VOLUME 15

1993

NUMBERS 1 & 2

THE ALIGARH JOURNAL OF NGLISH STUDIES

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THE ALIGARH JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

Vol. 15 Nos 1 & 2 April & October 1993

THE ALIGARH JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES is edited by Maqbool H. Khan and published by him on behalf of the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (India). The JOURNAL aims at bringing out, twice a year (April and October), critical and research articles dealing with subjects in all the main areas of English studies (with special attention to Shakespeare). Contributions should be addressed to the Editor. They should be neatly typed (double-spaced) and with notes and references at the end. Stylistic and other conventions as recommended in *MHRA Style Book* should be strictly adhered to.

Annual Subscription :
Rs. 30.00
£ 3.50
$ 6.00

Single Copy :
Rs. 20.00

Volume 15 1993 Numbers 1 & 2

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BOOK REVIEWS

Editorial Notes

THE urgent need to overcome the deadening sense of unreality often felt by those engaged in the pursuit of English literary studies in India expresses itself in diverse ways. Some of us have recently discovered a way of lending significance to our engagement with what is essentially rootless by attempting to assimilate the alien into a context that is our own and which we feel, perhaps overconfidently, to be still available. On the face of it, this is better than mindlessly pursuing the study of Western texts in borrowed (and by now rejected) contexts. The tendency being referred to here is exemplified in comparative and analogical studies. That it does give a certain sense of solidity and purpose is undeniable though at the same time it leads to a negation of historical and cultural specificity. Going through the pages of any of the numerous scholarly journals published by academic institutions in the country, one is bound to discover studies that seek to cross cultural barriers and approach British and other authors in the light of, say, ancient Indian poetics. (In one such study, some of the best-known poems by Donne were found wanting in poetic quality when judged by the traditional Indian aesthetic criteria.) The error, if I may put it this way, is of the same nature as in assuming—while using theoretical frameworks eclectically from the West—that aesthetic and philosophical edifices have a timeless and transcendent reality about them. That metaphysics has no privileged position and that all speculation is deeply and inextricably involved in complex questions of subjectivity are insights given by recent theory that, for us, may make criticism a little more meaningful activity. We may recall Kenneth Burke's fine analogy between

critical endeavour and a continuing heated discussion in a parlour that one enters and is obliged to leave quite arbitrarily while the interminable talk in the parlour goes on without hope of ever arriving at final insights. To say that the issues do not change but only acquire new forms has the appearance of truth because of the illusion generated by the continuity of the subject-matter of critical scrutiny. Issues do change, are sidetracked and occasionally reappear radically transformed. The inability to recognize the changes of perspective and subtle discursive shifts is a not uncommon form of disorientation and should provoke concern.

That the critical scene in the West has been unrecognizably transformed needs to be stated here only because most of us still regard it as a passing phase and fondly hope that 'normality' would soon return. They tend to ignore the fact that criticism is partly self-definition and partly a delimitation of spatio-temporal entities. Moreover, the West has never returned to 'normality', has had no conception of 'normality' since the day it bade farewell to the civilisational absolutes of the Middle Ages. Aristotle had longer innings in critical theory than in other fields probably because of the relatively conservative character of the subject. However, who else has symbolised the 'normal' once Aristotle was dethroned?

Change has become rapid in the closing decades of the present century. That it is not change for its own sake but change accompanied with brilliant insights would be apparent to anyone familiar with contemporary critical practice. In Shakespeare studies, for example, cultural materialism, neo-Marxism and new historicism have made much headway. How rapid is the tempo of change can be seen in the fact that the 'teaching Shakespeare' issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly* in 1984 was all concerned with performance-oriented criticism. However, a similar issue of the *Quarterly* in 1990 had nothing but alternative Shakespeares proposed in recent critical theory. And the change was not entirely due to there being a new incumbent in the editorial chair.

All this is not a plea—in our Indian context—for replacing old borrowings with new. I must, however, say that the distinctions between the West and the so-called East have generally been overstated—as also the distinctions between the material and the non-material. If technologies can be transferred, why not techniques? In any case, there is no excuse for poverty, economic or of other kinds.

* * * * * *

We must regretfully acknowledge now that *AJES* was, a little while ago, duped into including in its pages a totally plagiarised version of an article on Shakespeare actually written by a Canadian scholar and published in a journal little known in India. The fact was pointed out to us by the bibliographers of *Shakespeare Quarterly*. While apologising to the real author, we must state that contributions to our publication are accepted in good faith and that few of us would have the means of detecting such exceptional—and unpardonable—practices. In the present case the publication was almost simultaneous; the deception was made possible probably by its perpetrator obtaining, through what appear to be fraudulent means, a copy of the article in question just before its publication in Canada. Our feeling of outrage derives as much from a sense of the immorality of the act as from the unfortunate fact that the pages of *AJES* should have been used for committing this inexcusable offence.

* * * * * *

The accent in our next issue (April 1994) will be on Shelley—a rather belated bi-centenary tribute. The issue after that (October 1994) will concentrate on considerations and reconsiderations of Shakespearian tragedy.

—M.H.K.

B. G. Tandon

WHY DOES OPHELIA DIE OFFSTAGE ?

Classical critics of drama maintained that death should always be negotiated behind the curtain, for its onstage presentation is repugnant to sight and it lacks verisimilitude. Thus, in his *Art of Poetry* Horace asserted that 'Medea may not butcher her boys or savage Atreus cook human flesh in front of the audience....Anything you thrust under my nose in this fashion moves my disgust and incredulity.'[1] Lodovico Castelvetro said, 'Murder and other such difficult things, are not shown onstage because they are difficult to perform with dignity and verisimilitude'.[2] In short, death was banned from onstage enactment for it was disgusting and unactable.

Shakespeare disregarded this classical restriction as in his plays some deaths are onstaged and some offstaged. Caesar, for example, dies onstage, Macbeth, offstage. The hanging of Cordelia is narrated, the murder of Desdemona is enacted. The murder of Duncan is offstaged, that of Banquo onstaged. Each death is judged on its own merit and not with reference to classical rules. How did Shakespeare judge the death of Ophelia ? What made him offstage it ?

Let us first recall the situation. Claudius has hatched his wicked plot of killing Hamlet with Laertes. He has worked him to a maddening fury of revenge. At the crest of their conspiracy comes Gertrude with the news of Ophelia's death by drowning :

> There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
> That shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream ;
> There with fantastic garlands did she come,
> Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
> That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
> But our cold maids do dead man's fingers call them :
> There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds

Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indu'd
Unto that element; but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

(*IV.* vii. 166–83)

The simplest and the most obvious explanation of the offstage presentation of Ophelia's death would be the limitation of the stage: a brook cannot be shown on the stage. For the same reason the shipwreck in *The Comedy of Errors* and in *Twelfth Night*, the sea fight between Antony and Caesar, the Turkish expedition against Cyprus in *Othello*, and Hamlet's sea adventures are all offstaged. But the objection could be raised that Shakespeare would have done better by devising her death by some stageable means, say, by poisoning as in the case of Gertrude. The possible answer is that when Shakespeare was about fifteen years old a love-lorn girl from the neighbouring town, Katherine Hamlet from Tiddington, committed suicide by drowning herself into the river Avon. But the official version was that the death was accidental not suicidal.[3] This incident took hold of Shakespeare's mind like an obsession. It remained folded in his unconscious for long years and when the right moment came it found its place in Hamlet: the Katherine Hamlet of Tiddington became Hamlet's beloved in the drama. Such are the strange workings of creative minds. Such a kind of death forced itself into the drama, Shakespeare wishing or not wishing it, and it was neither stageable nor actable: it could not be shown on the stage and it could not be acted to just height.

Another simple explanation would be that Shakespeare offstaged Ophelia's death to shorten the play. The onstage presentation would have required one more scene and that

would have lengthened the drama which was already too long. *Hamlet* is the longest play of Shakespeare and the producers are called upon to cut it. Laurence Olivier's production of *Hamlet* is heavily cut, and in Kemble's *Hamlet* the axe fell upon Gertrude's narration of Ophelia's death; it was shortened.

These are the external constraints that might have pressed upon Shakespeare's mind, but possibly the more powerful causes lay deeper, they might have sprung from the inner needs of the drama. One such reason could be the need of underplaying the love element in the play. Shakespeare's main concern in *Hamlet* was to show the conflict that raged in Hamlet's mind between the command of the ghost to kill Claudius and the promptings of his own sophisticated temperament which considered all murders immoral. Externally, his chief business was to show the conflict between Claudius and Hamlet. The love story of Hamlet and Ophelia did not fit in this scheme. The onstage death of Ophelia would have given disproportionate importance to the love story. In fact, Shakespeare offstaged Ophelia from Hamlet's mental theatre also that is why nowhere in his conversation, not even in his intimate soliloquies nor even in his shared confidences with Horatio is there any mention of Ophelia, barring the soliloquy 'To be, or not to be' in which he says, 'The fair Ophelia: Nymph, in thy orisons/Be all my sins remembered.' Hamlet's silence about Ophelia and Ophelia's offstage death sprang from the same source, the need to minimise the love element in order to bring into full focus the motive of killing or not killing that lay at the heart of the drama.

The other possibility could be the need for redeeming the character of Gertrude. So far in the drama Gertrude is portrayed as an unwifely wife and an unqueenly queen, a creature of earth, earthy. Hamlet's condemnation of her in the closet scene has picturised her as a wicked woman. By putting the most splendid lines of poetry into her mouth Shakespeare made her more queenly, by making her describe the death tearfully he made her more tender and therefore more womanly. Later, in *Macbeth* he repeated the device;

he partially redeemed Macbeth's villainy by putting the best poetry of the play into his mouth.

Moreover, Shakespeare was both a dramatist and a poet. His audience too loved both poetry and drama. That is the reason why Shakespeare's plays are full of long poetic speeches. There are as many as 672 such speeches in his plays. Whenever the spell of poetry was on him he created the situation for it. Such was the death of Ophelia which had more poetry than dialogue potential in it Really speaking, all the information that was necessary for plot advancement was contained in her simple report 'your sister's drown'd'; the long narration that followed might therefore have proceeded from Shakespeare's sudden frenzy for poetry.

Part of the abiding fascination of *Hamlet* comes from the atmosphere of mystery that surrounds it. An inexplicable mystery wraps the play from its opening to the close. We are for ever on the search for plucking out the heart of the mystery, but the mystery remains, for ever fascinating, for ever inexplicable. The offstage presentation of Ophelia's death intensifies this all-pervasive element of enigma and thereby adds to the perpetual and compelling charm of the drama. The enigmatical questions that emerge from such an offstage representation are : did the queen report from her own first hand knowledge or from what she gathered from some eye witness ? Why did her guard (and she would not go to the brook without the guard, the queen as she was) or the eye witness not make any effort to save her ? Did Ophelia really die of accidental drowning or was it suicidal drowning as the Gravedigger maintained ? An onstage presentation would have specified things which would have detracted from its mystery and lessened the consequent fascination of the drama.

Finally, an early and graceful elimination of Ophelia was an exigency of the drama, early because she had no place in the clash of swords in the final catastrophe, and graceful because all along the play she had been presented as a nymph-like girl of esoteric beauty and tenderness. Her last live appearance on the stage was with songs and flowers. It was

therefore appropriate that she should die a gentle death in flowers and songs and water. The offstage death of Ophelia that Shakespeare chose was in full harmony with her life, her death was really an extension of her life, no different from it. An onstage death would have stressed the horror and ghastliness of the situation which we would ill associate with this creature of pure beauty and innocence. A swan-like death was all that suited her. Thus, Shakespeare offstaged her death to obviate the problem of her early and graceful elimination from the drama. Narration here is more effective than enactment.

School of Studies in English
Vikram University, Ujjain

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2 *On Aristotle's Poetics*, trans. Charles Gatting and reproduced by B.F. Dukore in *Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (New York, 1974).
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M. Yaseen

PHILIP MASSINGER'S ROMANTIC COMEDIES

Massinger, the collaborator and disciple of Fletcher, is among the last exponents of romantic comedy. When he came to London, the English drama was at its height. But before he had begun any dramatic work of importance the decline had set in. The last period of Renaissance drama coincided almost exactly with the reign of Charles I from 1625 to the outbreak of the Civil War and the closing of the theatres in 1642. One by one the old masters of the drama disappeared from the scene. Elizabethan England had given place to Stuart England, and with the dynasty the whole spirit of the nation was changing. In the sphere of theatre new names begin to appear. Following Ben Jonson, Brome maintains a fashion for the convention of realistic comedy. Ford's group of tragedies belong in tone and temper to the Jacobean age. Shirley whose activity exactly corresponds with this period, reflects on the one hand the romantic comedy of the school of Fletcher, and on the other anticipates the advent of Restoration comedy. Later writers felt the domination of the great masters. Shakespeare's influence was potent. Sincere efforts at realism were likely to follow the methods of Middleton or Jonson or both; lighter mixture of manners and intrigue, romantic comedy and tragicomedy took the manner of Fletcher. The glory of the great spectacle of Elizabethan drama was coming to an end.

Perhaps the most characteristic work of this period is the growing dependence of the drama on the court and on the courtly circles. As a natural result the Jacobean and Caroline drama ceased to be national in the sense that the earlier Elizabethan drama had been. The rift in national unity already apparent in the reign of James deepened and as the catastrophe of civil war approached, the drama, with a few exceptions,

took its stand with the court. Despite some new dimensions in realistic comedy, the period is beyond doubt one of decline from the height reached by the older playwrights. The romantic impulse fades away and with it the inspiration of poetry. The playwrights seem to have lost the secret of writing good blank verse. The prosaic rhythms of their dialogue are a poor substitute for the lovely music of Elizabethan masters. They pursue their medium with unfailing tact. Where romance and fantasy dominate, verse is the leading medium; where realism and satire dominate, the dramatists prefer prose. The exotic setting, numerous love-scenes, and facile poetry in some of Shirley's plays might lead one hastily to interpret the work as a sober dramatic romance. But Shirley is neither robust nor serious like his predecessors. Beneath all his lines run the sparkling wit and quiet laughter of a sophisticated spirit. Unlike Fletcher, Massinger paints bright showy superficial life with a graver and firmer brush. The indications of lessening vitality and strength, of growing extravagance and affectation which mark the period of transition, reappear in the drama of Massinger, as in that of Shirley, and sever it from Elizabethan drama. Arthur Symons rightly observes : 'Massinger is the late twilight of the long and splendid day of which Marlowe was the dawn.'[1]

After Fletcher's death in 1625, Massinger became chief writer for the King's men and wrote constantly for them until his death in 1640. He is said to have been popular at Court. His early contacts with the court are partly responsible for the sophisticated portrayals in his plays. His father, Arthur Massinger, had been a retainer of the Herbert family. It has also been conjectured that Philip Massinger may himself have been page to the Countess of Pembroke at Wilton. Life at the most cultured and refined house in England, if such favour was indeed granted him, would acquaint the future painter of courtly manners with the minutest details of his subject ; and in some of the men and women who met at Wilton he would see the ideal of manly chivalry, and a higher than the ideal of womanly virtue, to which his writings were to bear witness.

Massinger's education at Oxford is also responsible for his early tastes for poetry and romance. Arthur Symons quotes Wood saying that 'he gave his mind more to poetry and romances for about four years or more (1602-1606) than to logic and philosophy which he ought to have done, as he was patronized to that end by the Earl of Pembroke'. Langbaine, on the other hand, asserts that 'he closely pursued his studies, and that he was supported solely by his father'. Whatever view we hold, it is difficult for a reader of Massinger to help believing that logic and philosophy alternated pretty evenly with poetry and romances.

Massinger's dramatic apprenticeship, has frequently attracted the attention of English scholars. At the time of the publication of the first collected edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Works*, in 1647, Cockayne blamed the editor on account of the injustices towards Fletcher implied in the title, in as much as Beaumont had written but few of those dramas. He pointed out that Massinger also had to claim a partnership 'in other few', adding that he got this information from 'Fletcher's chief bosom friend'—possibly from Massinger himself. In the lines which Sir Aston Cokayne addressed to the printer of the 1647 folio he declared: 'Beaumont in those many writ in few,/And Massinger in other few; the main/Being the issues of sweet Fletcher's brain'. But he did not specify the plays in which Massinger joined hands with Fletcher. Modern scholars have traced the hand of Massinger in about twenty pieces of the Fletcherian series. Even internal evidences do not lead us to entirely satisfactory conclusions. Critics, therefore, differ considerably in their estimates and attributions, but broadly speaking, Massinger may be traced by his constructive power, his style more eloquent and impressive than lyrical or imaginative, and his preference for run-on-ten-syllable lines in contrast with Fletcher's end-stopped feminine endings.[2] Emile Koeppel has pointed out, 'in all their joint compositions, the older and the more experienced Fletcher was the leading spirit, the chief builder, to whose directions Massinger had to attend.'[3] Massinger seems to have been quite content to leave

the risk and glory to his teacher. Perhaps he never protested against the omission of his name on the title pages of the dramas printed during his life-time.

Both Shakespeare and Fletcher seem to have influenced Massinger profcundly. When he entered the theatrical world of London, which was suffering already from an excess of competition and production, he found established in it a great tradition from whose influence it was impossible for him to escape. We may well suppose the sensitive soul of a young poet to have been impressed and overwhelmed by the magnificent multitude of Shakespear's heroes and heroines. The younger dramatists could not help succumbing to the influence of his creations. They relished repeating and imitating him in thoughts, characters and situations in numberless scenes of their own dramas. And in Massinger's plays we meet with many reminiscences of this kind, though he carefully avoids anything like plagiarism.[4] However, it was not Shakespeare but the living Fletcher, the creator of a partly realistic and partly shadowy and romantic world, who became Massinger's teacher. Massinger was the disciple of Fletcher and often imitated him closely but both in collaboration and when writing alone he displays some notable differences. 'Massinger has more moral sense and a more painstaking art than his friend and master. His morality may be superficial but it is usually pointed. His plots are carefully constructed, usually with excellent exposition and he carries out the scheme of surprises and thrills ingeniously though not as vivaciously as Fletcher.'[5] He does not sacrifice characterisation to situations as recklessly as does the older dramatist, and he now and then achieves a subtle and vigorous portrayal of personality. In reading Massinger's plays, we often become aware of the contrast between two very different forces, his own serious and earnest manner, as it were, wrestling with the injunctions of his master to lay hold of the audience by any means, however frivolous.

Massinger' main field is the romantic drama. He attempted. indeed, tragedy, comedy, and history: but both tragedy and history, assume in his hands a romantic cast, while his two

great comedies verge constantly upon tragedy. Of the seventeen plays that Massinger wrote apart from Fletcher, six are tragedies, two *The City Madam* and *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* are realistic comedies dealing with contemporary London, The remaining plays are romantic tragi-comedies and comedies. These romantic plays present plots drawn from many sources and are very similar to those of Fletcher. There are wars and insurrections, usually represented on the stage by duels: there are depositions, banishments, alliances and other court affairs: and there are pirates, Turks and bandits all serving as a background for the trials of love. Virtue is tempted and jealousy is aroused. There is likely to be a Trial scene, for Massinger liked courts and pleas. Honour shines brightly in the hero, even though he be disguised as a slave, and attracts the lady. A more sensible variant is the diffidence and modesty with which the heroes are sometimes endowed. There is purity and elevation of sentiment in the heroines also, though we discover it usually through their own speeches.

From our point of view, seven of Massinger's romantic tragi-comedies deserve special attention. Three of them were certainly written during the later years of the reign of King James while Massinger was still in active collaboration with his friend Fletcher, and it is with these plays alone that we are here concerned.

The Bondman

The Bondman was in some ways Massinger's most successful play. It was licenced on 3 December 1623 for performance by Lady Elizabeth's men. It is a typical romantic play incorporating elements of romance in love, warfare, search for adventure, disguise and recognition. Purity and chastity characterize heroines and lovers are willing to suffer all sorts of privations for the sake of the beloved. All this smacks of Elizabethan romantic comedies. But this play has also elements which foreshadow the sexual overtones of Restoration comedies. Massinger has beautifully interwoven earlier romantic elements with contemporary elements of realism.

Laid in classic Sicily, the action has for a background the victory of Timolean, one of Plutarch's heroes, over the Carthaginians. As an episode in this war Massinger introduces, quite unhistorically, a revolt of Sicilian slaves. Massinger evidently chose Sicily as the *locale* of the play because the island-state suggested parallels with the England of his own day. Corinth comes to her help against Carthage as Holland was eager for an alliance with Britain against Spain. Moreover, the romantic glamour of Mediterranean countries also attracted the notice of contemporary playwrights.

The play begins with the news of Carthage attacking Syracuse (Sicilly) whose weak army cannot withstand its might. Timolean, the Corinthian General, comes to their aid but finds the treasury empty. He exhorts wealthy citizens to offer their wealth to the government to finance war preparations. It is, however, Cleora's speech that tilts the balance in favour of the government. She fervently pleads for money when 'liberty and honour' are at stake. In scene I of Act II, brisk preparations for war are made. Archidamus, the praetor of Syracuse, dresses up as a soldier and leaves his daughter Cleora to the charge of his slave Marullo. Cleora's lover Leosthenes swears she has inspired him to go to war. The lovers part with Cleora's assurance: 'whether I live or die/My chastity triumphs ov'r your jealousy'. In contrast to this scene of love and devotion, scene ii presents us with the wanton lady Carsica seducing her worthless step-son, Asotus by playing his mistress. In the concluding scene iii, Marullo incites the slaves of the city to rebellion and exhorts them to rob the coffers of the nobles and shake off their manacles :

> Their arsenel, their treasure, 's in our power,
> If we have hearts to seize. (Act II, Sc. iii)

He bases his argument on the stoic principle that all men were originally on the same level :

> Equal nature fashioned us
> All in one mould: the bear serves not the bear
> Nor the wolf, the wolf ; *(Ibid)*

In Act III, Sc. i Marullo explains his venture of rousing the slaves for his own ends. He has planned the rebellion not so much for the sake of liberty as to win possession of his adored Cleora. When, however, she comes into his power, he assures her of a love so pure that he will guard her from all outrage and return her unspotted to her betrothed, Leosthenes, a soldier with the army of Timolean.

> —nay, fear not, madam,
> True love's a servant, brutish lust a tyrant
> I dare not touch those viands that ne'er taste well,
> But when they are freely offered.
>
> (Act III, Sc. ii)

When the revolt is crushed, Marullo is seized and condemned to death on the cross. Cleora's intercession for him and her visit to his prison provoke still more the wrath of the already jealous Leosthenes. The case comes to trial before Timolean where Marullo reveals himself as Pisander, a noble Theban, who had disguised himself as a slave to live near Cleora. Leosthenes, on the other hand, is convicted of breach of vow to Pisander's sister (Timandra), a lady serving Cleora in slave's disguise. Leosthenes begs pardon of his betrothed and the play ends with a double marriage and the pardon of the slaves.

It is in its political and social aspects that the main attraction of *The Bondman* lies. The love story of Pisander, the pseudo-'bondman', who has the titular part, is ingenious and moving but too involved. Cleora's transfer of love from Leosthenes to one whom she believed to be a slave, is the extreme instance of Massinger's fondness for linking high-born ladies with men far below them in station. Even Pisander's noble nature and the revelation of his true rank do not make the *denouement* dramatically convincing.

The Bondman is a heroic play with a large admixture of comedy. Fantastic as the action seems, it is given power and dignity by the sober eloquence of the dialogue and by the characterization of the two chief roles. The bondman's disguise for love's sake goes back to incidents in the *Arcadia*.

The lingering influence of Fletcher appears in the farcial episodes where the slaves maltreat their late masters and more especially in a very broad scene where a wanton lady seduces her step-son.

The Maid of Honour

The Maid of Honour was published in quarto in 1632 and acted between 1625 and 1632, and retells a story from Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*.

The beautiful and wealthy Camiola who gives the title to the play, is besieged by suitors, the fantastic fop Sylli, King Roberto of Sicily's 'minion', Fulgentio, the faithful family retrainer, Adorni (whose love is unspoken), and Bertoldo, the King's bastard brother, who is a Knight of Malta. Her heart is given to Bertoldo, who in her soul's judgement is 'a man absolute and circular'. But she refuses to marry him on the plea that she is not his equal, and that as a Knight of Malta he is bound to a single life. In her rejection of his passionate vows there is the austere touch which just takes the bloom from the virtue of Massinger's heroines.

Bertoldo turns form love to arms. Duke Ferdinand of Urbin, besieged by the Siennese in their Capital, which he had attacked, has sent to his ally, King Roberto, for help. The cautious King of Sicily refuses to imperil the lives of his subjects, but on Bertoldo's appeal,

> May you live long, sir,
> The King of peace, so you deny not us
> The glory of the war,

he allows those who wish 'as adventurers and volunteers' to go to Ferdinand's aid. On the battlefield Bertoldo meets another Knight of Malta, Gonzago, general to the Duchess of Sienna, by whom he is wounded and taken prisoner, and who on recognizing him as one of their Order denounces him as false to his vows by drawing his sword against a lady, the Duchess of Sienna. Gonzago tears the cross from his breast, condemns him to rigorous imprisonment and puts the enormous ransom of fifty thousand crowns upon his head.

Meanwhile Camiola has again forfeited something of sympathy by harshly rebuking Adorni, who has been wounded in a duel with Fulgentio in defence of her honour. Yet when she hears of Bertoldo's captivity and the amount of his ransom, which the King, his brother, refuses to pay, she chooses Adorni as her messenger to the Knight to tell him that she will redeem him—and marry him, Then follows another of those abrupt reversals of situations which are the least convincing feature in Massinger's powerful constructive technique. When Bertoldo learns that he owes his freedom to Camiola, and to discharge his debt must marry her, he cries in protest (Act IV Sc. ;) :

> A payment ; an increase of obligation,
> To marry her;—'t was my *nil ultra* ever;
> The end of my ambition.

And he swears by heaven and hell that he will never be false to her. Yet when the Duchess of Sienna, in an uncontrollable amorous ecstasy, characteristic of so many of Massinger's royal ladies, offers him her love at first sight, after short hesitation, he declares, 'I am wholly yours'.

While her lover is proving false, Camiola's noble nature has been more and more clearly shining forth. When the King visits her on Fulgentio's behalf she dares to confront him in terms which it is surprising were ever allowed to pass by the Censor (Act IV, Sc. v)

> When you are unjust, the deity
> Which you may challenge as a King parts from you ...
> Tyrants, not Kings,
> By violence from humble vassals force
> The liberty of their souls.

The King's answer is in truly royal strain :

> While I wear a crown, justice shall use her sword
> To cut offenders off, though nearest to us.

He has soon to make good his words, While he is accompanying Bertoldo and the Duchess to the church for their

wedding, Camiola throws herself at his feet crying :

> He's the man.
> The guilty man, whom I accuse; and you
> Stand bound in duty, as you are supreme,
> To be impartial. Since you are a judge,
> As a delinquent look on him, and not
> As on a brother.
>
> (Act V, Sc. ii)

The recital of her wrongs follows, and on Bertoldo's confession of guilt and remorse, she forgives him and invites him to her 'marriage' which to the general amazement, is her reception as a 'maid of honour' by her father confessor into the religious life as a nun. Her last entreaty to Bertoldo is to resume his order as a Knight of Malta, whereupon Gonzago restores to him his white cross and greets him as once more a brother-in-arms. The climax to the play again shows Massinger as a master of the *coup de theatre*, and though the austere strain in Camiola fits her better to be a heavenly than an earthly bride, it required unusual courage to present such a solution before a Stuart audience.

The Maid of Honour is a play uniting the lighter and graver qualities of tragedy and comedy under the form of the romantic drama. And yet it is not something new. Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* is its nearest kin in dramatic form.

The Great Duke of Florence

The Great Duke of Florence written in 1627 and published in 1636, is akin in its title and its Italian court background to *The Duke of Milan*, but is very different in its plot and spirit. It is a pleasing refashioning of an old play entitled *A Knack to Know a Knave*. The original tale is that of the Saxon King Edgar and his faithless friend, Ethelwald, who, sent to report on the beauty of a prospective bride for the monarch, brought back a false report, and married the lady himself.

In *The Great Duke* Massinger retains the original motif, the deception of a prince by his trusted friend, but all else is changed. Cozimo, the widowed and childless Duke of Florence, has designed his nephew Giovanni to be his heir

and has appointed Charomonte as his tutor. It is a refreshing change from sophisticated court surroundings to the wholesome atmosphere of the tutor's country house. An idyllic affection springs up between the youthful prince and Charomante's loyely and innocent daughter, Lidia, the most charming of Massinger's heroines. The Duke has also under his care as guardian the young Duchess of Urbin, Florinda, who after the fashion of Massinger's royal ladies, has become enamoured of Cozimo's favourite, Count Sanazzaro. He is far from being, like others of his type, a mere minion, for he has given proof of his skill and devotion in the wars. But when entrusted by the Duke with a secret errand to report on Lidia's charms he falls a victim to them.

When the play opens, Contarino, the Duke's secretary visits Charomonte's house and delivers Giovanni a message from the Duke to return to the court immediately. Giovanni pays his respects to his teacher but feels sorry to leave Lidia. In his gallantry he offers to marry her and is unhappy with his lot. Lidia modestly acknowledges his love and prays for a better match for Giovanni. When the secretary and Giovanni present themselves before the Duke, Contarino gives a charming account of Lidia's beauty :

> The daughter, Sir, of signior Carolo,
> Fair Lidia, a virgin, at all parts,
> But in her birth and fortunes, equal to him.
> The rarest beauties Italy can make boast of
> Are but mere shadows to her, she the substance
> Of all perfection..
>
> (Act I, Sc ii)

It is this account which prompts the Duke to ask Sanazarro to report on Lidia's charm. Meanwhile Giovanni pays his court to Florinda and requests her to persuade the Duke to employ Lidia as her chamber-maid. She in turn asks him to plead with the Duke not to expose count Sanazarro, her lover, to the dangers of war.

In Act II. Sc. ii, Sanazarro visits Charomonte's house and in the following scene he finds himself in a dilemma and does not know whether he should report correctly or otherwise. He

is enamoured of Lidia's person and calls her a 'large theme'. Lidia modestly accepts his praise but her father cautions her to be 'civil and courteous' but by no means 'credulous'. Sanazarro finally decides to conceal the facts about Lidia and thus to secure his future happiness. Fearing that Cozimo intends himself to marry Lidia, he damns her with faint praise and persuades Giovanni, whose prospects of 'inheritance' are threatened by a second marriage to do likewise. Giovanni hesitates to tell lies about Lidia but is persuaded to speak plainly. Even Contarino contradicts his earlier statements. In the meantime Florinda requests the Duke to grant her Lidia's services as her chamber-maid and speaks of her exquisite beauty as described to her by Giovanni. This is both puzzling and intriguing. The Duke grants her wish but feels cheated by his dear friend Sanazarro and his own nephew.

In Act IV the Duke resolves to see Lidia in her home and the conspirators are forced to appeal to her for help. In an improbable but entertainingly farcical scene she allows herself to be impersonated by her rustic maid Petronella, who however over-does her part by dancing with the Duke when she is drunk, and rousing him to solve the riddle of these 'strange chimaeras'. This is done when the real Lidia is led in by her father. The Duke is bewitched to see her : 'Here are accents whose every syllable is musical.' (Act IV, Sc. ii) But being enraged at the deception practised on him, the Duke orders the arrest of Sanazarro and Giovanni as traitors. Lidia tries to appease the Duke and in an exquisite speech pleads for her royal lover :

> For me, poor maid,
> I know the prince to be so far above me
> That my wishes cannot reach him. Yet I am
> So much his creature that, to fix him in
> Your wonted grace and favour, I'll abjure
> His sight for ever and betake myself
> To the religious life. (Act IV, Sc. ii)

But Lidia is not to share the fate of Camiola in *The Maid of Honour*. The Duke makes the belated revelation that he had sworn on his wife's monument never to marry again. Sanazarro's fears were therefore unfounded, and while Giovanni,

inspite of his lapse deserves the hand of Lidia, the favourite is rewarded beyond his deserts by winning Florinda, whose love for him has even withstood the shock of his desertion of her for one of lower birth and fortune.

The Bashful Lover

The Bashful Lover (1635) is one of the best of Massinger's plays now extant. It is one play which in the fulness and variety of its episodes, is no unworthy successor to all but the best of Fletcher in its type. As usual with Massinger's romantic comedies, the scene is laid in Italy. There is love, war, adventure, disguise, court intrigue, jealousies, threat to life, mercy and reconciliation. Here and there are bold scenes of beauty in danger of 'rape' but Providence comes to the rescue of the distressed and they are invariably rescued. The play is a good example of comedy of intrigue in the Italian tradition.

The main theme centres round Hortensio, the bashful lover, the Prince of Milan disguised as a simple gentleman in love with Matilda, the princess of Mantua. He hires a page as a go-between. This page is actually a young woman, Maria, daughter of an exiled Mantuan general. The beautiful Matilda has other suitors, including the powerful duke of Tuscany, who threatens war if she is not given to him. Hortensio, accompanied by the page Ascanio (i.e. Maria) joins the Mantuan army at the front. There he severely wounds the nephew of the Tuscan duke, a youth named Alonzo, who is saved from capture by Ascanio.' There is a lot of fighting here and there, and Hortensio saves the Mantuans from a rout. He also saves Ascanio and carries him (her) to the house of a man named Octavio, who turns out to be Ascanio-Maria's father. Meanwhile Matilda escapes from the court in disguise, but soon falls into evil hands. Alonzo, now recovered from his wound and a comrade fight over her. Alonzo kills the comrade and then is killed by Hortensio, who arrives in time to rescue the disguised princess. It soon appears, however, that Alonzo and his friend are not actually dead; Maria and Octavio find them still breathing. And it turns out that Alonzo is the unfaithful lover of Maria.

This somewhat hectic series of adventures might be enough for one play, but it occupies only the first three acts of *The Bashful Lover*. In Act IV, Hortensio and Matilda (still in disguise) are brought as prisoners before the victorious duke of Tuscany, who forgets about the princess for whom he waged war and falls in love with the beautiful captain. In the secondary action, Alonzo confesses his sins to Octavio (disguised as friar) and offers to make amends. In Act V, the duke of Tuscany, who has discovered the identity of Matilda, is very gracious to the conquered Mantuans, but makes no progress in his courtship. Matilda loves Hortensio, although she despairs of ever marrying him. She is a very determined young woman, however, and when she vows that she will never be the wife of another, the duke abandons his claim. A formidable obstacle remains before the lovers. There is a Mantuan law stating that no marriage of the heir, or heiress, can be made that does not strengthen the 'estate and safety of the dukedom'. At the last moment an ambassador from Milan brings word that the old duke is dead and that Hortensio is now the ruler of Milan. Consequently there is a happy ending for Hortensio and Matilda, and for Alonzo and Maria as well. The Duke ends the last scene by his speech :

> Fortune here hath shewn
> Her various power; but virtue, in the end,
> Is crown'd with laurel : Love has done his parts too
> And mutual friendship, after bloody jars,
> Will cure the wounds received in wars.

Much of *The Bashful Lover* is really of the universal stuff of romantic drama. The wonder is that so genuinely pleasing a result could be produced with such hackneyed material.

The most striking feature of Massinger's individual art, undoubtedly, is to be found in his great constructive power. The structure of his best plays is admirable not only in the severity of its lines but also in the wise economy shown in the use of his materials. In most cases, he was content with working out a single action and avoided the mixture of plot which many of his brother poets preferred. Many of Massinger's independent additions to the stories in his sources are

also well calculated to deepen the impression left by his works. But a far more striking sign of a certain weakness in inventive power is his tendency to repeat himself in his technical artifices and in the means used for eking out his plots. The necessary revelation of a hidden passion is frequently attained by the simple strategem of letting a conversation between lovers be overheard by their enemies. Cleora and Marullo are surprised in prison (*The Bondman*) : the rivals of Hortensio listen to the decisive talk with Matilda (*The Bashful Lover*). By way of amplifying his plot, he repeatedly brings in a brother revenging a wrong done to his sister. Marullo-Pisander acts the part of a slave in Syracuse only to approach Leosthenes, the faithless lover of his sister Statilia (*The Bondman*) : Vitelli risks his life among the Turks to liberate or to avenge his sister Paulina, robbed by the renegado (*Renegado*).

In view of this inclination of Massinger to repeat himself, we are not surprised to find, also, that many of his *dramatis personae* resemble each other in a pronounced manner; the throy of typical characters of a dramatist stands confirmed by many of his figures. Arthur Symons observes : 'His characters seldom quite speak out : they have almost always about them a sort of rhetorical self-consciousness. The language of pure passion is unknown to them; they can only strive to counterfeit its dialect'.[6] The most typical of Massinger's heroines is the passionate woman who falls violently in love at first sight and runs to the embrace of her beloved without any reserve. This class of women is most characteristically represented by the Turkish princess Danusa, who offers herself to the unsuspicious Vitelli and persists in her wooing until he became the victim of her seductive charms, notwithstanding his Christian scruples about her being an infidel.

A somewhat subtler art of character-painting we observe in Massinger's delineation of the nature of those women who are not the powerless victims of a sudden passion. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that the utterances and the behaviour of his virtuous women often reveal that, in drawing female characters, he could rarely escape from the region of the senses But though most of Massinger's women are of the earth, earthy,

we must not forget that he was able to create at the best two women in another mould : the chaste Camiola and the lovable Lidia. Camiola—'that small but ravishing substance'—the Maid of Honour, deserves this title, though, perhaps the poet impaired the nobleness of her presence and of her actions by some superflous additions. Perfectly delightful is Lidia, the youthful heroine of *The Great Duke of Florence*. In her, everything is charming: the simplicity with which she talks of her love for prince Giovanni; her anxious pleading at the feet of the DuKe, who is righteously angry with his deceitful nephew, and her trembling readiness to sacrifice her own hopes to the happiness of the prince.

With these exceptions, a comparative study of the women of Shakespeare and Massinger is the surest means of convincing us how rapidly the moral character of the English stage had changed since the days of Shakespeare. The effrontery of Danusa and Massinger's other women of the same stamp would suffice to indicate the rise of a taste demanding stronger stimulants; but he went far beyond the loss of dignity and of delicacy of feeling which they exhibit. Massinger's general conception of women and the great number of his portraits of them, are alike debased and detestable. His bad women are incredible monsters of preposterous vice: his good women are brittle and tainted. We are but rarely allowed to forget that Massinger is separated from Shakespeare by Fletcher, whose plays had accustomed the public to the open licence of women.

Most critics agree that Massinger's male characters, as a rule, are more interesting than his women. While his women think and talk of nothing but 'the dominating passion of love', their lovers, though meeting their desires, are not rarely made the interpreters of the views of the author. In several plays, the passion of Massinger's heroes takes the form of violent, though groundless, jealousy. The jealous whims of Leosthenes irritate the noble Cleora and finally estrange her from him: Mathias doubts the fidelity of his wife: the suspicious Emperor of the East, threatens the life of Athenais. Besides these men, who fighting the battle of life, are not entirely observed by the passion of love: we find among Massinger's lovers, also, the

conventional types of the contemporary drama: the devoted lover who lives on the smile of his lady, such as Ladislaus the humble husband of the proud Honoria, Caldorio and the over-bashful Hortensio. The minor role is always taken by servants, gulls, pages and old men who provide mirth and merriment in his romantic comedies.

Massinger's mastery in poetic diction is acknowledged by most scholars of Jacobean drama. His plays contain many passages in which the beauty of the style equals the vigour of thought. He is a great orator, excelling in speeches in which, after the fashion of lawyers, speakers have to defend some particular position and to put their case in the most favourable light. Massinger set himself to follow in the footsteps of Shakespeare and he succeeded in catching with admirable skill much of the easy flow and conversational felicity at which he aimed. He possesses a considerable store of set phrases, metaphors and similes, which he shows around on every occasion without troubling himself to vary and individualise his expressions. Massingers' fatal fondness for conventional repetitions which has been pointed out in the situations, characters, thoughts and words of his plays apprise us of the limits of his merits as a dramatic artist. As a playwright, it is true, he seeks to perfect himself in the technical part of his art; as a psychologist, he is too much inclined to remain on the surface, from beginning to end. we feel that the dramatist does not sufficiently identify himself with his creations, that he does not live in them, that they are formed more from the outside than from the inside. They are at best cleverly formed and ably managed theatrical puppets.

L.C. Knights observes the 'first symptom of decadence' in Massinger in his dependence on Shakespeare,[7] and T.S. Eliot condemns him for his choice of the 'romantic comedy' which being a 'skilful concoction of inconsistent emotion' is 'inferior and decadent.'[8] Knights's charge is applicable to many other playwrights of the Jacobean age, the standard always being Shakespeare's works. But T.S. Eliot's allegation appears to be too severe because he condemns both the form as well as the practitioner. For all his limitations we cannot deny

Massinger the place he deserves in the hierarchy of Elizabethan-Jacobean masters of romantic comedy. He is the product of his age and in his plays he faithfully reflects the temper of court and society under the First Charles. Serious as a thinker and gifted with an instinct for nobility and sympathy he is at the same time an admirable story-teller and master of dramatic construction. If he has no power to carry us away, he succeeds in strongly 'interesting' us. Though his fame in England rested on his realistic comedies—*A New Way to Pay Old Debts* and *The City Madam*, he was recognized on the continent by his romantic plays. Massinger attracted the attention of the poets of the romantic school of Germany as one of the most fascinating of Shakespeare's successors. Count Baudissin translated several of his plays, and set the pace for German and French translations.[8]

Department of English
Aligarh Muslim University
Aligarh

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] Arthur Symons, *Philip Massinger*, (The Mermaid Series) Introduction, p. xiv.

[2] F.S. Boas, *An Introduction to Stuart Drama* (Oxford, 1946) pp. 286-87.

[3] E. Koeppel, 'Philip Massinger' in *Cambridge History of English Literature* Vol. VI. p. 145.

[4] T.S. Eliot offers a very suggestive theory in connection with Massinger's art : 'Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take; and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. Massinger borrows from Shakespeare a good deal..But his verse suffers from cerebral anaemia. Massinger is, in

fact, at a further remove from Shakespeare than that other precursor of Milton—John Fletcher. Fletcher was above all an opportunist, in his momentary effects..Fletcher had a cunning guess at feelings and betrayed them; Massinger was unconscious and innocent.' *(Essays on Elizabethan Drama* (1956), pp. 143 50).

5 Schelling, *Elizabethan Drama*, Vol. II, pp. 234-35.

6 Arthur Symons, *Massinger*, p. xx.

7 L.C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*, pp. 225-26.

8 T. S. Eliot, *Essays on Elizabethan Drama*, pp. 153-54.

9 E. Koeppel, *op. cit*, p. 165.

K. S. Misra

SEAN O'CASEY'S HOME-MADE EXPRESSIONISM IN *THE SILVER TASSIE*

O'Casey, perhaps, has been the most controversial of all the dramatists in the present century. He himself has confessed it in a letter to his American agent: 'I've never written anything that didn't cause a dispute, a row, a difference, or something.'[1] His *The Silver Tassie*, which was rejected by the Abbey directorate, initiated such an unpleasant controversy with Yeats on the issue of its artistic worth and theatrical viability that his relations with W.B. Yeats remained strained for a long time. The acrimonious debate between O'Casey and Yeats that ensued in the after-math of the rejection of the play was released to the press and became a notorious public scandal. O'Casey took to heart Yeats's critical 'pretensions' to such an extent that when he recorded the events in his *Rose and Crown*, written after twenty years, his passionate hurt seemed not to have healed.[2] The public nature of the debate over *The Silver Tassie*, between O'Casey and Yeats, naturally lured critics to base their evaluation of the play on the objections raised by Yeats. It will be useful to have a look at how Yeats argued against the play in his letter to O'Casey:

> I read the first act with admiration, I thought it was the best first act you had written (in which) you had surpassed yourself...I read the second third and fourth acts.. I am sad and discouraged, you have no subject... You are not interested in the Great War; you never stood on its battle fields or walked in its hospitals, and so write out of your opinions. You illustrate those opinions by a series of almost unrelated scenes, as you might in a leading article; there is no dominating character, no dominating action, neither psychological unity nor unity of action; and your great power of the past has been the creation of some unique character who dominated all about him and was himself a main impulse in some action that filled the play from beginning to end.[3]

Yeats goes on to object to the play on other grounds as well. For example, the World War, he says, instead of being 'reduced to wall-paper in front of which the character must pose and speak,' refuses to be a mere background and 'obtrudes itself upon the stage as so much dead wood that will not burn with the dramatic fire, whereas dramatic action is a fire that must burn up everything but itself.'[4] The play is alleged to be propagandist, because the dramatic fire does not 'burn up the author's opinions' which a work of art ought to do. Finally, the second act, says Yeats, though 'an interesting experiment,' is too abstract and 'too long for the material, and after that there is nothing.'[5] Yeats obviously is judging the play with the yardstick of realistic drama. O'Casey's reply to Yeats's objections is more in the nature of an angry and even vituperative retaliation than a reasoned justification of the dramaturgical innovativeness of the play[6] and hence does not merit our lingering over it. However one remark by O'Casey—that Yeats's statements about the inadequacies of the play 'will continue to be spoken forever and ever by professors in schools for the culture and propagation of the drama'[7]—has proved prophetically true.

Yeats's charge of the lack of unity and his assertion that the action of *The Silver Tassie* is a series of unrelated scenes have encouraged scholars to single out the second act of the play as the main culprit in bringing in a structural dissonance in the play as a whole. It has been argued that the first, third and fourth acts have a logical developmental pattern and are in the broad realistic mode with interlacing of symbolism which contributes to the play's cohesiveness, meaning and message. But the second act is written in an entirely different and even incompatible mode—i.e. expressionism—which is destructive of the structural unity of the play, and being independent of the main dramatic action, can usefully be dispensed with. O'Casey, perhaps, did so became of his sheer fascination for German Expressionism, a movement which was in vogue while he was working on *The Silver Tassie*.

There are two critical confusions operating in the whole controversy over the second act of *The Silver Tassie*. Critics

like A.E. Malone, Una Ellis-Fermor and Raymond Williams believe that O'Casey's dramatic genius is almost exclusively that of a realist. It is his realism in the Dublin trilogy which brought him international applause. His medling with a foreign technique, with which he was not fully acquainted. has only resulted in structural confusion in the play. The other critical fallacy is that here O'Casey radically departs from his earlier realistic dramatic practice and makes a bold experiment with his technique by adopting the devices of German expressionism to which he was exposed during the Dublin Drama League's performance of the plays of Strindberg and Toller in 1922. Both assumptions are untenable. That O'Casey was a thorough realist in his Dublin trilogy is as untrue as that the second act of *The Silver Tassie* is 'thoroughly expresssionist.' O'Casey's own stated stance as a realist is as unveiled as his traffic with Expressionism is ambivalent and even contradictory.

O'Casey categorically rejected realism in drama, which is inimical to the presentation of the Shakespearean fullness and vitality of life that he wanted to infuse in modern drama. He asserted.

> This rage for real, real life has taken all the life out of the drama. If everything is to be a fake exact imitation (for fake realism it can only be), where is the chance for the original and imaginative artist ?... The beauty, fire, and poetry of drama have perished in the storm of fake realism. Let real birds fly through the air, real animals roam through the jungle, real fish swim in the sea; but let us have the make–believe of the artist and the child in the theatre. Less of what critics call 'life', and more of symbolism for even in the most commonplace of realistic plays the symbol can never be absent. A house on a stage can never be a house, and that which represents it must always be a symbol...[8]

Long before O'Casey's above assertion, his contemporary Irish dramatist, Denis Johnston had perceived the direction in which the former was already moving. Commenting on O'Casey's *The Plough and the Star*, which even in the sixties was regarded by Saros Cowasjee as uncompromisingly realistic[9], Johnston had asserted in the twenties before *The Silver Tassie* was written, that 'as a realist O'Casey is an imposter.... His dialogue is becoming a series of word–poems in dialect;

his plots are disappearing and giving place to a form of undisguised expressionism under the stress of a genius that is much too insistent and far too pregnant with meaning to be bound by the four dismal walls of orthodox realism.'[10]

Like Toller[11] and O'Neill[12], O'Casey denies any influence on him of Expressionism. He has created an ambivalent situation for himself by making two contradictory statements : Soon after the publication of *The Silver Tassie*, he wrote, in a letter of 24 June, 1928, to Ivor Brown, 'It seems to me that Expressionism is an important element in the present and in the coming drama.'[13] Thirry two years later he confirmed, in a letter of 12 February 1960, to his American agent, Jane Rubin, that 'this scene (the second act of *The Silver Tassie*) is one of Expressionism, which if done well, is fine! if done badly, just awful.'[14] Yet in a letter, of 24 March 1960, to Ronald Gene Rollins about a discussion of *The Silver Tassie*, he wrote, 'I never consciously adopted "expressionism", which I don't understand or never did. To me there are no "impressionistic", "expressionistic", or realistic" [social or otherwise) plays : there are only good plays and bad plays.'[15] To be fair to O'Casey's assertion to Rollins we can say that it is, perhaps, unlikely that O'Casey had read the translated versions of the plays of Strindberg, Toller, or Kaiser before writing *The Silver Tassie*. But, as mentioned earlier, he did see the performance of their plays in Dublin in 1922, which was organised by the Dublin Drama League and hence was acquainted with the methods of the German Expressionists. But whether O'Casey used these methods in the manner they were used by the Expressionists is debatable. Joan Templeton has unreservedly asserted that the second act of *The Silver Tassie* is 'thoroughly expressionist' and that for this method O'Casey 'turned directly to Ernst Toller and Strindberg.'[16] She goes on to elaborate her judgement by referring to the stock-in-trade characteristics of the German Expressionists which O'Casey has consciously adopted in his play, especially in the second act. They are 'the dream structure, a delibertately distorted setting, exaggerated caricatures, highly symbolic stage action resembling pantomime, qualities

of freneticism and grotesqueness.'[17] Following the German Expressionistic method, Templeton argues, O'Casey has conceived, organised and executed the second act as an independent unit of the play. Like Yeats, Templeton, too, implies that the second act can be removed from the play without damaging its main plotline and thematic concern. But as our brief analysis of the play, especially the second act, will demonstrate below, O'Casey was neither imitating the German Expressionist method nor did he organise the second act as an independent unit. O'Casey has used a highly individualistic technique, a sort of homemade expressionism not only in the 'thoroughly expressionist' second act but in the other acts of the play, too.

Before we take up an analysis of *The Silver Tassie*, it will be useful to explain the term, 'Expressionism,' which has been rather loosely used in regard to the study of technique in modern drama. The term was, in fact, derived from painting and was used as the opposite of Impressionism. The essential difference, says Edith Hoffman, was between 'an art based on purely visual impressions' and one which 'aimed at the expression of ideas and emotions by the representation of things seen, but with emphasis on their symholic or emotive character.... Dissatisfied with an art that merely rendered the appearance of objects or offered a mirror of actual events, the expressionists wanted to penetrate deeper, to show things as they knew they were under the surface, or as they might have been, had the visual and tangible world always corresponded with the intangible and spiritual. They wanted to extend the domain of art beyond the boundaries of the actual, so as to include the imagined, the dreamt and the foreseen. They wanted more than anything else "to express" themselves.'[18] It is relevant to point out here that Hoffman's distinction between Impressionism and Expressionism seems to be misleading, because if the latter was reacting against photographic realism, the former, too, was a reaction against the technique of the camera. If the Impressionist art were confined to 'purely visual impressions,' it would become wholly objective. The art of the impressionists, says Ronald Ayling, 'is made out of

the impressions they have received of nature and life, ordered and shaped in accordance with their own ideas of aesthetic tonality."[19] The important difference, Ayling goes on to state, 'between the Impressionists and Expressionists is one of interpretation. The Expressionists convey a "message" or a "moral" in their art; the Impressionists do not.'[20]

Expressionism, broadly speaking, was also a strong reaction against the 19th century naturalistic concept of man, of man as the product of his environment. It asserted the importance of the spirit and essence and believed that man was not the passive, helpless witness to his deterministic environment but the very centre of the world and was in possession of the potential to transform the world around him to his own vision. When this concept was transposed to Art, it encouraged the artists to explore the essence, the spirit rather than its outer container, the body, and the surrounging environment. In order to achieve this, says R.S. Furness, Expressionism relied upon the following :

> a movement towards abstraction, towards autonomous colour and metaphor, away from plausibility and invitation; and fervent desire to express and create regardless of formal canons; a concern for the typical and essential rather than the purely personal and individual, a predilection for ecstasy and despair and hence a tendency towards the inflated and the grotesque; a mystical even religious element with frequent apocalyptic overtones; an urgent sense of the here and now, the city and the machine seen not from any naturalistic point of view but *sub-specie aeternitatis*; a desire for revolt against tradition and a longing for the new and the strange.[21]

Ivor Goll had written as early as 1918 of the early German Expressionists in whose plays 'men and things will be shown as naked as possible, and always through a magnifying glass for better effect.... The stage must not limit itself to "real life"; it becomes "super-real" when it knows about things behind things'.[22] The playwright uses exaggerated methods and properties which 'proclaim the character in a crudely typifying manner and have their equivalents in the inner hyperboles of the plot.[23]' The result should be a grotesque that does not cause laughter. The hallmark of the expressionist style is an admixture of

the farcical and the tragic, which creates the image of the grotesque. Toller preferred it explicitly in his statement that 'it is precisely through a mixture of the absurd and the tragic that the audience gets an inkling of the antinomy in the events of today.'[24] Thomas Mann, talking in a different context, subscribes to the same view of the necessity of the grotesque to portray the complexity of life. He says that modern art saw 'life as a tragicomedy with the result that the grotesque is the genuine anti-bourgeois style.'[25] The grotesque also results from distortion and stylization which are used to portray the immediate reality as well as suggest the timelessness of the experience. In form Expressionism includes a return to the Elizabethan and Jacobean techniques in its use of loose structure, alternation of verse and prose, monologues, and grotesqueness in style. Characters are types and abstractions rather than individuals. Since they are symbolic they are mostly anonymous and expressed through their functional nomenclatures or mathematical numbers. Language, too, is distorted or staccato and very often chanted rather than used as an interactional medium.

The above sketchy rendering of the Expressionist movement and its chief characteristics relating to drama can be used as a rough theoretical reference to approach *The Silver Tassie* to evaluate its artistry and to show how O'Casey used his own version of expressionism not only in the professedly expressionistic second act but also in the other allegedly realistic acts. O'Casey' own statements of his dramatic intention in *The Silver Tassie* are quite close to the manifesto of the German Expressionist playwrights. For example, he says, that as opposed to the 'slice of life' realism this 'new play' intends to create 'the wide expanse of war.'[26] As contrasted with Sherrif's *The Journey's End*, which O'Casey regards as 'a piece of false affrontery', both in form and content, his purpose in *The Silver Tassie* is to go 'into the heart of war' and portray its 'essence'.[27]

When *The Silver Tassie* was premiered in 1929 in London and New York the theatre reviews mainly concentrated on the second act which they found confusing and detrimental to the

play's unity because of the mixing of diverse dramatic methods. When the play was eventually performed at the Abbey on 12 August 1935, the criticism about the technical confusion was replaced by one about its representing a distorted view of Irish life and a parody of the Catholic Mass.[28] O'Casey's technical innovation in the second act was both praised and debunked by academic critics. Allardyce Nicoll, for example praised the play 'as the most powerul tragic drama of our time,' a superb piece unparalleled even by O'Gasey himself in his later career.[29] Contrasted with Nicoll's appreciative evaluation is Robert Hogan's regrets. He calls the technique of the play as 'a strange melange of methods"[30] and the use of expressionism in thesecond act as a high-handed experiement.[31] Even a critic of Bonamy Dobree's eminence and perceptiveness has fallen in the Yeatsean trap of considering the second act as 'entirely expressionistic' and independent.[32] Majority of the critics, like Ivor Brown, James R. Scrigmeour, Barbara Krepps and John P. Frayne have followed the same direction. It is only Allardyce Nicoll who was, perhaps, the first to assert that O'Casey used modified expressionistic devices of Toller, Kaiser and O'Neill and included representational elements in the second act of *The Silver Tassie*.[33] We propose to add to Nicoll's defence of the second act that the other acts, too, which are taken to be representational or realistic have a careful warping of the expressionist and symbolic elements. In fact, *The Silver Tassie* uses a complex structural technique of which expressionism is only one strand and unless we recognise the basic composite artistry of O'Casey's dramaturgy we will continue to perceive, like Scrigmeour, 'distinct styles' of the play, such as the naturalist first act, the expressionist second act, and the absurd-comic third end fourth acts.[34]

Though O'Casey has stated that his intention in *The Silver Tassie* was to present the essence of war in 'a war play without noise, without the interruptions of gunfire,'[35] we discover that the thematic fabric of the play is more complex. It does not present only the horrific essence of war through its impact on humans, but also a complex human predicament, constituted of social, political, psychic and emotional elements. For

example, besides the terrifying vision of the impact of war on humans, the play has a strong core of 'the workers' reaction to the minute or basic problems of living and eating.' Besides this social realism, we have the historical, political realism of World War I. The psychic and emotional components of the theme are to be seen in the disintegration of Harry, the protagonist of the main plotline. The multi-layered thematic concern of the play naturally needs a complex structural method. Hence O'Casey has used realistic elements in professedly non-realistic situations and non-realistic (expressionist and symbolic) elements in realistic situations. It is the warping and woofing of these elements, alongwith those of other dramatic devices and conventions, which constitute the structural complexity of *The Silver Tassie*.

As mentioned earlier, the central theme of the play is the impact of war on humans whose representative is Harry Heegan. The war has not been identified in the play so that its universality is not truncated by its specificity. Likewise, Harry begins as an individual but there are strong symbolic suggestions of his being a scapegoat hero. Before he appears on the stage his hero-like figure is created through Sylvester-Simon conversation about his past physical feats and through the stage props, like the trophies flanking his portrait, prominently placed in 'the eating, sitting, and part sleeping room of the Heegan family'. When he is still off stage he is described by Susie as being 'carried on the shoulders' of his fans as a mark of jubilation and hero-worship for his winning the silver tassie, the trophy of victory, a third time for the Avondale Football Club. He is full of life, vitality and youth, symbolically identified with the silver tassie, which, he says, is 'the sign of youth, sign of strength, sign of victory.' The already verbally realised heroic figure of Harry in the Sylvester-Simon narrative is confirmed and further expanded when on his appearance on the stage a mood of riotous excitement is created by Harry's verbal indulgence in self-glorification. The mood of ecstatic joy is further supported by the use of life-affirming colour symbolism—red, yellow, crimson and green—of the stage props and costumes. But the presence of black

colour—'the bed spread of black striped with vivid green'—is a symbolic pointer to the existence of death in the midst of life at a high pitch ot vitality. The sacrificial implication of the exulting hero is subtly contained in the symbolic arrangement and placing of the stage props. For example, the shield on the table, above which in the corner is placed Harry's portrait, is flanked by flower vases, suggesting the sacrificial altar and the crucifix The suggestion of the altar is reinforced by the religious symbolism of the portrayal of the priestess in Susie, dressed in dark blue. However, Susie's 'polishing a Lee-Enfield rifle with its butt resting on the table'—an obvious phallic symbol—is an ironic commentary on the true nature of the personality of the gospel-spouting priestess, which is dramatised in her sordid sexuality in the last two acts of the play. Besides this, Susie's dark prophecies which intermittently interrupt Sylvester's brilliant rhetoric and occasional poeticising, cast a sinister spell on the exuberant mood of the first act.

The image of Harry as an embodiment of physical prowess, youth and intense joy, portrayed in Sylvester-Simon narrative, is confirmed by the authorial introduction of Harry's animalism and manliness, sans any claim to spiritual, intellectual or emotional ingredients of his personality: 'sinewy muscles . made flexible by athletic sport...boisterous, sensible by instinct rather than by reason; strong heart, sound lungs, healthy stomach, lusty limbs '[36] It is in the fitness of things that Harry's sweet heart, Jessie, too, is portrayed in the image of a physical being, 'responsive to all the animal impulses of life. Ever dancing around, in and between the world, the flesh, and the devil...She gives her favour to the prominent and popular.'[37] She is symbolical of Life Force and will favour the company of only the virile and the potent. It is this symbolic nature of her personality which justifies her outright rejection of her maimed hero in the latter half of the play. The other symbolic element in the first act is a travesty of the religious significance of the Holy Grail. To toast to the victory of the Avondale Club Harry and Jessie drink from the

'chalice'—the silver tassie—which they are holding high 'joyously rather than reverentially,' accompanied with Harry's excited outbursts in grossly sexual expressions. The blasphemy of this Bacchanalian situation is undisguised, as it were, to lend justification for Harry's eventual punishment with maiming through the operation of nemesis. Both the dominant symbols—the mythic symbol of the scapegoat hero and the religious symbol of the Holy Grail—are exploited by O'Casey for ironic purposes : Harry's sacrifice remains futile and non-redemptive.

The drama of the play begins with an individual's predicament, which relates to Harry, a soldier, on home leave, who has to rejoin his trench duty during a war. In a subtle manner it extends to the domestic domain through the economic compulsions voiced in Mrs Heegan's (Harry's mother) anxieties to ensure that her son does not miss the waiting ship lest her maintenance money should stop. This domestic concern is further extended to embrace the whole society which backs up the war. This extension of the thematic concern is effected through the expressionistic device of chanted utterances replacing interactional dialogue. The chanted utterance is in the form of a compulsive command, 'You must go back,' first said by a single character, then by three of them in a chorus, and finally by 'voices of crowd outside,' with emphasis on 'must.' The 'must' of the command or supplication focuses on the element of external necessity subtly suggested by the complicity of the whole society in forcing the sacrificial role on Harry, which ironically is not only non-redemptive but futilely destructive. Thus there is a complex interweaving of the individual, domestic and larger concerns in a structural fabric of blended realistic, symbolic and expressionistic yarns. For example, Harry, who dominates the whole of the first act, towards the end of the scene gradually moves in the direction of annihilation of his individuality. He becomes increasingly visually indistinguishable from the group of soldiers marching to the quay and his distinct voice in the chanted song of 'the Silver Tassie' gradually becomes inaudible and undifferentiated from those of the other soldiers. Harry's march to

the quay, therefore, is symbolically a march towards loss of identity and destruction, which has been realised in the horrific panoramic vision of wasteland in the second act. Thus the second act, contrary to being independent, is a continuation of the first act. The scapegoat's sacrificial journey from his individualistic prominence to complete anonymity and merger with the indistinguishable crowd is completed in the second act. Likewise there is a perceptible development here from the preparation of scapegoat hero to his sacrifice.

Thus the first act, though realistic in its details of action makes use of symbolic and expressionistic devices without which the extension of the thematic concern of the play could not have been effected Besides symbolism of props, colours and actions, we have here explicit use of expressionism. The use of chanted utterance in place of interactive dialogue has already been pointed out. The characteristic expressionist structure of self-sufficient plot-units has been used even within the largely realistic first act. These units are the football match victory, Teddy-Foorawn quarrel, Susie-Harry-Jessie relationship, and the soldier's marching to the trenches—all independent but interlinked.

As far as the second act is concerned we have shown that it is vitally connected with the first act, both thematically and structurally. In order to convey the intense dramatic experience of the immense waste, desolation and destruction that the worship of the weapon of violence causes, O'Casey has dispensed with filling the second act with causally developed plotline. Instead he has heavily relied upon visual and auditory resources of the theatre to present the distilled essence of the impact of war. Since the achievement of the timelessness of the vision is the chief dramatic intention of this act, representational devices of presenting identifiable characters and using interactional and communicative dialogues have been replaced by anonymous characters and chanted utterances. The use of distortion and of the grotesque is intended to convey a vision rather than a debated idea or a sequence of events. It is for this purpose that individuals have been replaced by group. Hence the non-appearance of Harry, which has

been criticised by Yeats and Robert Hogan, is in conformity with O'Casey's structural strategies. One need not feel puzzled by O'Casey's denial of anonymity to Barney who, too, is as much merged with the group identity of the victims of war as the other soldiers. The mention of his name is not to lend any individuality to his personality but to emphasize Harry's presence *in absentia* because of his association with him brought out in the first act. The annihilation of Harry's individuality, for which the dramatist so carefully prepared him in the first act, becomes an artistic requirement in the second act. And there is no contradiction in his situation in the last two acts. It is because the Harry of the last two acts is not the Harry of the first act. He, in fact, is a breathing corpse, a continuing part of the vision of the second act, eventually so symbolised in the final act through the mangled silver tassie with which he had identified himself in the first act. Thus the second act is vitally integrated with the first act on the one hand and the last two acts on the other. Even his image of the sacrificial hero recurs in all the acts through the symbolic presence of the crucifix. We have pointed out its symbolic presence in the first act. In the second act the crucifix is present on the stage. In the third act it is suggested by the wooden framework attached to Harry's bed in the hospital ward, forming a crucifix-like shape. In the final act in the Avondale Club Hall the three lights hanging from the ceiling with different lengths form the shape of the crucifix. Similarly, the altar image of the first act is concretised in the second act in the platform on which the howitzer gun is resting and symbolically suggested in the third act by Harry's bed in the hospital at which Barney places the wreath of flowers sent by Jessie. The Hall floor of the Club in the final act suggests the altar on which Harry hurls the mangled tassie, which is symbolically himself and all that he stood for in the first act. Thus the second act is neither disjunctive of the otherwise complete plotline as has been argued by Hogan, nor is it disruptive of the inner unity of the whole drama as has been regretted by Yeats.

The second act is not wholly expressionistic and symbolical as the first, second and third acts are not wholly realistic. Hogan's criticism that this act is flawed because here 'nothing happens, the act is static, sheer mood'[38] is as untenable as Joan Templeton's assertion, mentioned earlier, that it uses the German Expressionist dream structure. The second act uses the representational structural method where there is an internal developmental pattern within the apparently disjointed details of the whole scene. There is, for example, a development from the opening panorama of devastation and wasteland through the soldiers' grumbling, complaining and reminiscing to their final movement in their recourse to the religion of the battlefield as the only option. If we take the whole scene as structured for a ritual drama, we can discern a defined ritualistic pattern of Intonation, Meditation and Ending. This Mass Structure ironically concerns itself not with peace, mercy, love and regeneration for man, but with his senseless, futile sacarifice, resulting in a vision of despair and hopelessness. However, sentimental pathos resulting from the audience's uncritical involvement is avoided by the dramatist's clever manipulation of satiric detachment through the intrusion upon the scene by the Visitor, a non-combatant outsider. The Visitor is a caricatured figure whose grotesque and absurd behaviour, hypocritical moralising, and unwarranted staccato utterances are satirically ridiculed. The other caricatured figure is the Staff-Wallah with his military commands and announcements in staccato utterances. The induction of these two farcical characters does not as some critics believe, disrupt the pervasive sombre mood of the scene. It rather intensifies our dramatic experience by the ridiculous unconcern of the two characters with the sufferings of the victims. The Visitor, moreover, establishes a link between the land of devastation and the outside world. He is perhaps a member of the institutionalised establishment which encourages such violence and destruction.

The setting of the second act, which is central to the panoramic vision, is a blending of realistic and symbolic elements.

The details of the setting[39] are largely realistic. It is 'the war zone : a scene of jagged and lacerated ruin of what was once a monastery.' The impact of the war has been shown on the physical objects of the setting against the background of which the predicament of the war victims, the soldiers, has been portrayed with focus on the state of their mental paralysis because of their being caught in an irreversible situation. Some of the realistic objects have been endowed with symbolic implications. For example, 'the figure of the Virgin, white-faced, is wearing a black robe'. The mourning Virgin is helpless to respond, as it were, to the agony of the Son of God whose life-size crucifix is leaning in symbolic supplication towards her with an 'arm outstretched' which was released by a shell. The helplessness of God in this devastating panorama is accentuated by the presence of 'a big howitzer gun with a long sinister barrel pointing towards the front', which is significantly placed in the centre of the set. The props with paradoxical significations—e.g. the Virgin and the crucifix in the company of the howitzer gun—in a realistic manner parallel the opening prophecy of destruction from *Ezekiel*, uttered by the Croucher, which is continually punctuated by the Mass of "Kyrie-e-elison"—of Lord's mercy—being intoned inside the dilapidated monastery. The auditory effect of the simultaneously intoned mass and prophecy, in the visual context of the panoramic wasteland, goes beyond realism not in the sense of transcendence into a dream world but in invoking a frightening vision and creating an almost palpably ominous gloom. This intense vision is certainly not dependent upon expressionistic dream sequence, abstractions and chants but upon a combined effect produced by the remarkable blending of realism, symbolism and expressionism. The scene, thus structured, reaches its climax when faith in divine intervention in humanity's destruction is repudiated and the alternative faith in weapon as man's saviour is espoused. The soldiers' posture of 'crouching in a huddled act of obeisance' to the gun at the end of the act is a superb example of blending the realistic, the symbolic and the expressionistic techniques to convey the meaning underlying

the catastrophic vista of devastation and wasteland resulting from man's senseless recourse to violence. It is O'Casey's homemade expressionism which could most effectively portray this timeless dimension of the theme of war in a uniquely skilful manner, unsurpassed even by O'Casey himself.

Department of English
Aligarh Muslim University
Aligarh

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Zahida Zaidi

IMAGE OF MAN IN ABSURD DRAMA

"The one thing that is not clear in modern art is its image of man. We can select a figure from Greek art, from the Renaissance or the Middle Ages and say with some certainty, That is the image of man as the Greek, the medieval or the Renaissance man conceived him. I do not think we can find any comparably clear cut image of man in the bewildering thicket of modern art. And this is not because we are too close to the period, as yet, to stand back and make such a selection. Rather, the variety of images is too great and too contradictory to coalesce into any single shape or form. May the reason why modern art offers us no clear-cut image of man not be that it already knows—whether or not it has brought this knowledge to conceptual expression—that man is a creature that transcends any image because it has no fixed essence or nature, as a stone or a tree has?"

Thus ends an interesting and perceptive analysis of modern art by William Barrett in his admirable book, *Irrational Man*[1] This may be, from a certain point of view, a valid assessment of modern art, but it is certainly not true of modern avant-garde drama or the so-called 'Theatre of the Absurd.' Nothing is more striking about, or characteristic of this drama than a vivid and haunting image of man and his predicament that these plays project. Perhaps it is by virtue of its form and medium, that modern drama, notwithstanding his fluid essence and elusive identity, has been able to create an image of man. And this is the image of a lonely and bewildered man in an absurd and incomprehensible universe.

As the mind explores the ever-extending gallery of the 'absurd drama', a series of vivid and compelling images of man appear on the screen of imagination : the image of a very old man sitting by his tape-recorder, staring in the void and the tape of his past life running on in silence (*Krapp's Last Tape*); the image of a middle-aged woman sinking deeper and deeper into the burning sand and thanking heaven

for small mercies, for another 'happy day' (*Happy Days*) : the image of two tramps waiting endlessly (for Godot) by the roadside, under a blasted tree *(Waiting for Godot)*; the image of a very old couple, in a circular room, surrounded by water, receiving an invisible crowd and cluttering up the stage with empty chairs (*The Chairs*); the image of a new tenant getting buried in a never-ending stream of furniture, which, then begins to block the passage and proliferate the streets *(The New Tenant)* ; the image of two maids in a room, playing at being themselves, each other and their mistress and endlessly lost in a hall of mirrors *(The Maids)* ; the image of two criminals in a basement room, frantically answering the demands of the 'dumb waiter' and waiting for the message that will end up the life of one of them *(The Dumb Waiter)* ; the image of a young man in a park, desperately trying to communicate with his complacent chance-companion and, finally, impaling himself on his own knife to bring the message home (*The Zoo Story*) ; the image of a lay priest setting out to find 'the true God', and getting crucified at the altar of a meaningless abstraction *(Tiny Alice)* ; the image of two young lovers, tearing the walls of their respective cells to reach each other, only to find that on one side of their cages is a fathomless abyss and on the other, more bars and more jailers behind them, and that even their jailer is a prisoner in a larger cage *(Humans and No)*; the image of a young man coming out for a stroll in the park to escape the stifling atmosphere of the interior and getting lost in an immense labyrinth of blankets *(The Labyrinth)* ; and so on.

All these images project in vivid, concrete and imaginative terms, the state of man and his predicament, and are felt to possess symbolic significance. All, to a lesser or greater degree, convey a sense of man's loneliness, anxiety, vulnerability and the vision of his entrapment in a complicated, painful and incomprehensible situation. From these instances, I have selected two, viz., *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett) and *The Chairs* (Ionesco) for close study, as they seem to me to be most characteristic of this dramatic mode, most poignant in the

vision of Man and of human existence they project, and artistically the most perfect. In them, as it were, all other images coalesce to create a poignant and haunting image of man and of human predicament, and a new myth is born.

II

Waiting for Godot (Samuel Beckett) is so original in form and bewildering in its contents that it led Kenneth Tynan to remark, 'A play, it asserts and proves, is basically a means of spending two hours in the dark without being bored'[2] and also that passing time in the dark is not only a condition for drama but also an essential aspect of human condition itself. 'The condition of Man' says Heideggar, 'is to be there.' Theatre also presupposes this presence. It depends on 'here' and 'now' for its existence. Beckett makes it not only a means of presenting life but also a subject-matter of his drama. According to Alain Robbe-Grillet, Beckett's men resist any attempt at interpretation except the most obvious and immediate one, that 'they are men and they are there'.[3]

The play explores a static situation. On a country road, under a blasted tree two tramps—Vladimir and Estragon (Didi and Gogo)—wait for Godot, who does not appear, but in the course of the evening, Pozzo and Lucky—master and slave—make their appearance. Towards the end of Act I the tramps are informed by Godot's messenger—a little boy—that Godot cannot come this evening but will surely come tomorrow. Gogo and Didi decide to give up their vigil, but they do not leave the stage. The curtain comes down on the two tramps standing still staring in the void. The second act begins in the same way and proceeds with slight variations. Time and place are the same, except that the tree has sprouted a few leaves. Pozzo and Lucky again make their appearance, but Pozzo is now blind and Lucky dumb. Towards the end the little boy comes again, informing about Godot's inability to keep his appointment and his promise to come the next day. Gogo and Didi decide to leave but they do not move. The curtain falls on the two tramps staring in the void.

We may, now, have a closer look at the two tramps to learn a little more about their existence. Gogo and Didi appear to be quite rootless and homeless. They are ill clad and ill at ease. Gogo's foot is a constant source of irritation and Didi suffers from kidney trouble. They subsist on carrots and turnips, which they stuff in their pockets along with other inconsequential rubbish. They do not seem to come from, or to go, anywhere in particular, although Estragon says that he spent the night in a ditch 'as usual' and was beaten up by 'them' as usual. To pass the time, they invent stories, improvise games, arguments and occasionally contemplate suicide. Eva Metman in trying to explain the personalities of the two tramps remarks :

> They belong to a category of people, well-known in Paris as *clochards*, people who have known better times and have often, as in this case, been cultured and educated. They make a point of being rejects of destiny, in love with their position as outsiders.[4]

She is, I think, grossly mistaken in this assumption and absolutely on the wrong track in trying to understand these creations with reference to their psychological motivations and cultural background. Gogo and Didi are not psychologically conceived characters in the ordinary sense of the term, nor are they placed in a specific social or cultural context. They are symbolic characters, creating an image of man and his predicament in a timeless, universal perspective. They are homeless, rootless, unprovided and ill-at-ease since this is how Beckett conceives of man in a metaphysical perspective. They are outsiders, no doubt, but that too in a metaphysical sense. Beckett, like the existentialists, seems to think that Man is an outsider in the universe since he cannot relate himself to his environment as naturally and spontaneously as a bird or a tree can, nor can get reconciled to the absurdity of his contingent existence.

While Vladimir and Estragon create the image of Man in a timeless, universal perspective, Pozzo and Lucky suggest an image of man in a temporal and social context. They are master and slave—torturer and victim—bound to each other in a pattern of sado-masochistic relationship. While Gogo

and Didi stay and wait. Pozzo and Lucky move, but their movement amounts to less than waiting. While Gogo and Didi are more or less interchangeable, Pozzo and Lucky are well-defined by their functions. Gogo and Didi are unrecognizable but eternal, Pozzo and Lucky are busy, self-important but subject to the devastating rush of time. They decline and deteriorate perceptively in the course of the play. In Pozzo, as Rossette Lemont points out, Beckett has caricatured the organizers of this world. 'President, trustee, absolute monarch this egotistical, narcissistic traveller, in love with his voice and the ready flow of his rhetoric..is a living symbol of the establishment.'[5] Lucky, on the other hand, stands for that section of humanity, which has been dehumanized by its slavery and suppression. But Lucky is lucky in the sense that he has a master, who, however cruelly, organizes his life for him. For this security he has sacrificed his soul and creativity. Lucky, we are told, could sing and dance and inspire Pozzo. But now this dancing is a vision of his entrapment and his thinking has been reduced to a monotonous babble of meaningless words. His monologue is also incidentally, Beckett's devastating parody of logic, science, medicine, sports, religion and other patent securities of the modern Man.

Like the central characters, the situation of the play, too, has symbolic significance. The plot can be summed up in four words, 'we waiting for Godot'. Waiting is the central action (or inaction) of the play and also its subject-matter. But what does it amount to. Gogo and Didi seem to say, 'we exist therefore we must be waiting for something', and, 'we are waiting for something therefore there must be something we wait for'. This waiting is neither a hope nor even a longing, rather, a habit or an excuse. It is the last resort by means of which the two tramps try to escape the transience and instability of their existence. As Vladimir remarks in the second act:

> What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this that we happen to know the answer. Yes in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come...or for the night to fall.[6]

This preoccupation of waiting fills up their life until the night falls—which, in my opinion, is a metaphor for death—it saves them from facing the human condition in its grim nakedness and from the anguish and suffering that might spring thereby. The monotony and aimlessness of their existence has been unconsciously camouflaged in the vague belief that they are waiting for Godot. Vladimir and Estragon are neither able to give a shape and meaning to their existence, nor are they able to face the horror of its meaninglessness. The positive attitude of the two tramps is thus, essentially, nagative and is, in fact a dramatic projection of an inauthentic existence. In existentialist terminology they are living in bad faith. This inability to face the unbearable precludes the possibility of tragedy. Consequently, the tone of the play is predominantly farcical and its heroes, who are, in fact, anti-heroes, incredibly clownish, inspite of the grimness and pathos of their situation.

Vladimir and Estragon drift and escape from a true awareness of being by means of their vague dependence on Godot, but they are not totally immersed in their bad faith like Pozzo and Lucky. Their forgetfulness is illuminated, though on rare occasions, by flashes of insight. Vladimir has a dim awareness of tragedy. 'The air is full of our cries, but the habit is a great deadener' he says. He looks at Estragon, who is sleeping, and reflects, 'At me too, someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing.' As for Estragon, his dreams reveal the hidden anxieties of his soul, but he has to suppress them as Didi avoids involvement in them.

Seen from another point of view, the waiting appears to be a metaphor for existence itself. Existence seen as process of slow suicide. Vladimir and Estragon (or Everyman) are being sacrificed at the altar of nothingness. And it is an endless and cruel process, for 'where Christ lived, it was warm, it was dry and they crucified quick'. But Gogo and Didi are not so lucky. Further it is in the act of waiting that we experience the weight of time. Time lies heavy on the two tramps:

> Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace, from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdaps have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death.
>
> (*Macbeth*, V.v. 18–23)

What we are confronted here with is absolute time. Consequently while life can be projected dramatically as a never-ending process of waiting, it can also be expressed as a flash of lightning between the womb and the tomb—between the dark security of the womb and the absolute darkness of the tomb.

There is a semblance of movement in the play, but it is a circular movement, which after some time conveys the impression of stasis. The action and the situation is circular. The first act ends where it began. The second begins at that point and ends exactly in the same way. The story of the dog moves in never-ending circles. Every argument in the play is circular and every attempt to pass the time ends where it began. We may say that the play is not only exploring a static situation, but is dramatizing a regression beyond nothingness, which Jung describes as a descent into Hades and which has also been characterized as a 'phenomenology of nothingness'. The play opens with the words 'Nothing to be done'. And these words resound in space and time. The word nothing punctuates the dialogue throughout the play. Similarly the verbal texture of the play as well as a close knit texture of symbols and images carries its vision with extraordinary poignancy and nimbleness. Themes of life and death, ambiguity and absurdity are interwoven in its texture, lending substance and flavour to the image of Man and his predicament.

'The world of the play', in the words of Gunther Andres, is an abstraction; an empty stage, empty but for one prop indispensible for the meaning of the fable : the blasted tree in its center, which defines the world as a permanent instrument for suicide and life as a non-committng of suicide.'[7] The characters, too, in view of the same critic are abstract not only in the sense of being man in general but also in

a more literal and cruel sense of the word. They are 'abstracti' that is 'pulled away', 'set apart'. The illusion of solidity is shattered and what we see is the disintegration or decomposition of the image.

We may now turn to Godot. Who is he and what does he stand for? Is he God? Is he hope for a better social order? Is he Death or Silence? Is he the elusive self that we look for but never come by? Yes, but not quite. The most important thing about Godot is that he is absent. If he is God he is a diminutive god and his absence lends a significant dimension to the total structure of the play. Vladimir and Estragon's faint chances of salvation dwindle into nothingness before our eyes. Nietzche announced the death of God and Beckett dramatizes the agony of his absence, or, shall we say, non-existence. While scores of critics have been baffled by Godot's ambiguity, Ruby Cohn asserts that Beckett's play tells us plainly who Godot is—'The promise that is always awaited but not fulfilled, the expectation that brings two men to the board, night after night. The play tells us this dramatically and not discursively'.[8] This statement is significant in so far as it shifts our attention from the question of Godot's identity to the experience of the central characters. But, in fact, it is another way of saying that we do not know any thing about Godot, except that Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for him. The ambiguity, like his absence, is essential to the meaning of the play. And this ambiguity is not confined to the identity of Godot, but is a characteristic stylistic feature of the play as well as of its subject-matter. *Waiting for Godot* reverberates with questions that remain unanswered, contains statements that are doubted, events and persons that are forgotten, decisions that are never translated into action and arguments that lead nowhere. This state of uncertainty conveys, obliquely, Man's sense of bewilderment and auxiety when confronted with the ultimate questions of being and existence.

The essential ambiguity of the subject-matter is reflected, not only in the vagueness and incompleteness of impulses,

thought, desires and memories but also in the treatment of language. Beckett is here asserting, and also illustrating that the tools of comprehension and communication at man's command are impotent and rusty. Logic and reasoning do not unfold ultimate truth and language is often a means of concealment rather than the revelation of meaning. The play confronts us with an ever-widening gulf between thought, language and action. Beckett's man lives in a world which is not of his making, and which resists any attempt to make sense of it. This spectacle of Man's helplessness in an incomprehensible world lends a dark tone to Beckett's vision of life. The world emerging from his play has been variously described as a 'desert of loss' or 'the Zone of Zero'.

But *Waiting for Godot* is not an incoherent work of art, though it is a play about the incoherence of life. Its apparant formlessness projects the formlessness of life itself and its rejection of action and plot reflects a life devoid of significant action and divorced from history. It creates, in concrete, vivid and moving terms, an image of Man and his universe. In the opinion of Martin Esslin it is a poetic image that has to be experienced in its totality[9] and, according to J.L. Styan, it is an extended metaphor that makes itself felt at several levels of meaning.[10] Beckett's vision, inspite of his dark tone and profound pessimism cannot be branded as nihilistic, for the play is not only a conplete artistic triumph, but Beckett's ruthless and deeply moving projection of Man's experience of being and his predicament is, in the last analysis, an act of supreme courage and integrity. And courage, as Paul Tillich points out, is the highest form of self-affirmation, as it confronts Man with Being, Non-Being and their unity. In other words Beckett's translation of a painful and tragic experience into a work of perfect symmetry and artistic coherence is a form of mastery and transcendence of that experience. And this is what makes the play both illuminating and exhilarating.

II

The Chairs (Eugene Ionesco) is a non-realistic play in which the tragic dilemma of existence is conveyed, largely,

through comic and hilarious means and projected in concrete visual symbols. *The Chairs* does not tell a realistic story, or present psychologically motivated characters, but creates an image of Man and the human condition. It does not unfold a plot, but reveals the panorama of the inner world. The dramatic method employed by Ionesco is symbolic, surrealistic and fantastic. Ionesco believes that realistic drama is inadequate for the purposes of conveying complex and elusive experience of Being and a sense of metaphysical reality. 'Realism' he asserts, 'never looks beyond reality. It narrows it down, falsifies it and leaves out of account the obsessive truths that are most fundamental to us : love, death and wonder. Truth lies in our dreams, in our imagination' (*Notes and Counter Notes*). A play, for Ionesco, is an organic growth and a structure of the imagination. His plays are striking for freedom of form and spontaneity of technique. But in his moments of inspiration, as Martin Esslin points out, 'the spontaneous creations of his subconscious emerge as readymade formal structures of true classical purity.'[11] And this is particularly true of *The Chairs*.

The Chairs presents a very old couple in a circular tower surrounded by water. The setting of a closed room, cut off from the outside world, has by now become a stock dramatic metaphor in modern drama. This scenic device suggests man's isolation and his entrapment in a situation of no exit, and creates a poignant image of human condition. Plays like *Henry IV* by Pirandello, *No Exit* and *Condemned of Altona* by Sartre, *The Room* and *Dumb Waiter* by Pinter, *Endgame* by Beckett, *The Maids* by Genet, and *Amadee* by Ionesco make effective and significant use of the setting of a closed space, cut off from reality. In *The Chairs* this scenic effect is combined with other visual devices and concrete symbols that lend poignancy to the image of man and his existence.

The action of the play takes place outside history and recognizable space. 'Paris never existed my little one', says the Old Woman to the Old Man. But her husband seems to think that, 'That city must have existed, because it collapsed.... It was extinguished four hundred thousand years ago and

nothing remains of it except a song', which paradoxically asserts that, 'Paris will always be Paris'. And so we are moving in a world where the common scale of values does not seem to operate. Even the certainty (or illusion) of space and time is shattered and the keynote of existential experience is ambiguity and paradox.

The Chairs presents an essentially static situation in which the illusion of movement is created by endless, meaningless repetitions and occasional regressions. Encouraged by the Old Woman, the Old Man is telling the same stories, imitating the same people and making the same complaints for the last seventy-five years. And when even this does not help to evade reality, he lapses into a second childhood and the Old Woman plays the part of the mother.

The play unfolds a life of failure, regrets, remorse, frustration and a general sense of futility made tolerable by vague aspirations, pretentious hopes and vital delusions. The old couple has lost grip on life, which is becoming more and more complicated and incomprehensible for them: 'The further one goes, the deeper one sinks', says the Old Man, and the Old Woman is bewildered and terrified by the spectacle of water all around them. They are desperately trying to live in an imaginary past, which their memory has glorified for them. 'Six o'clock in the morning, and it's dark already' says the Old Man to his wife, 'surely you remember, there was day light at eight o'clock in the evening, at nine o'clock, at midnight'. The Old Woman, of course, agrees with him.

The Old Man likes to believe that he is a misunderstood intellectual, 'unrecognized and underestimated by my contemporaries'. The Old Woman confirms him in his belief and assures him that he is very gifted and that though he is only a General Factotum, he could have been a 'head general, a head king, a head president or even a head comedian'. However, all is not lost, since the Old Man is preparing a great message for the world, which, he hopes, will save humanity. The Old Man lives either in the cold solace of excessive self-pity touching the boundaries of the grotesque, 'They have crushed my

bones, they have robbed me, they have assassinated me....I have been the collecter of injustices, the lightning-rod of catastrophes', or in the romantic nostalgia of a distant past : 'We could have shared youth, beauty, eternity—an eternity of joys', says he to his imaginary beloved, 'La Belle'. Only once, in the course of action, he seems to be awakened to the full horror of his condition and to a sense of metaphysical emptiness and nothingness....'Sometime I awaken in the midst of absolute silence. It is a perfect circle, there is nothing lacking, but its shape might disappear. There are holes throgh which it can escape'. The Old Woman echoes him : 'ghosts, phantoms, mere nothings'. But she quickly reassures herself and her husband, 'The duties my husband performs are very important–sublime'.

The other side of this self-pity, self-justification and nostalgia, which are different expressions of 'bad faith,' is a nagging sense of guilt that the old couple cannot shake off. The Old Woman believes that they had a son who deserted them because they failed to live up to his expectations. She confides in her invisible guest, the photographer :

OLD WOMAN : We've had a son...He left his parents...A very long time ago. And we loved him so much...He used to say 'you kill the birds.. why do you kill the birds ?...we don't kill the birds..'You are telling lies,' he would say, 'you are trying to deceive me and I loved you so much. The streets are full of birds you've killed and the the little children dying... The sky is red with blood...I thought you were good...The streets are full of dead birds...You've put out their eyes...Daddy, Mummy you're wicked. I won't stay with you any more'.[11]

The Old Man, on the other hand, is bitten by remorse as he cannot forget that he left his mother to die in a ditch. He confides in his invisible beloved, La Belle :

OLD MAN : I left my mother to die all alone in a ditch. She called after me, crying feebly, my little boy, my beloved child, don't leave me to die, I'm not long for this world.'...Dont' worry mother, I'll soon be back, I was in a hurry, I was going to dance...when I did come back, she was dead and buried deep in the ground...I started digging to try and find her but I couldn't. I know, I know, it always happens. Sons leaving their mothers and as good as killing their fathers. Life is like that...But it tortures me (p. 61).

These stories convey a deep sense of guilt and betrayal on the part of these old people. But this should not lead us to conclude that they are psychologically motivated characters. 'Avoid psychology, or rather give it metaphysical dimension,' 'says Ionesco in *Notes and Counter Notes* And this seems to be the case here too. We may note here that the Old Man tells his friend that they never had a child and the Old Woman tells the photographer that her husband was a loyal and loving son and that his parents died in his arms. This underlines the fact that we are not expected to take these stories at their face value, and what they convey is not an ordinary sense of guilt about specific events, but an all-pervading existential guilt and anxiety that is an essential ingredient of existential experience.

But these conradictory stories also contribute to a sense of bewilderment and loss. We are moving in a world in which logic has ceased to exist, moral values are uncertain and language has broken down as a means of communication. Every assertion is contradicted and every statement negated. The Old Man tells his first love, the invisible Belle, 'You have not changed a bit—Ah yes your nose has grown longer—a lot longer.' He tells her again, 'I loved you a hundred years ago but there has been such a change....No you haven't changed a bit—I loved you—I love you.'.....Ionesco is here preoccupied with the failure of communication,resulting in an experience of isolation and bewilderment. This is conveyed in the image of the empty chairs, fantastic conversation with the invisible crowd and above all in the image of the dumb Orator. But it is also brought out in the treatment of language itself, which had been Ionesco's main preoccupation in *The Lesson, Bald Prima Don a* and other early plays. Ionesco employs apparently realistic dialogue only to break it into downright nonsense until we realize that it always consisted of cliches, catchwords and banalities that conceal rather than reveal the meaning. This distrust and devaluation of language is a widespread phenomenon in contemporary culture, indicative of a general state of doubt about assumptions, concepts and values that were believed to be the foundation of all human communication and action.

To cap their life of vacuity and failure, the old couple stage an imaginary reception, to which all distinguished personalities, 'all the intellectuals and all the proprietors' are invited and at which a professional orator is to convey the Messianic message of the Old Man. Gradually the invisible guests begin to arrive. The old people receive them, converse with them and entertain them with great enthusiasm, and the Old Woman brings more and more chairs to accomodate the swelling crowd of the imaginary characters. Finally the Emperor arrives with great fanfare, to crown the occasion. But as the action proceeds, the dream becomes more and more complicated and closes in upon the two old people. They are separated from each other and from the emperor by the unmanageable crowd and the chairs cluttering up the entire stage. The action now rises to a paroxysm and frenzy which according to Ionesco is the true source of the theatre. Finally the Orator arrives and at the height of their imaginary glory the old people throw themselves out of the windows, leaving the stage to the deaf and dumb Orator whose massage is Silence—silence broken by the derissive laughter of the invisible crowd. The ending of *The Chairs* brings to mind the last scene of *The Hairy Ape* (O'Neill) set in the zoo, in which Yank's passionate pleas for sympathy and understanding are answered by the chattering and screechings of the invisible monkeys but Ionesco's method is more subtle and economical and its symbolic significance many-dimensional.

In *The Chairs* Ionesco has managed to retain a balance between madness and pathos, suffering and laughter, grotesque comedy and tragic horror. For Ionesco laughter is an indivisible part of the tragic for it is the perception of the unbearable, and for him, the unbearable alone is truly tragic. 'For my part,' he confesses, 'I have never understood the difference people make between the comic and the tragic. As the comic is the intuitive perception of the absurd, it seems to me more hopeless than the tragic. The comic offers no escape. I say hopeless but in reality is lies beyond the boundaries of hope and despair (*Notes and Counrer Notes*). Thus laughter becomes also a

means of transcending the absurd and the tragic. For Ionesco the gortesque is the means by which art can express the paradoxical and, in the words of Robert Corrigan, 'express the form of the unformed—the face of the world without a face.

The Chairs is a work of great artistic integrity and imaginative force. It is a complex and self-contained structure—organic, subjective and spontaneous. It does not contain a discursive argument but recreates a rich and complex experience. Themes of loneliness, despair, death, time, evanessence, vacuity, failure, remorse, guilt, absurdity and nothingness interpenetrate its structure and are orchestrated like themes in a musical symphony. In the words of Martin Esslin, it is a poetic image brought to life—complex, ambiguous, many-dimensional—the beauty and depth of symbol transcends any search for definition.'[13]

Ionesco's plays are conceived, primarily, in terms of the resources of drama. He has not only used language more dramatically, which in his own words, is just 'one member of the shock troop of the theatre' but has also extended the vocabulary of the theatre by endowing the stage props with a vital symbolic dimension. 'Nothing is barred in the theatre', he asserts, 'characters may be brought to life, but the unseen presence of our inner fears can also be materialized. So the author is not only allowed but recommended to make actors of his props, to bring objects to life, to animate scenery and to give symbols concrete forms (*Notes and Courter Notes*). The furniture in *The New Tenant*, coffee cups in *Victims of Duty* and the corpse in *Amadee* suffering from the incurable disease of the dead, i.e., geometric progression—are some of the examples of this method. In these plays the stage properties convey the horror of the proliferation of matter and the crushing weight of the universe. They also project leaden, hopeless and oppressive states of mind, which, in Ionesco's opinion, mark the victory of anti-spiritualistic forces.

The symbolic use of stage props in *The Chairs* is a triumph of this technique. Ionesco speaks of two striking states of mind—two opposing experiences of reality : the experience of

heaviness, materiality and opaqueness of the world and the experience of its evanescence, emptiness and nothingness. In *The Chairs* Ionesco has hit upon a symbol that conveys both these experiences and states of mind with equal force. The spectacle of the innumerable chairs, cluttered up on the stage, conveys a sense of the proliferation of matter, heaviness and oppressive weight of the material world, but these empty chairs may also convey a sense of emptiness and nothingness. In Ionesco's own words, 'The subject of the play is not the message, nor the moral disaster of the old couple but the chairs themselves. The absence of people, the absence of the emperor, the absence of matter, the unreality of the world, the metaphysical emptiness—the theme of the play is nothingness'.[14]

To conclude : *The Chairs* is a profoundly moving dramatic experience. It carries a great weight of psychological, moral and philosophical interest with extraordinary nimbleness and a minimum of apparent effort. It not only creates an image of Man and reveals several dimensions of his existential experience in a strikingly modern idiom but also suggests an image of his predicament in a timeless, universal perspective. 'Everything is a circumscribed moment in history', says Ionesco in *Notes and Counter Notes*, 'but all history is contained in each moment of history. Any moment in history is valid when it transcends history'. And this seems to be particularly applicable to *The Chairs*, thus justifying Ionesco's view that, 'Art seems to be the best justification for a belief in the possibility of a metaphysical liberation.'

IV

The image of man emerging from the absurd plays in general and *Waiting for Godot* and *The Chairs* in particular, translates the vision, intentions and philosophic assumptions of the 'Absurd Drama' in vivid, concrete and coherent artistic forms. Absurd Drama is a search for meaning in a fragmented universe, which is felt to have no central purpose or direction. It attempts to tackle the problem of being and human existence in its totality, complexity and in its essential

ambiguity and transience. In doing so it undertakes to shock man out of his complacence, smugness, illusions, evasions and mechanical habits of thought. Rejecting the conventional image of man based on conceptual thought, pseudo-scientific analysis or outdated moral sanctions, it creates a highly subjective image of man, which is disturbing and bewildering, but also exhilarating in its freshness and authenticity. It expresses the anguish and despair, springing from the recognition that man is surrounded by areas of darkness, and that no one will provide him with ready-made answers or rules of conduct. As Albert Camus puts it in *The Myth of Sisyphus :*

> The certainty of the existence of God, who would give meaning to life, has far greater attraction than the knowledge that without him one could do evil without being punished. The choice between these two alternatives would not be difficult. But there is no choice. And that is where the bitterness begins.[15]

Absurd Drama is an attempt to come to terms with the realities of this uncomfortable existence. It confronts the audience, not only with the absurdity of the inauthentic existence, shrouded in illusion and evasions, but also with the essential absurdity of human condition itself. The implicit assumption is that this confrontation may be the first step in coming to terms with human predicament.

Absurd Drama is not a drama of ideas but a drama of being. It is concerned not with ideologies or discursive arguments but with the elusive experiences of the inner world and with themes of permanent validity and universal significance. Themes of life, death, time, evanescense, emptiness, isolation, despair, wonder and transcendence are directly projected here through images, symbols, rhythmic patterns and verbal texture. Its language is the language of living experience rather than that of conceptual thought. And since it is concerned with the totality of being and realities of the inner world, it has abandoned the realistic technique of presentation. Realism in drama, these dramatists feel, is adequate only for the purpose of projecting conventionally conceived reality and superficial modes of perception. This drama depends, largely,

on surrealistic, expressionistic and symbolic modes of expression, as surealistic dream images and poetic symbols can encompass and obliquely convey realities and experiences which elude the grasp of reason and conceptual thought. As Jung says, 'The heart has its own reasons which the reason does not know.' In this respect the Absurd drama is essentially poetic theatre.

It is now my purpose to show that the Absurd Drama is not an eccentric movement, but is in tune with the central quests and intellectual and moral preoccupations of our time, and the image of Man, emerging from these plays, is a characteristic expression of the modern sensibility and a contribution to the imaginative culture of the contemporary world.

One of the striking features of Absurd Drama is its unique and shocking treatment of language which is a direct consequence of an attempt to convey the total reality of being. This distrust and devaluation of language is in tune with the mood and temper of our times. The inadequacy of conceptual thought as a means of encompassing the complex realities of being and subconscious existence of man, and of language as a means of communicating these realities, is a widely felt phenomenon in the present-day world. 'Meaning and purposefulness are not the prerogatives of the mind, they operate in the whole of living nature, says Jung. He also draws our attention to the fact that, 'The ideas with which we deal in our apparently disciplined waking life, are by no means as precise as we would like to believe. On the contrary, their meaning (and their emotional significance for us) becomes more imprecise. the more closely we examine them.' Language, it is felt, is not always the best means of conveying an elusive experience or a complex phenomenon. In some cases music or painting may have a more direct access to an elusive meaning and the profoundest experiences of spirit are best contained in silence. Absence of verbal language characterizes the higher stages of contemplative thought in oriental philosophy.

But in the present-day world, the inadequacy of language is felt, not only in relation to higher contemplative thought

and mystical experiences, but also in the sphere of day-to-day life and interpersonal relationship. Language, it is felt, has been so completely corrupted by cliches, banalaties, mechanical habits of thought and easy-going conventional attitudes that it fails to convey a precise meaning, fresh impulse or unique perception. On the other hand, the emphasis on specialization and fragmentation of knowledge has also rendered language somewhat secondary if not superfluous. The image of the world, as George Steiner points out in his essay 'Retreat from the Word', is fast receding from the communicative grasp of language. Much significant reality now begins outside the verbal context.

Modern philosophy, too, is distrustful of language, and since Spinoza much philosophical inquiry has been devoted to the use of the language for the clarification of language. Language is no longer seen as means of arriving at ultimate truth or certainty, but as a spiral or gallery of mirrors bringing the intellect back to its point of departure. Symbolic logic is one of the attempts to break through this circle. The work of Wittgenstein, the great Cambridge philosopher, can be seen as an attempt to escape from the spiral of language. He doubts whether reality can be spoken of since language is a kind of infinite regression. According to him, a clear cut relation between the word and the fact cannot be taken for granted. That which we call fact may well be a veil spun by language to conceal reality. Other psychological and anthropological researches like Warf-Sapir studies and the findings of growth psychologists, too, illustrate that language and the educative processes of culture orient the individual to a very few touch points with reality.

Similarly, *avant-garde* drama or the Theatre of the Absurd has close affinities with modern art in its techniques, spirit and intentions. Like Absurd Drama, modern art is not a statement of well-defined meaning or order, but a search for meaning in a fragmented universe. Abandonment of the traditional styles and forms in modern art can be seen as expression of dissatisfaction with conventionally-conceived reality. And the

abandonment of representational image parallels a distrust of the language of conceptual thought. Modern art is characterized by broken colours, segmented compositions, shattered surfaces and dissolving form. In break up, says Kathrine Kuh, can be found the key to the history of modern art. Contemporary art, like *avant garde* drama is not just an artistically pleasing or morally flattering experience. Like Absurd Drama, it is profoundly disturbing. In many of my paintings, says Albright, I am trying to lead the observer back, sideways, up and down into the picture to make him feel tossed about in every direction—what I am really trying to do is to make a coherent statement about life that will force people to meditate a bit. I am not trying to make a pleasant aesthetic experience. I want to make the observer uncomfortable.' The contemporary artist depicts a shattered world because he has courage to face destruction and death. These artists have rejected discreet codes and conventional restrictions and they deal with vital force, brutal, uncouth and disturbing but vigorously alive. The have turned their back on what they found stale or petrified. Truth is faced in its nakedness and disturbing ambiguity.

Hymon Bloom's 'Old Woman Dreaming' is a terrifying image of death and decomposition, and Francis Bacon's Study of Pope Innocent is a disturbing study in ambiguity. The figure moves and yet is frozen, it cries yet is silent. The figure is caged yet eludes its barriers by melting into the surrounding curtain, but one can never be sure whether it is seated before or behind the curtain. Dali's Paranoic Face is another ingenious and disturbing study in ambiguity.. A picture which appears to be an idyllic country scene, on being turned sideways, reveals a terrifying face. The composition conveys a double and divided experience. The observer turns from the one to the other image with uncomfortable ambivalence. Edward Munch's THE CRY, on the other hand is perhaps the most powerful expression of frozen horror in the entire history of art. Similarly, Giacometti's expressionistic sculpture, The Tall Figure, which seems to be on the point of breaking under its own rarified

tensions is a moving image of human isolation. These are some of the instances that create powerful and moving images of man and human predicament (contrary to the view of William Barrett) and reinforce and complement the image of Man created by Absurd Drama.

Absurd Drama has affinities with surrealistic and expressionistic art. Surrealistic paintings of Miro, Tanguy and Dali unravel the mysteries of the subconscious mind and recreate the fascinating panorama of the inner world. Kandinsky's abstract expressionistic canvases and Jackson Pollack's violent action paintings have some affinities with the Absurd Drama, particularly from the point of view of the freedom of form and subjectivity of approach. But in my opinion, Absurd Drama has much greater depth and range. Paul Klee's visual puns bring to mind the comic theatrical devices of Ionesco.

Absurd Drama has deep affinities with Existentialism. Both the existentialist philosophers and the absurd dramatists reject the concept of man as a purely rational being. The existentialists believe that man is not a thinking animal with reason engrafted on animality, but a vital, passionate being, whose vitality flowes into spirituality. Both concern themselves with the totality of being and believe that being is not a problem to be mastered and done with but a mystery to be lived and relived. Both reject the absolute truth and emphasize its unsurmountable ambiguity. Both seem to believe that a perception of absurdity and an encounter with nothingness is the starting-point of an authentic existence. In the existentialist philosophy the question of the moral choice is central and explicit while in the Absurd Drama it is implicit. Indeed the Absurd Drama is so close to the existentialist philosophy that it can be seen as the artistic manifestation of existentialism itself. We have, however, to make a distinction between the absurd plays and the existentialist fiction and plays of existentialist thinkers like Sartre, Camus and Simone de Beauvoir, which often have an air of being illustrations of their philosophic systems. Absurd Drama, on the other hand, does not seem to be motivated by a clearly defined philosophic

system. Its insights are arrived at independently and intuitively and its artistic approach more experimental and imaginative.

Martin Esslin, in his path-breaking book, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, also draws our attention to the affinities between Absurd Drama and mystic thought. Indeed, he goes to the extent of suggesting that the Absurd Drama comes closest to being a religious quest of our time.[7] Mysticism depends on intuition as a means of apprehending ultimate reality, and distrusts discursive thought and conceptual language as a means of apprehending and communicating this reality. Further, an encounter with nothingness and emptiness is an essential dimension of mystic experience, particularly of eastern mysticism and Budhist thought. These terms, however, have different connotations in the vocabulary of mysticism. A newly awakened interest in mysticism and Zen Budhism is a striking feature of the contemporary situation. We may say that Mysticism and Absurd Drama are two different ways of coming to terms with the totality of Being, but both register a protest against narrow limits of conceptual thought and mechanical approach to reality.

In short the Absurd Drama is not only a significant dramatic movement but also a supreme expression of the modern sensibility and contemporary experience. It is an attempt to face human predicament in its totality and stark nakedness, and by translating it in coherent and authentic artistic form, transcend man's tragic predicament and the absurdity of his contingent existence. As the above discussion shows, it is not only in the mainstream of contemporary thought and culture, but is also a significant contribution towards its enrichment.

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Bernard J. Paris

MARLOW'S TRANSFORMATION

Conrad wrote three works in the late 1890s that employ Charley Marlow as principal narrator. After completing 'Youth,' he started *Lord Jim* as an omniscient narration, but broke off to write *Heart of Darkness,* after which he returned to *Lord Jim* and introduced Marlow. The Marlow of these three works is, I believe, the same character. In *A Psychological Approach to Fiction* (Indiana University Press, 1974), I described the Marlow of *Lord Jim* as a man who suffers from insecurity and low self-esteem : 'After a period of youthful romanticism during which he had an exalted notion of his own greatness, he has been humbled by the might of nature, the uncertaintly of fate, and a sense of his personal insignificance. He has transferred his pride from himself to his community, which he invests with glamour and which he counts on to protect and sustain him. ..His idealized image (in the Horneyan sense of that term) is that of an humble man who keeps stroke, who does his duty and thereby holds on to his precious place in the ranks' (p. 261). In 'Youth' we see the young, romantic Marlow from the perspective of an older, chastened one; and in *Heart of Darkness* we see the experience that brought about his transformation. It is the nature of that transformation and Marlow's methods of coping with it that I wish to examine here.

The Marlow who goes to Africa is considerably more sober and realistic than the young second mate who finds the disastrous voyage of the *Judea* to be such a marvelous adventure, but he is still pursuing a delusive and dangerous dream of glory. As 'a little chap,' he tells us, he would look for hours at maps and lose himself 'in all the glories of exploration.' He had a hankering for the blank spaces, where he determined to go

when he grew up. One of these was the North Pole, but now 'the glamour's off,' and he is no longer interested. Though the biggest, the Congo, has 'ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery' and has become instead 'a place of darkness,' it continues to attract Marlow. As he looks at a map in a shop window, the shape of the river fascinates him 'as a snake would...a silly little bird.' He feels that he 'must get there by hook or by crook,' and in order to satisfy his compulsion, he uncharacteristically enlists the aid of his aunt.

What is it that is driving Marlow? His aunt thinks his going is 'a glorious idea' because she sees him as 'an emissary of light' who will help to wean 'those ignorant millions from their horrid ways'; but Marlow mocks his aunt for believing 'all that humbug' and observes that the company is 'run for profit.' *His* motive is not profit, but neither is it to be 'a lower sort of apostle,' and he feels like 'an impostor' for accepting his aunt's help. It seems to be the darkness itself that attracts Marlow. The river, 'fascinating' and 'deadly—like a snake,' symbolizes the threat of danger and evil lurking in human and physical nature. After his interview with the company doctor, Marlow has a better sense of the challenges that await him, but he dismisses the doctor as 'a harmless fool' and does not allow himself to be deterred, for it is these challenges that constitute the fascination of the journey. Marlow had exulted in the hardships he underwent on the *Judea* because, while they drove Captain Beard mad, they gave him 'a chance to feel [his] strength' : 'I did not know how good a man I was till then.' Marlow is still trying to prove how good a man he is. His new adventure will be an extreme test of his physical, moral, and psychological strength. The women knitting black wool seem 'fateful' (*Morituri te salutant*) and the doctor regards him as 'a fool,' but he will prove himself to be man enough to face the darkness.

Marlow does not return triumphant. His health breaks down and he wrestles with death, but he finds the contest to be 'unexciting,' 'without glory.' Life seems a 'mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose' that at best

provides 'some knowledge of yourself that comes too late—a crop of unextinguishable regrets.' 'Marlow is bitter, angry, and humiliated, full of scorn and self-hate. He admits that his behaviour upon returing to Brussels 'was inexcusable' and explains that his 'imagination wanted soothing.' He has difficulty restraining himself from laughing in the faces of his fellow humans, dreaming 'their insignificant and silly dreams,' whose 'knowledge of life' is 'an irritating pretence' because they cannot 'possibly know' what he does.

What does Marlow know that he did not know before his journey, and how does he defend himself against the threat that this knowledge apparently poses to his psychological stability ?

As learning theorist Frank Smith observes, we all have an elaborate theory of the world in our heads in terms of which we process our experience. One of the first things that happens to Marlow is that he confronts phenomena that his theory of the world does not enable him to comprehend. As a result, he feels himself to be cut off 'from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion.' The firing of the French gunboat 'into a continent' is 'incomprehensible' ; the blasting at the first station is 'objectless'; and there is a 'vast artificial hole... the purpose of which [he finds] it impossible to divine.' Marlow's experience is similar to that of the dazed and dying savages, absurdly called 'criminals.' to whome 'the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come . an insoluble mystery from the sea.' At first the world of nature and of savages had seemed to have a 'meaning' and had given him a sense of 'contact with reality'; but as he proceeds deeper into the wilderness, the earth wears 'the aspect of an unknown planet,' the 'frenzy' of the prehistoric men is unintelligible, and Marlow feels completely 'cut off from the comprehension of [his] surroundings.'

The anxiety generated by this inability to make sense of his experience is heightened for Marlow by the broader implication that his cultural assumptions and modes of understanding are inadeguate. The new realities he encounters seem unreal

at first because they are inassimilable, but then they become more compelling than what he had previously taken to be truth. The familiar world that had given Marlow his bearings seems fragile, arbitrary, and insignificant when juxtaposed against the unshackled monster of nature and the savagery of primitive or decivilized man. Marlow can find a stable and satisfying meaning neither in the natural nor in the human order of things.

Marlow experiences threats, then, to his sense of the orderliness, manageability, and comprehensibility of the world, and of the power of civilization, both as an institutional structure and a source of inner restraint. His feelings of personal strength, significance, and rectitude are also challenged severely. The overwhelming force and impersonality of the wilderness make him feel weak, small, and vulnerable; and the emergence of primitive lusts in the absence of external sanctions threatens his confidence in his own moral restraint. He does not succumb, like Kurtz, to the fascination of the abomination; but he is sufficiently tempted, it seems, that he identifies with Kurtz in some measure and needs both to judge and to justify himself.

I see the Marlow who is telling the story as still in the grip of his Congo experience, to which he is seeking an antidote. His telling the story is, in part at least, an effort to naturalize his experience, to give himself a sense of comprehending it through the process of articulation. He had felt inferior to Kurtz because, although Kurtz had made a fuller journey into the horrors of degradation and death, he was able to sum up and judge, whereas at his own extremity, Marlow found 'with humiliation' that he probably 'would have nothing to say.' Marlow is to his auditors as Kurtz was to him, an almost disembodied voice speaking with great eloquence of horrors beyond their experience. He now has plenty to say. By telling his story, he is successfully competing with Kurtz's eloquence, thereby undoing his humiliation and establishing himself also as 'a remarkable man.'

Marlow describes his behaviour in Brussels as 'inexcusable.' but he displays a similar aggressiveness and condescension

towards the men to whom he tells his story. His imagination is still in want of soothing. His narration seems to have been triggered by sentiments towards the Thames that had presumably been uttered by one of the others : 'We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush of a short day that comes and departs for ever, but in the august light of abiding memories.' The river is seen from a communal perspective in terms of its glorious history and its 'ages of good service done to the race.' It is 'crowded with memories' of 'hunters for gold or pursuers of fame' and of 'ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time.' This evocation of 'the gigantic tale' of British exploration and conquest is too much for Marlow. He invokes a cosmic perspective, announces that 'darkness was here yesterday.' and reduces the history of civilization to 'a flash of lightning in the clouds,' in 'tha flicker' of which we live. He mocks the celebration of the 'messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire, by speaking first of the Romans who tackled England when it was a darkness and then telling the story of his experiences in the Congo, in which the sacred fire is well nigh extinguished. Marlow compensates for the loss of his dream of glory by puncturing the illusions of others, by displaying his bitter wisdom and superior insight. He does not wish to suffer alone.

Marlow's aggressiveness toward his auditors arouses feelings of resentment and discomfort. He explains that as he pushed his boat up the river, he was insulated from 'the overwhelming realities' that surrounded him by having to attend 'to the mere incidents of the surface' ; but he was aware of 'the inner truth' all the same :

> 'I felt often its mysterious stillness watching me at my monkey tricks, just as it watches you fellows performing on your respective tightropes for—what is it? a half a crown a tumble—' 'Try to be civil, Marlow,' growled a voice....

The complaint is highly appropriate in that Marlow is failing to respect the meaning that his culture gives to the activities of its members. He is seeing such activities from a cosmic

perspective, as set of monkey tricks performed for trivial rewards, and he cannot resist inflicting his sense of their absurdity upon his auditors.

This complaint is followed by an apology in which Marlow acknowledges that the price doesn't matter if the trick be well done; and they do their 'tricks very well.' as did he, since he 'managed not to sink that steamboat.' Marlow's attitude toward communal values is quite ambivalent. His Congo experience has led him to see through their claims to power and authority, but it has also given him a sense of their persistence and importance. As he describes the decent young Roman citizen who is overcome by the 'fascination of the abomination,' Marlow acknowledges that 'none of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency.' While he admits that he has been morally challenged by his encounter with the primitive, Marlow is at contant pains to distinguish himself from those who have become, in varying degrees, decivilized. He is able to keep his 'hold on the redeeming facts of life' by virtue of his devotion to work, to duty, to the necessities of navigation. Towson's book on seamanship makes him 'forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real.' The wilderness makes him feel 'very small, very lost,..yet it was not altogether depressing, that feeling. After all, if you were small, the grimy beetle crawled on—which was just what you wanted it to do.' The human order with its standards, its discipline, its techniques for mastering nature is just as real, in its way, as the powers of darkness.

Marlow is saved from the fate of the others not only by his devotion to efficiency, but also by his innate morality. He stresses again and again the hollowness of the pilgrims and of Kurtz. He admits that there is 'an appeal' to him in the 'fiendish row' of the savages, but he emphasizes his ability to 'meet that truth with his own true stuff—with his own inborn strength.' He says that his auditors cannot understand the temptations to which Kuriz was subjected because they are

surrounded by external sanctions—policemen, kind neighbours, public opinion : 'These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness.' What is this innate strength that Marlow claims to have and that is missing in the others, making them hollow men ? It is a biological inheritance of acquired moral characteristics—Conrad was a Lamarckian—that is described quite vividly in 'Youth' when the crew of Liverpool scalawags obey the Captain's absurd order to furl the sails of the burning ship. It wan't professional pride, a sense of duty, or the pay that motivated them :

> 'No; it was something in them, something inborn and subtle and everlasting. I don't say positively that the crew of a French or German merchantman wouldn't have done it, but I doubt whether it would have been done in the same way. There was a completeness in it, something solid like a principle, and masterful like an instinct—a disclosure of something secret—of that hidden something, that gift of good or evil that makes racial difference, that shapes the fate of nations.'

Because the British Marlow possesses the inborn strength that enables him to 'look on without a wink,' he feels vastly superior to the hollow, hybrid Kurtz, who has been claimed by the 'powers of darkness.' Why, then, does he also feel inferior to Kurtz, whom he regards as a 'remarkable man'? Kurtz represnts not simply the dangers of an atavism to which Marlow does not succumb, but also the appeal of a romantic dream of individual glory to which Marlow has proved to be vulnerable. Kurtz is great in that he followed such a dream to the end, but everything he stands for must be severely condemned, as he condemns it himself in his final words, because the consequences have been so horrible. Marlow sets off for the Congo as a romantic who is out to prove his personal strength. He returns a chastened, repressed romantic who is well on the way to becoming the Marlow of ***Lord Jim,*** an humble, disenchanted man who does his duty in his obscure place in the ranks. He is bitter at having had to give up his dreams of

personal glory ; but he sees them as terribly dangerous, both to himself and to others; and he redefines the human project in purely communal terms :

> The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells, too, by Jovel—breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don't you see ? your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of *unostentatious* holes to bury the stuff in—your power of devotion, not to yourself. but to an obscure, back-breaking business. (My italics)

Marlow lies to the Intended in part out of a loyalty to Kurtz that is similar to his loyalty to Jim, another pursuer of personal glory who becomes lord of a primitive people. But his lie is also an act of civil virtue : he heroically keeps back the 'conquering darkness' for 'the salvation of another soul.' Though he and presumably his auditors are men enough to face the darkness, women 'are out of it—should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse.' Conrad is, after all, a Victorian. Marlow feels that 'there is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies—which is exactly what [he] hate[s] and detest[s] in the world'; but he is skeptical of man's—or at least woman's—ability to live with the truth; and so he calls upon his power of devotion to keep Kurtz's fiance from being contaminated by the sights and sounds that he has had to put up with. But he is profoundly uncomfortable with the paradox that he must betray his values in order to preserve them. Civilization, which provides our only shelter from the monstrous in nature and the primitive in man, is, like the Intended's belief in Kurtz, a 'great and saving illusion' that is based upon the 'obscure' and 'back-breaking business' of burying the truth. Marlow tells his story, in part, to escape from his false position.

Institute for the Psychological Study
of the Arts
University of Florida
Gainesville (U.S.A.)

Usha Pathania

SELF-CONCEPT AND INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION IN THE FICTION OF ANITA DESAI AND MARGARET LAURENCE

the eye sees not itself,
But by reflection, by some other things.

Julius Caesar, I. ii. 52

Self-concept, an important variable in personality dynamics, has traditionally been assigned an important place in formulations regarding the social nature of the individual and the character of social interaction. On the one hand, self-concept is the product of interaction and is subject to continuous revision according to the exigencies of interaction, on the other, it is a determiner of the cause of interaction. Psychologists, of all ages and schools of thought, believe in the reality of subjective life and the fact that human interaction at every level—from the most intimate to the most superificial—is nothing but an expression of the inner emotional needs of the interacting individuals. Carl Rogers defines human interaction as a way of self-disclosure and argues that, 'Man lives essentially in his own personal and subjective world and even his objective functioning is the result of subjective purpose and subjective choice'.[1]

The centrality of self in social interaction has been discussed and established not only by psychologists, sociologists philosophers and educationists, but by contemperary novelists also. Anita Desai and Margaret Laurence believe that one's capacity to adapt to new circumstances or dissimilar personalities, and the ability to interact warmly with others is closely linked with one's self-image, and the extent to which this self is experienced as worthy of esteem, The protagonists of both Desai and Laurence go through life in a terrifying

isolation because they find it hard to reconcile the demands of their psyche with those of the world around them. More specifically they are confronted with the stupendous task of defining their relation to themselves and to their immediate human context. They find it difficult to adjust to diversity when contextual conditions require behavioural responses to fall within a range of acceptable pattern.

Both Anita Desai and Margaret Laurence are fascinated by the psychic lives of their central characters and the fact that human interaction is guided and modulated by internal processes. A close reading of their works reveals that the earliest and the most general aspects of self-concept develop in interaction between the child and the parental figure. Their central characters, by and large, have strange childhood. When their experiences and interactions during this formative period combine with their congenital hypersensitivity they develop a negative self-image. Experience of self as negative and unworthy of love and esteem generates psychic states of fear, guilt, anger, anxiety, helplessness and depression. Their fragmented psyche forces them to view this world as a hostile place; a trap where their individuality is endangered. The unwholesome domestic environment and the peculiar filial bonds—sometimes characterised by pampering and sometimes by emotional deprivation—rob their protagonists of the ability to interact warmly and reduce dissonance in their adult relationships.

In *Cry, The Peacock,* Anita Desai focuses on the degenerative and crippling effect of an overindulgent parental attention on one's capacity for proper self-evaluation. For Maya's father, loving a child means creating a world of sugar and candy; flowers and fairies; moonlight and starstudded dreams. All reality is shut out to her. Maya remembers that at her father's place: 'The world is like a toy specially made for me, painted in my favourite colours, set moving to my favourite tunes'[2]. Her father's undue concern for her happiness gradually removes Maya away from reality, where the unique and the ndividual stand in a happy and bewitching contrast with the

commonplace and the stereotype. In her adult years Maya becomes painfully aware of this limitation : 'Yes, now that I go over it in my mind, my childhood was one in which much was excluded : which grew steadily more restricted, unnatural even, and in which I lived as a toy princess in a toy world' (*C P.*, p.89*)*. This overprotective attitude of her father does not let her arrive at a proper self-evaluation and a proper self-image. She is projected as an adorable being, whose whims and fancies are to be taken care of by those who claim to love her. Gautama is, naturally, unhappy over the way she had been brought up. His angry outbursts reveal that he fixes the responsibility for her unreasonable expectations from him on her father :

> Life is a fairy tale to you still. What have you learnt of the realities ?, The realities of common human existence, not love and romance, but living and dying and working all that constitutes life for the ordinary man. You won't find it in your picture books. And that was all you were ever shown picture books. What wickedness to raise a child like that. (*C. P.*, p. 115)

After Maya's marriage with Gautama she enters a different world altogether. The aim of human life for the members in Gautama's household is not an epicurean delight in the pleasures of the senses. They are ontologically secure people with a strong internal locus of control. Here frank and objective evaluation of each other does not mean the snapping of the bond between the parents and children. Gautama's mother loves her children no doubt, but she does not expect subjugation from them. They suffer from no inhibitions, no anxieties and express themselves without the fear of being misunderstood. This impresses as well as confuses Maya. Her mother-in-law is neither an idealist, nor a perfectionist, nor a romantic yet, Maya feels 'her father paling into insignificance in front of this small statured somewhat sloppy woman, who is endowed with the marvellous capacity of indifference to everything that was not vital, immediate and present' (*C.P.*, p. 162). This puzzles Maya : 'I did not know how they could do this, but somehow it had to be done. They were sane people, sane, sane and yet so much more human' (*C.P.*, p. 162).

An individual's concept of self-worth gets crystallized through regularized and recurrent responses of others. An unabated flow of positive response makes one feel secure, happy and fulfilled. The moment yawning gaps become visible between the cognized self and the ideal self, self-evaluation conflicts are generated. This is what happens in the case of Maya. The natural outcome of this conflict is that the disintegrated, neurotic and fearful Maya loses control over her environment and fails to relate herself meaningfully to Gautama.

In *Voices in tha City*, it is interesting to explore the childhood experiences and nature of the primary ties in the case of Nirode, Monisha and Amla. References to Nirode's childhood reveal that the personal prejudices of his parents against each other, their open hostility and contempt, and his father's frank preference for Arun adversely affect his psyche. The novel opens with a comparison between Nirode's failure and Arun's bright success. Arun is leaving for England, for higher studies, whereas Nirode decides to live in 'shadows, silence, stillness'[4]. His plight reminds one of William James' view of the self-concept of a person who has made one blunder after another. Accerding to him such 'a person is liable to grow all sicklied over with self-distrust and to shrink from trials with which his powers cannot really cope'[5].

No wonder Nirode develops a low self-esteem and finds it difficult to interact with any body for long. Deprived of self-confidence, he makes failure his creed. As a rootless drifter he keeps on changing his goals, one after another. His strong obsession with failure is revealed in his conversation with David: 'I want to fail quickly. Then I want to see if I have the spirit to start moving again, towards my next failure...fall to the bottom. I want to get there without that meaningless climbing. I want to descend quickly' (*V.C.*, p. 15). Certain unpleasant and undesireable events of his childhood fill Nirode with feelings of self-dislike and inferiority also. The dynamics of inferiority feelings are very complex. A subtle form of self-dislike is the tendency towards self-criticism. After bidding farewell to Arun, Nirode broods over his unfortunate boyhood.

Had he been a promising lad, instead of Arun he would have sailed to England for higher studies : 'It might have been he, he knew that, had he not, as a child, an emotional and disorderly schoolboy, fallen from his horse and declared to his father, through tears, that he hated horses, sports, and would never ride again ..If Arun had not ridden like a prince, captained the cricket team and won top honours in all examinations' (*V,C.*,p.7).

After his father's death his mother's obvious delight in the company of Major Chadha also damages his self-esteem, Alienation from his mother results in his alienation from society as well. He drifts from one person to another experiencing, all the while, an emptiness and meaninglessness in life. This despair turns him careless towards himself : bitter, cruel and rapacious towards others. Professor Bose is aware of this unhappy change in him. He is frightened by the planeness of Nirode's face and thinks : 'The boy was clever in those early days of his in Calcutta...He had been aggressive then too, but not rapacious and cruel The boy ought to go home. He had a home, the Professor had heard of it, but there had been a rift and Nirode had gone astray. Adrift in the city of Calcutta' (*V.C.*, p.17).

Nirode's elder sister Monisha's predicament is all the more sad. In her case also, the pernicious home environment robs her of the feelings of positive self-appraisal and proper self-image. Originally, in childhood, the basic hatred was brought into existence by certain people, but later, it becomes part of her personality structure and objects play a secondary role. Individuals with high self-appraisal and self-esteem are generally more tolerant and full of love, understanding and trust. After meeting David, Monisha becomes painfully aware of this deficiency in herself. She discovers an enviable quality of love in David : 'And I discover that it is the absence of it that makes us, brother and sister, such abject rebels, such craven tragedians. In place of this love that suffuses the white face of this waif, we possess a darker, fiercer element—fear. I mean by love only an awake condition of conscience. We fear

this and avoid it, and so step backwards from love and allow our hands to drop from her warm flanks, unable to respond because we are frozen with distrust' (*V.C.*, pp. 135–36).

Positive self-esteem is directly associated with accepting other people as they are. People with a positive self-regard view the world as a more congenial place and find their fellow beings more acceptable than people characterised by feelings of self-rejection. Monisha considers the women in Jiban's family as inferior to her. They are preoccupied with cutting vegetables, serving food, brushing small children's hair. She finds them spending their lives like birds in cages without any trace of aggressiveness of identity. All her efforts, therefore, are directed towards 'remaining aloof, apart and enclosed within myself beyond their reach' (*V.C.*, p. 238). She thinks herself to be superior to them because when, after getting tired of their mundane activities during the day, they are sleeping, she creeps up the top-most flight of stairs on to the roof to enjoy the splendour of stars and solitude :

> I think that what separates me from this family, heaving and rolling beneath me in its dreams of account books, pensions, examination results...relations, marriages, births and property...is the fact that not one of them ever sleeps out under the stars at night. They have indoor minds, starless and darkless (*V.C.*, p.139)

Like Maya, Monisha also suffers from the conflict between the real and the ideal self. She confronts her real self when she listens to the strolling musicians, and fails to understand their song and the emotional response it elicits from other ordinary spectators. Consequently, her pride in being different from others turns into the most potent cause of her agony 'Everyone in that afternoon audience seemed intensely capable of responding to passion with passion, to sorrow with sorrow. Monisha alone stood apart, unnaturally cool, too perfectly aloof, too inviolably whole and alone and apart' (*V.C.*, p. 238). She realizes that being different has been her undoing. 'What a waste ! what a waste it has been, this life enclosed in a locked container merely as an observer and so imperfect, so

handicapped an observer at that....unable to understand a single word or gesture each one of which moves my companions nearly to tears' (*V.C.*, p. 238).

In *Where Shall We Go This Summer*? again the protagonist, a woman of over forty years, with four children and a successful, responsible husband, displays distinct symptoms of a negative self-image. Lack of faith in her own self compels her to question everything and everyone around her. The strange and unusual nature of her childhood environment and interaction obstructs her way to a proper self-evaluation. Her uneasy relationship with her father, who indulged in clandestine activities while parading as a saint at the same time, also contributes towards her developing a low self-esteem. Things are made worse by the fact that even her sister Rekha, who is more talented than her and openly enjoys greater attention from her father, is completely indifferent to Sita. The two sisters do not enjoy a normal, wholesome and relaxed relationship between two siblings where dreams and ideals, fears and anxieties are shared. The mystery about her mother and the provocative information given to her by her brother Jivan make her full of doubt and suspicion. These doubts, misgivings and feelings of inadequacy get neatly stacked in her psyche. Long after everything is over at the island and she lives in Bombay, she feels dissatisfied with the people around her. Like Monisha she fails to accept them as they are. In her self-opinionated manner she thinks that a great majority of people lead lives full of boredom. 'They are animals—nothing but appetite and sex. Only food, sex, money matters. Animals'[6]. Nobody pleases Sita, nobody comes upto her expectations. She does not get used to anyone. When, after marriage, she goes to live with her husband's family she finds them intolerable. Living in their age-rotten flats they appear to be leading an inauthentic existence. Their 'sub human placidity, calmness and sluggishness' infuriates her. To make her feel happy, Raman arranges for a flat of their own where they could live all by themselves. But even this arrangement hardly improves the situation as people continue to

come and be unacceptable to her. Adaptability or adjustment is alien to her, nor is she willing to make any compromise.

In the fictional world of Margaret Laurence also, one finds fearful and anxious protagonists striving hard for achieving harmony and fulfilment in their interaction with others. While reading her novels one feels that the joy of living is possible for those, who not only understand themselves but have some knowledge of their human context also. 'How can one person know another ?' Hagar Shipley, the protagonist of *The Stone Angel*, constantly asks: but 'How can a person know himself ?' is the deeper question that Margaret Laurence asks by implication. Even the first of these questions is doubleedged. Hagar is not really known by the people around her, nor can Hagar really know them. Only late in her life, when she sees more clearly her relationship with her sons—the favourite flamboyant John and the solidly middle class Marvin with whom she lives—she comes really to see her true self, and hence to see and know her role in life.

In *The Stone Angel*, while exploring the implications of a grandiose self, Laurence highlights the fact that pride in one's uniqueness and false self-esteem deprives one of gratifying relationships with one's fellow beings. Magnificent self-concept erects insurmountable barriers between the spouses too. Hagar is pround of being fastidious : 'There is no one like me in this world'[7]. Like Monisha and Sita she too, cannot accept people as they are and finds it difficult to appreciate and accomodate others. She wants to outdo everybody by doing something unconventional and unique. To her father's remark 'There is not a decent girl in this town who would wed without her family's consent. It is not done'. 'It will be done by me' she said, drunk with exhilaration at her daring (*S.A.*, p.49).

Hagar is the one, who imposes her concepts on everybody but betrays no signs of resilience; no desire to open herself to different taste, different ideas and attitudes. When she is fully convinced that she cannot convert Bram to her concept of proper living, she takes her younger son John along with her

and goes out to live independently. For years together she stubbornly refuses to communicate in any manner with her husband or her elder san Marwin. Hagar all along thinks of herself as an autonomous self. She is convinced that she can live all alone at the age of ninety also. In Marwin's house she cribbs about the lack of priyacy and even in the hospital she wants to have a private or at the most, a semi-private room. However, this could not be arranged and she had to share the room with many other patients. Her experience in that crowded ward of the hospital brings to her the awareness that the human context is absolutely essential for human beings. Nobody can live in a vacuum. Sharing and understanding, tolerance and compromise alone can give one happiness and a sense of fulfilment. When, one day, her son Marwin tells her that she will be moved to a semi-private she feels 'a quick sense of loss' as though she had been cast out. She feels the betraying tears. In shame she blinks them away but he's seen and asks: 'What is the matter? you said you could not sleep'. 'yes, yes, I know, I've got more used to it that is all. It was'nt necessary to change' (*S.A.*, p.280).

Hagar becomes aware not only of the limitations of her own self but also realizes, for the first time in her long life, that even other people have some limitations. She feels kindly disposed towards her daughter-in-law, Dorris. 'She can't sit here by my bed all night' (*S.A.*, p. 285). Nevertheless, it requires lot of moral courage to remove the cloak of the grandiose self in one single stroke. Even in the hospital she gets pleasure in humiliating Dorris. When Dorris asks her about her meeting with Mr. Troy, in her characteristic style, Hagar says, 'we did'nt have a single solitary thing to say to one another'. Then she bites her lip, looks away and feels ashamed, but won't take back the words thinking 'what business is it of her any way ?' But an urge to face the truth, to tell the truth overpowers her and she feels a touchiness rising, and ultimately tells Dorris: 'I did'nt speak the truth. He sang for me, and it did me good'. (*S.A.*, p. 293).

Towards the end true wisdom dawns on her. She realizes that her pride has led her to an emotional wilderness. Sadly she muses that her main aim in life was to enjoy it, but her own concept of proper appearances always came in her way :

> This knowing comes upon me so forcefully, so shatteringly, and with such a bitterness as I have never felt before. I must always, always have wanted that—simply to rejoice. How is it I never, I never could ?...Every good joy I might have held in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a stands-till by some brake of proper appearances—oh, proper to whom ? when did I ever speak the heart's truth. (*S.A.*, p. 292)

This poignant and insightful delineation of Hagar's inner conflicts reminds one of William James's statement that, 'To give up pretensions is as blessed a relief as to get them gratified : and where disappointment is incessant and the struggle unending, this is what man will always do.'[8] At long last, a moment comes when Hagar Shipley gathers the courage to throw away all pretensions and faces her real self—proud, fearful and conflict-ridden: 'Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched' (*S.A.*, p. 292). When her real self—alone, anxious and fearful—rises to the surface, her shell of apparent self-sufficiency crumbles down. Despite her best efforts she blurts out—'I'm frightened Marwin, I'm so frightened'. She thinks it to be shameful but at the same time she finds that 'it is a relief to speak' (*S.A.*, p. 303).

In *A Jest of God* Rachel Cameron, is locked in the role of a spinster school teacher caring for her aging, ailing and psychologically disintegrated mother. There is a wide discrspancy between what Rachel is in her visible public life, how she deals with and appears to others, and what she really thinks and feels. At the age of thirtyfour, living with her widowed mother, she is almost frantically searching for the meaning of her existence, so that she can make an adequate response to life. Like Anita Desai's Nirode and Monisha, Rachel and

Stacey (her sister and the protagonist of *The Fire Dwellers*) are victims of a pernicious home environment and an unwholesome filial interaction. Their parents never thought of camouflaging their temperamental polarities and obvious dislike of each other's whims and habits. Neill Cameron confines himself to his funeral parlour and enjoys the constant company of his bottle. The two daughters are not allowed to enter the parlour and hence are deprived of any interaction with their father. Mrs. Cameron, Rachel's mother is an egocentric hypochondriac bound to her fears and her pills. Her pleasures in life are the small vanities of high heels, fussy blue rinsed curls, and her bridge parties. These and the dependence and servitude of her daughter are all she has, and to them she clings with the help of every ploy that cunning or self-indulgence and a real and desperate need can suggest. Rachel is neurotic and egocentric too. She and her mother are both children, each unwilling and unable to grow up and leave the other free, each battering on the weakness of the other.

As any other victim of a negative self-concept Rachel is desperately afraid of the shadow fears and fantasies of her own imagination. She is terribly oppressed with one absorbing anguish, 'what will become of me'[9]? Everything is intolerably heightened for her and everything is suspect. She is all raw nerve ends with self-doubt springing from every situation. As a child her father's occupation always meant embarrassment and fear. She admits, 'All I could think of, then, was the embarrassment of being the daughter of someone with his stock-in-trade' (*J.G.*, p. 13). As an adult she feels unhappy over the lack of money that did not allow her to finish university and forced her to come to Manawaka to support her mother. At the present crisis point in her life, when she is groaning under the weight of a negative self-image and nothing but loneliness seems to be her lot, she meets Nick. Her fleeting affair with Nick is not a deep emotional attachment, rather it is a last ditch effort to save herself from the shame of eternal spinsterhood. 'Nick doesn't

know—he doesn't know how I've wanted to lose that reputation, to divest myself of it as though it were an oxen yoke, to burn it to ashes and scatter them to the wind' (*J.G.*, p. 92).

Individuals with low self-esteem depend on others for a sense of identity, well-being and happiness. Rachel articulates it in very unambiguous terms: 'I'm not afraid when I'm with him, but when I'm not with him it seems to return (*J.G.*p.162). They do not have the confidence to take control of their life and its complicated affairs. Their tendency to lean heavily on the other person and expect him to solve all their conflicts comes in the way of abiding harmonious relationships. The moment Nick realizes that Rachel has become dependent on him for the gratification of all her needs, he withdraws himself. 'Not a muscular withdrawl. Something different, something unsuspected' (*J.G.*,p. 148). In a very subtle and discreet manner he articulates the limits of human relationships: 'Darling', he says, 'I'm not God. I can't solve anything' (*J.G.*,p. 148).

In *The Fire Dwellers* wife and mother, almost forty, Stacey MacAindra is desperately searching for new love. She tries to take the edge off desperation with another gin and tonic. She is sure her husband has found a lover. Her doubts, misgiving and apprehensions are the outcome of her having a negative self-image. Her small town background and inadequate education are enough to make her feel inferior in a city like Vancouver: 'Nearly twenty years here, and I don't know the place at all or feel at home. Maybe I wouldn't have, in any city. I never like to say so to anybody. I always think they might think it's obvious I'm from a small town'.[10] The novel begins with her anxiety about her deteriorating physical apperance. 'Sitting on the bed, Stacey sees mirrored her own self in the present flesh insufficiently concealed by a short mauve nylon nightgown with the ribbon now gone from the neckline' and one shoulder frill yanked off by some kid or other' (*F.D.*,p.2). These inadequacies haunt her day in and day out. She contemplates: everything would be all right if only I was better educated, I mean, if I were, or if I were beautiful, Okay, that is asking too much. Let's say if I took off ten or so pounds.

Listen, Stacey, at thirtynine, after four kids you can't expect to look like a sylph' (*F.D.*,p.2) Burdened with a low self-esteem and feelings of self-rejection, she is unsure of herself and her relationship with her husband. When he is late in returning home she imagines him enjoying his dinner somewhere else in the company of a more pleasant-looking person. 'He won't. Would you, in his place? No come on, be practical, Mac won't be here' (*F.D.*,p.120).

Self-concept is not something permanent and unchangeable. When the concept of self is changed, alteration in behaviour is a predictable concomitant, says Carl Rogers.[11] Stacey's fling with Luke restores her faith in herself: 'Well, nobody makes loves with someone who absolutely repels them he could'nt have, if he'd felt that way' (*F.D.*,p.183). Though she admits that her sex adventure with Luke was nothing more than a 'Shameless, shameful attempt at rejuvenation' (*F.D.*,p. 219) yet it makes 'her feel like about a million dollar or so'(*F.D.*,p. 184). That someone can still find her desirable gives such a tremendous boost to her self-image that she finds herself infused with courage to face life with all its demands and frustrations. She feels strong enough to face and tackle the situations that 'will be pure bloody murder'. Purged of all inner conflicts she understands herself better, and appreciates Mac in a way she has not for years. 'Old Mac has to pretend he's absolutely strong and now I see, he doesn't believe a word of it and never has. Yet, he is a whole lot stronger than he thinks he is' and so is Stacey.

To reiterate the main arguements one can say that both Anita Desai and Margaret Laurence regard family as the psychic agency of society. In their fictional world self-concept emerges out of the interaction within the family fold, and places considerable implications on human experience, since it involves a search for meaning of life itself. In a subtle but decisive manner the self-image structures the ways in which their protagonists perceive and orient themselves within their social environment. In the ultimate analysis self-concept is a kind of homeostasis at a higher psychological level : a gestalt,

a configuration in which the alteration of one minor aspect completely alters the whole pattern. The discussion has further revealed that in the background of any neurotic or psychotic sufferer is the tendency to avoid self-evaluation conflicts by living a cosmetic life of pretence.

Department of English
D.C.C., Himachal Pradesh University
Shimla

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Nandita Sinha

ELIOT'S 'PRUFROCK' AND THE ABSURD

While the bleakness and sterility of the world of Eliot's early poems have been commented upon, its marked affinity to the existential emptiness of the Absurdist vision has not received sufficient notice. Absurdist drama portrays the senselessness and irrationality of human action, the horrifying despair that follows man's realization of the purposelessness of his existence, the feelings of loneliness and alienation, the frustration at the impossibility of communication between people even though each individual is trapped in a vacuum of words, the sense of futility at the decay and disillusionment of old age and the inevitibility of death—ideas which pervade Eliot's early poems as they do the works of Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard. The sense of helplessness and uncertainty so basic to Absurd theatre is at the background of 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' as Prufrock struggles to orient himself to a puzzling and often frightening existence. He is like the characters in Absurd plays whose motives and actions remain incomprehensible largely because they appear trapped in a world they can neither fully understand nor control. The arbitrariness and irrationality of a dream world inhabit Prufrock's consciousness, a nightmarish world in which his very hold on reality seems to be slipping away, in which the streets seem to be following with 'insidious intent' and the evening fog takes on the hallucinatory image of a cat. This sense of imminent dissolution into chaos and disorder is a marked feature of absurd plays and is given an objective representation in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* with Pozzo's successive and inexplicable loss of his pipe, watch and vaporizer.

In the face of this dissolution, the rational self holds desperately to images from the outer world as a means of stabilizing its consciousness of reality. Thus mundane objects

like toast and tea, pillows, shawls ad bracelets serve the same purpose as the hats and boots, carrots and radishes in Beckett's play—they provide a tenuous link with a world that otherwise appears to be disintegrating.

[Prufrock's journey to the room where the women 'come and go' parallels the paradox in *Waiting for Godot*

> Estragon : Well, shall we go ?
> Vladimir : Yes, let's go.
> They do not move.] (p.54)

For Prufrock journeys only in the physical sense. Mentally, he is as firmly tied down to his hesitancy and fear in posing the 'overwhelming question' as Vladimir and Estragon are tied to the idea of waiting. For him, as for Beckett's duo, the functioning of the will power is suspended. 'Nothing to be done' characterizes the attitudes of both Beckett's protagonists and Prufrock. In fact, Prufrock's incantatory repetition of 'There will be time' is a desperate attempt to ward off the reality that he is reluctant to face—his endless ruminations become a means of postponing thought. It is a kind of desperate game that he plays with himself—of the same sort that Vladimir and Estragon play when they quarrel and make up, 'do' the tree and compete at abusing each other. As Estragon explains—'we are incapable of keeping silent It's so we won't think' (p.62).

Prufrock's litany 'I have known them all already, known them all' encloses him in a safe world of monotony and ennui. When he ventures to break out from the realm of thought (And indeed there will be time/To wonder 'Do I dare and 'Do I dare?') to the realm of intended action (Shall I say), he breaks out of habit and routine into what Beckett terms the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being'[3]. Vladimir in *Godot* says : 'we have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. (He listens.) But habit is a great deadener'.) (p.91) For him, as for Prufrock, these moments are tenuous, fleeting, unbearable, because they expose man to the full

reality of being. Vladimir concludes : 'I can't go on. (Pause) what have I said.' (He goes feverishly to and fro) (p.91). One such moment exposes to Prufrock the reality of his existence when he sees himself as just another of the 'lonely men in shirt sleeves leaning out of windows?'. The horror of loneliness is perceived as a threat from which Prufrock escapes into the safe haven of a mindless subhuman world of the crab 'scuttling across the floors of silent seas'.

This aspect of Prufrock's existence parallels the world of loneliness and despair in the plays of another playwright in the Absurd tradition—Harold Pinter, with a shift in the basic metaphor. The room which is the recurrent motif in Pinter's plays is the closed arena of Prufrock's consciousness. The world outside, which Pinter calls 'frightening' is the room where the women 'come and go'. When the outer world collides with the inner, it produces dread, a sense of menace. Thus Prufrock sees himself as an insect wriggling on a pin, his inner self exposed to insensitive, calculated dissection by hostile eyes.

Prufrock tries to ward off the horror of the invevitable (I grow old I grow old) by measuring out his life with coffee spoons or by pretending to an identity which is different from his real one by dressing up as a dandy, but his divided self fails to achieve the liberating wholenes which he yearns for. Imprisoned by his own subjectivism, Prufrock finds to his despair that communication serves merely to erect barriers to real uderstanding. The failure of language to communicate meaning is one of the recurrent themes of Absurd drama as in Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*. In the garbled conglomeration of words that is Lucky's speech in *Waiting for Godot* we witness in Rosette Lamont's words 'the ritual dismemberment of the cultivated mind'. She further elaborates: 'Here a loss of faith in the adequacy of language is accompanied by an equal mistrust of axiomatic procedures used to establish a chain of meaning'. 'It is impossible to say just what I mean', says Prufrock, preferring to remain in the realm of his mental indecisions, visions and revisions. Meaninglessness is what

arouses his despair, the spiritual indifference that he encounters. His only defence is to adopt a gesture from a more significant narrative than his own. These gestures are all gestures in the face of death. Each is a pose preserved because someone has extorted significance from a confrontation with death, whether Hamlet, Lazarus or John the Baptist. But the allusions serve only to heighten the 'absurdity' of Prufrock's situation. This deflating process, when the language of heroism is transposed onto inanity and despair, serves a similar purpose to the constant undermining of language that we notice in Beckett's play, the lyrical juxtaposed with the coarse, one statement of fact followed immediately by another doubting its validity the general effect enhancing the sense of irrationality and uncertainty. The world of meaningful heroism has degenerated into farce. The rope with which Vladimir and Estragon try to hang themselves breaks and the latter's trousers fall down. Prufrocks is aware that though his necktie mounts firmly to his chin, he has none of the strength needed to force the moment to its crisis. He is too keenly aware of the yawning gap between his grandiloquent 'I shall tell you all' and his listener's dismissive 'That is not what I meant at all.'

This longing for meaning encompasses the 'bewildered innocents' of another play in the Absurd tradition—Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Rosencrantz looks back to a time when 'There were answers to everything'. 'I haven't forgotten—how I used to remember my own name—and yours, oh yes! There were answers everywhere you looked. There was no question about it—people knew who I was and if they didn't they asked and I told them'.[5] The yearning for a lost past comes over Estragon too;. 'I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Coloured they were. Very pretty' (p.12). But the past is irrevocably lost and the present holds only a realization of what Eliot calls the 'awful separation between potential passion and any actualization possible in life.'

In spite of this the characters of both Beckett's play and Eliot's poem embark on a desperate search for permanence, for

an indentity that will somehow transcend the flux that they are caught up in. That is why Vladimir and Estragon are anxicus to be remembered. Vladimir tells the Boy 'tell him you saw us. (Pause) You did see us, didn't you?' (p,52). They look for stability in their hoped for encounter with Godot. In a smaller way, they look for it in some meaningful action. Vladimir responds to Pozzo's call for help with these words; 'Let us not waste our time in idle discourse. (Pause. Vehemently). Let us do something, while we have the chance. It is not everyday that we are needed.' (p.79) But the hope of positive action is an illusion. Vladimir is forced to confrcnt the horrifying truth : 'In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!' (p.81) Prufrock searches for a life somehow richer than one measured out by coffee spoons. Being denied this, he escapes in the imagination into a fantasy world of mermaids wreathed in seaweed red and brown, even as he accepts the fact that they will not sing to him.

This is the tragic vision behind both Eliot's poem and Beckett's play. And it is mirrored in the structure of both. The interior monologue technique allows for a representation of the shifting arena of Prufrock's consciousness. The ironical juxtaposition of free-floating images and allusions serve to image a world without definiteness. It is, in fact, a poetic rendering of an absurd world that lacks order and purpose, functioning much in the same way that Beckett's circular structure does in *Waiting for Godot*. We are left with an impression of endless repetitiveness. For both Prufrock and Beckett's pair are represented in the tradition which sees man as little more than a clown, funny as well as pathetic, bumbling and fumbling along the incomprehensible maze that is human existence.

Department of English
Mata Sundri College
University of Delhi
New Delhi

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Neeta Joshi

INTIMATIONS OF MORTALITY IN THE POEMS OF DYLAN THOMAS

As in the works of other Romantic poets, from Shakespeare to Keats, a distinct awareness of transience and mortality pervades many of Dylan Thomas's poems. The importance of his poetry lies pre-eminently in his treatment of this time-worn theme in an exceedingly original and unexpected manner. He sang of the elemental mysteries of creation and destruction. His sonorous 'rich fruity old port wine of a voice'[1] never failed in breathing new life into his poems which celebrated the inevitability of birth and death. It was this fact of mortality—the fate shared by all creation—that resulted in his compassionate identification of man with the natural world in 'The Force that through the green fuse drives the flower':

> The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
> Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
> Is my destroyer.
> And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose.
> My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.[2]

The flowing movement of the first two lines and the falling cadence of the short line in the middle of the stanza that rises again in the next two lines serves to emphasize the ebb and flow of life, the unceasing rhythm of temporal processes which link man inextricably with nature. This rhythmic movement is repeated in the next three stanzas with the aid of parallel constructions. The 'crooked rose' is reminiscent of Blake's 'The Sick Rose,' while 'My youth is bent by the same wintry fever' calls Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' to mind. Both Thomas and Keats were in their own ways intensely conscious of impermanence and the fleeting quality of time, a feeling which was perhaps accentuated by their belief that they did not have long to live.

Seeing his solipsistic poetry less as a form of communication than as a mode of self-expression and self-discovery, Thomas ranged through the entire gamut of elemental human experience Awesomely spanning the whole of creation in his highly imaginative manner, he not only succeeded in discovering and expressing his emoticns and apprehensions in the process but was also able to gain an intuitive insight into the transitory nature of human existence as well. He realized, for instance, that the seeds of destruction are sown as early as those of conception. The first of the 'Altarwise by owl-light' sonnet sequence commences enigmatically :

> Altarwise by owl-light in the half-way house
> The gentleman lay graveward with his furies;
> Abaddon in the hangnail cracked from Adam,
> And, from his fork, a dog among the fairies,
> The atlas-eater with a jaw for news,
> Bit out the mandrake with to-morrow's scream.
> Then; penny-eyed, that gentleman of wounds,
> Old cock from nowheres and the heaven's egg,
> With bones unbuttoned to the half-way winds,
> Hatched from the windy salvage on one leg,
> Scraped at my cradle in a walking word
> That night of time under the Christward shelter :
> I am the long world's gentleman, he said,
> And share my bed with Capricorn and Cancer.

'The hero of the poem,' says Elder Olson 'is a man who, aware of his sinfulness and mortality, faces the prospect of death. In Sonnet I, seeing the change of seasons reflected in the stars themselves, he feels that all nature is mortal; the very heavens symbolize the transit of all things to death; death claims the seed before conception, even, because it is mortal and must exist in time.'[3] Indeed, the fate of the gentleman lying graveward is shared by Thomas who is also a victim of time and subject to death.

One of Thomas's earliest published poems, the first draft of which was written as early as August 24th, 1933, begins :

> Thinking of death, I sit and watch the park
> Where children play in all their innocence,
> And matrons on the littered grass,
> Absorb the daily sun.[4]

These lines give us an indication of the extent of his obsession with death so early in life. That the awareness of death grew stronger and more real with every passing year is amply evident from his later poems.

'The boys of summer in their ruin' (p. 1) in the poem 'I see the boys of summer' are as oblivious of the evil designs of time as the 'wild boys innocent as strawberries' (p. 112) of 'The Hunchback in the Park.' These boys of summer forced to leave their home in Wales for London, thrown out of work by the depression of 1931, are heading for ruin. They are not only the victims of their circumstances but victims of time as well which 'has set its maggot on their track' (p. 50). The maggot signifies destruction, downfall, decay, and death. In the first stanza we find a conflict among images of fertility and sterility, summer and winter, creation and destruction, life and death, which inevitably proceed together, each being implicit in the other :

> I see the boys of summer in their ruin
> Lay the gold tithings barren,
> Setting no store by harvest, freeze the soils;
> There in their heat the winter floods
> Of frozen loves they fetch their girls,
> And drown the cargoed apples in their tides.
>
> These boys of light are curdlers in their folly,
> Sour the boiling honey;... (p. 1)

'Hold hard, these ancient minutes in the cuckoo's month' is another poem whose theme recalls 'I see the boys of summer.' Here again we have a poem about time and the fleeting seasons :

> Hold hard, these ancient minutes in the cuckoo's month,
> Under the lank, fourth folly on Glamorgon's hill,
> As the green blooms ride upward, to the drive of time;
> Time, in a folly's rider, like a country man
> Over the vault of ridings with his hound at heel,
> Drives forth my men, my children, from the hanging south.
> (p. 49)

Thomas exhorts the children of spring to treasure the 'ancient minutes' of the blossoming season, to make the most of time, and to gather their rosebuds while they may for spring is giving

way to summer and then winter will set in. Time which drives the 'green blooms' through the fuse also withers them. It is instrumental in bringing about not only fresh new life but death and decay as well. Time is pictured as a hunter with 'his hound at heel' relentlessly tracking down the 'country children' (p. 49) who become his quarry. The descending hawk in this poem—as in 'Over Sir John's Hill' swooping on the unsuspecting 'falling birds'—is symbolic of time's inexorable hold over all mortal creatures;

> Hold hard, my country darlings, for a hawk descends,
> Golden Glamorgan straightens, to the falling birds.
> (p. 49)

Even in the womb, in the poem 'Before I knocked', the 'ungotten' (p. 7) liquid has foreknowledge. It is aware of what the future has in store for him, of mortality and impending doom :

> My heart knew love, my belly hunger;
> I smelt the maggot in my stool. (p. 8)

In 'Then was my neophyte', time is pictured as a killer with 'blunt scythe and water blade' (p. 70) trying in vain to console the 'green and unborn and undead' (p. 70) child who concludes, 'I saw time murder me' (p. 70).

In 'Fern Hill' young Dylan running his 'heedless ways' (p. 160) and enjoying himself immensely in his aunt's farm 'unknown/To the burn and turn of time' (p. 137) is given an illusion of permanence :

> Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
> About rhe jilting house and happy as the grass was green,
> The night above the dingle starry.
> Time let me hail and climb
> Golden in the heydays of his eyes,
> And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns
> And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
> Trail with daisies and barley
> Down the rivers of the windfall light.
>
> And as I was green and carefree famous among the barns
> About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
> In the sun that is young once only,
> Time let me play and be

Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold
And the sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams. (p. 159)

The unimpeded rhythm and lilting cadence of these stanzas helps sustain the illusion that the happy-go-lucky child's 'Young and easy' days will last for ever. Yet it is this steady, unceasing rhythmic movement itself which strikes an ominous note by making us aware that time is slowly but surely slipping away. Soon the bewildered child wakes up to find his 'green and carefree' days together with 'the farm forever fled from the childless land' (p.161). The ineffable glory and the mysterious splendour of nature which promised to last forever has vanished never to return. It is time which rules supreme in 'Fern Hill'. The pensive wistfulness of a man above all of 'the unimaginable touch of Time' underlines this poem :

Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
Time held me green and dying
Though I sang in my chains like the sea. (p. 161)

It now strikes the poet that time has always held him captive without his realizing it :

And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows
In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs
Before the children green and golden
Follow him out of grace. (p. 160)

The 'green and golden' existence of childhood soon gives way to the sadness of maturity when the poet accepts the inevitable : 'The voyage to ruin I must run' (p. 172). It is this fact of transience, change, the ephemeral quality of life itself which is continually haunted by the spectre of time and death that permeates many of the 'elaborate arabesques'[5] which he calls his poems.

In one of his later poems 'In Country Sleep' written in 1947, we find Thomas cautioning his Infant daughter :

For ever of all not the wolf in his baaing hood
Nor the turked prince in the ruttish farm, at the rind
And mire of love, but the Thief as meek as the dew. (p. 163)

The 'Thief as meek as the dew' is probably Time or Death 'the gravest ghost' (p. 163) who will paradoxically wake the child from country sleep.

Thomas describes Laugharne's seaside setting in 'poem on his birthday' and views with compassion the drama of death being enacted in nature :

> Under and round him go
> Flounders, gulls, on their cold, dying trails,
> Doing what they are told,
> Curlews aloud in the congered waves
> Work at their ways to death. (p. 170)

In 'Over Sir John's Hill'

> Young
> Green chickens of the bay and bushes cluck, 'dilly, dilly,
> Come let us die.' (p. 168)

Thomas identifies himself with the flounders, gulls, curlews, and the young green chickens of the day, being acutely conscious that like these sea-creatures he too is a 'child of a few hours' (p. 129). Rushworth M. Kidder observes : 'Metaphors for the world surrounding the poet, these animals are the intimations of mortality that suggest the process of death working in life : they are the "sparrows and such who swansing" (sing their swan song) in "Over Sir John's hill", and the "Curlews aloud in the congered waves" that "Work at their ways to death" in "Poem on his birthday."'[6] These chickens of the bay seem to be calling his name and inviting Dylan himself to die with them. Dying even while singing the song of life, God's creatures afford the most concrete intimations of mortality to the poet who becomes aware that nature itself in its various aspects seems to be hinting at the same truth : The summer sun in 'Author's Prologue' rises only to set, 'Seaward the salmon, sucked sun slips' (p. viii), and the day dies, 'This day winding down now/At God speeded summer's end' (p. vii). These fleeting seasons also seem to be signalling in some inexplicable way that death is round the corner, 'the town below lay leaved with October blood' (p. 104). Thomas who believed that both nature and man

are subject to the same temporal processes knows that he must suffer the same fate. The old men singing from newborn lips in 'The Ballad of the Long-legged Bait' seem to provide an answer to Thomas's unspoken question as to how man can free himself from the fetters of time :

> *Time is bearing another son.*
> *Kill Time ! She turns in her pain !*
> *The oak is felled in the acorn*
> *And the hawk in the egg kills the wren.* (p. 155)

Though Thomas perceives that seed and egg are the beginning of death, it also strikes him in the course of his 'voyage to ruin' (p. 172) that it is no more possible to 'kill' time than it is possible to arrest the cyclical processes of nature.

Thomas is conscious that the medium of poetry is itself not enough to triumph over mortality :

> At poor peace I sing
> To you strangers (though song
> Is a burning and crested act,
> The fire of birds in
> The world's turning wood,
> For my sawn, splay sounds),
> Out of these seathumbed laaves
> That will fly and fall
> Like leaves of trees and as soon
> Crumble and undie
> Into the dogdayed night. (pp. vii-viii)

His 'craft or sullen art/Exercised in the still night' (p. 128) can itself lay no claims to immortality and permanence being as transitory, as fragile and perishable, as the leaves of trees and the 'spindrift pages' he writes on :

> Not for the proud man apart
> From the raging moon I write
> On these spindrift pages
> Nor for the towering dead
> With their nightingales and psalms
> But for the lovers, their arms
> Round the griefs of the ages,
> Who pay no praise or wages
> Nor heed my craft or art. (p. 128)

D.R. Howard says : 'Thomas is expressing, with Yeats, a discontent with the transitory world of the senses and yet answering (as Yeats in some measure did in 'Among School Children') that it is only out of the world of flux that one may perceive—and sullenly express—a world of permanence.[7]

Thomas's intense awareness of death is, however, to some extent transcended by what Walford Davies calls 'a kind of celebratory pantheism'.[8] Not only does Thomas affirm the unity of the world of man with that of bird, beast, and flower in the elegy 'A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London' but spans the whole of creation from Genesis to the Apocalypse in one magnificent sweeping movement with the dead child now part of the four elements yet very much a living presence :

> Never until the mankind making
> Bird beast and flower
> Fathering and all humbling darkness
> Tells with silence the last light breaking
> And the still hour
> Is come of the sea tumbling in harness
> And I must enter again the round
> Zion of the water bead
> And the synagogue of the ear of corn
> Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
> Or sow my salt seed
> In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn
> The majesty and burning of the child's death. (p. 101)

Thomas sings of glorious resurrection as another means by which death is transcended as in 'And death shall have no dominion.' Talking of the dead men, he affirms prophetically :

> Though they go mad they shall be sane,
> Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;
> Though lovers be lost love shall not;
> And death shall have no dominion. (p. 68)

Not only do the dead men rise from the sea, in 'Among those Killed in the Dawn Raid was a Man Aged a Hundred', we find that 'the craters of his eyes grew springshoots and fire' (p, 135). 'Springshoots' like the green fuse of nature are symbolic of

temporal resurrection on earth. For every year of this man's life a hundred infants spring, flown by a hundred storks :

> The morning is flying on the wings of his age
> And a hundred storks perch on the sun's right hand. (p. 135)

The sun is not only the agent of life and death but also of renewal. In the poem 'Holy Spring' the sun becomes an image for a new dawn ushering in light and hope which like holy spring renews the bleak wintry world of war and death, 'the morning grows joyful/Out of the woebegone pyre' (p 158) of burning London. The 'woebegone pyre' brings to mind the phoenix which is reincarnated from its own ashes. Though time like a running grave has quickly tracked Thomas down, he sees signs of renewal in nature, he feels 'the pulse of summer in the ice' (p. 1).

Thomas's last volume of poems, *In Country Sleep*, was aimed at overcoming the dread of this ubiquitous presence of death in nature. He concludes the poem 'In Country Sleep' praying for his daughter :

> And you shall wake, from country sleep, this dawn and each first dawn,
> Your faith as deathless as the outcry of the ruled sun. (p. 166)

Thomas becoming mellower with each passing year, yet even more profoundly conscious in 'poem on his birthday' of his impending death 'celebrates and spurns/His driftwood thirty-fifth wind turned age' (p. 170) :

> And freely he goes lost
> In the unknown, famous light of great.
> And fabulous, dear God.

The song of life sung 'with more triumphant faith' wipes away 'the tear of time[5] (p. 26) and drives away the fear of death as Thomas becomes aware

> That the closer I move
> To death, one man through his sundered hulks,
> The louder the sun blooms
> And the tusked, ramshackling sea exults;
> And every wave of the way
> And gale I tackle, the whole world then,
> With more triumphant faith
> Than ever was since the world was said,
> Spins its morning of praise (p. 173)

It is now as he sails out to die that unquestioning, unflinching faith in 'fabulous' God comes to his rescue and assures his triumph over death :

I hear the bouncing hills
Grow larked and greener at berry brown
Fall and the dew larks sing
Taller this thunderclap spring, and how
More spanned with angels ride
The mansouled fiery islands ! Oh,
Holier than their eyes,
And my shining men no more alone
As I sail out to die. (p. 173)

In these last poems Thomas finally succeeds in coming to terms with death. Change, he affirms, is inevitable. The green and golden days cannot be expected to last for ever. 'Lament' succinctly sums up his life-story which is, in a way, the story of every man :

When I was a half of the man I was
And serve me right as the preachers warn,
(Sighed the old ram rod, dying of downfall),
No flailing calf or cat in a flame
Or hickory bull in milky grass
But a black sheep with a crumpled horn,... (p. 175)

With advancing age Thomas becomes aware that he is reduced to half the man he once was. Even though time has got the better of him he faces this change in right humour without resentment. And herein lies the secret of his triumph over death. He accepts now that everything changes with time, it is time that reigns supreme, and the best man can do is to be ready to change with time without for a moment insisting on catching the sun in flight or wishing that an instant could last eternally.

It is this theme of transience and mortality which runs through his poems and indeed forms the leit-motif imparting a sort of unity to *Collected Poems*. Whatevr Dylan Thomas's means of transcending death—his pantheism which celebrates the timelessness of life, or his undying faith which ultimately emerges triumphant—he is constantly aware that like every

mortal creature he too is subject to the temporal process of birth and death. The mature Thomas knowing all along that he did not have long to live, and having rid himself of all illusions, poignantly describes his elemental experiences while undertaking the journey from womb to tomb :

> Twenty-four years remind the tears of my eyes,
> (Bury the dead for fear that they walk to the grave in labour.)
> In the groin of the natural doorway I crouched like a tailor
> Sewing a shroud for a journey
> By the light of the meat-eating sun.
> Dressed to die, the sensual strut begun,
> With my red veins full of money,
> In the final direction of the elementary town
> I advance for as long as forever is. (p. 99)

Department of English
D.S.B.C. College
Kumaun University
Nainital

NOTES

1. Quoted in Paul Ferris, *Dylan Thomas* (London, 1977). p. 104.
2. Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems* (London, 1952), p.9. All subsequent references to this volume appear in the text.
3. Elder Olson, *The Poetry of Dylan Thomas* (Chicago, 1954), p. 83.
4. Quoted in Constantine Fitz-Gibbon, *The Life of Dylan Thomas* (London, 1965), p. 100.
5. Louis Macneice in *Dylan Thomas : The Legend and the Poet : A Collection of Biographical and Critical Essays*, ed., E.W. Tedlock (London, 1960), p. 86.
6. Rushworth M. Kidder, *Dylan Thomas : The Country of the Spirit* (New Jersey, 1973), p. 193.
7. D.R. Howard, 'In my craft or sullen art,' *Explicator*, 12, No. 4 (Feb. 1954).
8. Walford Davies, *Dylan Thomas* (Philadelphia, 1986), p. 70.

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INTERVIEW

A. A. ANSARI INTERVIEWED BY M. H. Khan

MHK Shakespeare, apart from Blake, has been your life-long interest. I have a feeling that your involvement transcends mere academic requirements since you have continued to write about his work even after your retirement as an academic—in the *Aligarh Critical Miscellany* which you now edit. Even as the founder-editor of *The Aligarh Journal* you saw to it that the Shakespeare section never lacked substance or failed to make impact. You'll agree that Shakespeare's work means differently to different people. Moreover, Shakespeare is someone who lamentably never fails to elicit platitudes—especially in India. In view of all this I would be keenly interested to learn about the nature of your involvement in Shakespeare study.

AAA My involvement in Shakespeare was provoked, as almost everybody else's, by the fact that in him we come across insights into patterns of human behaviour and eternal and imperishable truths about life in general. Looking at the enigma of human life from the corner of his eye with steady gaze he never misses anything worthwhile to comment upon and his reactions are mediated through dramatic characters who are multi-faceted, engaging and alive to the very depths of their being. His grasp over the abundance and bewildering heterogeneity of life, his gift of synthesizing disparate experiences and presenting this synthesis in language that is highly creative, vibrant and marked with ambiguity : these things have never been attempted and with such tremendous success by any writer before or since. I fell under Shakespeare's spell a little late in

my life, and I do think that one can respond to him adequately only when one has achieved enough intellectual maturity: Shakespeare does not yield his secret to a raw and unsophisticated mind.

MHK You'll agree that Shakespeare generally recruits his admirers from other literary fields. Personally, I always look suspiciously at people who claim 'acquaintance' with Shakespeare at an early stage of their career. I don't have the relevant data but I strongly feel that Shakespeare is best approached obliquely—through the Absurdist drama, for example, or Eliot or, as with Frye, through Blake and the Bible. Your interest in Blake may have owed something to *Fearful Symmetry* (though Frye praised the originality of your reading of the three major Prophetic Books). Why is it that there is so little of Frye in your Shakespeare essays? Do you have doubts, like some of us, about the relevance and validity of his criticism of Shakespeare? Someone compared his approach to a hovercraft, never touching the textual surface. How do you react to it? And also the original question which I have not yet formulated: Are your Blakean and Shakespearian interests interrelated?

AAA I do agree that in Shakespeare one may detect germs of modern drama, the absurdist drama technique in particular, and that way Shakespeare is 'our contemporary' as Ian Kott put it in his own signification of the phrase. At the same time, the Bible provides the substratum for many of Shakespeare's intuitions in his dramatic poetry: Blake's genius is likewise steeped in the Bible and Christianity (of his own persuasion). For Northrop Frye, the full understanding of Blake depends, inevitably, on the exploration of his central myth in the Prophetic Books, and this can best be approached through one's immersion in the Bible and also via the anthropological findings of today. Inspite of my deep admiration for Frye in general evident from

my recent article, 'Northrop Frye on Shakespeare' [in *The Aligarh Critical Miscellany*, Vol. v, No. 1, 1992] and for *Anatomy of Criticism*, *Fools of Time*, *A Natural Perspective* and *The Critical Path*, I didn't reach Shakespeare through Frye but independently, so to say. I, however, agree that, perhaps, owing to his preoccupation with the mythical approach Frye's Shakespeare criticism is not sufficiently text-based and he doesn't seem to delve as deeply into his plays as poems or self-contained monads as one would wish. I was fascinated by Blake's *Songs* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* early in my academic career and came to be absorbed in Shakespeare very much later. There is thus no necessary interconnection between the two passions and pursuits though later on I realized that some of Shakespearean echoes in Blake are too striking and significant to be dismissed: Blake's emblem of Pity both in his colour print and in 'London', the felicitous image of the 'lark' in *Milton*, Book Second, the symbol of the worm in 'Ah! Sunflower' and in *The Book of Thel*, the whole narrative scheme in *Tiriel*, Gloucestor's two lines about 'the Gods' echoed in 'The Fly' and lastly Lear's final discomfiture: 'the ruined piece of man' mirrored in Albion's (the archetypal man's) disintegration in *Jerusalem*. Nevertheless Shakespeare's views are much more concretely realized than the huge, shadowy figures striding through Blake's mythical constructs.

MHK In your readings of Shakespeare's plays you have taken advantage of your close interest in existentialist thought. Generally you adopt the strategy of allowing existentialist insights to serve as the underlying framework of your approach to a particular Shakespeare play. The implicit parallelism emerges into a sharp focus as the essay is brought to a close. However, even at the end the reader is not clearly told that what he was gradually being led into was a kind of analogical stud. The

'appropriation' is, so to say, made only obliquely. Does it suggest a certain hesitation, or is it a way of disclaiming any allegiance to a contemporary fashion ?

AAA The last point raised in this question is more relevant, and you have put your finger in the right place. The existentialist approach to Shakespeare is a very valid and fruitful one and is relevant to some of the more important plays though not to all. It is at least as justifiable, or perhaps more, than discovering images of the Absurdist drama in him. I am rather cautious in my procedure so as not to give the impression of employing a critical strategy as a symptom of my 'allegiance to a contemporary fashion'. For me it is not a matter of imposing certain premises of existentialist thought on Shakespeare's plays but merely an attempt to discover analogies for this thought wherever they are traceable in his work. I started with a scrutiny of *Twelfth Night* with this objective in view and then realized, fitfully and gropingly, that I could make some headway in this direction in respect of the great tragedies and a number of other plays, including the comedies. The grotesque is admittedly one of the elements common to many plays and it is essential to an existentialist reading of the human predicament. I proceed with this business tentatively and obliquely and hence my basic intention is glimpsed at only towards the end of my exposition of a particular play.

MHK While still on the subject, let me also ask you whether you think your Shakespeare essays could be considered to have 'dated'. Much water has flowed down the critical Thames and the Shakespeare scene in the eighties and the early nineties is very different from what it was when *Scrutiny* made its first impact in India. What, by the way, do you think is of lasting value in Knight, Leavis, Knights and Traversi ?

AAA Yes, the recent trend in Shakespearian criticism is towards examining his plays through their stage versions,

the underlying assumption being that they were initially written not for the academics to be read in the closet but to be staged, and undoubtedly some important clues can be got by keeping this fact in mind. I became all the more aware of it at the International Shakespeare Conference at Stratford where brief symposia were held on this subject and which I had the occasion of attending several times. This has also been demonstrated largely by the monumental studies of the great tragedies by Marvin Rosenberg: *The Masks of Othello,* of *King Lear* and of *Macbeth.* In these explorations the points of view of scholar-critics, actors and producers have been amalgamated in order to bring out the full harmonies and rhythms of the plays and to this enormous corpus has now been added *The Masks of Hamlet* [University of Delaware Press, U.S.A., 1992]. Only a fortnight ago I received a copy of this prestigious volume from the publishers and Professor Rosenberg is currently engaged, I am told, on a similar adventure in respect of *Antony and Cleopatra.* But I don't think that this approach, immensely valuable as it is, invalidates the earlier philosophical-symbolical-imagistic approach that I, too, have been following to the best of my judgment and sense of discrimination. I think that Wilson Knight initiated in the early thirties an altogether fresh and provocative approach—an approach that offers a welcome breath of relief from the Bradleyean variety of criticism : his celebraced essay 'The *Othello* Music' was a landmark in Shakespearean criticism. But Knight tends to be highly speculative and his work following *The Wheel of Fire* and *The Imperial Theme* became more and more phantasmagoric and less and less convincing. F.R. Leavis contributed only a few pieces on Shakespeare : 'Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Moor', 'Measure for Measure' and 'The Criticism of Shakespeare's Late Plays' but they are, like all his criticism, masterpieces of acute and incisive textual and philosophical analysis. L.C. Knights and Traversi, and

to a lesser extent, John Wain, may be regarded as having produced the best Shakespearean criticism in the middle of the century. A very impressive book that came out very recently is by one of the modern poets, Ted Hughes: *'Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being'* [Faber and Faber, 1992].

MHK I would be very interested to hear you talk about some important Blake scholars and critics, particularly in relation to your own work on Blake. What is the scope of Blakean studies in India ?

AAA The foundation-stone of Blake studies was laid by no less a person than S. Foster Damon in his book *William Blake : His Philosophy and Symbols* [1924]. Northrop Frye, with his magnificent *Fearful Symmetry* [1947] took Damon's work to incredible heights by expounding Blake's central myth with superb profundity and acute perceptiveness. Mark Schorer with his *Politics of Vision* [1959] and Kathleen Raine in her *Blake and Tradition* [1968] made significant contribution to Blake studies. But probably no other critic has so far given an exposition of Blake's subtleties more penetratingly than Harold Bloom whose *Blake's Apocalypse* [1963] is an invaluable book on the subject. Earlier an epoch-making book, establishing firmly Blake's relationship to the 18th century social and political milieu, was brought out by David Erdman : *Blake, Prophet against Empire* [1954], and later another very impressive work reflecting Blake's revolt against the Newtonian cosmogony was brought out by Donald Ault : *Visionary Physics*. Morton D. Paley came out with two very significant books : *Energy and the Imagination* [1970] and later *The Continuing City* [1983] a masterly exposition of Blake's *Jerusalum*. This was followed quite recently by a forceful and incisive study of Blake's *Prophetic Books* by David Fuller : *The Heroic Argument* [Manchester University Press]. A beginning in the direction of the consideration of William Blake's paintings was made by

Darrel Figges whose book on the subject came out in 1925; thereafter W.J.T. Mitchell wrote on Blake's Poetic and Poetical Imagination and he was followed by David Erdman's study of the Illuminated Blake [1975] and a few articles by Piloo Nanavutty on explication of Blake's paintings. Blake's works were edited. with superb accuracy and attentiveness, initially by Sir Geoffrey Keynes, later by David Erdman in collaboration with Harold Bloom and still later by W.W. Stevenson who brought out the fully annotated edition of Blake's Poetical Works in the Longman's series. A model for these annotated editions had been set up by my Oxford tutor, F.W. Bateson, in 1957. There is ample scope for expounding Blake in the perspective of Indian thought : Denis Saurat took the lead in this field long time ago by drawing attention to parallelisms between Blake and Hindu thought. Piloo Nanavutty wrote very well on 'Blake and Hindu Creation Myths' [1957] and Charu Sheel Singh came out with a full length study of this subject : *The Chariot of Fire* [1981]. Late Professor Harold Brooks contributed his article on 'Blake and Jung' in three instalments to *The Aligarh Critical Miscellany* [1988, 1989, 1992]. I myself did a bit in establishing links between 'Blake and the Kabbalah' [1969] and this was followed by Bryan Aubrey's interesting book : *Watchman of Eternity, Blake's Debt to Jacob Boehme,* [1986].

MHK Your brief study (in Urdu) highlighting points of contact between Blake and the Indian poet Iqbal is immensely interesting. And also the chapter in *Arrows of Intellect*. Do you think the deeper experiential similarity between the two poets so wide apart in terms of cultural and historical specificity is sufficient ground for a comparative study ? Would you not say that the continuous process of eliminating differences leads to a kind of universalism of subjective life which is ultimately self-defeating. Surfaces, too, are important since cultural

life is a continuum of essence and existence, an indivisible entity in time and space.

AAA Inspite of there being no question of cultural analogy it struck me while concluding my book on William Blake, *Arrows of Intellect*, that there were a number of points of contact between the genius of Blake and that of the Urdu poet Iqbal. Later I contributed a full-length article on this subject in Urdu in which I tried to demonstrate the affinity between them : their essential radicalism, their belief in the spiritual basis of Reality, their cosmogony, their ideas of Good and Evil, their emphasis on creativity, their faith in the dynamism of the life-processes and above all their perceptions about Self and Identity and their treatment of Christ and the prophet Mohammad as Archetypal beings. I was driven to the conclusion that ultimately all distinctions between essence and existence and spatial and temporal co-ordinates fade away and become inconsequential. Also when we consider literature at the highest and deepest level art and metaphysics merge together into an indissoluble unity in our gesture of response.

MHK This probably is the time to turn to a question that I have long wanted to put to distinguished Indian scholars in the field of English studies. You are deeply rooted in the Indo-Persian literary tradition. In what way did the Urdu-Persian ethos contribute to your appreciation of English literature ? Did the fact of your being an Indian with access to Indian literature affect your work in English ? I ask this question because in the field of English studies in India there may be many who work in a kind of cultural vacuum—unaffected by anything in, say, classical Sanskrit or Persian or in modern Hindi and Urdu. With little or no grounding, culturally speaking, in the Western ethos, the work of such teachers of English may lack authenticity. Cases are not uncommon of people talking knowledgibly

about Eliot or quoting Shakespeare or Keats and displaying the next moment deplorable taste so far as their own literature is concerned. Now, formulating my question a little differently: did anything in Ghalib or Iqbal or the classical Persian poets (Khusrau, Hafiz or Khaiyam) help you in your engagement with Blake or Wordsworth or Shakespeare?

AAA It is a very intriguing question and the clue to its answer is contained in the phrase used by yourself: 'cultural vacuum'. I am quite sure that those Indian scholars and teachers of English who talk glibly and with self-assurance about Keats, Shelley or T.S. Eliot but also have had no grounding in Urdu, Persian of Sanskrit literary tradition cannot lay claim to any genuine acquaintance with English literature either. Their minds are by and large fed on second-hand sources of information and they lack the capacity to formulate their critical responses and judgments independently. From the beginning I managed to immerse myself into literary masterpieces both in Urdu and Persian languages which unconsciously moulded and sharpened my literary sensibility. Undoubtedly the enrichment that accrued to me from my reading of Hafiz and Omar Khaiyam and Ghalib and Iqbal did indirectly turn me into an avid reader of English poets and made me more responsive to the nuances of the English language than I could otherwise acquire. Most of us grow up in what you aptly call a sort of 'cultural vacuum' and therefore our appreciation and assessment of English literature tends to be impoverished and we are liable to be concerned with only the superficies of the English texts.

MHK Could you, from your long experience as teacher and scholar-critic, say something about how to make the study of English literature a more meaningful experience for the average Indian student? Let me add a few 'supplementaries': How could research become productive and fruitful? Or would you say that the objectives

of research should be re-defined with reference to the Indian context—away from research in literary history to some kind of appreciatory monographs ? I feel strongly on the subject. We had first the Deb, the Siddhanta, the Khwaja Manzoor Husain model of the teacher of English. Then came the patient researcher model. However, this latter model cannot honestly function in India. My question, therefore, is : How could genuine appreciation of literature be combined with patient and meaningful accumulation of facts and their interpretation ?

AAA A tricky question and a bit embarrassing to answer. The Deb, the Siddhanta, the Khwaja Manzoor Husain model aimed only at communication of vast tracts of information mostly verbally and not at all stimulating the students to creative and original thinking. In those days the concept of holding seminars on specific subjects with participation of a limited number of students in it and throwing the challenge of free discussion widely open had not come into vogue. The non-accessibility of source-material in India makes the task of the research student an uphill task, hence the theses produced in the Indian universities as a mushroom growth lamentably fall short of the minimum requisite degree of adequacy. I would like to add that a raw student should in no case be encouraged to embark on a research project unless he has deeply familiarized himself with the area or areas contiguous and proximate to his chosen subject. Research in comparative literature is not really worthwhile in most of the cases unless one is sure of the real points of contact between authors writing in the two languages. The mere accumulation of data which may be serviceable in literary history but unaccompanied with a sense of perspective is not likely to prove fruitful. The via media may, therefore, seem to lie in the preparation of 'appreciatory monographs' as you put it and strengthening them with emphasis on literary an

philosophic aesthetics —the substratum on which ultimately rest all critical evaluations. As John Crowe Ransom observes, the critic (or the researcher, for that matter) should be concerned not only with forming critical judgment but also with placing a work of art in the context of some sort of conceptual or theoretical framework (of aesthetics).

BOOK REVIEWS

Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos. By T. McAlindon, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, xvii + 306 pp.

Of all the books published on Shakespeare during the past five years or so, this one strikes me as the most insightful and worth having. This does not mean that the reader is obliged to agree with all the new assessments, but he will certainly be impressed by the learned documentation. The main approach McAlindon takes to most if not all of the tragedies is numerological, and this attitude might strike some readers as occultic, eccentric, or, at best, arcane (as he admits). Because I have taken a particular interest in this slant myself, however, I was not biased from the start, though I was a bit surprised at the individual numbers about which he made so much fuss. For example, he places particular emphasis upon the tetrad, notably in *Julius Caesar;* yet the number that has always fascinated scholars the most has been the triad. (One thinks of Dante having put Brutus, Cassius, and Judas in the mouth of Satan in the *inferno*, thereby parodying the Trinity, even as Milton related Satan to Sin and Death in a similar triadic manner. Yet McAlindon finds this parody of the Trinity operative rather in *Macbeth*.) The case he makes out for the tetrad is quite convincing, though one wonders how many theatregoers would pay attention to it.

The chapter on *King Lear* is one of the more fascinating and controversial ones, though there what appears to be operative is the nought, the echo of the word 'nothing,' as he admits, rather than a particular digit. He commences by

referring to 'the consensus view that *Lear* is pre-eminent among Shakespeare's—perhaps among all—tragedies,' yet one wonders whether he has not been carried away a bit too much. As the editor of *Hamlet Studies* remarked in a review of a new edition of William Elton's leading book on *Lear*, if that tragedy has overtaken *Hamlet*, as Elton himself claims, how is it that we have no journal called *Learian Studies?* At the time of writing, a new journal is slated to be published in Nigeria entitled *Othello Studies*, though that is subtitled *The African Presence in English Literature*, and so is not solely focussed on the Venetion tragedy. So two journals have a Shakespearean tragedy in their titles, but thus far none has centred on *King Lear*. And why does McAlindon register this play about madness with such high praise? Because it 'appeals more profoundly both to the heart and the mind than does any other play.' Indeed? More so than *Hamlet?* Granted, reference is made many times to the 'heart' in this later drama, but if the referent is to the 'ticker,' as it would appear to be for example in the case of figures with heart attacks, like Gloucester, then surely such emphasis upon the heart idea is misleading or sentimentalized.

With regard to *Othello*, McAlindon sees the protagonist's name as deriving from that of *Othoman*, the Turk. He provides some plausible rationale for this onomastic connection, which has been pointed out before in *Notes and Queries*, but is not much bothered by the unlikelihood that the Moor would be named after a prominent leader of the country which he is fighting! The arguments favouring an etymological association with the character *Thorello*, who appears in a Jonson play in which Shakespeare acted not long before, or even Otho I, Emperor of Rome, who likewise had his troubles because of his wife—in a bedroom setting he then also took his own life—seem more fathomable.

Regarding *Hamlet*, McAlindon finds lots of contradictions in the hero's character, as have others. In finding him heroic 'in the boarding of the pirate ship,' apropos of 'the chance encounter with the pirates,' he fails to take into

account the argument that the Prince could have arranged this get-together in advance—a point that has been debated several times in recent years. After all, his getting back to Denmark so easily afterwards may seem a bit hard to take otherwise. Further, McAlindon observes that 'Claudius is not at all in the repentant state which his kneeling posture suggests' when the Prince comes up behind him to take revenge but then desists. Who is McAlindon to judge? It would appear that the King starts off earnestly and that the devil leaves him and enters Hamlet, who then wants to send the sovereign to hell (surely not a Christian thought). Later, of course, Claudius' old temptations return.

Lastly I question whether McAlindon is not too kind to the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*. He blames the tragedy solely on Romeo and the Apothecary, but does not accept the often-heard modern argument that the matchmaker, Friar Laurence, is politically minded and somehow incompetent as a churchman. True, he is a lovable soul, but that does not make him enviable. I suspect McAlindon of special pleading here.

Yet these animadversions do not detract from the fact that the book is very readable, well documented, and beautifully written. The great majority of ideas sound sensible, many are novel, and the work should be in every Shakespearean's library. Proofreading could have been better.

Central State University, Ohio R.F. FLEISSNER

Treatment of Greek Mythology in the Poems of Tennyson. By Santosh Nath. Aligarh : Printwell Publications, 1992, 220 pp.

When Tennyson, in his Cambridge prize poem *Timbuctoo*, spoke of 'the great vine of *Fable*' which is 'deep-rooted in the living soil of truth,' he may have remembered Coleridge's lines in *The Piccolomini*, expanded from Schiller's original.

'Fable is Love's world, his home, his birth-place,' says Coleridge, and goes on :

> The intelligible forms of ancient poets,
> The fair humanities of old religion,
> The Power, the Beauty, and the Majesty,
> That had their haunts in dale, or piny mountain,
> Or forest by slow stream, or pebbly spring,
> Or chasms and wat'ry depths; all these have vanished.
> They live no longer in the faith of reason !
> But still the heart doth need a language, still,
> Doth the old instinct bring back the old names...

Dr Nath quotes two lines from a sonnet by Newman : 'Why, wedded to the Lord, still yearns my heart/Towards these scenes of ancient heathen fame ?' One source of these yearnings is in the authority of Greek and Latin literature, and that feeling which has never been quite lost, that everything written later in Romance or northern languages is only acknowledgement, and adaptation. But the lines from Newman remind us that the relationship between Christianity and the great pagan cultures of the past in nineteenth century England is a complex question, which has a good deal to do with Evangelicalism, and that political and social reaction against celebrations of enlightenment which was sharpened by the science of Lyell and Darwin. In Tennyson's case such myth and legend seem to have represented both a lost cause, and a continuing wisdom which could be tapped, and the poems which Dr Nath examines should be seen in the light of this, and of a possible interaction between the two. A lot has been written about Tennyson, but there is no need to dispute what she says when she claims that *Ulysses, The Lotos-Eaters,* and *Tithonus* have not received enough critical attention. In one way of course they have. But Dr Nath is arguing for what she describes as 'group identity,' and believes that critics have missed the 'cohesiveness' or 'metaphoric unity' in Tennyson's Greek poems, and 'the note of sustained personal allegory' in them. 'Sustained personal allegory' is a large claim, however qualified by 'note,' and it is likely that these poems, in spite of their common terms, cannot so easily be abstracted from Tennyson's poems.

This is a critical study of more than two hundred pages. About forty-eight pages are taken up by appendices giving passages from the major sources: Homer, Hesiod, Apollonius Rhodius, Ovid, Quintus Smyrnaeus. Dante, Horace, Euripides. The five main chapters are bracketed by an introduction and a conclusion. Chapter IV ('Poems on Mythical Places and Miscellaneous Uses of Greek Myths')—the list of contents, incidentally, is rather oddly numbered—is much shorter than the others, and Dr Nath has a note on this in her introduction, where she speaks of bringing together the poems on mythical places with some of the other uses of myth, in order to make up a full chapter. This is disarmingly frank. But a better use could have been made of the discussion of *Ilion*, *Ilion* and *Parnassus*.. The language of *Ilion*, *Ilion* reaches towards some effect which is hardly to be attained, and it is not merely one of style. Dr Nath argues convincingly that it has to do with the epic which the nineteenth century dreamed of, but could not write, and she is right to take this early poem together with the much later *Parnassus* as a kind of dream of and farewell to what the age was incapable of. But an argument which has so much to do with the poetry of the age is too important to be huddled together with mythical places and miscellaneous uses.

The main part of the study is in chapters I. II, and III, on the choric songs, and the Greek mythical heroines and heroes. *The Lotos-Eaters* can indeed be seen as a kind of echo of Greek drama, fragmentary, and characteristically dedicated to a single mood. (The difference between this and *Prometheus Unbound* is partly the difference betwen two ages of poetry. Whether the submission in *The Lotos-Eaters* has anything to do with a willing submission to art is another matter, One could argue that the most important thing in the poem is the irony of these drugged creatures thinking of themselves as gods. But there is never any one meaning, and the slightest change of position can change things radically. My own feeling, which I have argued elsewhere, is that this exquisite lingering over decay and defeat may imply a criticism of poetry itself, and that

this may show the real relationship between this poem and *The Hesperides*, which seems to celebrate the mystery of poetry. Dr Nath is on less debatable ground in her second chapter, on Tennyson's handling of the heroines of Greek myth, and on his strong feelings about wifehood and motherhood. But perhaps the idea of a sustained personal allegory is taken too far in the firm reference of *Semele* to a confict between his parents. It may reflect that, but again one would like more evidence. But the arguments about the importance for the early poetry of Tennyson's life at Somersby are interesting. In particular, the third chapter, on his use of the herores of Greek myth, has something to say about *Ulysses* in the context of the death of Tennyson's father, and his new responsibilities. I am not convinced, however, that *Tithonus* has as much to do with Emily Tennyson as Dr Nath would like us to believe. The discussion of *Tithonus*, like that of *Semele*, does rather suggest a thesis which must be supported. The third member of this trilogy (the word is apt) is *Tiresias*. This is presented, in considerable detail, as 'metaphoric autobiogrphy,' and some of the arguments seem persuasive. If this is what *Tiresias* is, it may answer a question which has puzzled more than one reader, which is why *Tiresias* is so stiff. It is magnificently eloquent, but it is stiff. In fact, it reads like accurate translation. Which may be what it is: a reasoned translation into language which has all the virtues, and is too conscious of having them. I do not know whether Dr Nath would agree with this. But the idea of these poems of Tennyson's as a single group embodying a sustained personal allegory is worth attention.

ALASTAIR W. THOMSON

Chuo University, Tokyo

ALIGARH JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES
(BI-ANNUAL)

(Declaration under Section 5 of the Press & Registration of Books Act, 1867)

1.	Place of Publication	:	Aligarh
2.	Period of Publication	:	Bi-annual
3.	Printer	:	Aligarh Muslim University Press
4.	Publisher	:	Maqbool Hasan Khan
5.	Editor	:	Maqbool Hasan Khan
	Nationality	:	Indian
	Address	:	Chairman Department of English Aligarh Muslim University Aligarh
6.	Owner	:	Aligarh Muslim University Aligarh

7. I, Maqbool Hasan Khan, declare that the above-mentioned particulars are correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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