

LITERARY JOURNAL



STELLA MARIS COLLEGE

1982—1983

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The Grotesque Element in "King Lear"

Note :

This essay is not to claim that 'King Lear' belongs solely to the Absurdist Movement. There are definitely certain 'non-grotesque' elements in the play. This is only a study of the elements of the grotesque theatre found in this play. The structure, for instance is basically grotesque (though of course Bradley would disagree).

The basic plan of the essay is this :

What is the world of the grotesque - What problems does it pose for man - what does man's action, man's response to it constitute - what is the release from this world - and what is his support, his refuge in the process of living in this world.

To see one of Shakespeare's most magnificent tragedies, in forms of the grotesque, is not really as outrageous as it seems. Basically, the worlds of both tragedy and comedy have a similar structure.

The grotesque is only tragedy re-written in different forms. Grotesque takes over the themes of tragedy, and poses the same fundamental questions. It is concerned with the same eternal problems, conflicts and themes of tragedy, such as, human fate, the meaning of life or existence, inevitability and freedom. The questions are the same. Only the answers are different.

Both the tragic and the grotesque worlds are closed ones. In both, man is presented at a crucial time, when he has to make a choice - on the spiritual level, between two opposing philosophies, and on the physical level, between two modes of action.

The tragic hero, inevitably makes the wrong choice (as a result of hubris or hamartia) and therefore has to suffer its consequences. But, with this suffering comes knowledge and awareness and therefore the tragedy lies only in the price he has to pay for this awareness. The ultimate viewpoint remains hopeful.

The grotesque is a crueller world. Here too, man has to make a choice, but the situation becomes grotesque instead of tragic, because, both alternatives of the choice imposed are absurd or irrelevant. The Hero has to make a choice, even when he knows this. He has to act accordingly even though there is no chance of his ever being successful. As Ionesco says, it offers "no way out of a given solution."¹

The very opening scene of 'King Lear' strikes the dominant note of the play. Gloucester is talking with Kent, referring to Edmund. He jests at the bastardy of Edmund, saying that, though he has "so often blushed to acknowledge him," "though this knave came something saucily into this world before he was sent for, yet was his mother fair; there was good sport at his making." As Wilson Knight² sees it, we seem to be starting the play with humour in bad taste. And the whole play, will witness a sense of humour in the Gods, which is of a similar bad taste.

"As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' gods -
They kill us for their sport."

This is the world of the grotesque - this grim fun, this hideous malicious sense of humour at the back of tragedy.

A Polish critic, Andzej Falkiewicz, sees the action in modern literature and drama as a process of maiming and mutilating man. He compares it to the peeling of an onion. One

Gloucester's splendid address to the God is mistimed and misplaced, makes the action absurd, and deliberately so—this the world the grotesque.

Similarly with Lear. Though he does not attempt suicide, he attempts a renunciation of his humanity, which is after all, only a spiritual equivalent of suicide. After his first meeting with Edgar, in Act III, Lear makes that classic exclamation .

“unaccommodated man is no more but
such a poor, bare forked
animal.....Off, you leadings.”

In the light of the grotesque, what seems like an expression of newly awakened, becomes, at best, an act of moral irresponsibility and at worst, childish defiance. Therefore the Fool, intervenes quickly with the admonition to

“be contented, tis a naughty night to
swim in.”

Lear's dramatic gesture is as absurd and foolish as a man preparing to swim on a stormy night.

Lear makes another similar attempt later on. After meeting the blind Gloucester, he petulantly demands that his shoes be taken off because they hurt him.

“Pull off my boots ; harder,....”

Knott sees this as a dramatic touch similar to Beckett's in “Waiting for Godot.” As he puts it: “The world is real and the shoe really pinches. But the gesture with which a ruined man demands that his shoe be taken off is ridiculous.” Just as ridiculous, really, as blind Gloucester's somersault on a flat stage.

Attempting suicide is ridiculous in this world because of all the fiendish, macabre,

of it. Therefore suicide is denied. Only death exists.

And death, is the ultimate joke. As pointed out earlier, in the grotesque world, both choices are absurd. Whether you choose the good, or the evil, you are damned, and therefore, by the end of the play, there is mass butchery. And death in the grotesque world, is divested of all the dignity afforded to it in the tragic world. Here, death comes, not as a release from suffering, but as the final joke of the ‘wanton’ gods.

Gloucester, is bound and tortured physically to such an extent that when Edgar confesses his true identity and their relationships seems to show signs of improving, he is too wasted to bear it, his “flaw'd heart,” is “Alack! too weak. The conflict to support.”

Similarly, the mind of Lear is impaled. “crucified on the cross-beams of love and disillusion.” And when sanity returns after the phase of madness, it is only in time to witness Cordelia's death, Again, when reconciliation seems to be on hand -

“We two alone will sing like birds ; the
cage ;
when thou dost ask my blessing, I'll
kneel down.

And ask of thee forgiveness.”

- death intervenes.

The most grotesque deaths, are of course, those of Edmund and Cordelia. Edmund's miraculous change of heart -

“Some good I mean to do,
Despite of mine own nature.”

- comes at a point when he is convinced of the power of love. Goneril and Regan, he believes, loved him.

“Yet Edmund was beloved,
The one the other poisoned for my sake,
And after slew herself.”

It is this that seems to mellow him, the Knowledge that he too, was loved. And yet,

I. G. Wilson Knight

this change is based on false assumptions. He was not encompassed by love but was the object of lust. Goneril slew Regan for his sake, but it was out of lust and ambition. She was incapable of love. And far from killing herself for his sake, she committed suicide at the implicit threat of arrest for treason. His deathbed nobility becomes therefore, merely a self - deluded and ridiculous gesture.

Similarly though much more cruelly, with Cordelia. As almost all critics note, she is, even at the beginning of the play, at the point which Lear and the rest reach only near the end. Her death therefore seems totally unwarranted. And besides, what makes it crueller is the manner in which she reaches it - a careless mistake by an over - enthusiastic, misguided hireling. Even Edmund is granted the dignity of death at the hands of a noble adversary - Edgar, but Cordelia has to have as her assassin, a common soldier. Cornwall is earlier killed by his own servant resisting the dastardly mutilation of Gloucester. Oswald, the courtier, is done to death by Edgar in the role of an illiterate country yokel. Cordelia's death is therefore equated to theirs, her position, reduced to that of the villains of least consequence. This is grotesque at its cruellist.

In the grotesque world therefore, unlike the tragic there is no hope, and there is no justice. The Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, defines this essential difference between the two worlds as the irreconcilable antagonism between the priest and the clown. Tragedy is the theatre of priests, grotesque, the theatre of clowns.

And in the theatre of clowns, no refuge can be sought with the Gods. At first the God's have names.

K. L. : By Jupiter, I swear, no.

Kent : By Juno, I swear, ay.

jokes, death is the cruellest. And suicide therefore ceases to be a protest against the 'rack' that is the world, but an acceptance. But gradually, there are no names. They too are 'stripped' to mere gods, great and terrifying judges, who are supposed to intervene for the cause of justice. But they do not intervene, and the ruined man invoking God, becomes more and more ridiculous.

By the kind gods, 'tis most ignobly done
To pluck me by the beard.

From here, it is only a small step to the
realisation that

As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods -
They kill us for their sport.

In the world of the grotesque therefore, in this world of clowns, the Fool becomes God - if God is conceived of as the All - Seeing, the refuge of suffering Man. Lear is extremely naive in his belief in his daughter's love and respect for him. The Fool has no such illusions. He sees brute force, cruelty and lust and seeks no consolation in a supernatural force which will reward the just and punish the bad. And like the traditional father figure of God, the Fool accompanies Lear with a curiously touching protectiveness, on his path to madness.

Often, his cynicism seems brutal, cruel, rather like the callousness of the Gods themselves.—

K. Lear : O me, my heart, my rising heart -
but down.....

Fool : Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney
did to the eels when she puts 'em i'
the paste alive.....

- But this ridicule it is that is ultimately healing, because Lear's first touch of returning sanity, is seen when he speaks in Fool's language, a Fool's philosophy :—" They told me I was everything ; 'tis a lie - I am not ague proof."

SOUDHAMINI
III B. A. LITERATURE.

1. The study of the tragic and grotesque structures is derived from the essay on Lear by Jan Kott. This is a simpler version of Kott's more complex one.
2. Most of the 'deductions' in the essay are Knight's or Kott's. Acknowledgement each time will be impossible.
3. William Rosen too talks about this stripping action, in K. Lear. One interesting point he has made is that 'evil' too is 'stripped' of the urban seshistry of Iago. Here it is present in all its naked brutality in Goneril and Regan. Even Edmund is more straight forwardly evil than Iago.

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Eliot's Theory and Practice of Poetry

All great English critics have been poets seeking to justify their own practise in poetry. "Poetry is a superior amusement. I do not mean an amusement for superior people. I call it an amusement—because if you call it anything else you are likely to call it something still more false. Here Roger Sharrok in his essay, "The critical revolution of T. S. Eliot" quotes Eliot's opinion on poetry.

Eliot's theory of poetry has been established in his early essays such as "Frontiers of Criticism" and especially in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." This paper will attempt to examine the

various points that the later essay puts forward and to find an application or deviation of these points in his 'epic' masterpiece "The Wasteland."

The first point that immediately strikes one is of course the poets concern with 'tradition.' He says: "We dwell with satisfaction upon the poets difference from his predecessors and we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their

'I shall walk out as I am,
'With my hair down,.....what shall we do
tomorrow'
'What shall we ever do?'

The hot water at ten

And if it rains, a closed car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess.

Pressing lidless eyes, and waiting for a knock
upon the door."

"The Wasteland" abounds in fragments and they are used either to demonstrate the parallel or to underline the contrast. In "The Burial of the Dead", Dantes lines in his 'Inferno' (I had not thought death had undone so many) are used to describe the city of clerks going across London Bridge :

"Unreal city,

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so
many,

I had not thought death had undone so
many."

Eliot does not claim to be going anything better, except that he is trying to make it different. In the 'Inferno' Dante describes the spirit of the people who are being punished for their deeds on earlier. Thus it is the real hell that Dante describes, while Eliot describes the hell on earth formed by its inhabitants living purposeless lines. Eliot communicates effectively the horror of the modern wasteland through a parallel between Dante and himself.

This is one way of using fragments from other writers. The second way is to emphasize the contrast rather than the parallel. Eliot uses a fragment from Goldsmith's "The Vicar of Wakefield". "When lovely woman stoops to folly" and to express the reaction of the typist girl to her copulation with her carbuncular young man. In Goldsmith's novel, Olivia repents her seduction and says that the only way left for a woman in her position is to die. But the typist in "The Wasteland" "Smooths her brain with automatic hand,

And puts a record on the gramophone" In her complete indifference to her seduction, she is a sharp contrast to Olivia.

The fragments from other writers used as epigraphs or parts of the poem point to the literary tradition used by Eliot. But it would be wrong to make a complete identification of these fragments to Eliot's concept of tradition. There are only two kinds of tradition a) the literary tradition, comprehending the entire literary history, and b) the tradition more often a re-interpreter of the tradition itself evolved by an individual writer. The two-fold division of tradition is evident from the following comment: "The poet must be very conscious of the main current, which doesn't at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations. He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of his own country which he learns to be more important than his own private mind - is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing enroute, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare or Homer, on the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen."

This leads up to another point in his theory of poetry—that of impersonality. Eliot's theory of impersonality is bound up with his own practice. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" he says that in poetry, "What happens is a continual surrender (of the poet) as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. "The impersonal theory of poetry deals with the relation of the poem to its author. The poet has not a 'personality' to express but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways, says Eliot, "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of

art is by finding an objective correlative, in other words, a set of objectives, or situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion; is immediately evoked."

This 'objective correlative' is, the unifying principle which every artist requires if he is to improve a form or a shape on the apparent chaos of his initial experience. The problem of this objective correlative presented itself in its greatest complexity in "The Wasteland", where Eliot was trying to express a most complex emotion. The complexity of the emotion is from the poem itself and not from the poet's mind. As the title itself suggests, the emotional effect of 'The Wasteland' is of sterility, and whether the sterility was personal or of the age that Eliot was expressing in the poem is an insignificant question. The idea of sterility is effectively communicated through the objective correlative. The sterility in the poem operates on two levels, namely sexual and spiritual, and the two levels combine in the grail myth described in Miss Weston's 'From Ritual to Romance,' which is the chief source of "The Wasteland's objective correlative."

The bringing together of impressions and shaping them into a centre of awareness is something that poets of all ages have done. But the most that Eliot could do as he came to see increasingly clearly in the course of his efforts to transcend the merely fragmentary or episodic, was to set a deliberate frame work side by side with broken, discontinuous experience. This throws light on the method of 'The Wasteland.' Eliot was out to create a shape, a form from the material provided by his experience. This implied a projection, an objectivizing, of the original impulse: for it was just in this that the urge to creation to self-expression was held by the poet to consist. The special problem of 'The Wasteland' rose

largely from the fact that it was far more ambitious in scope and intention than any of the preceding poems in which Eliot had followed more or less the same procedure. Its aim was to convey, beyond one man's personal intention nothing less than the state of civilization. To achieve this the poem needed something more than a single centre of awareness. His way of conveying the picture was on two binding principles. The first was an acceptance of the need to work through "a heap of broken images." He accepts this need because it was, in reality, a world of fragments he was setting out to explore. The various 'characters' or 'voices' who succeed one another, in the course of the course of the poem, and who tend, as the poet has told us in his note, to merge into the shadowy central figure of the blind prophet Tiresias, are as "broken as shifting as the images which convey such identity—or lack of it - as they possess. The aim is not to create a final impression of chaos. It is simply that the 'shape' of the poem, if it has come at all, can only emerge gradually, can only be achieved in the process of expression.

The 'heap of broken images' represents only one of the other pillars of the construction upon which 'The Wasteland' rests. Against the poet seems to set an awareness of what is left, of the continuity of significant tradition.

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent", he says it is not in the personal emotions that a poet is remarkable. "The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotion of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. "The business of the poet is not to find new emotions to express but to use the ordinary ones, and in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not actual emotions at all. This is just what Eliot does in 'The Wasteland', especially in the incident of "Marie, Marie on tight". The picture that Marie recalls is not one of as positive an effective as the incident of the hyacinth girl. "She first relates a moment in late spring in Munich

when she walked with a man. Immediately after this her memory flirts elsewhere and she recalls another picture, of her childhood when she was put on the mountains on a slid with her cousin. There is in this memory, something of value. While sliding she experienced a feeling of freedom, which by implication she has now lost. Finally, completing the complex, in the last time of the first paragraph there is another picture : 'I read much of the night, and go South in winter.' There are several emotions implied here. The lady is restless and bored, and she is also rich enough to go South in winter.' She is aristocratic, moves in cosmopolitan circles; growing old and has had at least one experience of enduring worth though it is a trivial as a slide ride, but now her life is reduced to fragments in her memory. There is added to the composite picture a touch of fear. She disclaims Russian origins because she is perhaps in a political situation where she needs to be truly German. The emotion conveyed here is this : Marie's is a life of some potential wasted, not so much by any action or intention of hers, but simply wasted by inaction, a failure to grasp experience.

Another feature of Eliot's concept of emotion-portrayed is his rejection of the Romantic subjectivity, of "emotion recollected in tranquility." For him emotion which he has never experienced will serve his turn as well as those familiar to him. What Eliot describes is neither an emotion, nor is it recollected in tranquility, it is a concentration, of a great number of experiences which to the practical person would not seem to be experience at all. It is a concentration which does not happen consciously or of deliberation. The first woman in the "The Game of Chess" is bored and cannot think of anything to do, for all the splendour of her surroundings, which shows among other things, the sordid rape of

Philomel by Tereus, which Eliot manages to make peculiarly nasty with "Jug Jug" to dirty ears." The nightingales sing in vain. The lady can think of only crazy things to do, like rushing out into the street with her hair down and however much she shuts her eyes, she and her companion can never shut out the desert sun of their wasteland : "You know nothing? Do you remember

'Nothing?'

I remember

Those were pearls that were his eyes.

'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'

Nothing, a sense of waste is the predominant emotion in this lady's life. These experiences are not 'recollected' and they finally unite in an atmosphere which is 'tranquil' only in that it is a passive attending upon the event.

Eliot summarises his theory of the impersonality of the poet by saying that there is a great deal in poetry which should be conscious and deliberate : "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion of personality, but an escape from personality."

But, for all Eliot's emphasis on impersonality, poetry and tradition does have a subjective side. The fragments used from other writers used by Eliot are only a part of his total view of tradition. The fragments from Dante suggest that time does not matter in literary tradition. B. Ifor Evans says : "T. S. Eliot who in his prose advocated tradition, has in his poetry been more responsible than any other writer for the break with the past" And the main point in Eliot's poetry that marks a break with tradition (according to Evans) is its allusiveness. Eliot employs his borrowings in such a way that "the magnificence of the original passage is torn down and trampled."² By tradition, Eliot means not mere conformity to the literature of the past but the use of it for the formation and restraint of the individual talent. What Evans calls the 'tearing down' and 'trampling' of the original only points to

1. Eliot T. S - Tradition and the Individual Talent.

2. Evans Ifor - Cited by Rajnath - T. S. Eliot's theory of poetry. A Study of the Changing Critical Ideas in the Development of his prose and poetry Chap. 3 pg. 62

the tradition being stirred by the individual talent.

Early reviewers look upon Eliot's allusive method as a *prendo* method by which the poet draws at life from the spectacle of books. What they missed was the immediate emotional power and authority of the tone of the poem. The general objection to his allusive method could be answered by taking quotations from his own criticism against private critical misgivings. We know from 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' that he was attempting to write a poem with not merely his generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literary tradition of Europe had a simultaneous existence. At one level the poem's allusions can be seen as a way of bringing the whole of literature to bear upon the situation described, giving it a historical and geographical description. Eliot believed that originality of material could only lead to eccentricity, true originality lay for him "in an original way of assembling the most disparate material to form a new whole".

"The Wasteland" was written at a time when he was interested in the theory of the poet as inheritor and bearer of tradition. It was concerned with the public communication of his theories of tradition and history and with the bring of the past to bear upon the present by juxtaposing fragments from many periods in one list.

Of the relation between the past and the present, Tiresias shows, that the poem, for all its elaborations and use of dramatic vignettes, is basically a logical observation on the present, confirmed by a metaphoric relation to the past myths. These myths perform the function of projecting the poets vision, for if the poets ego is present at all, it is behind the science and idiomatic differentiation. There is a brilliant triumph in the way Eliot establishes contrasts of local atmosphere and place with the utmost economy of detail and suggestion. One of his persistent techniques is to switch atmospheres with almost crude speed :

"Looking into the heart of light, the silence.
Od' und leer das Meer.

Madame Sosostriis, famous clarivoyante,
Had a bad cold.'

The almost perverse purpose of these shock contrasts jerk the reader into an awareness of the emotional identity beyond superficial differences. Though sharply and separately framed, the episodes share a basic group of predominant emotions like anxiety, fear. Such emotional identity helps the reader at first to orient among the fragments of experience united by the poet in so subtle and oblique a way. Once these predominant emotions are established, the mind is free to respond to the intricate range of thematic links formed through tone and image.

Any interpretation of poetic theory is incomplete if it does not indicate the effect of the doctrine on the practice of poetry. There are qualities in Eliot's poetry that are basically qualities of Augustan poetry too. A characteristic of classicism is an already existing background, whose function is to provide the poem's incidental symbolism. The Rape of the Lock' is conceived within the framework of the classical epic and of the same nature is Eliot's acceptance of traditional literature as his poetic world. In 'The Wasteland', the blending of traditional European and Eastern thought is the necessary background to his interpretation of the contemporary problem. The basic symbolism is taken from the grail legend, and in the last section, Eliot introduces the journey symbol, which is a well defined feature of European legend.

The symbols in the poem are used for their poetic value and are interdependent. The beliefs in the poem are entirely consonant with all Eliot's work. It is about the degeneracy of human nature. It concerns itself mainly with degraded forms of love. Its hope lies in that love which is generous and sympathetic in divine love, and the failing of the poem is perhaps the great leap that it makes from the sordid or dispirited pictures of sexual relationship to the exhortation of the thunder.

CLARAMMA XAVIER
II M. A. Literature

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Five Finger Exercise

PETER SHAFFER

THE THEME OF ISOLATION

“Clive...: I am myself, Myself—Myself... The smell of my skin is me, the trees and sofas that I see with my own eyes are me. You should want to become me and see them as I see them—as I should with you. But we can never exchange feelings. Keep us apart. We live away in our skins from minute, feeling everything quite differently....”

Isolation is the central focus of the play and from this point of view the play has been rather interestingly titled. Music plays an important role here and this is where the title assumes importance. Any reader who knows music knows that a “five finger exercise” is “a piano exercise for practicing all fingers, keeping them on the same five notes all the time”... The main purpose of this piano exercise is to strengthen the fingers so as to improve fluency and coordination.

The phrase “five finger exercise” thus has several aspects to it. In the first place, each finger is isolated and individual despite being linked to the same hand; secondly, (and this is a corollary) despite their individuality, they are linked to the same hand; and thirdly, they need to be strengthened in order to coordinate. Each of these three aspects has been skilfully worked out in the play—emphasizing Shaffer’s theme of isolation and non-isolation.

In “Five Finger Exercise”, Peter Shaffer has taken a family out of its usual urban setting and placed it in a new environment. He deliberately isolates it. Very little mention is made of characters outside the family. Of course, Walter Langer, strictly speaking, is not a member of the Harrington family, yet, despite his German background, he is a part of the family—a realisation they achieve only at the close of the play. With all the lights

thus focussed almost pitilessly on the Harringtons the underlying tensions are bound to reveal themselves. Very significantly, the setting is static—both a reflection and a foil for the action of the play. It creates an atmosphere of claustrophobia which makes Clive’s desire to break away understandable. It also serves as a foil, because in this static setting, the characters grow towards realization and awareness.

Significantly too, the living room “almost aggressively expresses Mrs Harrington’s personality.” Louise Harrington in fact, is one of the major influences of the play. In Act I Scene II, Louise reveals part of herself to Walter—her basic insecurity, unhappiness and dissatisfaction with her family. She from what Clive terms “a plaster-gilt suffers complex”, constantly emphasizing her aristocratic background as opposed to her husband Stanley’s “bourgeois” blood. Louise’s isolation lies in her dishonesty and self-deception. Stanley epitomises a culture which she despises. So she lays claim to a separate identity—the antithesis of Stanley’s bourgeoisie blood; and this she desperately tries to assert even if it means destroying him.

Pamela observes :

“I know mother’s frightful to him about culture and uses music and things to keep him out—But isn’t that just because he made *Her* keep out of things when they were first married....”

Clearly, Louise’s isolation is both a cause and a product of Stanley’s isolation.

It is this that is responsible for her bitterness, and her love for Clive, no matter how warm, is coloured by more than a hint of

“Clive-You should want to become one and see them as I see them—as I should with you, But we can never exchange. Feelings don't unite us, you see?...”

And later he pleads :—

“Why can't we be important to each other? -I want to know you...”

Much of this isolation is because they are afraid of sharing themselves too deeply with the other members. So Clive feels there is something wrong with him; Walter refuses to divulge details of his German past; Stanley takes refuge in his statement, 'I don't understand-' while Louise conceals herself behind a mask of intellectualism. While it is important for them to retain a sense of being unique, separate individuals, it is also important that there should be harmony in their individualism.

The importance of the title now becomes clear. The Harringtons need an exercise to jolt them out of their isolation, to strengthen them and to enable them to overcome their feelings of insecurity. The play is this exercise and Walter initiates the process. His entry into the family results in an unfolding of family tensions. More than this, he becomes the focus of their attempts

to grow in their relationship to each other. It is he, for example, who persuades Clive to break away from the family to find himself. Walter is the catalyst who precipitates the family conflict and it is through the conflict that the individual members abandon their isolation in order to justify, and hence, to reveal their hidden motives. Walter's intrusion into the family thus is a necessary one, a healthy one because it leads to a growth in awareness. Far from being an outsider he becomes an essential integral part of the family, a fact the other members realize only when he attempts to commit suicide. The shock of his attempt brings home to them not just his importance but the importance of each member - the fact that they belong to the same family. In the crisis, family conflicts are forgotten and Walter from being branded a German Bastard, is finally accepted in the family. With this, they have moved from lack of coordination and discord towards fluency and harmony. Once again, it is Clive who voices their plea :

“The courage. For all of us. Oh, God - Give it”

FRANCESCA SOANS
II B. A. Literature



The House and The Problem of Identity in 'A House for Mr. Biswas'

Man likes distance. To distance himself from others he builds a house. The house is man's sanctuary, a haven to which he retreats to seek his difference from others. It is also a symbol of love, security, and unity. In literature the symbol of the "house" has been used to convey all these meanings. We shall see now how Naipaul uses this symbol in his novel 'A House for Mr. Biswas.'

'The House', Michael Thorpe says, continues the themes of Naipaul's earlier novels: the perplexing relation of the individual to society, his struggle to impress himself upon it through achievement or defy its pressures with transforming fantasy that puts a gloss upon life and extracts order from the rude chaos of everyday existence. Seen in this light the house becomes the symbol of the ordinary man's struggle to "climb on to the ladder of life; to find order in chaos and to find self-realisation". But for Mr. Biswas the struggle to "climb on to the ladder" is far from easy for two major reasons: - firstly because Mr. Biswas is anything but a hero; and secondly because of the environment which offers no scope for development. Therefore, Naipaul uses the metaphor of the "House" to portray the conflict between determinism and freedom and the incongruity that arises from the gap between aspiration and reality. Mr. Biswas's problem is that he cannot find an "aesthetically and morally coherent system in terms of which he can define himself."

Society is eventually a limiting factor for Naipaul's hero. Hanuman House represents the social reality against which he must assert himself. William Walsh states

that Hanuman House is a symbol of a slavish system which provides subsistence and cover in return for total devotion, and abdication of the self. Hanuman House is a microcosm of a world which turns to ritual to recover a past which is no longer there. In the Tulsi household Mr. Biswas sees that everyone else exists to fulfil a function rather than to be a person. His rejection of the roles offered him, the dutiful son-in-law, the resident sign-painter, the obedient shopkeeper, the friendly uncle, means that for the whole of the novel he is on his own, and as soon as he detects the nature of a role assigned to him, including that of husband and father, he changes; he leaves to begin again on his own terms.

I have mentioned that the two courses available to the individual against a hostile environment are - achievement and fantasy. Biswas makes use of both. When the individual feels helpless before the conditions of society he can yet maintain his identity through rebellion and through fantasy. Fantasy is a means of ordering and giving shape to experience. Mr. Biswas's fantasies are not escapist. They are creative in nature and it would be more appropriate to term them imagination or creativity. "Imagination helps a man to become whole; Fantasy, which is the expression of a perverse hunger destroys a man," says Paul Theroux. Mr. Biswas's creativity is emphasized from the beginning. The first sign of this appears when he writes "cancelled" very neatly in block print in his arithmetic note book and is reprimanded by Lal. From this he goes to his first profession which is that of a sign painter. Another

kind of imaginative fantasy is in name-giving. Mr. Biswas is inexhaustible at this game. Hari he calls "Pundit" then Mr. God, then the Holy Ghost. His two brothers-in-law; 'the two Gods' become 'the monkeys'. Other Tulsis are the Bull, the Cow, the Hen. "And what about you?" Shama asks derisively. "The barking puppy dog?" Mrs. Tulsi is 'the Ad Queen', 'the She Fox.', Prakash's father whose real name is never told is W. C. Tuttle because he owns many Westerns by that author. Seth is the Boss and the Chinese receptionist in the doctor's office in Port of Spain is 'Fishface'. What redeems Mr. Biswas is that though he uses imagination he has a fundamental scepticism, a gift for self parody, and an ability to modify these pauses with humour. Though he is deceiving himself at the beginning it does not last and he manages to find a way to dispel his fantasy, to undo it and undeceive himself, to find his place in the real world to reach a point of resolution.

Hanuman House is a symbol of the decaying, disintegrated Hindu society in Trinidad. The novelist uses the house as a symbol to convey darkness and confusion - "Blackness seemed to fill the kitchen like a solid substance" - Hanuman House abounds with images of being trapped. But at the same time the anonymity or loss of individuality in this joint system provides an escape from the outside world where he cannot assert his identity.

The decision to move out of the Tulsi household is a kind of rebellion in itself. "The Chase" and the house there are significant because of the development of the Biswas Shama relationship. Biswas tries to discover meaning in family relationships. This is the real beginning to the marriage, the awakening of Mr. Biswas's feelings for his wife; first gratitude then tenderness. It is their first home and Shama cleans and busies herself making it habitable. But this new relation-

ship begins to strain Mr. Biswas. He rejects what Theroux calls the "established pattern of sensation" that he sees Shama wishing for. Mr. Biswas's marriage is happy for him only when he feels he has succeeded in tearing himself away from the Tulsi grip. He warns his children against the Tulsis, urges them to rebel. Naipaul says, "Their rooms became the place where he not only lived but had status without having to assert his rights or explain his worth" - he is able to find in the "Chase" a status for himself - that of father and husband. He makes another creative attempt to order experience through his reading. He reads innumerable novels, particularly those in the reader's library, and he even tries to write encouraged by the appearance in a Port of Spain magazine of a puzzling story by Musil. His creativity reveals itself in another form - landscape painting. But here too the social background is a limiting factor. "Not of the abandoned field next to the shop, and other familiar landscape" but he painted "cool ordered forest scenes, with gracefully curving grass". Sometimes the nature of Biswas's revolt reveals itself in absurdity. In the 'Chase' he begins to grow "his nails to an extreme length and holds them upto startle customers."

In the house in the 'Green Vale' Mr. Biswas tries his hand at different jobs - a driver, a sub-overseer. This is a step towards gaining independence from the Tulsis and it is connected with his desperate need to build his own house. Biswas's sense of panic and the disintegration of his personality is bound to his sense of not having a house. Biswas's present of a doll's house to Savi at Christmas is symbolic of his attempt to save Anand and Savi from the cruelty of the universe. The breaking of the dolls house by the Tulsi children is a symbol for the shattering of Mr. Biswas's illusion. At the end of this phase though we see Biswas finding sustenance in his relationship with his son we also find in him a considerable loss of the sense of identity. 'I am not your father. God is your father'—

he tells Anand. Here Mr. Biswas's attempts at self assertion are destroyed, not by the hopeless environmental conditions, but through the designs of nature.

Mrs. Biswas's return to Hanuman House highlights another aspect of the house. Though this kind of set up takes away individuality it can also be very reassuring. Biswas's attitude changes to Hanuman House, accepting it as the symbol of comfort and stability. "He welcomed the warmth and reassurance of the room. Every wall was solid"

But Biswas must move to the city to fulfill his dreams of writing and his fertile imagination. The symbolism of the house is maintained. The city strikes Biswas as a place of promise, excitement and activity. "Because he comprehended the city whole, he did not isolate the individual, see the man behind the desk or counter, behind the push cart or the steering wheel of the bus; he saw only the activity, felt the call to the senses, and knew that below it all there was an excitement, which was grasped". In the city Mr Biswas' creativity finds an outlet in journalism for which he is admired and respected. He is reconciled to the Tulsis. We notice that once Mr. Biswas acquires this job his status in Hanuman House changes. His wife shows a renewed respect for him. Mr. Biswas's efforts in the city culminate in his acquisition of a new and imposing house which gives him a sense of completeness and status in society. At this stage, he seeks escape though writing but his articles are rejected. His stories titled 'Escape' which reflect his search for romance, and which are based on his own situation remain incomplete. But Biswas does find recompense in his attempt to impart an education to his son which makes possible Anand's liberation. Reverses begin with the coming of the new editor in the Sentinel and Mr Biswas is forced to limit his fertile imagination by the motto **REPORT NOT DISTORT**. Forced to limit

his imagination, his writing becomes slow and dull. "Now writing words he did not feel, he was cramped."

All through the novelist has been building up the disintegration of the older order represented by Hanuman House. The move to Sharthills is a last attempt to create a kind of idyllic pastoralism which makes for their disintegration. The similarity between Mr. Biswas's home in Greenvale and that in Sharthills is that both of them are situated on the Tulsis estate, a reminder of the fact that Mr Biswas has not yet succeeded in freeing himself from his dependence on the enslaving old system. It is important to note that though he tries to assert his difference from the others his home is based on the same structure as hundreds of other rural homes. It is here that Mr Biswas realises the limitations of fantasy. He leaves his story writing and descends into the world of reality. A change occurs in his ambition at this point. 'He had lost the vision of the house' Mr Biswas's quest for self assertion transforms itself now into his attempt to live through his son Anand. "His vision of the future became only visions of Anand's future".

In his second return to Hanuman House Mr. Biswas changes his attitude towards the house because he realises that he did not need to make a mark as a proof of his existence. He has found some kind of meaning in relationships as a father and husband. "Relationships stood where none existed, he stood at their centre". Hanuman House in spite of itself, adds a new range of meaning to Mr Biswas's dream of a house of his own, his security and status and his rebellion against Hanuman House expands into a struggle against tyranny, an urgent need to leave the mark of his existence on the world- "He discovers that his identity is in his relationships. With Anand's return the past is finally destroyed with all its warmth and sweetness.

The slapping incident is a turning point in the novel because Mr. Biswas's rebellion now involves the whole family. The children force Mr. Biswas into his final commitment. Mr. Biswas rejects the recreated Hanuman House, "the swamping of his identity, its denial of his right to speak and act for himself. He rejects the Indianess it claims to uphold, its security, its philistinism, rejecting the light it still provides." He rejects it not only for himself, but also for his children.

He is cheated in the new home. But it is emphasized that the house is a culmination of all his former efforts. This house becomes for his children a centre of security a home such as their father never enjoyed. It is also a jumping ground for the children to study abroad. It is a place for Shama where she learns new family loyalties; to her husband and her children. For Mr. Biswas it is the climax of a lifetime's vision.

For Anand it becomes the pivot of the novel in which he records the quality of his father's experience and a means of organising on a fresh and deeper perspective his vision of that colonial society. In the end the empty house

seems to suggest Shama's grief, White says Mr. Biswas is very happy with his house though it is badly constructed. But achievement and failure are aspects of a single experience. The house is the image of their paradox.

Walsch says "the novel's substance is the transformation of Mr. Biswas, a slave to place, history, and biography into a free man—the sign and realisation of that emancipation being his House. "Mr Biswas's search for a house is a symbol for man's search to humanise his context."

Thus, 'A House for Mr. Biswas is a novel dealing with human problems of universal application drawing upon local detail to make itself credible but open to all whose identity is at odds with their society; who understand homelessness and the threat of disorder; who are ready to sympathise with struggle and failure. And the 'House' is a central image giving coherence and significance to the multitude of details and ideas.

ANJALI GERA

II M.A. Literature

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Realism of Synge as in 'Riders to the Sea'

The close of the preface to Synge's play, 'Playboy of the western World', marks his attitude to reality and realism as it can be expressed on the stage. Synge remarks. "On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed, and people have grown sick of the false joy of the musical comedy, that has been given them in place of

the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality". It was this idea that made him love life with all its "harshness and grotesque ignominious familiarities."¹

To Synge the natural world was present to the senses or the imagination, at every moment. It is present not as mere background but in its own right. Very often, we realise that it is the wildness, rather than the

beauty of nature that is stressed. Nature when related to man, as in 'Riders to the Sea,' we realise, is by reference to the needs of living. Consequently, we realise that there is nothing sentimental in his awareness of nature.

His plays, as he was the first to insist, owe much of their energy to the life of the Aran islands. So also do they owe much to the farmers tramps and tinkers of Wicklow and the west of Ireland. It was to him, a life "that had not only simplicity and passion, but emotional subtlety, courtesy and humour."² It was this sound conviction of the value of such a life that encouraged of him, a dramatic method that was basically representational. Consequently, the structures of his plays are quite straight forward, as in 'Riders to the Sea'.

There is in Synge, a concern for the whole person, including the body, and his conception of character is dynamic. It is this that makes Ronald Gaskell remark that in Synge, "energy counts for more than the marks left by the struggle towards self-determination." In short, he was a dramatist of the passion, not of the will, a plausible reason for his memorable characters being women—as Maurya in 'Riders to the Sea' and Deirdre in 'Deirdre of the Sorrows.'

His primary interest lay in the total reality of his characters. Micheal Mac Liammar points out that Synge's realism (the reality of his characters) operates at two levels. First, there is the characters' vivid realisation through their senses of the world about them. Secondly, there was the method of realisation by each other. This kind of speech, devoid of self-regard, would help one to appreciate the reality of others. Reality is more sharply defined in Synge, by adopting the method of

'genuine objectivity', as Ronald Gaskell remarks of it. An example may be seen in the artistic and beautiful distancing of Maurya towards the end of 'Riders to the Sea'. We have seen her in the light of the traumatic experience she has undergone and consider her almost as a tragic, heroic figure, when Cathleen's remark interposes. "It's getting old she is, and broken", places her in a suddenly harder light.

Yeats believed that, "tragedy excludes character". On the contrary, Synge would not conform to this idea. The tragic power of the ending of Synge's plays, based as their source, an awareness of men and women in their totality. To Synge emotion was not something to be enjoyed. For example, Maurya's passion derives its significance from the sharp etching it gives to a reality, that is made harsh by pain and disappointment, Yeats remarked of the 'astringent joy and hardness', that was present in Synge's work. It was this hardness we realise, that, by affirming the contradictions of experience, gives us moments of authentic drama: as in Maurya accepting the death of Bartley.

"The challenge to a writer for whom reality is the life of the passions, the senses and the natural world, comes finally from time and death."³ Time as the process of change including both death, and births, is strong in Synge's plays. Synge's awareness of death, has, we realise nothing morbid about it. To him death was as real as birth, as well as a counterpart to the joy of life.

In his notes about the Aran islands, he has remarked, "the Aran islander, can make a cradle or a coffin." So also, do we find that in 'Riders to the Sea', death is defined against birth :

1. Michael Mac Liammoir : J. M. Synge's Plays, Poems & Prose, Everyman's Library ; P. ix-
2. Ronald Gaskell : The Realism of J. M. Synge : Critical Quarterly, Vol. 5, 5, No. 3.
3. Ronald Gaskell : Realism of J. M. Synge ; Critical Quarterly. Vol. 5, No. 3.

actively detest. Becky's act of throwing the Johnson's dictionary at Miss. Jemima is as great a slap in the face of high society as is her revenge in the Bareares at Brussels.

Her one colossal gaffe is when she is caught with Lord Steyne by Rawdon. For Becky, who all her life has been making decisions and charming men who doted on her, such a show of strength as when Rawdon boxes Lord Steyne (Symbolic of high society) to the floor, is a luxury. 'Becky's schemes lay in ruins, but she watched her husband with something like adoration and desire. When I wrote that sentence, I slapped my fist on the table and said "That is a touch of genius". said Thackeray. In Becky, he embodied many of his own ambitions and feelings, and ultimately, it was his aim to present her as a character worth admiring and sympathising with. Even her blackest acts find extenuation, if we look hard enough. Her ill-treatment of little Rawdon is the failing that makes the heart bleed most. Thackeray shrewdly shows us that she is most violent where she feels most guilty. Her neglected child is 'a reproach and a pain to her'. She hates little Rawdon for what she has done to him. Seen in this light, many of Becky's actions are excusable due to their true motives.

Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* hailed as one of the greatest novels of all time, alive in every word, as was first published in 1936. In a way, *Gone with the Wind* is also a novel without a hero. The gigantic plot is woven round Scarlett O'Hara. The novel is set in and around the period of the American Civil War.

Like Becky, Scarlett's transformation takes place after her loss of financial security. The war disrupts the very life of the people in the South and it is after she leaves for Charleston that Scarlett hungers for money, and the comforts that accompany it.

1 Our headed and intelligent Scarlett is not beautiful, but men hardly realized it when she

chose to be charming, and Scarlett chose to be charming when ever it suited her purpose - like the times when she charms Charles Hamilton and Frank Kennedy into marrying her. Looked at coldly these actions of her's may appear cruel, even heartless and malicious in that she deprives Honey Wilkes of her Beau and even Suellen of her's; but when one studies the cause and motives of her actions, one is forced to excuse Scarlett - Scarlett had never willingly allowed Charles to pay court to her but caught on the rebound when Ashley's engagement to Melanie was announced she numbly agreed to marry Charles who was over joyed. When she makes a play for Frank despite Suellen it is because of an overriding anxiety to save Tara at all costs. She is shrewd enough to realize that Suellen, in a similar position, would never save Tara, and grasps the opportunity.

Her very endurance and grit throughout the novel engage the reader to the end as do her vanities and her selfishness. Like Becky, she is, in a way, an alien to the behaviour of the society she lives in. Full of zest and overwhelming *joie de vivre*, she asserts her scorn for social courtesies when she dances with Rhett at the ball even before the year of mourning for Charles is out.

Melanie, like Amelia, acts as a kind of foil to Scarlett. Her weakness and lack of determination recommend Scarlett's character doubly. Though there is a lot of difference between the characters of Melanie and Amelia, both believe implicitly in the goodness of the protagonist - Melaine believes in Scarlett because she admires her and is trusting herself. Basically good natured Amelia does not recognize Becky for what she is because she cannot understand even herself leave alone others. Contrarily, it is this fact that enhances the appearance of cruelty in both Scarlett and Becky. Both privately detest Melanie and Amelia, though adored by them. Scarlett cannot recognize Melly's true strength

of character, and takes her for a milksop. Like Becky, Scarlett finds no female friend except Melanie right upto the end.

Just as in *Vanity Fair*, the drumbeats of the Napoleonic war, rise to a crescendo that ends with George's death, the civil war, forms the background for 'Gone with the Wind.' It is war that brings out the best in Scarlett. She detests Melly, but single handedly, for the sake of a promise made to Ashley, delivers Melly's baby and latter transports her alone from Charleston to Tara through a raging fire, facing the threat of the Union's soldiers. It is Scarlett who takes into her able hands the care of the now senile Gerald the sick Suellen and Carreen, a house full of helpless Negro servants and the lands of Tara going to ruin. It is Scarlett, who with the help of Will Benteen, manages to resurrect the affairs of Tara, and house Melly and Beau as well. It is in these circumstances that she decides that somehow, someday, she was going to have plenty of money even if she has to commit murder to get it; It is after she finds herself faced with the almost impossible task of paying the taxes for Tara that she is driven to desperate actions. She promises Rhett 'anything' for money and later, finding him unable to pay, makes a desperate bid for Frank's hand, and through flattery, wins it and saves Tara and all concerned in the nick of time. This act completes her break with society where one and all are against a women who marries her sister's beau, buys and runs a mill, engages convicts for workers and is ostentatiously prosperous when others are in need. In the process, her grit and will power are forgotten—that she got where she was because she was a maverick believing that women need not merely let out rooms to be gentle womanly is condemned.

Just as in *Rawdon*, for a while at least, Becky finds a person with a sympathetic character to while away much time 'footloose and fancy free' paying no rent and living by their wits, Scarlett finds a person

with a similar character in Rhett; "For I do love you, Scarlett, I love you because we're renegades, both of us, and selfish rascals", are Rhett's words when parting with her to participate in the war. She marries the persistent Rhett, but doesn't recognize her own love for him. Unfortunately for her, Rhett changes in character after Bonnie's birth, even tries to reassert himself in society for Bonnie's sake and generally makes a better father to the children than Scarlett does a mother. The closing of the novel finds Rhett leaving Scarlett because the woman he loved was too hard, too long. It is unfortunate for Scarlett that she realizes her love for Rhett only after he leaves - and that in leaving, he has broken many of her idyllic images and ideas.

Becky finds herself in a similar plight when Rawdon leaves her after the showdown with Lord Stegne. One explanation for the attraction between these couples may be that having been so masterful all their lives, it was a luxury for both Scarlett and Becky to encounter so much strength and determination in a man.

The less important characters too can be said to have many things in common - Dobbin and Ashley, for instance, Scarlett's affair with Ashley is her main reason for despising Melanie. But she looks after her because of her promise to Ashley.

Becky, too, does a good, turn to Amelia when she reveals George's letter to her and makes her realize her stupidity in rejecting Dobbin. This way, she can hurt and help Amelia, which she does, killing two birds with a single stone, as it were. Dobbin has been called a 'spiritual geiger counter'. Ashley is one who lives in an Utopia of thoughts. He admires Scarlett for what she is but cannot understand her intense emotions for him, nor does he wholly approve of them. But his gentle remonstrances can only be a paper dam to Scarlett's flooding emotions and she determinedly pursues him without

stopping to analyse her feelings. It is only towards the close of the novel, at Melanie's death bed that the realization confronts her that Ashley loves not her, but Melanie - that they were both people who understood each other well and were people with harmonizing characters. She realizes that the Ashley she has been worshipping was an image, not the reality. The most shocking reatiation is her love for Rhett, but it comes too late for her to do much then - but for Scarlett, there's Tomorrow "I'll think about it, tomorrow in Tara. After all, tomorrow's another day." The very thought of Tara is security and comfort and may lead to more positive results when the problem yields to the pressure of so determined a character as Scarlett's.

We can only hope the same for Becky whose future lies amenable to the pressure of her character. It is therefore not ironic, that both novels feature iconoclasm. In the former, Rawdon's image of Becky is broken and vice versa. Amelia's image of George and Dobbin's of Amelia are broken. In the latter, Scarlett's image of Ashley, Ashley's of Melanie Rhett's of Scarlett and Scarlett's of Rhett are shattered.

The conclusions of both novels however, hint at optimism when circumstances yield to the domination of the strong characters of the protagonists.

PRABHA, J.
II Year Literature

Book Review :

'My name is Asher Lev'—CHAIM POTOK
The Novelist's conception of pain and its meaning in the novel.

The book haunts, and hurts. It is intense throughout and strangely poetic. It is the story of Asher Lev in his own words, his growth as an artist, the pain and anguish of it all, related in a peculiarly muted tone. Peculiar because, the very stillness the tone uses, is packed agony and torment. Take these lines that describe the moment, when the vision he had been subconsciously moving towards, overtakes him :

'And it was then, that it came, though I think it had been coming for a long time and I had been choking it and hoping it would die. But it does not die. It kills you first. I knew there would be no other way to do it. No one says you have to paint alternative anguish and torment. But if you are driven to paint it, there is no other way.'

That one moment in an artist's life, that one moment of exquisite pain which tears him apart and hales his soul out on to canvas is thus beautifully brought out. But what about the meaning that one moment brings for Asher Leu? It is highly significant and exquisitely painful for it grants him the kind of unity he had been seeking. The integrated vision which includes in it his awareness of his Jewish roots together with the Christian conception of pain. For Asher's masterpiece is a crucifixion, the one artistic motif, an orthodox Jew should shun even more vigorously than that of the Nude. By attempting the crucifixion, paradoxically Asher asserts his Jewish roots. For now he sees himself as the Arche typical wandering Jew who would spend the rest of his life seeking atonement for an act that cut him away from his people. Herein lies the psychological skill with which Chaim Potok brings about his resolution. He has already shown Asher,

in the earlier parts of the book haunted by a vision of a mythic ancestor who smashes 'through tall forests, looking mountainous with anger'. The whole point about the mythic ancestor was that he had aided a Goyim nobleman to amass wealth, and thus ravage the poor and oppressed. Unwittingly he had caused blood to be shed, against the precepts of the Torah. Hence he wandered for the rest of his life, seeking atonement, and into a young inheritor's dreams. So Asher, intensely sensitive, sees himself interrupting an External Act of atonement in which all his immediate ancestors, including his father were participating, by refusing to work in bringing the Master of the Universe to the Jews. He had submitted to the consuming Force of Art, and like his private ancestor had to restore balance. The moment of recognition and acceptance is most moving. Asher sees his ancestor beckoning to him. 'Now journey with me, my Asher. Paint the anguish of all the world. Let people see the pain. But create your own moulds, and your own play of forms for the pain. We must give a balance to the universe.'

This is doubly relevant to Asher, this private resolution of his, for his mentor Jacob Kahn had said 'Be a great painter Asher Lev, that will be the only justification for all the pain you will cause'. And this is the feeling that remains with you, when you have just put the book down. Whatever the pain, the torment, Potok has shown great art was worth it. Asher Lev who felt colours, Asher Lev who breathed colours, Asher Lev who could only communicate with the world outside through paint on canvas rises out of the wreck his own deed had created. Impaled on his own bed of thorns created with his own hands he resurrects himself. On the crucifix of his Art he is resurrected. In other words: "He realises, then the magnificence of his own existence."

'There was in that hand the demonic and the divine at one and the same time. The

Demonic and the Divine were two aspects of the same force. Creation was demonic and divine. Creativity was demonic and divine, Art was demonic and divine. I was demonic and divine.'

But the pain felt by his parents? This is what haunts one. Here pain exists on two levels, both of which would torment and cause anguish forever. On the one level is the pain the parents feel, in their roles as Jew. Their son has actually done a crucifixion. An event that has caused rivers of Jewish blood to flow. And he had put his mother on the crucifix. Even the mother, the friend and companion of years gone by could not understand :

"There are limits Asher'. Her voice trembled and her eyes were wet. 'Everything has a limit' But the deeper pain lay in the son's vision of his mother's pain and suffering which lays an extra load on her present agony. Asher has come to understand the agony his mother went through fearing for her husband and the son, waiting for them, eternally by a window pane. He had long sensed her pain as a mother and in a revoking of Michaelangelo's Pieta made the woman bearing the twisted arm of the crucified Jesus resemble his mother. Unconsciously Potok has an acute feeling for psychological reaction and no where is this revealed as in this detail. This effect of lingering pain that one finally senses is pure poetry. A virtual melody is created out of emotion. This does not in any way reflect on language, but on the mood evoked. The delicacy with which it is done is possible only to great poetry. As in Keat's Ode to a Nightingale one finds the same evocative power present at the end almost a taste of pain.

This book is not just a work that seeks to find certain answers. It is an experience and a cruel one at that.

V. GEETHA,
III B. A. Literature

**Printed at Gnanodaya Press, 40, Anderson Street, Madras-600 001 and Published by
the Department of English, Stella Maris College, Madras-600 086
(For Private Circulation only)**

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'genuine objectivity', as Ronald Gaskell remarks of it. An example may be seen in the artistic and beautiful distancing of Maurya towards the end of 'Riders to the Sea'. We have seen her in the light of the traumatic experience she has undergone and consider her almost as a tragic, heroic figure, when Cathleen's remark interposes. "It's getting old she is, and broken", places her in a suddenly harder light.

Yeats believed that, "tragedy excludes character". On the contrary, Synge would not conform to this idea. The tragic power of the ending of Synge's plays, based as their source, an awareness of men and women in their totality. To Synge emotion was not something to be enjoyed. For example, Maurya's passion derives its significance from the sharp etching it gives to a reality, that is made harsh by pain and disappointment, Yeats remarked of the 'astringent joy and hardness', that was present in Synge's work. It was this hardness we realise, that, by affirming the contradictions of experience, gives us moments of authentic drama: as in Maurya accepting the death of Bartley.

"The challenge to a writer for whom reality is the life of the passions, the senses and the natural world, comes finally from time and death."³ Time as the process of change including both death, and births, is strong in Synge's plays. Synge's awareness of death, has, we realise nothing morbid about it. To him death was as real as birth, as well as a counterpart to the joy of life.

In his notes about the Aran islands, he has remarked, "the Aran islander, can make a cradle or a coffin." So also, do we find that in 'Riders to the Sea', death is defined against qirth :

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1. Michael Mac Liammoir : J. M. Synge's Plays, Poems & Prose, Everyman's Library ; P. ix-
 2. Ronald Gaskell : The Realism of J. M. Synge : Critical Quarterly, Vol. 5, 5, No. 3.
 3. Ronald Gaskell : Realism of J. M. Synge ; Critical Quarterly, Vol. 5, No. 3.

“I’ve had a husband, and a husband’s father, and six sons in this house—six fine men, though it was a hard birth I had with every one of them and they coming into the world—and some of them were found and some of them were not found, but they’re gone now the lot of them.....”¹

Maurya’s acceptance, not only of the death of Michael and Bartley but of death as the human fate, has been criticised severally as a passive reaction. However, in order to understand the scope of Synge’s realism, we have to take into consideration the last few moments of the play. Maurya’s words :

“May the Almighty God have mercy on Bartley’s soul, and on Michael’s soul, and on the souls of Sheamus and Satch, and Stephen and Shawn; and may He have mercy on my soul, Nora, and on the soul of every one is left living in the world.”

As Gaskell points out it is ‘the broken reverence for the rhythm of life and death, the pathos of the individual death, the references to the white boards and deep graces that occur repeatedly’, that makes the play so moving and intense.

Of his dialogues, we realise that the energy of his phrasing brings out the reality of the senses and creates for us the natural world alive to our imagination. The imagination is not a faculty by which we invent a fantasy world, but the faculty that reveals to us the real world, changing, surprising and discordant.

‘On the stage one must have reality and one must have joy!’ The two are not to be separated for joy is found, according to Synge in, ‘what is superb and wild in reality’. The strength of Synge’s plays lies in the grip that the imagination gives on reality. According to Gaskell, it is in the grip that his imagination gives “on the energy of the body, on the passions of men and women, on wind, rain and sun”, that Synge’s realism lies.

Thus Synge echoed his age by his dramatic genius and painted his world with artistic and mature realism. It is this that has given rise to impassioned expression and action in his plays.

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1. John Millington Synge : Plays, Poems & Songs, An Everyman Paperback, P. 27,

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Vanity Fair and Gone with the Wind— A comparative study

Written in the (20th and the 19th century) respectively, Mitchell's 'Gone with the Wind' and Thackeray's 'Vanity Fair' have an extraordinary similarity of plot and the characterization of protagonist. Born in 1811, Thackeray began work on Vanity Fair in 1845. A novel of both character and society, Vanity Fair has been called 'A novel without a hero'. The plot of the novel revolves round the protagonist, Becky Sharp, an orphan brought up at Miss. Pinkerton's Academy, who, through various ways and means tries to gain a footing in high society. The many adventures she goes through in order to achieve this end, the result of these, and the interaction between various other characters that the novel is crowded with, forms the bed rock of the story.

A novel without a hero, however, has a heroic Rebecca Sharp. Though on the whole the impression that Thackeray insists on giving of her character is harsh and hard, one cannot but admire Becky. Deprived of the little luxuries the other girls at Miss. Pinkerton's had, and badly treated by Miss Pinkerton herself, she is, from society's point of view, of low status. Gifted with great intelligence, a will to learn, many talents and beauty, she is nevertheless looked down upon. Even Amelia's maid sneers at Becky's financial position. Becky, understandably, decides by means fair or foul to worm her way into high society just in order to demonstrate her superiority. She can be charming when it suits her ends, and it suits her ends to make a play of Jos Sedly, Sir Pitt and finally, Rawdon Crawley. Regretting the fact that she has no mother to speak for her openly while

she plays at being coy, we find her bravely acting her own mother. When the need arises cool-headed, sensible Becky puts Sir Pitt's affairs in order, amuses Lady Crowley, and, after her marriage to Rawdon, helps him repay much of his debts and generally advances him so much in life that he is finally made Governor of Coventry Island. She may have fleeced many an innocent Ms. Briggs, but she is so charmingly agreeable to her that one can easily excuse her.

All Becky's apparently mean actions stem from an aversion to high society and a need to take revenge on it. She is well aware of all its vanities and takes advantage of it. Sure enough, it plays right into Becky's able hands. Lord Steyne is an apt example of this. Becky, when it serves her purpose to do so, can be extremely winning. Her one all important aim is to have her revenge on society and the only way to achieve that is through money. Money therefore become an obsession with her. Since the very picture of society presented in Vanity Fair is most unflattering (and, according to Carey, the Victorians found its cynicism chilling,) one cannot but admire Becky's character and aims. Her very motives, in fact, excuse her actions and provide a softer, more delicate picture of her character.

She detests Amelia because she is a colourless character, but on a higher social rung nevertheless. Amelia however, is a foil for Becky. Becky's very character of determination and resoluteness is applaudable only due to its contrast with Amelia...Though Becky detests Amelia, the pink-faced chit for that one reason, as Thackeray himself voices through Becky, Amelia is the kind of person none can

actively detest. Becky's act of throwing the Johnson's dictionary at Miss. Jemima is as great a slap in the face of high society as is her revenge in the Bareares at Brussels.

Her one colossal gaffe is when she is caught with Lord Steyne by Rawdon. For Becky, who all her life has been making decisions and charming men who doted on her, such a show of strength as when Rawdon boxes Lord Steyne (Symbolic of high society) to the floor, is a luxury. 'Becky's schemes lay in ruins, but she watched her husband with something like adoration and desire. When I wrote that sentence, I slapped my fist on the table and said "That is a touch of genius". said Thackeray. In Becky, he embodied many of his own ambitions and feelings, and ultimately, it was his aim to present her as a character worth admiring and sympathising with. Even her blackest acts find extenuation, if we look hard enough. Her ill-treatment of little Rawdon is the failing that makes the heart bleed most. Thackeray shrewdly shows us that she is most violent where she feels most guilty. Her neglected child is 'a reproach and a pain to her'. She hates little Rawdon for what she has done to him. Seen in this light, many of Becky's actions are excusable due to their true motives.

Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* hailed as one of the greatest novels of all time, alive in every word, as was first published in 1936. In a way, *Gone with the Wind* is also a novel without a hero. The gigantic plot is woven round Scarlett O'Hara. The novel is set in and around the period of the American Civil War.

Like Becky, Scarlett's transformation takes place after her loss of financial security. The war disrupts the very life of the people in the South and it is after she leaves for Charleston that Scarlett hungers for money, and the comforts that accompany it.

1 Our headed and intelligent Scarlett is not beautiful, but men hardly realized it when she

chose to be charming, and Scarlett chose to be charming when ever it suited her purpose - like the times when she charms Charles Hamilton and Frank Kennedy into marrying her. Looked at coldly these actions of her's may appear cruel, even heartless and malicious in that she deprives Honey Wilkes of her Beau and even Suellen of her's; but when one studies the cause and motives of her actions, one is forced to excuse Scarlett - Scarlett had never willingly allowed Charles to pay court to her but caught on the rebound when Ashley's engagement to Melanie was announced she numbly agreed to marry Charles who was over joyed. When she makes a play for Frank despite Suellen it is because of an overriding anxiety to save Tara at all costs. She is shrewd enough to realize that Suellen, in a similar position, would never save Tara, and grasps the opportunity.

Her very endurance and grit throughout the novel engage the reader to the end as do her vanities and her selfishness. Like Becky, she is, in a way, an alien to the behaviour of the society she lives in. Full of zest and overwhelming *joie de vivre*, she asserts her scorn for social courtesies when she dances with Rhett at the ball even before the year of mourning for Charles is out.

Melanie, like Amelia, acts as a kind of foil to Scarlett. Her weakness and lack of determination recommend Scarlett's character doubly. Though there is a lot of difference between the characters of Melanie and Amelia, both believe implicitly in the goodness of the protagonist - Melaine believes in Scarlett because she admires her and is trusting herself. Basically good natured Amelia does not recognize Becky for what she is because she cannot understand even herself leave alone others. Contrarily, it is this fact that enhances the appearance of cruelty in both Scarlett and Becky. Both privately detest Melanie and Amelia, though adored by them. Scarlett cannot recognize Melly's true strength