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Negotiations

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Editor's Note

Negotiations seeks to offer a variety of impassioned intellectual deliberations. The contributors adddress issues in literature and culture and they range over diverse discourse-areas from liberal humanism to postmodernism. They, however, at the same time, reveal individual arguments that emerge from personal negotiations with the author or authors concerned.

This endeavour would not have seen the light of day in the first week of the first month of 2004 without a little help from our well-wishers. Our grateful thanks to Mr. Debojit Phukan for being so charitable regarding the cost of printing the journal even while working overtime and Mr. Ankush Bhuyan for having volunteered to do the cover-design by setting aside his own personal business interests for our cause. Special thanks are due to Prof. Mohan Ramanan, Central University, Hyderabad, who extended himself, despite his busy schedule, to contribute an article at our request.

Ranjit Kumar Chowdhury

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Creative Signs in *Ibsen's Last Plays* : The Problem of the Artist and his Aesthetic

Rakhee K Moral

ABSTRACT

Towards the end of his career Ibsen wrote obsessively about the artist, his protagonists, almost all of them symptomatically plagued by the idea of a creative energy which was either in decline or which often became the cause of conflicts in the artist's mind. In his plays of the nineties there runs, as it were, the leitmotif of the master builder, whether as painter, struggling writer or sculptor whose imagination is not entirely free from the knowledge of creating an aesthetic that was questionable insofar as what it entailed for the man who stakes his 'life' for his art. This creative preoccupation is further complicated in terms of the playwright's attempts to reconcile the expectations of his audience with his own need to justify his art to himself.

In the face of these, Ibsen's dramatic art poses interesting questions about the way he handles the compelling urge to situate the artist in his aesthetic through his use of a language that is heavily codified, grounded at once in the landscape of the mind and the natural Norwegian settings that provide signification of his themes. In this paper I propose to focus on two plays of the nineties, **Little Eyolf** and **When We Dead Awaken,** as illustrative of Ibsen's art and its semiotic possibilities. Both verbal and visual signs in these plays, and as in most of his last plays, point towards a deliberate and acutely self conscious probe of the world of the artist and his audience which is sought to be interrogated by an intertextual reading of them in the plays undertaken for this study.

> *No, now I can't stand this much longer!*
>
> ***(The Master Builder)***
>
> *Life still surges all around us – and within us too.*
>
> ***(When We Dead Awaken)***

A close reading of the last plays of Ibsen is accompanied by an emerging paradigm, of an overwhelming awareness and consciousness of an anxiety about the nature of the artist's role and responsibility towards himself and his audience. The progression of each of these plays involves a structural pattern that begins with the bleak confrontation of what has been lost through a searching probe of the moral and personal growth of the artist, the dramatic action weaving itself around the protagonist's somewhat late if significant realization that the attempt to create or make has been profitless, which, though in itself is fruit of his exercise, an education of sorts for the artist. Considered along this generic framework, the Ibsenian play of the last phase may well be read as a dramatic *kunstlerroman*, documenting as it were the life and times of a man who journeys through his art to arrive at the possible meaning of his existence.

In a large way, the Ibsen corpus too negotiates this idea of the individual's quest for selfhood, relentlessly colliding with the obstacles thrown in by society in his pursuit of a self-realization that is painful and often tortuous, attended by devastating naturalistic events and phenomena or alternatively, purged, as it were, by the intervention of a cruel fate. To consider the final plays as wholly departing

from this convention is to grossly formulate categories or stages in the Ibsenian cycle; to read all of them, however, in one characteristic code is also an oversimplification. The quintessential Ibsen play made familiar to the audience over the decades in which he wrote had created in them the expectations of a drama centred around familial and societal interests, whose protagonist suffers alienation, and whose struggle for fulfillment is more often than not met with frustration. Set against this seemingly predictable theme, the plays of the nineties veer away from these socially-centred issues and look inward from the wider realms of society to the small, circumspect and closed inner lives of a handful of people whose lives barely touch, or are touched by, the world outside. As Inga-Stina Ewbank notes, "the worlds of these plays are intimate, internalized spheres with their own private demons." (McFarlane 1994: 136) Ibsen, it would seem, like Rubek in *When We Dead Awaken,* tired of his readers' misjudgement and predilection for the somber end of his plays, tried to accommodate new and more ambiguous meanings into their dramatic denouement, at least in terms of the redefined relationships and in his attempts to forge new equations between the protagonists' tenuous lives.

Such a concern, on closer scrutiny may reveal something of a zeitgeist, a spirit of the age, the underpinnings of which could be sought in the *fin de seicle* temperament of the times in which Ibsen wrote his mature plays, shared by the early moderns, as various as Yeats, Eliot or Joyce steeped in a similar history and literary sensibility. Ibsen of the last plays is the modernist artist in search of a soul, alone in his creative despair and feverish in his anxiety to reach out to his audience: his preoccupation, thus, with the problem of making his art known to his audience provokes the contemporary reader into inferring signs built into the text, signs that can be decoded into a pattern of thought and structure that reveal the Ibsenian design just as much as they hide it. Of course, it may be obligatory here to question what is meant by the Ibsenian design, or if there is anything like a coherent principle or a *Weltanschaung* underlying the plays. The playwright's ability to create a mood through the intellectual idea and his experiential reality, which are at once agents of a dialectical process so evident in the plays may often be the reason why the Ibsen play evades an easy summing up.

Hans Robert Jauss, in his theory of semiotics advances the importance of reception studies for any account of literary signification and emphasizes the factor of the audience and its active participation in the literary work. Art to be truly and effectively communicated relies on this dialogical process, which Ibsen seemed to have increasingly recognized towards his mature phase of playwriting. In a letter to his publisher, he refers to the Mss of *The Wild Duck* in the following terms:

> *For the last four months I have worked at it every single day, and it is not without a certain feeling of regret that I part from it. Long daily associations with the persons in this play have endeared them to me in spite of their manifold failings; and I am not without hope that they may find good and kind friends among the great reading public and more particularly among the actor tribe...* (Introduction to *Wild Duck and Other Plays*).

It is however difficult to decide at once what Ibsen may have meant by his 'great reading public' in view of the historical knowledge we have of it from more than a century of Ibsen criticism garnered from sources as diverse as Ibsen admirers such as

William Archer, Edmund Gosse, Eleanor Marx, not to mention Shaw himself, Virginia Woolf, critic Eric Bentley and in more recent times, G Wilson Knight and Brian Johnston among others. At a time when Ibsen was being read, staged and critiqued throughout Europe and the United States it seems unlikely that Ibsen entertained negative or skeptical views about his audience, though it is possible that the huge interest generated in them may have triggered off fresh thinking in the author's mind about the way he was being interpreted. Thus, in *When We Dead Awaken*, Rubek wearily exclaims to Maja, his wife about his masterpiece that the public had already hailed :

> *What does the world know? It knows and understands nothing!...It hasn't the faintest idea of my meaning, but it goes into ecstacies all the same... What's the use of spending one's lives slaving for the Masses – All the world!* (Act 1)

This statement elicits more than surprise, coming as it does from the greatest living European playwright for how does one account for the kind of near derision and contempt that Ibsen nurses against his great reading public and audience. Yet it may be necessary here to linger a while on his notion of the audience which he calls "the Masses, all the world." Clearly, the idea of the public, his potential audience that grew by the years as he churned out one play after the other, also required a kind of adjustment on the author's part to clarify and make whole his meaning to his reader.

In this context it is possible to refer to Hans R Jauss' excellent essay on reception history or what has been more commonly called reader response in the field of literary interpretation and hermeneutics. Jauss says, "the historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees...The perspective of the aesthetics of reception mediates between passive reception and active understanding, experience formative of norms and new production."(Leitch 2001: 1551) Thus reader, listener and spectator, ie., the audience, continually effect a dialogue between the work and audience forming a continuum in the process of literary production

That Eliot too should have also dwelt at length on the relationship between the artist, his art and his readership in his critical essays is perhaps not an accident of history and can be seen in the light of the growing modernist interest in the aesthetic process of. the artist. Art was for these men of modernism a dialogic experience and the participatory process gave it fuller meaning and signification.

Though I shall limit myself to a discussion of those signs in Ibsen's verbal and visual lexicon that need to be understood in terms of what they stereotypically suggest so as to strive towards a necessary closing of gaps or what Wolfgang Iser calls the "fundamental asymmetry between text and reader" that actually enables continued communication in the reading process, I am tempted to comment occasionally on the way a certain translation of his plays in attempting to close the gaps may have generated its own theory of reading Ibsen (Leitch:1676). Something like the theory of reader-response developed by Iser and Jauss called the *Rezeptionsasthetik* in the second half of the twentieth century, was thus already recognized, if in an elemental form, by Ibsen, whose views on the role of the audience and the actor, as the playwright himself noted, must necessarily be taken into consideration. Elisabeth Robins, eminent Ibsen heroine stated that he treated his actor as a 'fellow creator', which corroborates this important issue of reception and participation that Ibsen addressed while creating his plays. In her memoirs Robins remarks that "Ibsen could and usually did cooperate with his

actors" (Robins1928: 52). What is more, Ibsen demanded of his actors to be interpretative artists themselves, thus widening like never before the horizon of the Ibsen actor and the interdependence of the playwright and his performers.

In the light of these, the inference traditionally attached to many Ibsen signs need to be reviewed for their fuller and more nuanced meanings. If the plays in question here suggest a greater attention to rhetoric it provokes the reader into a closer reading of the rhetorical statements often given by Ibsen to his protagonists, to arrive at the plausible inferences of these verbal signs for what they may reveal or conceal.

The language of 'analysis' that Ibsen chose in these late plays, seems on the face of it a natural response to vexing doubts about art at the end of what been a phenomenally successful career in playwriting. Yet, the codes he brought into the text of these plays suggest certain ambiguities that promote an indeterminacy of meaning, which is proof of that amazing imagination that Ibsen exercised even at the end of his oeuvre. While the plays of this phase betray a common concern, Ibsen plays with words and dialogue in a manner that makes it nearly impossible to lump them into some sort of conclusive vision statement of the author-artist. Solness' painful confession in the *Master Builder* is direct :

> *All that I have succeeded in doing, building, creating... all this I have to make up for, to pay for. And not with my own happiness only but with other people's too. That is the price which my position as an artist has caused me, and others.*

It claims our attention as the central concern about the artist which Ibsen grapples with; but this is not available in the same terms in *Little Eyolf* or *When We Dead Awaken.* In the latter play, while Rubek the sculptor, also meditates on this, his reaction is different from that of Solness as he asserts boldly,

> *I am an artist Irene...I was born to be an artist. And I can never be anything other than an artist.*

And for Alfred Allmers in *Little Eyolf,* it is a chosen middle path, as it were, as he resigns himself to his new-found vocation of fatherhood to his lame son when he states,

> *..I've become increasingly aware of other claims—of more important duties.*

If the verbal structures illustrated above can be worked into a progression of meaning, this seems possible in terms of answers they provide to questions posed by what in semiotics is called "the horizon of expectation" of the reader. Instead of ascribing independent meanings to this negotiation with the problem of the artist and his creative impulse, as revealed by the three different situations, it is perhaps more rewarding to see them as interrelated and as intertexts of one another, wherein each case conceals a subtext that can be read and worked into the overt meaning and which is a connective to the next and so on, till we have a web of meanings out of which the drama's complex meaning emerges.

Just as the verbal signs build themselves into a network of texts that supply fresh meaning and signification of what Ibsen recognized as the vital relation of life to art, the visual help to graphically capture and identify those inner psychological states that have contributed to the recognition of Ibsen's expressionism. The falling tower of the Master Builder that takes him to death is not the tower atop which, Rubek and Irene ascend to their life in death, to their ressurection. Ibsen's recurrent use of these images, of towers, fiords and mountain peaks does not connote their regular symbolism. As

Raymond Williams notes, there is rather the availability through them of a schema or what he calls "a scatter of images" which underpin an evolving dynamics of meaning in the manner that Ibsenian dialogue hints at "the second unspoken reality behind the surface of things" or what Maeterlinck called a *'dialogue du second degree*`'(Bradbury & McFarlane 1991:502). What the Ibsenian text displayed to a large extent, thus, was the immense possibilities of dramatic language and in our immediate context what the terminal symbolism of his last plays might be able to say.

Little Eyolf, Allmer's child contains within his small cripple frame the meeting point of the tangled web of seemingly irreconcilable relationships that threaten to drown his sanity, that of the natural kinship and bond between Allmer and Asta, his supposed half sister, of Allmers and his devastatingly beautiful wife Rita whose all consuming love he cannot seem to reciprocate and lastly, of Allmer's guilt-ridden filial love for his son he loses to the fiord. The Rat woman's parting shot to Rita, "if you should ever notice anything nibbling and gnawing or creeping and crawling, just send for me.." hearkens at the sign that Eyolf has come to bear for his mother, an unwanted pest, an Evil eye she must necessarily rid herself of. (*The Oxford Companion* suggests that Eyolf is lost at precisely the moment when Rita and Allmers are making love though in my translation of *Little Eyolf,* by Eva le Galliene, there is no such indication.)

Death appears in the Eyolf play at first as a sinister force, threatening to swallow the peace of the Allmers family, taking Little Eyolf in its wake, and then the other Eyolf, Asta whose death of one self, the self she discloses to Allmers as not her true one, is death of another kind until Allmers seems to have made his peace with death in an epiphanic moment in the desolate lake side on his 'mountain trip'. Unlike in *When We the Dead Awaken,* the need to die for

Rubek and Irene in order to live is not the mantra of the Allmers couple who discover that "we human beings belong here on earth". Though, it remains significant that there is one common point of intersection of signs in the climb or symbolic ascent, a vantage from where the seeking into knowledge of the birth of a new life or the death of an old one is readily possible.

The inability of Allmers to write and complete his great tome, his aborted masterpiece, significantly called Human Responsibility, is another way of critiquing the business of the artist, a hollow and "foolish" pursuit of earthly success and fame against what is later perceived as 'real' and ultimate happiness: *I have been foolish upto now, you see. Thinking is what brings out the best in one. It doesn't really matter what you put on paper.* Allmers' acknowledgement of this and his need to "go back to the wilds, upto the very highest peaks", point to an experience of desired freedom, in being liberated from his obsessive vocation. There is also the suggestion that going away from his domestic life with Rita will regain for Allmers the prelapsarian and remembered innocence of his '*samliv*' (life together) with Asta. Ironically, this life together of the siblings is later revealed to have been actually not innocent of sexual desire, for Asta is actually discovered to be not his half sister. Ibsen's characteristic manner of turning accepted symbol and meaning around extends to other areas within the plays and prepares the reader for more surprises.

The title of Allmer's unwritten work, *Human Responsibility,* is thus, a sign both literally and figuratively burdened by the abstract idea of the artist–writer as spokesman for his society, that it supposedly signifies. The symbolism of this potential tome sits heavily on the mind of Rita who cannot comprehend Allmer's change of heart just as Asta is stunned into remarking, "But that book is

your life work Alfred". Rubek on the other hand discovers the vanity of his art as love and the possibility of happiness surges back into his barren life as he perceives it "burning" within him.

Borghejm, the engineer, who will take Asta on the steamer into a new life away from the Allmers home, is also a builder and significantly he tells Allmers that the road he was building is "finished" and in opposition to Allmer's incomplete book here is something " that did come to an end". His high spirits find expression in his comment that "life seems so bright and full of promise" and echo the bear hunter of *When We Dead Awaken*, Ulfhejm's optimistic assertion that "in the end we conquer". Pitted against the ideal and ethereal world that Rubek envisions in his creative destiny and higher life, Ulfhejm, in a manner not unlike Borhejm of the earlier play, is content to live in the world of flesh and blood. Living dangerously his 'satyr'like physical presence that Maja is only too aware of, makes him a hunter in the real sense of the term. But his promise of a life in a castle sans works of art is a risk Maja is willing to take on if only to get away from the make- believe world of art into the life denied her by Rubek. Ibsen sets his pairs of men and women in these two plays at poles that represent on the one hand life's active principle, a lesser mortal and base existence and the ethereal, ideal but seemingly unachievable life of the spirit on the other.

In *Little Eyolf* the Rat woman is an agent of death, or release as it may be alternately argued for Eyolf, whose removal from the scene ensures the retribution that saves Allmers and Rita. She is menancing in her black hooded cape and black bag and is described, if a little too theatrically, as shrunken and with piercing eyes, a shadow like figure recalling the shrouded deaconess who lurks around Irene and is witness to her end; or beginning, as it were, into awakening.

Though these binaries seem to easily suggest a formulated and structured explanation of Ibsen's idea of human life and its interface with art, there are no easy solutions at the end of these late plays and more significantly, no predictable formulae. It is difficult to miss the complex motifs that Rubek works into his artistic masterpiece, *The Resurrection* or even to overlook the symbolic suggestion of its title itself. The man who cannot separate himself from his art and what it entails is present in the scene Rubek sculpted as his masterpiece. As Rubek confesses in that momentous unburdening of his soul to Irene before their final journey together, the "man weighed down by guilt who finds it impossible to break loose from the earth" in the foreground of that marble work is himself. Here is Arnold Rubek, almost cast in the image of a weary Ibsen confronting the losses in the sums he has worked out of his life. But Rubek who is brushed aside as weak and dismissed as the breed of poets, a *dikter,* by Irene, is not spent entirely as suggested in the visual What also needs to be noted is the particular nuances of the original Norwegian words that are retained in most translations of Ibsen to render alive the meanings of the plays.

In this vital scene, they play with flowers, which Irene strews into the waters of the brook, pink flowers that resemble flamingos, which Rubek sees as sea gulls with red beaks. But Rubek throws green leaves into the water, which he says are ships that will see them safely off. He is the unrelenting artist who still aspires for the ideal and entertains dreams of " beauty, sunshine and life itself". The private symbolism is perhaps symptomatic of the times, the heady days of the European Symbolist movement of Ibsen's age, but the reader may reserve his right to read the signs in a manner that continually brings to light the struggle he confronts in terms of his art and aesthetic, of the man and the artist whose destiny is

fraught with risks that he must undertake to gain knowledge.

The sunrise, which bathes the mountain side with light is a promise on which hinges the possibility of a renewal of love between Rubek and Irene, which the latter claims has been dead. In the land of the sun it is ironic that Rubek has " never seen a sunrise". Close to his revelation of the creative profitlessness he has so longed engaged in, Rubek pleads for life instead of art. This is a life arguably different from the joy of life and freedom that Maja celebrates in her way down into the depths of the valley as she descends with Ulfhejm from the craggy mountain peaks that takes Rubek into another life. Maja's shrieks of wonder and ecstacy, " I am free I am free... " rings somewhat hollow as the silence of the misty mountain tops and the snows wrap Rubek and Irene into their life of marriage that awaits them in the light that glistens at the top. Maja and Ulfhejm are denied the ascent that is the way by which suffering, penitence and salvation are assured to Rubek.

If the reading of signs is intertextual as proposed earlier, then the incomplete stage in the self-realization of the Allmers couple who envisage that someday their love will be reborn, "on a purer higher level" amidst the mountain peaks, towards the stars, must find its logical conclusion in the willed for annihilation of Rubek and Irene in the mountain peaks both of whom discover through death on the very summit of life's promise, their awakening into life.

Rubek's reaffirmation of life through the perilous journey into death on the mountain peaks assisted ably by his alter ego Irene is at once a scathing indictment of the poet-artist that must perish in order to confront his real self and an attestation of that faith in the ability of the artist to resurrect himself despite being condemned to "remain forever in his hell". Rubek goes up towards the mountain peaks, with the realization that a *dikter* had to first die before the man in him could emerge.

When We Dead Awaken was written in the summer of 1898, the year that also saw Ibsen finally putting the lid on what was to be an autobiography that never got written. Ibsen perhaps judiciously called this last play his dramatic epilogue. If the Last Plays do seem to be part of a continuous text it appears more than likely that at the end of his long, illustrious career Ibsen allowed his drama to finally write himself. In an essay on twentieth century Ibsen criticism, Errol Durbach rightly points out that Shaw's suspicion that the quintessence of Ibsenism is a paradoxical absence of quintessence seems to be confirmed when the Ibsen corpus is read as one continuous whole. Each time the reader looks for a design in his plays, the text refuses any such formulation and slips into an ambiguity, at once provoking interpretation and denying it. The meaning that is left for the reader and viewer to surmise is finally available where words and images come together like signs, constituting the quintessential Ibsen text.

(This essay is a revised version of a paper delivered at The Ibsen Seminar held at the Department of English, Gauhati University, India 2003)

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Notes and References:

All references to the Last Plays, *Little Eyolf and When We Dead Awaken* are from the 1961 Eva Le Gallienne translated and edited version of *The Wild Duck and Other Plays*

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CONFLICT OF 'SELF' AND 'SYSTEM' : THE SOCIAL REALISM IN DICKENS

Arunabha Bhuyan

ABSTRACT

Dickens, the eminent Victorian novelist, represented through his novels the transitional phase of the English society. The child heroes/ heroines are the medium through which the frailties of the Victorian society are perceived. The various social organizations—schools, prisons, court, industries etc—which administer the society are placed under scrutiny as well as attacked. This article attempts to project the conflict that lies at the root of his novels between individuals and institutions, the 'self' and the 'system'. The demolishing nature of the organizations , the struggling individuals and the attitude of Dickens is what this article attempts to define.

Dickens was greatly influenced by the tendencies of his age. The Victorian Age witnessed a changing trend from an agricultural to an industrial one and also the rise of the middle class. Dickens while writing his novels kept this changing scenario in mind. The child characters who are at the centre of his novels are always shown in relation to their social surroundings. Thus frailties of the society are perceived through the eyes of a child. Oliver, Nell, Jo, David, Paul and Florence Dombey, Amy Dorrit or Pip move from one situation to another and encounter various evil aspects of society which deepens their struggle for survival. The society in Dickens's time was a materialistic one and his child heroes and heroines are shown to be entrapped in the selfishness and ambitions of the adults who are directly or indirectly associated with them— be it the parents, guardians, teachers or employers.

It was a common feature in Dickens to project the child hero or heroine as a figure of innocence seeking to survive in a world of corruption. These characters are not only projected as witnesses to the changing face of society, but are also shown to be swept in the tide of events. Dickens while delineating the sufferings of his characters attacked the various social organizations which administer the society. He dealt with the workhouse in Oliver Twist; exposed the tyranny of the Yorkshire school masters in Nicholas Nickleby and David Copperfield; mentioned the debtors' prison in David Copperfield and Little Dorrit; the utilitarian principle governing the functioning of the industries as well as education system in Hard Times; the long drawn legal battles in Bleak House; and the wrong done in the name of education in Dombey and Son. He was desirous of drawing of the attention of Victorian public to the demolishing nature of these institutions. In the words of Richard T. :

> "He exposes the unacknowledged conflicts that lie at the heart of the social and legal order. These conflicts constitute a kind of hollowness or blank at the centre of a social world that seems to be totally dominated by institutionalized system of orders. (1992:7)

At the heart of his novel lies the individual 'self' being dominated by the institutionalized system. The struggle deepens in his later novels like Hard Times, Little Dorrit and Great Expectations.

The hero finds it increasingly difficult to free himself from the dragnets of the system.

Except for that scene where he asks for more gruel in the workhouse Oliver Twist remains a passive hero, one who is jostled from one situation to another. Similarly in The Old Curiosity Shop, little Nell is shown to be a victim of the familial world as well as the external one. However, like Oliver she does not let the evil forces of society to corrupt her physically or morally.

At the center of Dombey and Son there is the world of money and power. Paul Dombey is subjected to the kind of education which crush the individuality of the child. But the persecuted child (unlike Oliver or Nell) makes an attempt to assert himself. His opinion of money, his mild protest against Mrs. Pipchin's establishment and Dr. Blimber's Academy all speak of an individual spirit in the child. Mr. Dombey's ambition of moulding him into his successor overnight without taking into account the needs of the child leads to his premature death. Thus in this novel the individual self fails to survive under the pressure of the 'system'. Mr. Dombey a London merchant whose attitude is shaped by his love of money and power stands here for the dehumanising effects of money and business:

> "The women, children, and servants in Dombey and Son are perceived by the dominant culture to have investment value only. Servants are valued for their work; wives gain value by producing sons, and sons by growing up and augmenting the family property; daughters have no value at all. (Marks 1994: 14)

Mr. Dombey suffers unbearably due to the untimely death of Paul, the failure of his marriage, the betrayal by his own trusted manager and finally the collapse of his business. This is Dickens's way of showing that a man ruled by the 'system' is bound to such a fate.

In David Copperfield instead of attacking some particular social institution, Dickens exposed the anomalies of society in various forms, like the lack of sympathy for the poor and indifference to the plight of the orphans. Though David is presented as a victim of social injustice, he is shown to have overcome the elements that tend to deter his progress in life. The very fact that David becomes a successful writer as well as a respectable gentleman also shows that he does conform to the social patterns that surround him.

Dickens's later group of novels show a deeper struggle of the individual and the society. At the center of Hard Times lies the 'system' and the individuals who are the products of this ruthless 'system'. Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby, the propounders of the utilitarian school of thoughts are placed in dominant positions. The children Tom and Louisa Gradgrind are never allowed to emerge from the shadows of the 'system' that torment them. They are in fact used to illustrate the futility of the 'system' that governs them. In Hard Times, Dickens denounces a society guided by a harsh utilitarian philosophy where knowledge is based on facts and figures and the individuality is never allowed to flourish. Coketown which functions on the basis of this philosophy is devoid of creativity. The characters are as lifeless as the machines. Louisa and Tom Gradgrind are incapable of preserving the 'self' within them. Similar is the case of Stephen Blackpool whose life has assumed a meaninglessness at work and home alike. A world without 'fancy' can nourish only individuals like these. Coketown serves as a prison to the rich and the poor alike:

> "The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of

> their construction. Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town, fact, fact, fact everywhere in the immaterial. (35)

The rapid growth of industrialisation did only tarnish the pastoral landscape. Sissy Jupe who had been earlier picked from the circus to be educated retains her natural charm and honesty and she is the one who is able to bring about a change in the heart of Gradgrind. It is her natural wisdom that acts as an opposing force against the mechanical tendencies of the age.

In Little Dorrit Dickens attacks the various institutions like the Debtors' Prison, Circumlocution and the bureaucracy that suppress the lives of the common individuals. This novel projects the society as a prison for its members. Talented men like Daniel Doyce fail to get due recognition as these institutions can only suppress, they cannot allow the natural impulses to flow, they cannot create but can only destroy. In his earlier novels the social evils like the Poor Law, unsatisfactory parenthood, bad education are attacked, but in Little Dorrit he depicts the fate of individuals who are victimised by that 'system'. Here his intention is to exemplify the repressive elements of the society inside and outside the prison. The union of Amy Dorrit and Arthur Clennam at the end of the novel confirms Dickens's belief that love and understanding and not material prosperity are the forces that can withstand if not overpower the destructive forces of society.

Pip in Great Expectations is a victim of the changing values of society. He aspires to belong to the upper crust of society, to be a gentleman. What strikes one in Great Expectations is the snobbery of Pip, and whereas David's despair at the blacking warehouse is justified as he was used to a modest life, Pip's condescending attitude towards Joe and his forge only hints at his growing snobbery

which he had acquired after his contact with Miss Havisham and Estella. Pip is exposed to the urban world through the figures of Miss Havisham, Magwitch the convict and Jaggers the lawyer. However, Herbert Pocket and Wemmick though belonging to the same world prove beneficial to him. Humphry House terms the story of Pip as 'a snob's progress'. In House itself we locate the sense of the importance of class — attitude of the members of a particular class in a particular age. Whereas in his other novels the 'system' is under attack, in Great Expectations Dickens not only censures the society, but also the hero who is responsible for his own predicament. But one cannot overlook the fact that Pip's ambitions rose from living within the society. The changing values of society, the changing economy had enabled a man to dream, to rise in life. In Great Expectations 'money' is the system through which the relation of 'self' and society are established. The later novels like Little Dorrit, Hard Times and Great Expectations point out how difficult it was to free oneself from the corruptive forces of society. Unlike Amy Dorrit who inspite of all her sufferings retains her individual goodness and moral strength and manages not to demean herself, Pip is swept away in the state of affairs. It is only when he learns of the source of his expectations that better sense prevails. Pip's story is that of an individual caught between two classes — the rich and the poor. In the later Victorian novels Dickens reveals the tremendous pressure of the 'system' on the individuals leading the theme of the novels to be a struggle of the individuals against the hostile forces of society. This pattern of social criticism becomes the cohesive force of all the novels of Dickens.

As a young man Dickens's attitude was that of a Conservative believing in the class distinction and therefore his heroes were found to be aspiring for better positions in life. But time and life had enabled him to review life in a wider perspective. In his later novels he projects a kind of liberal humanism — his faith not so much on social distinctions as on the humane qualities. Dickens wrote Hard Times in order to attack the growth of industries and consequently the lack of humanity in mechanisation. This prophetic novel, where he hints that machines can never overpower human feelings and compassion, was an answer to those men of his age who were continuously striving for material success.

The relation of 'self' and 'system' was a subject also discussed by the French post-structuralist thinker Michael Foucault and Jeremy Tambling[1] in his essay 'Prison-Bound: Dickens and Foucalt' applied some of his ideas to his discussion of Great Expectations. According to him ,Foucault did not believe in the idea of an individual self surviving outside the society—that a social order was necessary for self-discipline. The school, prison, factory were the 'disciplinary technologies' necessary to control the unruly behaviour of the population. Dickens repeatedly showed his distrust in the functioning of the philanthropic organisations where the spirit of benevolence was sadly missing in the officials. What Dickens advocated for was his change of attitude especially of the men who were behind the functioning of these agencies.

What we have discerned in the discussed novels is the inevitable struggle between Man and Society. Society is identified through various institutions and these institutions are shown as repressive forces which tend to crush "the strongly realized goodness of individuals." (Roberts 1994:40) Dickens's heroes and heroines are shown to be established in life and society and this indicates that though he did attack the social organisations, yet he clung to a sense of community and the organic relationship between the society and the individual and a sense of family and kinship represented through

the parental figures in the novels. Men and women like Brownlow, Daniel Peggotty, Betsy Trotwood and Joe Jargery who endeavour to extend their help to the less fortunate ones and regard the other members of the society as their comrades in the long journey of life are capable of realizing Dickens's vision of an ideal society where the 'self' is not buried and destroyed under the 'system' but allowed to survive and grow within it.

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THE OTHER BATTLEFIELD: WOMEN'S WAR WRITING

Geetam Sarma

ABSTRACT

War and its scripting has always been a male prerogative. Recently however, social historians and feminists have questioned the validity of fixed gender defined roles. Despite altered gender activities during the war years, it has been the male voice exclusively dominated and become assimilated in the canon of war literature. Although women's voices were submerged in literature, their fleeting assumption of male responsibility granted them an ironic view of their own marginality and this ironic distancing grew into the feminism of the post-war years.

In the beginning, politics was war, and war has always been a quintessentially male activity. The story of politica and war in the western tradition does notr unfold as a fall from grace from a bucolic age; instead it is a tale of arms and the men. War, in fact, has always created the gfreatest gender gap, serving to recreate and secure women's social position as non-combatnats and men's identity as warriors. We liove today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in a world increasingly polarised, between light and dark, between “them “ and “us”, between womwn and men, with nuclear war looming as the most terrible form of collective destruction

Despite periods of questioning and reassessment after both 1918 and 1945, the mythical distinction between men and women in regard to war persisted. When social historians discussed the home-front, they generally reduced women to aggregate statistics. In keeping with this trend literary scholars too customarily exclude “women's voices” from the canon of war literature, favouring writings based on combat experience.

Two recent waves of scholarship have, however, raised questions about the myths behind war's gender. Firstly, feminist historians, like Lynne Hanley (Writing War – Fiction, Gender and Memory) challenged the assertion that the two wars were exclusively male preserves. They exposed through historical instances the many roles women played in the resistance, military and medical corps. Yet inspite of it women retained their subordinate status to men who dominated the labour market and monopolized political power.

In the second wave of scholarship, John Keegan in *The Face of Battle* questioned the assumption that men in the aggregate are committed to fight. He picks individual battles and individual men to focus on the discrepancies between mythical constructs and real facts. Eric Leeds and Paul Fussell delve into the same area of soldiers' cultural and literary responses to the Great War revealing the fear and passivity in many of the fighting men.

Both these views, in the historiography of war, raise questions about war and its relationship to gender, revealing that masculine traits are not universal and that women's subordination persists despite profound changes in their political and economic activities. This suggests that status does not depend on reaching a fixed position in the social order, but corresponds to the changing social scenario. By insisting that feminine identities and roles must be understood in terms of a system that also defines masculine ones the study of gender moves women's history from the margins to the mainstream.

This shift in perspective will be nowhere more sharply defined than in the study of war. In wartime, the most explicit and deliberate efforts to redefine masculinity and femininity have appeared in propaganda, that principle tool of government to mobilise people to assume unaccustomed roles. Many of these official definitions are echoed in popular media, while personal diaries and photographs describe personal reactions to sexual upheaval.

Total war has acted as a clarifying moment, revealing gender systems in flux and further emphasised their reworkings. Within this framework female dependency is almost always seen as natural as is the state of peace. War appears as both unnatural and abnormal, but necessary for men to protect their women and families. But during the two World Wars, women's situation underwent a crucial change. Women, during the Great War, took over men's jobs and risked their lives as nurses and ambulance drivers. By the second war they had joined resistance groups and combat forces in Europe. The idea of the home front as an inviolate zone too subsequently disappeared with the advent of aerial bombing. The old conceptions of gender suddenly seemed to disintegrate and new images of men and women took their place.

Ironically, when the home front was mobilised women were allowed to rise above their social and economic positions, yet the battlefront, an essentially male preserve, took economic and cultural priority. Therefore, while women's objective situation changed, relationships of domination and subordination persisted. Subsequently, historians have questioned why women failed to capitalise on wartime gender disruptions for their empowerment. The First War seemed to provide women greater opportunity for it shattered conventional 19-century ideas about women and their social roles.

To explain the lag in the development of women's consciousness we have to take into account that state policy, political organisations and labour markets gave meaning to women's new activities in ways that limited their potential to transform gender relations. Although wartime propaganda exhorted women to brave unfamiliar work it stipulated that women's new roles were contained, were "only for the duration," thus reinforcing patriarchal notions of gender relations; beneath her overalls, Rosy the Riveter was still "wearing her apron". Wartime experiences no doubt affected women's consciousness and may have temporarily altered their identities, but for many women the war years were perceived and remembered, both collectively and individually through discourses that revived rather conventional gender relations.

But conventional definitions of gender were not all pervasive. The literature of war allowed more latitude for probing definitions of masculinity and femininity. Both male and female authors challenged myths about their gender, yet these messages had little impact on their contemporaries. The reasons for this lack were different for different authors. Men's writings passed directly into the cannon of 20th century literature while women's wartime writings, passed into obscurity and their expose‘ of gender myths were submerged.

To understand why women's writings disappeared, we must first look at the way the cannon was established. The two wars altered the literature of war in several ways. The "soldier/writer" was a new phenomenon of the Great War. The authentic voice and the intensity of moral conflict to be found in works of a poet like Wilfred Owen created a new set of touchstones for the literature of war. Wartime writing became significant not only in itself, but also in its impact on 20th century literature. Hemingway considered "war to be one of the major subjects….and those writers who had not seen it were always very jealous and tried to make it seem unimportant, or abnormal, or a disease as a subject, while, really it was just something irreplaceable that they had missed". (*Green Hills of Africa*) The Second War saw the male writers perpetuating the cannon unified by a tone of cynicism, black humour and the theme of male community through multiple protagonists.

The literature of war essentially derives its source from a privileged position, and it is not surprising that in women's wartime writings we find some special variance on the "anxiety of authorship". Since the definition of war poetry privileges actual battlefront experience, women who are barred from combat can only participate in this literary mode at second hand using what Judith Kazantzis calls a "transferred voice" (*Scars Upon My Heart*). Unfortunately they risked producing sentimental elegies, verbalised by Cicely Hamilton in "the idle useless mouth" in her poem *Non Combatant.*

Even when women writers described the wartime losses they had suffered – as wives, mothers and lovers – they are displaced, for the primary loss of war is life, mourning is secondary. There is a further difference between men's and women's experience. For the soldier the battle disrupts time "steals the undone years" (Owen), while for the women who have lost those they love "the long battle now against defeat" continues even after the war is over.

Women's absence from the front constrains their direct critiques of the war, apparently waged on their behalf. Much of men's literature of war derives from the tensions between patriotism and criticism. On the other hand, in women's writings such tensions are turned upon women themselves, as in Edith Sitwells' image "we are the dull blind carrion flies that dance and batten". It was not until two decades after the war that Vera Brittain, Gertrude Stein and Virginia Wolf felt free to criticise it.

> "It is true but of course women cannot suffer from it the way men do, men after all are soldiers, and women are not, and love France as much as we do and we love France as much as the men do, but after all we are not soldiers and so we cannot feel a defeat the way they do, and besides in a defeat after a defeat women have more to do than men have, they have more to occupy them that is natural enough in a defeat and so they have less time to suffer". (Gertrude Stein: *Wars I Have Seen*)

Since women are exterior to war men interior, men have long been the great war storytellers, by virtue of having "been there". The stories of women resistance fighters and soldiers have sometimes been narrated but they have not attained the status of the great war novels by Stephen Crane, Erich Maria Remarque, Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer, James Jones, Joseph Heller; nor have women written the most powerful war poems of the sort we associate with the names Brook, Sassoon or Owen.

Part of the female absence has to do with how war gets defined (Where is the front?). And who is authorised to narrate?

Muriel Sparks' short story *The First Year of My Life* is a condensed master work of ironic discourse which features as its protagonist, a baby "born on the first day of the and brothers." The baby refuses to smile, banging her spoon at figures of the dead and the maimed until the moment when Prime Minister Asquith reports "that the war had made all things new, a great cleansing and purging, it had been the privilege of our country to play her part… that did it". To really smile means to respond to the words uttered by Asquith – and by extension to those uttered by all who see a glorious New World as the outgrowth of massive carnage. The story is significant because Sparks' ironic voice has emerged some sixty years after the event; it is a voice largely foreign to women writers of explicit historicised accounts of war, factive and fictive. Sparks' story cuts several ways – against glorifiers of war and against utopian projections of peace.

When women have imagined war itself, however, it has frequently been in abstract stereotypical tropes that bear little relation to war's realities. Edith Wharton's account of *Fighting France* published in 1915 and Gertrude Stein' *Wars I Have Seen* (1945) are literary constructions in which the lines between fact and fiction are purposefully blurred. Looking around her, Wharton who journeyed through France in 1915 sees buoyance and life its "sudden flaming up…. the abeyance of every small and mean preoccupation clearing the moral air as the streets had been cleared".

Wharton's account is not, of course, exceptional. Men being sent off to the font, riding the crest of the jubilations of August 1914 in Europe, were lofted up on popular enthusiasm. But the actual experience of wartime soon crushed such sentiments, inviting bitter German soldiers (in Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*) to curse angrily the teachers and elders who sent them off to

carnage with abstract slogans and gestures.

Such bitterness was foreign to Wharton's sensibility.

> "War is the greatest of paradoxes: the most senseless and disheartening of human retrogressions …. and yet the stimulant of qualities of soul which, in every race, can seemingly find no means of renewal.. war has given beauty to faces… war was the white glow of dedication … for the moment baser sentiments were silenced." (Edith Wharton – *Fighting France: From Dunkirk to Belfort*)

The problem with this abstract construction is not that Wharton built it in the first place but that she had no way to take its measure against concrete experience. She and the war passed one another by, as frequently happens for non-combatants who are not pressed upon as war fighter are. Here Wharton assumes a lofty perch and celebrates the transformative power of war.

Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and Willa Cather's *One of Ours* (1922) provides us with an instructive contrast of comparing two novels of the First War. In Cather's novel, Claude Wheeler's existence in a bleak mid-western town has a profound emptiness at its core. Things perk up as news of the war reaches the American plains. His entry into war is, in one sense, a release, and a whole life of adventure opens up for Claude. The war is "golden chance" and Claude ceases it. The war took a little fellow and "gave him an air and a swagger". When Claude and the other soldiers speak there are no sentence fragments, no indelicacies, no curse words. Men fall, they are not killed in Wharton's book. It is all very pleasant; wounds are clean and the end swift and merciful. The war probably wouldn't make the world safe for democracy, but something important would come of it, some "new idea" would come "into the world … something olympian". For Claude, "the call was clear, the cause glorious". He died holding "beautiful beliefs".

What is striking about Cather's account is not its enthusiasm for war, for that was widely shared, but its literary re-inscription of that jubilant innocence as the war dragged to its bitter end. Wholly without irony, Cather's prose grates. Its apotheosis of war is dulled with an abstract sentimentalism.

The year Cather's novel hit the book stores, a despatch by Ernest Hemingway appeared in the *Toronto Star Weekly*, entitled *War Medals For Sale*. "What is the market price of valour?" a man asked. The pawn shop owner told him that men came in every day to sell medals, but "we don't buy medals from this war". A short story of Hemingway's from the 1920s, *Soldiers' Home*, tells the story of young Krebs from Oklahoma, who enlisted in the marines in 1917 and served for two years. His town had listened to too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities. Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie. A distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war set in because of the lies he had told,

"If the war didn't happen to kill you," George Orwell once remarked, "it was bound to set you thinking." Set to thinking and writing, Hemingway produced *A Farewell to Arms*. His protagonist, Lt. Frederick Henry, comes to hate the war, that grandly constructed event so much at odds with reality. Characters throughout the novel talk of war hatred and confusion about why the war goes on. His protagonist quits the war (I had made a separate peace) and determined to desert he rows across to neutral Switzerland with his pregnant lover Catherine. Unlike Cather who self consciously uses words like sacrifice, honour, ecstasy, freedom, Hemingway enunciates what

became the modernist understanding – bitter, ironic.

> "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot … and had read them … there were many words that you couldn't stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity … abstract words such as glory, honour, courage or halo were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the number of roads, the names of rivers, the number of regiments and the dates." (*A Farewell to Arms*)

To the irony of which Hemingway is here master, must be added an additional ironic note in history's gender-gap. Male modernists offer the critical distancing from war and the reflective puncturing of war myths that most powerfully served to defeat the simplistic heroics that plunged the western world into war. Women who wrote of war had not (for the most part) had the experience that made them wary and suspicious.

If marginality made women hesitant and somewhat incompetent to speak against war, no such compunction prevented them from expressing their views of gender inequality, for this was something they had experienced directly. It may be that female writers, because of their marginality, were more alert than their male counterparts to the systems of gender that were revealed in wartime. Yet only a handful of women – Virginia Woolf, Vera Brittain, Simone de Beauvoir allowed their insights to lead them to overt feminism, either literary or political. In other writings protest was more muted. Mollie Panter Downs in her novel *One Fine Day* depicts her heroine Laura Marshall vaguely resentful of the demands her husband, a returned veteran makes on her time. Her rebellion takes the form of napping on the hillside when she should be fixing dinner. Despite her inability to redirect her own life she is optimistic about her daughter's future: "I want a good deal for Victoria, she thought ... but not the same things my mother wanted for me". Writing in 1946, Panter Downs' words seemed almost prophetic: although the women who lived through the war made few permanent gains, the momentary experience of gender disruptions granted them an ironic view of it that they passed on to their daughters. Turned critical, the irony of one generation became the feminism of the next.

We are six decades beyond the Second World War, the last "good" war. Much has changed or been challenged including received expectations about the social identities and proper spheres for men and women. But it would be unwise to assume that the combined effects of Vietnam, feminism, the involvement of over fifty percent of adult American women in the labour force and the growing postponement of marriage and childbirth undercut received webs of social meaning as these revolved around men, women, and war. Feminist protest has moved several dimensions in this matter. Some feminists proclaim a right to fight; others appalled at refashioning the new woman after the old man, consciously appropriate traditional notions of women's connections to ideals of peace as a cultural basis for anti-militarist activism.

Social historian Walter Millis hopes for the extinction of warfare. Should Millis' hope concerning the extinction of warfare be realised then of course the tradition of the American war novel comes to an end. Unfortunate in its breeding ground, it nevertheless includes a number of works that are excellent both in terms of their achievement as art and as commentary on society and politics. Even

more unfortunate, however, is the probability is that the tradition will be a continuing one. Barring the possibility of a war of ultimate intensity, it is certain that some men and women who participate in them will write about their experiences in fiction. For if warfare continues to be inevitable, then inevitable too are man's attempts to represent it. Despite the nightmare of history, in the words that follow war there is always the hope that man may better understand the condition of his own humanity.

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THE THEME OF THE FAMILY IN AGNES GREY

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ABSTRACT

The paper studies the theme of the family in Agnes Grey, with reference to the Victorian concept of a family, It examines the place of 'family' in society, linking it with class, gender and work all being determining factors in conditioning a women's role in society. The paper deals with the protagonist's search for an identity, through a three –fold role – daughter/governess and woman. This quest for selfhood provides the key concept of Victorian society – the family as a micro-unit solid and integrated. The limitations and tensions disturbing the Victorian myth of "happy family" are looked at from the point of view of class conflict, husband/wife relationships, employer/employee relationships and parent/child relationships. Through the theme of the family, it reveals and upholds conventional values but at the same time rejects these attitudes, and ironically questions the validity of institutions like marriage, society and family. Agnes Grey is presented as a novel of protest that questions both the validity of the family of the family, as well as the threat to its sanctity.

In the hostile world of riots, bloody strikes, violent clashes, poverty and industrial troubles, religion remained a powerful force in Victorian life and literature. The real strength and felicity of this age, lay to a large extent on Puritan traditions, to which Wesleyan and Evangelical movements had given a new lease of life. "Society was held together by the comment of Christian moral teaching, and laid a particular stress on the 'Home' and the 'Family' (Sanders: 400) Faced with insoluble and inconceivable problems, man turned to personal and familial relationships to seek relief from the world of strife, and extolled highly a strictly strict adherence to domestic virtues. In the words of Ruskin home was "the place of Peace, the shelter not only from all injury, but from all terror doubt and division"(Ruskin:72). The home thus became the foundation of all civilization, and the family the fountain of all moral, religious and social precepts that shaped good citizens. The Victorian fiction industry flourished, because it was the best vehicle equipped to present a picture of life and manners reflecting the forces which were shaping the modern complex world. Nineteenth century writers, gratified the public taste by giving enlivening and realistic pictures of society, and prime importance was given to the family which was considered a sacred and noble institution upon whose continuance depended all that was free and enduring in the British civilization.

The work of female novelists also represents a considerable deepening of the novel as portrayal of English life. Thematic concerns of such writers have been centering around female related issues. Miss Stoddart in her Female Writers Thoughts of Their Proper Sphere , was one of the first to suggest that qualities of delicacy, sensitivity, quick sympathy and powers of observation commit women novelists to a particular literary mode – the depiction of home and family. Like other women novelists Anne Bronte too was centrally preoccupied "…… with the women and her influence on others within her domestic and social circle" (Selden:538). Anne Brontes interest in the family lay partly in the Victorian idealization of the family, its emerging concerns with Victorian with fiction and also in the bitter experiences of her personal life. Early deaths, genteel poverty and a life of immense solitude in the moors of Haworth led to the 'Home' and "Family' playing an important part in both her novels. Through the families portrayed in Agnes Grey, the novelist helps in delineating the character of the protagonist, and also enlightens the reader about the family and the tensions that exist therein. The paper aims at tracing the theme of the family in the context of the Victorian ideal and also discuss the contradictions.

Agnes Grey is the only Bronte novel in which the protagonist can think of "home with unqualified affection" (Pinion:237). On the metaphorical plan Agnes Grey is a journey of a soul in search of freedom, friendship and acceptance in an alien world. The importance of 'home' and 'family' which is the pivot in the wheel of society is highlighted, when Agnes takes up the job of a governess. Through this role, the novel charts the development of Agnes from a naive and inexperienced girl, to a mature and seasoned woman with an identity of he own. In realization of that 'self' she provides the key concept of Victorian – the family as a micro-unit solid and integrated. Her decision of becoming a governess in a moment of crisis is a genuine filial gesture and according to Terry Eagleton is "with" any trace of chafing ambition" (126). But hidden behind this need to help her family, is an urge to explore the world and find her own identity being the 'child' and 'pet' of her family. In the Victorian age it was not unusual for a daughter of the middle-class home to take up work due to death of the father or ruin of the family. So withstanding all oppositions, Agnes sets out eagerly to a new life an unknown terrain. This quest-plot which sends the female protagonist on an exploration to self-discovery, reflects her will to disinherit the dominant tradition, and her resistance to do so. Fiction has transcended the classically idealized women into an assertive, self women searching for her true self. With an optimistic vision Agnes tries to find her identity in the upper class world where neglect and cruelty reign supreme. This clash between classes is an intrinsic feature of Agnes Grey and determines the social ethos of the novel. In her depiction of the 'family', Anne Brontes pre-occupation with class, is a matter that points to her own impulses of delineating a self constrained by class. Thus, this question of identity revolves around two central pre-occupations in the novel – linking the heroine's desire to find an identity, and Brontes' desire to transcend the limitations of class by emphasizing social mobility.

On the literal plan, the novel is a journey of a member of the middle-class environ, to the socially affluent upper class domain. The story revolves around a contrast between the vain, shallow, artificial, egoistic, aristocratic class, and virtues of compassion and integrity displayed by Agnes, the protagonist. The novelist seems to think that "the lower your rung on the social ladder the more virtuous you are likely to be". Due to the basic set-up in the families, a clash of aristocratic and middle class values, is evident in the portrayal of families. The novel points out, the differences between middle class hypocrisy and the negative attitude prevalent in the upper class. It is a comparison between the mutual dependence on care and love of the Greys and the ruthless individualistic traits that tend to hurt the unity of the upper class life, is at complete odds in this world, which is characterized by vulgarity, cold-heartedness and artificiality. The atmosphere of this world is enveloped by a chill, whereas her home was a symbol of love, warmth and security. Her family instills in her a sense of courage to work dedicatedly, inspite of restraints and also reminds her of her duty as a member of a family. On the other hand relations between members of upper class families were very formal with parents addressing their own children as 'Miss' and 'Master' . This "Chilling piece of punctilio" often led to a remoteness in relationships between parents and children (99) . Anne Bronte's obsession with the symbol of the family in this novel leads her to develop in her narrative, a critical awareness of the limitations imposed by this sense of "family" – she looks at it from the point of view of the class conflicts, husband/wife relationships, employer/ employee relationships and parent/child relationships). In each of these Anne Bronte shows the underlying tensions that exist and disturb the myth of the Victorian "happy family".

The ideal of middle-class family and relationships were defined in terms of sub ordinance and dominance where the elder controls the younger, the male the female. This patriarchal nature of family helped to analyze a systematic organization of women's oppression. It gave some conceptual form to the nature of male dominance in society. Finding the dinner not up to his taste, Mr. Bloomfield bursts out in anger "...in future when a decent dish leaves the table, they shall not touch it in the kitchen. Remember that Mrs.Bloomfield" (47).According to Catherine Beecher "a woman must be subordinate to man in society......" This dominance of man and subordinance of woman has been beautifully epitomized in Tom Bloomfield. When Agnes reprimands him for sticking his sister he replies – "I am obliged to do it now and then to keep her in order." (39).. Tom is encouraged by his guardians to drink spirits and hurt innocent animals to establish the reletive cultural superiority of man. Recent critical scholarship delves into the feminist concerns in the writings of the Bronte's sisters and with Victorian women writers in particular. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out that nineteenth century women writes revolted against both literal and metaphorical confinement – "We decided ... that the stricking coherence we noticed in literature by women could be explained by a common, female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of 'self', 'art' and 'society', and this desire for liberation is expressed through a need to act out male metaphors in their own texts as if trying to understand implications" (Gilbert and Gubar: Introduction). The patriachial tendencies and the marginalized figure are discussed at length in critical essays. With Anne Bronte, family is a refuge that serves as a symbol to focus on the 'repressed self' that finds expression in her novels. The male figures remain constant reminders of the tyranny of the male ego. Thus the self and class are the major themes that Anne Bronte seeks to explore and define in her novel.

The novel also brings forth the message that those with social power inflict hardships on the powerless. When Agnes begins work as a governess, she encourter many obstacles as she is bound to work under a lot of restraint. Her wards were unmanageable like "wild unbroken colts" and her powers to discipline them were limited as punishments were the privilege of parents. She had to face interruption and unwanted supervision for her employers never failed to find fault in her. Whatever the children did good or bad the governess was solely responsible. As such she sometimes felt degraded to submit quietly, but it was the thought of her 'home' that inspired her to carry on with devoted diligence unshaken firmness and unwearied perseverance – "They may crush, but they shall not subdue me. Tis of thee that I think, not of them." (60) Time and patience ameliorated matters, and in the course of the novel we find how Agnes turns out to be a good friend to Rosalie Murray. The role of the governess in Victorian literature is one of the many ways concern of thinkers and social reformers – the working-class women. The governess heroine, a fictional type who emerged in the late 1830's and 1840's alongside the spoiled lady of fashion, was one whom these writers could readily re-create in their own images. Lady Blessington's The Governess, a society novel turned social tract, spoke out for the rights of a governess as a human being way back in 1839. Maria Edgeworth's The Good French Governess, Elizabeth Sewell's Any Herbert, Harriet Martineau's Deer brook and Mrs. Sherwood's Carolinc Mordaunt all deal with the frustrations, humiliations, and disillusionments of the working class womaen. Agnes Grey too succeeded in rousing public opinion for in 1968, Lady Amberley noted in her diary, "read Agnes Grey ... should like to give it to every family with a Governess to remind me to be human." (Welton and Gaulding: 47). Anne Bronte highlights this concern and it is the quality that she draws out in her portraysl of Agnes Grey – as daughter/governess/woman. It is this threefold role that we have to see how Bronte very skillfully portrays in Agnes's search for an identity. All her trials and tribulations help mould her into the women she becomes.

In the course of her work, Agnes comes across varied images of the 'lady' of the households in which she is employed. According to the Victorian concept, a sife should be a complement of her husband, and Alice Grey the mother of Agnes beautifully fulfils this ideal. She is the hull, the crest upholding divergent filial relationships. She is an epitome of a fully translucent mother and wife – a key figure in Victorian society amidst upheaval and ambivalence. When her husband looses all in a ship-wreck she stands by him and consoles him y trying to amend matters "Together with wifely duties' the mistress "must take up the supervision and maintenance of the house hold with a serious intensity." (Rees: 56). However, Mrs. Bloomfield is least interested in household matters and her vagueness regarding the food being served for dinner testifies this. On the other hand Mrs. Murray is a loquacious lady, interested only in refining her daughters for rich aristocratic matches. She and her daughter attach much importance to wealth and rank, which was a common feature in Victorian society. Rosalie is shocked to hear that Mary, the sister of Agnes is getting married to a middling Vicar – "How can she think of spending her life cooped up there with that nasty old man, and no hope of change" (120). Rosalie is a portrait of a selfish and frivolous butterfly whose self-love mars the blossoming of love for her little daughter – "What pleasure can I have in seeing a girl grow up and enjoy the pleasures that I have been debarred. I can't center my hopes in a child that is one degree better than devoting oneself to a dog" (283). Rosalie's dream world is shattered and she finds the placid, somber rhythm of a secure married life turning to boredom – "Oh I would give ten thousand worlds to be Miss Murray again." (281). Her destiny is an incompatible marriage, as in her search for existence within the conventionally ordained relationship, she realizes how different she is from her husband – "that's not my idea of a wife. It's the husbands part to please the wife, not hers to please him and if he isn't satisfied with her as she is –he isn't worthy of her that's all."(278).

Simone De Beauvoir opines in The Second Sex, "Women do not context the human situation because they have hardly begun to assume it. This explains why their works for the most part lack resonance and also anger. (Seldan:356). Thus the theme of the family is used by Anne Bronte to both reveal and uphold the conventional values but at the same time subverts and rejects these attitudes. There is more than an element of irony in her attitude to these characters. She questions the validity of these institutions itself – Marriage, society and family and challenges the hierarchy implicit in the notion's of class and gender and it is this that makes the novel disturbing

Through the portrayal of these families Anne Bronte is perhaps making a protest at the Victorian concept of a family. At certain points she has kept to the Victori8an Ideal but at certain points she deviates. Like Gaskell, Eliot and Craike Anne Bronte seems to convey the message that "marriage (Forster: 18). Rosalie Murray is torn between two antagonistic identities – her culturally conditioned sense of herself as a woman and her feministic aspirations for selfhood. Marital union here seems to be "a source of entrapment crushing a woman's individuality" (54). The home does not offer the kind of mobility craved for by Rosalie. She becomes the embodiment of rage and helplessness of woman hood. But this is not the case with Agnes, the protagonist. For her, a home and family are the ultimate in life. In a careful blending of description and characterization, the move list conveys the idea of the integration of the female figure. The belief that marriage is indeed a happy culmination of a girl's life is instilled by upbringing. Her journey in search of self-hood offers her a moment for reflection, understanding and acceptance and ends in a full circle. She thus disengages herself from the aristocratic world, for she realizes that women like her, who aspire to find fulfillment, marriage is the only appropriate social status and she accepts this – "After a few weeks, I became the wife of Edward Weston and never have found cause to repent it and am certain that I never shall (301). Agnes finds her 'self' in the role of a mother and a wife and once again the importance of 'home' and 'family' comes to the fore. She has finally found an identity that can transcend differences The novel reiterates the novelist's yearning

for home and a family, which is the tragic outcome of the novelist's own passionate yearnings for a family. This is but one of the ways by which the novelist displays her concern for the self, and its interaction with society. It displays the Victorian writer's obsession with the theme of the family, the implicit notions of the value of "family" and confronts the transgressions to this notion and also reveals the writer's own ambivalent attitude to the prevailing concerns of the age. Anne Bronte negotiates these conflicts and differences, of the family and the threat to its sanctity.

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Philip Larkin's "Next, Please": Reflections on Cross-cultural Criticism

Mohan Ramanan

This study is primarily concerned with cross-cultural encounters. What happens when an Indian reader responds to an English poet, say a representative contemporary like Philip Larkin? Should the Indian reading be distinguished from the reading of a native speaker in any particular way? I am not at all sure that there is any essential Indian reading of English poetry. A reading is a reading and there is no reason why an Indian ought not to read an English poem in an Oxbridge way. And yet one is deeply aware that a self-conscious Indian reader of English poetry is likely to be bi-lingual and bi-cultural, both Indian and English, and that one cross-cultural reading method is to employ the aesthetic criteria from his own tradition, the Sanskrit tradition for example, and to attempt an application of it to say a poem of Philip Larkin's like "Next, Please". The exercise is certainly worth doing and while it might yield insights because after all Sanskrit aesthetic categories have their counterparts in the Western, it should at least be clear that there is difference as well. A point must surely be reached where the contact breaks down because of the different cultural codes in operation.

"Next, Please" is a poem organised on logical and rational principles. It is a good example of the English short poem, and it clearly has been written from a cultural perspective quite distinct from the traditions informing Sanskrit aesthetics. To put it bluntly,

many of the Sanskrit categories are appropriate for the study of what is called Maha Kavyas (epics) and not always for Muktaka (precious poem) or Laghu-kavya (light verse). "Next, Please", of course, is neither precious nor light but it is not an epic. Thus the academic exercise proposed must tread carefully and assume only a provisional status for its categories. The poem itself reads as follows:

Always too eager for the future, we
Pick up bad habits of expectancy.
Something is always approaching; every day
Till then we say,

Watching from a bluff the tiny, clear,
Sparkling armada of promises draw near.
How slow they are! And how much time they waste,
Refusing to make haste!

Yet still they leave us holding wretched stalks
Of disappointment, for, though nothing balks
Each big approach, leaning with brasswork prinked,
Each rope distinct,

Flagged, and the figurehead with golden tits
Arching our way, it never anchors; it's
No sooner present than it turns to past.
Right to the last

We think each one will heave to and unload
All good into our lives, all we are owed
For waiting so devoutly and so long.
But we are wrong :

Only one ship is seeking us, a black-
Sailed unfamiliar, towing at her back

A huge and birdless silence. In her wake
No waters breed or break.

A cursory glance at it tells us that while Larkin will eschew the grand gesture or the epic sweep, he is not averse to dealing with a subject (Vastu) which is a criticism of life, serious, ethical and humanly significant. Larkin's poem, paraphrased, says the following. We are living life always with the hope that something will turn up eventually to release us from the dull round of existence. We are wrong because the truth is that the only end of life is death. A poet writing in this way on such a theme is not arrogating to himself a prophetic role. On the other hand he is seriously engaged with society and has a citizenly concern for it.

With this proviso we may now attempt an application of Sanskrit aesthetic ideas to the study of Larkin's short poem. Sanskrit aesthetics is very clear that the poet's Karavitri pratibha (creative imagination) stimulates in the reader a 'corresponding breeze', the bhavavitri pratibha (responsive imagination). The poet and the reader are kindered spirits, the reader being called a Sahrdaya (one after one's own heart). On this showing Larkin must be a man speaking to men, an accessible poet. Indeed Larkin's own understanding of the creative process confirms this view. In an essay entitled "The Pleasure Principle", he writes that composing poetry has three stages. An emotional concept obsesses the poet and this preliminary feeling compels him to do something about it. The poet constructs a verbal device that reproduces this emotional concept in the reader whenever the latter reads it, and the reader finally recreates the poet's experience in himself. Larkin's emphasis on author, work and reader is satisfying and does have its points of contact with Sanskrit aesthetic categories :

If there has been no preliminary feeling, the device has nothing to reproduce and the reader will experience nothing. If the second stage has not been well done, the device will not deliver the goods or will deliver only a few goods to a few people, or will stop delivering them after an absurdly short while. And if there is no third stage, no successful reading, the poem can hardly be said to exist in a practical sense at all.

Admittedly, the three stages are inextricably related but what is most important is that the experience and the verbal expression of that experience will come to naught if there is no reader, or audience, for the poem. This, the Indian insistence on the reader as Sahrdava underscores. Larkin will not accept obscurity in his poetry and for him the civilized act of communication is very important. Larkin believes that the emotional experience has to be communicated in intelligible language. Poetry, Larkin asserts, is "born of the tension between what (the poet) non-verbally feels and what can be got over in common word usage to someone who has hot had his experience". The reader, for Larkin, is all important and the poet has to test constantly his capacity for artistic expression by asking himself if he has communicated, because "once the other end of the rope is dropped what results will not be so much obscure and piffling (though it may be both) as an unrealised, 'undramatised' slackness..." The reader, or audience, is the other end of the rope Larkin speaks of. All this is well taken but one must pause to point out that Larkin's philosophical perspective is logical positivistic and informed by a democratic humanism associated with the British Welfare State. Indian aesthetic theory stems from a philosophical idealism and is perhaps closer to Plato, Plotinus and Longinus.

Nowhere is this philosophical position more forcefully focussed than in the Sanskrit aesthetics of Presence. Sanskrit aesthetics posits Vak or speech but shows its manifestation in four stages – para, pasvanti, madhvama and vaikhari. The poet has an impulse and he feels compelled to express himself. The creative process is, of course, indescribable, but the stages show how the pre-verbal gains substance to become utterance. Madhyarna is a half-verbal state after the pre-verbal states of para and pasvanti where presumably authorial presence and attunement to Being is strong. Vaikhari is utterance where Being presumably disperses into its scattered manifestations in speech. This is quite close to a Platonic view of the imitative process and parallels neo-Platonic variations of Plato.

Put in another way the anubhava or experience of the man who suffers is the origin of anubhava or the contemplated experience in the poem. The subject is very much a presence both outside the poetic utterance and as imbedded in the verbal artefact. This creative process shows the raw emotions of the poet getting transformed through pratibha or imagination into art emotion. Larkin's account of the creative process is not at odds with the Indian view, and clearly quite close to some of the views of T.S. Eliot, particularly Eliot's views about impersonality or his account of the three voices of poetry. Eliot's first voice it must not be forgotten "is the voice of the poet talking to himself", that is the author is very much present in his work. He is again present in the second voice which is "the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small".

To go back to Larkin's statement the pre-verbal state is of vital importance to the poet because it enables him to move on to the second stage, that of creating a "verbal device". It is the successful second stage-the point at which Bhava, Vastu (the content or theme of the poem) and alamkara (the formal properties of the poem) get

integrated into a unity-which leads to what Larkin would call poetic pleasure, but what the Sanskrit alamkarika (aesthetician) would call rasanubhava or aesthetic enjoyment. Sanskrit poetics would accept this fusion of poetic elements as an activity of the Karavitri pratibha, the creative imagination of Kavi or poet, with which a response is generated in the reader whose Bhavavitri pratibha, responsive imagination, enables him to be a Sahrdaya. Sanskrit poetics asserts the community of interests between the two subjectivities of author and reader and this inter-subjectivity allows for a dynamic exchange. Larkin's own philosophical assumptions will not perhaps allow him to make such an idealist claim but his recognition of the common reader and the participation of the reader in the poetic experience makes it possible for one to make certain cultural adjustments and respond positively to him. At the level of Being and Presence, the Indian reader does not have much difficulty in responding to the secular experience of Larkin.

The formal analysis of the poem also does not present an insuperable problem for cross-cultural study. The poetic experience itself as we pointed out is a transformation of anubhava into anubhava, the vastu of the world of actual experience getting transformed into the vastu of the poem. The transformation as is well known to us from Bharata's formulation takes place through the union of vibhavas (determinants), anubhavas (consequents), and the transitory mental states (vvabhicharibhavas). Through the transformation of laukika bhava (real-life feeling) into sadharanikarana (universal art-emotion), we move to what Larkin would call the third stage, the completion of the poem in the mind and heart of the reader. Indian poetics would explain this as rasanubhava.

At the level of verbal analysis, Sanskrit rhetoric is useful and it is possible to subject a poem like "Next, Please" to close study. We may proceed to do just this kind of analysis. "Next, Please" begins in a complex of feelings, emotions and half-uttered, half realized ideas and rhythms. I shall simply (for convenience) call this Bhava, from which the poem originates. At this point Larkin is the man who suffers, distinct in a way, but not fundamentally different, from the poet who creates. We know from the social background and the politics of Welfare State England and indeed from Larkin's own writings about contemporary England, that it was not the best of times, that it was in fact a depressing scenario. Larkin's attitude to that England was quite negative. Without degenerating into cynicism, Larkin satirizes the England of his times, though he is also realistic enough to recognise that no other England is available for him, that parliamentary democracy, a shabby second-best at all times, is the only real option, eternally preferable to a Hitlerian authoritarianism. These democratic truths and the restrictions they place on him will not allow him to indulge in romantic adventure. He wants to be 'less deceived', and to go through life without too much risk. It is this weary and resigned tone that informs "Next, Please", and this is the Bhava from which the poem originates.

Larkin's Bhava, in turn, puts pressure on him to write a poem where the craft will be deliberate, where the argument will be built up phrase by phrase, sentence by sentence. It compels him to use, what Donald Davie has called' authentic' syntax, which imposes restrictions on the free play of the image. Just the right degree of importance is given to the image unlike in poems of a 'modernist' cast, where the image seems to be the central and dominant element, overwhelming all other elements. Larkin pays scrupulous attention to syntax, all the elements in his poem are conditioned by his poetic intention, which in turn is informed by his Bhava. Larkin's poetic idiom or varnana matches his intentions. The match between

intention and idiom is characterized by auchitva, a principle of propriety and decorum, ideas not unfamiliar to Larkin because of his admiration for eighteenth century English poetry where such notions were widespread.

There is, therefore, both deliberation and premeditation in Larkin fleshing out his poem of six stanzas with a basic pattern of couplets. We notice the rhymes which are not always full, and which suggest non-fulfillment, much like Wilfred Owen's half-rhymes which mime with great fidelity, the frustration of war and the pity of it. Larkin plays off his rhymes against a conversational speech rhythm and this in turn integrates the stanzas in terms of an argument concerning the real meaning of existence. Larkin's syntax, as indicated earlier, is authentic. He follows the rules of grammar, as it were. His syntax gives momentum, force and energy to his poem. This is evident from the strategically placed verbs in the poem-"pick" and "say" in stanza 1, "think" in stanza 5, and the verbal energy of stanza 6. There is music in this poem but it is not the music of a modernist poem by, say, Eliot, but the music of well-chosen words and phrases, of a well-developed argument. Larkin does not subscribe to the view that a poem should have a musical syntax, where as Susanne Langer would have it, the poem is not about this feeling or that feeling, but about the, "morphology of feeling", of what it feels like to feel. Larkin believes in providing rational organization to his pre-verbal state, to his Bhava. "Next, Please" is as good an example as any from Larkin to exemplify his characteristic practice. It is a statement about human experience, but the statement has metaphorical force. The two images in the poem are nautical. A life informed by hope, Larkin says, is an "armada of promises". A life without it resembles a "black-sailed unfamiliar", a pirate ship, which can only bring death in its wake. The two images underscore the basic poetic thought of the poem but do not overwhelm it, as it often happens in a modernist poem which apotheosizes the Image at the cost of everything else. Indian poetics, with its emphasis on vastu and sahitva does not ignore poetic thought or content, nor does Larkin. His poetry is satisfying precisely because there is this substantial quantum of thought and content. At the same time, the different formal properties described above, Larkin's alamkaras, fuse thought and feeling, content and form, into an organic unity.

The beauty of the poem, I believe, can be explained with reference to Rasa. K. Krishnamoorthy has pointed out that Rasa is a principle of auchitva, propriety, and harmony in a poem. We have seen auchitya at work in the poem. Rasa is what we as readers perceive as the informing principle of unity in a poem. "In the lyric", Krishnamoorthy says, "where there is no variety and no plot or character development, the self-same principle of Rasa assumes a new form of harmony between mental states and moods through the central core of a dominant emotion underlying them all. It also embraces the assessment of the contribution made to the Rasa by figures of speech and qualities of style". The auchitya we noticed in the poem (even an expression like 'tits' does not smack of impropriety, because we can argue that the speaker in Larkin's poem is expressing his frustration with life, anti an expletive is not unnatural), the syntactic integration of rhyme, speech rhythms, stanzaic forms, thought and imagery, all lead to our sense of a satisfying aesthetic experience. Though the Bhava which was the origin of the poem is ugly, the Rasa we get out of it is a principle of beauty.

The unpleasant feelings Larkin, the man, has about life are transformed into a thing of beauty. Indian poetics in its idealist strain, can understand Larkin's poem at this level because it sees the poetic experience as akin to atmananda. Rasanubhava, which is the end of art, is from this point of view, akin to Brahmananda, to the Vedantic immersion in Brahman. Indeed according to such a view, even God's creation is imperfect in relation to the poet's act of creation. God has to contend with the good, bad and ugly, while the poet's world as Sir Philip Sydney knew, is a golden one; it transforms the brazen world of actuality. The poet is umestrained, nirankusah karavah, his pravogas (practices) are shot through with the perfection of the imagination. Any dosas (faults) he may have are anitva (impermanent).

Larkin's poem, then transforms, through pratibha, his feelings of disgust and frustration with the world. Through careful artistry and through the grace of imaginative energy, Larkin's soka (grief) becomes sloka (verse), if we may for a moment invoke the archetypal act of poetic creation in Valmiki. Larkin's kavva (poem) has elements of santa (peace/and adbhuta (wonder), but the quintessence of it all is the final modulation into an ineffable suggestion of karuna (pathos), pity for the human condition. In other words, the disgust, frustration and sorrow with which the poem originated has been transformed into something like Karuna Rasa and this has been made possible through a proper integration ofvastu and alamkara (matter and manner). We are left wondering at the way Larkin has idealised his personal emotion into art-emotion. We experience atisaya.

The following analysis has assumed that the poem is by a stable authorial self called Larkin, that the speaker in the poem is either the author himself, or a stable persona put there by the author, and that the author is clearly addressing a stable reader. This is a context quite at odds with the de constructive zeal of post-modernism where neither author nor work nor reader is stable. Indeed the question asked by post-modernists is whether such categories are real. In such a context it would be appropriate to return to T.S. Eliot's 'voices' to which we alluded earlier. In his essay "The Three Voices of Poetry", Eliot says:

> The first voice is the voice of the poet talking to himself-or to nobody. The second is the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small. The third is the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse, when he is saying, not what he would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character. The distinction between the first and the second voice, between the poet speaking to himself and the poet speaking to other people, points to the problem of poetic communication; the distinction between the poet addressing other people in either his own voice or an assumed voice, and the poet inventing speech in which imaginary characters address each other, points to the problem of the difference between dramatic, quasidramatic, and non-dramatic verse.

Eliot's succinct passage assumes first of all the principle of a transcendental ego existing prior to the creative act. This we may assert from our knowledge of Eliot's essential adherence to a particular theological position. And this is an assumption fundamental to the Indian poetics of Vak. Larkin's poem, as we have seen so far, can be fruitfully studied in terms of the first and second voices of Eliot's formulation. Larkin is not creating a dramatic character as in Tennyson's "Ulysses", or in Browning's dramatic monologues, or even in Eliot's "Prufrock", but Larkin's poem has a sense of the poet speaking to the reader-the voice of the poet talking to other people-with or without a mask as in a dramatic monologue. But we

also hear something else, something more-the voice of the poet speaking to himself, directly expressing his own thoughts and sentiments. This is the 'romantic' Larkin, heir to the tradition of the romantic 'crisis' poem of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the tradition of the odal debate in Keats and Shelley. Yeats' remark that out of our quarrels with others we produce rhetoric and out of our quarrel with ourselves we produce poetry is applicable to Larkin's poem where the two selves of Larkin-the hopeful self and the hopeless self are engaged in a dialogue. This means that Larkin's poem employs the first voice of lyric poetry and clearly this is a work one can read crossculturally using Indian poetic categories as we have done.

But the reading is possible only because Larkin's poem allows us the philosophical assumption of an essential self which exists prior to the writing of the poem, and because the poem enacts the division of the self, after that pre-verbal, essential presence has been acknowledged. Such a reading would not have been possible if we were reading a poem by say Charles Olson or a 'Language' poet of New York or any poem based on philosophical principles which deny essence, foundation, ground and centre. Such poems would put paid to our ideas of a karavitri pratibha, or ideas of the preverbal emotional state which is a frame of reference for the writer and which precedes Vak. Since everything is unstable and has to be interrogated our ideas of the communication process of the reader's bhavavitri pratibha getting stimulated, of the reader as Sahrdava, or even the idea that the end of the reading is rasanubhava, all get negated. Some work proceeding from Nagarjuna and Buddhistic concepts of Sunvavada have managed to engage with post-modernism but I do believe these methods require greater systematic building up. In the meanwhile the Rasa-Dhvani tradition does service but can do so only with work amenable to it.

But there is a further point. Though we can impose an idealist viewpoint on the Larkin poem, we must not forget that Larkin himself, perhaps, will not share these idealist concerns. If anything he is on the side of a logical positivist view of life, has an empirical view of all things and does not much care for the transcendental, what he once termed as the "witches of Endor", that whole world of the mythopoeic imagination. This is only to introduce the important consideration that in cross-cultural analysis, one is likely to read a literary work with one's own predilections, oblivious of the author's views. Clearly we can see here a disjuncture between what the poem, as poem, can yield, and what the poet himself believes is his claim on the world and the reader. Far from seeing this as a problem, I see it as a creative possibility. I am, as a cross-cultural critic entering into a dialogue with a poet from another culture sharing different cultural assumptions. That engagement can only enhance the critical reading, not diminish possibilities.

And to complicate matters further, if we can impose an idealist framework on Larkin's poem, assuming as Kathleen Raine in direct opposition to Larkin and other Movement poets does, that neo-Platonism is the basic structure of poetry, we have to concede the possibility that there may be readers, a Mikhail Bakhtin for instance, who come to a text with totally different assumptions, assumptions which Larkin clearly does not share, but which nevertheless can be the basis for a deconstructive or post-modernist framework. Bakhtin would argue that nothing like a self is available prior to the task of constructing a poem. Indeed the self itself is being constructed in the poem, and it is in dialogue with the not-self, the other. From this point of view Larkin cannot even be speaking in anything like a first voice (Eliot's theory of voices breaks down), because the monological context implied there is a self-evident fallacy. Only the dialogical and the polyphonic are real. Bakhtin's anti-essentialist position can produce yet another reading and it is a moot point if Indian poetics of the Rasa-Dhvani school can engage with this sort of thing. T.R.S. Sharma in his new book Towards an Alternative Critical Discourse clearly thinks it can because his view of our classical concepts is not static at all. He sees our theories in a historical perspective and by a judicious selection of a usable part and a fusion of it with ideas from the West he demonstrates ways in which our theories can be put to good contemporary service. Such cross-cultural criticism where a catholic openness to various critical currents and traditions is the dominating factor, perhaps, will allow us to read Larkin variously, adding to our stock of critical ideas, enhancing our appreciation of works of literature, and above all breaking down false dichotomies of East and West, dissolving these binaries, and producing a criticism which is genuinely open, catholic and humane.

The Topographical Imperative : Locale and Poetic Identity

Liza Das
& Abhigyan Prasad

I

In proposing what we term the 'topographical imperative' in identity construction, we wish to make it clear in the beginning of the paper, that we are not using the term 'imperative' in the sense of 'authoritativeness' or passive inevitability, but in the more liberal and accommodating sense of 'vital' or 'crucial', both being lexically attested. We will also steer clear of adopting the 'love of nature' school of thought usually used for undergraduate purposes: the naive 'worshipper of Nature' strand that tends to see a poet like Wordsworth passively enraptured in the bounties that topography has to offer. We shall propose a more complex and hopefully rewarding way of looking at certain issues that perhaps could be resolved regarding the contested area of identity studies. At the same time we are aware that tackling the question of identity from a point of topographical urgency is itself only *one* of the ways of trying to pin down the slippery identity question.

We suggest the following approach: **the interaction between a poet's self and something as material as terrain is a reciprocative, dialogic process in which we would give predominance to both, even as we realize that we are thereby dealing with two very disparate areas as the mind and the land, the abstract and the concrete.** Thus we propose to look deeper into topography, a 'variable' which has perhaps been already explored in identity matters apart from the usual 'socio-political' variables like class, race, language, gender and so on. It may be mentioned here that the concern in this paper will be with attempting a recognition of a **poetic identity** that is formed as a result of a reciprocal, quasi-symbiotic relation between locale and self. We do not prematurely rally for 'a complete identity' being formed in the process, for we will only end up having a reductionist understanding of a term that is in itself ever so dynamic. What we therefore (a little gingerly perhaps) point to is a more generous way of looking at identity as multi-leveled.

Meanwhile, we enter the discursive terrain by posing aloud (for the umpteenth time perhaps) the question - 'What is Identity?' The answers to this question run the entire gamut of responses: from the certainties of lexical definitions - "the condition of being a specified person or thing" (OED) - to the freeplay of postmodern discourses - for instance, Stuart Hall's definition of identities as "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (Mathews 16). Further, there may be the historical or diachronic investigation into the question of identity: when did the idea of the self and identity emerge as a distinct philosophical, or more particularly, an epistemological concern in secular literature? Was it during the Renaissance or during the Enlightenment? In our paper, we have tried to explore an area, wherein we look closely at the *process* of the "creation" of identity in a few of the poems from Northeast India, thereby bypassing normative and definitional matters of identity. Further, in attempting to lay our cards on the table, we should also begin by saying that this paper *does not* propose to go into the intricacies of political debates or ethnographic affiliations - the more visible and deliberated-upon areas in identity studies. What it will do is highlight the fact that frequently locale is of the essence in forging a poetic identity in poetry. "Identity," according to Anthony Giddens, "is the ongoing sense the self has of who it is, as conditioned through its ongoing interaction with others." (Mathews 16-17). We propose that identity may also be forged by extra-social forces: the self is in a state of constant, though not necessarily conscious, negotiation with its surroundings and, impinging itself on the poet's psyche, topography recreates itself as the poet harnesses the locale as a set of willing metaphors to express himself with. Hence the crucial importance of the topographical imperative at a level which we may provisionally call 'cognitive'. In poetry locale – whether of the city or of the countryside - serves as both the constructor of identity as well as identity construct.

II

Let us begin with a poem by the Assamese poet Hiren Bhattacharjya. This is for us almost exemplary in that it uncannily clothes in the poetic medium the very assumptions of the approach we are suggesting here.

> I extract from the grains of hard timber,
> words stained by the blood of experience,
> like sure sure arrows from the Santhal male's bow,
> words become ardent in my blood, flesh and desire,
> some of them stand high as mountains,
> some lie low like rivers,
> while others are grave as the lake, –
> not at any body's beck and call.

> I am a poet of the vast continent
> studded with rivers and mountains,
> the earth is my poem. (*Ancient Gongs* 70)

In this poem the whole poetic process or procedure is inextricably bound to the. topographical imagery. Indeed, the poem as well as the poet seems to lean heavily on locale for their very existence. The contours of his poetry - 'words stained by the blood of experience' - are explained in terms of the topographical contours: 'high as mountains', 'low like rivers', 'grave as the lake'. The images – grains of hard timber, mountains, rivers, lake – too seem to yield themselves to the poet as all-too-willing metaphors ready to be incorporated in the poem. This approach must be familiar to those acquainted with Lakoff and Johnson's Experiential Hypothesis – we have certain preconceptual experiences as infants which eventually lead to our abstract concepts by metaphorical projection. This hypothesis would support our suggestion that topography, by metaphorical projection, impinges itself in the poet's psyche and participates in the creative process. The end result seems a metamorphosed entity in which the poet and the locale are interfused to create an identity in which each of the contributing elements feeds off each other in reciprocal gestures. Thus they are united in a cognitive dialogue in which none of these clamours for the privilege of a predominant role. This may lead us to the question – what is the nature of the identity constructed here, and how is it relevant to the questions regarding the local and the global? We will tackle the first question at this point and arrive at the second later.

Here it may be fruitful, we believe, to draw on work done in the field of environmental psychology or, if you will, cognitive geography. We refer to the approach as advanced by Kevin Lynch in his study *Image of the City* where attention to the cityscape helps in restoring the social and symbolic function of public spaces. In his empirical study of three American cities - Los Angeles, Boston and New Jersey - Lynch divides the cityscape into cognitively strategic parts like paths, nodes, districts, landmarks and edges. Each points towards corresponding 'mental maps' in the citizens. Mental maps are internal representations of the world and its spatial properties though not cartographically delineated sketches in the mind. These are multifaceted organizations of discrete pieces that operate at multiple levels in cognition. What is crucial in Lynch's proposal is the attribute of **imageability** – the quality in a physical object necessary to evoke a strong image and emotion in an observer. Environmental images can create cognitive emotions in the perceiver. It is this "imageability" in topography that, according to us, plays a constructive *and* constructing role in the creation of identity. We suggest that by turning our attention to such cognitive possibilities offered by locale, we could perhaps address the identity question from a new perspective. Cognition entails more than mere perception. It is held that to know something at the cognitive level involves sensation, perception, thinking, imagery, memory, learning and language. It is our contention that identity – or a sense of the self – is the cumulative product of these very processes involved in cognition. Now, one of the immediate – because of its all pervading presence – factors that contribute towards evoking sensation, perception, thinking, memory, is topography, if only because of the fact that it is an impinging force by virtue of its sheer visual inevitability. Locale, then, can be easily perceived as a powerful and fertile contributing factor in the construction of identity. It is powerful not only because of its imposing visibleness but also because at times it impels the poet to empower it with agency. On the other hand, it is fertile on account

of its almost seemingly passive malleablility at the hands of the poet. Consider the following lines in Hiren Bhattacharjya's "Autumn Landscapes":

I) The cruel festivities
of the lusty sky is over.
A green wave
blows through the gay field.

II) The soft white flowered grass
breaks the stillness of the copper sky.
There is a season for poetry too
The autumn sky whispered in my ears.

III) in the folds of sunshine
boundless wonder.
raptness of words
breaks in emotion. (*Ancient Gongs* 17)

Here, not only do the lines carry the attribute of imageability that Lynch proposes, they also startle us with their own robust gust of energy and virility —the 'lusfy sky'. the green wave blowing through the gay field - as well as their almost silent power to pierce copper skies and to compel the poet to break into "raptness of words." On the other hand topography surprises us with its extreme malleability in the hands of the poet:

Bring water, break rivers,
Streams, ponds and pools of water.
Powder into dust the soil
The obstinate sticky soil of the seedling bed.
(*Chandrabhaga* 69)

III

Here we try to answer the first question posed in our paper: what is the 'identity' emerging from this dialogic interaction between locale and self? **It is, we propose, an identity created at the cognitive level – that of the poetic self** and therefore of the very poem. At this level the identity created is not yet informed by other variables like race, caste, gender etc. In a way we are addressing the poetic identity itself - it is an identity that has been constructed, as we have seen, with the agency and participation of the locale in the poetic process. The poem as an identity construct is inseparable from the cognitive processing of the locale by the poet in the form of metaphors. Hence, our contention that locale acts as both identity constructor and construct. In Robin Ngangom's "Hill", for instance, the poet invokes the hill to his aid in his attempt to create a metaphor for his poetic identity:

> Hill, you and I have seen
> only upheaval since our birth.
> ......
> Hill, you have preserved from decay
> hearts like mine,
> faltering forward in absurd death. (*Ngangom* 39 - 40)

In this, the hill is a co-creator of identity along with the poet. We are almost tempted to say that the very sage-like wisdom of the hill guides the seemingly vulnerable poet:

> With subterranean instincts
> you have seen habitations, and
> generations of children come and go. (Ngangom 39)

In Nini Lungalang's "Going Home", the hills are clearly recognized as having an identity and power totally intrinsic: "Forever clad in the dignity of silence.../ They are a law unto themselves,/ And for them time has no meaning at all/ So [she] return[s] to where [she] began." Even her corporeal identity is one constructed by the hills: "I return to the dust of which I was formed/ And the air that breathes life in me."

We find that the poems with their topographical metaphors become wholly new constructs. The metaphor of the hill that the poet uses is a cognitive product of the poet. In this process the locale gets (re)constructed in the body of the poem thereby establishing itself or getting established as part of the poetic identity. In Hiren Bhattacharjya's "A Live Root of Words", the poet who has long been in a state of poetic hiatus discovers the possibility of poetic expression through the agricultural metaphor:

> Words of my poetry ended long ago
> How again today in the darkness of blood
> my lost crop of words wriggle
> clamour for fresh air
> ......
> On the other side of words, a past of words,
> a thick crop of words
> and their utterances. *(Chandrabhaga* 68)

In Navakanta Barua's "All Cities, All men," we discern a mental mapping of the cityscape in a brilliant correlation of the actual city and the 'city' of the mind. Just as, in a way that Kevin Lynch would suggest, images of the city evoke certain emotions or moods in us that are explained in cognitive psychology, so too mental images or conditions evoke certain responses in us. But what is interesting here is the parallel Barua draws between city-mapping and mental-mapping :

For, I too live in that city
I carry water in skins to vend in the streets,
Change money at the temple gate
……
I dive into sewage to fish out lost coins
Dig mausoleums for gold
……
At tavern brawls I kill
Or am killed by friends
……
Maybe, that day the noonday cicada
Made me sad for a moment,
And,
Seeing the delegged capering spider
I felt like spanking my son. (*Selected Poems* 42 - 43)

Corresponding to the various images and landmarks in the city, there are landmarks in our minds as well. What we would like to focus here is the 'processing' at a cognitive level of the images in a manner that causes the ambience to shape the poet's thoughts and words. At certain heightened moments there is even a complete identification with the city:

Unreal I am and
Unreal the great modern city.
(*He Aranya He Mahanagar* 8, translation ours)

Finally, Hiren Bhattacharjya's 'The Picturesque Alphabet of Crops" epitomises the dialogic process that creates the poetic identity. Here, the entire poetic self is thoroughly interfused with locale in such a taut and heightened manner that it is impossible to separate one from the other. Consider, in the following lines, the merging of the self and the landscape in a cognitive bind that provides the high point of the poem:

Till me, harrow me and sow the seeds of grain.
I shall moisten the soil of stony breast with tears.
With the manure of bone and marrow,
The picturesque alphabet of grain will grow in abundance.
Purify me with sesame and the sacred leaves.
In my overwhelmed lips give me the language of the landscape of creativity.
Let the silent construction of the emotion-self be firm with the flood of paddy.
The unseen roots of sun and wind are under my heart.
(*Chandrabhaga* 70)

The identity of the poet seems to be one with the soil so much so that he begs to be tilled and harrowed and manured like the soil in order to create what he calls "the picturesque alphabet of crops." Perhaps it will be hard to find a more intense and complete identification of a poet with the land.

IV

What, it is now time to ask, could the above deliberations on locale and identity propose with regard to the relationship of the local and the global? Compared to other variables in identity construction - race, gender, class, caste - locale is cognitively more immediate for the poet for reasons we have already discussed. All others are first socially or culturally created before they enter the poet's psyche. Topography alone seems to escape the pitfalls of a cultural relativism or eternal deferral of certainties. How might this be, we may ask. This is to be answered at a level of immediate cognitive processing where the interaction of the self and the topography is yet untainted by issues that stem from our regional or cultural differences. In operating at the levels of social constructs and thereby arguing for a dead-end relativism, are we not moving away from the human self, particularly the poetic self, which must be seen as above the local and the global; in other words as a universal phenomenon beyond spatio-temporal boundaries. Therefore, when a poet is engaged in creative dialogue with topography, his preoccupation at a cognitive level is inextricably bound to the creation of poetic identity. At this level of self, perception and identity, the dialectics of the local and the global do not enter the picture and seem secondary details for cultural relativists to dig out. On the other hand this dialectics may be accommodated in a multi-layered framework that would allow for either the clash or reconciliation of the local and the global, depending on the social and cultural orientation of the poet. Thus when Ngangom uses the transferred epithet "gullible hills" with respect to what he calls "these North-Eastern colonies" (Ngangom 41), it may lend itself readily for appropriation by the advocates of territorial or local identities. But in a multi-layered framework, the adjective "gullible" comes only after the poet has cognitively appropriated the **hill** in the first place. Such appropriation of topography is an 'imperative' in the sense of 'vital', let us remind ourselves, and to argue this imperativeness of topography, we have selected texts from both in translation and the English medium. Our chief concern is this: in the loud clamour of localisms and globalisms, we should not let the universality of the poetic identity get drowned.

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THE WOMAN: A RECONSTRUCTED IDENTITY

GARIMA KALITA

ABSTRACT

The identity formation for the woman is ascertained within the conscription of domesticity and the politics of sexuality. The 'voice' of the woman is oblique and it traverses the whole gamut of 'women experiences'. All kinds of conjectures are levelled against notions of equality and universality and vital questions still disturb the empathisers of the feminist cause. Whether it is Simone de Beauvoir , Virginia Woolf ,Elaine Showalter , Helen Cixous ,Juliet Mitchell or any other participant in the feminist cause , this subject of the women is looked into from diversified perspectives from the politics of 'difference' to the question of women as activists, writers , critics, readers, citizens, homemakers or workers.

In the domain of women speaking in their own voice , parallelism and echoes may occur and have occurred. The following treatise seeks to probe into the familiar and popular genre of novel , its source and various other historical processes closely associated with it . The history of women is the history of repression . Freud and Lacan are denounced for their phallocentric loyalty and the lack of active engagement of their premises with the cause of the woman . Hence the need of the hour is to find the 'lost voice' of the woman .That too involves complications. For the woman may seem to work as ventriloquist dummies for the male voice. To find their own voice or language becomes the challenge now. Next, another question is delved into. How different is the language of women from the language of men ? Essentially ,then it is again a basic question of identity formation on newer ground and by newer perspectives .Indeed , everything needs to be reassessed, reanalysed and relocated and the identity called 'woman' recreated and reconstructed.

Women as reader , writer and critic need to be evoked out of a series of historical agenda that probes into the location of women inside and outside domesticity , marginalized policy or politics of gender and physiological and psychical avenues that delimit the woman question . The identity formation of women as is widely accepted is entangled with variety of factors that work parallely or diagonally between axis/modes _ psychological ,emotional and intellectual , on the internal level and economic and cultural on the exterior one . The question of gender bias too has to be tackled on the consideration of dialectical concerns like low/high ,black/white ,social/individual, psychological/empirical etc. Of course the proposition that the woman needs to be exhumed out of the dislocation of binaries or 'coupling' remains vital for the feminist critic as in place of difference and 'singularities' that disintegrate and 'bombard' to recompose 'in other bodies for new passions.' (Sorties) Cixous's notion of *invention* of personalized 'I' sidelines various conditions and stresses the 'presence in the inventing subject of an abundance of the other,of the diverse :'This recognition of difference and strangeness also includes the journey toward multiple collectivity and many strangenesses .

Woman as a propagandist apparatus is to be recreated in order to wage 'her inevitable struggle against conventional man' and she must write her 'self'. That again brings us to the initial question and many other associative questions relating conventions, social systems and individual existence. The creation of a different category in this respect is not without a problematic. The woman writes ; but can she speak her voice? The essential inheritance of the male dominant order necessarily deprives her of that possibility. So what appears to be 'women-texts' need not contain the essential woman. The theoretical locus of the woman critic and writer becomes suspect. As Shoshana Felman probes and raises it , it becomes the 'question' that retains the position of the other. 'Is she speaking the language of men or the silence of women? Is she speaking *as* a woman or in place of the (silent) woman, for the woman , in the name of the woman? ' (Women and Madness: The Critical Fallacy) The nature of this adventure though complicated and diverse needs to be accepted without bias. Juliet Mitchell's women 'hysterics' speaking the women's masculine language (that being the only language in a phallocentric world) form the class of women novelists . As against Kristeva's denunciation of the tradition of the novel she adds an affirmatory note - " The woman novelist must be a hysteric. Hysteria is the woman's simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the organisation of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism."(*Women, The Longest Revolution* cited. 155: Eagleton : 1996)

The woman novelist's predicament of both denying and accepting her sexuality makes her susceptible to certain modes of behavioral pattern reflected unconsciously in the fictional characters. To Mitchell Emily Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights* offers such a scope of bisexuality in the story of Heathcliff and Catherine. " Each

is the bisexual possibility of the other one , evoking a notion of oneness which is the reverse side of the coin of diverse heterogeneity."(158: Eagleton : 1996) Sexuality redefined in terms of universality , sovereignty and repression necessarily refers back to Freud and Lacan and their psycho-physical theories. The castration complex as it is given shape by Freud , raises the conscious status of the masculine and the not-masculine . This consciousness of the overall dominance of the phallus or the absence of phallus is segregating and discriminatory ,enhancing repression .This also answers the fact why the father of psychoanalysis with an obsession of phallocentric agenda is a taboo for the feminist thinkers. Lacan 's symbolic order (inclusive of Name-of-the-Father and nominally of Desire-of the-Mother) too recognises the heterogeneity ultimately substantiating in the masculine and the not-masculine .

Rita Felski's *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* reflects on the notion that 'reception is strongly functional and often collective.' The text is read less for its own sake than for its contents in relation to the reader's own life. The notion and the process of identification with the text here is not an obstacle but an accelerator for further research and probing into the complicated patterns of subjective experiences.

A historical proposition as the following needs to be reconsidered and revalued in the light of a complicated gender discrimination and reconstruction of a novel , renewed feminist perspective.

" Women writers ... in response to their cultural exclusion , have developed a relatively autonomous , clandestine tradition of their own ." (Marxist-Feminist Collective cited, 170 : Rice and Waugh : 2001) The source of this autonomy is to be traced back into the segregated status of the 'women writers' . This subversive independence consequently has been unable to produce regenerative resulting force in women as writers and critics or readers. The dichotomy between gender obsession and gender disavowal working and expressed in the psychology of the women writers consequently had ill effected their conviction and self assessment. This historical juncture is marked with a polarity of 'revolutionary feminism' and conventionalism on one hand and romantic fictional tendency and social realism on the other. To offer it a separate interpretation, this duality of gender obsession and gender disavowal, instead of forestalling may in turn be linked with the process of separate identity formation for women, with distinctive sets of 'difference'.

Women writers' predicament or formative experiences in terms of feminine ,feminist and female are again not singular and monolithic .What lies beneath a naïve interpretation is an attempt to reduce everything to something 'general'.Showalter's linear history can be posited against Cixous's vertical analysis of the characteristic individual qualities of women . The infinitismal variety of individual constituents in women are recognised by Cixous as something defining and specifying . "You can't talk about a female sexuality ,uniform, homogeneous , classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another . Women's imaginary is inexhaustible , like music ,painting, writing, :their stream of phantasms is incredible."('The Laugh of the Medusa' cited. 320: Eagleton : 1996) Speaking in the same vein is Luce Irigaray , for whom the creative lies not in difference as opposition but in difference as heterogeneity. With that multiplicity concept the woman experiences with her full potential , complete jouissance . When the woman is in her real self , she finds her own voice ; she does not parrot talk and does not play the ventriloquist dummy for the man . With felt experiences and the history of repression behind , Cixous

becomes the mouthpiece of '*Ecriture feminine*' . " Smug-faced readers ,managing editors ,and big bosses don't like the true texts of women –female-sexed texts . That kind scares them ."(Medusa) She must write her self and against the male imperative. The language she chooses has to be her own language . The women writing are not just 'writers' but 'feminine' writers , propagators of 'affirmation of the difference'

How does one write feminist history? The feminist writer bespeaks women's voice , emotion and truth ,since men fail to respond to and grasp women's voice and mind it is she that has to create her own fiction that also should reflect and record social reality. The dichotomies and contradictions involved are probed by Elizabeth Baines in "Naming the Fictions" that tries to solve the binary between fiction and social reality by an acceptance of the proposition that " the relation between fiction and social reality is far more complex than she'd so far acknowledged". That realisation may perhaps ,as the writer sees it , pave the way to reconcile the inherent feminist aspiration of presenting convincingly "Fiction as record and Fiction as vision".

The phallocentric 'objectivity' or the pervasive symbolic order or even the universals have to be renamed and relocated . The politics of feminity and feminism is an area that encompasses culture , economics and social hierarchy in a complex crisscrossing. The Enlightenment discourse of sovereignty, equality and rationality is an area, looked askance by the feminists. Since the time of inception of these ideas, feminism has qualified the demenses of domesticity and public spheres, calculatingly guarding the interest of the women. At the same time, it also has to tackle the inherent questions, dichotomies and contradictions rising in the wake of postmodernist views of life and society. And that is a major challenge posited against feminity and women.

The emergence of the women as readers and the genre of novel 'writing' was almost simultaneous . That identity of the woman was instrumental in creating a space in the otherwise conventionalised phallocentric arena . The dominant symbolic order of the eighteenth century included the bourgeois spheres of public and private _ that went synonimously with the masculine and feminine respectively . The fact that the bourgeois private sphere and the origin of novel are invariably related is suspect no doubt , but that this narrow confines of domesticity gave rise to all the marvelous creations of Jane Austen ,The Brontes and Mrs Gaskell must be a matter of wonder taking into perview the impediments and constraints within that circumsribed area . Of course the rise of professionalism for the women writers was a major contribution toward creating a separate space for women in general , yet that professionalism was not by any means complete ,as the woman as writer that emerged was still in its embryo ,toddling and tottering . Charlotte Bronte's earning from her publishers (100 pounds for *Jane Eyre* as the first instalment) seemed a dazzling amount compared to her meagre salary as a governess but giving it an objective glance it would not deserve to be called 'substantive'. In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf deliberates upon the vulnerability of the women's position in that respect .The women novelists , above anything else , suffered from 'a narrowness of life' imposed upon them by circumstantial patriarchy. The private sphere which in reality was suffocating and constrictive of space , rarely ,gave way to a semi-public sphere ,enabling the woman to have access to that front stage for public negotiations. These 'intermediate zones' mediating between public and private offered avenues to writers like Jane Austen ,Charlotte Bronte or Mary Evans to 'expand' their territorial circuit in and around the

'common sitting room' ,front-stairs, lobby, parlour etc . This metaphor of the common sitting room is made to have an innate linkage with the spurious growth of the writing of novels. Again it is the ingrained merit of Jane Austen creating characters and situations from that corner. The destiny of the women writers was closely bound with that closed embience. " Her sensibility had been educated for centuries by the influences of the common sitting-room. People's feelings were impressed on her; personal relations were always before her eyes. Therefore , when the middle class women took to writing , she naturally wrote novels ..."(146: Eagleton: 1996)

The same ,specific area is explored with diverse treatment by Ian Watt , Terry Lovell , Juliet Mitchell and Ellen Moers among others .The rise of this genre of writing is seen with the upcoming middle section of the social hierarchy . But the said relation is not without complication. In fact, the element of 'free time', which itself is problematic because it is associated with the questions of production and reproduction (Marxian analogy) and the surplus value of the 'housework', is thought to work through factors of non-payment, voluntary engagement and pleasure or leisure.

The identity formation of women necessarily involves the exhumation of the long buried feminine self. That reallocation and recreation would mean a separate space for 'women splendour to germinate and grow .This distinct difference aught to be retained in subtle interpretation of specific characters related to female and feminity . As against deconstruction of identities , the liberal humanist tradition calls for reanalysis and redefinition of terms .

Decoding of structural units within and outside families would not deny individual and universal loyalty to principles. In fact feminism needs to be rethought in terms of individual potential and individual expression or reaffirmation. Once that cultural context or space is realloted with a proper emphasis on the distinctness of 'wonder'(courtsey Luce Irigaray), women would not remain a gendered species with reference to aesthetics or culture. A crisis in feminist history is about the identity formation of the woman on the basis of equality , universal human values and status . Even if that history is fraught with pain and suffering , out of suffering may come the cure , as was wished by Florence Nightingale , against the protected unconscious lives of middle class Victorian women . " Give us back our suffering , we cry to heaven in our hearts - suffering rather than indifferentism—Better to have pain than paralysis : A hundred struggle and drown in the breakers . One discovers a new world ." (Cassandra)

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Simultaneity of Diverse Futures: Borges' Fork

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Abstract

This paper underlines the imperatives of the mimetic mode in narrative. Borges' insistent diegesis is at best or worst a distraction or a subversion.Implicit in the endeavour, however, is a qualified surrender to mimesis withdomain-shifts and genre-critiques. Apocryphal attributions and bogus bibliographies notwithstanding, Borges manages to enrich the open-ended form of the short story. These contentions are illustrated primarily with 'The Garden of Forking Paths',- the most 'popular' of his creations.

We begin at the beginning, usually a good place to start from because then we have an end in sight and can traverse through a middle,- tortuous, ingenuous, or simple. It is also, from western subscription, the beginning of the 'short story', for we begin in the first century of the Year of the Lord, with Petronius' 'The Widow of Ephesus'.

Once upon a time there was a certain married woman in the city of Ephesus whose fidelity to her husband was so famous that the women from all the neighbouring towns and villages used to troop into Ephesus merely to stare at this prodigy. It happened, however, that her husband one day died. Finding the normal custom of following the cortege with her hair unbound and beating her breast in public quite inadequate to express her grief, the lady insisted on following the corpse right into the tomb, an underground vault of the Greek type, and there set herself to guard the body, weeping and wailing night and day. Although in her extremes of grief she was clearly courting death from starvation, her parents were utterly unable to persuade her to leave, and even the magistrates, after one last supreme attempt, were rebuffed and driven away. In short, all Ephesus had gone into mourning for this extraordinary woman, all the more since the lady was now passing her fifth consecutive day without once tasting food. Beside the failing woman sat her devoted maid, sharing her mistress' grief and relighting the lamp whenever it flickered out. The whole city could speak, in fact, of nothing else: here at last, all classes alike agreed, was the one true example of conjugal fidelity and love. In the meantime, however, the governor of the province gave orders that several thieves should be crucified in a spot close by the vault where the lady was mourning her dead husband's corpse. So, on the following night, the soldier who had been assigned to keep watch on the corpses so that nobody could remove the thieves' bodies for burial suddenly noticed a light blazing among the tombs and heard the sounds of groaning. And prompted by a natural human curiosity to know who or what was making those sounds, he descended into the vault. But at the sight of a strikingly beautiful woman, he stopped short in terror, thinking he must be seeing some ghostly apparition out of hell. Then, observing the corpse and seeing the tears on the lady's face and the scratches her fingernails had gashed in her cheeks, he realized what it was: a widow, in inconsolable grief. Promptly fetching his little supper back down to the tomb, he implored the lady not to persist in her sorrow or break her heart with useless mourning. All men alike, he reminded

her, have the same end; the same resting place awaits us all. He used, in short, all those platitudes we use to comfort the suffering and bring them back to life. His consolations, being unwelcome, only exasperated the widow more; more violently than ever she beat her breast, and tearing out her hair by the roots, scattered it over the dead man's body. Undismayed, the soldier repeated his arguments and pressed her to take some food, until the little maid, quite overcome by the smell of the wine, succumbed and stretched out her hand to her tempter. Then, restored by the food and wine, she began herself to assail her mistress' obstinate refusal. 'How will it help you if you faint from hunger? Why should you bury yourself alive, and go down to death before the Fates have called you? What does Virgil say?'

Do you suppose the shades and ashes of the dead are by such sorrow touched?

"No, begin your life afresh. Shake off these woman's scruples; enjoy the light while you can. Look at the corpse of your poor husband: doesn't it tell you more eloquently than any words that you should live"?

None of us, of course, really dislikes being told that we must eat, that life is to be lived. And the lady was no exception. Weakened by her long days of fasting, her resistance crumbled at last, and she ate the food the soldier offered her as hungrily as the little maid had eaten earlier.

Well, you know what temptations are normally aroused in a man on a full stomach? So the soldier, mustering all those blandishments by means of which he had persuaded the lady to live, now laid determined siege to her virtue. And chaste though she was, the lady found him singularly attractive and his arguments persuasive. As for the maid, she did all she could to help the soldier's cause, repeating like a refrain the appropriate line of Virgil :

If love is pleasing, lady, yield yourself to love.

To make the matter short, the lady's body soon gave up the struggle; she yielded and our happy warrior enjoyed a total triumph on both counts. That very night their marriage was consummated, and they slept together the second and the third night too, carefully shutting the door of the tomb so that any passing friend or stranger would have thought the lady of famous chastity had at last expired over her dead husband's body. As you can perhaps imagine, our soldier was a very happy man, utterly delighted with his lady's ample beauty and that special charm that a secret love confers. Every night, as soon as the sun had set, he bought what few provisions his slender pay permitted and smuggled them down to the tomb. One night, however, the parents of one of the crucified thieves, noticing that the watch was being badly kept, took advantage of our hero's absence to remove their son's body and bury it. The next morning, of course, the soldier was horror- struck to discover one of the bodies missing from its cross, and ran to tell his mistress of the horrible punishment which awaited him for neglecting his duty. In the circumstances, he told her, he would not wait to be tried and sentenced, but would punish himself then and there with his own sword. All he asked of her was that she make room for another corpse and allow the same gloomy tomb to enclose husband and lover together.

Our lady's heart, however, was no less tender than pure. 'God forbid' she cried, 'that I should have to see at one and the same time the dead bodies of the only two men I have ever loved. No, better far, I say, to hang the dead than kill the living.' With these words, she gave orders that her husband's body should be taken from its bier and strung up on the empty cross. The soldier followed

this good advice, and the next morning the whole city wondered by what miracle the dead man had climbed up on the cross.

So it tells a story, narrates and dramatises events and has the required beginning, middle, and end. Besides, it also has a theme, for, as Robert Frost says, theme alone can steady us down or the writer/ reader would kick himself from one chance suggestion to another in all directions as of a hot afternoon in the life of a grasshopper. The narrator of 'The widow of Ephesus' began his tale by declaring that no woman was so chaste or faithful that she couldn't be seduced. He tells the story to illustrate this maxim of his. ' A vulgar fellow, he interprets his story rather cheaply, even indecently. But the reader can more accurately restate the theme, giving it greater significance and making it more acceptable: life and love are too strong to be buried alive. These generalities, however carry weight only when they are couched in particulars. Death, grieving, and celebration figure in Petronius' story. We find death, sadness and even penitence in Borges' story, almost as in the life of a Christian soul. Anyway, we can re- christen 'The Garden of Forking Paths' as 'The Spy Who Came out of the Mirror'. This is fictionalisation or falsification because we have zeroed in on one alternative as the final but Borges' story is about accepting all possibilities simultaneously. The protagonist of the story, because he perpetrates all the action and the denouement, is one Dr. Yu Tsun, a former teacher of English in England. who has to, in his new role as a German spy, shout out the name of a town Albert to his chief in Berlin, the exact site of the new British artillery park, so that it can be bombed. His adversary, Captain Richard Madden, has already accounted for the other spy Victor Runeberg, alias Hans Rabener, and is now on the sure track of Yu Tsun. His voice, like any human voice, of traitor or patriot, is too feeble and even a pistol shot has a too limited auditory range. He has no alternative but to shoot a man of that name He has only about an hour's lead on his foe and his neck is already hungering for the noose. A telephone directory leads him on to an English Sinologist, Stephen Albert, who introduces him to his forefather's garden of forking paths, which is a tome of many volumes and his metaphorical labyrinth, his infinite maze. He shoots his friend/foe Stephen Albert, and announces his secret to the chief. This he can bring about only when he steps out of his subjective self, captive in the mirror, to face the bleak English evening, steadily deepening into night.

Whenever we recount a story we do it chronologically. While Petronius' story is straight forward narration Borges' tale is a forced, posthumous narration of multiple synchronicity, where the action/events(there are many) have only a complex continuity. Here death and life, treachery and trust, past and present, beginning and end, are equal contending concerns. 'No, better far, I say, to hang the dead than kill the living'. After all, the dead cannot die, so, they start living again in the infinite maze of possibilities. The hero of Ts'ui Pen dies in the third chapter and is alive in the fourth. This spy thriller delves deep not only into philosophy but into the intricacies of narratology. All Borges heroes are exceptional people in exceptional circumstances. Details establishing character and locale are discounted, apocryphal attributes and bogus bibliographies, even footnotes contradicting the veracity of the narration are joyfully paraded and they alone give the story its true character. In the story itself, Borges critiques the traditional story by turning it into an essay that tries to solve a riddle. This he achieves through domain-shifts. There are entirely different reception regimes in the two stories.

Petronius tells the story to sailors and they greeted it with

great guffaws, surely the appropriate response. It is an amusing, successful, and very popular story, largely because it is well told. Borges' story also enjoys immense popularity but its regime is strictly academic, educational. It is a story without customary pretensions. The journeywork, however, from beginning to middle to end can be easily traced through mimetic action/events. Yu Tsun discovers that he has precious little money and his revolver has only one bullet. 'Silently, I took leave of myself in the mirror, went down the stairs, sneaked a look at the quiet street, and went out.'

'I was going to the village of Ashgrove, but took a ticket for a station farther on. The train would leave in a few minutes, at eight fifty. I hurried, for the next would not go until half past nine. There was almost no one on the platform. I walked through the carriages. I remember some farmers, a woman dressed in mourning, a youth deep in Tacitus' *Annals* and a wounded, happy soldier.'

'At last the train pulled out. A man I recognized ran furiously, but vainly, the length of the platform. It was Captain Richard Madden. Shattered, trembling, I huddled in the distant corner of the seat, as far as possible from the fearful window.'

'But from the end of the avenue, from the main house, a lantern approached; ... a paper lantern shaped like a drum and coloured like the moon. A tall man carried it. I could not see his face for the light blinded me. He opened the gate and slowly spoke in my language. "I see that the worthy Hsi P'eng has troubled himself to see to relieving my solitude. No doubt, you want to see the garden.'

'With slow precision, he read two versions of the same epic chapter. In the first, an army marches into battle over a desolate mountain pass. The bleak and sombre aspect of the rocky landscape made the soldiers feel that life itself was of little value, and so they won the battle easily. In the second, the same army passes through a palace where a banquet is in progress. The splendour of the feast remained a memory throughout the glorious battle, and so victory followed.'

'With proper veneration I listened to these old tales, although perhaps with less admiration for them in themselves than for the fact that they had been brought out by one of my own blood, and that a man of a distant empire had given them back to me, in the last stage of desperate adventure, on a western island. I remember the final words, repeated at the end of each version like a secret command: "Thus the heroes fought, with tranquil heart and bloody sword. They were resigned to killing and to dying.'

'Albert rose from his seat. He stood up tall as he opened the top drawer of the high writing cabinet. For a moment his back was again turned to me. I had the revolver ready. I fired with the utmost care: Albert fell without a murmur, at once. I swear that his death was instantaneous, as if he had been struck by lightning.'

'The secret name of the city to be attacked got through to Berlin. Yesterday it was bombed. I read the news in the same English newspapers which were trying to solve the riddle of the murder of the learned Sinologist Stephen Albert by the unknown Yu Tsun. The Chief, however had already solved this mystery. He knew that my problem was to shout, with my feeble voice, above the tumult of war, the name of the city called Albert, and that I had no other course open to me than to kill someone of that name.'

'He does not know, for no one can, of my infinite penitence and sickness of the heart.'

This then is the mimetic content which makes it a story. Time, events, and characters bifurcate and converge infinitely in the story and its theme lies complexly between these action statements. There are differing and converging fictional levels in the story and it is the dialogues and the apparent digressions which establish the theme of the infinite maze, which is, together and separately, the labyrinth, the garden of forking paths, and the novel. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan has underscored this idea in some detail :

'Pen's novel is a labyrinth, a 'garden of forking paths'. Albert's garden abounds in zigzagging footways and, like Borges' own story, is named the garden of forking paths after the title of Pen's novel (or is it only a metaphor for the novel?). On the way to Albert's house, Tsun must turn always to the left, following a road that forks, as one goes in order to discover the central point of certain labyrinths. Labyrinths are familiar to Tsun since he grew up in a symmetrical garden of Hai Feng, and like the garden, a certain Fang is mentioned in Albert's explanation to Tsun of Pen's mystery. War dictates Tsun's behaviour, and war is described in the contradictory chapters of Pen's novel. To write that novel, Ts'ui Pen retired to the 'Pavillion of the Limpid Solitude', and Albert, upon meeting the narrator, says, 'I see that …Hsi Peng persists in correcting my solitude'. Similarly, Tsui Pen was murdered by a stranger and Albert, too, is killed by a stranger, Yu Tsun, who is himself about to be hanged for that crime. Yu Tsun is Chinese, a former professor of English at the service of a western power, and Albert, an English professor of Sinology, puts himself at the service of a Chinese labyrinth/book. In explaining Pen's concept of diverse futures to Yu Tsun, Albert gives the example of different possible outcomes, all simultaneously maintained in Pen' fiction, of an encounter between a certain Fang and a stranger who calls at his door and whom Fang resolves to kill. This is obviously analogous to the events of the diegesis, but it also reverses them; for in the example it is Fang who resolves to kill the stranger, whereas in the diegesis it is the stranger who intends to kill Albert. However, the result in the example, as Albert says, may be different from the intention and may thus parallel the events of the diegesis. And the pattern of analogy and reversal thus created is itself similar to the mutually contradictory chapters of Pen's novel, which in turn, resemble the opposed accounts of the first world war by Liddel Hart and the narrator in Borges' own story.'

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Borges' implicit genre-criticism in 'The Garden of Forking Paths' involves the essay and all its traditional arsenal of footnotes, bibliographies, problems, riddles, classical allusions and conceptualisations. In Petronius' story, the narrator is an outsider, in Borges, he is the protagonist. The allusions in ' The Widow of Ephesus' spouted by the maid on a full stomach, are ironically exploited. Goethe takes the place of her Virgil in Yu Tsun's penitent recounting: 'I knew an Englishman-a modest man- who, for me, is as great as Goethe. I did not speak with him for more than an hour, but during that time, he *was* Goethe.'The parallels in themselves are insignificant and merely computational but their contexts, and the radically different reception regimes alone further the communication. 'Communication is always dependent on context…Different societies at different times operate with different logonomic systems that divide contexts up into categories of place associated with kinds of meaning and kinds of semiosic agent.' These are the domains, and like genres, they also make their inroads into the politics of 'systematic' control. Borges uses this domain as a site of resistance as he, equally purposely, critiques the genre. '…Genres have a double face depending on their orientation…As an instrument of

control, a genre limits meanings. But for those who write or read texts within a genre, it enables a specific plenitude of meanings. So a generic label, such as 'Romance', may be sufficient to allow a superior critic to dismiss out of hand every work that conforms to the romantic formula, whereas for the fan of Romance, each new text can be positioned and evaluated against other texts and authors in the genre, producing a wealth of implicit meanings that are invisible to the non-fans.' Borges' context, in this story, and almost all the other stories of his is an un-sentimental intellectuality. The 'go tell it to the marines' encounters the academic domain with the invocation of Virgil by the maid, bit the bringing in of Goethe by Yu Tsun only establishes the 'locale' of the war but it leaves us free to deduce the disruption and desolation consequent upon war. Further, it highlights the protagonist's involuntary/forced motif: 'I am a timorous man. I can say it now, now that I have brought my incredibly risky plan to an end. It was not easy to bring about, and I know that its execution was terrible. I did not do it for Germany- no! such a barbarous country is of no importance to me, particularly since it had degraded me by making me become a spy. …I carried out my plan because I felt the Chief had some fear of those of my race, of those uncountable forbears whose culmination lies in me. I wished to prove to him that a yellow man could save his armies. Besides, I had to escape the Captain. His hands and voice could, at any moment, knock and beckon at my door.'

What originates in one domain can pass on to another. A spy tale of a penitent human who is also duty-bound does something for his race through a thoroughly inhuman act. Everything undergoes a domain shift. One follows the modalities of the actual while the other marginalizes verisimilitude and incorporates and changes semiotic relations for a crucial type of subjective meaning. It simply makes strange. This is simply because 'century follows century but everything happens only in the present'. Yu Tsun and Borges are questioning conventional temporality, but then, what is narrative if not a manipulation of time?

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