exaggerated regions of India; and medical and police authorities in any country observe the link between that quality and "queer" criminal minds.... [4]

There are many reasons why Edgar is suitable for being the governor of Bengal. 'Owing to the particular circumstances it was important to put a man there who was conciliatory and at the same time firm' (p.100). It may be recalled that the British did not adopt any fixed policy in India in their interaction with Indians. Political and social expediency marked their decisions. Kipling put it succinctly: 'A policy is the blackmail levied on the fool, by the Unforeseen. I am not the former, and I do not believe in the latter....Perhaps this is the Viceroy's way of saying, "Lie Low"'.[5] Edgar does appear to execute the British approach of expediency. He had finished his term with the reputation of being the most capable man in India and had proved himself a great administrator; though resolute he was tactful,

and if he was peremptory he was also generous and moderate. 'The Hindus and the Muslims liked and trusted him' (p.3).The particular circumstances also implied that an experienced man like him, who had been in India for more than thirty years, was likely to do a better job than a new civil servant from Britain having no first hand experience of India. Edgar's thirty years' experience in India is considered important by Maugham because it would have -and it certainly had—enabled him to know the Indian character. The long stay in India would have made him conversant with Indian customs and social institutions. He was somebody between Kipling's Strickland and Kim.

Edgar's physical fitness and his distinguished demeanor are equally important in his being considered for the job. Though fifty four, he 'did not look a day more than forty-five' (p.5). He had thick black wavy hair which was hardly touched with grey. He was tall and slim and 'held himself so erect' (pp.98-99), and looked both athletic and distinguished. 'He had dignity without arrogance' and looked every bit 'a handsome man in the prime of life' (p.6).Edgar's physical fitness, his fondness for tennis and his distinguished gentlemanly demeanor is in conformity with imperial demands of character and physical strength. The British officers in India were encouraged to play outdoor games like cricket, tennis and polo. They were expected to dress up immaculately. In keeping with the spirit of the outdoor games, they were also supposed to display the virtues of courage, honesty and unselfishness. One of the most important champions of British Empire, Rudyard

Kipling emphasized the importance of physical fitness for the Empire-builders: ' This is the Law which all laws embrace—Be fit—be fit!'[6]

The emphasis on a youthful image and a fit body perfectly suited the imperialist mission of the British in India and elsewhere. Youthfulness is identified with strength and vigour while old age evokes the images of weakness and senility. It was part of the imperialist scheme to present its officers as youthful, energetic and alert. Indians were not expected to see old and sickly white men who could easily be dominated. In other words the colonial subjects were 'denied' to associate weakness and decline with the British Empire.

Edgar's love for May notwithstanding, what appears surprising is the fact that despite spending thirty years and enjoying important positions in India he remains a bachelor even at the age of fifty four. His bachelor status reveals the subtext of the social and sexual exclusivity of the British in India during their rule. The racist and insular character of the British imperialism was built by the strict avoidance of social intimacy with the Indians. The marital alliances between the Indians and the British were few and far between. The British saw themselves as superior race who should not commit the folly of having marital relations with a subject race. If at all there were some of these alliances the Indian girls in them mostly came from modest backgrounds, mostly ayahs working for their masters.[7] The opinion of Dr Cuthbert, quoted by Samuel Sadoc, can be considered representative in this respect: 'I do not deny the

fact that some Indian girls think it a great cause for pride to marry a white man, and some educated Indian girls commit this folly. But who are the white men who marry them? Mostly Tommies and such like riff-raff. Even these find to their cost that they have committed an error, and run away, leaving their black wives behind them to repent at leisure'.[8] Edgar is certainly no riff-raff and hence even after spending three decades of his youthful years in India, the question of his marrying an Indian girl would have never crossed his mind. He is the kind of man who is straight in his personal relations and does not 'tell a pack of lies' (p.105). He is certainly not the kind to leave his wife in a lurch, be she black or white. Moreover, he is not only an honorable man he is also an Empire-builder who has to enact the role of a great man. He cannot think of marrying an Indian girl; he can marry only a white girl, that too of impeccable character because the life of a great man like him, one who is carrying the burden of the Empire on his shoulders, must be above any reproach and scandal. It is for this reason that when Mary discloses to him the scandalous details of the unfortunate incident that happened in her villa—her act of 'mercy' in offering herself to a hapless refugee, Karl's suicide and her act of disposing off the dead body with the help of Rowley Flint—Edgar's first thoughts are about his changed equation with the Empire in the light of the tragic incident. The honorable man that he is, he feels duty-bound to marry Mary but immediately realizes that for that he must sacrifice his career because after marrying a tainted woman he will certainly become unfit to serve the Empire. He knows that

Mary's crime cannot go undetected and very soon tongues will start wagging in London—London gossip exerted some pressure on the British officers posted in India during the Raj—and from London the scandal will reach India. And because he is going to be the governor of Bengal, it would 'be a fine chance for an unfriendly Italy to sling mud' (p. 106) on Britain. Concerned also about the moral superiority of Britain over other imperialist powers, Edgar will not do anything which will create problems for Britain's imperialist mission.

Somerset Maugham's writings often ironically deflate the pretensions of the people filled with a sense of their own importance. In this novel he also shows the other side of the colonial masters. They are for the most part tormented by their fears and insecurities. In *Up at the Villa* he uses an apparently good for nothing, shifty and happy go lucky Rowley Flint to puncture some notions about Empire - builders. He is presented as an antithesis of Edgar. Mary calls him a waster and rotter. Edgar considers him 'an unscrupulous scamp, an idler and just the sort of man that I have no use for' (p.105). Edgar's seriousness and formal manners are contrasted with Rowley's wasteful life style. What Kipling would have considered Rowley's superfluities of wit is used to good effect by Maugham to have a dig at some notions of Empire-building. Rowley always displays a very dismissive attitude towards the Empire-builders represented by the likes of Edgar. He takes himself very lightly, unlike Edgar who has to bear the weight of the imperialist doctrines of the greatness of character. He does

not have to act as 'a great man posing as a great man' (p.115). It can be said that Rowley's distancing himself from Edgar — 'I'm not an Empire-builder...I'm just an easy-going chap with a bit of money who likes to have a good time' — reflects the envy of a certain class of people for the Empire-builders. His refusal to meet Edgar even half-way and the dismissive stance that he adopts towards the task of Empire-building reveal his liberal views. It also points to a popular lament expressed in circles openly supporting British imperialism. The lament was that Empire-building was a thankless job and the Empire-builders were not given their due by a thankless people. Kipling repeatedly made the point that despite many attractions and romantic notions attached to the Raj any young man posted in India would have felt troubled by his terrible sense of isolation and aloofness. Rowley Flint gives the impression of being not too receptive to the glorification of many dangers and risks involved in the venture of Empire-building. However, the casual reference to his reading habits, especially to his reading of Samuel Johnson — 'in the leisure moments of an ill-spent life I've read a good deal' (p.118) — suggests that his opinions are well-thought out. In Maugham reading as an activity is generally used to reveal a character's intellectual caliber. Larry's intellectual leanings in *The Razor's Edge* and Ashenden's intellectual difference from others in the town in *Cakes and Ale* manifest themselves through their attraction for books.

Rowley appears an irreverent liberal who, the imperialist would say, has forgotten that his good living

conditions are a result of the hard work of Empire-builders. What is ironical here is that though he is critical of Edgar, Rowley does not realize that he himself is a beneficiary of imperialism. His vast estate in Kenya where he plans to settle down after marrying Mary is itself a result of the Empire-building activities of the Edgars of English society. The acquisition of big farms in Kenya by white settlers was one major cause of discontent among the Kenyans. The scarcity of land among Kikuyu ultimately led to the Mau Movement against the British rule just after the Second World War. However, for Rowley Flint, the problems and suffering of Kenyans, or, for that matter, those of Indians do not count. In the same manner he does not feel any sympathy for the refugee status of Karl— 'an Austrian when Austria existed' (p.42), that is till March 1938— who also is a victim of imperialism though in his case it was Nazi imperialism. Like other characters in the novel, Rowley Flint is also dominated by the ideology of imperialism which makes him apathetic to the plight of the 'inconvenient' refugees like Karl. The invisibility of Indians and Kenyans in his world-view, also the result of this ideology, is the other side of this apathy.

The 'apathy' displayed by Rowley flint towards Empire's subjects, the unmistakable championing of imperial notions by Edgar and the colonial utterances of minor characters, in a nutshell, confirm the decisive influence of the Empire on the worldview of characters. The thoughts and actions of characters acquire a different meaning when viewed in the context of imperialist ideology. The many hints and dots in the narrative accord readers a fair opportunity

to join up the picture of the imperial attitudes of the characters .

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Notes and References

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2 W. Somerset Maugham, *Up at the Villa*, (Great Britain: William Heinemann Ltd, 1941; repr.Vintage, 2004), p.7.All further references to this book, from the reprinted edition, are indicated in the text of the paper by page numbers only.
3 See Bipan Chandra, *Modern India*, (New Delhi: NCERT, 1971; repr.1986), pp.261-307.
4 Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* as quoted in Suhash Chakravarty, *The Raj Syndrome: A Study in Imperial Perceptions*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1989; repr1991) p. 79.
5 Quoted in *The Raj Syndrome*, p.134.
6 Quoted in *Raj Syndrome*, p.25.

7 The white girls married to Indians were also looked at with great contempt by the British Officers in India. Catherine, a character in Tarun Tejpal's *The Alchemy of Desire*, is white trash because she is married to brown trash so what if syed, her husband, is royalty. Lieutenant-Colonel Boycott does not even acknowledge the presence of Catherine and speaks to Syed 'as master to slave'. See Tarun J. Tejpal, *The Alchemy of Desire*, (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2005), P. 381.

8. Quoted in *Raj Syndrome*, P.89.

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Experiencing The Feminine: A Comparative Study of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Kamala Das's *My Story*

Sylvia Plath's reputation as a major confessional poet and Kamala Das's popularity as an important poetic voice in Indian Writing in English cannot be questioned. Their similar concerns for some subjects and similar reaction to and treatment of some problems encountered by women have led some critics to consider Kamala Das also as a confessional poet like Sylvia Plath.In an effort to establish Das's place in the canon of poetry in English Language it is pointed out that she 'writes in the mode and pattern of several 'new' American poets like Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, W.D. Snodgrass, John Berryman, Theodore Roethke and, surely enough, Sylvia Plath... (These poets) usually focus the reader's attention on 'the trials of life, their misery and heartache.'[1]

However, Sylvia Plath's and Kamala Das's fictional and autobiographical works have not often got the attention they deserve. Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Kamala Das's *The Alphabet of Lust* and her numerous stories are not spoken of in the same vein as their poetic creations. Anisur Rehman has attempted a comparative study of the poetry of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das and has rightly suggested that their other works can also be read together rewardingly.[2] In fact, it is not only possible but also quite illuminating to read The *Bell Jar*, widely regarded as an autobiographical text[3], and *My Story* an autobiography marked by a strong narrative element, in comparative perspective.

In both texts there are striking similarities with regard to the articulation of essentially feminine experiences. Both seem to justify, though perhaps not as aggressively, Adrianne Rich's remark that 'Women have been driven mad, gas lighted, for centuries by the refutation of our experience and our instincts in a culture which

validates only male experience. The truth of our bodies and minds have been mystified to us.'[4]In the individual cases of Plath and Das this experience and truth consists of issues such as childbirth, disappointment in love, lack of sexual fulfillment, gynecological problems, a haunting state of depression and a preoccupation with thoughts of suicide and death. The criticism of male ordained roles for women in society was also a subject which preoccupied both Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das.

The Bell Jar seems an unusual name for a fictional work, but Plath has used the bell jar (which is kind of glass jar in which artifacts are preserved) to symbolize the suffocating male ordered world that encloses a woman and keeps her for public viewing. Esther, a thinly-disguised persona of Sylvia Plath, finds herself imprisoned in this bell jar and views herself a victim of the oppressive gaze of the male world. Kamala Das also touches on her consciousness of victimization in *My Story*. Caught between two worlds, the inner and the outer, both Plath and Das struggle to retain their identity. The female experience perceived in these two books can be read at two levels: one is the woman's intimate world of dreams, ideals and emotions and the other being the outer or external world made of oppressive patriarchal norms to which she is forced to conform. Their worlds may be culturally different, but they are similar in the way they are forced to conform to roles defined for them by a patriarchal set up. *The Bell Jar* speaks in great detail about the agony and pain that Esther endures as she learns to conform to the male idea of a woman's role in society. David Holbrook rightly believes that the central theme of *The Bell Jar* is impingement: 'she who has had to make her identity out of scraps of 'being done to' is continually preoccupied with the relationship between being forced to conform and the true self that seeks to fulfill itself'. [5]

Thus it is impressed upon Plath that she realize not only the importance of the institution of marriage but also the need to prepare herself for the necessary changes that marriage will bring

about. For instance Buddy's sinister, learned words prepare her for her 'assigned' role in society:

> I also remembered Buddy Willard saying in a sinister, knowing way that after I had children I would feel differently, I wouldn't want to write poems anymore. So I began to think that maybe it was true that when you were married and had children it was like being brainwashed and afterward you went about numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state.[6]

Kamala Das also expresses ironically how she made a secret out of her unhappy married life just to keep her father's bloated male ego intact:

> I wished then to cry and to tell him that he had miscalculated and that I ought not to have married the one I did, but I could not bring myself to hurt him. My father was an autocrat and if he went wrong in his decisions he did not want ever to hear about it.[7]

Both Esther and Das are victims of an oppressive male society that tries to assign a self to them. Just as Buddy Willard coldly tells Esther that she will lose her artistic self once she becomes a wife and mother, Das's husband also tells her that she is free to fall in love but it must not hurt her:

> ...Amy, he said, you may play around with love but be choosey about your playmates... (MS, p.151).

Both Esther and Das try to look objectively at the roles assigned to women in marriage. Esther speaks of marriage in the following terms:

> I tried to imagine what it would be like if Constantin were my husband. It would mean getting up at seven and cooking him eggs and bacon and toast and coffee

> and dawdling about in my night gown and curlers after he'd left for work to wash up the dirty plates and make the bed, and then when he came home after a lively, fascinating day he'd expect a big dinner, and I'd spent the evening washing even more dirty plates, till I fell into bed utterly exhausted (BJ, p.93).

Das mused in a similar manner on her prospective marriage:

> My life had been planned and its course charted by my parents and relatives. I was to be the victim of a young man's carnal hunger and perhaps, out of our union, there would be born a few children. I would be a middle-class housewife, and walk along the vegetable shop carrying a string bag and wearing faded chappals on my feet. I would beat my thin children when they asked for expensive toys, and make them scream out for mercy. I would wash my husband's underwear and hang it out to dry in the balcony like some kind of a national flag, with wifely pride... (MS, p.85).

Though their angst is couched in metaphors that are culture - specific -- Esther sees the housewife 'dawdling about in night gown and curlers', and Das sees herself 'carrying a string bag, wearing faded chappals and beating her thin children' -- it expresses similar attitudes. Both express the feeling that they are trapped in roles that have been assigned to them; both show a patriarchal set up in which the wife is the inferior being who serves and the man is king who is waited upon. Above all, the interest in love and marriage is devoid of romance, intimacy and warmth and is merely a ritual that is mechanically performed.

It can also be pointed out that Das's life story revolves around the quest for true love which she is unable to find within or outside marriage and the lack of which frequently causes phases of despair, sickness and even madness. She also confesses that her love for her husband had lost its romantic ardour and the relationship is merely

mechanical where she attempts to fulfill his needs. Her unfulfilled sexual fantasies within and outside marriage and her conclusion that 'the ancient hungers that once tormented me were fulfilled' (M S, p.208) present a contrast to Esther's one sexual encounter, her attitude to love and sex, especially her long held notions of virginity:

> Ever since I'd learned about the corruption of Buddy Willard my virginity weighed like a millstone around my neck. It had been of such enormous importance to me from so long that my habit was to defend it at all costs. I had been defending if for five years and I was sick of it (BJ, p.256).

Being deceived by Buddy Willard into thinking that he is a sexual novice which in reality is not true, leads her to become cynical about the idea of a woman's fidelity and devotion to a man.

Ironically enough, even the exclusively feminine experience of childbirth is controlled, manipulated and degraded by the male ordered society, a fact Esther rudely learns as she attends a birth in a hospital with Buddy, her doctor boyfriend. It leads Esther to comment ironically

> I was so struck by the sight of the table where they were lifting the woman I didn't say a word. It looked like some awful torture table, with these metal stirrups sticking up in mid-air at one end and all sorts of instruments and wires and tubes I couldn't make out properly at the other (The Bell Jar, pp. 71-72)

When the baby gets stuck, the doctor administers a drug and a cut is made. Buddy tells her that the woman will not remember the experience afterwards. Esther feels that 'only

a man could have invented such a drug so that the woman would forget the painful experience and go home and have another baby right away '(BJ, p. 72).

Das too writes in her narrative about her husband's lack of involvement and interest at the birth of any of her three children. She mentions that it was always her mother, granny and cousins who were by her side at difficult moments.

The tension of being caught between two opposite worlds and the pressure to conform to roles assigned by an androcentric order fills both Plath and Das with uneasiness and a sense of alienation. Despite their different cultural milieu, their sense of alienation is quite similar as they face a ruthlessly oppressive male world. While Esther works and struggles in New York with a fashionable magazine and is plagued by loneliness and despair, Kamala Das describes the peace and contentment in her home (Nalapat), away from which she too is plunged in loneliness and despair. Esther, as she experiences work and life in New York revolving round bars, parties, and sexual orgies, views it all in a detached manner:

> "I am an observer", I told myself as I watched Doreen being handed into the room by the blond boy to another man (BJ, p.117).

A similar kind of alienation is expressed by Kamala Das who finds her romantic self reduced to being a victim of a cold, unfriendly and indifferent world, 'We felt that we were

Gods who had lost their way and had strayed into an unkind plane' (MS, p.115).

The sense of alienation causes not only a sense of rootlessness but also depression and thoughts of suicide in both. The vision of depression and suicide, though, is expressed in culture- specific terms. Plath's heroine, a nineteen year old girl working as a writer for a fashion magazine, is dissatisfied with life in New York:

> Look what can happen in this country, they'd say. A girl lives in some out-of-the-way town for nineteen years, so poor she can't afford a magazine, and then she gets a scholarship to college and wins a prize here and a prize there and ends up steering New York like her own private car.
> Only I wasn't steering anything, not even myself. I just bumped from my hotel to work and to parties and from parties to my hotel and back to work like a numb trolleybus. I guess I should have been excited the way most of the other girls were, but I couldn't get myself to react. I felt very still and very empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo(BJ, pp.2-3).

Das's pain and the sense of alienation reveals a similar intensity:

> The growing misery inside me, the darkness that lay congealed, removed from my face all that was pretty. I was like a house with all its lights put out. I walked up and down in our rooms wearing a torn saree and although my legs ached for rest, the movement went on and on as if they were propelled by some evil

> power. I stopped washing my hair. My husband told me that I was going mad (MS, pp.103-104).

It is interesting to note how contrasting images such as 'hotel' 'trolleybus' 'parties' suggestive of loneliness for Plath and images such as 'torn saree' 'house with all its lights put out' 'evil power' used by Das to suggest insanity have a similar connotation of emotional trauma.

This compulsion to be something other than their own true selves finds expression in different ways in their writing. Plath presents an indifferent and objective self (in which the real feelings are masked) in various similar situations whereas Das is subjective and emotional. Objectivity is an important mode of expression in Plath's poems where the persona views the self as a show thing or spectacle before the 'peanut crunching crowd', as a reading of her poem 'Lady Lazarus' would suggest. As the quest for identity appears improbable Esther dons the mask of indifference and objectivity and submits to imprisonment in the stifling and suffocating bell jar:

> I knew I should be grateful to Mrs. Guinea, only I couldn't feel a thing. If Mrs. Guinea had given me a ticket to Europe, or a round-the -world cruise, it wouldn't have made one scrap of difference to me, because wherever I sat— on the deck of a ship or at a street café in Paris or Bangkok—I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air.
>
> Blue sky opened its dome above the river, and the river was dotted with sails. I readied myself but immediately my mother and brother each laid one hand on a door handle. The tires hummed briefly over

> the grill of the bridge. Water, sails, blue sky and suspended gulls flashed by like an improbable postcard, and we were across.
> I sank back in the gray, plush seat and closed my eyes. The air of the bell jar wadded round me and I couldn't stir (BJ, p.209-10).

Esther, it appears, was on the point of plunging to her death in the sea but is denied that return to freedom; instead she remains a captive in the bell jar and must breathe its sour air.

Das expresses herself somewhat differently but the sense of being shorn of all identity and becoming a captive to the cold, scornful world of reality is similar:

> My world, de-fleshed, de-veined, de-blooded,Just a skeletal thing, then shut my Eyes and take refuge,.... Here in your nest of familiar scorn.... (MS, p.168)

The surrender to objective reality and the disowning of one's subjective world also leads to illness, both mental and physical, and a desire for death. Both books under discussion are replete with images of death. *The Bell Jar* opens with the mention of the execution of the Rosenbergs and the speaker is unable to get rid of the image of the cadaver's head.[8] Watching the birth of a baby or Buddy's genitals does not impress on Esther the idea of life, instead she sees in them death. Her vision of death is evoked in a detached and cold tone as is visible when she visits the hospital with Buddy,'These cadavers were so unhuman looking; they did

not bother me a bit. They had stiff, leathery, purple-black skin and they smelt like old pickle jars' (BJ, p.69.)
Even when Esther commits suicide, her state of semi consciousness is presented in a detached and impersonal manner:

> The man with the chisel had come back.
> "Why do you bother?" I said. "It's no use."
> "You mustn't talk like that." His fingers probed at the great aching boss over my left eye.
> Then he loosened something and a ragged gap of light appeared, like the hole in a wall (BJ, p.193)

The loss of emotion in dying reveals how death was to Plath as unreal and meaningless as life trapped in the bell jar. Dying is an art as Plath has said in her poem "Lady Lazarus":

> Dying
> Is an art, like everything else
> I do it exceptionally well.[9]

Das's book too is filled with images of death. To begin with, the idea of separation from her home Nalapat evokes the image of death. While Kamala Das remembered being sent to a boarding school, she called her box of clothes a coffin, suggesting her unhappiness at leaving Nalapat in Malabar, 'I went with him in a taxi, carrying with me a long black box shaped like a child's coffin in which my grandmother had packed my meager belongings' (MS, p.38).

At various points in her narrative she seems to come face to face with death, 'I discovered then that death was the closing of the lotus at dusk and probably temporary'(MS, p.136) and 'If death had been offered as a gift she had knocked that gift away....'(MS, p.136). Das's vision of death is personal subjective and romantic, rather than cold and objective.

The symbol of the sea has also been invoked by both writers. It has been artistically exploited to show Esther's semi conscious state after she has committed suicide, 'The silence drew off, baring the pebbles and shells and all the tatty wreckage of my life. Then at the rim of vision, it gathered itself and in one sweeping tide, rushed me to sleep' (BJ, p.191).

Images such as 'pebbles', 'shells', 'tatty wreckage' and 'sweeping tide' are associated with the sea and metaphorically express mortality whereas Das draws upon the symbol of the sea to express the immortality of the soul:

> Often I have toyed with the idea of drowning myself to be rid of my loneliness which is not unique in anyway but is natural to all. I have wanted to find rest in the sea and an escapè from involvements (MS, p.215).

Both Esther and Das tire and fall sick at various points of crises in their lives. Even their gynecological problems that result in bleeding in both Das and Esther have remarkable similarities and symbolic overtones. In the case of Kamala Das the following passage is significant:

> The day after the operation I felt a sudden warmth between my legs and found to my horror that it was the beginning of a haemorrhage. The nurses, woken from their sleep, tried to stem the flow but it went on and on untill in desperation one of them rushed up to call the doctor.
> I could hear a kind of silence trilling in both my ears and feel my body grow lighter. At one moment I felt that I was flying about in the room like a chiffon scarf and hovering over the inert body on the bed from which flowed the river of blood. It was the beginning of delightful death which removes, before it stabilizes itself, all anxieties connected with this world (MS, p.136).

This illness which she termed a delightful death was probably symbolic of physical exhaustion of her body. After the illness she recovered and was rejuvenated and was more involved with her writing.

Esther sounds a somewhat similar note when she faces a gynecological problem:

> I bent down, with a brief grunt, and slipped off one of my winter-cracked black Bloomingdale shoes. I held the shoe up, before Joan's enlarged, pebbly eyes, tilted it, and watched her take in the stream of blood that cascaded onto the beige rug (BJ, p. 260).

After this episode Esther is freed from the torturous and suffocating environment of the mental hospital. She begins a new journey of self identification in society.

It can be seen from this discussion that the two women writers explore, share and validate some vital truths of female experience.

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Notes and References

1. A.N. Dwivedi, *Kamala Das and Her Poetry* (New Delhi: Doaba House, 1983), p.40.
2. Anisur Rehman, 'Love is shadow: A Perspective on Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das *The Indian Journal of American Studies* 22.2 (Summer 1992),75-79.
3. John Fitzsimmons's comment is relevant in this regard: 'One of the problems associated with the criticism about Sylvia Plath in general and in relation to *The Bell Jar* in particular, is the way that critics view this novel as autobiographical. It is very difficult to find criticism which does not in some way refer to Plath herself when discussing this novel, or indeed any of her poems. In this sense, much of this criticism is both expressive realist and Leavisite in that it holds that the text is expressing the insights Plath has about the world around her, and in particular, about her lived experience. The fact that the "heroine" of *The Bell Jar* is called Esther Greenwood does not stop critics from making direct links between Esther and Plath.'See ch.5 'Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*' in North American Fiction and Film. (http://www.cqu.edu.au/arts/humanities/litstud/naff/northamerfic.html)Last updated August 1996
4. As quoted by Alka Nigam, 'No More Masks: The Poetry of Kamala Das' in *Perspectives on Kamala Das's Poetry*, ed., Iqbal Kaur (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1994), p.99.
5 David Holbrook as quoted by John Fitzsimmons 'Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*'.

6. Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (New York: Harper& Row, 1971), p.94.
(All subsequent references to *The Bell Jar*, abbreviated as BJ, are indicated by page numbers only.)
7. Kamala Das, *My Story* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd), 1988. p.91.
(*My Story* is henceforth referred to as MS with page nos. given in the text itself.)
8. *The Bell Jar* opens with the reference to the execution of the Rosenbergs which took place in America on June 19, 1953. They were accused of the crime of espionage (of having leaked the secret of the Atomic bomb to Russia). However, many Americans considered them innocent and their electrocution sent shock waves in the entire country as is apparent from the way Esther views the execution.
9. Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*, ed. Ted Hughes (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p.245.

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Milton's Christology in *Paradise Regained*

There has been a lot of controversy about Milton's idea of Christ as one of the Trinity. There was a time when scholars attributed Arianism or a qualified version of it to the poet. The discovery of Milton's treatise in the early part of the nineteenth century, far from settling the question of Milton's Christology, only complicates it further. Arthur Sewell explicated Milton's Latin treatise *De Doctrine Christiana* in his book on the subject in mid-twentieth century. For one thing, we do not know when exactly Milton composed the treatise or how far it reflects the views of the mature Milton on the matter though Maurice Kelley thought that *Paradise Lost* reflects the theology of the treatise. For another, the treatise is one thing, and the poems and the poetry are another. The views that emerge in the poems are the result of the evolution of poetic thought and feeling in the poems themselves. These views should ultimately be our concern. It is perhaps especially so in Milton's case because it has often been postulated for instance by A.JA. Waldock that his intentions and the actual effect of his poetry could be different, though this view about the gap between intention and effect in Milton is not held by several critics. In any case, C.A. Patrides in his books and articles may be said to have, in a way, established that Milton's religious thought synchronized with the central protestant tradition.

However, this does not rule out the possibility that Milton's thought about Christ and his role evolved through variations and stages and reached a shape in his mature poems, *Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. That probably seems to have happened, the crystallisation thus taking place in the mature poems. It may also be noted that Milton as a young poet wrote an ode on Christ's Nativity which follows the convention of such nativity poems. He also started writing a poem on the passion ('The Passion') but left it unfinished when he was less than half-way through. He published the fragment with the note.

> The subject, the author finding to be above the years he had when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, and left it unfinished.

All this goes to show how preoccupied throughout Milton was with the theme of Christ.

In this perspective, Milton would appear to represent in and through his portrayal of the inner experiences of Christ in *Paradise Regained* the whole course of evolution of his own Christology over the years and the decades. The graph that the poem traces is one of an evolution of Christ's sense of his godhood from a half-knowledge and half-consciousness of it to its full awareness at the end. That is what Christ's experiences in the poem do to him. Interestingly, this corresponds with the development of Milton's idea of the question. But the whole process is a hard-fought struggle against Satan's subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, successive temptations of Christ in the wilderness

through Satan's offer of food for the raging hunger experienced by Christ after forty days of starvation, of riches, of kingdoms and glory, of books and learning and of the challenge of Satan to Christ to provide a concrete ocular proof and manifestation of Christ's godhood through the strange act of standing on the precipice of a hill without falling. It is by dint of his unyielding resistance to all these temptations in quick succession through unflinching faith in god and through a total surrender of his will in God's that Christ is able to come through to a realization of his identity with the Father as the Son of God.

What we have in *Paradise Regained* in is not only a reiteration of the theme of temptation so central to Milton's major poems but also what could be described, without the risk of a biographical fallacy, as a projection and reflection of Milton's own experiences with the struggle against these particular temptations.

Milton was himself a lover of good food, as witness an early poem like the one 'Inviting a Friend to Supper' and the engagement and fervor with which he develops the details and riches of the food that he introduces in poems like *Comus*, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. At the same time, he was fully aware of the risks of yielding to the temptation to gormandize Milton was not without his ambitions for a political and public role; he undertook to be the Latin Secretary to Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth and threw himself heart and soul into the job. But later he got sufficiently disillusioned and came to realize the emptiness of such dreams of political glory and public

grandeur. So he could well depict the temptation of kingdoms and the glory they are supposed to invert one with, of power and all such mundane grandeur. No wonder that he makes his Christ undergo such a temptation only to reject it outright. Similarly, Milton was also attracted by the allure of book-learning in his youth as he was of the typical Renaissance, Faustian thirst for encyclopedic knowledge. But he came to understand the futility of it all, and by the time he came to compose the later poems *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* he appears conspicuously sparing in his use of classical myth and allusion, though in his early poems he did make a liberal use of the Renaissance neoplationising of classical myth, giving it a Christian slant. We can now turn to some aspects in this connection of Milton's depiction of the inner experience and state of mind of Christ in *Paradise Regained*. At the beginning, Christ has

> ... a multitude of thoughts at once
> Awakened in the swarm, while I consider
> What from within I feel myself, and hear
> What from without comes often to my ears.
>
> (Bk. 1,ll. 196-199)

He recalls his miraculous birth and what the angels foretold about his destiny as Christ the Saviour, the spiritual kingdom he will establish and the advent of John the Baptist to confirm this. By a secret motion of God's will, Christ is led now into a desert wilderness to encounter Satan who appears in disguise determined to use all his guile to tempt Christ into a false pride about his destiny. It is God's

providence for his Son that he should prepare himself for his mission by facing the trial of ordeal in the wilderness. In the first attempt Satan, knowing that Christ has gone without food for forty days on end, tries to tempt him by the offer of food and sustenance. He had succeeded in tempting the hungry Eve in Paradise at noon-tide with the alluring apple. Milton had already used the motif of temptation through food of the famished Lady in the forest in *Comus,* which offer she promptly renounces. This latter is what Christ does when Satan spreads before him a rich feast magically called up by him from nowhere. Christ's action becomes an exemplification of the virtue of tempterana which Eve and Adam grievously failed to exercise. Similarly Christ rejects Satan's offer of riches and wealth, spelling out how these do not bring inward peace.

The next offer by Satan is the promise of great glory and power through conquest, and that too effortless, and power over all kingdoms. Satan reinforces the offer with a concrete, ocular vista he shows Christ from a hilltop which commands a truly spatial view, Christ counters him by distinguishing clearly between the false feeling, and illusory, glory which belongs with the earth and the true glory of God and Heaven. Christ by now comes into consciousness of his destiny of establishing a spiritual kingdom on earth and thus in that sense occupying David's throne. But Christ would wait on providence for that 'due time' to arrive which he knows is not yet. This again is one of the main motifs of Milton's major poems, the difference between true and false glory and 'magnificence'.

The last temptation which Satan brings before Christ is an offer of a full mastery of all book-learning and knowledge, which is perhaps the strongest and most difficult to resist in Milton's own scheme of things. But Christ is quite clear in his mind and makes it plain that all booking knowledge, unless absorbed and made one's own by divine intuition such as derived from the Psalms and hymns, would be no more than isolated pebbles on the shore, mere scraps and ends unintegrated into a whole. Satan, now desperate, throws to him a challenge that Christ should come and stand steady on the edge of a steep hill, Christ who has accepted everything as divine will leave it entirely to God to protect him telling Satan at the same time

> Also it is written
> 'Tempt not the Lord thy God.' He said, and stood
> But Satan, smitten into amazement, fell.

Thus, in a reversal of the situation in *Paradise Lost*, it is the tempter who falls now. Christ proves himself in more than one sense of the term. Now as he comes into full awareness of the coalescence of his individual and God's providential will, the angels come and set before him a feast so that he could relieve himself of his hunger.

Christ's active experience and successful resistance of these temptations is a forerunner of his great sacrifice on the Cross and his Final Resurrection. It is an understanding of true heroism as one of conquest over subtle temptation through an inner and the spirit of sacrifice fortitude and a

hard-won affirmative acceptance of God's 'special providence' for oneself.

That the stage by stage evolution of Christ's consciousness of his divine role parallels that of Milton's thought is not the result of the poet's egotistical self-expression, as it is at times taken to be. It is more by way of self-analysis and self-examination. Milton was well aware of his proneness to certain temptations including pride and he takes care to be on his guard against these. Milton's portrayal of Christ's emerging awareness of his godhood, of his being part of the ' three-person'd God', reminds one of how the epic poets of India dealing with Rama as an *avatar* of Vishnu, the god of the Hindu Trinity, handle the question. Valmiki the originary poet in Sanskrit depicted Rama as an ideal person, but yet a human figure, though one may trace an undergirding awareness of Rama's godhood in the epic. Kamban in his Tamil *Ramayana* and Tulsidas in his Hindi account treated Rama as a conscious incarnation of divinity. Milton's could be viewed as taking a middle course making his Christ aware at once of his human status and divine destiny. What comes to Christ is a realization of God in his self which the mystics hold as the ideal to be sought after, with the special difference that Christ is the Son of God himself.

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Note

The quotations from Milton are from the Oxford World's Classics edition of Milton's poems by Charles Williams.

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Jalal Uddin Khan

Manfred as a Key Byronic Text

English Romantic poetry is highly autobiographical. Byron's is no exception being, among other things, an expression of the characteristic traits of his personality – proud, reckless and egotistical disregard of others and sad, melancholy reflections about human destiny and human history. Critical of contemporary conventions, Byron is in search for a perfect ideal not possible in human life. Born in a line of Byrons, all known for their wild character, he was the only child of his parents, born with a defective foot but he grew up to be a handsome young man.[1] No wonder he had a number of scandalous affairs, including the incestuous one with his half-sister Augusta Leigh, which contributed to the breakup of his marriage, seriously damaging his social reputation and causing him to leave England in 1816, never to return again, till his death in Greece in 1824 at the age of 36.[2]

This sense of self-exile combined with the pride of noble birth and contempt for ordinary humanity is reflected in Byron's heroes, who are actually dramatic projections of his moods of ego, obsession, isolation and cynicism. His choice of setting in the wild and stormy aspects of nature provides a fitting background to his turbulent personality and that of his characters. He was called "the Napoleon of

London drawing rooms" and "the last Promethean," who compared himself to a volcanic eruption in view of his passionate ambition and tragic destiny to ruin all he came near. He is considered the most European of all the English Romantic poets not only because of his extensive European tours and cosmopolitan connections but also his similarities with his elder and younger contemporaries on the continent, Goethe and Leopardi, respectively.

Similarly, Byron is considered the least Romantic of all English Romantic poets. One of the reasons is that he admired the eighteenth century Augustan satire and the neoclassical elegance of form and style, although he himself did not care much for the art of diction in his poetry. He did not like the elder generation of his fellow Romantic poets (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey), whom he bitterly attacked as inferior and insufficient because he thought they were confined to small lakes and ponds and hills of the English Lake District as opposed to the oceans and seas across the continent through which he would extensively travel. His sense of rebellious pride and freedom was unlikely to find home in the tame and tranquil surroundings of the Lake poets. With no sympathy for the Wordsworthian sense of the moral and benevolent nature, Byron developed his particular attitude to the wild and stormy aspects right from his boyhood. In *Hours of Idleness* (1807), his first volume, he speaks of the inspiring mountainous scenery:

> ...freeborn soul,
> ...loves the mountain's craggy side

> And seeks the rocks where billows roll.

Expressing his dislike of flat country, he wrote to Augusta, "Level roads don't suit me."
In his *Childe Harold,* He says that "High mountains are a feeling, but the hum/Of human cities torture" (*CHP,* III, 682-83).

However, in his own way, he too, like other Romantics, was conscious of human imperfections in the world of reality but, unlike them, he gives a satirical portrait of such imperfections, constantly mocking at them and searching for an impossible ideal of perfection. It is precisely against such an obsessive search that Madame (Germaine) de Stael, who was regarded as the mistress of the age, warned Byron when she attempted, without success, to effect a reconciliation between him and his wife, saying:

> You ought not to have declared war on the world. It's an impossibility ... I tried it myself when I was young—but it's impossible.[3]

Manfred is Byron's first dramatic work—"a dramatic poem," as he called it in its subtitle, suggesting that it is a combination of lyric and drama like the later *Prometheus Unbound,* "A Lyrical Drama," by Shelley. By describing the piece as "metaphysical" in nature, Byron suggests that it is a closet drama of strange and inexplicable ideas, meant for reading, not for the stage. The quotation from *Hamlet* prefacing the poem ("There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/ Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.") also

suggests the conception of incomprehensible things beyond the bounds of ordinary, general human philosophy and the amazing power of the human mind to conceive of things normally inconceivable. That there is a great influence of Shakespeare's play on Byron's is made clear not only by the above extract but also, as it will be shown below, throughout the rest of *Manfred*. Byron himself knew that he was writing something wild and strange. "God help me," he wrote to his publisher, "if I proceed in this scribbling I shall have frittered away my mind before I am thirty. But it is at times a real relief to me."[4] Like the earlier *Childe Harold*, especially Part III, and *The Prisoner of Chillon*, *Manfred* is highly psychological, "at core 'mental,' a psychomachia, in which the allegory is one of the individual in quest of self-definition."[5] All three works, Byron's most cohesive set, according to Shilstone, are "a sustained examination of the autonomous life and mind," exploring the issues of what he calls "philosophical exile" and "the mind's ability to forge myths as well as to debunk them."[6]

The time and circumstances of the composition of *Manfred* are significant. It was begun in late 1816 when Byron was in exile following a series of events that, according to John Clubbe, formed "the crisis of 1816" and constituted "the central traumatic experience in Byron's life."[7] Finished the following year in Italy, its composition was immediately preceded by Byron's knowledge of Goethe's *Faust* from Matthew Lewis, the author of the Gothic novel *The Monk*, who was visiting him in Geneva in the summer of 1816.[8] Both in its setting (Manfred's Gothic castle in the high

mountains of the Swiss Alps) and its content of strange and scary excesses of supernatural, ghostly nature, it is Byron's most Gothic work. Perhaps the poet took the name of the title character from the evil Manfred, one of the major characters in the first true Gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765). It is also possible that he took the name from the 13th century young king of Sicily, Manfred, who was a natural son of Emperor Frederick II and who in many ways seemed to resemble both Byron and his hero.[9]

It was in the same summer, on the stormy night of June 16th and the following night, that Byron and the rest in the group all living in exile (Byron and his personal physician John William Polidori, Shelley and his wife Mary Shelley, and her stepsister Claire Clairmont, who was Byron's former mistress) had their famous ghost story sessions during which Byron was prompted to challenge themselves to come up with their own ghost stories. On the following night he recited Coleridge's *Christabel* to a highly embarrassing yet subsequently creative impact on Shelley and Mary Shelley. The immediate results of Byron's instigation, "We will each write a ghost story," were an undeveloped and lost story by Shelley based on the experiences of his early life, *The Vampyre* by Polidori, a fragment of a tale by Byron himself, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus,* which had of course a longer and more complex genesis with more developments to follow in the activities of the group during the week following the evening of June 16th.[10]

If the main character of Polidori's tale, Lord Ruthven, may have been based, as some critics think, on Byron, the

first-person narrator of Byron's fragment seems to have been based on Polidori, while its main character Augustus Darvell—a remarkable man "of considerable fortune and ancient family," "a being of no common order," "a prey to some cureless disquiet," with "peculiar circumstances" and "irreconcilable contradictions" in life, who "had already traveled extensively"—is an autobiographical projection of the poet himself to be developed within a few months into the autobiographical Manfred. *Manfred* is indeed a product, just as *Frankenstein*, of the influence of the discussions they all had that summer on "various philosophical doctrines," including, following the Promethean myth of the creation of man from clay and the more recent (late 18th century) experiments of the natural scientist Erasmus Darwin, "the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated" by reanimating a corpse or manufacturing and then bringing to life the component parts of a creature.[11] It is clearly evident in Manfred's wonderful self-disclosure to the Witch of the Alps, that while he held slight communion with ordinary humanity and in fact hated being a human being of "all clay" himself,

> My joy was in the Wilderness, to breathe
> The difficult air of the iced mountain's top, ...to plunge
> Into the torrent, and to roll along
> On the swift whirl of the new breaking wave ...
> To follow through the night the moving moon,
> The stars and their development; or catch
> The dazzling lightnings till my eyes grew dim;

> Or to look, list'ning, on the scatterd leaves,
> While Autumn winds were at their evening song.
> These were my pastimes, and to be alone; ...*And then I dived,*
> *In my lone wanderings, to the caves of death,*
> *Searching its cause in its effect; and drew*
> *From wither'd bones, and skulls, and heap'd up dust,*
> *Conclusions most forbidden. Then I pass'd*
> *The nights of years in sciences untaught ...I made*
> *Mine eyes familiar with Eternity ...and with my knowledge grew*
> *The thirst of knowledge, and the power and joy*
> *Of this most bright intelligence* ...(II.ii. 62-96, emphases mine)

Manfred's long and laborious cultivation of his "sciences", that is, occult bodies of knowledge, not only enables him to raise spirits and have power over them just as the 4th-century neoplatonic philosopher Iamblicus, as he mentions, could call up Eros and Anteros, gods of love and unreturned love respectively, from the Gadaran hot springs (in Syria), but also experiment with dead tissues in an effort to discover the principle of life and death. He is asking the Witch if it is in her power to "wake the dead" or make him dead. Ultimately he discovers that even the "long pursued and super-human art" of his occult "sciences" fails to provide him his long-sought forgetfulness, forcing him to live in despair for ever.

Under the impact of the Alps, Byron used strange and wild materials in *Manfred*, although it may also have some Wordsworthian elements of deep calm and solitude present in his other contemporary compositions.[12] Whatever action it has mostly consists of dialogues with powerful

supernatural spirits including the Witch of the Alps, Arimanes, Destinies, and Nemesis, and only a few human characters (a pastoral chamois hunter living in the higher regions of the Alps; an old abbot, who represents organized yet weak and ineffectual Christian religion, and two other minor characters—Herman, and Manuel). Obviously, there is what Ryan Hunter calls "a sort of three-tier hierarchy" with the "sublime pagan or polytheist figures" easily dwarfing the Christian abbot in power and influence but themselves being subordinate to the yet greater power of the individualist human will embodied in Manfred.[13] But Hunter fails to see that there is actually a four-tier hierarchy with Manfred himself being subject to a controlling, invisible, overseeing power suggested several times in the play—by the spirit of his star, which both "obeys and scorns" him and which is "Forced by a power (which is not [his])" to appear at his call; by the incantational voice ("By a power to thee unknown"); and by Manfred himself when he is about to jump from a high cliff ("There is a power upon me which withholds/ And makes it my fatality to live").

The mountainous and misty landscape with crags, cliffs, cataracts, precipices, avalanches, and woods and valleys, both in the higher and the lower Alps, at all times of the day (midnight, morning, noon), not only provides a sensational setting for the strange and uncommon nature of the plot but also serves the function of symbolically reflecting the restless agitation in Manfred's mind. The remarkable scenery described by Byron as "rocks, pines, torrents, glaciers, clouds, and summits of eternal snow far

above them" is a fitting background against which, Watson says, "Byron's conception of the powerful mind on the mountain summit receives its most extended expression."[14] Acknowledging that the poem as a whole drew its inspiration from the Alps, Byron himself said, "It was the Staubach and the Jungfrau, and something else, much more than Faustus, that made me write *Manfred*."[15] Yet, Manfred is very much a Faustian figure—highly proud, extremely independent, individualistic, and lonely, musing in despair and melancholy and invoking dark, evil spirits through magic conjurations.[16] As Nelson claims, "Like Goethe's *Faust*, which Byron had just read, *Manfred* is concerned with man's struggle against the universe."[17] Like Faust, Manfred's scholarship in philosophy and science has left him dissatisfied. Both are overreachers and both use the means of sorcery and magic to overreach themselves, although the knowledge of the occult ultimately proves to be futile. Both either confront or are tempted by the forces of good and evil struggling for the control of their respective souls.

However, there is one major difference: while Faust sells his soul to the devil in order to gain humanly impossible unlimited power, the very idea of such subjection is anathema to Manfred, who says to the evil spirits just before his death:

> My past power
> Was purchased by no compact with thy crew
> But by superior science—penance—daring—
> And length of watching—strength of mind—and skill
> In knowledge of our fathers—when the earth

> Saw men and spirits walking side by side,
> And gave ye no supremacy. (3.4.113-19)

Manfred never seeks to enter into any agreement that will make his soul yield to the devil:

> Byron's great invention is to have Manfred, unlike Faust, disdainfully reject the offer of a pact with the powers of darkness. He thereby sets himself up as the totally autonomous man, independent of any external authority or power, whose own mind, as he says in the concluding scene, generates the values by which he lives "in sufferance or in joy," and by reference to which he judges, requites, and finally destroys himself.[18]

Among the other differences, while Faust seeks omnipotence to be able to do whatever he likes, Manfred seeks death and forgetfulness. While Faust is set on the course which actually takes him to his tragic loss of self-control, masterminded by Mephistopheles, Manfred remains the master of his fate throughout and meets his tragic end on his own terms, not those of the devil. Whereas Faust has a brief period of deceptive worldly enjoyment followed by intense and unbearable suffering in death, Manfred is past the stage of worldly bliss only to continue in his pain and despair, to be relieved in death. For Faust, it is utter damnation and hellfire in religious sense; for Manfred, it is a matter of his own raging in his own mind with no care for religious sanction or consequences of religious transgression. In other words, Manfred begins where Faust ends. Manfred is also a figure like Ahasuerus, "the legendary Wandering Jew who, having

ridiculed Christ as he bore the Cross to Calvary, is doomed to live until Christ's Second Coming."[19] His condition of longing for death that is denied him is modelled on the legend of the Wandering Jew, so repeatedly treated in Romantic literature.

Manfred seems to be guilty of some mysterious crime, which has been the cause of him being an outcast, living in proud isolation but tormented by endless remorse. He expresses a sense of unbearable burden upon his conscience from the very beginning:

> My slumbers—if I slumber—are not sleep,
> But a continuance of enduring thought, ...in my heart
> There is a vigil, and these eyes but close
> To look within. (I.i.3-7)

Alone at midnight in his Gothic castle in the mountains, Manfred recounts, like Faustus, his mastery of the various fields of knowledge, which he says has been of no avail to him. Even though a human being, he has no human emotions of fear, love, hope or dread and therefore remains unaffected by the ways of mankind with no interest whatsoever in their concerns and pursuits:

> Good, or evil, life,
> Powers, passions, all I see in other beings,
> Have been to me as rain unto the sands,
> Since that all-nameless hour (I.i.21-24)

In fact, he is even hostile to anything that is human. Like Faustus, the mortal Manfred then sets his course on the

forbidden quest and invokes the powerful elemental spirits to help him out of crisis. These polytheist pagan spirits—seven of them, being, in order of appearance, those of the air, mountains, oceans, earth, winds, night, and Manfred's own star—are of "the unbounded universe, ...to whom the tops/ Of mountains inaccessible are haunts/ And earth's and ocean's caves familiar things" (I.i.29, 32-34). They are proudly aware of their immortal and eternal state of being, the seventh being the most interesting of them all in view of the fact that it is the spirit of Manfred's guiding star, under whose influence he was born and which thus rules his destiny. This seventh spirit provides the complex history of that star and its checkered course in the space (which actually reflects Manfred's own in life), from its smooth origin before the earth to how it later became

> A wandering mass of shapeless flame,
> A pathless comet, and a curse,
> The menace of the universe;
> Still rolling on with innate force,
> Without a sphere, without a course,
> A bright deformity on high,
> The monster of the upper sky! (I.i.117-23).

All the spirits, however, regardless of their formidable power, still have to yield to Manfred, who, in the forcefulness of his spirit of independence and determination, dominates them and makes them to be at his service as he wishes. They are ready to offer him everything (power, kingdom, pleasure, wisdom, long life) except what he seeks—forgetfulness of what pains him, which they know but which he would not

...utter. As superhuman beings, to whom past, present and future are the same, they do not have any knowledge or idea of death, memory, recollection, and forgetfulness. As such it is beyond their power to provide Manfred with what he so desperately longs—oblivion—which is possible, they suggest, only when he dies. As they stress upon their fine quality of glorious otherworldliness and thereby try to undermine Manfred's mortal status by calling him "a child of clay" and "a worm," Manfred asserts his supremacy by being sarcastic and scornful about them and by describing himself in terms of the extraordinarily noble and heroic elements of his favorite deity—favorite with other Romantic liberals as well including Shelley:

> Slaves, scoff not at my will!
> The mind, the spirit, the Promethean spark,
> The lightning of my being, is as bright,
> Pervading, far darting as your own,
> And shall not yield to yours, though coop'd in clay! (I.i.153-57)

As the spirits are about to be dismissed for having been of no use, Manfred asks them to appear in the physical forms of their choice. When the most powerful of them, the seventh, appears in the shape of a beautiful female figure, Manfred rushes forward to embrace it only to see it mysteriously vanish, causing him to fall senseless.[20] This figure, probably representing "the ideal of the beautiful and good that Manfred had pursued in his uncorrupted youth" may be "a simulacrum of Astarte," to appear later in Act II.[21] According to the "elderly and wise" Manuel, one of

Manfred's long-time dependants, who plays a role like that of the chorus in ancient Greek tragedy or the blind octogenarian Tiresias in the Oedipus myth, one Lady Astarte was

> The sole companion of his wanderings
> And watchings—her, whom of all earthly things
> That lived, the only thing he seem'd to love,—
> As he, indeed, by blood was bound to do ...(3.3.43-46)

That Manuel's testimony is authentic can be concluded from the fact that he had been in the service of the Manfred household even from before the birth of Manfred and knew both him and his father so well that he could distinctly contradistinguish between them in "mind and habits":

> I served his father, whom he nought resembles...
> Count Sigismund was proud,—but gay and free,—
> A warrior and a reveler; he dwelt not
> With books and solitude, nor made the night
> A gloomy vigil, but a festal time,
> Merrier than day; he did not walk the rocks
> And forests like a wolf, nor turn aside
> From men and their delights. (3.3.15, 19-25)

Sigismund was therefore exactly opposite to Manfred, thus confirming, as many other evidences in the play do, the latter's complete separation from his family tradition and other legacies of human nature in general.[22] In order for those earlier "jocund times" to return to the Manfred castle in which, Manuel claims, "some strange things" have recently been happening, their current chieftain, Manfred, has to be replaced.

It seems Manfred has committed some grave sin with relation to Astarte. The nature of the sin is only suggested but never clearly disclosed. The voice in the Incantation confirms the spell of the curse Manfred has been under and the hellish suffering he is destined to suffer without end. That there is a curse upon him is alluded to several times—by the incantatory voice ("Hath baptized thee with a curse"), by the spirit of his own star (quoted above), by himself in the opening soliloquy and invocation ("And feel the curse to have no natural fear"; "By the strong curse which is upon my soul") and later with the chamois hunter beside him ("A blighted trunk upon a cursed root") and in his dialogue with the Witch of the Alps ("Then cursed myself till sunset"). The reference by the voice in the Incantation to him being in the "brotherhood of Cain" -who murdered his brother Abel—suggests that Manfred may have killed someone closely related (Astarte) or may have contributed to her being killed.

The following morning Manfred is about to take his own life by plunging from a crag in the Jungfrau. His excellent Hamlet-like existentialist monologue as he contemplates suicide is worth-quoting in length:

> My mother Earth!
> And thou fresh breaking Day, and you, ye Mountains,
> Why are ye beautiful? I cannot love ye.
> And thou, the bright eye of the universe,
> That openest over all, and unto all
> Art a delight—thou shin'st not on my heart....
> ———————Beautiful!

How beautiful is all this visible world!
How glorious in its action and itself;
But we, who name ourselves its sovereigns, we,
Half dust, half deity, alike unfit
To sink or soar, with our mix'd essence make
A conflict of its elements, and breathe
The breath of degradation and of pride,
Contending with low wants and lofty will
Till our mortality predominates,
And men are—what they name not to themselves;
And trust not to each other. (I.ii.37-47) [23]

The notion that humans are "half dust, half deity" implies that if they could only change their "half-dust" part into something divine, they would be entirely divine in status with all the potential of a super-deity.[24] It is this burden of mortality, which Byron describes in *Childe Harold* as "a fleshly chain," "this degraded form" and "the clay-cold bonds which round our being cling" (Canto 3, ll. 685, 697, 699), from which Manfred longs to escape to become a pure soul as he hears the echoing pastoral music of the mountain shepherd and "the sweet bells of the sauntering herd" in the distance:

Oh, that I were
The viewless spirit of a loving sound,
A living voice, a breathing harmony,
A bodiless enjoyment—born and dying
With the blest tone which made me! (I.ii.53-56)

Manfred's pattern of thought here and later in the "We are the fools of time and terror" soliloquy anticipates Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* and Shelley's *To a Skylark*, both of which

foreground the contrast between body and soul, human and natural, and the pure principle and permanence of joy as represented by the bird-song and the transitoriness and ephemerality as represented by the condition of human mortality.

On the eye-witness account of the pastoral chamois hunter (one who hunts for chamois – rare goatlike antelopes found in the high mountain ranges), Manfred is a lordly figure in dress and appearance: "Thy garb and gait bespeak thee of high lineage" (II.i.7), with "his air/Proud as a free-born peasant's" (I.ii.63). But he is a man of "strange words and some half-maddening sin/Which makes [him] people vacancy" (II.i.31-32). He does not live a healthy life as he suffers from prolonged sorrow and unrest. Hardly of middle age, he describes himself as "gray-hair'd with anguish" as if he were a kind of desolated ("blasted," "blighted," "barkless" and "branchless") pine in winter, with a sense of the hours torturously dragged into ages (I.ii.66, 73). It is not only that nothing can give him relief but also that everything becomes a projection of his disturbed mind, autobiographically supported by Byron's own experience. "Neither the music of the Shepherd, the crashing of the Avalanche, nor the torrent, the mountain, the Glacier, have for one moment lightened the weight upon my heart," Byron wrote, "nor enabled me to lose my own wretched identity in the majesty, the power and the Glory, around, above, and beneath me."[25]

In his restless misery Manfred is about to jump to death from a perilous peak when the chamois hunter, who

would not have his "pure vales" stained with Manfred's "guilty blood," suddenly seizes him from behind to prevent him from his attempted suicide, helps him with his staff and girdle to secure a sure footing and leads him away to his cottage down the Bernese Alps. He offers Manfred drinks of "an ancient vintage," who, however, sees only blood at the brim:

> I say 'tis blood—my blood! the pure warm stream
> Which ran in the veins of my fathers, and in ours
> When we were in our youth, and had one heart,
> And loved each other as we should not love
> And this was shed: (II.i.24-28)

Manfred's terrified reaction is yet another evidence that he is totally cut off from his forebears. It seems he had loved and destroyed a young lady related to him by blood. The chamois hunter offers to guide him to his lordly castle down below in the lower valleys as he tries to comfort him by suggesting "The aid of holy men and heavenly patience" (II.i. 34), which he declines in his habitual scornful manner:

> Patience and patience! Hence—that word was made
> For brutes of burthen, not for birds of prey;
> Preach it to mortals of a dust like thine—
> I am not of thine order. (II.i. 35-38)

Manfred may be suffering endlessly with the consciousness of "the fierce thirst of death," yet he feels extremely superior to the rest of the humanity to whom he is misanthropically averse. He can bear what others may not even dare to dream or what would make others perish in their sleep. In the

wretched contemplation of his terrible actions his time seems to have prolonged into ages, empty and endless, yet heavy and unavoidable:

> .....actions are our epochs: mine
> Have made my days and nights imperishable,
> Endless, and all alike, as sands on the shore,
> Innumerable atoms, and one desert,
> Barren and cold, on which the wild waves break,
> But nothing rests, save carcasses and wrecks,
> Rocks, and the salt-surf weeds of bitterness. (II. i. 52-58)

To a simple villager like the chamois hunter, Manfred's ability to capture his own state of mind in such a penetrating self-analysis is nothing but madness. Unlike Manfred's aristocratic yet wandering, feeble, weary-of-life tottering person seeking death as he suffers from the inescapable burden of consciousness, the chamois hunter, much older than him, represents the common virtues of average humanity: innocence, steadiness, domestic peace and happiness, rest, warmth, guidance, and continuity through generations. Manfred gives a full picture of him as

> ...a peasant of the Alps—
> Thy humble virtues, hospitable home,
> And spirit patient, pious, proud, and free;
> Thy self-respect, grafted on innocent thoughts;
> Thy days of health, and nights of sleep; thy toils,
> By danger dignified, yet guiltless; hopes
> Of cheerful old age and a quiet grave,
> With cross and garland over its green turf,
> And thy grandchildren's love for epitaph;...(II. i. 63-72)

One of the most interesting things about *Manfred* is that it contains more pastoral elements than any other works by Byron. Since Byron was hardly a pastoral poet, there are not too many pastoral elements in his works in the first place. Unlike Wordsworth, he was not much attracted to the solitude of nature, country life—idealized or realistic—and the simplicities or adversities of country people. Yet, as it has been noted above, not only the chamois hunter is an interesting pastoral character but also the deep quiet of nature as expressed (through many soliloquies, monologues and apostrophes) in *Manfred* is informed by a sense of the Wordsworthian pastoral idealism. Also, as it has been observed in Note#11 that Byron was reading Wordsworth about the same time as the composition of *Manfred* as well as *Child Harold's Pilgrimage III*, which is the only other comparable poetical work in matter of pastoral interest in Byron. In this contemporaneously written travelogue, nature and people along the banks of the Rhine are described in an idealized manner, the latter being as happy and carefree, so that even an exile find it nice and comforting to be in the midst of such a scene. Byron's reflection, we remember, was in direct response to his own exile from England, from whose civilized community he had just run away with the result that he had now an opportunity to practically test out Wordsworth's proposition about the value of common or natural man in a natural setting. Byron's *Alpine Journal* of the time also bears out this realization of a pastoral existence as represented by shepherds in their mountain pastures.[26]

Ironically, while Manfred sees all the good qualities of ordinary settled life in the chamois hunter, none of them would matter to him whose "soul was scorch'd already!" He denies that he wreaked any revenge on his enemies; instead, he pleads guilty that

> My injuries came down on those who loved me—
> On those whom I best loved: I never quell'd [killed]
> An enemy, save in my just defence—
> My wrongs were all on those I should have cherished—
> But my embrace was fatal. (II.i.84-88).

In his proud isolation and independence, Manfred not only utterly rejects the chamois hunter's offer of prayer for him wishing the restoration of his being through penitence but also, having generously recognizing his pity for him by a gift of gold, asks him not to follow him any more.
So far neither Manfred's communion with the "abstruser powers" nor his contact with common humanity has been of any assistance to him. He retires, at about noontime, into the "sweet solitude" by a cataract in a lower valley in the Alps enjoying the lovely sight of the arch created by the rays of the sunbow of the torrent. This provides the ideal condition for him, as a "Son of Earth," to invoke the spirit of the place—the beautiful Witch of the Alps—by playfully flinging some water in the air and muttering the adjuration for her to appear beneath the arch. She is described in terms of her "hair of light,/ And dazzling eyes of glory," her "calm clear brow" reflecting her "serenity of soul,/ Which of itself shows immortality" and her "celestial aspect" far superior to "The beauties of the sunbow which bends o'er thee." The

Witch thus becomes one of the most significant characters to whom Manfred unlocks most of what he calls his "idle attributes" and his "heart's grief":

> From my youth upwards
> My spirit walk'd not with the souls of men,
> Nor look'd upon the earth with human eyes;
> The thirst of their ambition was not mine,
> The aim of their existence was not mine,
> My joys, my griefs, my passions and my powers
> Made me a stranger; though I wore the form
> I had no sympathy with breathing flesh
> Nor midst the creatures of clay that girded me
> Was there but one who—but of her anon. (II.ii.50-59)

Despite the fact that Manfred hardly held any communion with human beings, it is implied that there was one with whom he had a dangerous relationship and whom he had badly harmed. That the sin was atrocious in nature is hinted at when he says:

> I have not named to thee
> Father or mother, mistress, friend or being,
> With whom I wore the chain of human ties;
> If I had such, they seem'd not such to me—
> Yet there was one— (II.ii.100-104)

Clearly, the memory of a woman haunts him with her physical and spiritual resemblance to him. Like him she also had a power to grasp the mystery of the universe but with a characteristic difference:

She was like me in lineaments—her eyes,
Her hair, her features, all, to the very tone
Even of her voice, they said were like to mine;
But soften'd all, and temper'd into beauty;
She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,
The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind
To comprehend the universe: nor these
Alone, but with them gentler powers than mine,
Pity, and smiles, and tears—which I had not;
And tenderness—but that I had for her;
Humility—and that I never had,
Her faults were mine—her virtues were her own—
I loved her, and destroy'd her. (II.ii.105-117)

She was destroyed not with his "hand" but with his "heart," which

...gazed on mine, and withered. I have shed
Blood, but not hers—and yet her blood was shed—
I saw—and could not staunch it. (II.ii.119-21)

By all indication it seems that Manfred was guilty of incest. He honestly admits she was "a sufferer for my sins" (II.ii.197). Such an admission unmistakably suggests a nobility of character far above ordinary humanity. He continues to give lyrical expression to the painful state of his mind in a poetry rich in imagery:

My solitude is solitude no more,
But peopled with the Furies; I have gnash'd
My teeth in darkness till returning morn,
Then cursed myself till sunset ...the cold hand
Of an all-pitiless demon held me back,
Back by a single hair, which would not break.
In phantasy, imagination, all

> The affluence of my soul—which one day was
> A Croesus in creation— (II.ii. 130-142)

Manfred's terrible suffering forces him to pray for madness as a blessing or plunge deep into fantasy:

> But, like an ebbing wave, it dash'd me back
> Into the gulf of my unfathom'd thought. (II.ii.143-44)

Yet his sense of pride is so frightening that when the Witch of the Alps demands his allegiance as a condition for her help with the fulfillment of his wish for death or forgetfulness, she is scornfully rejected:

> I will not swear— obey! and whom? the spirits
> Whose presence I command, and be the slave
> Of those who served me—Never! (II.ii.158-160)

Left alone in the evening Manfred soliloquizes about the sorrows of life and dread of death, in a way reminiscent of Hamlet, and decides to try his science of black magic one more time, this time to call up the dead to find out what it is that is so dreadful about death. His rare admission that he fears death and that he trembles at the prospect of facing the spirits of the dead who might disclose strange secrets of death puts a human face on him. As he nears death, he realizes that the cold fact of death and its mystery are better left without being delved deep into lest his fears about what is inevitable prove overwhelming.

At last Manfred enters the hall of the most powerful and presiding spirit of darkness and evil, Arimanes, who is

in his throne beside a globe of fire at the summit of the Jungfrau. The name derives from Ahriman, who is the evil principle in the dualistic Zoroastrian religion. All the attendant spirits, destinies, and Nemesis, who remain ever-ready to fulfill Arimanes' commands to his complete satisfaction, speak in one voice in glorifying him hailed and worshipped as "Sovereign of Sovereigns," "Prince of Earth and Air" and "Prince of the Powers invisible." All this provides yet another opportunity for Manfred to assert his towering superiority. In keeping with his proud determination and stark independence, Manfred refuses to comply with the demand that he, a worm-like crouching mortal creature of clay, must bow down and prostrate before the "Great" Arimanes. That he is an exceptional human being is testified to not only by the second spirit, who becomes distinguished in its knowledge of Manfred as a master of occult sciences and hence "of great power and fearful skill," but also the first Destiny, who becomes even more individualized in her brilliant characterization of Manfred thus:

> This man
> Is of no common order, as his port
> And presence here denote; his sufferings
> Have been of an immortal nature, like
> Our own; his knowledge and his powers and will,
> As far as is compatible with clay,
> Which clogs the ethereal essence, have been such
> As clay hath seldom borne; his aspirations
> Have been beyond the dwellers of the earth,
> And they have only taught him what we know—

That knowledge is not happiness, and science
But an exchange of ignorance for that
Which is another kind of ignorance.
This is not all—the passions, attributes
Of earth and heaven, from which no power, nor being,
Nor breath from the worm upwards is exempt,
Have pierced his heart; and in their consequence
Made him a thing, which I, who pity not,
Yet pardon those who pity...
No other Spirit in this region hath
A soul like his—or power upon his soul. (2.4.51-72)

According to the testimony of yet another spirit, Manfred would have made "an awful spirit" had he been one of them. Though an ill-fated and gloomy figure, he remains the supreme master of his fate, rejecting to kneel down before anything except his own despair and desolation or before anybody except "the overruling Infinite—the Maker" (2.4.47) to whom, he claims, even Arimanes himself is subject. Like his earlier human fear of death or of facing the dead, this also is a remarkable moment of admission of faith, religious and spiritual in nature, by Manfred, who is characteristically too overconfident and self-conceited in his blasphemous projection of himself to recognize any controlling power over him. In a moment he would also talk about the fact that compared with his own power "there are/ Powers deeper still beyond" (2.4.76), which he is seeking in order to obtain what he wants. He also believes that whatever he is "rest[s] between Heaven and myself" (3.1.53), describing the setting sun as the "earliest minister of the Almighty" (3.2.11). It is these moments which establish, in a noble and dignified manner, the fact that

Manfred does indeed have a sense of religious faith, however unorthodox and thinly pronounced it may be.

Manfred asks Nemesis, goddess of retribution for the sin of excessive pride known as *hubris* in Greek, to call up the dead, particularly the phantom of Astarte, "one without a tomb." With permission from Arimanes, Nemesis makes Astarte's spirit to appear but both Arimanes and Nemesis fail to make her speak, which make them realize the limit of their power. While she would not yield to their command, she would respond, at least briefly, to her lover Manfred. In contrast with her who in death lost her "living hue" and looks pale and feverish, "a strange hectic—like the unnatural red/ Which Autumn plants upon the perish'd leaf," Manfred suffers a state of life-in-death, which is much worse:

> Astarte! My beloved! speak to me:
> I have so much endured—so much endure—
> Look on me! the grave hath not changed thee more
> Than I am changed for thee. Thou lovedst me
> Too much, as I loved thee: we were not made
> To torture thus each other, though it were
> The deadliest sin to love as we have loved.
> Say that thou loath'st me not—that I do bear
> This punishment for both—that thou will be
> One of the blessed—and that I shall die,
> For hitherto all hateful things conspire
> To bind me in existence—in a life
> Which makes me shrink from immortality—
> A future like the past. I cannot rest...
> And I would hear yet once before I perish
> The voice which was my music—Speak to me!

> For I have call'd on thee in the still night,
> Startled the slumbering birds from the hush'd boughs,
> And woke the mountain wolves, and made the caves
> Acquainted with thy vainly echoed name...
> Yet speak to me! I have outwatch'd the stars,
> And gazed o'er heaven in vain in search of thee.
> Speak to me! I have wandered o'er the earth,
> And never found thy likeness-Speak to me!
> Look on the fiends around—they feel for me:
> I fear them not, and feel for thee alone— (2.4.118-147)

The spirit of Astarte foretells Manfred's death the next day: "To-morrow ends thine earthly ills" and disappears without saying anything else, meaning that his questions whether he is forgiven and whether they would meet again go unanswered. Despite the ambiguity of the situation, Manfred seems to have obtained some peace of mind. Mythically, Astarte, also known as Ashtoreth, is a Semitic goddess of love, fertility and maternity, hence of productive powers, the Eastern equivalent of the Greek goddess Aphrodite. She thus stands in ironic contrast to the suffering hero who has been condemned to utter loneliness, emptiness and isolation.

The element of incest in *Manfred* may be taken as Byron's veiled confession of his relationship with his half-sister. However, it should be taken into account that the theme of incest was common in contemporary Gothic fiction as well as in the works of many contemporary writers such as Goethe, Chateaubriand, Scott, and Shelley. Thus, the character of Manfred is a unique creation combining literary and autobiographical elements with those of heroic defiance and single-minded independence and rising to a level of

imaginative power and conception at which it becomes its author's "supreme representation of the Byronic hero." Nietzsche recognized that Byron anticipated his own idea of the superman "who posits for himself a moral code beyond the inherited standards of good and evil" and claimed that the character of Manfred was greater than that of Goethe's Faust.[27]

Back in his castle in the evening with some "inexplicable stillness," as he calls it, Manfred is greeted by an old abbot whose function, like the Good Angel and the Old Man in the tragedy of *Dr. Faustus*, is to try to get Manfred back to the way of religious solace and comfort. The fatherly abbot tells Manfred that it is unfortunate that people everywhere speak ill of him because of his communion with evil spirits instead of being an inheritor of the good name of his noble ancestors who were held in high esteem for centuries. The abbot who by virtue of his age and religious calling claims that he has come to save his "son" Manfred and not to torment him by "prying into his secret soul" advises him to seek "penitence and pardon," to have "higher hope and better thoughts" and to repent and reconcile with heaven through the church. All the abbot's earnest pleadings for "atonement" and "auspicious hope" for the "blessed place" to succeed "earthly errors" are scornfully rejected: "I shall not choose a mortal/ To be my mediator" (3.1.54-55). Manfred does not believe that there is any power in religious practices and rituals to lighten the agony or

> The innate tortures of that deep despair,
> Which is remorse without the fear of hell,

> But all in all sufficient to itself
> Would make a hell of heaven—can exorcise
> From out the unbounded spirit, the quick sense
> Of its own sins, wrongs, sufferance, and revenge
> Upon itself; there is no future pang
> Can deal that justice on the self-condemn'd
> He deals on his own soul. (3.1.70-78)

In any case, whatever the power of religious institutions and beliefs may be, it is already too late for Manfred to repent and reconcile with heaven. Speaking in the same figurative language that Byron uses to record his mixed feelings yet great admiration for the fallen Napoleon, whom he describes as "the Lion" among the "Wolves" of the tyrannous kings (*CHP*, III, 169-70), Manfred too calls himself a lion of untameable nature, in proud and splendid isolation.[28] Like Napoleon, Manfred too, as the Witch of the Alps describes him, is "a man of many thoughts,/ And deeds of good and ill, extreme in both,/ Fatal and fated in thy sufferings." Yet, as Shilstone argues, there is a significant difference between Manfred and Napoleon.[29] Manfred, who seems to have learnt the lesson of the failure of fame, would not, therefore, hanker after fame by ruling and serving at the same time as Napoleon did. For him, to rule and to serve at the same time for the sake of fame are an unacceptable "living lie" and as such he would never become the leader of the ordinary masses who are dismissed as mere flocks of sheep or packs of wolves:

> Who would become
> A mighty thing amongst the mean, and such
> The mass are; I disdained to mingle with

A herd, though to be leader—and of wolves.
The lion is alone, and so am I. (III.i.119-23)

In fact, there is a strong presence of Napoleon and Napoleonic elements of tyranny, flight and despair in *Manfred*, thus completing as well as complicating the identification of the two heroic characters. Held responsible for "the blood of a million" and "a nation's destruction," Napoleon's escape from his captivity is directly alluded to in the song of the first Voice exactly in the middle of the play, thus undercutting any efforts at complete identification between him and Manfred.[30]

Being singularly disinterested in life Manfred finds desolation everywhere and describes the course of his existence in terms of the hot desert wind called Simoom, which

...sweeps o'er
The barren sands which bear no shrubs to blast,
And revels o'er their wild and arid waves,
And seeketh not, so that it is not sought,
But being met is deadly...(3.1.130-33)

Strikingly echoing Manfred's own understanding of himself and humankind—an understanding, as mentioned earlier, similar to that of Hamlet's—, the abbot, despite being rebuffed, does not want to give up on such "a noble creature," who

Hath all the energy which would have made
A goodly frame of glorious elements,
Had they been wisely mingled; as it is,
It is an awful chaos—light and darkness—

> And mind and dust—and passions and pure thoughts,
> Mix'd, and contending without end or order,
> All dormant or destructive: he will perish,
> And yet he must not; I will try once more,
> For such are worth redemption; and my duty
> Is to dare all things for a righteous end.
> I'll follow him—but cautiously, though surely. (3.1. 160-171)

On his reappearance as Manfred nears his death, the abbot reiterates that he (Manfred) is a noble spirit, wandering but "not yet all lost." But Manfred knows that it is too late and asks the abbot to go away. In his last moment—like that of Faustus but without Faustus's searing agony—both the abbot and Manfred see the fearful fiend of death—"the spirit or deity presiding over a human being from birth"—appear to take Manfred's soul away. It rises as a "dusk and awful figure,"

> Like an infernal god from out the earth;
> His face wrapt in a mantle, and his form
> Robed as with angry clouds...
> His sight may shock thine old limbs into palsy...
> Ah! he unveils his aspect; on his brow
> The thunder-scars are graven; from his eye
> Glares forth the immortality of hell—(3.4.62-68, 76-78)

More demons appear, as Mephistophilis and his followers do in *Faustus*, to summon and establish their claim upon Manfred. Despite the abbot's interference they claim Manfred to be theirs only to be defied and dismissed as "greater criminals," having no right to punish him:

> I stand

Upon my strength—I do defy—deny—
Spurn back and scorn ye! (3.4.119-20)

Manfred asserts himself for one more time before he breathes his last, claiming that the evil spirits have no power over him, that they can never possess him and that there is nothing they can do to help mitigate his inner torture. In what is yet another echo of Satan's argument,[31] Manfred says:

The mind which is immortal makes itself
Requital for its good or evil thoughts—
Is its own origin of ill and end—
And its own place and time—its innate sense,
When stripp'd of this mortality, derives
No colour from the fleeting things without,
But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,
Born from the knowledge of its own desert.
Thou didst not tempt me, and thou couldst not tempt me;
I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey—
But was my own destroyer and will be
My own hereafter.—Back, ye baffled fiends!
The hand of death is on me—but not yours! (3.4.138-141)

As the demons disappear, Manfred expires, in presence of the old abbot, in the same tower where he studied his art. In his final moment he asks, in an extraordinary gesture of human bond, for the hand of the abbot whose selfless efforts to redeem him have been rebuffed again and again. The fact that it is only the abbot who is allowed to be there by his side at the moment of his death suggests not just the human element but also the positive and benign influence of religion on Manfred, however meagre that may be. His

final words are an assertion of what Byron later claimed to be "the whole effect and moral of the poem": that it is "not so difficult to die"—an assertion in line with the earlier Byronic heroes such as the corsairs who also speak of death without fear. It is obvious that death comes to Manfred as a relief rather than a punishment.

The theme of death, which is of utmost importance in *Manfred*, has also been previously explored in *The Prisoner of Chillon* where Bonnivard, resigned to his fate, would not seek relief from the increasing despair in death because of his faith. Manfred, on the other hand, not only seeks relief in death but also dies a death completely on his own terms consciously driving away all kinds of influences, religious, supernatural or otherwise. "In undertaking that investigation, *Manfred* culminates the works of 1816 and their exploration of Byron's exiled consciousness and in addition makes a final statement on the fate of the Byronic hero."[32]

According to Shilstone, *Manfred* presents "a moment of intense mental apprehension through the manipulation of characters, both natural and supernatural, that symbolize the forces operating within and upon Manfred's mind."[33] Comparing the play with Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, John Clubbe writes: "Both plays concentrate on mental rather than on physical action: Prometheus literally does not move on stage, Manfred moves only to find new settings and beings to counterpoint his mind's conflict. Only he has a life of his own; the other characters hardly exist except as projections of his moods."[34] Genre-wise, *Manfred* may not

be more than a dramatic monologue which, as Blackstone thinks, "catches the hero in a moment of crisis,"[35] but its greatness lies in the way that moment of crisis is captured and made to provide an opportunity to deal with a number of complex and metaphysical themes containing most if not all the essential elements of a Byronic character. As a dramatic poem on a critical state of the hero's mind, the poem achieves the feat of brilliantly dramatizing a range of varying moods, feelings and emotions yet expressing them in a reflective poetry of great lyrical heights. It is not easy to dramatize, describe and meditate all at the same time especially when there is nothing much—in the form of clashes and confrontations, external or internal, public or domestic—to build on. Only a poet of great power intensely experiencing the imaginative and psychological depths of his mind in a burning state of sensation or consciousness can do so. *Manfred* is therefore a key Byronic text picking up many of the characteristic ideas from his earlier poems and thus containing the key elements in the spectrum of Byronic perceptions, from heroic to scornful, intended to assert the independence of the Byronic mind. Once again, in the words of Shilstone, it is "the ultimate act of summary and conclusion in Byron's struggle to define the imperative of the self and how it can oppose the myths of tradition, the end of a lengthy chapter in the poet's canon that has stretched from the earliest lyrics to the productions of 1816."[36]

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Notes and References

1. Byron's father was a Captain in the army, who came to be known as "Mad Jack" for his extravagant nature, squandered away all his wife's property, and fled from his creditors to France in 1791. His grandfather, Admiral John Byron, was called "Foul Weather Jack." His grand uncle, the "Wicked Lord," was the fifth Lord in line, upon whose death, childless, in 1798, Byron succeeded as the sixth Lord. Byron's mother, Catherine Gordon, was a hot-tempered woman.
2. Byron had a boyish passion for his young kinswoman Mary Chaworth. He had married Isabella Milbanke in 1815, who left him after the birth of their only daughter, Augusta Ada. Following his incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta Leigh, he left England with his mistress Claire (originally Jane) Claremont, who was stepsister to Mary Shelley and who became the mother of his (Byron) daughter Allegra. Subsequently they fell out of love when he fell in love with Countess Teresa Del Gambey and lived with her till his departure for Greece in 1823.
3. Quoted in Howard Nelson, "The Thinking Man's Lake," *Horizon: A Magazine of the Arts*, Autumn 1965, Vol. VII, No. 4, p. 75.
4. Quoted in Nelson.
5. Frederick W. Shilstone, *Byron and the Myth of Tradition* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p. 3

6. Shilstone, 100, 136. Shilstone also mentions *The Giaour* as "largely concerned with different ways in which the mind can perceive reality."
7. John Clubbe, "'The New Prometheus of New Men': Byron's 1816 Poems and Manfred," in *Nineteenth-Century Literary Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Lionel Stevenson*, ed. Clyde de L Ryals, et al. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1974), p. 23.
8. The nature of Byron's knowledge of Goethe's *Faust*– whether he actually read it in English translation, if not in German original – should be made clear here: to quote from *The Norton*, "Byron denied that he had ever heard of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, and because he knew no German he had not read Goethe's *Faust*, of which part I had been published in 1808. But his friend Matthew Lewis had read parts of *Faust* to him in extempore translation during the summer of 1816, just before the composition of *Manfred*, and Byron worked his memories of this oral translation into his own drama in a way that evoked Goethe's admiration."
9. The historical King Manfed had a stormy relationship with the Pope, was excommunicated, was reported to have been a noble and magnanimous, but strong and assertive character, and was renowned for his physical beauty and intellectual attainments. Both politically and personally he lived a short but turbulent life of 34 years only, very much like Byron, so much so that he was the subject of a number of plays.
10.For the relevant details of the ghost story sessions, see Mary Shelley's 1831 "Introduction" to the revised, 3rd edition

of *Frankenstein*, also included in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, p. 847-51. Although nothing is known about what P B. Shelley began and abandoned, according to Nora Crook (in her edited *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley* [London: William Pickering, 1996], Vol. 1, p. 178), "Shelley's 1816 verse fragment beginning 'A shovel of his ashes took' has been identified as a vestige of his attempt." On her part at first Mary was uninspired. By hearing *Christabel* Shelley became so distraught that he thought Mary was the evil Geraldine and ran out of the room in fear. On the night of June 22nd, the group discussed various philosophical doctrines including the principle of life and whether it could ever be discovered and whether scientists could galvanize a corpse of manufactured humanoid. When Mary went to bed, she had a nightmarish dream described in the second part of her Introduction according to which from the next morning she started developing the frightful yet powerful ideas of her dream with the opening lines of Chapter IV of *Frankenstein* – "It was on a dreary night in November." She completed the novel in May of 1817, which was first published anonymously on January 1, 1818. Also See Polidori's Diary and Kim W. Britton's online links to Byron's *Manfred* or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

11. See Mary Shelley's 1831 Introduction to *Frankenstein*.

12. Most of the third canto of *Childe Harold*, the whole of *The Prisoner of Chillon*, and several love poems addressed to Augusta were also composed at this time when Byron, under the influence of Shelley, had an opportunity to read

Wordsworth's nature poetry characterized by a sense of the quiet and sublime. As such, these works by Byron are deeply colored by the Wordsworthian elements of meditation and contemplation and description and conversation.

13. Ryan Hunter, "Individualism and Religion in Byron's *Manfred* (online).

14. *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals*, ed. R. E. Prothero (London, 1898-1901), Vol. III, p. 352; J. R. Watson, *Picturesque Landscape and English Romantic Poetry* (London: Hutchinson Educational, 1970), p. 176.

15. *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals*, Vol. V, p. 37.

16. The other literary ancestors of Manfred include the Gothic villains, Prometheus, and Satan.

17. Nelson, p. 75.

18. See the Introduction to *Manfred* in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed., Vol. 2, p. 514.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 513.

20. The scene reminds us of Marlowe's Faustus embracing the phantom of Helen, which is actually devil in Helen's form and which thus seals Faustus's death and damnation for ever. In Ingmar Bergman's screenplay *Wild Strawberries*, one of the death images is a dream figure that crumbles when the hero Isak Borg touches it.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 519, note #7.

22. Shilstone, 154.

23. Compare Hamlet's glowing Renaissance tribute to man, the earth and the sky (II, ii, 310ff):

"...this goodly frame the earth.....this most excellent canopy the air.....this brave overhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire....What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals..." Despite his eloquent tribute to fellow human beings, Hamlet does not forget the reality of the human condition, which he describes as a "quintessence of dust" with the vast space around him as "a sterile promontory" and "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours."

24. Byron states the same idea in "Prometheus":

> "Man is in part divine,
> A troubled stream from a pure source;
> And Man in portions can foresee
> His own funereal destiny;
> His wretchedness, and his resistance,
> And his sad unallied existence:
> To which his Spirit may oppose
> Itself—an equal to all woes,
> And a firm will, and a deep sense,
> Which even in torture can descry
> Its own concentred recompense,
> Triumphant where it dares defy,
> And making Death a Victory."

25. *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals*, Vol. III, p. 364.

26. Shilstone, 127.

27. *The Norton Anthology.*

28. Byron frequently expresses his complex range of feelings about Napoleon as a great hero and at the same time as an evil, Satanic power in his letters and journals. He wrote a number of poems on Napoleon following his fall. In *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte*, he describes Napoleon as one who was "yesterday a King/ And now ... a nameless thing," who taught others the lesson of the futility of ambition, who was "The Desolator desolate!/ The Victor overthrown!/ The Arbiter of other's fate/ A Suppliant for his own!" In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, I (52-3), Napoleon is represented as "the Scourger of the world," "Gaul's Vulture" and "one bloated Chief's unwholesome reign;" in *CHP*, III (19-20, 36-39), Napoleon is portrayed with many of the characteristics of the Byronic hero. He was a "fallen despot" yet "the greatest, nor the worst of men, / Whose spirit antithetically mixt/ One moment of the mightiest, and again/ On little objects with like firmness fixt,/ Extreme in all things! hadst thou been betwixt,/ Thy throne had still been thine, or never been;/ For daring made thy rise as fall. In his fierceness he was "the Thunderer of the scene," who shook the world, which seemed to tremble even at his fall. "Conqueror and captive of the earth," he was "more or less than man—in high or low,/ Battling with nations, flying from the field;/ Now making monarchs' necks thy footstool, now/ More than thy meanest soldier taught to yield." He was "the loftiest star" who could "crush, command, rebuild" an empire but who could not control his own "pettiest passion"; he was deeply skilled in men's spirits but he could neither look through his own spirit "nor curb the lust of war." He

was flattered and then abandoned by Fate; he was Fortune's "spoil'd and favourite child."

29. Shilstone, 156. For a detailed discussion on the subject, please see Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

30. Napoleon escaped from his captivity on the island of Elba in March 1815. After his defeat at Waterloo, he was imprisoned on another island, St. Helena, in October 1815.

31. Satan's claim is that "The mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a Heaven of Hell, and a Hell of Heaven" (*Paradise Lost*, I, 254-55). Also I. 252 and III. 73.

32. Shilstone, 153.

33. Shilstone, 153.

34. John Clubbe, 38.

35. Bernard Blackstone, *Byron: A Survey* (London: Longman, 1975), p. 231.

36. Shilstone, 153.

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