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CONTENTS

Stevens 's Emperor of Ice-Cream and the Dark Wake Once More: Enter Hamlet and Luther	Robert F. Fleissner	01
Divinity in Prometheus	Syed Asim Ali	17
Philosophical, Intellectual and Literary Frontiers: The Modern Perspective	Syeda Nuzhat Zeba	37
Grandeur of Nature in Wordsworth and other Romantics	Munir Mujtaba Ali	75
Brecht on "Verfremdungseffekt"	Shaheena Tarannum	100

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Robert F. Fleissner

Stevens's Emperor of Ice-Cream and the Dark Wake Once More: Enter Hamlet and Luther

Among the intriguing, innovative views regarding Wallace Stevens's celebrated lyric *The Emperor of Ice-Cream** is Celeste Turner Wright's arresting interpretation that it basically concerns an African-American wake.[1] Such a reading, surprising as it may be, naturally can put readers (both non-Caucasian and Caucasian) tentatively on their guard because of the plausible dangers of special pleading, stereotyped readings, and speculation readily invoked. The purpose of the present follow-up to Wright is to affirm that the lively pros concerning her intriguing suggestions may still easily outweigh negative ones, particularly because a number of new points can now be adduced in her favor. Because these suggestions may present some passing problems regarding focus and concentration, the reader is hereby encouraged to bear it all patiently till the interrelated subtleties can finally be ironed out. For example, in addition to the *wake* aspect, the title-play in the poem may connote "I Scream" but also point to a form of expectant religious consummation, thereby to awakening upon entering Paradise after death. In this connection, even Hamlet and Luther appear to enter the Stevens picture at least on the sidelines.

To begin, Wright takes the position that Stevens was evidently basing the lyric upon his own experience in Key West, where doubtless many disadvantaged African Americans have lived, though the same can be said of Hispanics, notably those of Cuban heritage. Because Cuban Americans have largely Catholic backgrounds – with which

wakes often are also traditionally associated – the query can arise about whether a black, or rather merely a Cuban, wake is here implicated. Questions finally of the kind of food served at such gatherings then bring up another issue, for one can contend that the specific mention of ice-cream could point more to a Cuban than African-American setting (certainly not here to an Irish-American one, though that cultural group is still particularly known for such festivities, ones including even the use of alcohol). In any case, a Hispanic association need hardly abrogate an African-American one as well, the imaginary persons involved not so implausibly being of both black and Hispanic heritage. That muscular "roller of big cigars," in other words the titular Emperor, might well represent a hefty, black Cuban, an exporter at one time of Havana tobacco.

Wright makes a good point of Stevens having had O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* solidly on the back of his mind, particularly because that play was produced just one year before the poem itself was launched and indeed right along with a Stevens drama, presumably *Three Travellers Watch at Sunrise*, which then has its own notable enough African-American element. Such circumstantial evidence (with Stevens ostensibly having been fully cognizant of both productions) carries fairly strong weight, especially because of the similarity in a later O'Neill play relating titularly and thematically, in retrospect, also to this lyric, namely *The Iceman Cometh*. Because this drama actually is after the poem, no influence on the poem is possible. Yet we may raise rather the question of whether Stevens in effect looked ahead to O'Neill, or (for that matter) whether O'Neill might not have been, in his turn, even indebted somewhat to Stevens. In any event, it could well be said that Stevens's poem looks ahead to the theme of the later play, as it were, providing for us thereby a similar subject of thematic

concern, at least in terms of historical correlations. For this reason, it is helpful to bear in mind also the Stevens play as likewise multiculturalist in emphasis. Further, we might well observe that *The Emperor Jones* by O'Neill represented not only a kind of archetypal, black-culture study, but that its title to fame had much to do with the talent of a leading African-American actor, Paul Robeson, who accepted the titular role.

Wright makes a point of the lyric's phrase "the boys" as being a typically Southern white expression in reference to young blacks, yet since such a term could simply have been meant in a literal way, more evidence from overall imagery patterning needs to be adduced to support any such affinity. On the surface, at any rate, the phrase "the boys" in this context could be taken in a somewhat offensive manner, being thus a bit acceptable historically but only as a pre-Civil-War expression at best. Then, in accompaniment with these "boys" are "the wenches," a phrase which could thus be seen as an allusion to loose women in a folksy manner. Thereby Wright sees much indication of liberalist sexual attitudes in the poem, notably because of some striking expressions of this nature like "concupiscent curds" and "horny." For the poor dead woman may in fact then have gone about barefoot.

True enough, *wenches* could refer to loose women in general without any particular reference that way to African Americans. But, in context here, is that really the case? The point is that in this situation the term would very easily recall, at least, let us say, on the half-conscious level, the popular one used to refer to black mistresses as employed by white slave owners. With this connotation being relevant, other proof can then be adduced in support as well. The strongest piece of such corroboration turns out to be the image of the muscular cook *whipping* the curds. Aside from

the verb's immediate contextual culinary meaning, on a valid secondary level it turns out to be an ironic throwback to the habit of a white slave owner in his whipping his subordinates who, he thinks, misbehave. In this instance, the figure in charge turns out to be an "Emperor" rather than an owner of slaves, and his whipping only edibles together then stands, ironically enough, for an *inversion* of the image of black slaves having themselves been scourged that way in the past.[2]

Recognizing these additional levels of meaning can add to the overall depth of this popular poem's Southern imagery, but at the same time such an association could be taken too far. For example, the allusion at the end to the corpse being truly "dumb" appears to refer only to its not being alive and so is in that respect hardly a prejorative reference to, let us say, any poor, ignorant African-American woman in the process, though perhaps a minimal hint of such a bias may not be totally ruled out (whereby it would best refer back to the poem's persona, not to the well-meaning, objective poet himself presumably - his familiar, plausibly somewhat depreciative "Cemetery" poem about black people notwithstanding).

More importantly it might be appended that a decided "echo" of *Hamlet* in the lyric, one that has happened to have been uncovered several times by recent scholars independently, can also reinforce such a basic racial interconnection, even if mainly through the rear stage door, historically speaking. At first, such a presumed link may appear rather curious, off-hand at best, in that the Danish Prince is himself naturally thought of as being Nordically blond and light-skinned. Yet, in its seemingly incidental way, the present correlation can enter in too, that is if we allow

ourselves to give it a little leeway, for which there is warrant enough.

Twice before I happened to make something of how the key line repeated in the lyric and at the tail end of each stanza ("The only emperor of ice-cream"), as well as the preceding line in the first stanza (" Let *be* be finale of *seem*"), represents, in effect, a vital transformation of Hamlet's terse remark about the body of Polonius (standing, politically speaking then, for Lord Burleigh), thereby concerning the "worm" as being the "only emperor for diet" (4.2.21).[3] Obviously comparable in context here is his earlier, sudden utterance "Seems, madam ? Nay it is; I know not 'seems'" (1.2.76). After my setting forth these parallels in the record, first in the Washington State University *Research Studies* and then in the current, more specialized *Wallace Stevens Journal*, though in different enough format,[4] a scholar from India, R. Viswanathan, duly himself arrived at the main parallel independently in print.[5] Further, it turns out that we were then once again anticipated, this time by Eleanor Cook,[6] who went more deeply than I originally did into overall Shakespearean resonances, for instance linking as well Stevens's *The Worms at Heaven's Gate* to Sonnet 29 with its own "hymns at heaven's gate" (l.12).

But what none of us had considered as truly germane yet is that the context in the tragedy, in terms of the earliest correlation at least, links with later imagery patterning to suggest nothing less that a genuine "African" connection after all. Astonishing as this overall tally may at first seem, it does deserve some more careful scrutiny now in detail. The main critical point is that if the common reader may easily miss this, Stevens himself may well not have done so. For he is what counts.

First, immediately after Hamlet asserts that, as far as the matter of appearance versus reality is concerned, he will side with the latter, he is told to shed his inky cloak, but then has to retort that he is already "too much i' the sun" (1.2.67). Although the principal wordplay here is self-evidently on the homonyms *sun* and *son*, the very notion of being in "solemn black" because of having been associated with solar rays "too much" bespeaks the European's early misunderstanding of how the African originally acquired his pigmentation, the idea being (to resort to the standard bromide) that he was "out in the sun too much." In Shakespeare's time, to be sure, the true cause of much melanin in the skin was not clearly or popularly understood: namely that it was only nature's way of shielding the skin from excessive solar rays, not a case of being unhappily sunburnt by them. So Shakespeare himself is hardly to be blamed for any racism in such a context.

The very idea that the Prince had this conception of skin color at the back of his psyche is then supported by several key contextual factors: (1) his unusual references to the Book of Jeremiah later in talking with his mother, whereupon she alludes, in a noted line, to probably the most famous biblical description of blackness: "Can the Ethiope change his skin or the leopard his spots ?" – Jer. 13.23 (3.4.90-92); (2) certain presumed, at least ideological, linkages between the Prince and a Doctor of sorts (Martin Luther), whereby the latter's original association with the order of St. Augustine – recalling the Saint's own African heritage, if only on his mother's side—could likewise easily enough revert to mind. Let us now closely examine these points.

The connection with Ethiopia, first of all, is truly a bit fascinating, a noteworthy article having appeared in the leading non-Caucasian Shakespeare journal on this very

biblical link-up.[7] The Prince's own utterances, in conjunction with his mother's indirect allusion to African pigmentation ("I see such black and grained spots/ As will not leave their tinct"), have been carefully worked out duly in terms of the total Scriptural context – that is, in harking thus back to Israel in Old Testament times as having been historically culpable of deviating from its erstwhile spiritual goals - so that little dubiety remains that now Shakespeare must have had the Bible somewhere in the recesses of his psyche. What is more, the key biblical line there (cited earlier) again stresses the factor of pigmentation (although this is notably then *mis*applied, in context, by Gertrude). Because the Prince is habitually also "in black" throughout the tragedy, quite reverently, owing to the recent death of his father, a veritable correlation with some sort of overall symbolic blackness turns out to be inevitable.[8]

The question then is how all this relates to the earlier cited "Lutheran" connection. Could it not probably tie in, however obliquely, as being yet another relevant religious dimension? The answer is once again regarding the reference to Polonius' body as consumed by worms. Critics can scarcely avoid remembering, in terms of verbal, or at any rate textual, association here, that intolerant "Diet of Worms" in Germany which excommunicated the Doctor of Theology (whereby the cross-reference in terms of the Emperor in the lyric would readily recall to mind Charles V).[9] That Shakespeare could well have had this schism in mind is nowadays given special credence; many editions (from the standard Variorum onwards) provide an erudite footnote to this macabre effect. Probably the biggest piece of supportive textual evidence is the passing reference, in immediate context, to "a certain convocation of poetic worms" (4.3.19), thereby pointing to the political sub-surface meaning of *Diet*, even as *Worms* can connote the German *Würmer* (worms).

Now Raymond B. Waddington has gone so far as to propose that the entire play is structured around seemingly noted Lutheran allusions, the final effect being that the Prince even seems, to some extent, to be based on the learned Doctor of Theology himself. Waddington has been supported, moreover, in religious terms in various follow- up papers.[10] This matter is quite controversial admittedly, but let us especially notice his linking Luther's originally wearing a black cowl strongly with the Observant Augustinian religious order, to which he belonged, and quite conceivably thereby with Luther's being somewhat reflective in his monkish attire of the Saint's maternal African heritage.

With all this closely knit texture in mind, we find that the two key concluding lines in the initial stanza of the Stevens poem are tied together even more closely. In both instances, the overall effect has a definite religious connection, at least in terms of the concept of a wake to celebrate belief in a dead person's providentially finding eternal bliss. The stress upon expiration, first that of Hamlet's father and then that of Polonius, is so strong also in the tragedy that this drama has been considered critically, notably by G. Wilson Knight, as being even about this very concern in a major thematic way, namely dealing with death.[11]

Another documented link of Hamlet's early lines with some form of Lutheranism, one which Stevens could easily have pondered, is in terms of his very first utterance: "A little more than kin, and less than kind!" (1.2.65); for the last word may inherently, as it were, connote the German noun for *child* (namely *Kind*), this being a throwback to the Prince's having just come from studies at Luther's university,

Wittenberg, in Germany. At least such a textual tie-in relates better, in terms of pronunciation (the "i" vowel), to paronomasia than the mere British enunciation of *kin* and *kind* here would.

Would not Stevens have been aware of all this somehow? As I have demonstrated elsewhere, he was indeed intriqued enough by Luther and Lutheran thought to have had a copy of the Reformer's songs, the *Gesänge*, in his personal library and then even to have written a related poem entitled "The Old Lutheran Bells at Home."[12] Might not then his poem called Worms at Heaven's Gate also reverberate with not only a further subliminal *Lutheran* interconnection, but thereby with a link to Hamlet's own "politic worms"?

The related question of whether Shakespeare himself was already fully cognizant of such Lutheran associations is more complex, most likely bearing on the extent to which the allusions to Wittenberg (cited as "Wertenberg") in *Doctor Faustus* tie in with his own. The parallels between the two plays are extensive enough (one of the most obvious nominal ones being the Cornelius / Valdes and Cornelius / Voltemand close onomastic associations in terms of companionship and early entrances) – even though admittedly Marlowe studied at largely *Calvinist* Cambridge University.

Granted, one key problem with the Stevens poem can be his well-known claim that "ice-cream" here stands for an "absolute good," as he has once put it, also his entertaining a certain amount of euphoria in readers being thrown somewhat off-guard by the seemingly ambiguous climax of each of his stanzas. The problem involved is, in brief, as follows: If this tasty dessert stands for partying and enjoyment, how can it at the same time likewise connect with the frigidity of death? Yet spiritually need there be any

contradiction when death here is the entrance to an eternal party? Clearly his famous, somewhat analogous poem "The Snow Man" is worth comparison in passing, especially because the obvious passing wordplay on the term *nothing* therein links with that found throughout another Shakespearean tragedy, *King Lear* (though more in the Folio than Quarto).[13]

In any event, returning to *Hamlet*, the strongest evidence favoring its influence appears now in Cook's book. Observing that "Hamlet on Yorick is commonly recognized as the model for Stevens's skull stanza in Le *Monocle de Mon Oncle*," she cites the poet himself to this vibrant effect:

> "I have not had a poem in my head for a month, poor Yorick." Thus Stevens in May of 1920, after *Le Monocle de Mon Oncle* but before *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* (. . . May 16, 1920). The remark confirms one reading of *The Emperor*.[14]

In addition, then, other connections with Shakespeare become self-evident, so that the Danish hero does not have to stand proverbially alone again, notably the reference to Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* ("Good sooth, she is / The queen of curds and cream" – 4.4.160-1), which provides further incidental gloss on Stevens's noted "concupiscent curds" and "(ice-) cream" in the Emperor poem.

The main points, as Cook states, seem to be that Stevens reverses the death imagery of *Hamlet* specifically by correlating the romantic effects of the later romance: "We have only to recall the climactic recognition scene at the end of *The Winter's Tale* to hear its imagery playing against that of *The Emperor* and to note that it reverses, point by point,

the plot and imagery of *Hamlet*."[15] (Notice the irony again.) However that may be, some recollection of Dante's Satan (black in the sense of evil) is also apparent with the Emperor effect, as Joan Richardson shows,[16] even as I happen to have anticipated her in passing in my essay "Stevens in Wittenberg."[17]

In brief, then, to revert to my original thesis now after these subtle, but needful, divagations, Wright's conclusion that a black wake is somehow involved does gain weight through additional associations that can be validly enlisted – most subtly, but importantly, those relating to the Danish tragedy. Should a dubious reader now choose to object, arguing that eating ice-cream is hardly commonly associated with formal religious wakes (whether black or, for that matter, even Irish), the answer is that in Stevens's time customs were divergent, or a more liberal Cuban connection enters in concomitantly. In any event, once the dominant imagery of blackness is seen for what it is, it still plays along, as it were, with the necrological symbolism. This is clear also from other poems on the subject, such as *Like Decorations in a [Black] Cemetery*,[18] *The Domination of Black*, and particularly *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*, wherein the final way (or unlucky one, if one prefers) is seeing this creature as then symbolic even of the deathbed itself. If ice-cream somehow stands for life in the end, even for the Redeemer perhaps (as death leading to life), the blackness up to that point can hardly be denied as well. The final stress is more upon *a wake* than on becoming, let us say, *awake* to God's presence, although the New Jerusalem can be thought of as part of the climactic design as well and even as proleptic of Stevens's own final conversion to Christianity.[19] In any event, the ice-cream allusion at the tail-end need not relate specifically to edibles at the wake *per se* – and, as has been suggested here earlier, could incidentally likewise

connote the subliminal, death-like sound effect of "I scream" – but that would be possibly playing down Stevens's having dubbed the ice-cream reference an absolute good. At any rate, such a natural exclamatory intrusion, which in this context suggests sorrow over death more than terror, need hardly be much at odds with the overall religious overtones, with hints of Hamlet and Luther, as presented in this paper.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

**The Emperor of Ice-Cream*

1. Call the roller of big cigars,
2. The Muscular one, and bid him whip
3. In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
4. Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
5. As they are used to wear, and let the boys
6. Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
7. Let be be finale of seem.
8. The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

9. Take from the dresser of deal,
10. Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
11. On which she embroidered fantails once
12. And spread it so as to cover her face.
13. If her horny feet protrude, they come
14. To show how cold she is, and dumb.
15. Let the lamp affix its beam.
16. The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

--- Wallace Stevens

*line 9: *deal* means pine wood or fir.

*1ine 11: *fantails* means birds with fan-like tails

[1] "Stevens and the Black Emperor of Key West," *Arizona Quarterly*, 35 (1979), 65-76. She clearly must mean a *private* black wake only.

[2] This is of special concern for me because the locale at which I have been teaching for over thirty years (Wilberforce, Ohio) was founded originally for the children of white slaveowners and their black "wenches." The African – American student body here is well aware of the *topical* basis of what might otherwise be taken as simply a misogynistic expression.

[3] All Shakespearean references in this essay are to the Pelican ed., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, rev. ed., gen. Ed. Alfred Harbage (New York: Viking, 1977).

[4] See my "Stevens in Wittenberg: 'The Emperor of Icė-Cream,'" *Research Studies*, 42 (1974), 256-60; also my follow-up, "Steven's Good Black Humor Man," *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 8 (1984), 103-4.

[5] "Stevens's 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream,'" *The Explicator*, 50 (1992), 84-85.

[6] *Poetry, Word-play, and Word-war in Wallace Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988), p.91.

[7] William Rossky, "Hamlet as Jeremiah," Hamlet *Studies*, 1(1979), 101-8.

[8] In a major production I happened to witness at Stratford-upon-Avon, England, in the summer of 1966, Hamlet's "blackness" was prominently stylized; other characters then

appeared, in stark contrast, in white eskimo costumes (Denmark being not so very far from, for example, Iceland).

[9] It must be mentioned, nonetheless, that the "worm" allusion in the play could rather be to a documented reference in Montaigne, though no doubt a dual "echo" is by no means out of the question. The quotation from John Florio's translation of Montaigne's essays reads, in part, as follows: "The heart and life of a mighty and triumphant Emperor is but the break-fast of a seely little Worme. . . ." "See *The Essayes of Michael, Lord of Montaigne*, trans. John Florio. 3 Vols. (London: Dent, 1928), II, 155. On the Shakespeare / Montaigne connection, cf. Also Martin Scofield, *The Ghosts of Hamlet: The Play and Modern Writers* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), p.183, yet bear in mind that he cites the Diet of Worms also (p.340). All told, the most authoritative study is still that by Robert Ellrodt, "Self-consciousness in Montaigne and Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Survey*, 28 (1975), 37-50, e.g.: "I am not impressed by the number of alleged parallels – 100 to 170—but by the closeness of some of them: half a dozen" (41). Among these, he singles out the worm reference as involving "parallels in both thought and phrasing." Nonetheless, *Stevens himself* would more readily have had Luther rather than Montaigne in mind here. That is part of my thesis.

[10] See Waddington's "Lutheran Hamlet," *English Language Notes*, 27 (1989), 27-42. Sequels include those by R. Chris Hassel, Jr., "Hamlet's 'Too, Too Solid Flesh,'" *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 25 (1994), 609-22; " 'How Infinite in Faculties': Hamlet's Confusion of God and Man," *Literature and Theology*, 8 (1994), 127-39. The stress upon Hamlet's sense of Providence after his trip to England as paralleling Luther's own theology is in accord with Waddington. A major controversy on the Hamlet-Luther association then

ensued, stirred up in the popular press by David Remnick's "Hamlet in Hollywood," *The New Yorker*, 20 Nov. 1995, pp.66-83. All this led to a provocative paper on the subject at The International Shakespeare Association Congress in Los Angeles (April 1996) by Mary Ann McGrail: "*The* Source of *Hamlet*."

[11] See his chapter "The Embassy of Death: An Essay on Hamlet," in his collection *The Wheel of Fire: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Sombre Tragedies* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1930), pp.34-50.

[12] See n4 above, especially the first article for the key citation here (p. 260). See also J. M. Edelstein, "The poet as Reader: Wallace Stevens and His Books," *The Book Collector*, 23 (1974), 53-68.

[13] Cf. Stevens's "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" in *The Snow Man* with the wordplay on nothingness and the extensive aftermath of the love-test in *King Lear* (1.1.87-89). See also Joan Richardson, *Wallace Stevens: The Early Years, 1879-1923* (New York: Morrow, 1986), p.408. (This is hardly *thematic*.)

[14] Cook, p.92.

[15] Ibid., p.91. For the record, this association with *The Winter's Tale* was also broached to me independently in correspondence some years ago by a leading Shakespearean stationed in Japan, Peter Milward, S. J. (Thematically *Othello* is apter.)

[16] Richardson, p. 558.

[17] One of my points there (see n4) is to associate the possible Dantesque connection with another Shakespearean one, namely with "too cold for hell" in *Macbeth* (2.3.15), Dante having been known for making his Inferno ice-cold rather than red-hot. This connection is then bypassed by Viswanathan (see n5 above.)

[18] This title has been taken by some critics as racist (hence here my interpolation for the n-word), but Andrew Lakritz, in *Modernism and the Other in Stevens, Frost, and Moore* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1996), observes that Stevens did make favourable enough comments about blacks to his daughter ("very much alive," "full of fun," etc.) and that the title of the "Cemetery" poem was not, in point of actual fact, of Stevens's own manufacture, it so happens, but something he unwittingly took over from a Southern friend, Judge Arthur Powell; thus he did not mean it in any racialist manner (see pp. 50-51), at least personally. He used a *persona*.

[19] On his acceptance of Catholicism at the end of his life, see Janet McCann, "A letter from Father Hanley on Stevens' Conversion to Catholicism," *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, 18 (1994), 3-5.

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Divinity in Prometheus Unbound

Much more than a zealous reformer, Shelley sounds a mystical philosopher in his mythopoeic drama, *Prometheus Unbound*, a product of his maturest days. He is preoccupied here with issues such as the problem of the unity of existence, invincible might of the human will, shadowy nature of evil, and significance of love as the only effective remedial power. The social and political themes lie shrouded in a thick mist of mystical meanings which, though not vague, often tend to elude the reader because of their abstraction and delicacy of distinction. About this least imperfect poem, Mary Shelley aptly remarks: "It requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as his own to understand the mystic meanings scattered throughout the poem."[1] It seems as if his gradual but steady maturing by this stage beyond the immediate social and political concerns and into a mystical philosopher was predisposed by his unending quest for getting at the core of the human social and political plight; which brings to light his steady movement from substance to essence and from periphery to centre. The tendency to reach the core made Shelley in *Queen Mab* to assail God and religion, and in *The Revolt of Islam* to seriously ponder the incessant strife between *good* and *evil*. Transcending both the juvenile atheism (proved and sealed with a *Q.E.D.* in *The Necessity of* Atheism) and institutional reform of *Queen Mab* and eloquent rhetoric and iconoclasm of *The Revolt of Islam*, he emerges a mystic exploring the secrets of the self in this mythopoeic drama. His treatment of the subject of divinity here establishes him as a nonconformist to the conventional divinity rather than the one denying faith in an unnameable, indefinable and non-anthropomorphic Ultimate Reality, the

origin and final recourse of all that exists. Godhead as it is in Shelley's mind can be seen in this poem cracking apart from the godhead of the common notion;— the latter still a target of his denunciation in that it is not what it is taken to be.

The poem opens with the description of the unbearable sufferings of Prometheus, the benefactor of mankind, as he is chained to a bleak precipice in the Indian Caucasus and undergoing his age-long torture. He must endure endless woe until Demogorgon is activated to cause the fall of Jupiter, the omnipotent ruling tyrant, and Hercules releases Prometheus to be reunited with Asia and retire to a cave. At the very outset we are confronted with the question of real Being; — in what capacity Jupiter rules over the world, in what sense Demogorgon is his creator and superior to him and what is the power called Demogorgon. A little pondering over the issue, even though the dramatic action is so laden with philosophic purport, may bear out the possible resolution. Prometheus, unlike the popular opinion, does not seem to be Man, but *Existence* as a whole, the experimental aspect of eternal reality. He is the eternal Sole Intelligence or *One Mind*, of which humans are non-eternal portions bound by the illusions of Time, Chance, Occasion and Change etc. Jupiter appears to be the distorted projection of the same all-inclusive Intelligence, and Demogorgon is the realm of infinite possibilities whence every thing flows into actuality or being of time and space and to which it returns. It has to be seen how by miscalculation and unnatural actions the *One Mind*, Prometheus, brings upon itself numerous ills which chain the modified partial manifestations of *One Mind*, the humans, in a numberless evils of multiple shades.

Unlike Aeschylus', Shelley's Prometheus was never to divulge the 'secret' to Jupiter which by implication brings the responsibility of the fall of Jupiter squarely on the

shoulders of Prometheus, and does not offer a choice to Jupiter either to marry or abandon Thetis. The refusal to yield the 'secret' or the 'fateful word', symbolising the 'will' of Prometheus, the only thing held back by him while giving away all power to Jupiter, ultimately brings about the fall of Jupiter, the Tyrant. That is why Shelley prefers the Prometheus of his drama to the Satan of *The Paradise Lost*, as he states

> "Prometheus is, in my judgement, a more poetical character than Satan, because, in addition to courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement, which, in the Hero of *Paradise Lost*, interfere with the interest."[2]

From his arbitrary and tyrannical Jupiter Shelley eliminates every possibility of softening in the course of time as opposed to Aeschylus' Zeus. For Shelley, only *One Mind*, Prometheus, is capable of possessing complete freedom and not Zeus, as in Aeschylus' scheme of things. Giving full freedom to Jupiter would amount to admit absolute tyranny. Aeschylus holds Prometheus sinful for transferring undeserved powers to mankind out of his excessive love for humans, in addition to his defiance of Zeus's supremacy. But, Shelley locates all power and divinity in the human spirit, relinquishing any of which remains man's essential sin. Therefore, in the Shelleyan version of the myth,

> "Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of intellectual and moral nature, impelled by the purest and the true motives to the best and noblest ends."[3]

In such a background of recast and inversion of Aeschylus' myth, this mythopoeic drama of Shelley focuses on the sole end of eliminating evil from human nature and society. Under the belief of man's perfectibility Shelley holds, Mary Shelley tells us

> "that evil is not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident that might be expelled... Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none . . . that man could be so perfectionised as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater part of the creation, was the cardinal point of his system."[4]

Shelley appears in this poem to be making a clear distinction between 'evil', the active agent, and its external manifestations. Penetrating the outer layer of these shifty manifestations, he comes to regard all visible and experiential forms and shapes of evil to be various manifestations and shades of one central evil, Jupiter, which sticks to the minds of many as the basic concept of god[5] to mould their actions accordingly. This very 'concept' has been responsible for causing recurring bloodshed and protracted enslavement of humankind. Time stands witness to it. The Spirit of the Hour alludes to the same in the long speech towards the end of the third Act

> And those foul shapes, abhorred by God and man, —
> Which, under many a name and many a form
> Strange, savage, ghastly, dark and execrable,
> Where Jupiter, the Tyrant of the world;
> And which the nations, panic-stricken, served
> With blood, and hearts broken by long hope, and love
> Dragged to his altars soiled and garlandless,

And slain amid men's reclaiming tears,
(III, IV, 180-87)

The shadow of *One Mind* (i.e. Jupiter, the false god) demands total obedience and surrender of all to him. He is not agreeable to anything less than that. Through Mercury he seeks of Prometheus to submit the 'secret' known to him alone and thus eschew his wrath

... there is a secret known
To thee, and to none else of living things,
Which may transfer the sceptre of wide Heaven,
The fear of which perplexes the Supreme:
Clothe it in words, and bid it clasp his throne
In intercession; ...
(I. 371-76)

Submission to this false god is not sought through love or sympathy but fear, hatred etc. symbolised by hell. Even before coming to the point Mercury had already mentioned the powers of the 'Torturer' armed "With the strange might of unimagined pains" to "scheme slow agonies in Hell" (II. 365-67). Mercury is commissioned to direct all those intensified pains unto Prometheus. It suggests that unless all bow to him in blind submission, Jove would never withdraw from tormenting him beyond all limits. Mercury, therefore, asks Prometheus "to blend thy soul in prayer," (I. 376) and

'Let the will kneel within thy haughty heart:
For benefits and meek submission tame'
The fiercest and the mightiest.
(I. 378-80)

But Prometheus would not divulge that 'secret' to Jupiter, as it would ensure both the tyrannical supremacy of Jupiter and

eternal enslavement of mankind. In two ways Shelley deviates here from Aeschylus' legend: the secret has nowhere been worded and Prometheus never submits, whereas in Aeschylus the secret is worded and Prometheus humbles himself by submitting. Determined not to submit his 'will' which would ultimately cause Jupiter's overthrow, he draws Mercury's attention to the fact that

> Evil minds
> Change good to their own nature. I gave all
> He has; and in return he chains me here
> years, ages, night and day: ... (I. 380-84)

He believes that all the social and political evil flows from this very surrender to the shadow of 'Good', the fountainhead of evils. That is why he chooses to suffer and not to surrender. Each and every object echoes the great misery of Prometheus to the extent that it seems as if the entire universe is filled with only one thing, misery. Under the omnipotence of the false god, Jove, everything has vanished or lost its individual significance.[6] Only the 'will' of *One Mind* can check the excesses of its dark shadow. Only good sense can expose his falsehood and relieve the wrongfully enslaved humankind through its determination for not to submit. Prometheus says

> ... me alone, who checked,
> .....
> The falsehood and the force of him who reigns
> Supreme, and with the groans of pining slaves
> Fills your dim glens and liquid wilderness:
> (I. 125-29)

From the shadow of *One Mind* nothing can flow but evils such as tyranny, agony, pain etc. whereas from *One Mind*

flows only good sense, kindness and wisdom.[7] The entire paraphernalia of Jove—Mercury, tempest-walking hounds and Furies are all his supporting agents, through whom he efficiently inflicts tortures upon mankind represented in Prometheus. The delight of the Furies at the idea of torturing the bound Prometheus knows no limits

> The hope of torturing him smells like a heap
> Of corpses, to a death-bird after battle
> (I. 339-40)

The Furies, failing to inflict the desired pain, are scolded back by Mercury, 'Jove's world-wandering herald' (I. 325) to gnash their foodless teeth beside the streams of fire and wail, so as to enable themselves to take the deepest bite.[8] Mercury then summons more efficient Geryon, Chimera and Sphinx, who are the subtlest of fiends to perform the task of inflicting the severest pain on helpless mankind. Indirectly, Shelley condemns the utterly unjustifiable and gruesome practices carried on in the name of the false god by its many self-appointed lieutenants. If the situation has to be interpreted in absolute political terms, we may quote Cameron who holds that the 'Furies' stand for

> "all the satellites and agents of court and state by means of which — as well as by its armies — the ruling aristocratic class kept itself in power."[9]

Shelley entertains no doubts about the fact that the sufferings of mankind had to last as long as the subservience to the false god was not relinquished. Prometheus is ready to suffer and wait until the rule of Jove comes to an end. He seems to have risen above desire or fear which has enabled him to bear so steadfastly and patiently the uncountable 'years to come of pain' which 'last while Jove must reign:

nor more, nor less / Do I desire or fear', (I. 415-16) and he proclaims: 'I would not quit / This bleak ravine, these unrepentant pains' (I. 426-27). Instead of giving in to the oppression, Prometheus gets more and more determined and challenges the Furies to pour out whatever miseries they may have in their possession: 'I laugh your power, and his who sent you here, / To lowest scorn. Pour forth the cup of pain' (II. 473-74). To all the new horrors he responds only thus

> 'Pain is my element, as hate is thine;
> You rend me now: I care not'
> (I. 477-78)

and

> 'I weigh not what ye do, but what ye suffer,
> Being evil. Cruel was the power which called
> You, or aught else so wretched, into light.
> (I. 480-82)

Such steadfastness and invincibility originates in the legitimacy of his cause. His superiority lies in his being the master of himself, whereas instruments such as the Furies are mere slaves.[10]

Shelley's belief in the perfectibility of human nature is so great that he is not ready to admit the subservience of the human soul, even if so inclined, to any false god. Even if the human bodies were prone to such slavery, the ever-present spark in the human soul never extinguishes, although it may fade and grow dim for the time being under the shadow of adversity

> All else had been subdued to me; alone
> The soul of man, like unextinguished fire,
> Yet burns towards heaven with fierce reproach, and
> doubt,

> And lamentation, and reluctant prayer,
> Hurling up insurrection, . . .
> (III, I. 4-8)

The spirit of doubt in man rescues him from total or permanent subservience and urges him towards disobedience to and rebellion against all superimposed false concepts of divinity. Jupiter wonders as to how even 'eldest faith' and 'hell's coeval, fear' (III, I, 10) could not successfully contain the rebellious man and his spirit of doubt. Despite all his efforts to crush the soul of man, he 'yet remains supreme over misery, / Aspiring, unrepressed' (III. I. 16-17). In Shelley's opinion, therefore, tyranny and oppressive rule flourish only on the strength of terror, cruelty, suppression etc. relying chiefly on stripping man of his humanness, and banishing sympathy and love from the domain of social interaction.

As to the question who the real centre of power is in the universe if not Jupiter, Shelley takes recourse to an unconventional answer. It is in his opinion Demogorgon, the imageless, shapeless, dormant darkness, whom he visualises as a timeless and spaceless realm of infinite potentialities, in which everything has its origin and existence, but which is neither a creator nor created. This might be explained probably in the light of his belief in the non-duality of mind and matter and 'thought' being the sole reality, a belief which absorbed his attention even after writing *Mont Blanc* in 1816. In the light of the role played by Demogorgon and Jupiter it seems implausible to assume Demogorgon to be necessity as does Cameron who says

> "(Demogorgon) is not only necessity or Fate in a general sense but necessity in the special, semi-

> scientific sense given to the concept by Godwin and Hume."[11]

It is not Demogorgon but Prometheus who can rightly be called the unflinching law of necessity through whom the Demogorgonian potentialities become functional in the arena of actuality. However, Cameron may be justified in pointing out about Jupiter that

> "in terms of political allegory ... as distinguished from the general social allegory, he represents not just tyranny but tyrannical rule of Metternich, Castlereagh, and their satellites, and tyranny of the Holy Alliance, to the overthrow of which Shelley looked forward."[12]

The awareness of Demogorgon, even though a non-experimental reality because it lacks any resemblance, can be activated and achieved only through love. Asia, the symbol of generative love, and Panthea's descending to the depths of the abyss is suggestive of the mystical experience; the deepest form of meditation for knowing the reality of the self and external objects. It also suggests that in Shelley, Reality lies 'within' and is not superimposed from without. It is not external to the nature of man but pours out from within the core of his *Self*, the locus of divinity. It is in other words the essence of the existence. Asia approaches the cave of Demogorgon following the echoes not radiating from it but withdrawing into it. Demogorgon, the ultimate reality, has no resemblance whatever with time, space or fate-bound existence, and so cannot be described in words or grasped by sensory experience. It is only an intuitive realisation. Panthea could speak only thus about this reality

> I see a mighty darkness

Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom
Dart round, as light from the meridian sun.
—Ungazed upon and shapeless, neither limb,
Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is
A living spirit.
(II. iv. 3-8)

To the questions of ultimate value, put forth by Asia, like 'Who made the living world?' and 'Who made all / That it contains? Thought, passion, reason, will,/ Imagination?' (II. iv. 8 &10-11), and the emotion of love, Demogorgon responds by repeating the same answer 'God' and 'God: Almighty God' and 'Merciful God'.[13] As to the question who created evils like terror, madness, crime, remorse, abandoned hope, love turned to hate, self-contempt, pain, Hell, and sharp fear of Hell, Demogorgon vaguely says 'He reigns.' The answer may appear to be evasive on the surface which it is far from being. In peculiar Shelleyan style, Demogorgon makes it clear that all good rests in God, a non-Being, and evil is generated by the shadow of that Being cast upon itself which can be cast aside only by the exercise of free will vibrant with the principles of love and forgiveness. The apparent vagueness of his answer owes to the fact that "the Primal Power of the world"[14] cannot be imagined; no name or shape could be ascribed to it. This will-less, thoughtless, passionless "mighty darkness" of the "living Spirit"[15] appears to have no resemblance with the mind of an anthropomorphic god because Shelley holds that

> "the basis of all things cannot be, as the popular philosophy alleges, mind, is sufficiently evident. Mind... cannot create, it only perceives. It is said also to be the cause. But cause is only a word expressing a certain state of human mind with regard to the manner in which two thoughts are apprehended to be related

> to each other.... It is infinitely improbable that the cause of mind, that is, of existence, is similar to mind."[16]

All things could be explained but 'the deep truth is imageless' (II. iv. 116). The 'eternal love' is the only absolute truth. Even if 'Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change' (II. iv.119) were to speak up, they would not be able to define truth because to them 'All things are subject but eternal love.' That is why Demogorgon has not been able to name The Master of Jove. That it is a sort of mystical experience becomes quite obvious from Asia's reaction to the voice of Demogorgon which she felt to be 'the voice of her own heart, and echo within,' [17] and so his answer seems to her not an alien or a far-fetched idea.

The fall of Jupiter comes without any noteworthy resistance on his part. Since the origin of all being is reactivated through love it would withdraw the shadow of Being, Jupiter, from the realm of actuality owing to which all forms of tyranny would vanish from the face of the earth. Jupiter would have no choice but to follow the command of Demogorgon, since his will was endowed and not self-acquired. But, as hinted at earlier, such a doom to Jupiter would not be occasioned unless the principle of love gets activated and supplants, in all its strength, the principle of hate; since, according to Shelley, free will is shown only in right action and while acting evilly it is not free, an idea resembling that of Plotinus who holds

> "Only when our soul acts by its native pure and independent Reason-Principle can the act be described as ours and an exercise of Free-Will."[18]

In accomplishment of evil there is the negation of freedom; an idea voiced by Demogorgon as well: "All spirits are enslaved which serve things evil" (II. iv.110-11). Jupiter flourishes under the curse battered upon by Titan until he withdraws it, as is clear from the following lines

> The wingless, crawling hours, one among whom
> —As some dark Priest hales the reluctant victim
> Shall drag thee, cruel king, to kiss the blood
> From these pale feet, which then might trample thee
> If they disdained not such a prostrate slave.
> Disdain! Ah no! I pity thee. What ruin
> Will hunt thee undefended through wide Heaven!
> How will thy soul, cloven to its depth with terror,
> Gape like a hell within! I speak in grief,
> Not exultation, for I hate no more,
> As then ere misery made me wise. The curse
> Once breathed on thee I would recall. ...
> (I. 48-59)

The withdrawal of the curse activates the origin of things, Demogorgon, whose action immediately and inevitably follows to dethrone Jupiter, and who wills (which amounts to be the mightiest command) him to relinquish the domain in these words: 'Descend, and follow me down the abyss,'(III. i. 53-56) and "we must dwell together / Henceforth in Darkness."[19] In this way, Demogorgon absorbs the evil incarnate, Jupiter, from the realm of actuality into the realm of potentiality, which is his own self. It is beyond Jupiter's choice to disobey the command of Demogorgon, as none may exist independently of his Grand Will. Neither can any of its own potentialities if released into actuality assume so great a power or magnitude as to disregard or trample its own origin to the extent of disabling it to reassert itself. The same astonishes Jupiter: "Even thus beneath the deep Titanian

prison / I trample thee! Thou lingerest?"(III.i.62-63). It is ironic that the Tyrant who knew no mercy pleads for the same for the furtherance of his own evil existence. Quite reluctantly, he agrees to sink, which he is bound to, along with Demogorgon "on the wide waves of ruin" "Into a shoreless sea,"[20] with the lament

> Ai! ai!
> The elements obey me not. I sink
> Dizzily down, ever, for ever, down.
> And, like a cloud, mine enemy above
> Darkens my fall with victory! Ai! Ai!
> (III. i. 79-83)

In the social and political context, the fall of Jupiter suggests the end of all tyranny based on the false notion of god, the fountainhead of all superstition, envy, pride and fear. As mankind awakens to the universal principles of love and reason, the shadows of tyranny have to withdraw fast, as when the sun of knowledge shines, the shadows of superstition flee. It is not a superimposed (*Queen Mab* style) reform but the change within man, symbolised by the withdrawal of the curse by Prometheus. It is the evolved form of the same philosophical basis which finds only a vague expression in *Queen Mab*, in which the emphasis is on institutional reform rather than on the evolution of man's nature and his inner refinement. Shelley has suggested that according to Demogorgon's mighty law of necessity, evil has to withdraw, while love prevails, to the realm of infinite potentialities to remain there in the form of an unannihilated potentiality. Demogorgon does not annihilate Jupiter, points out Wasserman, but takes him away; implying thereby that evil always retains its potential presence posing a permanent threat to erupt again. But it may become functional only

when the intensity of love weakens. In the words of King-Hele

> "Jupiter's fall means reform's triumph. Prometheus represents the enlightened thinkers of Shelley's day, Mercury the supine drudges in the pay of the governing class (Jupiter), and the Furies the sycophants who grow fat on the spoils of their master and let off steam by persecuting reformers."[21]

Extending the metaphor, it might be taken to represent the reformist and progressive thinking of all times.

Be it in philosophical or social and political context, the fall of Jupiter, for Shelley, is not only an end of tyranny, but it also marks the beginning of the era of the attainment of the millennium. The chief characteristic of this era is its disentanglement from the concept of false god and the train of slavish and negative ideas flowing from it. Shelley envisages a total withering of religion in the society of new man, which was a faith 'dark yet mighty' and 'a power as wide / As is the world it wasted' (III. iv. 174-5). In the post-Jovian era, this concept would grow completely out of the hearts and minds of men, not overthrown 'but unregarded now' (III. iv. 179). Its withering away would ensure the deliverance of mankind from all social and political evils. The millennium will see a progressive and prosperous world free from the traditional, supervisory, anthropomorphic god and his paraphernalia

> Ceaseless, and rapid, and fierce, and free,
> With the spirits which build a new earth and sea,
> And a heaven where yet heaven could never be.
> (IV. 163-65)

Thus, Shelley casts aside the concept of the new era being externally imposed on man. It would emerge from within his own mind and good sense. The night of godhead will be outsped by the spread of perfect, shadowless light of wisdom; a day without night

> Solemn, and slow, and serene, and bright,
> Leading the day and outspreading the Night,
> With the powers of a world of perfect light.
> (IV. 166-68)

Such is the prevailing, though false, concept of god to which Shelley traces all the social and political ills and every form of tyranny and oppression. The sole aim of such a god is to deprive man of his 'will', the only thing that he cannot subdue, as it is most essential for the continuance of his tyrannical power. Men, even though they might have given in physically, have always worn rebellious gesture against such a so-called divine demand and consequently have been put to severest tortures and miseries by the representative agencies of the false god. Prometheus, who represents not only humans but the Being as such, endures the wrath of Jove for the same reason. Jove's wrath, along side inflicting heavy wounds on man, also upsets the natural harmony of the entire universe and plunges it into suffering on that account. But evil prevails only as long as man does not will otherwise, as says Prometheus

> Whilst me, who am thy foe, eyeless in hate,
> Hast thou made reign and triumph, to thy scorn
> O'er mine own misery and thy vain revenge.
> (I. 9-11)

In his mad revenge, the false god, in whose name every wrong is justified on earth, has slapped upon mankind heaps of social ills

> Requitest for knee-worship, prayer, and praise,
> And toil, and hecatomb of broken hearts,
> With fear and self-contempt and barren hope.
> (I. 6-8)

For the crime of refusing to share the tyranny and give up his 'will', Prometheus, whose modified partial manifestation are the humans, hangs

> Nailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain,
> Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured; without herb,
> Incest, or beast, or shape or sound of life.
> Ah me! alas, pain, pain ever, for ever! (I. 20-23)

Shelley implies that *good* shrinks away from tyrannical society, for even if it retains itself it is changed to *evil* because 'Evil minds / Change good to their own nature.' Every good for tyrannical Jove turns bad, who rewards Prometheus for all the powers he gave him by chaining him: 'I gave all / He has; and in return he chains me here' (I. 381-82). In other words, good, if unguarded by love, supports tyranny and becomes its food. An unjust and tyrannical social and political system checks all progress and holds up society in deep stagnation. Only stagnation, monotony and persistent miseries have marked Prometheus' life. The disturbed and disharmonised universe is also alive to his agony. Objects of nature such as mountains, earth, heaven and sea share his pain, but being bound by the law of necessity cannot help but further add to Prometheus' miseries. Despite this, he has not given up hope in a future when Spring will return to the

world to stay there permanently and he will no more be in pain[22]

> And yet to me welcome is day and night,
> Whether one breaks the hoar frost of the morn,
> Or starry, dim and slow, the other climbs
> The leaden-coloured east; . . . (I. 44-47)

In this visualisation of a prosperous future reverberates the prophecy of *Ode to the West Wind*: "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" (l. 70)

In *Prometheus Unbound,* therefore, the problem of divinity is seen in a more mature philosophical perspective. The targets of Shelley's denunciation do remain the same, but the poetic idiom and imagery undergo intensive philosophising effect and mystical intonation. Shelley has now come to believe in the unity of *Being* irrespective of its immediate relevance, good or bad. The *Being* is pervaded by a grand Intelligence which he names Prometheus, who has its existence within one metaphysical reality in the form of potentialities. The release of these potentialities into actuality or their withdrawing to the same metaphysical reality—Demogorgon—depends on the actual will of Prometheus. Their being good or bad also depends on the conflicting forces of love and hate as they may be in actuality. Deep reflection leads Shelley to infer that evil is not an independent agency, but only a miscalculation by, and distorted projection of, the purest Intelligence. Human beings, the earthly portions of Prometheus, are impressed by the arbitrary and assertive distortion of Prometheus whom they start calling god. From this false concept of god flow all the social and political evils and ills. Human beings learn wisdom through sufferings and also realise the grand significance of love. But, love cannot be evoked or made

operative without exercising the will power. The human will is the grandest power in this universe. If humans exercise their will to love, it automatically compels evil/hate to withdraw. Prometheus embodies 'love-activated' by withdrawing the curse breathed upon Jupiter and this very act causes the latter's fall. Evil, hate and revenge cannot undo themselves as they further reinforce in their invocation what they are meant to deracinate. Evil begets evil. Tyranny or evil can be ripped up only through love. Liberty, equality, and fraternity can survive only on the strength of love. Man is most supreme in this world of creation and he is predisposed to subdue everything in the universe by the power of his *will*. In the case of weakening and submission of his will, he debases himself and ensures his permanent slavery, the mother of all social and political evils. In order to get rid of evil and slavery, Shelley upholds, it is necessary to brush aside the concept of an anthropomorphic supervisory god. Once this objective is achieved, the world shall see the eternal spring.

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Note on *Prometheus Unbound* by Mrs. Shelley, *op. cit.* p. 270.

[5] Throughout this essay 'god' with small 'g' stands for false entity and with capital 'G' for the real entity.
[6] I. 115-17
[7] I. 141-45
[8] I. 344-45
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[13] II. iv. 8-18
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Philosophical, Intellectual and Literary Frontiers: The Modern Perspective

The modern temper is complex, involuted and contradictory. However, given the fact that it is the product of extraordinarily diverse and often mutually conflicting influences - philosophical, scientific, political and cultural - it is hardly a matter for surprise. Advances in the natural sciences and in technology, new developments in the field of philosophy, anthropology and depth-psychology created a revolution in the world of ideas, particularly those concerning man's relation to the universe. The image of man in the cosmic frame as projected by this revolution was such that it robbed him of his complacence and created a climate of thought which was both disturbing and challenging. Man found that his beliefs, based on what had appeared to be unshakable grounds, and were a part of his inheritance for centuries, were but a network of melting shadows. The conflict between the rationality of science and eschatological claims of religious dogma, between psychoanalytic and anthropological discoveries about the meaning and range of human practices and the accepted norms of natural, civilized human behavior, between Positivism and Existentialism, these and the sense of the ever-extending frontiers of knowledge, only deepening the mystery of the universe, left man baffled and humbly conscious of his insecure and precarious situation in the order of things. Man found himself perpetually frustrated in his ambitions as he struggled with a world he did not make but hoped at all events to control, since for him the meaning of knowledge and understanding had narrowed to the mere ability to manipulate and control. And yet all the control he

could achieve over the processes of nature gave him no peace because he was haunted by the need to understand.

The modern age, one could say, therefore, is one in which the human situation or at any rate, man's perception of the human situation is neither too certain, nor too optimistic. In spite of the fact that the twentieth century represents the peak of cultural advancement, modern man feels lonely, isolated, and even afraid of the future. The reason behind this, in the words of Ruth Benedict, is that:

> The sophisticated modern temper has made of social relativity ...a doctrine of despair. It has pointed out its incongruity with the orthodox dreams of permanence and ideality and with the individual's illusion of autonomy.[1]

Modern man feels confused and uncertain because he has been rudely woken up from the dream of an anthropocentric universe into a reality in which his existence is, to say the least, marginal in the scheme of things. He is disconcerted at having to face an age where, as William Barrett[2] points out, science, on the one hand, makes living conditions simpler and on the other hand, lurks as an instrument of naked power. The loss of faith and spiritual beliefs adds to his loneliness for he has nowhere to turn to for solace. In fact he cannot form a coherent picture of the universe anymore. As G.H. Bantock says:

> Behind all these manifestations of confusion and uncertainty there lies a deeper and more profound problem - the inability to arrive at a commonly accepted metaphysical picture of man.[3]

The frustration, anguish, disillusionment and despair of the modern age are born out of this predicament. Man, deprived of faith appears "in his true alienated state,

suffering extreme despair in the very triumph of his willed assertion of autonomy."[4] In a world without God, he can only see himself as a biological organism whose entire behavior is explicable in terms of the survival strategy of adaptation to environment. But he is no more a creature of instinct, and his transcendental craving leaves him spiritually listless, emotionally isolated, a stranger in a coldly mysterious if not hostile universe. Like Henri Barbusse's unnamed hero in *L'Enfer* [5] or like Mersalt in Camus' *The Stranger* [6] he imagines himself an outsider to normal human reality. As symbolized by Krebbs, the hero of Hemingway's short story *The Soldiers' Homes* [7], modern man shrinks from belief as one who has revulsion for it, and he knows not why.

In order to understand these essential features of the modern temper, one must get a clear idea of its intellectual, cultural, social and economic moorings. Let us try to trace, without quite attempting a chronological account, the slow and erratic shift in sensibility from the nineteenth to the twentieth century which has created the situation of a crisis of values and necessitated in writers a serious quest for new values which constitutes the crux of modernity. For this purpose, let us divide our survey into three significant sub-heads, and begin from the philosophical revolution, then look at the artistic and cultural movements that represent the essence of modernity, and finally, focus on some major writers who have contributed vitally to this shift in thought and sensibility.

Changes in the Philosophical Landscape

Even as late as the nineteenth century a certain balance had been maintained between the religious convictions of the age and the secular aspirations of the intellectually aware middle-class. The philosophical ideas of the age suited the

people well, for such views offered a frame of human relations appropriate to its ideological needs, more specifically, to the needs of ideological hegemony operative in that age. The sentiment expressed in Browning's *Pippa Passes* that:

> God's in his heaven,
> All's right with the world. [8]

only voiced the ideas of a people who still had faith in a supreme deity, who cared for the world and whose understanding of human destiny was simple, clear-cut and based on the idea of God as the source of all meaning, all value and all fulfillment.

However, a marked shift in thinking set in when in the latter half of the nineteenth century man's self-image as the static facsimile of the divine spirit began to undergo a change. The idea of growth emerged and impressed itself upon the mind of the people in two ways. Applied to the human world this idea meant the renewing of the faith in the perfectibility of man; on the other hand, transferred to biology, the idea of growth placed man in a naturalistic setting and gave him a new understanding of his origins adumbrated most clearly in Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. This theory forced man to see himself as a being whose essence could be explained purely in biological terms. All the glorious aspirations of man could be seen as his efforts to adapt himself dialectically to his environment, even as he tried to reshape it. The Biblical notion of the origin of man was at stake now. Regardless of their conscious response to the implications of Darwin's theory, the subconscious influence it exerted on the modern sensibility was subtle and complex in its ramifications.

Another significant theory, which shaped the modern worldview, was Freud's psychoanalysis. Freud used the concept of "unconscious" to explain the irrational roots of

"normal, rational" behavior. He developed the method of psychoanalysis, which claimed to plumb the depths of the human psyche and reveal the origins of our surface emotions, feelings and practices. He emphasized the need to reach into the individual's early past to trace the traumatic origins of his neurosis which determined the pattern of his adult behavior. However, Freud ranged far beyond the theory of the individual mind and extended his discovery to an analysis of society and its history. He pointed out that an understanding of present social neuroses may be achieved by the awareness of a buried past. Thus philosophy and even poetic insight were as important to a diagnosis of man's personal and social ills, as were biological and physiological data. This view had implications for man's vision of the ethical, which were far reaching.

Before Freud, studies in psychology were concerned with the insane. Freud turned the attention of psychiatry towards the neurotics and the so-called normal people who cannot be happy with the world or themselves. He tried to show that the human personality was a battlefield in which libidinal forces contended with the super-ego, which represented the moral standpoint.

> Above all, the implied criticism of the traditional behavior and the discovery that the super-ego could distort the ego, so that in our therapy we often find ourselves obliged to do battle with the super-ego and work to moderate its demands, had a profound effect on twentieth century moral attitudes.[9]

Further, the way in which Freud's theories of personality made libido, or sexual instinct, the principal force in psychic development shook popular belief about civilized man, who was revealed to be an instinct-ridden animal, foredoomed to

perpetual misery by inner desires, which he could neither satisfy nor renounce with equanimity.

While discussing Freud as a significant influence on modern thought, one must also mention, along with him, the contributions of C.G. Jung in the field of depth psychology. Although a close associate of Freud in the early phase of his career, Jung differed from him in more ways than one. For example, he disagreed with Freud's excessive emphasis on sexuality as the key to human personality. He also envisaged a more complex role for the relations of parents and children in the formation of personality than Freud's narrow and reductive notion of Oedipal complex. The fact that according to Jung the unconscious -- individual or collective is not a mere storehouse of repressed sexuality but a fountainhead of creativity, had a very significant influence on all domains of art and culture.

Further, Jung developed the concept of the Collective Unconscious, which according to him was a reservoir of collective racial memories and represented a much deeper stratum of the psyche. It constitutes the unknown material from which our consciousness emerges. It harks back to an unknown area of the mind beyond rational comprehension. Jung believed that civilized man preserves, though unconsciously, psychic structures or archetypes which when transformed to conscious symbols, form the language of mythology and also the universal symbols that recur in diverse cultures at various stages in history.

Jung's theory of the archetypes of the Collective Unconscious also had some interesting conclusions to offer about man's religious functions and the state of his psychic health. In contrast to those psychologists who viewed religion as an illusion or an escape from reality, Jung held that religion had an important existential function, namely that of mirroring the structure of reality within the psyche in

the form of symbolic patterns. In short, Jung believed that man needs to experience the image of God within his own soul. When this does not happen there is a split in man's personality[10]. Myths, according to him, are a direct expression of the Collective Unconscious and are found in similar forms among all peoples and in all ages, and when man loses touch with the forces of creativity that nourish his being, it results in the disintegration of personality. Religions, poetry, folklore, all draw sustenance from those creative forces and they all serve the same primal function of maintaining the integrity of Being.

Another significant and direct influence on the life and thought of the twentieth century was, of course, Marxism. Marx traced the historical and social roots of modern capitalism, laying bare the contradictions inherent within it, and showed the historical inevitability of its downfall. According to Marxism, all changes, whether in the physical world, or in society, occurred in a dialectical fashion, that is, as a progressive resolution of internal contradictions. A series of quantitative changes resulted in a qualitative transformation, thus raising the particular form to a higher stage of existence. Applied to the realm of man's social relations it was called historical materialism. As stated by Engels in the Preface to the English Edition (1888) of the *Communist Manifesto*:

> ...the whole history of mankind (since the dissociation of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles (which) ... forms a series of evolutions in which, nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class - the proletariat - cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class - the bourgeoisie -

> without... emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction and class struggles.[11]

Marx declared that each society developed according to its internal economic contradictions. Moreover, every social system has a superstructure of ideas, which emerge from its basic economic structure, and constitute a body of religious and/or secular thought, philosophy, social mores, cultural practices, government and laws of jurisprudence. Marx argued that ideas themselves could sometimes, particularly during a phase of social crisis, act as a motive force of change, acquiring an apparent independence from the economic base, which gave rise to it. This would be a period of great intellectual activity, of creative experimentation. Here again he drew attention, repeatedly, to the role of the proletariat in actively combating old ideas and disseminating and promoting new ones.

Unlike the idealistic philosophers who uphold the primacy of ideas and the subjective factor, Marx emphasized the primacy of the objective reality and underlined the fact that even subjective life is determined by the objective factors. In the thought of the early Marx, alienation, a dominant problem of the modern man, is a necessary evil arising from the capitalist mode of production. Marx pointed out that in a capitalist system, man becomes identified with his role in a complicated system of production, resulting in self-alienation. Money comes to dominate all relationships, and it is the worker, who is the chief victim, deprived of all spontaneity, mechanized and estranged from himself. To regain his own identity, the worker must overcome the forces of oppression. That is how the concept of alienation applies to the economic sphere. What in psychiatry relates to the loss of identity is shown to originate in the economic sickness from which man, particularly the proletariat, suffers. These ideas exerted enormous influence at all levels

- ideological, political, economic, and cultural - on the entire world, and decisively molded the shape of the modern era.

Another important thinker who, with prophetic insight, grasped the spirit of the modern era, gave a poetic voice to it and analyzed the genealogy of its dilemmas, its inconsistencies, its sense of irrevocable decadence, was the great and much misunderstood philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche rejected Christianity and its tenets as having failed to offer any spiritual solace or upliftment for man. His solution was diametrically opposed to what Christianity proposed. Pity and suffering are redeemed by the Will-to-Power, not by Christ; beatitude is realized in Eternal Recurrence, not in heaven; Zarathustra, the prophet and savior (whom Nietzsche chooses as the persona for articulating his thought) replaces Christ; and the negation of life in Christianity gives way to tragic affirmation. Nietzsche believed firmly that by following his creed as embodied in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, modern man would transcend himself, overcome his feeling of alienation and in general strive towards being a superior race in the way the Greeks were. Zarathustra, the supreme sage, who knows neither God nor devil, the man who masters himself through obedience to his positive instincts becomes Nietzsche's symbol of the ideal man. Man can attain eternity by being able to face life with courage and honesty: "Remain true to earth and believe not those who speak to you of super-earthly hopes..."[12], proclaims Zarathustra. He emphasizes the importance of Force, the strength to rise above and overcome pettiness and vulgarity, on to affirmation of life and emancipation from all that is questionable in existence. It is the Will-to-Power that takes life beyond good and evil, death and life.

Nietzsche's philosophy with its deeply tragic and yet profoundly optimistic vision of the meaning of existence and the future of man was to so strongly influence the philosophy of Existentialism that it would be no exaggeration to say that some of Nietzsche's texts are a prologue to the drama of existential thought.

Existentialism, which perhaps more than any other mode of thought, characterizes the intellectual spirit of the modern age, began roughly in the aftermath of the First World War in Western Europe, but soon became a pervasive influence on every aspect of modernity everywhere. The essential thrust of this philosophy can be understood from a statement like the following describing it as

> ...a protest against the views of the world, and policies of action in which human beings are regarded as the helpless play things of historical forces or as wholly determined by the regular operation of natural processes. All Existential writers seek to justify in some way the importance of human personality. [13]

The origins of this philosophy can be traced back to the nineteenth century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, but it was most cogently expounded and also made widely influential in the twentieth century by Jean-Paul Sartre. Kierkegaard spoke of the wretchedness of man without God and the need for "the rediscovery of the religious center of the self."[14] Sartre, however, rejected Kierkegaard's belief in God, but accepted his conception of life as disorder. Sartre envisioned man as a stranger to himself and to others, helpless, flung without knowing how or why into a world he may betray, but cannot deny; forced to make his way, as best as he can, in uncertainty, fear and anguish in a world in which he was superfluous. Sartre holds that the problem of

"What is Man?" can only be approached subjectively and each man defines himself through his choices and actions.

Existentialism maintains that existence precedes essence, that is, man exists before he acquires essence or individuality. Man performs an act of bad faith when he refuses to question the nature of things - religion, society, values, and dogmas - when he tries to avoid making a choice. Man must accept the onus of transforming existence into essence by asserting his freedom of choice and thus shape his own personality. Sartre asserted this human heritage of freedom of the choice of existence and described in a superbly imaginative analysis how it proves a curse as well as a blessing; a blessing, a gift as well as a burden -- a burden, in that it places upon man, the full responsibility for shaping his own destiny. This is the theme of *The Flies.* Thus Existentialism is a philosophy that inspires man to strive towards the highest ideal of authenticity, that demands that he throw away all kinds of crutches and take responsibility for "nothingness" of his existence, which is not a "given" something but pure, unlimited potentiality - exhilarating as well as terrifying in its openness.

The cumulative effect of the crosscurrents of all these ideas on the modern age was mind-boggling. Claimed as an inexhaustible object of analysis by every science and yet abandoned by all knowledge in the solitude of his search for meaning, man found himself on the verge of nihilism, where all beliefs, all values, all ideals appeared to be pathetic emblems of his own insecurity. Yet he was aware of his transcendence, aware that he cannot be reduced to mere matter or animalism or blind unconscious impulses or whatever. But he did not seem to know how to grasp that illusive transcendence that had seemed so easy, so simple in the days of faith. He was too afraid to face the truth and too honest to deny it. This led to the "cataclysmic devaluation of

human values and dissociation of culture and civilization,"[15] which we may call the hallmark of the twentieth century.

The Artistic and Cultural Movements

The intellectual revolution created by the thinkers and philosophers discussed in the previous section, had far-reaching consequences for literature and the arts. The new insights into psychology, particularly depth psychology, and the new concept of man's social evolution gave rise to numerous artistic movements. Art and literature were freed from the fetters of hackneyed styles of presentation, and in their urge to project the new image of man and the human condition, writers and artists evolved new techniques and devices to express their vision of life. The numerous styles of presentation such as Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism, Impressionism, Expressionism and Surrealism have all been manifestations of this desire of the modern writer and artist to come to grips with reality and present it imaginatively in all its dimensions - in the plastic, pictorial and performing arts, as well as the different forms of literature. But since this work is about the dramatic vision of a playwright we shall confine ourselves to their impact or influence on modern drama.

Till the very end of the nineteenth century, European theater was simplistic and convention-ridden. Dramatists such as Eugene Scribe, Victorien Sardou, Guillaume Victor Augier and Alexander Dumas fils had inundated the theaters of Europe with sentimental romances and simple comedies, and gradually a deep discontent came to be felt among the serious theater goers, to which perspicacious playwrights and critics began to respond. Realism as a style and form of presentation was advocated by Herman Hettner in *Das Modern Drama* (1850). Hettner claimed that the writer Hebbel was the pioneer of "a great dramatic revival" and

that "in the struggles within the social fabric lay the material for a new form of tragedy."[16] Hebbel in Germany and Emile Zola in France called themselves "naturalists". Under the impact of Darwinism and other scientific discoveries, these Naturalists attempted what they claimed was a faithful and acute presentation of life. This was actually an extreme form of realism, based purely on a crude interpretation of the evolutionist conception of man as an animal without a soul and free will, whose behavior is determined by heredity and environment. The Naturalists called this literature "slice of life". Emile Zola, with his *Therese Racquin*, set the style to perfection. He painted the picture of middle class life with a detached and completely scientific or what one might prefer to call clinical objectivity. His world is that of the human condition at its rawest - full of starkness, squalor, poverty, with characters who appear to be psychological case studies. This obviously involved the abandonment of literature's perennial interest in "the dialectic of the spirit, the process of self-transcendence, the vital problem of subjectivity."[17]

Somewhat different from the naturalism of Zola, though not always quite distinct, was the movement of Realism in literature. The objective of this approach was to capture the image of human reality in all its nuances, but without sentimentality, without a superficial, false and clawing romanticism. This movement may be said to have originated in the novels of Flaubert and Balzac. It was a reaction not only against Gothic romances, picaresque adventure and allegorical fantasy, but also against conventional norms and conservative morality. In drama, realism was adopted and refined by Henrik Ibsen, both in theme and content. He was the first dramatist to utilize drama to sharply delineate the deep structure of contemporary social problems. Ibsen adopted the technique of the Well Made Play, but by casting aside the older methods of presentation - of exposition and

soliloquies - and enriching the form with his social and psychological vision, he transformed drama into an instrument of incisive analysis. Thus what was mechanical before, he made organic and vibrant. His terseness of form, combined with an economy of means, the abolishing of the ancient five-act division and the precision of his carefully thought out stage-directions, all these factors made him a model for the younger generation. Ibsen's forte was his art of characterization, where he depicted middle class characters but with a difference. His characters do not represent the type but are always removed from the ordinary. They are human beings driven by one single passion - Nora, Rebecca, Hedda, Solness - each one of them is an individual obsessed with a single aim, which he presents with extraordinary insight and infinite compassion but never deviating from an unsentimental realism. His *Ghosts* and *The Doll's House* represent the culmination of realistic drama in the modern era.

As an exponent of drama fully committed to the problems of contemporary world, Henrik Ibsen portrayed the image of society in its numerous facets. His revolt against society was messianic in the early phase where he celebrated the importance of man in nature. In this period he produced extravagant epics like *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*. Modern man feels, like Peer Gynt, to be a hollow man devoid of the capacity to feel, he suffers from a devitalized sensibility, an oppressive sense of reality that he cannot understand. Brand suggests the modern man's quest for an ideal. It is a play which voices the striving progressive spirit of the age. Beneath these plays is the same sharp and penetrating vision of life and powerful depiction of character, which is a hallmark of his later plays. In the next phase, the rebel against God has turned into a rebel against society. In *Ghosts*, Ibsen's ruthless exposure of the workings of heredity in its most unpleasantly clinical form, congenital

syphilis, created a sensation in Europe. It hit the mark because it was a burning question of the day. *The Doll's House* is an attack on marriage based on a lie and on hypocritical conventional morality, while in *Hedda Gabbler* he presents the problem of the maladjusted woman. In *The Master Builder* he dramatized aspiration or exertion of the will in defiance of inhibiting circumstances. Thus in his plays, Ibsen pictures the forces which destroy or retard the development of the human personality. The tragedy in his plays rises also from the fact that the Ibsenite protagonist remains

> always the same wilful individualist, the same protestant against the world as it is, ... the same egotist whose failures arise from his selfishness. They all climb and they all fall. [18]

Though George Bernard Shaw comes much later, the inspiration behind his writings is Ibsen. His significance lies in the fact that he broadened the horizon of comedy, while Ibsen was the pioneer of social tragedy. Even when Shaw deals with a serious subject his treatment of it is consistently and brilliantly comic. He wrote realistic plays with a view to reforming society. One of his greatest achievements was the refining of all dramatic forms. He would take a particular style or convention to its logical conclusion, thereby exhausting its utmost possibilities as well as exposing the absurdity of its extremities.

He created an altogether new approach to drama, which consisted of a package in which the structure is familiar, but the presentation is novel and even subversive. He managed to upset all the established conventions of stagecraft and in the process exposed the complicity between popular ethos and dramatic method.

Like Ibsen, Shaw too was a philosopher in his own right with a vision to project - social, moral and spiritual. He made comedy the tool of presentation and even when he deals with a serious theme, his treatment of it is consistently and brilliantly comic. In this way he could give a dose of bitter medicine to his readers and yet not displease or irritate them. A social rebel, desirous of change, Shaw made drama the instrument of social reform, and this gave him the opportunity of shattering numerous false idols and awakening our minds to thoughts beyond the shallowly conventional. Influenced in his social outlook by Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* and Karl Marx's *Das Capital*, he challenged the entire fabric of British Society and put to test all its cherished beliefs, ideals and institutions.

Although Shaw presented an unforgettable picture of Europe headed for destruction, he did not altogether despair because he was certain that while Nature would make mankind pay the price for its follies by making it extinct, the process of evolution would still go on towards perfection. This is Shaw's theory of Life Force, drawn from various sources, significant among which are Darwin's theory of evolution combined with Nietzsche's theory and concept of the Superman. It is the Force in or behind evolution, which is forever striving to attain a higher state of existence. So far its most wonderful achievement is Man. Man however is at present in a state of stagnation because the social institutions that were created to help his onward march have become outmoded and obsolete ideas have got hold of him. Unless man shakes off his stupor, cleanses his mind of superstitions and delusions and cooperates with Life Force in the march towards a higher manhood, Nature will abandon him and evolve some other creature that will respond to its purpose.

Shaw for all his rationalistic fulminations against the Church was essentially a religious man. All his life he was

dedicated to a high purpose and his faith in mankind, made explicit in his theory of Life Force, emerges not only in *Man and Superman* but also in *Back to Methuselah*. Shaw never interpreted God in theological terms but manifested as Life Force, forever creating something new.

While Ibsen and later Shaw were the exponents and the masters of realistic drama, Ibsen's contemporary, Strindberg, championed the cause of the anti-realistic theater. Intensely subjective in his presentation of theme, reality in his plays takes on strangely distorted, fantastic forms; the world around the protagonist is the dream-like projection of his disoriented mental state. Strindberg's dramas highlight the dark obsessions of the unconscious, the irrationality inherent in every man. His major achievement was the "dream-play technique" which conceptualized a play in a flowing, fluid series of episodes in which Strindberg imaginatively used light, music, visual symbols and atmospheric effects to cut through the materiality of life to the spiritual truths beneath. He discarded realism and the narrative style of dramatic sequences for a new and more sophisticated technique - the stream-of-consciousness device by which life on the stage was depicted as intensely subjective, internalized and blurred as in a dream. Strindberg was therefore hailed as the father of a number of dramatic movements among which Expressionism and Surrealism deserve special mention. He also foreshadowed many of the developments in the delineation of the image of man, for example, the drama of the Absurd.

The most modern of the moderns, Strindberg, endeavored to project the image of man as dream-impelled, bedeviled, irrational. The world of *The Dream Play* is a queer surrealistic world, an insane place, full of contradictions. Life often seems purposeless and meaningless. In the final scene of the play the Daughter of Indra comes to understand

the plight of man - he is a split creature, burdened with impossible desires and irreconcilable conflicts.

Strindberg suffered the alienation and spiritual disintegration of man in a personal capacity. *The Road To Damascus*, *The Dream Play* and *Spook Sonata* were all written after he underwent a spiritual crisis and these plays highlight extremely complex experiences and the dark obsessions of the unconscious, the irrationality of the inner self. Reality takes on strangely distorted forms, fantastic and at times horrifying. The world of his plays is the projection of the disoriented mental states of his characters. By virtue of his dramatic presentations, Strindberg is rightly hailed as the father of Expressionistic drama as well as the Drama of the Absurd.

Strindberg's Expressionistic plays shadow forth the falling apart of the traditional world of values and the disintegration of personality. The people in a Strindbergian play are strictly devoid of any character traits, rather, they are hopelessly split. He explored the causes of a split personality, and revealed its neurotic aspects, which earlier writers had tended to ignore. Like Nietzsche, Strindberg anticipated the epidemic of Nihilism that swept over Western culture.

Chekhov, the great Russian playwright, and a contemporary of Ibsen and Strindberg, is considered "the gentlest, subtlest, and the most dispassionate of the modern dramatists."[19] While Ibsen and Strindberg are at war with society at several levels and use drama as a vehicle for expressing their vision of reality, both social and moral, Chekhov, by comparison, seems un-obsessed with the depiction of reality. He rather believes in using drama as "a form for depicting that fluid world beyond the self with the author functioning only as an impartial witness."[20] The readers and scholars of Chekhov believe that his aim and

purpose was to depict life as it really is with all honesty and truthfulness. He often declared that the writer must be as objective as a chemist and allow the least amount of subjectivity to enter and interfere in the presentation of reality. Yet in spite of all his detachment and objectivity, he is a writer very seriously concerned with reality and his plays reflect "both his sympathy for human suffering and his outrage at human absurdity."[21] He is a dispassionate realist who is subtly arranging reality in a particular way "in order to evoke some comment on it."[22]

By virtue of the style of presentation too, Chekhov occupies a unique place. Chekhov embodies in his works the elements of symbolism combined with psychological realism. His drama is the drama of almost static external action but great inner lyrical movement. One of the greatest achievements of Chekhov was to affect a synthesis between reality and theatricality, guiding events, which seem to have no visible means of propulsion and developing a form, which seems to be no form at all. He was able to achieve in his plays a poetry of emotions and environment, which the realists and naturalists failed to instill in their works. Chekhov manages it by means of a mood that consists of alternate shadings of despair and hope, laughter and fear. He employs symbols in his plays, which are very subtle, subdued and suggestive, and are inherent in the theme and structure of his plays. In *The Seagull*, the tragedy of young people cut off in their prime is symbolized by the bird, which Treplev shoots down without rhyme or reason. The Prozorov house in *The Three Sisters*, which is eventually hollowed out by Natasha as though by a nest of termites, the storm in *Uncle Vania* as also the forest which is a symbol of gradual and unmistakable degeneration associated with the lives of the family, the orchard in *The Cherry Orchard* which is a symbol of the old order and old times giving way

to the materialistic new, are all symbols with several layers and numerous directions of meaning. Hence we see that Chekhov's plays are "a dramatization of the triumph of the forces of enlightenment, the degeneration of culture in the crude modern world."[23]

Realism, which was the dominant style of artistic presentation till the turn of the century, soon gave way to revolutionary ideas and experimentations in the field of art and literature. The realism of Emile Zola and Guy de Maupassant was reinforced by the realism of the Russian writers, Turgenev, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. The realism of these writers was of a grimmer and more tragic kind. They favor a realistic depiction of life and society on all levels, concentrating on the individual and therefore the least universal aspect of a social milieu. However, between the extremes of realism and anti-realism there were forming mature and moderate approaches to drama, which also refined the medium in significant ways.

In 1897 Constantin Stanislavsky, a great Russian artist, actor, scenic designer and theoretician of the art of acting, played a pivotal role in bringing about the opening of the Moscow Art Theatre. Stage realism, dedicated in its first phase to photographic literalness, gradually matured and mellowed into psychological and imaginative realism with him. Stanislavsky's theory on the art of acting is essentially an appeal to dramatic actors to identify with the role. Acting must follow the law of inner justification, and the actor must create his role as if it were one with his personality. Appropriately enough, this theater was called "the theater of inner feeling." Stanislavsky's stress upon psychological realism on stage, and his theory of acting, made him an excellent executor of the plays of Anton Chekhov, who gave a new sensitive meaning to realism.

The early decades of the twentieth century saw the rise of a number of dramatic movements, which were reflections of the artistic mind in its struggles to come to grips with the human situation. Of the minor trends, Futurism and Dadaism are noteworthy but they died a premature death. The pioneer of futurism was Marinetti, an Italian who founded the school in 1909. Futurism strove to portray the problems of the twentieth century life. It glorified danger, war, the machine age, and in theory at least glorified Fascism. It reflected the Nihilistic attitude of the modern man. The literary ancestor of the Dada movement was Alfred Jarry, who, in 1897, had written *Ubu Roi*, a contemptuous, or to be more precise, savage attack on the middle class man with his bourgeoisie values and his intellectual and literary pretensions. But formally the movement started in Zurich during World War I and was disruptive and Nihilistic in nature. Dadaism was also a violent revolt against the horrors of war. It spread to England and America but died out in the 1920's.

A more successful and longer lasting movement was Expressionism which had been foreshadowed in the works of Strindberg and Wedekind and which gained considerable impetus in the twentieth century. It emerged in Europe

> from an intellectual climate consisting of diverse features amongst which Nietzsche's vitalism, Marinetti's futurism, Whitman's pantheism and Dostoevsky's psychological probing into sub rational darkness played an important part.[24]

The whole tendency was

> towards abstraction, towards autonomous color and metaphor, away from plausibility and imitation, a fervent desire to express and create, regardless of formless canons, and 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 grotesque and ...an urgent sense of the here and now.[25]

In the expressionistic drama the plays unfolded in a series of short scenes which

> took the place of longer acts; dialogue was made abrupt and given a staccato effect; symbolic forms were substituted for 'real' characters; realistic scenery was abandoned and in its place use of light was fully substituted; frequently choral or mass effects were preferred to the employment of single figures or else single figures were elevated into positions where they became representative of forces larger than themselves.[26]

These means, being new, had a peculiar fascination for the audience, and playwrights like Kaiser, Toller and Capek took up the technique to project contemporary social and economic issues. The expressionists were "in conscious revolt against the whole impressionistic theater of inwardness." and strove to present "action as symbol peopled by abstractions and presented in closely shifting elusive scenes."[27] The expressionists represent the protagonist not as an individual but as an abstraction, a symbol of Man, Society, Life.

Closely following Expressionism was another art movement called Surrealism. Surrealism was an assertion of the belief that the world of the unconscious mind has a reality more significant than that of our conscious perceptions. The seeds of this movement had been sown in Strindberg's works but the theory owes much to the research of Freud also, whose technique of probing the unconscious mind for the ultimate truth of human behavior also influence the Surrealistic endeavor to the depths of human psyche to tap the inexhaustible sources of the creative imagination. As a well-defined artistic movement, it was first launched in France by Andre Breton's *Manifesto on Surrealism* (1924). Breton declared a rebellion "against all restraints on free creativity...the restraints to be violated were logical reason, standard morality, social and artistic conventions and norms, and any control over the artistic process by forethought and intention."[28] The unconscious mind was considered the fountainhead of truth and all knowledge, and dreams, hallucinations and the states of mind between sleep and waking were tapped and exploited in Surrealistic works. Andre Breton along with Louis Aragon and the painter Salvador Dali, created a revolution in the world of modern literature, painting and sculpture. Writers and artists in the continent as well as in America were immensely influenced by this avant-garde approach, and some of its finest examples can be found in the poetry of Dylan Thomas, in the novels of Henry Miller and James Joyce.

The intensification of the Surrealistic technique, of studying the mental processes of the individual mind in society, and specially the subconscious loneliness of the individual in a state of isolation from its conscious social relations took place in the form of stream-of-consciousness technique in modern fiction. The term was invented by William James, the leading advocate of the philosophy of

pragmatism and ardent believer in the concept of free will. In his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) James compared consciousness to a stream or river, which carries submerged and floating memories and receives constant changing impressions of the external world. He used the term to describe individual sensations, thoughts, memories and associations, which make up the continuity of consciousness in the ego and flow in an uninterrupted fashion. James' theory, along with that of Henri Bergson, the French philosopher, who also stressed the role of memory in perception, impressed upon the writer to aim at reproducing the rhythm of thought. In the hands of the twentieth century writers the stream-of-consciousness technique became "a highly special mode of narration that undertakes to reproduce without the narrators intervention, the full spectrum and the continuous flow of a character's mental process, in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings and random associations."[29] The most outstanding example of this style is James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which pursues the steady flow of the thought processes of Stephen Daedalus and Leopold and Mary Bloom in the course of just twenty-four hours. The thought processes or interior monologues, delivered in a telegraphic lingo and the images, which seem fantastic and bizarre and chaotic, represent the process of consciousness in a state of disintegration. The other writer who mastered this technique was Virginia Woolfe and her novels *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* are also considered landmarks in the stream-of-consciousness technique.

The development of the subjective theater was closely tied with the avant-garde movements, styles and techniques in the field of art and literature. It was influenced in its stage of infancy by the Impressionist School and in many ways foreshadowed the absurd drama of Beckett and Ionesco. The

Impressionists led by Claude Monet were a group of painters who were, "particularly concerned with the transitory effects of light and they wished to depict the fleeting impression from a subjective point of view. They were not interested in a precise representation; the resulting impression depended on the perception of the spectator."[30] The French symbolist poets Baudelaire, Mallarme and Rimbaud were considered impressionist poets as were the English poets Oscar Wilde and Arthur Symons. Antonin Artaud, poet and visionary, introduced the heady and feverish intoxication of the French poets into the subjective theater. Artaud changed the modern man's understanding and perception of drama, stage, and theater in a revolutionary way.

The incentive for the subjective theater came from other quarters too. In 1897 Alfred Jarry had written an essay - *Ubu Roi*, a treatise on the surrealistic style. In 1917 Guillaume Apollionaire presented *The Breasts of Tiresias* in the same Bohemian vein as Alfred Jarry; it was an attack on "the western tradition of very similitude since it is written in the form of a disjointed dream with wrenched symbols and abrupt transformations."[31] In 1925 Andre Breton published his first surrealistic manifesto, which recommended the revitalization of

> the psychic forces by a vertiginous descent into the self in quest of that secret and hidden territory where all that is apparently contradictory in our everyday life and consciousness will be made plain.[32]

The most eminent exponent of the subjective theater was, however, Antonin Artaud who was also a poet, a professional actor and director. Artaud was closely associated with the Surrealists early in his career, and he "shares their loathing of traditional art, of modern industrial

life, and of western civilization... a romantic who tolerates no boundaries...Artaud demands nothing less than a total transformation of the existing structure. And this revolution will begin in the theater."[33]

His real importance lies in his theories of the theater, expounded in a series of essays, letters and manifestos, published in 1938 under the title *The Theater and its Double*. Artaud reached the conclusion that the confusion of his time springs from the "rupture between things and words, between things and the ideas that are their representation."[34] He also rejected the psychological and narrative theater with its "preoccupation with personal problems"[35] and like the Surrealists passionately called for a return to myth and magic, for a ruthless exposure of the conflicts of the human mind, for a theater of cruelty. "Every thing that acts is a cruelty. It is upon this idea of extreme action pushed beyond all its limits that the theater must be rebuilt."[36] Artaud thought, "by confronting the audience with the true image of their internal conflicts, a poetic magical theater would bring liberation and release."[37] Calling for a total rejection of realism, Artaud desired a plastic and physical stage and language of the theater, which would be a wordless language of shapes, light movement and gestures. To him the aim was to express on stage what the language failed to do in words. As far as the theoretical foundation is concerned, Artaud is the founder, along with Jarry and Apollionaire, of Absurd Drama.

The Image of Man in Modern Literature

Modern literature voices an excruciating mood of despair, and this despair is an expression of a protest against a life that has been drained of meaning. The modern writer is faced with the problem of picturing an image of the human condition, which seems to have lost its reality. The central character in the works of modern writers has lost the

integrity of his soul; he is a robot, a mechanical nullity. For example, the hero of Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* is an unregenerate Mr. Zero. Society as depicted by Dos Passos in *U.S.A.* and by Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* is a huge, vastly efficient yet monstrously impersonal mechanical structure in whose grinding innards the spirit of the individual is crushed beyond redemption. As Glicksberg[38] says, if we are to view in proper perspective the spiritual and religious conflicts of our age, as they are reflected in drama, fiction and poetry, then we must endeavor at the outset to understand the nature of the relationship between literature and the problem of alienation and loss of faith.

A number of writers in the twentieth century have struggled to present imaginatively this crisis of values and meaning. Earlier on, writers like Dostoevsky and Gorky had depicted the psychological, moral and spiritual disintegration of man in their works. In the modern times writers like Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg, Chekhov, Kafka, James Joyce, Sartre, Camus, Samuel Beckett, Dos Passos, Eugene O'Neill, Pirandello, Faulkner, Gide and Norman Mailer have projected this theme with profound and poignant insights. Indeed there are few modern writers who have not been influenced to varying degrees by this profound feeling of alienation.

In the works of Dostoevsky it becomes amply clear that like Kierkegaard he was trying to grapple with the question of the existence of God and in his major novels he presents a tug-o-war between good and evil and highlights the upsurge of the irrational in man. Like Kierkegaard he depicts

> the religious life as a continuous struggle, full of unresolved contradictions. It is impossible to believe in God and it is impossible not to

believe in Him. This is the battle of doubt in which the rebellious characters of Dostoevsky engage."[39]

These warring impulses create the neurotic heroes of Dostoevsky's fiction, and *The Brothers Karamozov* is perhaps the best example of this dilemma of man. In most of his novels Dostoevsky depicts man as the product of a rootless, valueless society. Such a man necessarily suffers from a sense of inferiority, and is irrational, submissive and yet vindictive.

A humanist by conviction, Gorky, who wrote in the last years of the nineteenth century, highlights the poverty, ignorance, superstitious beliefs and also the futility of his times in his novels, yet he brings a ray of hope too for mankind. For example in his famous novel *The Lower Depths*, Gorky presents a number of derelicts who philosophize broodingly about the world which treats them so cruelly, but the most wretched and degraded of these creatures has a soul, a secret aspiration, a private dream, a longing to redeem himself by reaching out towards goodness. These characters are depicted with a tender passion and a deep perception of the loneliness of the human condition. In fact, like Ibsen, in *The Wild Duck*, and later O'Neill in *The Iceman Cometh*, Gorky in *The Lower Depths* tackles a very significant problem of our age - the need to settle the question of what is truth, what is reality. In *The Lower Depths* for example, when Luka the pilgrim is asked by one of the lodgers whether God exists, Luka replies that it is all a matter of faith; if one thinks He exists, He does; what one believes, exists. In all his works, what comes through is his belief that the only thing, which it is proper to regard as sacred, is "the dissatisfaction of man with himself and his striving to be better than he is."[40]

Almost all the writers of the twentieth century were profoundly influenced by the works of Dostoevsky who depicted man as irrational and tormented by the question of the existence of God, Gorky who stressed that there is nothing beyond the sphere of the human, Strindberg who depicted man as irrational and impelled by dreams, as also by Nietzsche whose superman celebrates the freedom of man and his heroic courage in casting off the bondage of illusion, Freud who analyzed the role of repressed natural instincts of man in shaping his personality, and Marx who gave to the world a new understanding of the dialectics of society as also a hope for the poor and downtrodden.

Pulled by diverse philosophies and a cross current of thought, in twentieth century literature, the image of man emerges as one who is spiritually degraded and hence irrational and nihilistic. Everything, every value, tenet, belief is negated and even the remnants of the early civilization and culture are annihilated. Many writers now see man as an instinct-ridden animal, a mere biological occurrence. In this connection one must take into consideration one writer whose influence has seeped into the very marrow of the modern spirit, and that is Franz Kafka. Kafka probed into the psychological dilemma of man and projected his vision of the divided and often degraded personality in fantastic and compelling terms and highly articulate symbols. His novels are terrifying allegories of man's state in a world where nothing seems certain and where incredible things happen. Kafka employs zoological images and symbols in order to suggest the grotesque state of the degradation of man. Suffering from a sense of inferiority, man is seen as living in a hole, alienated and depressed, as in the horrifying story, *The Burrow*. *The Metamorphosis*, the most famous of Kafka's tales epitomizing the essential ambience of modernity, depicts a

man who has turned into a huge, helpless beetle. The terrifying impact this tale makes on the reader testifies to the fact that Kafka's genius resonates with the deepest sense of dread, anguish and perplexity that characterizes the being of modern man.

Luigi Pirandello who wrote in the early 1920s gives us yet another glimpse of the image of man and his predicament in the modern times. His plays are obsessive vibrations on the theme of alienation and the divided personality, the loss of communication between man and man, themes which were to be taken up and developed by Sartre, Camus, Beckett and Ionesco. His plays probe the depths of the inner life of man. Like Kafka he leaves everything hanging in doubt. Pirandello reveals the nature of man and the inveterate human tendency to indulge in make-believe and the difficulty of ever grasping the truth of the soul of man. That is why his characters are presented as creatures of the imagination that move on different planes of illusion.

Life for Pirandello is essentially a stage. Arresting the deceptive flow of action in time, Pirandello highlights the contradictions between life and art. Life is marked by ambiguity and paradox and it becomes impossible to determine what is illusion and what is reality. Men are compelled to play a certain role in society but while some protest against their fate, others become identified with the role they assume. Many do not comprehend the nature of the role that has been assigned to them or thrust upon them until something happens that causes the mask to fall off and they are confronted with the reality of self.

Pirandello portrays the individual in all his ambivalent states of feeling. His basic contention is that we do not and cannot know ourselves. That is why Pirandello's hero is shown as imagining himself to be identical with his public familiar persona, but in time discovers that he does not know

who he is or what he is. This, according to Pirandello, is the basic and the most bewildering problem of modern man.

Based on his belief that the human personality is multifaceted, Pirandello develops his theory of the mask and face and goes on to discuss the relationship between art and nature, life and form. If anything is permanent, it is the reality of a work of art. Art is arrested movement and therefore permanent; life is in a constant state of flux and therefore impermanent. These ideas abound in the plays of Pirandello and his most famous play, *Six Characters in Surch of an Author*, is an epitome of the eternal controversies between art and life, illusion and reality.

Like Pirandello, Andre Gide also tackles some of the major spiritual conflicts of the modern age, "the conflict between Hellenism and Christianity, spirit and sensuality, instinct and renunciation."[41] His chief concern lies in discovering truth, about himself, about life. Andre Gide was a pre-existentialist writer in search of a self that did not exist because, like Pirandello he felt it was forever changing. The image of man that emerges in his works is that of man without a fixed center and the characters that he portrays are full of contradictory emotions and behavioral patterns. In *The Immoralist*, Gide the artist, wrestles with the problems that plague modern man:

> The struggle between his need for solitude and his craving for community, the conflict between unconditional individual freedom and social responsibility. [42]

While Pirandello and Gide portray man as a victim of illusion, Malraux's characters are metaphysical rebels who picture the world as absurd, hostile and alien, and desperately wish to break this sorry scheme of things, though to no avail. Malraux underlines the heroic endeavors of man

to fight against the hopelessness of the human condition and stresses that therein lies his greatness. In his novel *The Conqueror*, he creates the absurd hero who is the progenitor of the heroes in the works of Beckett and Ionesco.

The birth of the Theater of the Absurd was a landmark in the history of drama as it sought to define or rather redefined the image of man and the human condition. Ionesco, in his essay on Kafka, defined the term Absurd as follows

> Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose ...Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.[43]

The most significant aspect of the absurdist attitude is that

> All the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of the former ages ...Have been tested and found wanting; (that) they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions.[44]

Camus' depiction of a world where all illusion is shattered is rather apt

> A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity.[45]

When Samuel Beckett, one of the leading exponents of the Absurd Theater wrote *Waiting for Godot* he presented his

own absurdist vision of life - bleak, dark and pessimistic. According to him the worst that could happen to mankind has happened, man is spiritually dead. Beckett did not believe in mourning for anything lost, as earlier writers had done, precisely because he perceived man's life on this earth as pointless, futile, without any hope for anything. The absurdity of the human plight is highlighted in *Waiting for Godot* by adopting the technique of stripping the stage of unnecessary props and characters. The tangible stage image in *Waiting for Godot* - a country road, a bare tree and two wretched looking tramps waiting on a mound by the tree, who declare that nothing was to be done - sets the tone for the existential impasse of a futile waiting. The picture that Beckett paints is of an uncanny, unpredictable, frightening world, where death perhaps may be the only answer to years of waiting and hoping for something to happen to change the drudgery of existence.

This futility and despair is once again the preoccupation of Beckett's contemporary in the Absurdist movement - Eugene Ionesco. Ionesco too presents a critique of contemporary life by showing the total collapse of communication in modern society. For example in *The Chairs* the old people needing to express their thoughts address themselves to a mask of empty chairs, which, as the play progresses, crowd all else off the stage. In *Rhinoceros* the inability to communicate causes an entire race of so-called rational human beings to be metamorphosed into a herd of rhinoceroses, thereby highlighting the failure of language as a means of communication. Death is the main theme of *The Killer*. Since death cannot be circumvented, since it is inescapable, human existence is absurd. All man's convictions, all beliefs are meaningless as life has an inexplicable fatality about it.

The very same sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition which is the pre-occupation of the absurdist is the concern of the post World War II existentialists like Sartre and Camus too, but with a difference. Sartre and Camus

> present their sense of the irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning, while the theater of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought.. [46]

Both Sartre and Camus were able to put their fingers on the wound of the modern times - the angst, disillusionment, nausea and spiritual bankruptcy of this age. Sartre began with the concept of spiritual bankruptcy, where God is dead, life is accidental, unpredictable, disordered. Sartre envisioned man as helpless, flung without knowing how and why into a world, and there he wallows in uncertainty, fear and anguish. Sartre holds that the problem of what is man can only be approached subjectively and man defines himself through his choices and actions. In his concept of existentialism, existence precedes essence, that is to say that man "first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards."[47] Sartre contends that every man must change mere existence into essence by asserting his freedom of choice and thus shape his character and destiny. To illustrate and substantiate his point, he presents in his literary works characters wholly engaged in a specific social situation and confronted with the necessity of making a definite choice, but the conflict is always such that the solution is somehow a commitment to the nature and possibilities of man.[48]

The necessity of making a choice is so important in the existential context that Sartre says, man performs an act of Bad Faith when he refuses to question the nature of things - values, dogmas, society, life.

Hence we see that twentieth century literature projects an image of the disintegrated personality, the spiritually rootless, morally anguished man. We have discussed the different projections of reality of the modern times by some of the major writers but of course the list is far from complete. By the twentieth century a sense of cultural crisis had gripped Europe and this reflected in the works of every serious writer. World War I left, in its wake, a sense of acute pessimism, and an enhanced sense of loss, disenchantment and frustration. In the ensuing moral confusion the writer felt even more desolate in spirit. Eliot talked of the hollow men:

> We are the hollow men
> We are the stuffed men
> .....
> Our dried voices, when
> We whisper together
> Are quiet and meaningless
> Shape without form
> Shade without color
> Paralyzed force, gesture without motion

Yeats heralded the *Second Coming,* made imperative because

> The Falcon cannot hear the falconer
> Things fall apart; the center cannot hold
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

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Grandeur of Nature in Wordsworth and other Romantics

Nature is the first and foremost concern of Wordsworth's poetry. As a poet of nature, Wordsworth stands supreme. He is the worshipper of nature, nature's priest. The fact how he is held as a nature-poet in America can be understood from the following statement:

> We have always acknowledged the popularity of Byron in this country in the 19th century, but we have tended to consider Wordsworth as the most important of the English Romantic poets for American writers. Because Wordsworth made Nature central and because not only our writers of the first rank - Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman - but also American political orators moved by the mythology of 'Nature's Nation' and 'Manifest Destiny' concentrated so heavily on Nature, we have concluded that Wordsworth was the virtual progenitor of American Romanticism, much as Locke was of the constitution. (Crozier 203-204)

Wordsworth gave nature an independent status in poetry. His love for nature was genuine and extreme. As he himself declared many times, he was fortunate in his birth. His birth and bringing up in the Lake District of Hawkshead, an exceptionally lovely part of the country surrounded by nature's abundance, and his loss of his mother at age 8 and his father at 13 explain why he took refuge in nature. In his

long autobiographical poem *The Prelude*, he states that he 'felt much favoured in his birthplace' and he mentions of having the freedom to roam the countryside 'till the daylight failed', staying out longer to enjoy the adventure of the night with his sister Dorothy:

> . . . at last;
> When all the ground was dark, and the twinkling stars
> Edged with black clouds, home and to bed we went,
> Feverish with weary joints and beating minds.
> (Negrotti 5)

The river Derwent and the mountains of Cumberland were as mother and father to him. Being deprived of his mother's love and his father's guidance at that early age, he found soothing peace in nature and learned more eagerly from the flowers, the hills, and the skies than from books. As he maintained, he loved whatever he saw, not lightly but most intensely. He loved the sun because he saw it spread its beauty on the morning hills. He rejoiced to stand beneath some rock at night to watch a storm in order to drink in the visionary power and deemed the mood of shadowy exultation profitable because it gave his being a sense of sublimity and awe. Swayed now by love and now by awe, his feelings were alternatively enkindled and restrained, intensified and disciplined. (Gingerich 93)

Of all the poets who have written of nature, there is none that compares with Wordsworth in the truthfulness of his representation. Wordsworth had a full-fledged philosophy, a new and original view of nature. Three points of his creed of nature may be noted: a. He conceived of nature as a living personality. He believed that there was a

divine spirit pervading all the objects of nature. This belief in a divine spirit pervading all the objects of nature may be termed as mystical pantheism, which is fully expressed in *Tintern Abbey* and in several passages in Book II of *The Prelude*. b. Next, Wordsworth believed that the company of nature gave joy to the human heart, and he looked upon nature as exercising a healing influence on sorrow-stricken hearts. c. Above all, Wordsworth emphasized on the moral influence of nature. He spiritualized nature and regarded her as a great moral teacher, as the best mother, guardian and nurse of man, and as an elevating influence. He believed that there was mutual consciousness or spiritual communion or mystic intercourse between man and nature. He initiates his readers into the secret of the soul's communion with nature. According to him, human beings who grow up in the lap of nature are perfect in every respect. This belief, expressed fully in *Three Years She Grew* and in *Tintern Abbey*, is brought out also in *To a Highland Girl* where the Highland girl, who is born and brought up in natural environment, is presented as a specimen of female perfection. In *Three Years She Grew*, nature says about three-year-old Lucy,

> A lovelier flower
> On earth was never sown;
> This Child I to myself will take;
> She shall be mine, I will make
> A Lady of my own.

Here nature is shown as a nurse, a mother, and a teacher. In Wordsworth's eyes, nature is a teacher whose wisdom we can learn if we will, and without which any human life is vain and incomplete (Parker 33). He believed in the education of man by nature. In this he was somewhat influenced by Rousseau. This inter-relation of nature and man is very

important in considering Wordsworth's view of both. This kind of intermingling of nature and man is absent in the American Romantic writing, which tends, rather, to claim that nature holds off from man's approaches. Tony Tanner claims of American nature writers being devoid of any genuine communion with nature even when they scrutinize their environment with extreme care and provide great details of nature in their works. With Wordsworth, as we have seen, man and nature could be considered as essentially adapted to each other. (Tanner 99)

Wordsworth had mercurial sensitivity toward every subtle change in the world around him. In *The Prelude*, he compares himself to an Aeolian harp, which answers with harmony to every touch of the wind. There is hardly a sight or a sound, from the violet to a mountain and from a bird-note to the thunder of the cataract, that is not reflected in some beautiful way in Wordsworth's poetry. He can, when he wishes, give delicate and subtle expression to the sheer sensuous delight of the world of nature. He can feel the elemental joy of spring:

> It was an April morning, fresh and clear
> The rivulet, delighting in its strength,
> Ran with a young man's speed, and yet the voice
> Of waters which the river had supplied
> Was softened down into a vernal tone.

He can vividly picture all the little graces and charms of a summer day:

> The Nature down
> In clearest air ascending showed far off

A surface dappled o'er with shadows fleecy
From brooding clouds.....

The restfulness of the evening and the spacious quietness of the sea-shore allure him:

It is a beauteous evening calm and free
The holy time quiet as a nun
Breathless with adoration, the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquility.

But he is not interested in mere nature description. He also records his own feelings with reference to the objects that stimulate him and call forth the description:

Oh! at that time,
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ears! the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds!

Wordsworth's attitude to nature can be clearly differentiated from those of the other great poets of nature. He did not prefer the wild and stormy aspects of nature like Byron, or the shifting and changeful aspects of nature and the scenery of the sea and sky like Shelley, or the purely sensuous objects in nature like Keats. It was his special characteristic to concern himself, not with the strange and remote aspects of the earth and sky, but nature in her ordinary, familiar, everyday moods. Nor did he recognize the ugly side of nature, 'red in tooth and claw', as Tennyson did. Wordsworth is to be distinguished from other poets by the stress he places upon the moral influence of nature and the need of man's spiritual intercourse with her. (Bradley 105)

Wordsworth and Coleridge felt in their bones a natural piety; they both held the view that it was a crime against the living universe to kill wild life. They both wrote poems about the consequences of fun killing or slaughter for no apparent reason. The albatross in *The Ancient Mariner* and the hart in *Hart Leap Well* are powerful symbols; they are more powerful and memorable symbols in an age of hunting and fishing. It was his sister Dorothy who taught Wordsworth that it was a crime to kill a butterfly or uproot a strawberry plant. Wordsworth believed in the primitive view that inanimate objects and forces of nature possessed life of their own. He also believed that not only are we able to make contacts with these objects of nature, but we are also able to make contacts with the mighty Being that animates the universe. Sitting under the sycamore in the valley of the Wye above Tintern, looking at the 'wild green landscape' and the little farms and hedgerows, Wordsworth declares:

> And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.

Similarly, on his ascent of Snowden, he seems almost to see and hear 'The Soul, the Imagination of the whole':

I looked about, and lo
The Moon stood naked in the Heavens, at height
Immense above my head, and on the shore
I found myself of a huge sea of mist,
Which, meek and silent, rested at my feet:
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still Ocean, and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves,
In headlands, tongues and promontory shapes,
Into the Sea, the real Sea, that seem' d
To dwindle, and give up its majesty,
Usurp'd upon as far as sight could reach.

This is the kind of landscape, according to Drabble, that had not appeared in English since Milton, and that has not appeared after it. (162)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's fame as a poet does not primarily rest on his landscapes, though it is significantly important to note that his finest descriptive poems are of his native West Country, which received immortality in such poems as *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison*, *The Nightingale*, and *Frost at Midnight*. These, written in the years of friendship with Wordsworth, show him at his most happily responsive to the natural world. The landscapes of his childhood remained nearest and dearest to his heart. Like Wordsworth, he believed in the power of the environment and association with things of nature, though he was much more given to expounding his faith in terms of philosophic theory, quoting Locke, Hume, Berkley, Godwin and David Hartley. In *The Nightingale*, he tells the reader that his infant son Hartley (named after the philosopher) 'knows well the evening star', and that he once quieted the baby's crying by taking him out to the orchard to show him the moon. He had

a conviction that his son would grow up more happily in nature's association and guidance, so he wrote in *Frost at Midnight*:

> My babe so beautiful! It thrills my heart
> With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
> And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
> And in far other scenes! For I was reared
> In the great city, pent'mid cloisters dim,
> And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
> But thou, my babe! Shalt wander like a breeze
> By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
> Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds...
> Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
> Whether the summer clothe the gentle earth
> With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
> Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
> Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch
> Smokes in the Sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
> Heard only in the trances of the blast,
> Or if the secret ministry of frost
> Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
> Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.

As Drabble pointed out, Coleridge's most impressive landscapes are not English at all: they are the lurid imagery seascapes of *The Ancient Mariner* and the deep romantic chasms and cedar covers of an ambiguously Oriental Xanadu (168). Although Coleridge's most famous poem, *The Ancient Mariner*, deals with the subject of terrible guilt, suffering, expiation and wandering, the great appearances of nature, according to Humphry House, play an overwhelming part in the poem (170-173). The visual description of the seascapes,

provoking elation as well as sadness in the reader, is simply wonderful. Some examples of such ever memorable description are as follows:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free.

Or

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

Or

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken-
The ice was all between

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!

Or

The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,

Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.

Wordsworth and Coleridge shared two attitudes to nature - the 'Realist' and the 'Projective'. In the 'Realist' attitude, the poet's mind sees tough the outward appearances of things to reality and reads nature as symbol of this hidden reality. In the 'Projective' attitude, the poet's mind creates or invents a nature in which he can read his own feelings. If Wordsworth was the realist, then Coleridge was the projective. (Pricket 24)

The clouds in *Dejection: An Ode*, for instance, are to him a symbol of his own mental turmoil. In *Dejection* Coleridge continues:

O lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live:
Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud!
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than the intimate cold world, allow'd
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth,
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the earth ---

In his *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison*", Coleridge shares the view of pantheism with Wordsworth. He says:

Henceforth I shall know
That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure;
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,

But Coleridge's shared view of pantheism is gone in his *Dejection: An Ode*. Nature is no longer
felt as

> a living thing
> Which acts upon the mind, and with such Hues
> As cloath the Almighty
> Spirit, whom he makes
> Spirits perceive his presence
> [This Lime-Tree Bower];

nor do we hear of the beauty of the inanimate impregnated, as with a living soul, by the presence of Life. Now, nature is cold and inanimate, dormant or indeed dead, having no internal life and thus unable to give her votary anything. All that Coleridge here claims is that nature will respond if the soul takes the initiative; there is something better to see than the inanimate cold world of everyday prose, but it can only be seen by a soul able to project into nature its own energy and joy. Coleridge is, however, reporting in this poem how things feel in the mood of dejection. (Prickett 91-92)

Nature occupies an important place in Shelley's poetry, as in Wordsworth's, but Shelley, like Byron and unlike Wordsworth, describes not his native land, but his chosen land of exile, Italy. Shelley spent his early years in the countryside of West Sussex and lived in England for more than twenty of his thirty years, but his skylark sang near Leghorn, and his *Ode to the West Wind* was written near Florence. The grand places that he added to English literature -- Mont Blanc, the Appenines, the Euganean Hills, Naples, Hellas -- are all foreign to the English readers (Drabble 168). Most of his English poems are political, but one poem, *The*

Question, written in 1820, seems to evoke a memory of England:

> And nearer to the river's trembling edge
> There grew broad flag-flowers, purple pranked with white,
> And starry river-buds among the sedge,
> And floating water-lilies, broad and bright,
> Which lit the oak that overhung the hedge
> With moonlit beams of their own watery light;
> And bulrushes, and reeds of such deep green
> As soothed the dazzled eye with sober sheen. . .

Shelley's attitude to nature was as much perplexed and confused as was Wordsworth's in his early years. In his early poetry, for instance, *Alastor*, he lavishly decorates his verse with many lovely images of nature. But even here the meeting boughs and implicated leaves that wove twilight over his path were but an aid to his pursuit of love, or dream, or God, or mightier death. And in all his later poetry, there is a dominant tendency to personify objects of nature or to use images as symbolic in the service of indefinite or abstract conceptions. *Alastor* begins with a confident assertion of spiritual modes of being:

> Oh! there are spirits of the air
> And genii of evening breeze,
> And gentle ghosts, with eyes as fair
> As star-beams among twilight trees.

The intuition of spiritual existence, which is of course the focal experience of Romanticism, is gained through solitary communion with natural objects:

Such lovely ministers to meet
Oft hast thou turned from men thy lonely feet
With mountain winds, and babbling springs,
And moonlight seas, that are the voice
Of these inexplicable things,
Thou didst hold commune, and rejoice
When they did answer thee.

The confusion appears in the unresolved paradox that the beings and shapes of the sensuous world (natural scenes or human smiles), although they are the voice of the universal spirit or the spiritual universe, are nevertheless described as inconstant, false, faithless, and ultimately contemptuous of the poet's love:

but they
Cast, like a worthless boon, thy love away. (Gerald 139-140)

The *Ode to The West Wind* illustrates all the essential characteristics of Shelley's genius. A superb rhapsody, it has clinging to it something of Shelley's spirit of reform. Though beginning with a rather naturalistic description of the west wind, the poet, as he proceeds, is borne up, as the wind is transformed into some vast and mighty power, or at least the symbol of such, to which he bows in devout worship. Had he remained wild and free as in his youth, he would not have cried:

I would ne'er have striven
As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need
Oh lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!

I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One, too, like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud

The unbroken and full-throated flow of the verse, the even graduation from pure objectivity in the beginning to almost complete subjectivity at the end, the movement from the faint 'I hear' in the beginning to the vehement, climactic 'Be thou! spirit fierce, My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!' in the closing are all nothing short of marvelous. The poet creates a deep sense of helplessness of a fettered soul, wildly longing to be free. The release comes when the shadowy personal identity is made with the tumult of the mighty harmonies of the West Wind, and thereby becomes a fit instrument to arouse the slumbered earth and to regenerate mankind. (Gingerich 234 - 235)

Precisely the same mental process is developed, and precisely the same results are obtained in *To a Skylark*, which also illustrates all the essential elements of Shelley's genius. Under the pressure of the poet's ecstasy, the bird becomes an unbounded joy, a tumult of mighty harmonies, filling the spaces of the universe. This rapture and dazzling splendor produces languor and dissatisfaction in the mind of the poet, from which he escapes by losing himself in that splendor of harmonious ecstasy, and fancying the wisdom thus learned to be revealed to mankind:

The world should listen then, as I'm listening now.

Shelley is a skilled artisan in describing things of nature. Like Wordsworth, he gives delicate expression to the sheer sensuous delight of the world of nature. Undeniably beautiful is the description of night in the desert in Shelley's *Queen*

Mab:

> How beautiful is night!
> A dewy freshness fills the silent air;
> No mist obscures, nor cloud, nor speck, nor stain
> Breaks the serene of heaven.
> In full-orb'd glory yonder Moon divine
> Rolls through the dark blue depths.
> Beneath her steady ray
> The desert-circle spreads,
> Like the round ocean, girdled with the sky.
> How beautiful is night.

In general, Byron's early work, for example, the first two cantos of "Childe Harold", is highly emotional and romantic -- strong in the love of nature. Many critics credited the poem's immediate success to the fact that it is replete with not only descriptions of nature but also the enthusiasm and melancholy, which were also established aspects of Romanticism. These elements could be better seen in the following excerpt:

> Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll!
> Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain
> Man marks the earth with ruin, - his control
> Stops with the shore.

The third canto is Byron's great nature poem. Its exalted tone and atmosphere owe something to the indirect influence of Shelley. The influence of Wordsworth's early naturalism, however, is more obvious. In certain passages, quite un-Byronic, Wordsworth's ideas emerge:

> Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part

Of me and of my soul, as I of them?
Is not the love of these deep in my heart
With a pure passion?

Wordsworth's description in *Tintern Abbey* of his youthful experience with nature -

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colors and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love

is distinctly echoed by Byron in-

I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me; and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities torture

However, Wordsworth would not have subscribed to the last clause just quoted, for it was characteristic of Wordsworth that he contemplated nature, not as something to flee to, but as a power to humanize and socialize man, a shaping influence "on that best portion of a good man's life, his little, nameless, unremembered, acts of kindness and of love". A waterfall that would have been a mere description in earlier days has broken free and is gifted with a power to "haunt". The ghostly metaphor is surprising enough, but we are then told in the simile that follows that the cataract does its haunting like a human emotion. Rock, mountain, and wood are experienced not for themselves, nor for their pictorial qualities, but as a craving for nourishment, a feeling, a form

of love. In the concluding passage of *Tintern Abbey*, he speaks of the steep woods and lofty cliffs as dear, both for themselves and for his sister's sake -- for the human association with them. But Byron was antisocial in his relation to nature. The mountains and wild ocean shores were places of refuge from the society of men. Byron loved the ocean because it was wrathful; the mountains and the ocean shores were soothing to his own rebellious, antisocial nature. (Gingerich 250-251; Wordsworth et all 100)

Again, in his early naturalism, Wordsworth conceived of nature as functioning so vitally in human character and of human character as reacting so vitally to nature that the entities man and nature are inseparable. In characteristic poems, such as the fourth Lucy poem, one can not tell where nature ends and character begins. Lucy and nature are inseparable. Byron, on the other hand, who has no such conception of the vital interaction between man and nature, uses the more conventional method of parallelism: he describes a scene in nature at length and then runs parallel to it a human or personal experience. In a magnificent passage in the third canto of *Childe Harold* -- stanzas 92 to 96 included -- he describes a storm at midnight in the Alps. Then in stanza 97, he makes the transition from description to the personal feelings:

> Sky, mountains, river, winds, lake, lightnings! ye
> With night, and clouds, and thunder, and a soul
> To make these felt and feeling, well may be
> Things that have made me watchful; the far roll
> Of your departing voices, is the knoll
> Of what in me is sleepless, -- if I rest
> But where ofye, oh tempests, is the goal?
> Are ye like those within the human breast,

Or do ye find at length, like eagles, some high nest?

Byron had also satiric view of nature. Byron glanced with a satiric eye upon nature in his earliest verse -- in poems written in 1807 and 1809-1811. It is first to be noticed in *Hours of Idleness*, where Byron twice subjected the pastoral scene to a youthful, boisterous satire, in the lines entitled *The Kiss of Love* and in *To a Lady Who Presented to the Author a Lock of Hair*. In the former piece, his early bias in favor of the 'real' may be noticed:

Your shepherds, your flocks, those fantastic themes,
Perhaps may amuse, yet they never can move.
Arcadia displays but a region of dreams.

A humorous and impious attitude toward nature is evident also in two slight poems written in June 1810, at the very time that he was composing the first Canto of *Childe Harold*. *Hints from Horace* attacks pompous overwriting in landscape description of worn away aspirants to eminence in the pastoral form for the reason that none can hope to excel the pastorals of the youthful Pope, and it contains the inevitable attack upon Wordsworth-

The name of poet may be got with ease,
.....
Write but like Wordsworth, live beside a lake,
And keep your bushy locks a year from Blake.

The attacks thus far described have been largely concerned either with the outmoded pastoral or with individuals whom Byron regarded as nature poets. (Lovell 51-52)

When Wordsworth was making his objections to Byron's 'natural piety', he probably recognized in Byron the mere lover of the picturesque, a role that seemed to suit Byron well. This essential preoccupation with seeing and the determination to make a highly accurate and almost literal transcription of the natural scene before him set Byron apart from all other great Romantic poets. It is obvious to any reader of Byron's poetry, and it has been remarked by most commentators, that Byron was a lover of wild nature (Robinson 87-88). Some picturesque lines in Byron are:

> More mighty scenes may rise - more glaring shines
> But none unite in one enchanted gaze
>
> or
>
> Rock, river, forest, mountains, all abound
> And bluest skies that harmonize the whole

Keats' sentiment of nature is simpler than those of the other Romantics. He remains absolutely uninfluenced by the pantheism of Wordsworth and Shelley and loves nature not because of any spiritual significance in her or any divine meaning in her but chiefly because of her external charm and beauty. Keats is the poet of the senses, and he loves nature because of her sensuous appeal -- her appeal to the sense of sight, the sense of hearing, the sense of smell, and the sense of touch. He loves flowers because of their beauty of color, fragrant smell, and softness. He loves streams because of their music. He loves the snow, the moon, and the rainbow for their visual loveliness. He has no mystic intercourse with nature and reads no moral significance in her. How his poems

appeal to the senses can be found in the following lines of *Ode to Psyche*:

> Saw two fair creatures, couched side by side
> In deepest grass, beneath the whispering roof
> Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran
> A brooklet, scarce spied:
> 'Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,
> Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian,
> They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass.

Here four senses are addressed, in a sequence rising to the tactile empathy of "cool rooted", an image that disciplines the erotic touch, and "fragrant-eyed" then reaffirms the dominant sense-mode, sight, imagining the object seen as the organ that sees. (Sheats 89)

There is ample evidence of his love for nature for nature's own sake in Keats' first volume of poems. In *I Stood Tiptoe*, we have several nature-pictures showing Keats' delight in the beauties of nature. We have, for instance, the following lines:

> The clouds were pure and white as flocks new shorn
> And fresh from the clear brook; sweetly they slept
> On the blue fields of heaven, and then there crept
> A little noiseless noise among the leaves
> Born of the very sigh that silence heaves.

This beautiful picture of the white clouds, sleeping on the blue fields of heaven, is followed by other pictures of nature:

> A bush of May-flowers with the bees about them;

Ah, sure no tasteful nook would be without them;
And let the lush laburnum oversweep them,
And let long grass grow round the roots to keep them
Moist, cool and green; and shade the violets,
That they may bind the moss in leafy nets.

This picture of the May-flowers, the long grass, the violets, etc. has an obvious sensuous appeal. Keats' observation of nature is very keen, and nothing escapes it. In most of his poems, we have nature-description for its own sake, expressive of nothing but a keen delight and genuine joy in nature. His nature-pictures are detailed and elaborate. It is for this reason that he is generally regarded as a precursor of the Tennysonian school of nature. In *Endymion*, the account of the feast of Pan contains passages, which, in the quality of direct nature-interpretation, are scarcely to be surpassed in poetry:

rain-scented eglantine
Gave temperate sweets to that well-wooing sun;
The lark was lost in him; cold springs had run
To warm their chilliest bubbles in the grass;
Man's voice was on the mountains, and the mass
Of Nature's lives and wonders puls'd ten-fold
To feel this sun-rise and its glories old.

In *Ode to a Nightingale*, we have a couple of remarkable nature-pictures showing Keats' delight in the purely sensuous appeal of nature. One is the picture of the moon shining in the sky while there is darkness on the grassy floor of the forest:

And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by her starry Fays;

But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

The other is a picture of flowers -- hawthorn, eglantine, violets, and musk-roses:

White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-Mays eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Then we have *Ode to Autumn* in which we have beautiful pictures of autumn's fruits and autumn's songs. The ripe apples, the swollen gourd, the sweet kernel in the hazels, the honey in bee-hives have all a rich sensuous appeal. The songs of autumn are the mournful sounds of goats, the bleating of lambs, the singing of crickets, the whistling of the redbreast, and the twittering of the swallows. The whole of the poem illustrates Keats' extraordinary powers of observation in the world of nature. The brief picture of the sun set over the fields in this poem is noteworthy:

While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day
And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue:

Keats' attitude to nature has been compared with those of the ancient Greeks. The ancient Greeks personified the objects and forces of nature. They called moon Cynthia, they named sun Apollo, and they saw Dryads in the wood and Naiads in water. Keats sometimes followed the Greeks in this respect. In one of his poems, he says:

I shall again see Phoebus in the morning:
Or flushed Aurora in the rosiest dawning!
Or a white Naiad in a rippling stream.

Aurora in Greek mythology is the goddess of dawn, Phoebus is the god of sun, and a Naiad is a water spirit. Keats possessed a myth making faculty in regard to nature, and this is, of course, best seen in *Endymion* and *Hyperion*.

Keats was one of the supreme poets of nature. To Wordsworth, nature is a living being with power to influence man for good or evil. Keats neither gives a moral life to nature, as Wordsworth did, nor attempts to pass beyond her familiar manifestations, as Shelley did. But in Keats' nature poetry, realism or the quest for pure truth informs every detail. He is the predecessor of the Tennysonian school of nature because all his nature poetry is based on exact knowledge, and the knowledge of a man deliberately observing and storing up the minutest details of what he sees. (Ende 149)

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Brecht on 'Verfremdungseffekt'

Make it not your goal
That in the hour of death
You yourself be better.
Let it be your goal
That in the hour of death
you leave a bettered world.

The above utterance of the dying heroine of *St. Joan of the Stockyards* perhaps epitomizes the working of Bertolt Brecht's mind in heralding a change in the existing dramaturgy, thereby coming closer to the realization of this goal. Terms like 'Verfremdungs Effekt" (V-Effect), 'Epic Theatre', 'Gestus', 'Non-Aristotelian drama', 'Historification' have, to a great extent, become synonymous with his name. These terms form part of the theatrical armoury adopted by Brecht to destroy the habitual social and theatrical habits which had resulted in complete aesthetic paralysis. Around 1920's Theatre had "degenerated into a branch of the bourgeois narcotic traffic"[1] content in doing 'culinary' enjoyment.

The existing theatre was besieged by Zola's naturalistic dictum of presenting the picture of the "slice of life" on the stage. This was the fallout of the Romantic disenchantment with and excessive reliance on man's potentiality and idealism which had come to naught. In the given circumstances, then the naturalistic theatre seemed to be the only possible stage convention where

> the audience was supposed to be *moved* by what was presented on the stage. Whether they were to believe in the play as real or artificial, to regard the actors as skilful mimics or suffering human beings, they were to feel pity with them and to identify themselves with the experiences of the hero.[2]

Theatre all over the world busied itself in experimentation, conspiring to create an illusion of reality, luring the spectator into a stupor. In this state of "willing suspension of disbelief,' he is presented with a picture of the world as "fixed", where "things long unchanged appear unchangeable." This kind of theatre transformed the spectators into

> motionless figures in a peculiar condition: they seem strenuously to be tensing all their muscles.... True, their eyes are open, but they stare, rather than see, just as they listen rather than hear. They look at the stage as if in a trance, an expression which comes from the Middle Ages, the days of witches and priests.[3]

This was due to the working of the principle of the Aristotelian concept of catharsis which was based on empathy. Empathy means identification with or entering into the character and event represented on the stage. It is exactly what nineteenth century German aestheticians meant when they coined the term Einfühlung (Empathy) – "the projection of the recipient of a work of art into it – his identification with it"[4]. This type of theatre "liberated" the feelings and emotions of the spectator, made the world apparent but not lucid. He has been enabled to "see it but not through it." Since the theatre lacked the capability to lend credibility to

events presented "we learn nothing more about society than the setting can give."[5]

Undeniably, orthodox theatre performed one social function by offering, with all its powerful intoxicants what could be classified as Freud's "palliative remedies" to man whose life is marred by schisms and disintegration. To such a spectator the old theatre's "swapping a contradictory world for a consistent one" was indeed a relief.

Nonetheless, to Brecht, as he argued in his article *On The Experimental Theatre*, this function was morally and intellectually degrading, because

> the more the public was emotionally affected, the less capable it was of learning. That is, the more we brought the public to where it agreed, experienced, sympathized, just that much less was it capable of seeing the ins and outs of the matter, that much less did it learn, and the more there was to learn, just that much less was the artistic treat brought to realization.[6]

Especially in the present day when change is the operative term,

> how much longer, are our souls, leaving our 'mere' bodies under cover, of the darkness, to plunge into those dreamlike figures up on the stage, there to take part in the crescendos and climaxes which 'normal' life denies us?[7]

The position of man, his relationship vis-à-vis society at social, economic, and political levels is constantly shifting and is in a flux. Man has to be viewed against the background

of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and dangerous scientific discoveries.

Influenced by sociology and Marxism, Brecht felt that if there was to be a new social structure, there ought to be a new aesthetic to cater to the "children of the scientific era". A battle was to be waged in what he described towards the establishment of a "non-Aristotelian drama",

> Just as it [non-Aristotelian drama] refrains from handing its hero over to the world as if it were his inescapable fate, so it would not dream of handing the spectator over to an inspiring theatrical experience. Anxious to teach the spectator a quite definite practical attitude, directed towards changing the world, it must begin by making him adopt in the theatre a quite different attitude from what he is used to.[8]

To transform the "cowed, credulous, hypnotized mass," that the spectators had been reduced to by conventional theatre into an active, alert, assertive determinant with a critical faculty was indeed an arduous undertaking. It called for a total functional alternation in the theatre as well as in the attitude of the spectator towards the theatre. The intention of the new theatre was pedagogical and hence Brecht banished emotions from making any claims in the new theatre. "I do not write for that scum," Brecht stated in 1926, "which puts a value on having its heart gladdened."[9] In the face of criticism, Brecht later on admitted emotion in his concept of theatre. But in the formative stages he resolutely owed allegiance to intelligence only and declared "I appeal to the intellect.[10]

Brecht believed that, on the annihilation of the old theatre, Epic Theatre, alone had the potentiality of understanding man in totality. Furthermore, the postulation of Epic Theatre was to arouse the spectator from his narcotic slumber, destroy the "habitual way of looking at a thing," impede identification between the stage and the spectator and yet unite them in mutual enjoyment. Epic Theatre was one of the many solutions offered by Brecht's contemporaries to overcome the limitations of naturalistic theatre, but it was, in quintessence, by far the most revolutionary.

As the old dramaturgy was based on empathy and illusion, it was but natural that the new beginning by Epic Theatre was to be made in the opposite direction. In other words, all attempts to create illusion were to be dispelled right at their inception. The spectator must come to the theatre with an understanding that he is entering a theatre and not a replica of the world. Brecht staunchly believed that fidelity to reality was not in the ambit of theatre by any stretch of imagination. Therefore, the theatre should give up its attempts at a faithful depiction of truth on the stage. What Brecht advocated was a certain amount of distancing, a sense of aloofness, of separate existence from what was happening on the stage. Only then would the spectator be able to enter into a unique dramatic experience – an experience which would make him enlightened and induce a frame of mind proper to grasp things and master rather than be mastered by them. This was achieved by what Brecht called 'Verfremdungseffekt', which forms the basis of Epic Theatre.

'Verfremdung', unsatisfactorily translated into English as 'alienation', 'estrangement' for the lack of an exact equivalent, meant to Brecht, to take "what to the event or character is obvious, known, evident, and produce surprise and curiosity out of it,"[11] Instead of "imagine" (einbilden),

Brecht chooses to "portray" (abbilden), to report the happenings or events. The technique of 'Verfremdung' introduces an element of detachment, initiates a process of rediscovery of mundane, ordinary things which at once start to appear strange and alien, arousing in the spectator a sense of wonder and curiousity. In other words, 'Verfremdung' breeds an attitude of unfamiliarity towards the ordinary and socially conditioned phenomenan. All this implies the activation of critical and creative potentiality of the spectator, introducing a "state of suspicious inquiry." It is the beginning of a new attitude towards the theatre. Essentially, the response of the spectator towards the stage forms the crux of the technique of 'alienation.'

It was in the notes to the play, *Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe*, in 1936, that Brecht first used the term 'alienation'. He wrote

> Certain events of the play ... by means of inscriptions, interpolation of music and noise and the technique of the actor ... should be elevated (alienated) out of the realm of the ordinary, natural, or expected, and function as scenes complete in themselves.[12]

Interestingly, the concept of 'alienation' is not of Brechtian origination. Rather it is a translation of the Russian word Priem Ostrannenija or 'device of making strange' coined by Victor Shklovski in 1917. It suggests the "transformation of an 'ordinary' or 'automatic' perception into a poetically felt, poetically visionary perception."[13] Shklovski was in quest of an artistic procedure which would "deliberately impede" and provoke the reader to a more strenuous effort and a coming to grips with the reality of the world.

Shunned of all the hypnotic trappings, the theatre employed a variety of means to keep the spectator in its fold, stimulated, active and perceptive. As a first step, Brecht drastically changed the very conception of the character. Unlike the old theatre, where the "structure of society" (represented on the stage) was depicted "as incapable of being influenced by society (in the auditorium),"[14] Brecht warned against creating "fixed," individualized characters. In his opinion,

> character should not be regarded like a stain of grease on a pair of trousers, which, however much you try to rub and wipe it away, will always come up again. In actual fact the question is always how a given person is going to act in a specified set of circumstances and conditions.[15]

The working of the principle of alienation can best be illustrated by the now famous example of the wrath of King Lear over the ingratitude of his daughters. If the scene is enacted on the old precepts of empathy, then the actor presents the wrath in such a manner that the spectator justifies the anger, endorses it, because he feels that this is the *only* emotion possible and ultimately finds himself seething with anger of the same intensity as of Lear's. On the other hand, if the technique of 'Verfremdung' is applied, then the actor portrays the anger on the stage in a manner which leaves the spectator stunned and amazed because he has been made aware of other possible reactions, too. The whole scene is performed in such a manner that the stamp of universality has been removed. Rather, by historification the "pastness" of event or character has been emphasized. The idea behind this is to show the flexibility in character and event, to bring

out their transient nature, thus making identification impossible.

Thus, a new style of acting was required, whereby the actor was not to approach the character just as the spectator was not to identify himself with the actor in the first place. The actor must alienate himself from the character he is portraying to the extent that "even when he plays a man possessed he must not seem to be possessed himself, for how can the spectator discover what possesses the character if he does?"[16] He must demonstrate, narrate rather than impersonate the character, because to an Epic Theatre actor the verdict: " He didn't act Lear, he was Lear would be an annihilating blow."[17] The rationale behind this was to allow the actor a chance to show to the spectator the alternates that were available to the character, even when he decides to act otherwise. In short, he is exposing the weakness of the character and at the same time giving the spectator a chance to form an opinion of his own. In order to do justice to the character being portrayed, the actor should not be taken by surprise. He should, therefore, be clear about all the experiences, the ebbs and flows of the character's personality. Right from the beginning, he should be aware of its middle as well as how it is going to 'end' and "thus maintain a calm independence throughout."

Epic Theatre, however, did not plunge into the inner recesses of man's mind. Rather, it attached importance to highlighting man in his relationship with others, thus making "story" the chief concern, as "everything hangs on the story; it is the heart of the theatrical performance. For it is what happens *between* people that provides them with the material to discuss, criticize alter."[18] Brecht's emphasis on narrative signalled another departure from the classical theory which was highly centralized, logically woven, taut, finally

culminating in a suspense-filled climax. On the contrary, Brechtian theatre survived on well-rounded episodes, independent but "knotted" together in a way that the knots are easily discernible, giving the spectator an opportunity to 'interpose', ponder and respond critically. Drama, under the new canon could be read as a "play within the play", as Brecht stated in his *Kleines Organon für das Theater* (The Little Organon for the Theatre). The total effect was achieved by the juxtaposition of incongruous or contrasting episodes. Further, the whole play was enacted in sharp light, in full view of the spectators. Even the character was created before the eyes of the spectator. The dramatist either introduced the character, or the actor himself would do so. The theme of the play may be flashed on the curtain with the help of a placard or poster. The stage was conspicuous for its sparsity. Only those props integral to the story would suffice. Music and songs were other devices used by Brecht in achieving 'alienation,' for they abruptly changed the atmosphere from getting carried away into the magical sphere.

These are the broad concepts of Brecht's 'Verfremdungs-effekt'. It may be clarified that though he set out to liquidate the orthodox theatre, he was not a theorist belonging to the category of Aristotle, Sidney, or Coleridge. It would be futile to look for a complete theory of drama in Brecht's critical statements and practice. The principles of Epic Theatre grew out of practice, making it a widely misunderstood dramatic theory. As Brecht himself confessed, "a man with one theory is lost. He needs several of them, four, lots". This probably explains why he avoided publication of his ideas which only appeared in scattered articles. It was only in 1930 that he incorporated them in his published work, *Versuche* (Experiments). For a full study of his concept of dramaturgy one had to wait for *Kleines Organon für das Theater*', published in 1948.

It is, no doubt difficult to assess the measure of success Epic Theatre achieved in practice. However, it succeeded in imparting a critical spirit. With the spell of familiarity finally removed, the spectator endowed with a new insight and a better grip on things, is willing to respond – respond in his unique independent way, willing to act rather than be acted upon. He has been awakened to a new realization: instead of being a mute sufferer, he becomes the determinant of the forces influencing his life. What Brecht demanded was an active participation of the spectator rather than an "illusion of sitting in front of a key-hole." This participation, resulting from provocation, could be in the form of argument, criticism, or discussion. This in itself is an achievement, and this is what Brecht had in mind when he called for the application of the 'Verfremdungseffekt' in the theatre.

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