

**THE THEORY OF REALISM AND THE MUTATIONS OF
THE NOVEL AS A LITERARY FORM WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO MODERN AMERICAN FICTION**

A Thesis Submitted to the University of Calicut

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C. SATHEESAN

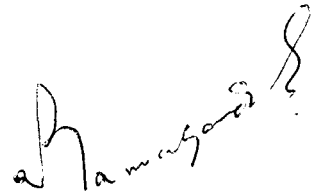
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis, entitled *Theory of Realism and the Mutations of the Novel as a Literary Form with Special Reference to Modern American Fiction*, submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a record of *bonafide* research carried out by C. Satheesan, under my supervision. No part of this thesis has been submitted earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, title, or recognition.

Calicut,
31 May 2001.



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DECLARATION

I, C. Satheesan, do hereby declare that this thesis has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an attempt to inquire into the mutations of the novel as a literary form. It begins by examining the theory of realism, and then looks into the important characteristics of expressive realism which was the informing principle of the nineteenth century literature in Europe. It is followed by a discussion of the mutations of the novelistic form in modern American fiction. In order to study the characteristics of the nineteenth century European realism, I have chosen two great masters, namely, Honore de Balzac and Stendhal. The modern American novelists chosen for study are Sinclair Lewis, John Steinbeck, Ken Kesey and Kurt Vonnegut (Jr). An exhaustive study of the works of these authors is beyond the purview of this dissertation. The emphasis is always on the mode of realism employed in their works.

It is now common knowledge that the realist theories of the nineteenth century classic realist period have become outdated, and that even the concept of realism has been challenged and subjected to serious criticism. Classic realism takes for granted the existential independence of the object and its representation. To what extent does the realist novelist of today respect this norm, and work in this direction? What strides does modern realism take in recognising as a fact of contemporary consciousness, the increasing complexity and volatility of its subject matter? How does twentieth century realism look when viewed against the background of the much publicised death of the novel and the post-modernist approaches to the representation of reality? These are some of the questions addressed in this study. The essence and justification of the realistic novel is the reciprocity between the experience of humanity and the consciousness of the individual. It is my endeavour here to examine how far this reciprocity is justified in the works of the authors chosen for study.

The term 'realism', in its broadest sense has been employed in a large number of areas: art, literature, aesthetics, philosophy and law. Even before this term was taken up in serious literary discussions, it had gained wide currency in philosophy. Realism in the novel is, no doubt, different from realism in philosophy. Yet the realist thought in general, and the realist method of investigation are of importance in literary realism as well.

The earliest recorded use of the word realism with a literary as distinct from a philosophical application was in a Parisian periodical, *La Mercure Francais* in 1826. As a critical term, it was accepted in literary discussions towards the beginning of the nineteenth century. Edmund Duranty's journal *Realisme* used the term to denote the *verite humaine* of Rembrandt as opposed to *the idealite poetique* of neo-classical painting. (For a detailed discussion, see Ian Watt, 1970, P. 10)

Towards a definition:

Definition is always a difficult task in the case of a literary genre, and especially so, with the novel, as, unlike many other literary forms, it does not have a definite form. The rules invented for other literary forms, which were born far earlier, cannot be applied in the case of the novel, which was born in the modern era. Moreover, the novel, as Henry James rightly remarked, remains, still, under the right persuasion, the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms ("Preface" to *The Ambassadors* as in Lodge, 1991, P.56).

Etymologically, 'realism' means 'thingism', as the adjective 'real' is derived from the Latin 'res' meaning 'thing'. The first definition of 'real' according to Dr. Johnson's dictionary is 'relating to things', 'not persons'. John Locke

believed that one of the chief ends of language is to convey the knowledge of things. The term 'realistic', thus viewed, describes some kind of objectification which says that objects are to be defined not by their inherent qualities, or limits, but by their relation to a fixed observer governing a closed system—a stance that was developed during the Renaissance period. It is connected to the intellectual and imaginative approach to reality that Galileo discusses in his *Dialogue of the New Sciences* and Descartes discusses in his *Discourse on Method*.

According to Ian Watt, realism is the defining characteristic which differentiates the work of the early eighteenth century novelists from previous fiction (P.10). The history of realism is thus ~~is~~ not different from the history of the novel. *The Oxford Dictionary* describes the novel as a fictitious prose narrative of a considerable length, in which characters and actions representative of real life are portrayed in a plot of greater or lesser complexity. Dennis Walden lists three important reasons for the close connection between the novel and realism: the intimate relationship between the history of the genre and the concept of realism, the fact that the nineteenth century novel has always been closely associated with the family of features or conventions related to realism, and the still continuing use of the mode of realism in fiction, drama and television (1995, P. 17).

Realism, in its widest general sense, can be taken as a word which means portraying in literature, life as it is. Long before realism became a powerful movement in European literature, Dr. Johnson, in 1750, describes this new trend:

The works of fiction with which the present generation seems more ^dDelighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by the accidents that daily happen in the world and influenced by those passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind. (*The Rambler*, Vol.I, No. 4).

Later, in the nineteenth century, exponents of realism like Edmund Duranty and the Goncourt Brothers, and writers like Balzac and St^endhal, too, stressed the very same "life in its true state" and "passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind" as the essence of the realistic movement. In our own times, Rene' Wellek, too, means more or less the same thing when he speaks of the objective representation of contemporary reality as the chief aim of the nineteenth century novel. To D. H. Lawrence, the novel is the one bright book of life. "Books are not life. They are only tremulations on the ether. But, the novel as a tremulation can make the whole man alive tremble, which is more than poetry, philosophy, or science or any other book-tremulation can do" (as in Lodge, 1991, P. 133).

Raymond Williams elaborates on the term realism in his essay "Realism and the Contemporary Novel". "The most common definition is in terms of an ordinary, contemporary, everyday reality, as opposed to traditionally heroic, romantic or legendary subjects". "In the highest realism, society is seen in fundamentally personal terms, and persons, through relationships, in fundamentally social terms. The integration is controlling, yet, of course, it is not to be achieved by an act of will. If it comes at all, it is a creative discovery and can perhaps only be recorded within the structure and substance of the realistic novel" (1975, P.300, P.314). Williams is emphatic about the inclusiveness of the novelistic form. "Novel", he says, "is not as much a literary form as a whole literature itself. A form which, in fact includes, *Middlemarch* and *Auto da Fe*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Rainbow* and *The Magic Mountain* is, indeed, as I have said, more like a whole literature" (P.304). Virginia Woolf, too, stresses the infinite possibilities of the art of fiction as she remarks that there is no limit to the horizon, and that nothing, no "method", no experiment even of the wildest, is forbidden in the writing of the novel. "The proper stuff of fiction" does not exist, everything is the proper stuff or fiction, every feeling, every thought, every quality of brain is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss" (1968, P.194).

According to Robert Scholes, "realism is a matter of perception. The realist presents his impressions of the world of experience. A part of his

vocabulary and other technical instruments, he shares with social scientists. The realist writer seeks always to give the reader a sense of the way things are....The realist's truth is a bit more general and typical than the reporter's fact. It may also be more vivid and memorable". (1968,P. 9).

Engels defines realism as typical characters in typical situations. Here, the word 'typical', Lukacs reminds us, is not to be confused with what is frequently encountered:

What makes a type, a type, is not its average quality, not its mere individual being however profoundly conceived, what makes it a type is that in it all the humanly and socially essential determinants are present on their highest level of development in the ultimate unfolding of the possibilities latent in them in extreme presentation of their extremes (1964, P.6).

Lucien Goldman defines the novel in sociological terms. "The novel seems to me, in effect, to be the transposition on the literary plane, of everyday life in the individualistic society created by market production" (1975, P.7)

According to Elizabeth A. Drew, the novel is contemporary social history, and it invariably reflects the society to which the novelist belongs. "The twentieth century novel, indeed, might almost be identified with that device of punctuation so liberally employed by its creators, and called the *Novel of the Three Dots*.... It suggests, inquires, collects instances, supplies illustrations on every side of human experience, but it would fain leave all ultimate judgement tailing off into impartial decision" (1926, P.137)

Novel - Origins:

The novel is a fictional form which is a kind of written narrative, and its relationship to its narrative predecessors is not clear. Lennard J. Davis in *Factual Fiction: The Origins of the English Novel* (1983) classifies the theories of the novel's origin into three groups: the evolutionary, the osmotic and the convergent. The evolutionary theories argue that the prose romances gradually became more realistic until they turned into something like the form we recognise as novel. According to the osmotic theories, literary forms absorb changes in the structure of the society and change accordingly. Thus, the novel may be said to have been an offshoot of the rise of the bourgeoisie and the new interest in individuals after the Renaissance. Theories of convergence express the general view that different genres like romance, biography, picaresque narrative and so on come together to form the new genre of the novel. The word 'novel' means 'new', and it is derived from 'novella' an Italian term for a short tale in prose. In many European languages the term for novel is 'roman' which is related to romance, and so implies a continuity with the medieval prose works known by that name. Romances written in vernaculars that appeared in many European countries in the medieval period were accounts of events, magical, fantastic or supernatural, mostly centered on love, and had an elevated tone about them, and always contained a moral. From the fifteenth century onwards, some of the romances started appearing in prose instead of verse. It is often these prose narratives that we consider as the precursors of the novel. It is interesting to note that when the novel proper appeared in the mid-eighteenth century or so, critics and authors themselves were much more inclined to call it history or romance rather than use the new term novel. Even in the nineteenth

century, many novelists still insisted that they were writing romances. Perhaps, it was only by the twentieth century that romance took its current debased connotation of a sentimental love story and the term novel acquired a positive character. Some of the cultural factors in the Renaissance period, writes Kershner, were quite encouraging to the prospect of the novel form: a liking for the exploration of the physical world around man and a desire to verify ideas through personal experience rather than by appeal to an authority. However, the Renaissance reverence for the classical Greek and Roman literary figures, and a desire to emulate them, were obstacles to the use of forms unknown to the ancients (1997, P.3). Besides, literacy was too low and consequently, there was not enough of a popular readership for literary works. By the eighteenth century, popular readership was there, but literary consensus was slow in coming.

Philosophical Origins:

As has already been pointed out, the term realism was first used in philosophy. Platonism, also known as conceptual realism, states that the concept or universal is what is truly real rather than the individual or particular things. The real is what is common to all individuals of a class. Thus man means the species of man and not an individual human being. In the Middle Ages, nominalism tried to dislodge conceptualism by insisting that universals were mere names, and only the individual things existed. Later, Aquinas combined Aristotle's modified version of Platonism with the nominalistic emphasis on individual things and gave his version of realism that was to influence Christian thought and writings. Thus, while conceptualism held the view that universals existed only in the mind, and nominalism even denied the existence of universals altogether,

and held that they were simply names, realism granted the specific or generic nature of the thing a distinct existence in reality outside the mind. Against idealism it asserted that the existence of sense objects and their qualities is external to thought.

The Platonic-Aristotelian kind of realism was replaced in the eighteenth century by a new view of what is purported to be real. Empiricists like David Hume and objective idealists like Emmanuel Kant held the view that objects do not have an existence independent of man's perception of them. At the same time, Thomas Reid's commonsense school proclaimed that the objects of perception are objects and they have a real existence outside the perceiving mind.

Modern realism, however, begins from the position that truth can be discovered by individuals through their senses. It has its origin in Descartes and Locke, and received its full formulation in Thomas Reid in the middle of the eighteenth century. The seventeenth century witnessed the emergence of a new school of materialist determinism. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke belonged to this school. To Hobbes destiny meant material reality. John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) was to be the cornerstone of the empiricist theory of knowledge. The *Essay* is a study of how the mind acquires knowledge and understanding. It emphasizes that all knowledge is acquired through the senses and none of it is innate. Locke's followers claimed that what a man thought and did, depended on what his senses encountered, and that different milieus made different men. Although Locke saw the mind as a *tabula rasa*, he claimed that it could nevertheless comprehend and reflect on what the senses wrote there.

Abbe Etienne de Condillac, using Locke's theory as his point of departure, maintained that all functions of the conscious mind—acts of concentration, making judgement, remembering etc—were achieved by the same mental process. Condillac's novelty lay in the fact that he dispensed with Locke's autonomous realm of reflections. Claude Adrien Helvetius brought together the materialist determinism of La Mettrie and the sensualism pioneered by Condillac. Destutt de Tracy, on the other hand, reconciled determinism with a satisfying concept of the individual will. It was with Thomas Reid's commonsense school that realism assumed, in philosophy, the sharp delineation which was to have an unambiguous attraction for writers, critics and theorists in literature. Thus, the idea that the perceived objects have an existence independent of the perceiving mind was developed in opposition to all forms of idealism. Descartes's greatness dwells primarily in the thoroughness of his determination to accept nothing on trust, and his *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations* did much to bring about the modern assumption whereby the pursuit of truth is conceived of as a wholly individual matter, logically independent of the tradition of past thought.

Ian Watt, in his book, *The Rise of the Novel*, remarks that the novel is the only literary form which most fully reflects an individualist and innovating reorientation. Earlier literary forms, he says, had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth. The plots of classical and renaissance epic, for example, were based on past history or fable, and the merit of the author's treatment was judged largely according to a view of literary decorum derived from accepted models in the genre. This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel whose primary criterion was fidelity to individual experience, individual experience

which is always unique and therefore new. "The novel", Watt argues, "is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel, and it is therefore, well named" (1970, P.13). Since the novelist's primary task is to convey the impression of fidelity to human experience, adherence to any pre-established formal convention can only endanger his success. As Ian Watt observes, "What is often felt as the formlessness of the novel, as compared with tragedy, or with the ode, probably follows from this; the poverty of the novel's formal conventions would seem to be the price it must pay for its realism" (1970, P.14). In short, the impact of philosophical realism on literary realism lies in the general temper of its thought, its methods of investigation, and in the kinds of problems it has raised. The general temper of philosophical realism has been critical, anti-traditional, and innovative; its method has been the study of the particulars of experience by the individual investigator.

Damian Grant's book, *Realism: the Critical Idiom*, describes two kinds of realism, namely, the conscious realism and the conscientious realism. Conscious realism is connected to the correspondence theory and the conscientious realism to the coherence theory. The correspondence theory is empirical and epistemological and it involves a naïve common sense realist belief in the reality of the external world. In the coherence theory, the epistemological process is accelerated or elided by intuitive perception. Truth is not earned by labour of documentation or analysis, but coined by a ready synthesis. Evidence is replaced by self-evidence. In the correspondence theory, truth is true to something, in the coherence theory it is straight, flawless, containing the truth, not simply representing or attending to it. In the first case, reality is, as it were,

way-laid by truth, arrested by it; in the second, reality is discovered, and in a sense, created in the very act of perception. The correspondence theory can be called a semantic conception and the coherence theory, a syntactic conception of truth; one probes for and refers to a verifiable meaning, the other makes a "true" statement.

In all the forms of realism, we can discern a tension between correspondence and coherence as the criterion of reality, reflected or achieved. The correspondence theory of realism is the expression of what one might call the conscience of literature, the conscience which protests when it neglects or disparages external reality, and seeks to draw its sustenance from, and exist for, the disengaged imagination alone. It is the conscience which made Yeats exclaim in the last line of "The Circus Animals' Desertion":

"I must lie down where all the ladders start,

In the rag-and-bone shop of the heart" (1965, P.69).

The coherence theory of realism, on the other hand, is the consciousness of literature, its self-awareness, its realisation of its own ontological status. Realism, in this case, is always something created; it does not exist *a priori*. Here there is no nature or reality outside the mind, and the artist need not worry about the relationship. We are reminded of William Blake's lines in "Jerusalem":

"I must create a system, or be enslaved by another Man's

I will not reason and compare: my business is to create" (1969,P.629).

Philip Stevick, in *The Theory of the Novel*, points to the connection between the novel and the actual ways of the world. "The novel", he says, "records

the passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience, from the ignorance which is a bliss, to a mature recognition of the actual ways of the world" (1967, P.14). Falstaff, in a sense, foreshadows the sensibility that will make the novel possible. The protagonist of the novel follows more or less the same pattern of disillusionment that Falstaff embodied as he stood on the battlefield of Shrewsbury questioning the value of such aristocratic absolutes as chivalric honour, and deciding to choose the life of a coward.

Georg Lukacs, in *The Theory of the Novel* (1971) defines novel as the epic of the transcendental homelessness of man. It is an attempt by the modern man to reconcile life (existence) with true self (essence) through a form of epic narration. The novel shall remain only a pale shadow of the true epic, because the historical conditions which made the epic possible, the organic community and its unquestioned value system, have vanished from the Western world. The epic, Lukacs says, is an extensive totality, a closed art in which the hero is never an individual, for the epic must describe not his destiny, but that of the community. The epic hero is intimately connected to the community and he never questions its values. In contrast, the novelistic hero is the product of man's alienation from the world, a world in which values are no longer universally binding and where the individual is no longer bound to a closed community.

If the epic gives form to the extensive totality of life, the novel tells of the adventure of interiority. The content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and by proving itself, to find its own essence. The first great novel of world literature, *Don Quixote*, was written at a time when the Christian God began to

forsake the world, and man, having lost his transcⁿscendental home, sets out in search of his own soul. Cervantes lived in a period of desperate mysticism, a period of great confusion of values against the background of an, as yet, unchanged value system.

In short, the novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem as it still thinks in terms of totality. The hero is therefore problematical and shall seek the goal and meaning of life within a mundane world which denies and frustrates him. The structural instability inherent in the novel form is the direct result of the necessary tension between the problematic hero and the contingent world, the conflict between the universal values sought by the hero and the stark fact about the impossibility of realising them, because realising those values would be tantamount to destroying the novel form and regaining epic wholeness.

Narrative, Formal Origins:

Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg in their work, *The Nature of Narrative*, speak of two antithetical modes of narrative: the empirical, owing primary allegiance to the real, and the fictional whose primary allegiance is to the ideal. They further subdivide the empirical narrative into history, which is true to fact, and *mimesis* or realistic imitation which is true to experience. Similarly, fictional narrative is subdivided into romance which cultivates beauty and aims to delight, and allegory which cultivates goodness, and aims to instruct. The book also tells us that the primitive oral epic was a synthesis of empirical and fictional modes that under various cultural pressures (chiefly, the transition

from oral to written forms of communication) broke up into its component parts twice: at first during the period of the late classical literature, and then, during the period of the development of the European vernaculars. A perceptible movement in narrative literature towards a new synthesis of the empirical and fictional modes started during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance period, and it was this movement that culminated in the novel form in the eighteenth century. W. P. Ker, in his *Epic and Romance*, comments on the epochal event of the epic yielding to romance. "The change of temper and fashion represented by the appearance and the vogue of the medieval French romances is a change involving the whole world and going far beyond the compass of literature and literary history" (1931, P.6).

Among the seventeenth century literary forms that influenced the structure of the novel, the conduct book or guide literature was one of the most important. The domestic conduct book gave guidance on attitudes and behaviours, about marriage and married life. The full title of Eliza Haywood's conduct book (1725) is: *The Tea Table: Or a Conversation Between some Polite Persons of Both Sexes, at a Lady's Visiting Day Wherein are Represented the Various Foibles and Affections, which Form the Character of an Accomplished Beau or Modern Fine Lady.*

Boccaccio who followed the specific tradition of the fourteenth century favellatore and the general tradition of the story tellers from the epic to the *fabliaux*, retold stories with eloquence and evocative power. As we come to Chaucer, we have a narrator who claims to have witnessed the events of the narrative, but here, the pretence is an obvious convention and operates as a skillfully created device. "What distinguishes the novel from the epic, the early

short narrative, and the stories told within the walled garden of a plagued city or the time encompassed by a journey to Canterbury”, says Raymond Federman, “is our sense of the narrator not as a story teller, but as a witness who has imposed his frame upon reality. Whether his story is told in the first or third person, the narrator is present as a witness who holds a world of time and space within his solitary purview” (1975, P.50).

Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* is an overview of the Western realistic literature. It makes an important innovation in the concept of realism by linking it with the stylistic development over long historical periods. Auerbach tells us that in the classical period, the separation of styles into the *sublimitas* and *humilitas* was the literary expression of the social hierarchy of those times, and it was this separation that prevented the development of realism in that period. Only characters of high social standing were treated as truly serious, and ordinary human existence was treated in a manner that lacked any seriousness. With the story of Christ, this principle of stylistic separation is violated: the lowliest man (son of a carpenter) is identified with the highest being. What prevents medieval Christian literature from attaining the full seriousness of realism is its other- worldliness.

Auerbach tells us that even though the courtly romances of the Middle Ages had about them a great deal of realistic flavour and psychological refinement, they had always the stronger limitation that the fairy tale atmosphere about them was entirely without basis in political, geographical or social reality. The courtly romances were not attempts to shape or set forth reality; they were content to be fairy tales or fables. Contrasting the feudal

literature with the liturgical plays, Auerbach tells us that there is in the latter a movement toward everyday contemporary reality. In Saint Francis of Assisi, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, we have a mixture of the *sublimitas* and *humilitas* with a resulting irresolvable fusion of action and expression, content and form (Pp. 143-173). This is in direct contrast to the antique theory that the sublime and elevated style shall always be separated from the low style. Dante's work, he says, laid open the panorama of the common and multiple world of human reality, and in Boccaccio, literature, perhaps for the first time, presented a world of reality and of the present: "Gift of observation and power of expression Boccaccio had by nature; what he owes to Dante, is the possibility of making such free use of his talent, of attaining the vantage point from which it is possible to survey the entire present world of phenomena, to grasp it in all its multiplicity and to reproduce it in a pliable and expressive language" (P.219). During the fifteenth century, realism becomes more sensory, the colours become more glaring. Yet the representation always remains within the bounds of medieval determination and of Christianity. Only with the modern novel does the writer present mundane reality in its historical particularity and with full seriousness.

B.M. Eichenbaums's essay "O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story" discusses the relationship between oral tales and the written story. Tales such as *Decameron*, he says, have a fundamental connection with the oral speech, and so, they are related to oral tales, gossips and anecdotes. The oral element, he argues, persists even in the early novels. Eichenbaum substantiates his argument by pointing out the oratorical narrative voice of Scott and the lyrical voice of Victor Hugo (as in Scholes, 1973, P.143). The novel, nevertheless, broke

with the narrative form and became a combination of dialogues, scenes and detailed presentations of decor, gestures and intonations. Eichenbaum considers the novel as a "syncretistic" form which is made up of other elementary forms and agrees with the view of the earlier Russian literary critics that the novel is a new mixture of all the genres with variant sub classes as the epic novel (eg. *Don Quixote*), the lyrical novel (*The Sorrows of Werther*), and the dramatic novel (novels of Walter Scott).

Lennard J. Davis, in *Factual Fiction: The Origins of the English Novel*, observes how the early novelists adopted the method of the documentary or historical writing for obtaining complete truthfulness to reality in the depiction of fictitious characters and events. The eighteenth century reader, he thinks, was unable to make sure whether *Robinson Crusoe* or *Pamela* were true stories or not. At the same time, the novelists raised a defensive smoke-screen around the contradictory demands made upon them as story-tellers. On the one hand, was the traditional aesthetic imperative that literature should embody general truth about human nature, and on the other, was the particularity of reportage. Davis's theory applies more obviously to Defoe and Richardson than to Fielding who mocked the technique of what he called the pseudo-documentary reporting in *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*. Nevertheless, it is well-known how Fielding had put the facts of a real historical event (The Jacobite Rising of 1765) into his novel *Tom Jones* with unprecedented care and attention to detail. The classic and the modern phases of the novel also are not totally free from this relationship between fact and fiction. James Joyce even used to boast that even if the city of Dublin were to be destroyed, it could be reconstructed from his books.

Tobias Smollett, in his "Preface" to *Roderick Random*, tells about the three phases in the evolution of prose fiction. The ancients, he says, were unable to

relish a fable in prose because they had seen so many remarkable events celebrated in verse by their best poets. Then came the dark ages when the minds of men were debauched by the imposition of priestcraft to the utmost pitch of credulity and this resulted in the writings of romances which appealed to the human sense of wonder rather than judgement. At last, Cervantes appeared, and with one blow, by an inimitable piece of ridicule, reformed the taste of mankind, representing chivalry in the right point of view, and converting romance to purposes far more useful and entertaining, by making it assume the sock, and point out the follies of ordinary life (1964, P.4).

Realism and Romance:

The spectrum of fiction ranges between the extremes of history and fantasy, with realism and romance coming in between. The works and lives of all poets and writers would seem to oscillate between the poles of *Dichtung* and *Wahrheit*, fiction and truth. Harry Levin, in his book, *The Gates of Horn*, refers to Homer's description of the twin gates: one of opaque ivory through which pass fictitious dreams and the other of transparent horn, which lets out nothing but truth. Walter Scott, in his *Essay on Romance* (1824) points to the distinction between the novel and the romance: While in the romance we have "a fictitious narrative...the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents", in the novel, "the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society" (as in Kershner, 1997, P.9).

Realism and romance are the two principal ways in which fiction can be related to life. They indicate the double descent of prose narrative. The novel develops from the lineage of non-fictitious narrative form: the letter, the

journal, memo or biography, the chronicle or history; it develops, so to speak, out of documents, and stylistically it stresses representative detail, 'mimesis' in its narrow sense. The romance, on the other hand, the continuation of the epic and the medieval romance, may neglect verisimilitude of detail, addressing itself to a higher reality, a deeper psychology. Realism is a matter of perception, the realist presents his impressions of the world of experience. Romance is a matter of vision and the romancer presents not so much his impressions of the world as his ideas about it. Nevertheless, the two ways are not necessarily opposite to each other. Realism itself is more romantic than history or journalism, and romance is more realistic than fantasy. Many important works of fiction are rich and complicated blends of romance and realism. "The greatest works", says Robert Scholes, "are those which succeed in blending the realist's perception and the romancer's visions giving us fictional worlds remarkably close to our sense of the actual, but skillfully shaped so as to make us intensely aware of the meaningful potential of existence" (1968, P.10).

The novel, which is a further development from the romance, differs from its ancestor in that its hero is an anti-hero. Whereas in a romance the search after glory and adventure makes the protagonist a hero, in a novel, he discovers, with Falstaff, that there is no future for heroism and that he is a perfectly ordinary man with the experience and knowledge that suit his station. Don Quixote, the Knight of the Sad Countenance, is only Alonso Quixano. The sensibility that produces the novel asks questions instead of making contrary statements. As Quixote, the Knight, describes the windmills as giants, his squire Sancho asks, "What giants?" This crucial question by Sancho makes explicit the distinction between the novel and the romance. The novel rejects the spirit of

romance which sees the world through a haze of imagination, coloured by sentimentality and transformed by the poetry of legend and myth. Don Quixote's frequent fall off the horse indicates the protagonist's fall and it completes the educational process with which the novel deals: an initiation into the material world and of man's life in society. Ortega Y-Gasset, in his book *Meditations on Quixote*, points to the demythification of the novelistic form: "The myth is always the starting point of all poetry, including the realistic, except that in the latter, we accompany the myth in its descent, in its fall. This collapse of the poetic is the theme of realistic poetry" (1961, P.144).

The romance is a transitional form standing somewhere between the idealism of the epic and the realism of the novel. It is perhaps one of the ironies of history that Spain the last citadel of feudalism, the most traditionalistic culture of Western Europe, provided the best venue for irony, and so the most fertile soil for the seed of the modern novel. Commenting on Don Quixote, Harry Levin writes in *The Gates of Horn*: "While the former (Quixote) looks back toward the romance, transfiguring commonplace windmills into chimerical foes, the latter (Sancho) looks ahead to the novel, wryly squinting and dryly asking, "What giants?" (P. 41).

According to Richard Chase, the main difference between the novel and the romance lies in their attitude to reality. The novel renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. The people in a novel are inextricably related to nature, to each other, to their social class and to their own past. Character is more important than action or plot and the events that occur will normally be plausible. Even if a violent or sensational occurrence is introduced, it will be

done only after preparing the reader to accept it. By contrast, the romance, following distantly the medieval example, feels free to render reality in less volume and detail. It tends to prefer action to character and action is more free in a romance than in a novel, encountering as it were, less resistance from reality (1973, Pp. 12-13).

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "*Preface*" to *The House of the Seven Gables* distinguishes between the novel and the romance:

When a writer calls his work a romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former, while as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart, has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation (1981, P.vii).

Realism as a convention: Important characteristics:

Fiction has assimilated the exterior features of various other literary forms like essays, letters, memoirs, chronicles, dialogues, rhapsodies, religious tracts and revolutionary manifestoes, sketches of travels and books of etiquette and such like writings in prose and verse. It has been so polymorphic that it now

seems amorphous. As Harry Levin remarked, "it can therefore be distinguished not by uniformities of structure, but by variations of growth, not by morphology but by physiology" (1963, P 24). Nevertheless, some of the qualities that characterize realism can be summed up as: particularity, temporal and spatial circumstantiality, humble subject matter, view point, chronology, interiority and externality. "Every good author will confine himself within the bounds of probability", writes Fielding in *Tom Jones* (Bk. viii, Ch. I, 1749). Commenting upon Horace Walpole's attempt to unite the various merits and graces of romance and novel, Clara Reeve writes: "There is required... enough of the manners of real life to give an air of probability to the work" (as in Miriam Allott, 1977, P.45).

Ian Watt points out how from the time of the Renaissance onwards, there has been a growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality. What Defoe did in novel, says Watt, was something similar to what Descartes did in philosophy. Defoe allowed his narrative order to flow spontaneously from his own sense of what his protagonist might plausibly do next: "In so doing, Defoe initiated an important new tendency in fiction; his total subordination of the plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir is as defiant an assertion of the primacy of individual experience in the novel as Descartes's *Cogito ergo Sum* was in philosophy" (Ian Watt, 1963, P.13). Further changes were to be introduced before the novel could adopt the individual apprehension of reality as the most appropriate means of bringing out the immediate facts of consciousness. Instead of the general human types against a background primarily determined by literary convention, the actors in the novel were particular people in particular circumstances. This change, again, is analogous to the rejection of universals and emphasis on

particulars that characterised philosophic realism. Extending the psychological approach of Hobbes and Locke to literature, Lord Kames observes in *Elements of Criticism* (1762) that abstract or general terms have no good effect in any composition for amusement, because it is only of particular objects that images can be formed (as in Watt, 1963, Pp. 16-17). The tensions of the realistic tradition are well brought out in a passage in *Robinson Crusoe* in which Robinson's father urges him to recognise the happiness of his middle state:

He bade me observe it and I should always find that the calamities of life were shared among the upper and lower parts of mankind, but that the middle station had the fewest distastes and was not exposed to so many distempers and uneasinesses either of body or mind as those were whom by vicious living luxury and extravagances on the one hand, or by hard labour, want of necessaries, and mean or insufficient diet on the other hand, bring distempers upon themselves....(1961, Pp. 9-10).

In *Pamela*, the novelty is in style rather than in subject. The style is plain and direct, although in terms of the subject, it is perhaps, the purest of all romances: virtue rewarded, pauper made princess, and innocence triumphs over evil.

Novels, more than any other narrative form, are full of facts, dates, time, place-names and proper names. The characters act in a world which can be described spatially and temporally in the same way as the world we inhabit. Richardson, seeking literal authenticity, is said to have remarked while writing *Clarissa Harlowe*: "The fixing of dates has been a task to me. I am afraid I make

the writers do too much in the time" (as in Miriam Allott, 1977, P.124). Fielding, who makes no attempt to disguise the fact that his works are fictitious, mocks Richardson's abundance of circumstantial detail: "He accordingly ate, either a rabbit or a fowl, I never could with any tolerable certainty discover which" (1966, P.15). Nevertheless, it is well known that the action of *Tom Jones* was worked out with the aid of an almanac so that the events were chronologically consistent with each other and with public events in the year 1745. At a much later stage of the development of the novel, we find James Joyce writing to his aunt Mrs. William Murray in Dublin recalling the final stages of *Ulysses*: "Is it possible for an ordinary person to climb over the area railings of No.7 Eccles. St. either from the path or the steps, lower himself down from the lowest part of the railings till his feet are within two or three feet of the ground and drop unhurt? I saw it done myself, but by a man of rather athletic build. I require this information in detail in order to determine the wording of a paragraph" (1957, P.175).

Different literary forms imitate reality in different ways, and the realistic convention, more than any other literary convention, approves of a more immediate imitation of individual experience in its temporal and spatial environment. Right from the time of Homer, to the prose fiction of Bunyan, we get detailed and exact descriptions of events, places and human life. But, the important difference, as Ian Watt puts it, is that "in Homer and in earlier prose fiction, these passages are relatively rare, and tend to stand out from the surrounding narrative; the total literary structure was not consistently oriented in the direction of formal realism, and the plot, especially, which was usually traditional and often highly improbable, was in direct conflict with its premises" (P.33).

The new awareness of time:

The role of time in ancient, medieval and Renaissance literature is certainly very different from that in the novel. The celebrated unity of time, place and action is really a denial of the importance of the temporal dimension in human life. The classical world's view of reality as subsisting in timeless universals, and the equally celebrated personification of time as the winged chariot or the grim reaper focus attention not on the temporal flux, but on the supremely timeless fact of death and eternity and, the emphasis has always been to overwhelm our awareness of daily life so as to enable us to face eternity. The attitude to time in early fiction is very similar, and no real importance is given to time as a factor in human relationships. The temporal allegory is vague and unparticularised.

The modern sense of time began to permeate many areas of thought in the late seventeenth century with the rise of a more objective study of history which brought in its wake a deeper sense of the difference between the past and the present. Newton and Locke presented a new analysis of the temporal process and as a result, time became a slower and more mechanical sense of duration which was minutely enough described, eg: to measure the time of the falling of objects or of the succession of thoughts in the mind. These changed, emphases are reflected in Defoe's novels. At his best, he convinces us that his narrative is occurring at a particular time and at a particular place. This impression becomes much stronger and complete in Richardson. The superscription of each letter gives us the day of the week and often the time of the day. We are told that Clarissa died at 6.40 p.m. on Thursday, 7 September. Fielding approached the

problem of time from a more externalised and traditional point of view. In *Tom Jones* he indicates his intention of being much more selective than Richardson in the handling of the temporal dimension.

Locke defined personal identity as awareness of identity in consciousness through duration in time; the individual was in touch with his own continuing identity through memory of his past thoughts and actions. The principle of individuation accepted by Locke was that of existence at a particular locus in space and time. According to him, since the ideas become general, when separated from the circumstances of place and time, they become particular only when both these are specified. In the same way, the characters of the novel can only be individualised if they are set in a background of particularised time and place (Ian Watt, P 21). The novel breaks with the earlier literary tradition of using timeless stories to mirror the unchanging moral verities. Defoe is perhaps the first writer who visualized the whole of his narrative as though it occurred in an actual physical environment. Richardson carried further the process of narrative realism. If in Defoe, the attention to the description of the milieu is intermittent, in Richardson, considerable attention is paid not to the description of the natural scenery but to the interiors. Miriam Allot remarks that the genius of particularity to which the English novel owes much of its vitality and richness of texture is a gift of the poetic imagination rather than the effect of dispassionate and scientific observation (1977,P 28).

Almost every technique the novelist uses, is in keeping with the tendency to particularise: "The autobiographical memoir, the epistolary method, the dramatised consciousness, the withdrawal of the author from the scene, the

stream of consciousness, all these methods designed to heighten the desired effect of authenticity and verisimilitude by locating experience in the individual consciousness and making that consciousness operate in a particular place at a particular time" (Miriam Allott, P.24).

Problematic hero:

According to Lukacs, the most important characteristic of the novel is its problematic hero. The novel is the story of a degraded search, a search for authentic values in a world itself degraded, but otherwise at an advanced level according to a different mode. Authentic values do not mean the values that the critic or the reader regards as authentic, but the ones which without being manifestly present in the novel, organise in accordance with an implicit mode its world as a whole. Naturally, these values are specific to each novel.

Since novel is an epic genre characterised by the insurmountable rupture between the hero and the world, two levels of degradation are possible, that of the hero and that of the world. The radical rupture alone would, in effect, have led to tragedy or to lyric poetry, the absence of rupture or the existence of a merely accidental rupture would have led to the epic poem or the folk tale. Situated between the two, the novel has a dialectical nature in so far as it derives specifically on the one hand, from the fundamental community of the hero, and of the world presupposed by all epic forms, and, on the other hand, from their insurmountable rupture. The demoniacal hero of the novel is a problematic character whose degraded, and therefore, inauthentic, search for authentic values in a world of conformity and convention constitute the content of this new literary genre known as the 'novel'. Rene Girard also holds the view

that the novel is the story of a degraded search for authentic values by a problematic hero, in a degraded world.

Lucien Godlman's *Towards A Sociology of the Novel* discusses, in detail, the similarities and differences between Lukacs's theory of the novel and that of Girard. He believes that Girard makes the Lukacsian analysis more nuanced. The important difference in their approaches is that while Girard describes the novelist's position in relation to the world of his creation as humour, Lukacs describes it as irony. Both agree that the novelist must supersede the consciousness of his heroes and that this supercession (through humour or irony) is authentically constitutive of fictional creation. However, they differ from each other as to the nature of this supercession. To Girard, the novelist has left the world of degradation and achieved authenticity and vertical transcendence, through writing his work(1975,Pp. 4--5). The novel according to Lukacs and Girard, is a literary form in which authentic values, cannot be present in the work in the form of conscious characters or concrete realities. These values exist only in an abstract, conceptual form, in the consciousness of the novelist in which they take on an ethical character.

Catherine Belsey elaborates on the characteristics of classic realism in her book *Critical Practice*. "Classic realism", she writes, is characterized by illusionism, narrative which leads to closure, and a hierarchy of discourses which establishes the 'truth of the story'. (P 70). Barthes in *s/z* defines classic realism as the readable (lisible), the dominant literary form of the nineteenth century, no longer pertinent in the twentieth century, and yet still the prevailing form of popular fiction (P 73). It tends to offer as the obvious basis of

its intelligibility, the assumption that character, unified and coherent, is the source of action.

Subjectivity is perhaps, the major theme of classic realism. Insight into character and psychological processes are considered to be the chief marks of serious literature. Classic realism presents individuals whose traits of character understood as essential and predominantly given, constrain the choices they make, and whose potential for development depends on what is given. Human nature is thus seen as a system of character differences existing in the world. The system, nonetheless, permits the reader to share the hopes and fears of a wide range of characters.

Realism and Mimesis:

Mimesis, or the view that art is essentially an imitation of the aspects of the universe, is the most primitive aesthetic theory. Imitation is a relational term signifying two items and some correspondence between them. Plato's *Dialogues* characteristically operate with three categories: firstly, the category of ideas, secondly, the category reflecting the first, that is, the world of sense, natural or artificial and the third one, reflecting the second, comprising such things as shadows, images in water and mirrors and the fine arts. M. H. Abrams discusses in *The Mirror and the Lamp* how Socrates, in the Tenth Book of *The Republic* described the three beds. According to Plato, imitation carries a negative connotation: to imitate means to produce a secondary copy, a version which is less pure than the original.

Aristotle, however, dispenses with the Platonic plane of Ideas. He makes imitation a term specific to the arts, distinguishing them from everything else

in the universe and thereby freeing them from rivalry with other human activities. Mimesis, he believed, is a basic human faculty, which expresses itself in a wide range of arts. It cannot be equated with mere mirror reflection; on the contrary, it involves a complex mediation with reality. Aristotle divides mimesis into three aspects : 'means', 'objects' and 'manner'. One can imitate not only by means of words or paint, but with flute playing and dancing. Secondly he recognizes that imitation always involves a rigorous selection of those objects which are deemed appropriate for imitation. Thus, what we have in tragedy, is an imitation of people's actions rather than their characters. Developing Plato's notions he also sketches out what we would now call fictional modes.

Not only does Aristotle avoid a literal notion of representation, but he preserves a subtle tension between the requirements of mimesis and those of an aesthetic structure. Art, he believed, should correspond to life and achieve a certain structural order. As to correspondence, he contrasts the poet with the historian; while the latter reflects the particular and the factual, the former reflects the universal and the general. The poet is concerned not merely with the possible, but with the probable also. A likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility. There may be probability in a fairy-story; the connection between one incident and another may conform to a sense of the probable; on the other hand a plot which is full of coincidences, none of which is impossible, may seem improbable. Interestingly, that which makes for probability also makes for aesthetic coherence and harmony. The writer does not merely imitate particular objects or events, but reveals the logical coherence underlying events in human life.

The modern proponents of realism and naturalism are not derived from Aristotle in any direct line, but in a general sense, adopt the Aristotelian view of representation and not the Platonic View. There is also a theory of realism descended from the classical commentaries on comedy (notably Donatus and Terence) which describe comedy as a mirror of life. Comedy, the original vehicle of realism, welcomed Cicero's concept of persuasion in rhetoric which demanded of the orator capabilities like conciliating, informing and moving the minds of the auditors.

Horace's *Ars Poetica* lays down the *dulce* and the *utile* as the two fundamental aims of poetry. As one comes to the Renaissance period, art begins to be viewed as a means to an end. Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* speaks of poetry as an art of imitation with the dual end of teaching and delighting. In order to teach and delight poets imitate not what is, had been or shall be, but only what may be and should be, so that the very objects of imitation become such as to guarantee the moral purpose.

The concept of mimesis or imitation was, even in ancient times, rectified by that of the potentiality of the artist's inner vision. Cicero's remark testifies to this: "That artist, in executing the figure of Zeus or Athena, would gaze at nobody from whom he could take a resemblance, but in his own mind he would find a sublime ideal of beauty." (as in 1985, P 457). Flavius Philostratus, in the late second century A. D, is also unequivocal in his emphasis on imagination. It is the imagination that produces these works, she is a wiser demiurge than mimesis; mimesis will fabricate nothing but that which it has seen, whereas imagination will also do what she has not seen for she will surmise it in

reference to reality, and frequently fear drives away mimesis, whereas nothing can stop imagination, for she heads imperturbably towards what she alone conceived.

With the contributions of Hobbes and Locke in the seventeenth century, increasing attention was given to the mental constitution of the poet and the quality and the degree of his genius. Summing up his discussion of the expressive theory, Abrams observes.

A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's own mind, or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operations of the poet's mind (P 22).

This means that the cause of poetry is not formal as in Aristotle; it is not determined primarily by human actions and qualities imitated, nor is it, as in neo-classicism a final cause, the effect intended upon the audience, but instead, an efficient cause, the impulse within the poet, of teachings and desires seeking expression, or the compulsion of the creative imagination, which, like God the creator, has its internal source of motion.

Thus, in almost all discussions of art and literature, the mind mediating in the process of creation was given equal importance as the concept of mimesis

or imitation. "When the object represented in poetry or painting is such as we could have no desire of seeing it in reality", says Edmund Bruke, "then I may be sure that its power in poetry or painting is owing to the power of imitation and to no cause operating in the thing itself." (1968, (1751) P49). Expressive realism was, indeed, the product of a fusion of the concept of mimesis with the Romantic conviction that poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" expressed the perceptions and emotions of a person possessed of more than usual organic sensibility" (as in Enright and Chickera, 1966, P 165).

John Ruskin applies this principle to painting. In *Modern Painters* he emphasises two great and distinct ends which every landscape painter shall be conscious of : the first, to induce in the spectator's mind the faithful conception of natural objects, the second, to guide the spectator's mind to those objects most worthy of its contemplation and to inform him of the thoughts and feelings with which these were regarded by the artist himself. In other words, the artist must both represent faithfully the objects portrayed and express the thoughts and feelings they evoke in him or her. Ruskin's arguments run like this : "Mimetic accuracy is the foundation of all art..... nothing can atone for the want of truth..... no artist can be graceful, imaginative or original unless he be truthful." (Vol.III Pp133-139) "Mimetic" and "expressive" are to Ruskin not two qualities but one. In portraying truth, the artist expresses a personal and particularly incisive perception of that truth. The facts of nature are there for everyone to see and to be plainly expressed; some people with high and solitary minds perceive these facts more keenly, and if they are artists, portray them invested with a mobility not apparent to everyone, represent them differently. This different representation is also accurate.

A constituent element in the emergence of the novel was the blending of factual and fictional narratives in the popular press of the last seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Though no poetics of fiction existed *per se*, the principle of mimesis was there as the novel's central organizing force. *Don Quixote*, *Tom Jones*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Tristram Shandy* and other works associated with the rise of the novel -- all have mimesis, or at least the question of it -- as one of their main focuses. A cursory history of the novel confirms that a significant organising principle of the genre has been the linguistic representation of the life.

The attitude of the 19th century realists towards the mirror analogy of the novel form is manifest in their writings. George Eliot explains in *Adam Bede* that her strongest effort is to give a faithful account of men and things as they mirrored themselves in her mind. Although she is conscious of the distorting power of the mirror, she has firm faith in the mirror analogy. "The mirror is doubtless defective, the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness box narrating my experience on oath" (1966, P.171).

Stendhal elaborates on the mirror analogy in Part II, Chapter 19 of *The Red and The Black*:

Why, Sir, a novel is a mirror carried along a high road. One moment it will reflect into your eyes the azure of heaven, the next, the mire in the potholes along the road. And you would accuse the man who carries the mirror in his pack, of

immorality. His mirror shows the mire and you blame the mirror? Oughtn't you rather blame the road with the pot holes, or even better, the inspector of highways, who let the water gather and the potholes form? (1986, P.365).

Mimesis is not imitation in the sense of a photographic copy; the Greek word has no exact counterpart in other languages. The word rather calls up the idea of verisimilitude. That is, homogeneity is supposed to exist between the representant (the referent) and the represented (the object of *mimesis*), the job of the artist being to correct, adjust, modify the represented source in relative terms, without changing it to the extent that it becomes naturalistically unrecognizable.

Although the mirror analogy has always provided the best illustration of the representation theory, it has its inherent limitations, too. Edmund Gosse in *The Limits of Realism in Fiction* points to the disproportion which exists between the small flat surface of a book and the vast arch of life which it undertakes to mirror. Many modern theorists like R. G. Collingwood (*The Principles of Art* -1938) and Ortega Y. Gasset (*The Dehumanization of Art* - 1968) have insisted on the bankruptcy of the representational theory in literature.

"The 'life-likeness' of realism", says Hemmings, "depends upon a particular set of rules for the disposition of concreteness and detail, as well as of value and question of ultimate concern. Because the realistic convention distracts attention from its artificiality, it may be in fact one of the most artificial of all conventions. In any case verisimilitude of realism, or the

illusion of life-likeness is no simple or natural expression; on the contrary, it is a highly artificial and highly achieved effect" (1974, P.23).

Representing reality in fiction is different from representing it in non-fiction. Taylor Stoehr discusses this question in his essay "Realism and Verisimilitude". He tells us that there are different kinds of truth to life, different degrees of it and different criteria for it. Truth of truth to life, he says, is not the essential thing in mimesis as it is in history or philosophy. "Most of the theorising on the subject of mimesis is concerned with a literary manner, realism, rather than with representation of reality, mimesis, that is, with one means of effecting verisimilitude rather than with verisimilitude itself (1986, P2). According to him, various literary manners like realism, symbolism, naturalism and so on, are different means writers have developed to present experience in words, and the theory of mimesis is the theory of the foundations of all such manners, their common problems built into the relations of language and life. Unfortunately in critical parlance verisimilitude becomes a mere tool of realism. Stoehr remarks that it is a mistake to assume that realism is better suited to the imitation of reality than the other modes.

The reaction against the mirror analogy grew stronger and stronger with the decline of realism. Virginia woolf asserts that if one looks within, a one understands that life is not like this or like that (1968, P.189). Douglas Hewitt points out that the fallacy of the celebrated mirror analogy in Stendhal's *The Red and The Black* is that it is concerned with the manner in which the non-verbal phenomena are presented in terms of words and with the inevitability of the form:

Whereas a mirror reflects an object as itself, a novel presents objects in a sequence of words from which it would be impossible to reconstruct the actual appearance of what is supposedly mirrored. Second, a mirror reflects something which is there already, while a novel does not exist until it is written, the image leaves out of account which road you choose at which point on it you start and finish, in which direction you point the mirror and whether, from time to time you cover it up (1972, P 48).

The Sociology of The Novel:

Sociology and novel had common origins in the sense that both had the same intellectual drive, emotional excitement and expanding horizons experienced in the eighteenth century. Both the social scientist and the novelist of the eighteenth century felt an intense need to explain human behaviour rather than only to describe, exalt and criticise it. They turned to races, nations, classes, occupations and religions to illuminate social life.

Alan Swingewood in *The Novel and Revolution* discusses some important problems of the sociology of the novel. According to him, any sociological discussion of the novel has to consider two important inter-related theories: one regarding the connection between the development of the novel and the growth of the bourgeoisie, and the other connecting liberal ideology and the novelistic form. George Steiner stresses the link between the novel and the bourgeoisie. "In its production and distribution, in the domestic privacy, leisure and reading habits which it requires from its audience, the novel matches precisely the great

age of the industrial, mercantile bourgeoisie" (1967, P-104). F. W. J. Hemmings in the *Age of Realism* speaks of the age of realism as the age of countless inventions, an age in which a dynamic, enthused, self-confident, literate middle class was coming to the fore and gaining more and more power in England and France. W. J. Harvey's *Character and the Novel* examines the more complex connection between liberal ideology and the novel form.

This state of mind has at its controlling centre, an acknowledgment of the plenitude, diversity, and individuality of human beings in society, together with the belief that such characteristics are good as ends in themselves. It delights in the multiplicity of existence and allows for a plurality of beliefs and values...Tolerance, scepticism respect for the autonomy of others are its watchwords, fanaticism and the monolithic creed its abhorrence (1965, P.24).

Ian Watt, in *The Rise of the Novel*, points to the close social connection between the development of the novel and the English middle classes and suggests that this class correlation is embodied in what he calls the 'formal realism' of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding. Formal realism is defined in the book in terms of the narrative techniques necessary for a full and authentic report of human experience in which the novelist satisfies his readers "with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the time and place of their actions" (P 33). He argues that with increasing secularization of culture, there developed a realist epistemology based on materialist philosophy which helped shape the novel form. According to this

materialist philosophy man's destiny was decided not by divine will but by man's complex relations with the world: "The novel could only concentrate on personal relations once most writers and readers believed that individual human beings, and not collectivities such as the persons of the Trinity, were allotted the supreme role on the earthly stage" (P87).

Capitalism brought in a great increase of economic specialisation; this, combined with the loss of a rigid and homogeneous social structure in favour of a less absolutist and more democratic political system, enormously increased the individual's freedom of choice. The effective entity on which social arrangements were now based, was no longer the family or the church or the guild, nor the township or any other collective unit, but the individual; he alone was primarily responsible for determining his own economic, social, political and religious roles. The great English empiricists of the seventeenth century were as vigorously individualist in their political and ethical thought as in their epistemology. Defoe's philosophical outlook was similar to that of the English empiricists of the seventeenth century and he expressed the diverse elements of individualism more completely than any other earlier writer. *Robinson Crusoe* can be called a unique demonstration of the connection between individualism in its many forms and the rise of the novel. The hero of the novel *Robinson Crusoe* is perhaps the first ever illustration of *homo economicus*. Crusoe's original sin is the very dynamic tendency of capitalism : to be never satisfied with the status quo, but go on attempting to transform it successfully. This fundamental tendency of economic individualism prevents Crusoe from sentimentalising over family ties whether as a son or as a husband. Crusoe is not an explorer like Ulysses or a hero like Don Quixote determined to right the wrongs of the world; he is on his way to economic independence. "It is

appropriate", writes Ian Watt, "that the tradition of the novel should begin with a work that annihilated the relationships of the traditional social order, and thus drew attention to the opportunity and the need of building up a network of personal relationships on a new and conscious pattern; the terms of the problems of the novel and of modern thought alike were established when the old order of moral and social relationships was shipwrecked, with *Robinson Crusoe*, by the rising tide of individualism" (1970, P. 96).

Arnold Hauser agrees with the theory that the novel is essentially a middle class cultural product. He tells us "how the eighteenth century European writers like Goethe, Rousseau and Diderot were influenced by Richardson, simply because he was the first to make the middle class man with his private life, living within the framework of the home, the centre of his literary work (1962 Pp.53 - 63). He considers the eighteenth century sentimental novel as an important ideological weapon used by the middle class in the struggle with the landed aristocracy. Madame Stael also is of the view that the development of the novel was greatly influenced by a strong middle class. Hegel writes that the novel is the epic of the middle class world, a world in which industrialisation, specialisation of work, individualism and the growth of bureaucracy condition the forms of all art. As the expression of the modern middle class, the novel reflects the fragmentation and the loss of unity implicit in the movement from a society based on land to one dominated by commerce and industry. The social basis of epic action ceased to exist with the advent of modern industry with its division of labour and efficiency in work and administration. The ideology of individualism and the division of labour succeeded in tearing man away from a living contact with nature and others. The novel thus becomes the bourgeois

epic only in the sense that it embodies a striving for unity for poetry in life. But the striving is negated by the reality it describes; the hero asserts his freedom and self in a world which denies both. Lucien Goldman describes the work of Balzac as "the only great literary expression of the world as structured by the conscious values of the bourgeoisie : individualism, the thirst for power, money and eroticism which triumph over the ancient feudal values of altruism, charity and love" (1975, P.14).

The sociological approach to literature begins with Hippolyte Taine who viewed all knowledge as derived from experience. He could not tolerate any notions of the intellectual apprehension of the essences. He applied the method of the natural sciences to social sciences and literature, and considered literature as an object to be dissected and analysed. He believed that literature reflected society and an environment of racial and climatic forces, and so can be used as a document of its own period. In his famous *Preface to The History of English Literature* he set forth the celebrated formula that literature is determined by race, milieu and momentum.

According to the nineteenth century positivism, the novel was degraded to the status of an object, a kind of private and public record book, the repository of individualistic ideology and useful historical information. This approach was utilitarian. Thus the sociology of literature during its development in the nineteenth century was essentially deterministic, the writer and his creative activity were reduced to an appendage of geographical or class environment. Literature was causally related to and reflected whole societies. And since the novel was pre-eminently produced by and for the literate middle class, it necessarily reflected their dominant values, ideology and material existence.

Frank Norris points to the close connection between the novel and the social life in his essay. "The Responsibilities of the Novelist": "Today is the day of the novel. In no other day and by no other vehicle, is contemporaneous life so adequately expressed; and the critics of the twenty second century reviewing our times striving to reconstruct our civilization will look not to the painters, not to the architects nor dramatists, but to the novelists to find our idiosyncrasy.... If the novel is popular it is popular with a reason; that is to say, it is essential;...it is an instrument, a tool, a weapon, a vehicle" (1971, Pp.289 - 290).

Lucien Goldman, in his book *Towards A Sociology of the Novel*, observes that the first problem that a sociology of the novel should have confronted is that of the relation between the novel form itself and the structure of the social environment which it developed, that is to say, between the novel as a literary genre and individualistic modern society. He tells us that the gradual elimination of individualism by the transformation of the economic life and the replacement of the economy of free competition by an economy of cartels and monopolies, is paralleled by a transformation of the novel form that culminates in the gradual dissolution and disappearance of the individual character of the hero, a transformation characterised in an extremely schematic way, by the existence of two periods: i) the transitional period during which the rejection of the importance of the individual brings with it attempts to replace biography as the content of the work of fiction with values produced by different ideologies (eg: Socialist ideology) ii) the second period beginning more or less with Kafka and continuing to the contemporary *nouveau roman*, characterised by the abandonment of any attempt to replace the problematic hero and individual biography by another reality and by the effort to write the novel of the absence of the subject, of the non-existence of any on-going search.

Realism in the nineteenth century:

Nineteenth century was primarily a century of realism, and France took the leading role in the European realism of this period. Harry Levin is very emphatic about the French lead role:

The occidental novel looks back to brilliant beginnings in Italy and Spain. Perhaps it registers its highest degree of imaginative intensity in Russia and America, but it was England which led the way in the eighteenth century and France which seems to have taken it over in the nineteenth century. The fact that Germany had had so few novelists of distinction is clarified by a remark of Andre Gide's: "The fatherlands of the novel are the lands of individualism". A sociological study had concluded that Germany identified itself too uncritically with the interest of the middle class. No land has been more self critical or more individualistic than France and no literature has spoken for all of Europe with more authority (1963, P.74).

The abiding preoccupation of the French novel, he says can be summed up in the single word, *moeurs* which can be translated by two different English words, namely 'manners' and 'morals', but which retains the impersonality of the Latin *mores*. In English literature, there seems to have been a gradual divorce between manners and morals. Novels of manners like Meredith's for example, have been rather eccentric and superficial, and novels of morals like George Eliot's have been more earnest and didactic. "For Flaubert and Zola morals were the criteria of manner, and manners, the test of morals and where the practice

failed to live up to the theory, nothing less than an uncompromising realism could deal with the situation. (1963, P. 75). The comparatively shorter distance between fiction and criticism is due, in Harold Laski's phrase to "the great French tradition of making criticism a commentary on life". (As in Harry Levin, 1963, P.76). In other countries, literature and society are two distinct things but in France they interpenetrate. Hence the novelist is ex-officio a social critic. French philosophy, under the aspect of Cartesian dualism, had insisted upon a clear-cut distinction, and a running parallel between material reality and the realism of ideas. "Realism as we define it", Levin concludes, is therefore implicit in the traditional structure of French thought" (1963, P.74).

Charles Nodier, an anti-establishment thinker made this remarkable observation in *La Quotidienne* 12 January 1823.

At the state we have reached, the novel as an expression of the civilization of our times to which it has regularly adapted itself through every shift and turn, appears destined to assume a new character in response to the interest that contemporary minds take in important social questions and their readiness to challenge those interests and prerogatives that former generations took for granted. The novel of this century will thus necessarily be informed by an austerer and more profound spirit of observation than that which concentrates on the minutiae of social behaviour and the passing 'quirks' of fashion. It will absorb the lessons taught by that experimental philosophy of purely human origin which is gaining increasing doctrinal credit among the nations as the dogmatic philosophy of revealed religions begins to lose its hold. (as in Levin, 1963, P. 58).

Ever since the outbreak of the Revolution, France, but for a short spell, had felt a sort of vacuum created by the lack of an efficient or answerable governing class. It was against this backdrop that the French novel assumed certain quasi public obligations. In the absence of regular institutions, literature became one whose leadership was conceded in Europe, if not in France. Of the successive generations that have been shaken by literary revolution, only one-- the generation of the mid nineteenth century -- claims the explicit label of realism. It was Gustave Courbet known among his admirers as the landscape painter of humanity, who first proclaimed himself a realist. When the salons objected to his literal treatment of peasants and labourers and middle classes, he retorted by issuing manifestoes in the name of realism. When the Paris exposition of 1855 refused to hang his pictures he erected his own *Pavilion du Realisme*, and began to publicize the movement on an international scale. He was finally exiled for his involvement in the Paris commune. The quasi photographic genre painting of the Barbizon School later popularised realism. When photography was invented by Niepce de Saint Victor in 1824 and subsequently developed by Jacques Daguerre, it was considered by writers and painters as a threat to their own creative skills. Nothing short of a work like the *comedie humaine* by Balzac could compete with the daguerrotype.

Two prominent figures who can never be ignored in any discussion of European realism are a pair of journalists whose novels created less excitement than their articles on contemporary art and literature. Jules Fleury Husson under the pseudonym of Champfleury collected some of his critical articles into a volume *Le Realisme* which came out in 1857. Edmund, Duranty edited seven numbers of a little magazine *Realisme* at monthly intervals between November 1856 and May 1857. Both of them were opposed to using the term 'school' to

refer to their movement as they felt that realism signified a frank and complete expression of individualities and was actually an attack upon convention, imitation and every sort of school.

To Duranty the objective of realism was the exact, complete and sincere reproduction of the social milieu and the epoch in which one lived. Champfleury's laconic definition of realism as sincerity in art meant something against a context of artistic affectation. He remarked that the lower classes were apter subjects for literature as he felt that they were more sincere. He reminds us that realism is an insurrection of a minority. His distrust of form and his attempt to judge works of art by their content fore shadows the later Marxist critics. He distinguished the friends and foes of realism as *sinceristes* and *formistes*.

The realists were against all sorts of romanticising and imaginative treatment of literature. Edmund Duranty's language turns abusive when he attacks writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Baudelaire and Lamartine. By the end of the nineteenth century, realism and naturalism together revolutionised writing by attempting to liquidate the last assets of "romance" in fiction and by purging it once and for all of the idealism of the "beautiful lie". Champfleury is all praise for Diderot's realism : 'Diderot did not invent anything, discover anything, he was only the intelligent copyist of an unfortunate passion that played itself before him; he had to do no more than display human nature in a certain number of pages". (1857, Pp.94-95).

The united front formed against romanticism gave a superficial and deceptive aspect of cohesion to the realist idea. But the appeal made by the

realists to truth was essentially simplistic. The realists' obsession with truth did not leave room for anything else. Questions of technique were ignored and even proscribed as a part of literary paraphernalia of the past. Realists were in revolt against complexity and consciousness, and, so, simplicity and sincerity came to be viewed as criteria of worth in artistic production. Emile Zola formulates the reductive principle of the realistic technique most vividly in his metaphor of the three screens: The classic screen enlarges, the romantic screen distorts, whereas the realist screen gives an unimpeded view. "The realist screen is plain glass, very thin, very clear, which aspires to be so perfectly transparent that images may pass through it and remake themselves in all their reality". (Letter of August 1864 as in Grant, P.28). Damian Grant compares Zola's relegation of imagination to Plato's exclusion of the poet from the ideal state of the Republic.

Balzac decided to structure his entire fictional output in order to provide a complete contemporary history of a kind no novelist had ever attempted before. His grand design inspired his successor, Emile Zola to embark on his own series *Les Rougon Macquart*, wisely limited to twenty volumes, which dealt with the life of the Second Empire (1852-70).

The period of industrial capitalism is also known as the period of classic realism. It is during this period that human culture has most consistently and profoundly been examined by the novel. Everett Knight divides the classic realist works into two distinct levels of discourse: the explicit and the implicit:

The explicit is the tribute the novelist pays to the obvious; it is his denunciation of a society which, with a monstrous abuse of

confidence, always places money before people. The novelist may convey his judgements, criticisms, directly by suspending the narration momentarily as do Balzac and Dickens, or in the more refined technique of a Zola or Tolstoy; opposition will be incorporated into what is shown and how it is shown. On the implicit level, the novelist gives expression to pre-suppositions which are those of his class and historical period, and these assumptions are of nature to annul in one way or another the novelist's criticism of his society (1970, P.26).

Over-emphasis of the explicit leads to a thesis novel like Balzac's *Medicin de Campagne*, an over emphasis of the implicit may be intolerably dull, but it remains undoubtedly a novel. These two levels are not always clearly discernible as they are in writers like Balzac and Dickens, one level may easily shade into the other. Therefore, Knight says, by and large, we can conclude that the explicit is what the novelist says consciously and deliberately and the implicit is what is said much less consciously. The 'classical novel' he says, is about the identity of human beings and this identity is at once, 'free' (for it has to be proven) and yet it is an entity (for it is always given). We shall say that identity is a given proven. (P.29).

Naturalism:

If realism was on the way to becoming in art what positivism was in philosophy, then in its naturalist apotheosis it realised this condition. It was Taine who first argued for the naturalist theory in literature in the Introduction to his *Histoire de la Litterature Anaglaise* (1863-1864). The universe he said, was a great mechanism, and everything, including man, his

moral life and all his work, could be understood in terms of cause and effect. The research into causes must come after the collection of facts. It doesn't matter whether the facts are physical or moral, they will still have causes; there are causes for ambition, courage and truthfulness, as there are for digestion, muscular movement and animal warmth. Vice and virtue are products like vitriol and sugar, and every complex element has its origins in the admixture of other, simpler elements on which it depends. Taine argues that Stendhal was the first who composed his works by a scientific procedure, who introduced scientific procedure into the history of the heart. Balzac's work, he believed, is the greatest hoard of information which we have on human nature. His intention, Taine argues, was to emulate Buffon's work in Zoology, and write a natural history of man. It must also be remarked that Balzac deliberately dissociated himself from the sensualist and materialist philosophy that was to provide the real impetus for naturalism. Zola quotes Taine in the epigraph to the first edition of *Therese Raquin* : 'Vice and virtue are products like vitriol and sugar'.

The naturalists declared their faith in science, in the methods observation, experimentation and documentation. Zola's theory, as stated in his "*Le roman experimental* (1880) made of the novelist, a kind of diagnostician in fiction, with a scientifically dispassionate attitude. His faith in the scientific method is complete, and he held the view that the novel should set a good example by submitting itself to the scientific spirit. Naturalism derives from the natural science, and the naturalist, therefore, has to be an observer of the natural phenomena. In the Preface to *Therese Raquin*, Zola compares himself to a surgeon. The naturalist, according to him, is both an observer (empiricist) and an experimenter (scientist); the observer prepares the ground where characters may appear and things may happen, then the scientist appears and begins the experiment, sets the characters in motion in a particular story. Zola attempted a social panorama of the Second Empire, just as Balzac had attempted one in respect of the Restoration period. He took up a single family with two branches, one legitimate, enjoying all the advantages of education and in inherited

property, and the other illegitimate, outcasts from the very start. The legitimate branch, the Rougons, would give Zola his opportunity to study the rising middle class, the illegitimate, the Macquarts, would provide a variety of lower class types. Zola titled his novel series: *The Naturalist and Social History of a Family Under the Second Empire*.

Naturalism has often been described as pessimistic determinism and the naturalists were all determinists in that they believed in the omnipotence of abstract forces. They regarded individuals as pawns on a chessboard. Theodore Dreiser once remarked that man is the victim of forces over which he has no control. In some of his works, Frank Norris carried this magnification of forces and reduction of persons to an even greater extreme. Men were nothings, were animalculae, were ephemeridas, that fluttered and fell, and were forgotten between dawn and dusk, he said in the last but one chapter of *The Octopus*. "Men were nought, life was nought, FORCE only existed - FORCE that brought men into the worlds, FORCE that made the wheat grow, FORCE that garnered it from the soil to give place to the succeeding crop" (1963, P.430). But like many other novelists, he was able to combine this romantic pessimism about the individuals with the romantic optimism about the future of mankind. "The individual suffers, but the race goes on", he says at the end of the novel. Zola, too, believed in the perfectibility of mankind.

Naturalism is the logical result of realism, and by exaggeration makes the defects and limitations of realism more apparent. The very fact that naturalism very heavily depended on scientific method reveals its inherent weakness. Only scientific objectives can be attained by scientific methods. When the scientific substructure supporting the naturalist facade started collapsing, the movement

was discredited. Huysman said that his objection to naturalism was not because of "the lumpy wash of its clumsy style, but, for its garbage of ideas" (as in Grant, 1978, P.45). Naturalism thus got trapped in the perversity of its own theoretical ideas and was confined to the monotonous studies of mediocre characters revolving among exhaustive descriptions of drawing rooms and landscapes. Benardete makes an interesting comparison between realism and naturalism in the Introduction to his *American Realism: A Shape for Fiction*.

It is not ultimately their class or their vision of society that distinguishes realists from naturalists. The unavoidable difference between them lies in their vision of the "real", the "true". For realists it is immediately verifiable. Reality, truth, is found in the visible present and is even available to an intelligent perceptor. It affects his moral judgement because this informed person will see the advantage of living wisely, sensibly in the current hour. For the naturalists the real and true is always partially hidden from his eyes. It is the very shape of a system only partially revealed by facts now at hand. No man fully divines the ultimate end of that creation in which he is but a part" (1971, P.23).

According to George J. Becker, "the effect of naturalism as a doctrine is to subtract from literature the whole notion of human responsibility. Men were the blind result of conditions, forces, physical laws, or nature itself" (1963, P.434). Lukacs observes that restricting itself exclusively to the faithful reproduction of immediate reality, naturalism robbed literature of its power to give a living and dynamic picture of the essential driving forces of history" (1981, P.245).

Novel and Ideology:

Lennard J. Davis believes that the novels have entered and changed our culture in ways that, in fact, may not be salutary, and therefore, we have to resist them. Novel reading is a relatively new phenomenon. In Shakespeare's time, for example, none would have thought of spending hours in reading a book all alone. People were more used to communal experiences like theatre going or listening to a ballad singer. Today it is quite common to see people sitting passively and alone in the midst of hordes of strangers in some corner of a room, reading some novel, blocking themselves from outside stimulæ and trying to visualize, analyse, and experience a fantasy which they believe, in some provisional way, to be true.

Novel is a strange combination of commodity and cognitive experience and so, it occupies a special role in the development of culture. It is Janus faced as it holds on to an earlier form related to craft and cottage industry for its creation, but it is at the same time reliant on technology and merchandizing for its distribution and effect. It is against this backdrop of the novel as the first rearing of the mass media head that one has to consider the way in which ideology and human defenses began to jointly operate from the eighteenth century onwards. Novel reading began when the authority of the religion began to lose hold on man's life. The role of mediating between the self and the world passed from religion to novel. When a commodity based on the market place and on merchandizing replaced a traditional form, the distinction between fact and fiction, self and the other, the inner and outer worlds, began to collapse in a completely different way with significant consequences. As Christopher Lasch

observes, "reality itself is no longer real in the sense of arising from a people's shared understanding, from a shared past, and from shared values. More and more, our impressions of the world derive not from the observations we make both as individuals and as members of a wider community, but from elaborate systems of communication which spew out information, much of it unbelievable, about events of which, we seldom have any direct knowledge". (1979, P.133). The novel, as a cultural phenomenon, Davis says, is one part of a gigantic defense mechanism, that is, it serves a defensive function in helping us carry on and live in the world.

Davis's arguments run on the following lines: Novels are not life, their situation of telling their stories is alienated from lived experience, their subject matter is heavily oriented towards the ideological and their function is to help humans to adapt to the fragmentation and isolation of the modern world. Novels do not depict life, they depict life as it is represented by ideology. Ideology constitutes the sum of that which a culture needs to believe about itself and its aspirations as opposed to what really is. Ideology is in effect a culture's form of writing a novel about itself for itself. And a novel is a form that incorporates that cultural fiction into a particular story. Likewise, fiction becomes, in turn, one of the ways in which the culture teaches itself about itself, and thus novels become agents inculcating ideology.

That novels are ideological doesn't mean that they are trying to make some political point or other, they operate ideologically, primarily at the level of content. Just as ideology presents a complete and evident explanation of the state of affairs of a society, novels attempt to represent the totality of a society at a given time. The incidents of a novel may take place perhaps only in a

drawing room, but that room will contain in its small and limited scope the social relations and thought systems of the larger world. The ideological factors, however, do not operate only at the level of content, but even at the level of form. Davis's book dwells at length upon the ways in which ideology works at the levels of location, character, dialogue and plot.

Before the advent of the novel, narratives in most cultures used a fairly flat, simple backdrop that lacked the thickness of the novelistic space. Space in realistic novels must be more than simply a backdrop. It must have dimension and depth. Novelistic space is involved in a series of more or less hidden, ideological presuppositions about the nature of property and lands and the relationship of various races and classes to those lands. "At roughly the period that Europe was creating a representation of its colonies", writes Davis, "its novelists -- at least Defoe -- were colonizing another kind of space, a space perhaps more complete and total because it was inside the mind of that particular captive of the novel who was the middle class reader" (1987, P. 63). Early novels were ideological not in the sense that they were attempts at propagating any particular ideology or view point, but in the sense that they were trying to devise structures that worked in those times and places. Robinson Crusoe colonizes the island and then imposes his language and system on the islanders Lennard Davis points out that Crusoe's private act of settling in the island can be seen as a kind of parody, intended or not, of what England was doing throughout the world.

The problem with America was that there were no ruins and relics and its myths were hidden behind the obscure cloak of native American signs and symbols and the wilderness resisted any kind of association. That is to say, the

spaces of the colonies were without pre-ordained meaning or ideology, and meaning had to be supplied from without. Painters like Thomas Cole, John Frederick Kensett and novelists like James Fennimore Cooper gave a meaning to the wilderness, inscribed the natural forms with intelligible iconography, and so, turned them into ideological space. Irwing Howe tells us that a political novel is "a novel in which the political milieu is the dominant setting" (1957, P.3). According to Davis, the novel's ideology operates not by advocating a particular political stand point or by imposing on the reader any of the novelist's beliefs:

The process of allowing a novel to work, allowing it to tell a story, is inseparable from the desire to have each element of the story infused with another kind of meaning, a meaning which controls the reality of the novel and our reaction to it. It is in this very special sense that novels are ideological not so much because a novelist tells us to vote for a poor law reform or condemn the Vietnam War, but because the very presupposition of the novel is that a here and now rationalising authority creates an order to which the reader must passively assent in order to allow the novel to work (1987, P.144).

Introductory notes on American Realism :

The history of modern America begins precisely at the same time when modern novel was born. As Leslie Fielder points out in his essay "The Death and Rebirth of Novel", the underlying national mythos of the Americans is a pop myth, and their revolution consequently a pop Revolution, as compared with either the French or the Russian Revolution which began with ideological

disputes and the formulation of high level manifestoes. "Our own war of Independence, on the contrary, began not with abstract ideas at all (though later we composed ideological documents to justify a *fait accompli*.), but with a group of quite grown up men dressing up like Indians and dumping into the Boston Harbour that supreme symbol of effete European Civilization, British tea" (1974, P 195). The American writers, he remarks have mostly produced best sellers more than works of high art. It may also be pointed out that no American novelist at any rate has ever forgotten the necessity of speaking to and for everybody, including all the ethnic minorities. Especially notable in this regard, are the authentic voices of those two non-European groups in whose presence and on whose backs, as it were, transplanted Europeans have built the American Culture: the Red man and the Blacks. It started with Chingachgook of Fennimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* and continues even today, in characters like Bromden of Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

The development of America as a nation was, from the beginning, a conscious adaptation of older European cultural patterns to a frontier civilization. Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards remark that "the average American was unusually aware of his role in history and of the direct relationship existing between his everyday life and the shaping of his government and social institutions. The writings in American Literature naturally reflect this relationship even more strongly than would the literary products of a more settled society". (1974, P.1).

The American novel, according to Richard Chase, "has worked out its destiny and defined itself by incorporating an element of romance, and it differs

from its English counterpart, by its perpetual reassessment and reconstitution of romance within the novel form" (1973, viii). Romance is usually known for its qualities like fantasy, sentimentality and escapism. But the American novelists have used romance for a better purposes: to introduce into the novel what one may roughly describe as the narrow profundity of New England Puritanism, the skeptical, rationalistic, spirit of the Enlightenment, and the imaginative freedom of Transcendentalism" (x). The fundamental moral question in Cooper, and in American fiction generally "is one of piety; characters are judged according to whether they have reverence for life, especially for wild, innocent, untainted life, whether this may appear in a deer on the prairie, a whale in the Pacific, or in an excellent and complicated young American woman on her travels in Europe" [Chase P 62].

Comparing the English novel with the American, Chase observes that the English Novel has always followed a middle path. It is notable for its great practical sanity, its powerful engrossing composition of wide ranges of experience into a moral centrality and equability of judgement. "Yet the profound poetry of disorder that we find in American novel is missing in the English Novel". (P 2). The two strong influences behind the English Novel, he says, are the classical tragedy and Christianity. The American imagination even when it wishes to assuage and reconcile the contradictions of life, has not been stirred by the possibility of catharsis or incantation by the tragic or Christian possibility. It has been stirred, rather, by the aesthetic possibilities of radical form of alienation, contradiction and disorder. The English novel, he says, has been a kind of imperial enterprise, an appropriation of reality with the high purpose of bringing order to disorder. By contrast, the American novel has

generally seemed content to explore, rather than to appropriate and civilize the remarkable and in some ways unexampled territories of life in the New World and to reflect its anomalies and dilemmas. The middle brow literature in American writing has generally been dull and mediocre. "Our best novelists have been not middle brows, but either highbrows like Henry James, or lowbrows like Mark Twain, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, or a combination of the two like Ernest Hemingway, Herman Melville and William Faulkner. The English Novel at best is staunchly middle brow. The cultural conditions within which English literature has evolved have allowed it to become a great middlebrow literature, the only one it may be, in history"(Chase, 1973, P.10).

An important difference between the European writers and the American novelists is that while many of the front ranking European novelists were eminent as writers of the novels of manners (eg: Cervantes, Fielding, Stendhal, Balzac, Tolstoy and so on), the great American writers very rarely made their mark in this area. Their natural style is something else. The reason, Chase tells us, is that, as Cooper once complained, there are no manners to be observed in American life and the manners we notice, at all, are nearly uniform among all Americans. Although, it may not literally be true, certainly, a novelist needs a far more vivid variety of manners than so far, has been discovered in the country. Also, there is the persistent distrust of or simple lack of interest in the idea of society itself, so that it seems unnatural to most American writers to suppose that social conventions and laws are beneficial to the individual.

In Europe, the novels of manners have met with success by bringing people of different social classes into conflict, but in America nearly everyone a novelist of manners is interested in, has been middle class, and has very likely prided himself on manners indistinguishable from a lower class which is always incipiently middle class itself. On the whole, the American novelists have not been interested in social manners, but in personalities or transcendent value. Chase is of the firm opinion that "the novelist who undertakes to reflect our social scene, or some segment of it in literal detail, as Sinclair Lewis did in *Babbitt* or Howells in *A Modern Instance*, or Mrs. Wharton in *The Age of Innocence*, finds that not all his wit and perspicacity can save his novel from reflecting too strongly the comparative social dullness of America"(Chase, P.16).

Eric J. Lundquist in *American Realism* speaks of the contradictory characteristics in American realism:

In material, it includes the sensational, the sentimental, the vulgar, the scientific, the outrageously comic, the desperately philosophical, in style, it ranges from the exquisitely fine craft of James, to the resonant colloquial idiom of Twain, to the block-like profusions of Dreiser, in purpose, it approaches the cultural essay, aspires to the utility of propaganda, seeks to dramatize the theatre of social manners cuts its own throat in deliberate parody. It is, and does all these things -- often at the same time. (1982 "Preface").

Nineteenth century American realism, Alfred Kazin once remarked, had not true battle ground, as it had no intellectual history, few models, virtually no theory and no unity.

"The origin of the problem", he says, "lay in the fact that while various European traditions of realism could more clearly be seen to have grown out of identifiable and logically successive climates of political and philosophical thought, realism in America grew out of the bewilderment, and thrived on the simple grimness of a generation suddenly brought face to face with the pervasive materialism of industrial capitalism" (1942, P.10, P.12).

For half a century before the Civil War, romance dominated the American literary scene and the prominent writers of the period were Fennimore Cooper, William Gilmore Simms, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. The post Civil War period brought severe criticism against the damaging effects of romance. W. D. Howells was the first to write of and for, the new American bourgeois. A group of writers generally known as the local colorists expressed in their works a lingering parochialism and they considered political nationalism a threat to the independent village life of an earlier America. Prominent among them were Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909) and George Washington Cable (1844-1925). Yet another school of realists known as embittered local colorists belonged to the west. They were victims of the agricultural hard times of the 1870s and 80s. (For instance, writers like Joseph Kirkland and Hamlin Garland). Alfred Kazin argues that it is the writings of these westerns that shaped later literary styles. "It is to these lone protestants of their time who did not always know that they were writing 'realism', to Jeffersonian hearts plagued by a strangely cold and despotic America, to writers, some of whom lacked every capacity for literature save a compelling passion to tell the truth, that the emancipated and metropolitan literature of contemporary America owes its very inception (1942, Pp. 16-17).

The American Civil War was followed by an extraordinary progress in the development of communication and transportation, in the spread of education and a sudden increase in the mobility of people and of ideas resulting in a sort of abrogation of the entire social structures of orders and categories previously held valid. The sudden wave of capitalism brought wealth and abundance to American society. The close connection between realism and wealth brought in by massive industrial production is evident in American literature as it is in the European literature, yet, with a distinction.

The age of realism in America, is the age of the romance of money - money not in any simple sense, but in the complex alterations of human value that it brings into being by its own capacities for reproduction. In American realism the way in which a hero revolts is different from the way the European hero does. The debased values and hypocritical entanglements of the society are countered by him not by an outright rejection of them, but by those distortions of character that can make him the exemplary figure of power within the society. The hero is democratised by being permitted to incorporate the age's own dream of successes, its own special romance (Lundquist, 1982, P.20).

According to Edwin H. Cady, the American realism of the period 1860-1910 which began as a negative movement exhibited six characteristics: the customary features of a literary revolt, a new notion of reality from which to be critical of its past, a positive method and content, an ethical outlook of its own, a major, but losing battle for American public taste, and finally a tendency towards the psychologism which was to succeed it. (1971, Pp. 4-5). A few relevant entries in Ambrose Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary* would help us to understand the ironic

and perverse directions American literary realism had taken by the last decade of the nineteenth century: "Realism : (n) The art of depicting nature as it is seen by toads, the charm suffusing a landscape painted by a mole or a story written by a measuring worm. Reality : (n) The dream of a mad philosopher. That which would remain in the cupel if one should assay a phantom. The nucleus of a vacuum. Really: (adv) Apparently" (as cited in "Preface", Eric J. Lundquist 1982).

Decline of Realism

Realism, which was an intense and powerful movement in the nineteenth century European literature, was on its decline towards the concluding phase of the century. How did such a movement which dominated the literature of a whole continent go out of focus within such a short period? Literary historians usually consider the year 1887 as the beginning of the decline of this great movement. A few young writers, all self-proclaimed disciples of Emile Zola, issued some kind of a manifestoe in that year in which they solemnly declared that having read *La Terre* or as much of *La Terre* as had appeared at that time in instalments, they wished to declare themselves against his school, because they were shocked and disgusted with Zola's brutal savagery and the excessive preoccupation with sex in his latest writings. Shortly after this, Zola's naturalism was denounced in countries like Italy, Spain and Germany. Along side this denouncement came the general reaction against rationalism that was gaining momentum under the impulse of such varied thinkers as Schopenhauer, Gobineau, Wagner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and Rimbaud.

If the rise of realism can be linked with the rise of the bourgeois in Europe, its decline can likewise be linked with the decline of self confidence among the middle classes at the end of the nineteenth century. By the close of the century, when all the political, economic industrial and cultural apparatus of the nation-state had come under the control of the successful bourgeoisie, realism acquired a new function: it became vehemently critical and deflationary, especially with writers like Emile Zola. There was at this time among the bourgeois, a vague mistrust of the future and an uncertainty as to how long it would be able to contain the increasingly militant forces of the underprivileged. This concern was shared not only by the people of Europe, but also by people in other parts of Asia and Africa where the European powers had established colonies. The publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1847, founding of the First International in 1864, an unprecedented outbreak of class warfare represented by the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871, the growth of trade union movements -- all these were portents of a cataclysmic future. All these accelerating forces resulted in the waning of self confidence among the middle classes. Hemmings in *The Age of Realism* discusses the change of public opinion among the middle classes during this period: "It grew more and more averse to reading harrowing accounts of the seamy side of life in slums, factories and impoverished villages. Instead, it looked to its writers to provide an imaginary refuge from reality, it applauded any and every experiment in escapism, from historicism to occultism, from airy symbolism to the grossest forms of decadent eroticism" (1974, P 361).

Another reason for the decline of realism is the emergence of academic sociology as a scientific discipline. Ever since Balzac's writings, realists always

claimed to be writing 'studies' rather than works of imaginative fiction. They were all trying to analyze the social problems and collect data by diligent inquiry and research. This virtually amounted to imitating, in an amateurish way, the work that was being undertaken more diligently by a group of people pursuing studies in what later came to be called academic sociology. Auguste Comte, an exact contemporary of Balzac (1798 - 1857) considered sociology as the most complex of the six main categories of human knowledge, the others being mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology. His methods of observation on the basis of which he was to formulate his laws were very similar to the studies and analyses that Balzac proclaimed in the Preface to the *Human Comedy*. His principal successor Frederic Le Play (1806 - 1882) and another figure, Gabriel Tarde continued their studies in the same line, and, in due course, it became evident that the sociologist was better equipped than the novelist for the task of investigating and explaining social phenomena. Once this was established, one of the principal claims of realism was discredited.

Possibly, a more fundamental reason lay in the fact that it became increasingly difficult to believe in the possibility of achieving genuine objectivity in the novel. Zola's description of the three screens, the classic, the romantic and the realistic was indeed picturesque. Even though he talked much about the realist screen and its capacity for giving an objective account of the life around, he himself, quite often felt that he was a poet, and despite being a man of his time, he could certainly not escape from the influence of his own romantic temperament.

Summing up the chapter on "Decline of Realism", Hemmings refers to the quasi-algebraical formula by Arno Holz: $\text{art} = \text{nature} - x$, where x stands for the limitations of the medium. The best efforts of the realists were devoted to reducing the value of x to zero, in which case, the equation would read: $\text{art} = \text{nature}$. Admittedly, art should never be nature; it was always in Zola's phrase nature seen through a temperament, the more transparent the interposed 'temperament' the more satisfactory would be the resultant art product (1974, P. 364). This was the slightly absurd position reached by the theoreticians of realism at the end of the nineteenth century.

If the realist tradition was to thrive, the novelists had to retreat from the doctrinal *cul de sac* where it had come to stay, and explore new paths. Some writers did put in their remarkable efforts to save the realist tradition from this sad plight: The socialist realists of Russia, English authors like Arnold Bennet and John Galsworthy and writers like Upton Sinclair and Theodore Dreiser in the U. S. were all realists in whom the realist tradition evolved into new forms. But the more gifted geniuses didn't look back to this tradition in their own writings. For example, Marcel Proust didn't even believe in the concept of disinterested observer or a neutral viewpoint. According to him, there is no external reality and each one of us lives in his own subjective universe which of course, is affected by what goes on outside, but is structured, in addition, by all the experiences he has undergone throughout his life, experiences which have determined the particular cast of his mind and the special quality of his imagination. Proust believed that every impression is two sided, one half embedded in the object and the other half extending to ourselves. It is only the other half that we can know, but the traditional realist art had consistently

neglected this other half. What it could produce was only a useless copy of what the eye sees. The real duty of a realist should be, according to him, to translate into terms understandable by the reader, the reality that lies within him.

But despite this rejection of external reality by the modernist writers like Proust Marxist writers and critics were still profoundly interested in the concept of realism. In *Studies in European Realism*, Lukacs asserts that the question as to whether the European realism reached its culmination in Gide, Proust and Joyce, or whether it had reached the peak much earlier in Balzac and Tolstoy shall be decided by the *weltanschauung* their works present. Realism, he says, is not some sort of a midway between false objectivity and false subjectivity, but is the true solution- bringing third way opposed to all the pseudo-dilemmas engendered by the wrongly posed questions of those who wander without a chart in the labyrinth of our time. The central aesthetic problem of realism, Lukacs says, is the presentation of the complete human personality and even the inner life of man, its essential traits and conflicts can be truly portrayed only in organic connection with the social and historical factors. This organic connection between man as a private individual and as a social being has been a difficult question ever since the rise of the modern bourgeois society. It seems, the inner life has been proceeding almost parallel to the outer, obeying its own autonomous laws. The great realists of the nineteenth century knew that this schism in human personality amounted to a mutilation of the essence of man. It is this schism which has become an essential factor in the modernist writings. Whereas the great realist literature recognised the Aristotelian dictum that Man is *Zoon Politikon*, and that his *Sein an sich*, or his ontological being, cannot be separated from the context in which he is created, the

modernist argument is that man by nature is solitary, asocial and unable to enter into meaningful relationship with other human beings. Heidegger's description of the human existence as "thrownness into being" (*Geworfenheit ins Dasein*) is perhaps the best graphic evocation of the ontological solitariness of the individual. This state of thrownness implies not merely that man is constitutionally unable to establish relationships with things or persons outside himself, but also that it is impossible to determine theoretically the origin and goal of human existence. This negation of history, says Lukacs in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, takes two different forms in modernist literature: the hero being strictly confined within the limit of his own experience, having no pre-existent reality beyond his own self acting upon him or being acted upon him, or the hero without any personal history being thrown into the world meaninglessly with no development through contact with the world. Lukacs asserts that realist literature aiming at a truthful reflection of reality must demonstrate both the concrete and abstract potentialities of human beings in extreme situations of this kind. Whereas abstract potentiality belongs wholly to the realm of subjectivity, concrete potentiality is concerned with the dialectic between the individual's subjectivity and objective reality. If solitariness is taken for the essential human condition and it is identified with reality itself, the distinction between the abstract and concrete potentiality becomes null and void.

Lukacs's essay, "Art and Objective Truth", gives his views on representation and the novel. He concentrates on four ideas: reflection, idealism, materialism and objectivity. To reflect is to frame a mental structure in words. Like Aristotle, Lukacs believes that the writer does not simply

register individual objects or events, but gives us the full process of life. Art is a special way of reflecting reality, and it is not to be confused with reality itself. The notion of the novel's separation from reality links Lukacs with German idealist philosophy and distinguishes his approach very clearly from that of Zola. The novelist, he argues, refuses to see reality as mechanical causation of random flux, but tries to assist the reader to experience the process of reality as an ordered and significantly shaped world. This idealist element means that Lukacs' materialism is not the pseudo-scientific materialism of Zola, but a materialism which seeks to reveal the deep structural process of historical change. The objectivity of realism, according to Lukacs, is not a dispassionate non-involvement, but a commitment to a particular reading of human society, the partisanship of objectivity (as in Raman Selden, 1992, P. 59).

According to Lukacs, the nineteenth century realist novel is a model of literary form because it achieves the adequate presentation of complete human personality. Bertholt Brecht's profound disagreement with Lukacs centres on the question of form. Realism, he says, is an old concept, and before we apply it to the modern context, it has to be "spring-cleaned," because literary forms of expressions cannot be taken over like industrial methods:

We shall take care not to ascribe realism to a particular historical form of novel belonging to a particular period, Balzac's or Tolstoy's for instance, so as to set up purely formal and literary criteria of realism. We shall not restrict ourselves to speaking of realism in cases where one can (eg.) smell, look, feel whatever is depicted, where 'atmosphere' is created and

stories developed in such a way that the characters are psychologically stripped down. Our conception of realism needs to be broad and political, free from aesthetic restrictions and independent of convention. *Realist* means : laying bare society's causal network / showing up the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators / writing from the standpoint of the class which has prepared the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society/ emphasizing the dynamics of developments/ concrete and so as to encourage abstraction (as in John Willett, 1964, P.108).

This means that by copying the methods of realists like Balzac or Tostoy, we cease to be realists. Brecht continues: "Methods wear out. Stimuli fail. New problems loom up and demand new techniques. Reality alters: to represent it, the means of representation must alter too"(as in Willett,P.109).

The realist literature, despite its vehement criticism of reality, always takes for granted that there is a wholeness, a unity, in the world at large, and that the world is one with man himself. But with the modernist's subjectivisation of time and disintegration of human personality, the once natural unity of the world has turned into a constructed unity. The disintegration of personality in modernist literature has made *angst* the basic modernist experience.

Expressive realism owed its wide currency to the commonsense view which held that literature and valuable literary texts should tell truths about the periods in which they were produced, about the world in general and about

human nature in particular. It belonged roughly to the last century and a half, the period of industrial capitalism. In expressive realism the text is seen to possess a single determinate meaning, however complex, and the authority for this meaning is the author. Meaning is what the author puts into the text. Almost all the recent theories have rejected this view, and expressive realism has been subjected to a series of theoretical attacks from various quarters. The Russian Formalists, the semioticians, the New Critics, and genre theorists like Northrop Frye have all deplored the theory of expressive realism. Several critical positions co-existed within the earlier paradigm which was premised upon commonsense. At one extreme is F. R. Leavis who argues that what makes a writer great is his intuitive apprehension of "felt life". At the other extreme is the Marxist position of Georg Lukacs who thinks that it is sympathy with the sufferings of the people in conjunction with the thirst for truth and a fanatic striving for reality that makes a writer great. Concluding the chapter on "Criticism and Commonsense" in *Critical Practice*, Catherine Blisey writes: "Truth to life, for instance, is not a universal criterion of greatness in literature, but a value which characterises the period of humanism, seen as historically determinate, distinct from both the middle age and the modern period when the mimetic theory is without authority" (1980, P.35).

The logical possibility of expressive realism is put in question by post-Saussurian linguistics which challenges the empiricist idealist ways of understanding the relationship between language and the world. Language, according to Saussure, is not a nomenclature, a way of naming things which already exist, but a system of differences with no positive terms. It is a system of signs where the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. At the same time, the signified and the signifier are inseparably linked.

The arbitrariness of the signs points to the fact that language is a matter of convention. Meaning is the result not of individual intention but of inter-individual intelligibility. In other words, meaning is socially constructed and intimately related to the social formation itself. So, the post-Saussurian position is that if signifieds are not pre-existing, given concepts, but changeable and contingent concepts, and if changes in signifying practice are related to changes in the social formation, the notion of language as a neutral nomenclature functioning as an instrument of communication of meanings which exist independently of it, is clearly untenable. Language is a system which pre-exists the individual and in which the individual produces meaning. Writers in their works do not, in fact express a unique perception of the world, but produce meaning out of the available system of differences, and texts are intelligible in so far as they participate in it. From this post-Saussurian perspective, it is evident that the theory of literature as expressive realism is no longer tenable. The claim by the realists that a literary form reflects the world is simply tautological. Yet, it can't be denied that inspite of all the multipronged assaults on expressive realism the commonsense view has continued to flourish, and expressive realism has survived to this day with only minor injuries.

CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY MASTERS

AND

THE DEPICTION OF HUMAN PERSONALITY.

The term *realism* as applied to the literary movement of the nineteenth century France refers to the French sense of actuality, the sense of portraying life as it really is, that is, presenting objectively and correctly the observable details of actual life. The two great masters of realism in the nineteenth century French literature, Honore de Balzac, and Stendhal, recognized the adequate representation of the complete human personality as the central aesthetic problem of realism. They represent two basic trends in the realist movement. Balzac's primary concern was sociological, and he aimed to be the historian of his own times. Stendhal, too, was a chronicler of his times, but his concern was more psychological than sociological. Even while being a historian of his own times, he turned his attention to the individual, and what goes on in the individual psyche. According to Andre Maurois, "it is Balzac who occupies the central position in any considered account of realism, who claims and earns and duly receives the title of novelist before all others. The overwhelming quantity and the substantial quality of his writing form a monument around which there are no detours" (1971, P.151).

Balzac himself believed that the French society was going to be the historian and his task was to become the secretary to the historian. He tells us how he started observing life when he took a resolve to become an author:

I began to observe the activity of the Faubourg, its inhabitants, its characters. Observation soon became a matter of intuition with me, I looked into their souls without failing to notice externals, or rather I grasped these external features so completely that I straightaway saw beyond them. My method of observation endowed me with the capacity to share in the life of the individual in question just as he lived it; it permitted me to put myself in his place in the same way that the dervish in the *Arabian Nights* assumed the form and soul of the people over whom he uttered his magic incantation (as in Zweig, 1970, P.29).

Balzac's "Preface" to *The Human Comedy* tells us of the scope of his work, which he plans to complete in three stages:

In the *Studies of Manners*, are to be depicted all the repercussions of social conditions. I want to portray every situation in life, every type of physiognomy, every kind of male and female character, every way of living, every profession, every social stratum, every French province, childhood, the prime of life and old age, politics, law and war — nothing to be omitted. When this has been done and the story of the human heart revealed thread by thread, social history displayed in all its branches, then the foundations will have been made. I have no wish to describe episodes that have their springs in the

imagination. My theme is that which happens everywhere. Then comes the second stage — the *Philosophical Studies*. The depiction of effects is to be followed by the description of causes. In the *Studies of Manners*, I shall have shown the interplay of emotions, life, and its consequences. In the *Philosophical Studies*, I shall speak of the origin of emotions and of the motivating causes of life. I shall pose the question: “What are the operating forces, the conditions, without which neither society nor the life of the individual is possible?” And after I have dealt with society in this way, I shall examine it with a critical eye. In the *Studies of Manners*, individuals will be depicted in types; in the *Philosophical Studies*, the types will be depicted as individuals. It will always be life that I am portraying ... And finally after the effects and causes, will come the *Analytical Studies*.... For after the effects and causes we must look for the principles. The manners provide the drama; the causes represent the *coulisse* and the stage machinery. And finally, the principles, in other words, the author of the play. In proportion however, as the whole work gains height as though in a series of spirals, it narrows and becomes more and more concentrated. If I shall need 24 volumes for the *Studies of Manners*, I shall require 15 for *Philosophical Studies*, and only another 9 for the *Analytical Studies*. In this way I shall describe, criticise and analyse man himself, society and humanity without indulging in repetitions in a work which is to be a kind of the *Arabian Nights* of the occident (as in Zweig, 1970, Pp. 174-75).

The "Preface" tells us clearly how much he was concerned with the question of the complete human personality.

Portrayal of Reality:

What makes Balzac a truly great realist is the inexorable veracity with which he depicted reality even if that reality ran counter to his own personal opinions, hopes and wishes. *The Peasants*, a book which Balzac himself described as the most important book he wanted to write, tells us of the tragedy of the doomed landed aristocracy of France. No doubt, Balzac's sympathies were with the aristocracy. But, as Lukacs observes, "Yet for all his painstaking preparation and careful planning, what Balzac really did in his novel was the exact opposite of what he set out to do: What he depicted was not the tragedy of the aristocratic estate, but of the peasant small holding. It is precisely this discrepancy between intention and performance, between Balzac the political thinker and Balzac the author of *La Comedie Humaine* that constitutes Balzac's greatness" (1964, P.21).

Even though what Balzac really wanted was a compromise between the aristocratic landowner and the newly emerging bourgeois business community, he saw with pitiless clarity the direction in which social evolution was moving in the nineteenth century France. He calls the peasant a Robespierre with one head and twenty million arms, but the true realist in him gives us a monumental and perfectly balanced picture of the forces locked in struggle on both sides. He himself says in the novel about a writer's duty: "A story teller must never forget that it is his business to do justice to every party; the unfortunate and the rich are equals before his pen; for him the misery of the

peasant has its grandeur and the meanness of the rich its ridicule . . .” (as in Lukacs, 1964, P.28). The struggle that is depicted is a three-cornered fight among the peasant, the landowner and the usurer. A great variety of types are introduced to represent each warring camp and they bring into play the various forces in the French society of those days. Rigou is the peasant usurer who skins the poorer peasants by means of small loans and makes them his dependants for life; his ally is the small-town timber dealer Gaubertin. Around these two characters Balzac’s brilliant imagination groups all the corruption and provincial nepotism and graft. Gaubertin and Rigou hold the whole world of the lower administration in the hollow of their palms. They thrive by robbing the peasants by means of mortgages and small usurious loans, by rigging the market, and rendering trifling services. Balzac would have liked to see the great estate and peasants to join forces against the usurer capitalists; but what he could not avoid showing here, concretely and with realistic power, was that the peasants had to ally themselves with the usurers they hated, and fight together with them against the great estate. Struggle of the peasants against the remnants of feudal exploitation, for a bit of land, for a small holding of their own, necessarily makes them accessories of the usurers on whom they were dependent. What is described here, is not merely the defeat of the nobility, but also the inevitability of this defeat. The nobility is concerned only with retaining, increasing and enjoying in peace, its revenues, while the new bourgeois, represented by Gaubertin and Rigou, are engaged in a stormy accumulation of capital. The peasants’ hatred against usurers is impotent, not only because of their economic dependence, but also because of their land-hunger.

The essence of Balzac's realism is that he always reveals social beings as the basis of social consciousness. "Tell me what you possess", he says in *The Peasants*, "I will tell you what you think" (as in Andre Maurois, 1971, P.198). Balzac held the view that property conditions thought, and thought produces action. He always begins with what his characters have, their incomes and addresses, their house and belongings, and then only tells us what they think. He never confines himself to a trivial photographic naturalism or Kodak realism. To express some socially correct and deeply conceived content, he always seeks and finds the most clear-cut and the most trenchant expression.

Money the Mainspring of Modern Society:

Balzac was the first to paint one of the most vital aspects of the capitalistic society, namely, the desire to gain money and the possessions money brings. He realized that money was the mainspring of modern society. The upper class needed it to sustain them in rank and society, the middle class amassed it more for the sake of security than from any instinct for enjoyment. There was nothing that Balzac did not know about money and financial operations of all kinds. No novelist depicted more exactly or more variously the different fashions in which a man may gain or lose large sums of money, or calculated in exact figures, the income required to keep up various styles of living. Money is indispensable to the young man who wants to get on. "I cannot do without the tools they cultivate the vine with in this country", Rastignac wrote to his mother (Balzac, 1984, P.108). And Delphine, wishing to give Rastignac not money, but the things that her money has bought, tells him that fine rooms and their contents are the weapons of the times, comparable to the swords that ladies girded their knights with in the olden times and the armour they gave them.

“Money is life, Money is all powerful”, Goriot cries out (P. 284). We are told of the precise facts of Nucingen’s swindling scheme for raising money. We follow closely the successive changes in Goriot’s and Rastignac’s financial circumstances. We note the cost of everything, from the rent paid by each boarder in Maison Vauquer and the market value of the pears Madame Vauquer serves up to them as dessert, to the sums a fashionable young man must pay in Paris to his tailors and launderers. According to Martin Turnell, “The problem of money is fundamental in the *Comedie Humaine* because money was the great problem of Balzac’s age as it is becoming the great problem of our own No one can fail to notice the extraordinary interest that he displays in bankers, merchants, commercial travelers, misers and usurers and it is easy to understand the reason. They are the most characteristic representatives, not simply of a commercial society, but of a society obsessed by money” (1962, P.227).

The frustration and disillusionment thrown up by the social evolution in France provided the pattern for the political growth of the middle class everywhere. Balzac’s *Lost Illusions* relates this tale of disillusionment and frustration. The theme of the book is the transformation of literature into a commodity. From the writer’s ideas, emotions and convictions, to the paper on which he writes them down, everything is turned into a commodity that can be bought and sold. “What is fame”? asks Dauriat the publisher, and answers himself: “12000 Francs’ worth of newspaper articles and 3000 Francs’ worth of dinners”(1981, P.275). The writers had become word-merchants and their talent had become a commodity, an object of profiteering by speculators who dealt in literature. They were exploited, but they were also prostitutes, their ambition being to turn exploiters themselves. Balzac himself was a victim of this kind of

exploitation. When he was still young, when both his passionate desires—love and fame— failed him, with a determination to succeed, he started toiling like a galley slave. He wrote as a hunted man runs, with panting breath and bursting lungs, in order to make money. Stefan Zweig, in his book on Balzac tells us that Balzac at this time of his life was a harlot serving simultaneously two or three literary pimps (P.49).

Character as a Totality of Social Reality:

Balzac's characters are never mere lay figures expressing only a few aspects of the social reality. Characters and situations are always determined by the totality of the socially decisive forces. Broad and spacious as Balzac's plots are, the stage is crowded with so many actors living richly varied lives that only a few of them can be fully developed within one story. His remarkable and typical characters cannot unfold their personality fully within a single novel; they protrude beyond the framework of one novel and demand another plot and theme for fuller development. Thus Rastignac who remains in the background in *Lost Illusions* is a leading character in *Old Goriot*. Vautrin, who with cynical wisdom is trying to win over Rastignac in *Old Goriot*, turns up towards the end of *Lost Illusions* when Lucien, hopelessly ruined, is about to commit suicide. This brilliant device that integrates Balzac's works, the '*retour des personnages*' cannot be called his invention. It may have been suggested by Fennimore Cooper's novels where Leather-Stocking reappears in five of his books. But in Balzac, characters complete within themselves, live and act within a concrete social reality and it is always the totality of the social process that is linked with the totality of the character. The several parts of a Balzacian cycle have their own independent life because each of them deals with individual destinies. But these individual destinies always appear as radiating the socially typical.

Balzac goes beyond the boundaries of average reality in his mode of expression. D'Arthez in *Lost Illusions* says : "And what is art? Nothing more than concentrated nature. But this concentration is never formal; on the contrary, it is the greatest possible intensification of the content, the social and human essence of a situation" (1981,P.214). Thus, it is the very depth of realism which removes his art so completely beyond the photographic reproduction of "average reality," without the addition of any romantic ingredients; his extreme concentration of content lends to it a sombre, gruesome and fantastic quality. It is perhaps this fantastic quality that makes his psychology look abstract and reductive and makes the author himself look like anything but an adult. The romantic utterances in Balzac also do not go beyond this fantastic quality. It derives merely from the fact that he radically thinks through to the end the necessities of social reality, beyond their normal limits, beyond even their feasibility. The figure of Vautrin is the incarnation of this fantastic quality in Balzac. This "Cromwell of the Hulks" figures in those novels of Balzac in which the typical figures of the post-revolutionary generation turn from ideals to reality. Vautrin's function in *The Human Comedy* is almost the same as that of Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*. Even though he, like the devil, smells of brimstone and hell, he has been deprived of superhuman greatness and glory, and has been brought down to earth. He doesn't lure his victim with glimpses of heavenly glory, but tries to tempt him with sensible and practical earthly plans. Vautrin's Mephistophelean criticism of the world is only the brutal and cynical expression of what everyone does in this world to survive and thrive.

Character and Milieu:

While depicting characters, Balzac always stresses the correspondence between character and milieu. Madame Vauquer, the keeper of the boarding

house in *Old Goriot*, is at one with Maison Vauquer, the boarding house. Just as there is no prison without its warder, you cannot conceive of the Maison Vauquer without its keeper, Madame Vauquer. This correspondence between people and their environments may strike us now as a sociological cliché, but Balzac was the first novelist to use it systematically in the portrayal of character. He held the view that man tends to represent his customs, his thought and his life, in everything which he appropriates to his needs: his clothing, his furniture, his home. Conversely every milieu has its physical and psychological effects; the quartier of the *rue-Neuve Sainte Genevieve* explains Madame Vauquer in the same way as the world of finance explains Nucingen and Grandet.

One of the distinguishing marks of Balzac's realism is the Balzacian exposition. He proceeds from the largest to the smallest enclosures, settling at last in that human mind which is the real centre of its milieu. For example, in *Old Goriot*, he starts from the location of the boarding house, and takes us through the grimmest quarter of Paris. Then, there is the description of the house, of a garden and a statue there, after which he takes us into the house. Here the description is from the attic to the ground floor, and at last we are led into Madame Vauquer's room.

Although Balzac is pre-eminently considered as one of the greatest realists of the nineteenth century, there are writers who rate him as a visionary also. His own contemporary Baudelaire writes of him :

I have many a time been astonished that Balzac's great glory should be his reputation as an observer; it has always seemed to

me that his primary merit, was that he was a visionary, and a passionate visionary at that. All his characters are endowed with that vital ardour with which he himself was imbued. All his fictions are deeply coloured as dreams. From the lofty heights of aristocracy down to the social outcasts in the lower depths, all the actors of his comedy are more ardently alive, more active and wily in the struggle, more patient under suffering, more greedy in enjoyment, more angelic in devotion, than the comedy of the real world shows people to be (1859 Section IV, "Theophil Gautier").

At a very early age the word 'seer' became a part of his vocabulary and in his dreams he journeyed through time and space and believed that time and space in their entirety existed in his mind. His novel, *La Peau de Chagrin*, written as a fable, gives us the picture of a decadent society. It tells the story of a magic talisman, an ass's skin which makes all its owner's wishes come true. It bears the following inscription in Sanskrit:

IF YOU POSSESS ME YOU WILL POSSESS ALL THINGS BUT YOR LIFE WILL BELONG TO ME.

GOD HAS SO WILLED IT. DESIRE AND YOUR DESIRES WILL BE FULFILLED.

BUT MATCH YOR DESIRES TO YOURSELF. IT IS THERE. WITH EVERY WISH I SHALL DIMINISH LIKE YOUR DAYS.

DO YOU WANT ME? TAKE ME. GOD WILL HEAR YOU.

SO BE IT"(P.27).

Commenting on the visionary in Balzac, Andre Maurois writes: "That is what he was, the man of mythical bankruptcies, of hyperbolic and phantasmagorical ventures in which he always forgot to light the lamp: the grand pursuer of dreams, ceaselessly in search of the Absolute..." (1971,P.471).

A powerful strain of thought that had won wide currency in the nineteenth century Europe was that since the eighteenth century thought had culminated in the disorganization of society, the chief task of the nineteenth century writers and thinkers shall be the reorganization of the society. The periodical of the Saint Simonians was called *L'organisateur*. Balzac's works, too, were an attempt in this direction. According to Andre Maurois, his works are:

...a titanic attempt to impose a cosmos on the chaos of contemporary life. *The Human Comedy* is both the truest portrayal of the eternal man and the best picture we possess, of manners and customs under the Bourbon restoration. It contains everything, aristocracy and bourgeoisie, the administration and the Army, the mechanism of credit and commerce, of transport, of the press and of judicial, political and fashionable life—not superficially sketched, but drawn in depth, dissected, examined like the separate components of a huge machine (P.451).

Stendhal:

Among the nineteenth century French novelists, Stendhal occupies a unique position. Any introduction to this author usually begins with a description of the picture of oddity that was Stendhal. Victor Brombert in his "Introduction" to *Stendhal: The Twentieth Century Views*, calls him a timid dreamer who wanted to become a cold-blooded analyst and a man of action:

He yearned to open his heart to confess himself in his writings, yet nothing delighted him so much as to disguise his emotion

and mystify his readers. A Frenchman in proclaimed rebellion against France, a Bonapartist with a nostalgia for the *ancien regime*, a Republican with a distaste for the plebian mentality, an inveterate freelancer badly in need of approval and friendship – Stendhal appears indeed as the embodiment of paradox and insubordination (1962,P.1).

In Clifton Fadiman's "Introduction" to the English translation of *The Red and The Black*, he speaks of a schism in Stendhal's life : "The life for which he was unfitted—that of a would be popular playwright, soldier, businessman, civil servant—he lived unsuccessfully. The life for which he was fitted—that spent in grasping the history of his time in terms of the perspective of the future—he lived successfully" (1958,P.3). Erich Auerbach speaks of something unsettled about Stendhal's whole nature which made him fluctuate between realistic candour in general and silly mystification in particulars, between cold self-control and rapturous abandonment to sensual pleasures (1973,P.459).

Unlike his other eminent contemporaries, Balzac and Hugo, Stendhal was a writer who bridged two centuries, two worlds. He was born six years before the French revolution, brought up during a period of turmoil, had his schooling under the Directory, his adolescence with the Consulate and manhood under the Empire. Most of his writings he completed under the Restoration and the July Monarchy, and he died in 1842, six years before another revolutionary storm was to shake France and many other parts of Europe. In his own days history was a felt presence; it could not be treated with any sense of archaeological detachment. Witnessing the rapid succession of political changes in his time,

Stendhal became all the more conscious of the forces of instability, evanescence and transformation, and of the co-existence of several generations drawn together temporarily but distinctly alienated from each other by dissimilar mode of education and experiences. The novels of Stendhal, like those of Balzac, portray this theme of conflicting generations.

In keeping with the nineteenth century habit of treating the novel as equal to or substitute for history, Stendhal sub-titles his masterpiece *The Red and The Black, A Chronicle of the Nineteenth Century*. The word *chronique* in French, it is worth noting, is applied to newspaper reports of current happenings. Here, one can discern an important difference between Balzac and Stendhal. Balzac usually places the events of his novel at some distance in the past. A majority of the books that constitute the *Human Comedy* were set at a time well before the July Monarchy, though much of the work was composed during that period; for example, *Old Goriot*, published in 1834, deals with events in 1819. Stendhal, on the other hand, often deals with current events in his books. *The Red and The Black*, largely written in the early months of 1830, has references to the first performance of *Hernani*. Instead of the retrospective view of the historian, Stendhal tried the method of the leader-writer in a newspaper. The plot of *The Red and The Black* itself is based on the newspaper account of the crime committed by a poor servant against the mistress of the house.

Stendhal, the Realist:

In order to understand the treatment of realism by Stendhal, it is necessary to examine some of the influences on the novelist and some of the pet ideas that distinguished him from his other great contemporaries. Helvetius, de Tracy and Montesquieu were early influences in his life. He shared with Helvetius

and Condillac their empiricism, sensualism and rationalism, and believed like them, that senses are the basis of all knowledge. Leon Blum in his essay, "A Theoretical Outline of Beylism"(1962,Pp.101 - 113), elaborates upon the characteristics of Beylism. Stendhal was one of the pseudonyms adopted by the French author by name Henri Marie Beyle. In Beylism the conquest of happiness operates according to the same laws as the search for truth. Stendhal's Beylism relates exclusively to an elite. The author writes and thinks only for the "happy few", for the small number of original personalities who dare to violate the great principle of the epoch: "be like everyone else". Stendhal confronts his elite with daily reality and plunges them into the tedium of social life, that routine of exchanges and obligations and minor relations. He thinks that the world doesn't acknowledge variances; originality is as offensive as rebellion, and if it can't be nipped, at least, it has to be punished. The conditions of life in society are not exactly conducive to the growth of original personalities. Stendhal's "dream of the happy few," evolved into the artist's alienation in the next generation.

Stendhal had a fine grasp of the reality of his day and hence the realism of his novels is equally powerful as that of Balzac's works. His realistic writings deal with reality as it presented itself to him. As Erich Auerbach says in *Mimesis*:

the reality, which he encountered, was so constituted that without permanent reference to the immense changes of the immediate past and without a premonitory searching after the imminent changes of the future, one could not represent it. In

so far as the serious realism of modern times cannot represent man otherwise than as embedded in a total reality, social, political and economic, which is concrete and constantly evolving as it is the case today in any novel or film, Stendhal is its founder (1973,P.463).

In *The Red and The Black*, the French aristocracy is represented by Marquis de la Mole, a true *grandee*. He has got wealth and power, and he involves himself in the intrigue to maintain and consolidate his position. The salon of the Marquis is magnificent, but its *habitués* are horribly dull. They always limit their conversation to 'safe' topics. This dullness and boredom was the mood prevalent not only in the aristocracy, but was a phenomenon politically and ideologically characteristic of the bourgeois drawing rooms of the period immediately before the Restoration. Stendhal even makes one character, Count Altamira, say: "there's no real passions left in the nineteenth century" (P.304). In the past, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the bourgeois salons were anything but boring. But the mediocre attempts which the Bourbon regime made to restore conditions, long since made obsolete by events, created among its loyal followers in the official and ruling classes, an atmosphere of pure convention, of limitation, constraint and lack of freedom against which the intelligence and goodwill of the persons involved proved powerless. The scare of the catastrophe of 1793 still ruled over them. They had little faith in the things they represented, and they knew that they were bound to be defeated in any public argument. So they chose to talk nothing but weather, music and court gossip. The Marquis's salon is visited by young noblemen who

are courting the daughter of the house, and by a host of academicians in the making, a bunch of spies and a few newly ennobled millionaires. The Revolution of 1830 was shortly to give a final blow to this unillustrious company. The old aristocratic families retired to their country houses, where Stendhal shows them in his *Lucien Leuwen*, fretting and fuming and ineffectually plotting the return of the pretender, the grandson of Charles, whom they call Henry V.

Making a comparison of Stendhal and Balzac in their portrayal of the aristocracy, Hemmings writes in *The Age of Realism*:

As a rule the older aristocrats in Balzac are either mercenary or hopelessly behind the times, lost.... The womenfolk, the married ladies living in the capital, at any rate, are interested only in amorous intrigues. Their children are badly brought up: daughters once safely married, behave much as their mothers did; the sons, trained to no profession, grow fit only for cards, betting on horses, or seducing village maidens, some run foul of the law and find themselves in prison. A few become bohemians living in near destitution, but conserving all the old arrogance of their caste. Once turned to 40, they settle down, that is, marry into the wealthy middle class. This is how the best known of all of them, Eugene de Rastignac finishes up, taking for wife the daughter of his first mistress, whose husband was Nucingen, a multi-millionaire banker (1974,P.53).

Stendhal was not much interested in portraying the lower classes. Julien Sorel in *The Red and the Black* is from a poor family but not a starving one, and he has in fact, contempt for men from poor backgrounds. At the seminary in Besancon, as Julien encounters poor students, this is how he reacts: "It is hardly surprising that happiness in their eyes, consists firstly in having dined well, and secondly, in possessing a good suit of clothes" (P.196). Balzac, on the contrary, draws vivid pictures of the lowly peasants in his unfinished work, *The Peasants*. Montcornets make a fierce, but unavailing attempt to keep their estate intact and draw a reasonable income from it. Earlier, the estate had belonged to an opera singer, whose timidity and indolence deprived her of a good portion of her belongings. Montcornet tries to put a stop to the encroachments from the tenants, thereby arousing their hostility. As Hemmings observes:

Even though Balzac could not see how France was to be governed without a ruling class of territorial magnates, he viewed with clarity, the inescapable defeat of Montcornet and the partitioning of the large estate among the peasant small holders. The most remarkable aspect of his social analysis is that he doesn't merely depict the conflict between landowning aristocracy and landless peasantry, but portrays another class, the moneyed class in the middle, a small group of intelligent, unscrupulous men led by the unfrocked monk Rigou, the very type of the village usurer, as he still exists in many an agrarian community outside Europe today (1974, P.55).

Stendhal was a liberal, but not a democrat. He hated democracy and universal suffrage, and was of the view that the lower class

should be kept in their place. He can be called a typical, left-of-the-centre, moderate. Balzac, on the other hand, an early sympathizer of the Republican Party, perversely moved to the right in the early 1830s. In the "Forword" to *The Human Comedy*, he went even so far as to proclaim that he wrote his novels by the light of the two eternal verities, Religion and Monarchy. This pronouncement was made at a time when most of the French writers were straining in the opposite direction. But he never allowed his conservatism to interfere with his acute powers of observation of the human condition. As Hemmings observes in *The Age of Realism*:

Hardly any of his works can be called works of overt propaganda. In the novels, his political creed emerges in the occasional parenthetical remark, but his principles never distorted the clarity of his observation, nor did he ever construct a plot to prove a point. This is why, despite his retrograde opinions, left wing thinkers as diverse as Zola and Engels, have judged him to have contributed more to the discrediting of the nineteenth century establishment than all the self-proclaimed middle class 'friends of the people' from Hugo down. It is arguable, even, that his denunciation of the governing and property owning classes was more devastating than Stendhal's, simply because it was more thorough; but the two novelists concurred in their conclusions, particularly as regards the evolution of the class system over the thirty years that followed the collapse of the Empire at Waterloo (1974,P.50).

Stendhal as a Political Novelist:

Irving Howe in his essay, "Stendhal, The Politics of Survival", estimates Stendhal as a political novelist:

Stendhal is not an ideologue in the manner of Dostoevsky, nor even a novelist of ideas; nevertheless ideology and ideas swarm through his books. Living at the time he does, Stendhal cannot avoid them, short of risking irrelevance, he juggles political notions with the reckless good fortune of the gifted amateur, but in the end, he proves to be a profoundly non-political man(1957,P.26).

Stendhal's notion of the relationship between politics and novel is clearly stated in *The Red and The Black*. Here, in a sense, the author himself makes a direct statement. Julien Sorel, acting upon instructions from the Marquis de la Mole, goes to take note of the proceedings of a secret meeting organized by the aristocrats:

Here the author would have liked to introduce a page of asterisks. "That will not look elegant", says the publisher, and for such a frivolous book a want of elegance means death. "Politics", the author retorts, "are like a stone tied to the neck of literature which in less than six months, will drown it. Politics in the middle of things that concern the imagination are like a pistol shot in the middle of a concert. It does not harmonize with the sound of any instrument. This talk of politics will mortally offend half my readers, and bore the other

half, who have already come across far more vigorous and detailed politics in their morning paper". "If your characters don't talk politics", my publisher replies, "then they are no longer French men of 1830 and your book is no more a mirror as you claim" (Pp.394-95).

The great political problem of Stendhal's days was to find a viable alternative to the mediocrity of Louis Philippe's bourgeois monarchy. People who were aware of this problem had once thought that literature was the right answer to this problem. Liberalism was a uniting force as long as it was out of power. Before the Revolution it had held together all the forces behind the slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity. But once it had gained power, these exalted slogans were overshadowed by many less exalted social interests. In these circumstances, a writer like Stendhal, could not simply believe in the unity of society, at least, in the unity claimed by those in power. At the same time he could not carry himself to the point of contempt for the masses which was to be later expressed by a writer like Gustave de Flaubert. Stendhal was no blind worshipper of Napoleon. He criticized his despotism and his betrayal of the libertarian ethos of the Revolution. But he admired Napoleon for creating an atmosphere in which young and ambitious men from the provinces could obtain enough chances for success in life. It was Napoleon who had perpetuated the bourgeois principle of social mobility.

Stendhal very often fails to recognize any precise boundary between political and private categories. He allows each to dissolve into the other, but not destroy one another. He could not solve the crisis of liberalism, rather he tried

to evade it by abstracting from the liberal position a code and style of life. In other words, he took up liberalism from politics and transformed it into a personal strategy, a way of overpowering mediocrity which he knew was the order of the day. He tried to challenge the stabilized hypocrisy of society with the insubordinate freedom of the person, what he called *espagnolisme*, the vitality of instinct and emotion which creates a valid order of its own, brushing aside both morality and convention. To trick society you must employ *ruse*. By *ruse* he doesn't mean hypocrisy or Machiavellianism. It is a kind of strategy of having one's cake and eating it, being both a rebel and a *bonvivant*, deceiving society to undermine it and wooing society to enjoy it. The energy that makes *ruse* possible comes from *espagnolisme*. Stendhal considers it primarily as a private endowment, but in all his novels it plays a political role.

It motivates the rebellion of the favoured characters and still more important, it defeats their rebellion, upsets their plans and renders their *ruse* unsuccessful. *Espagnolisme* in Stendhal's novels represents the triumph of emotion over ideology, of humane impulse over calculated cleverness. Stendhal's heroes are always advised to calculate and he seems always to concur in this advice, yet his greatest joy is in seeing calculations undone, even those of which he approves, the calculations of his insurgent heroes (Howe, 1957, Pp.33-34).

The Red and The Black is a novel about politics, and politics, though felt throughout the book as a directing energy, is seldom obviously visible except in the chapter in which the nobles scheme to cauterize their country by entrusting

it to English mercies. Each character in the novel is sociologically defined and no character is conceived outside the particular historical situation of the Restoration period. This conception was the lesson taught by the French Revolution. Though the revolutionary leaders were long since dead and the revolutionary wave had passed and the revolutionary ethos had become corrupted, still the work of the revolution remained. The French Revolution was the first of the great mass movements of modern times, which was distinguished by its widespread mass effects and by the changes it brought about in practical daily life within a comparatively extensive territory. With the Revolution there began not only in Europe but all over the world, a unification of human life upon a far wider practical foundation and in a far larger context than before. Side by side with this, there developed also a consciousness that the social base upon which man lives is not constant even for a moment, but is perpetually changing through convulsions of the most various kinds. Julien Sorel, his friend Fouque, M de Renal, Madame de Renal, Marquis de la Mole, his daughter Mathilde, Abbe Pirard, Father Chelan—all these characters are defined against their historical and sociological background.

One of the central themes of *The Red and The Black* is class war. The novel itself, according to Martin Turnell, is the story of a parvenu who succeeds in penetrating the 'Walls' which protect the privileged and in attaching himself to a class to which he does not belong (as in *Stendhal: Twentieth Century Views*, 1962, P.17). But society does not spare him. It has its vengeance on the parvenu by making him an outcast. He is put behind bars and finally executed, not for slaying or attempting to slay one of its members, but for trying to usurp

its privileges. As Irving Howe tells us, "... in no other nineteenth century novel is there such a formulated awareness that society has broken into warring classes" (1957,P.36). To Julien, the whole world as it presents itself to him, be it his father's house where he was forced to spend his childhood, or the estate of M de Renal, or the Hotel de la Mole, or the company of his only friend Fouque, is always a battlefield. There is strife among the bourgeois for upper hand in society and politics. M de Renal's answer to Valenod's purchase of two horses is to employ a tutor for his children. Julien, who thinks like a strange blend of Byron and Marx, begins his final speech to the jury almost like a political prisoner:

Gentlemen of the Jury, a horror of contempt, which I thought I could defy at the hour of death, obliges me to speak. Gentlemen, I have not the honour to belong to the same class as yourselves, you see in me a peasant urged to revolt against the lowliness of his lot. I ask no mercy of you, I am under no illusion, death awaits me, the penalty will be just. I have been guilty of an attempt on the life of a woman most worthy of all respect, of all homage. My crime is atrocious, and it was premeditated. I have, therefore, Gentlemen of the Jury, deserved death. But even were I less guilty, I see before me men, who without pausing to consider what pity my youth may deserve, for ever discourage that body of young men who, born in an inferior station, and in some degree oppressed by poverty, have the good fortune to secure for themselves a sound education and the audacity to mingle with

what the pride of rich men call society. That is my crime, Gentlemen, and it will be punished with all the more severity in that, in point of fact, I am not being tried by my peers. In the Jury box I see not a single peasant who has grown rich, but simply and solely men of the middle class enraged against me (P.484).

In *The Charterhouse of Parma*, the scene of which is set in northern Italy, politics is not a pistol shot in the midst of a concert, but an obstacle in the path of happiness of the main characters. Politics keeps Count Mosca and Duchess Sanseverina from happiness, it prevents Fabrice from running off with his dear little Clelia; politics is that force of the world, which distracts men from their most decent instincts. But, to Stendhal it is also something else; it is an outlet for the very passions it suppresses. It is not merely an obstacle to the will but also a challenge, not merely the occasion for meanness, but sometimes for heroism.

In this novel, Stendhal treats power in its various aspects of pettiness—as craven absurdity on the part of those who employ it, as a constant threat to intelligent men and as corruption for weak ones. The three central figures have different attitudes to power:

Count Mosca manipulates it while privately holding it to be farce. Sanseverina tolerates it, but is always ready to oppose it with the full force of her personal desires. Fabrice bends to it with the bow of the courtier and cleric, but remains fundamentally indifferent to its claims. Stendhal shares in all these attitudes, but in none exclusively (Howe, 1957, P.39).

According to Leo Bersani, "Society in Stendhal is primarily politics, the behaviour by which social life is shaped into hierarchies of power. And politics, especially in *Charter House of Parma*, can be easily summed up: it is the frantic, unscrupulous attempt to gain the power necessary to guarantee a constant satisfaction of vanity" (1970.P.92).

Outsider-heroes:

Stendhal took to realistic writing in the post-Napoleonic era, at a time, when he was seeking a safe haven for the storm-tossed boat of his life. At forty, he realized with all the sting of that painful knowledge that he belonged to nowhere. Stendhal always loved material success and worldly enjoyments in life. With the fall of Napoleon he was stripped of all material success, and the social world around him became a problem for him. His feeling that he was different from other men, until now borne easily and proudly, emerged as the predominant concern of his consciousness and thereby the recurring theme of his literary works. Stendhal's heroes are all outsiders. His 'outsiderism' springs not from a deficiency but from an excess of mind. Each of his outsider-heroes is a representative of a particular social trend or phenomenon. Octave embodies the predicament of the old families in a world, which offers no employment to the blue-blooded aristocrat. Julien is a representative of the educated and highly ambitious young men of the lower middle class in a society that is still rigidly stratified. Lucien exhibits in a concentrated form all the moral uncertainties of the triumphant middle class under Louis Philippe. Each of these characters stands apart from the crowd, unwilling and unable to make contact with others. Stendhal's characters are what they are by virtue of what they do. They are, a century before existentialism, "the sum of their acts".

Whatever their social origin (Fabrice del Dongo is an aristocrat,
Lucien Leuwen a bourgeois, Lamiel and Julien not far from the

bottom), they are strangers to their fellows for refusing to act in a predictable manner, except in so far as they act hypocritically, so as to maintain some contact, however fragile, with others (Knight, 1970, P. 100).

Julien Sorel, the hero of *The Red and The Black*, is the classic example of an outsider. The outsider is essentially an individualist at odds with society. His is the Janus face that emerges in periods when the sensitive individual cannot identify himself with any of the different groups of which society is composed. Each character who comes into contact with Julien Sorel—his own father and brothers, his fellow seminarists, his confessor, M de la Mole the aristocrat—has one thing in common to say about him. The reader's reaction also will be the same. Julien is 'different', 'difficult to place' or 'undefinable' and sometimes even 'frightening'.

One character in modern fiction with whom Julien is quite often compared is Meursault the hero of Albert Camus' *Outsider*. Meursault thinks that he is the same as any other human being. But he is quite unwilling to accept the "human nature", that is, he won't feign those thoughts and feelings supposed to belong to a 'normal man', those 'appropriate reactions which are always a certain guarantee of a 'correct' identity. Julien's story, too, is precisely the same, down to the pistol shots and the trial. Julien is base-born, in a strictly stratified society, and he is to work out his own destiny in the midst of a chaotic society. He is spiritually an orphan, feeling despised by all in his family, by the Renals, and the aristocratic circle in the house of the Marquis de la Mole. He is admired for his trivial qualities—agility, memory power, and poll-parrot

scholarship. All his bitter sense of exclusion is brought to a head by his intellectual pride. In the struggle for independence and survival, the alienated hero has only a few weapons. Julien has fully realized the efficaciousness of the art of hypocrisy, of conscious and controlled dissembling. His only supports are his immense strength of character and his own genius.

Psychological Realism:

One of Stendhal's lasting contributions to the writing of the novel is his psychological realism. He was the first to suffuse the novel with a systematic psychology. Writers before him—Cervantes, Richardson and Sterne—were interested in the psychology of their characters, but there is in their works nothing like Stendhal's hawk-like look into the character's minds.

In the two autobiographical pieces, *Souvenirs d'Egotisme* and *Vie de Henri Brulard*, Stendhal repeatedly asks the questions: "What am I?" and "What have I been"? The answer to these questions, he sadly recognizes, is that the eye cannot see itself. The two books also show, to what extent their author is trapped between the need to reveal himself, and the fear of being penetrated by another conscience. Masking oneself becomes as important as unveiling of the mask. Stendhal's principal characters are haunted by the novelist's own obsession of the search after one's own self. Constantly they question themselves about their own feelings and thoughts, quite often wondering as to what they really feel for some woman or why some other woman leaves them cold. Sometimes they want to know whether their strangeness is the result of some flaw in the very make of their being. Stendhal was a keen observer of the human heart, and its portrayal, to him, was as primary a concern as the writing down of a chronicle of his own times.

The Red and The Black deals with the life of an outsider, and the class war with which he was confronted. But his war was not only at the social level, but equally at the psychological level as well. The frequent reference to "walls" in the novel signifies not only the separation between the privileged and the under privileged, but also the fortifications which preserve the bourgeois world from the incursions of peasants and workers. M de Renal's gardens are separated by a wall from Old Sorel's sawmill. The mayor readily pays a fat price to buy this adjoining plot from Old Sorel, because he wants to thrust his own ramparts further forward, and acquire fresh territory. "The walls are barriers between different classes, but they also stand for psychological barriers which cut the 'outsider' off from the rest of the humanity" (Turnell, *Stendhal: Twentieth Century Views*, 1962, P.21). Julien-Mathilde relation is one of attraction and repulsion. They frequently quarrel and both take a kind of savage delight in humiliating each other's pride. Notwithstanding these quarrels, they are allies against society, and are united by a bond which is far stronger than their mutual hatred. Their complex relationship can best be described by the words "singular" and "singularite", which occur at least a hundred times in Part II of *The Red and The Black*. Each of their encounters begins with their unspoken thoughts, then suddenly there is a violent eruption, and each start denouncing the other with such a vehemence that one is temporarily knocked out. Martin Turnell calls it a "psychological obstacle-race in which they take it in turns to be the pursuer and the pursued, executioner and victim"(1962,P.31). What makes the Julien-Mathilde encounter so intense is the impression they give, of the total involvement of their whole being in every action of theirs.

Julien's career is a journey to the interior. As he moves from the bright and open gardens and fresh green valleys of Verriers to the dark corridors and cloisters of the seminary, we are made aware of a feeling of claustrophobia. Henceforth the scene of the drama won't be in the open air, but in the oppressive darkness of the seminary, in the library of M de la Mole and secret gatherings amid anonymous conspirators. The physical journey is at the same time a journey to the interior of the mind. In Verriers he used to take delight in spending some time with the children of the house. He would sit for hours in the company of Madam de Renal. In the Hotel de la Mole, the action gradually shifts to the inner world. When Mathilde asks Julien to fetch a book for her from the library, he does so by bringing a ladder. As the ladder was carried back, one of the glass-panes protecting the shelves was broken, and the sound of the splinters falling down woke him up from his dream world. The characters live in a dream world, and are entirely preoccupied with their own inner thoughts. From time to time, a violent incident like the breaking of the window pane, is necessary to bring them back to the world of mundane realities.

In the prison at Besancon, we have Julien with his sensibility brought to a point of exhaustion. He can't carry on any further, there is nothing left for him in life. Julien can't think of the prospect of a life together with Mathilde. When he returns to Madame de Renal, he is again embarrassed because, in her he sees always the mother image. The prison itself is a symbol of the womb to which he wanted to return. He does not want to secure an acquittal from the court. Mathilde's attempts to save him are, to him, simply exasperating, and he takes utmost care to see that they fail. Julien courts death heroically. We can even say that he commits suicide, because he is almost driven by the realization that

he is "finished", and he doesn't want to breathe any further in a world of mediocrity. The account of the execution is a very good example of Stendhal's power of understatement, "Everything passed off simply and decently, and with no trace of affectation on his part" (P.508).

A unique contribution by Stendhal to modern realism is the creation of the modern hero. Stendhal was the first writer who gave shape to the hero who forces society to accept him as its agent. Julien Sorel, the hero of *The Red and The Black*, is low-born. He is detested by his own family. But he is very much self-conscious about his own capabilities and about the mediocrity of others around him. He scores a victory in making an incursion into the household of the Mayor, makes them recognize his merit and worth. Wherever he goes, he makes others recognize the force of his will and the worth of his potentialities. He is a representative of those who are committed to the doctrine of equality, an offshoot of the French revolution. This doctrine was gaining more and more popularity as the restored Bourbons were trying to suppress it. Before the Revolution, men had been concerned with privileges and not expectations. Now they had dreams of success. Napoleon had aroused their imagination, and there were heroic persons. Julien represents that class of intellectuals who tried to ennoble themselves with visions of self-willed effort, to lift themselves, through industry and chicanery, to a higher level. This modern hero is not merely ambitious; he is sensitive even to the point of paranoia, he discovers and imagines a constant assault upon his dignity. But despite all these thoughts, he has the realization(which again is a lesson from the French revolution) that men are fully equipped to survive on this earth, and that social order is made, and not decreed.

Correspondence between Balzac and Stendhal:

Any discussion of nineteenth century realism would remain incomplete without a reference to the exchange of views between the two great realists of the nineteenth century, Balzac, and Stendhal. Balzac, in 1840, published an enthusiastic and most profound review of *The Charterhouse of Parma* by Stendhal, the only contemporary writer whom he regarded as his equal. Stendhal replied in a long and detailed letter. Georg Lukacs, in his *Studies in European Realism*, discusses this literary exchange between the two masters of realism. In his review, Balzac states clearly his position with reference to the development of the novel. He speaks of three stylistic trends in the novel. There is the literature of ideas, by which he means chiefly the literature of the French Enlightenment. Voltaire and Le Sage among the old, and Stendhal and Merimee among the new writers are the great representatives of this trend. Then, there is the literature of images, represented mainly by the romantics, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Hugo, and others. The third trend, to which he himself belongs, strove for a synthesis of both the other trends. Walter Scott, Fennimore Cooper and George Sand represented this trend. He wanted to justify his own creative method as a great historical trend, while in the trend represented by Stendhal, he detected the presence of a galaxy of precursors. What is at issue here is the central problem of the nineteenth century worldview and style: the attitude to Romanticism. No great writer living after the French Revolution could avoid this issue. Its discussion began in the Weimar period of Goethe and Schiller and reached its culmination in Heine's critique of Romanticism. Romanticism was by no means a purely literary trend; it was the expression of a deep and spontaneous revolt against rapidly developing capitalism, although, naturally,

in very contradictory forms. All this provided a strange dilemma for the great writers of the age, who, while they were unable to rise above the bourgeois horizon, yet strove to create a world picture that would be both comprehensive and real. They could not be romanticists in the strict sense of the word; had they been, they could not have understood and followed the forward movement of their age. On the other hand, they could not disregard the criticism levelled by the romanticists against capitalism and capitalist culture without exposing themselves to the danger of becoming blind extollers of bourgeois society and apologists of capitalism. They therefore, had to attempt to overcome Romanticism, that is, to fight against it, preserve it and raise it to a higher level, all at the same time. This was the general tendency of the time and was not achieved completely and without contradictions by any of the great writers of the age. Balzac, while accepting Romanticism, strove to overcome it, whereas Stendhal's attitude was one of complete rejection. While Balzac admired romantics like Chateaubriand, Stendhal detested them and advised the young writers to turn to Helvetius and Jeremy Bentham to write good French.

Similarities and Differences:

Both Balzac and Stendhal regard the portrayal of the great types of social evolution as their main task, but their conception of what is typical, has nothing in common with that of the later Western realists who wrote after 1848, and who confuse the typical with the average. Balzac and Stendhal regard as typical, only figures of exceptional qualities who mirror all the essential aspects of some definite stage of development, evolutionary tendency, or social group. Stendhal's principle of composition is diametrically opposed to Balzac's. The Balzacian principle of cyclic structure rests on the assumption that unfinished

and incomplete characters in one novel reappear as central figures of some other books. Stendhal, too, strives to present a totality, but by crowding the essential features of a whole epoch into the personal biography of some individual type (eg. the period of the Bourbon Restoration in *The Red and The Black*, absolutism of small Italian states in *The Charterhouse of Parma*). The deepest disagreement between the two great contemporaries rests on the fact that Balzac's world view was essentially influenced by all the newer trends, while Stendhal's world view was at bottom an interesting and consistent extension of the pre-Revolutionary Enlightenment. Stendhal held the view that in pre-Revolutionary times there had been a culture and section of society able to appreciate and judge cultural products. The new rich, on the other hand, are a pack of self-seeking and ignorant upstarts indifferent to cultural values. While Balzac's last novels are full of profound pessimism about society and apocalyptic forebodings regarding culture, Stendhal expected that his hopes regarding bourgeois culture will be realized around 1880. Both Balzac and Stendhal chose as central characters, that generation of gifted young people, on whose thoughts and emotions the storms of the heroic period had left deep traces, and who, at first, felt out of place in the sordid baseness of the Restoration world. Balzac knew well the price that had to be paid for finding a niche in the society of the Restoration period. It is not by accident that the almost superhuman figure of Vautrin appears twice, like another Mephistopheles, to tempt the heroes struggling in a desperate crisis into the path of reality, or in other words, onto the path of corruption and unprincipled careerism. What Balzac painted here, is how the rise of capitalism to the undisputed economic domination of society, carried the human and moral degradation and debasement as an inevitable corollary. Stendhal, too,

understands all the essential phenomena of his time, no less clearly than Balzac. Count Mosca in *The Charterhouse of Parma* speaks much the same words as Vautrin does in *Old Goriot*. Stendhal allows his hero to take part in the game of corruption and careerism, to wade through all the filth of growing commercialism, to learn and, apply, sometimes even skillfully, the rules of the game as expounded by Mosca and Vautrin. But it is interesting to note that none of the principal characters is at heart sullied or corrupted by this participation in the game. A pure and passionate ardour, an inexorable search for truth, preserves from contamination, the soul of these men as they wade through the mire, and helps them to shake off the dirt at the end of their career (still in the prime of their youth). Perhaps, in the process, they cease to be participants in the life of their times, and withdraw from it, one way or another. This is the deeply romantic element in the worldview of Stendhal, the enlightened and bitter opponent of Romanticism.

If by Romanticism we mean the celebration of the individual ego, Stendhal and Balzac could be called romantics. Both were romantics in the limited sense that their works expressed their own individualities in a strongly marked and clearly recognizable fashion. Stendhal's works contain Beyle's personal beliefs, prejudices, hopes, attitudes, and dreams. As for Balzac, something of his burly physique and magnetic gaze is quite apparent in all his works. Stendhal definitely shares the romantic's rebellion against the materialism of the early capitalist society. But he doesn't seem to be conscious of the fact that, the assumptions behind this rebellion are themselves grounded in the rise of capitalism. Stendhal's disagreement with Romanticism starts in its idealization of one or another forms of pre-capitalist society, and when it

degenerates into a willful inflation of language and emotions, he has severed all links with it.

A conspicuous difference between Balzac and Stendhal as realists, is the importance both attach to narrative in their writings. While Balzac is never tired of any amount of descriptions, Stendhal, very rarely, if ever, indulges in elaborate descriptions. The reason for Balzac's fondness for descriptive passages is his eagerness to preserve word pictures of reality, because reality, in those days, was nothing but a flux of evanescent forms—buildings, costumes, trades and professions.

The two novelists' differing attitudes to narrative can better be traced to the difference in assumptions made by each novelist concerning human psychology. Balzac firmly believed in the influence of environment on personality and conversely, on the extent to which human beings leave on the environment, the imprint of their character and way of life. As he tells us in *Old Goriot*, Madame Vauquer and Maison Vauquer, the owner and her lodging, are inextricably linked with each other. Grandet, the miser, and his cold, dark house in Samur, in *Eugenie Grandet*, both form a part of each other. For this belief in the mutual connection between man and environment, Balzac is indebted to the theories of Lavater, the Swiss clergyman who founded the pseudo-science of physiognomy. In his treatise on the art of telling character by facial study he wrote:

It is true that everything that surrounds man acts on him, but conversely, he acts on external objects, and if he is modified by them, in turn, he modifies his environment. Hence it is

possible to assess a man by observing his dress, his house, his furniture (as in Mount, 1966, P.18).

Stendhal was perhaps, more of a materialist than Balzac. Montesquieu's influence had taught him the lesson that men were governed far less by the pressures of their physical environments than by their passions, their ambitions and fears and their greed. These motivations are implanted and nurtured by the social circumstances in which man finds himself. Thus, for Stendhal, a man's personality is determined not by the conditions in which he works, but by whatever feelings he entertains about his position, privileged or otherwise, in the total social structure. Hence Stendhal never bothered to give elaborate details of the material setting of any particular scene. He would rather leave it to the reader to picture for himself. Comparing the two great masters, Andre Maurois observes:

Two such disparate temperaments cannot be viewed through the same focus; two such contrasting talents cannot be measured by the same scale—with Stendhal we must piece together fragments, and draw out implications. Balzac is so thorough and explicit that he simplifies—threatens to oversimplify—the problems of his critics. Comprehensive rather than intensive, deductive rather than inductive, synthetic rather than analytic, his work carries its own commentary.... Stendhal is so nonchalant an amateur, whereas Balzac is so inveterate a professional. There was no rivalry between the two. Stendhal's values were so unswervingly individualistic and his particular

domain lay within the individual consciousness; only in reverse could he create a society. Balzac whose values were pre-eminently social, could put his individuals in their respective places, and—what is more— could set the entire panorama in motion. Balzac was the sociologist and Stendhal, the psychologist...The two related modes of interpretation, converging upon the same tract of material from opposite points of view, supplement and corroborate each other.... The other side of Julien Sorel's valediction will be Eugene de Rastignac's salute(P.151).

Stendhal's work is a critique of the Restoration from the standpoint of a revolutionary Bonapartist, whereas Balzac's work is a critique of the July Monarchy from the viewpoint of a Catholic royalist. Balzac and Stendhal built a whole world of characters, an extensive and animated reflection of the whole social evolution, and each of them did so from his own distinct angle. Their point of contact lies in their deep understanding, and their contempt for trivial tricks of mere naturalistic realism and of mere rhetorical treatment of man and destiny. A further point of contact is that they both regard realism as transcending the trivial and average, because, for both of them, realism is a search for that deeper essence of reality that is hidden under the surface. Where they diverge widely is in their conception of what this essence is. They represent two diametrically opposed, although historically equally legitimate, attitudes towards the stage of human development reached in their own time. Both brought the novel as close as possible to the life of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER II

THE AMERICAN SCENE: THE G.A.N. AND THE REALISM OF THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF THE COMMON LIFE OF THE 1920S

The beginning of the twentieth century in America was marked by an intellectual view, which approved of a happy, though, critical, optimism about the promise of the life of the American middle class and its democracy. But, as the century advanced two decades, there set in an awareness that wealth and abundance didn't mean everything and that the problem of living was far deeper and more complex than they had been accustomed to think it was. People were ready for a self-examination. It was in this period that Sinclair Lewis emerged as a significant and successful writer. When Lewis started writing, American novel was marked by two distinct strains, namely, the shocking naturalism of Theodore Dreiser, and the sentimental gentility of writers like Booth Tarkington and Meredith Nicholson. Lewis's writings won recognition as a kind of bridge between these two methods. In a way, the writer in him was a continuation of the realist and the romancer. The realist in him gave expression to a faithful depiction of the details of everyday life and the romancer indulged in that happy optimism about the American life of the pre-War years, its adventurousness, its flexibility and variety and the potential heroism in the lives of very ordinary people.

Lewis's important works are *Our Mr. Wrenn* (1914), *The Job* (1917), *Main Street* (1920), *Babbitt* (1922), *Arrow Smith* (1925), *Elmer Gantry* (1927) and *Dodsworth* (1929). In this chapter I shall be discussing *Main Street* and *Babbitt* as important

works of realism. I have selected these two works, because *Main Street* is the first work, which made him a major writer of the 1920s and *Babbitt*, of course, is considered his masterpiece. *Main Street* discusses a very significant problem of those times, namely, the problem of the small town. The other work has become so famous that the name of its hero has passed into the language of the Americans.

Realistic Portrayal of Life:

As a realist, Lewis's main concern was the portrayal of the life around him, drawing a true and faithful picture of life as he saw and experienced it. *Main Street* holds a mirror to the life of the Americans at a time when it was lived in small towns, and when the village life dominated the thought patterns of the natives. Lewis himself calls it 'the village virus'. This life was gradually undermined by the rise of the big industrial towns and cities. "If *Main Street* lives", says Mark Schorer, "it will probably be not as a novel, but as an incident in American life" (1961, P.268). After the success of *Main Street*, as he was planning to write a novel about a typical tired American businessman, he wrote to Harcourt, on December 28, 1920:

I want the novel to be G.A.N. (General American Novel) in so far as it crystallizes and makes real the Average Capable American. None has done it, I think, no one has even touched it, except Booth Tarkington in *Turmoil* and *Magnificent Ambersons*; and he romanticizes away all bigness. *Babbitt* is a little like Will Kennicott, but bigger.... He is all of us Americans at 46,

prosperous but worried, wanting - passionately - to seize something more than motor cars and a house before it's too late (as in Grebstein, 1962, P.24).

Some of the views and perceptions expressed in *Babbitt* are taken from thinkers and observers like Thorstein Veblen, Randolph Bourne and H.L.Mencken. Veblen had observed that wealth symbolized honour and prestige in society. He said that social status depended on money, and self-respect depended on social status. When man acquires wealth, he turns to power, because he wants to rise above the average. Possession of money alone is not enough. Man has to exhibit his wealth either by his freedom from labour or by the amount of goods and services he and his family can consume. Modern life heavily depends on machines, and a natural corollary of mechanization is the standardization of life, which is bound to collide with and weaken tradition and traditional morality. Randolph Bourne warned against the American elders' complacency which had made them almost incapable of thinking about and trying to answer life's more difficult questions. They pretended there were no questions at all. They didn't have any genuine faith in religion; nevertheless, they were not ready to part with rites and rituals. The comfortable routines of business, church and family made them partially or fully blind to the ages new needs and demands. According to Mencken, the typical American is distinguished from all the rest, by his social aspiration, a passion to lift himself at least by a step or two in the society. This desire to rise socially, he believed, is at the root of all American restlessness.

Mencken points out how *Babbitt* portrays the true, average American

citizen, and how Lewis depicts that character with complete and absolute fidelity. Despite touches of irony in the portrayal of his character, nowhere does the author depart from the essential truth:

Every American city swarms with his brothers. They run things in the Republic, East, West, North, South. They are the originators and propagators of the national delusions – all, that is, save those, which spring from the farms. They are the palladiums of 100% Americanism, the apostles of Harding politics, the check guardians of the Only True Christianity. They institute the chambers of commerce, the Rotary Clubs, the Kiwani's clubs, the watch and ward societies, the Men and Religion forward Movements, the Y.M.C.A. directorates, the Good Citizen Leagues.... They are the leading citizens, the speakers at banquets, the profiteers, the corruptors of politics, the supporters of evangelical Christianity, the peers of the realm. Babbitt is their archetype. He is no worse than most, and no better; he is the average American of the ruling minority in this hundred and forty sixth year of the Republic. He is America incarnate, exuberant, exquisite. Study him and you will know better what is the matter with the land we live in than you would know after plowing through a thousand such volumes as Walter Lippman's *Public Opinion* (as in Schorer, 1962, Pp.21-22).

Concluding the same article Mencken writes: "I know of no American novel that more accurately presents the real America. It is the social document of a

high order”(P.22). A.Howe comments on the true and faithful portrayal of life in Babbitt; “...works like *Babbitt* can hardly be called fiction, for there is next to nothing fictitious about them. They are studies in everyday social life, built up from start to finish on first hand observation”(1962, “Preface” to *Babbitt*).

The usual realistic method of filling the text with details, is very liberally used by Lewis in *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. Although he finds fault with Balzac for the latter’s “disgusting details” Lewis himself is not free from this tendency. See how he describes a room in Babbitt’s house:

...it was all as competent and as glossy as this bedroom (firm but not hard mattresses, small table with an electric bedside lamp, a glass of water, and a stand and bed side book with coloured illustrations, what book it was no one could say because none had ever opened it), large, easily opened windows, with the best catches and cords and Holland roller shades guaranteed not to crack - had the air of a very good room in a very good hotel. In fact there was but one thing wrong with Babbitt’s house: it was not a home (1962,P.41).

Balzac, too, never gets tired of details. In *Eugenie Grandet*, he describes Grandet’s features:

As to Grandet’s exterior. He was a broad, square-shouldered, thick-set man, about five feet high; his legs were thin (he measured perhaps twelve inches round the calves), his knee joints large and prominent. He had a bullet shaped head, a

sunburned face, scarred with the smallpox, and a narrow chin; there was no trace of a curve about the lines of his mouth. He possessed a set of white teeth, eyes with the expression of a stony avidity in them with which a basilisk is credited, a deeply furrowed brow on which there were prominences not lacking in significance... (1968,P.18).

Sociological Concerns:

Lewis's imaginative frame of reference was essentially sociological. Walter Lippman in his article, "Sinclair Lewis," tells us of the sociological importance of Lewis's writings. His America is the America of the well-to-do and prosperous descendants of the Puritan Pioneers. But while their ancestors had to conquer nature to establish themselves in alien situations, they themselves had no Indians to fight against, nor wild animals to dread. They had comfortable houses to live in and enough leisure to trouble their minds with questions like, "what is it all about?" and "Is it worthwhile after all?" They had become the inheritors of a lost tradition, as the European heritage had been completely blotted out from them. The only European legacy they had, was a series of prohibitions called morality, and a habit of Church attendance without feeling there the presence of the God they worshipped. As Walter Lippman puts it, "they are the creatures of the passing moment who are vaguely unhappy in a boring and senseless existence that is without dignity, without grace, without purpose. They are driven by they know not what compulsions, they are ungoverned and yet unfree, the sap of life does not reach them, their tap roots having been cut" (1962,P.90). The opening page of *The Main Street* tells us of the passing off of the tradition of pioneering, of lassies in sun-bonnets, and bears killed with axes in piney clearings (P.7).

Harold Bloom, in an article on Sinclair Lewis, points out how Lewis was a writer invested with the capacity to see and be interested in the overriding dramatic quality of the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and the world (1987, Pp.71-82). In the same essay, Bloom refers to *The Lonely Crowd* by David Riesman in which the author theorizes the relationship between the individual and the society. Accordingly, three options are possible: adjustment, in which the individual will conform to the universals of the culture and accept the narrow range of choices open to him, anomie, in which there is maladjustment, and autonomy, in which there may or may not be conformity. Here the individual makes choices; lives upto culture's norms as and when it suits him and transcends them when there are reasons to do so. *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, according to Bloom, can be shown as working out the process of adjustment. Even though both Carol Kennicott and Babbitt rebel against their societies, in the end, they become largely adjusted to their surroundings.

Carol's rebellion follows a three-stage course of questioning and challenging, withdrawal from, and then reconciliation to Gopher Prairie. It begins during her bridal journey to Gopher Prairie, when the train was waiting endlessly at a remote railway station, and when she was watching Rauskukle crossing a street. Her husband told her about how respectable a person Rauskukle was, his assessment being based on the lots of mortgages he held. She cannot agree with her husband and tells him that a man's worth does not depend on the money he possesses. She also asks him why the villagers and farmers were not raising their voice against Rauskukle's usurious suppression of independent people. Her revolt against the ugly drabness of the town society manifests itself in her overfrenzied activity... giving parties, and taking up and giving up many

projects. When the villagers reject her and scoff at her, she retaliates with outrageous behaviour. She flirts with a tailor, but soon withdraws for fear of scandal and disgrace. This is the first step in the process of adjustment. Then she withdraws and goes to Washington, only to learn from there, that Washington, too, is full of Main Streets. At last, she yields to her husband's persuasions and returns to Gopher Prairie. As Harold Bloom points out, "Adjustment of course spells defeat for her aspirations, but it is a peculiar kind of defeat, almost without a sting"(1987,Pp.71-82). James Marshall has commented that:

Her achievement, so to say, is to become an average person in revolt, that is, an allegorical pioneer whose protesting voice of commonplaceness articulates strong resistance to the encroachments of dishonest authority.... If she effects no social reforms in Gopher Prairie, she undergoes change into an individual confident of her ability to challenge the shibboleths of village conformity. Her actual change is modest, but allegorically significant. She feels confident in facing Stowbody and others who ruled the Main Street with their collective myopia. Thus, although she does not threaten the security of Main Street land speculators, she learns the principle of questioning shameless materialism (1985,Pp.529-545).

Babbitt, too, follows the pattern of adjustment. He cannot be said to have, in any real sense, deviated from the paths shown to him by society. What we have in *Babbitt* is only an extension and expansion of the theme of *Main Street*.

Instead of a small town, Lewis makes an average mid-western state called Winnemac (Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan) and placed it in the imaginary city of Zenith, and depicted the life of its representative citizen, George.F.Babbitt, middle class (\$9000 a year), 46, somewhat overweight, resident in a fashionable suburb, father of two children, real estate dealer, good fellow. He is in and of Zenith upto his chin and over. Even while being a conformist, he tries to rebel against society, first, through some sexual strayings, and then in his refusal to join an organization devoted to repression of dissent. Lewis, anyhow, is not ready to engage his hero in a full-fledged battle against society. With his wife Myra's sickness he re-enters society and the rebellion ends there.

The one theme Lewis was keenly interested in was the standardization of manners and the stultification of morals. Mark Schorer tells us that "the world of Sinclair Lewis rests upon two observations: the standardization of manners in a business culture, and the stultification of morals under middle class convention. All his critical observations can be marshalled in support of these propositions and his portrait of the middle class rests entirely upon them"(1962,P.49). Babbitt, undoubtedly, is the most faithful representation of a standardized American businessman. Arrowsmith portrays and satirises American life. Before Martin Arrowsmith, the protagonist of the novel takes refuge in the wilds of Vermont, where he can pursue his researches undisturbed, he has to encounter all the obstacles which the nation can put in the way of a doctor— standardization, conformity, inner emptiness and discontent. Since it presents more of a vertical than a horizontal view, it cuts across all strata of American life except perhaps that of manual labour, and is therefore more inclusive and more varied than his earlier works. And it is more positive, and it

goes deeper, concerning itself less with the surface and more with a fundamental trait of the national character. Any seeker after truth, whether he be a doctor, chemist, economist, historian, philosopher or a theologian, will have to confront the stark truth of the people's preference for the active to the theoretical, acquisitive to the creative and practical to the contemplative life.

As a Satirist:

Sinclair Lewis is primarily a satirist. Sheldon Norman Grebstein calls him a descendent of the line of Cooper, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and Twain in his reproach of the insidious effects of mass culture, standardization of manners and hallowed institutions. In his writings he did attack hallowed institutions like the small town (*Main Street*), the successful businessman (*Babbitt*), medicine (*Arrowsmith*) and religion (*Elmer Gantry*) (1962,P.19). Lewis's grand father, father, uncle and elder brother were all medical men and Lewis had the feeling that his father never forgave him for opting to be writer. This feeling rankled in him and formed the basis of his satiric impulse. The satirist in him broadened his conviction to include all American middle and lower classes as people without taste or ability to appreciate art or writing. *Babbitt*, for example, is financially quite successful. He is a thriving realtor, but does not know anything about landscaping, architecture and economics. He is hypocrite enough to dismiss one of his employees for some unethical practices, while he himself has followed a quite elastic ethics in business. With all his professed respect for law and order, he has no hesitation to procure and serve bootlegged whiskey at a party. By introducing Sir Gerald Doak, an Englishman who is very similar to *Babbitt* in his pursuits and in his disdain for the intellectual and the aesthetic, Lewis is making the point that *Babbitt* is not a national disease only, it is endemic.

Vernon.L.Parrington's article on Sinclair Lewis lays stress on the element of satire in his works. Lewis, he says, is an irrepressible and irritatingly effective satirist. Using the technique of the realists, he tries to tell the truth objectively and dispassionately, revealing to us the unaccommodated man, as a poor bare, forked animal (1962,P.62). In fact it was the satirist in him that gave Lewis a mark of distinction as a major writer in American literature. *Main Street* was his major success and Mark Shorer tells us that its significance is that the author had found in it his metier in the satirical treatment of American provincial life, and this vein he was to continue to exploit in his later works. T.K.Whipple in his article, "Sinclair Lewis", writes: "Gopher Prairie and Zenith are portrayed with all their looks, habits, their talk and their thoughts. Nothing could be more life-like than Lewis's counterfeit world in all its accurate and unbearable detail. His novels are triumphant feats of memory and observation" (1962,P.72). *Babbitt* begins with the description of Zenith, a modern city, a city of giants. The remainder of the novel is something like an ironic commentary on this statement. We are told how *Babbitt* and others in the city are pygmies and not giants.

The chief target of attack in Lewis's satirical writings is the herd culture of America. In earlier times, too, herds rambled about the plains and drove foolishly in whatever directions their noses pointed. These herds were always endowed with tremendous power, with big bull leaders, but with minds rarely above their bellies and their dams. As a herd, they were big-necked, red-blooded, lusty, veritable lords, and masters of a huge continent. Lewis examines the constituents of the herd as stupid individuals, feeble in brain and will, and stuffed with self-conceit. In the past, aristocratic and feudal societies used to respect

the priest, the knight and the artist above the usurer and the craftsman. There were some other generations, which professed to serve truth, beauty and goodness in their lives, but the great American herd cares nothing for such things. Priests, knights and artists are mere lackeys to merchants, bankers and realtors, and a good, decent life is measured in terms of commissions and percentages. The pity is that it is all done in the name of democracy, by men who understand as little of democracy as of Christianity. Lewis did his homework quite well to prove his theory of herd culture, wandering along main streets, playing poker in back rooms with wicked young men, enjoying drinking sessions in gentlemen's clubs, meeting brokers and listening to their discourse on ethics, learning lessons on politics and constitutional theory from realtors, lessons on Bolshevism from the presidents of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry. No field of American experience escaped his minute investigation, and he learned the American language in all its subtle shades and nuances.

De-humanization of Life:

The cardinal aspect about Gopher Prairie and Zenith is the de-humanization of life by sheer indifference or enmity to all human values. Gopher Prairie forms the heart of agricultural America, a place known in earlier times for its kindly and wholesome values, but which at present has become the breeding ground for self-sought slavery and dullness glorified. Zenith is the wonder and admiration of all right-minded citizens. The creed of both the towns is the philosophy of self-promotion; it is towns like these that form the true capital of the red-blooded Americans who look upon themselves as the greatest race in the world. This philosophy of boasting leads to hollow optimism and a hypocrisy that makes them believe that business knavery is social service. The people offer stiff resistance

to any new ideas that are likely to break this bubble of pretense. Despite all this pretense to culture and cultural things, both Gopher Prairie and Zenith are intellectually dead, and the dead in both the towns are resolved that none shall live. Lewis also attacks the religion of these towns. In Gopher Prairie, they have a debased religion which takes the form of repressive Puritanism and prurient espionage. In Zenith, it is only a form of boasting. Intellectual and spiritual numbness deprive them of any meaningful social life. They have a group existence only because loneliness is terrifying to them; and even in this group existence, there is little effective communication among individuals. Their curiosity about each others doings is equalled only by their indifference to each other. As T.K.Whipple writes:

Lewis's world is a social desert, and for the best of reasons, it is human desert. It is a social void because each of its members is personally a human emptiness... Having no substance in themselves, they are incapable of being genuine. They are not individual persons, nor do they have a developed personality. If one searches for the real Babbitt, he is likely to be disappointed because there is no real Babbitt. There are several Babbitts, but there is no integration amongst them. The same is the case with other characters. They have no inner integrity and so are forced to adopt the standards and ideas of the herd (1962,P.74).

According to Parrington:

...what emerges from the drab pages of Sinclair Lewis...is the authoritative pronouncement that the effects forecast by

earlier critics, have become in our day, the regnant order of things. Babbitt is the son of Plugson of Undershot (Plugson was Thomas Carlyle's typical commercial radical who in the middle of the 19th century found that no decent Tory would ever shake hands with him), and Babbitt is a walking corpse who refuses to be put decently away to make room for the living men. An empty soul, he is the symbol of one common emptiness(1962,P.69).

As a Mimic:

Lewis had an extraordinary gift of mimicry. Joseph Wood Krutch locates this gift somewhere between mere naturalistic reproduction and imaginative recreation. But, since Lewis's primary concern was more of the creation of types rather than of individuals, he does not photograph or mimic individuals. Babbitt is not an individual; rather he is assembled out of many Babbitts. He is a successful businessman, and he mimics the traits of a sound businessman. The result is that there is no development of character which is, certainly Lewis's flaw as a novelist. In *Main Street*, too, the author doesn't show much interest in developing the character. Rebecca West speaks of Lewis's mimetic genius, which she thinks has hardly ever been transcended: "*Babbitt* as a book was planless; its end arrived because its author had come to the end of the writing pad, or rather, one might suspect from its length, to the end of all writing pads then on the market. But George. F. Babbitt was a triumph of impersonation" (1962,P.40).

The Twentieth Century Views on Sinclair Lewis contains an article by E.M.Forster, entitled "Our Photography: Sinclair Lewis"(Pp95-99). Here he compares Lewis with H.G.Wells and comments that both writers have the same

gift of hitting off a person or a place in a few quick words. Both are indifferent to poetry and pass much the same judgements on conduct. Lewis Mumford in his article, "The America of Sinclair Lewis", comments on the photographic quality of Lewis's satires: "Mr. Sinclair Lewis's satires have the value of photography, and to say this is not to disparage his achievements, but to reinforce the claims of photography" (1962,P.105). See how Babbitt is introduced by Lewis: "George. F. Babbitt, 46 years in April 1920. Physical features: large, pink head, brown, thin hair...face babyish in slumber, despite his wrinkled skin and red spectacle dents on the slopes of his nose...not fat but exceedingly well-fed... seemed prosperous, extremely married and unromantic" (P.28). Babbitt's son, Ted, doesn't want to go to college, because he knows pretty well that he can start making money before he starts attending a college, and that one can continue study through correspondence courses. The author gives us almost a photograph of a course on Masterman:

What we Teach you

- How to address your Lodge
- How to give Toasts
- How to tell dialect stories
- How to propose to a lady
- How to entertain banquets
- How to make convincing selling talks
- How to build big vocabulary
- How to create a strong personality
- How to become a rational, powerful, original thinker
- How to be a MASTERMAN(P.104).

As a Romancer:

Sinclair Lewis, one of the staunchest of the American realists, was a

romancer, too. Grebstein calls him an ambivalent writer who was torn between the satirist and the realist in him on the one hand, and the romancer and the yea-sayer on the other (1962, Pp.19-36). As a young boy he was a spinner of stories in his native town of Sauk Centre. But even as a storyteller, he was compelled to be affirmative, as he was much influenced by qualities like hard commonsense and dependability which he acquired from Sauk Centre. He ran away from home at the age of 13 to get enlisted in the Spanish American war, but was caught by his father at a Railway Station in a nearby town. Later he joined a society organized by Upton Sinclair and worked with him for sometime. There are critics who consider him as a romancer more than a realist. For example, T.S. Matthews questions the commonly held view that Lewis was a satirist, because, a satirist, he says, has to feel superior, and Lewis has not felt superior since he wrote *Main Street*. Despite his satirical attacks on the American society and capitalism, he himself tried to become a part of the surface reality and had nothing to offer for betterment of the society. "I have always thought his reputation as a great American satirist was a great American joke; he always seemed to me as defenseless a romantic as one of his own Babbitt businessman"(1982, Pp.60-61).

One of the pet theories of romantic fiction or *bildungsroman* is education. The accent is always on *Bildung*, the development and cultivation of the self, and not on the experiences which contribute to this development. The *bildungsroman* or the apprenticeship novels relate the life of a young man as he enters the 'society', seeks similar souls, and experiences love and friendship, and in the whole process, comes into conflict with the realities of the world. The experiences he confronts mature him, and he meets with success. The

important characters attain some progress in finding the proper set of ideals and making them the reality. Lewis's earlier fiction follows this pattern. But, with *Main Street* the theme becomes disillusionment. Education takes place, but the end of education is the dispelling of illusions. Carol Kennicott, the heroine of *Main Street*, is determined to make the Gopher Prairie a better place. What really happens is that she receives a counter-education, an education in disillusionment - which begins with her marriage to Will Kennicott. Gopher Prairie's drabness, shabbiness and lack of plan are appalling to her. The counter-education teaches her the bitter lesson that the town's social habits and behaviour are as distressing as its architecture. A successful party meant inviting the same people who would eat the same refreshments and talk about the same subjects with the same dullness or viciousness. But the bitterest lesson she learns is that everywhere there are Main Streets and that small towns always mould small people. Lewis stresses the point that Gopher Prairie is a microcosm, and its philosophy of dull safety would gradually overcome the whole of America, and then the world, and it would drive away variety and beauty from all other cultures just as it has, in two generations, standardized the Scandinavian and German settlers, and made them ashamed of the old world ways which really form the richest aspects of their lives.

Prof. Richard Predmore considers Carol Kennicott as a female Quixote in his essay "The Quixotic Motifs of *Main Street*" (1982, Pp.174-183). Quixote's problem is one of reading, and his will to believe what he reads. He transforms what he sees into what his reading has lead him to see and also into what he now wishes to see. Just like the Don, Carol has the beginning of her career in the library. If Quixote wanted to reform the world by righting the wrongs, Carol's

reformist zeal was to improve the plight of the grateful poor. She is learning to transmute reality. For example, she sees the Mississippi river as her fanciful mind dictates. "She listens to the fables of the river, about the wide land of yellow waters and bleached buffalo bones to the west, the southern levees and singing darkies and palm trees towards which it was for ever mysteriously gliding..."(Lewis, 1973, P. 12). She spends a year in Chicago after her graduation. One evening, she goes to a Bohemian studio to attend a party where she hears talk of "Freud, Romain Rolland, Syndicalism" (P. 16). When she gets the job of a librarian, she maintains her reading habits and reads "volumes of Anthropology and Parisian imagistes, Hindu recipes for curry, voyages to the Solomon isles..."(P. 16). Will marries her by exploiting her desire to find a purpose for herself, but, after the marriage her illusions evaporate.

One motif that particularly directs the female Quixote is romantic love. When Erick Valborg appears in Gopher Prairie, he is less a substantial character than a projection of what Carol fancies him to be. At times he is an uneducated, commonplace, shallow young man to her, at other times she sees him as a poet, a Keats, or a Shelley. He continues to stimulate and confuse her mind. That the life in the village is purer and mentally more rewarding is another quixotic notion that is exposed by Lewis in *Main Street*.

Lewis's successful works are those in which the storyteller illustrates and reinforces what the realist and social critic has asserted. Of course, one element is never present without the other, even in such romantic concoctions as *The Innocents*, and in such wholesale indictments as *Gideon Planish*. Only when there is balance and conjunction, point and counterpoint, message fused

with plot, is Lewis worthy of serious consideration as a novelist. In *Main Street*, the exterior conflict, Carol's war with Gopher Prairie, has a counterpoint in the interior conflict, Carol's war with her husband Will. While Carol is for change, Will, even while claiming to believe in progress, is really suspicious of anything new. Carol loves art and beauty; Will scorns both; Carol is flighty and unpredictable, Will is a willing slave to routine; she is given to fantasy while he is pragmatic. *Main Street* is neither fully a work of satire nor of romance; it is rather a realist piece. At the end, Carol gives up the battle, but not the war. She tells her husband about the potentials of her daughter; she is confident that her daughter will certainly blow up the engulfing smugness.

Lewis and Dickens:

Lewis's talent has often been described as Dickensian. As Geoffrey Moore puts it, "In the first place, one must admit that he created a world of his own and peopled it with characters who make sense within its confines. It is a Dickensian type of talent. This is why I usually find myself objecting to the unqualified use of the term *realistic* with which American literary historians so often label Lewis" (1962, P.162). Even though writers like H.G.Wells and Bernard Shaw influenced him (he named his son after Wells), it was Dickens who most fascinated him. He shared Dickens's fabulism and exaggeration. Grebstein calls him the American Dickens(1962,P.29), and he lists out the similarities between the two writers. Both held the view that the author ought to feel tenderness towards his characters. One may recall Lewis's affection for Babbitt and the citizens of Gopher Prairie. Dickens's belief that it is the writer's responsibility to discover and reveal beauty in the commonplace is being worked out in Lewis's characters like Carol Kennicott and Babbitt. Despite the fact that Dickens's characters are

mostly 'flat', because of his excessive reliance on their 'humours', many of them have passed into common language, eg: Pecksniff and Micawber. In the case of Lewis, Babbitt and Gantry have passed into common speech. Another similarity between the two is the lively and interesting 'stories' in their works. Just as Lewis had separate interesting stories to expose the pettiness of small-town life and hollowness and philistinism of American business community, Dickens, too, tells stories to ridicule many of the foibles of his own times. Dotheboys Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby* tells the story of the private schools of those days. *Oliver Twist* exposes the stony-heartedness of organized charity. Dickens's American visit of 1842 was quite disappointing, because he had hoped to find too much natural goodness, equality and justice in that free republican state. *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a record of his disillusionment with America. This novel presents one of the most well known Dickensian characters, Mr. Pecksniff – a pen-portrait of a true hypocrite. The novel itself is a grimly ironical study of the effects of greed on character, and of the possibilities of self-knowledge and knowledge of others.

Again, Lewis and Dickens show similarities in the bulk of their writing, and in the high moral seriousness and social concern of their works. Dickens's sense of truth and his moral purpose were akin to the force that motivated Lewis in his satire and realism. The peculiar mixture of radicalism and orthodoxy in Dickens's political and social views was much like Lewis's. Both the writers were aware of class distinctions and hated snobbery; both viewed the upper classes as aggressors and oppressors, with popular classes fighting back in self-defense. Both were generally hostile to money and money values even while enjoying high financial returns from their writings. Philanthropy, big business, finance and speculation and the respectability bought by money were targets of

attacks in the writings of both the novelists. Both opposed extremist movements. If in Dickens's case, it was Chartism, in the case of Lewis it was Communism. Monroe Engel in his book *The Maturity of Dickens* observes:

Increasingly, he expressed his earnestness by pointing out to the English on every possible occasion the social evils and vices which they did their best not to recognize, and by undermining the false values and prides by which they lived and destroyed life. He was a subversive who undermined the accepted principles of his time whether those principles related to representative government, class structure, treatment of the poor, making of money or other subjects (1959, P.72).

This observation can very well be applied to Sinclair Lewis.

Lewis Compared to Balzac and Zola:

If the one British novelist to whom Lewis comes closest is Charles Dickens, Honore de Balzac and Emile Zola are the European authors with whom he can draw a parallel. All these writers tried to tackle in their writings most of the social problems of their respective ages. Balzac and Lewis were well aware of the dangers posed by the excessive importance given to money in the capitalist system. But, Lewis was not able to go beyond the surface level because he was not as imaginative, exuberant or dynamic as either Balzac or Zola. In spite of his protestations as a progressive liberal, he could not or dared not measure the real depths of the important issues of his time. Balzac, on the other hand, even while being a supporter of royalism, could see through the societal changes of his own times. His reactionary political views did not blind him to the democratization

process that was under way. There is nothing in Lewis that bears comparison with the vision that Balzac presents in his *Human Comedy*. This is because Lewis was not an exceptionally intelligent or gifted author, nor a man with a sensibility or power of understanding above the average.

Robert Morss Lovett compares Lewis to Emile Zola. He points out that Mr. Lewis employs the inclusive formula of the naturalists in the *Main Street*, setting down as much of the visual and audible stuff of life in Gopher Prairie as his vehicle could carry. In *Arrowsmith* the background is chiefly occupational as in the classics of the *Rougon Macquart* series. Martin Arrowsmith is a physician and a medical student. Lewis's method exhibits the conscientious thoroughness of Zola as we find the author follow the fortunes of Arrowsmith (1962, Pp.32-35).

Even though Lewis was the leading exponent of critical realism in America during the first half of the century, critics have generally been rather severe with him. He has been looked upon as a publicist in fiction and has been decried for certain philistine attitudes that infected some of his works. According to Mark Schorer, "he was one of the worst writers in modern American literature" (1962, P.1). Geoffrey Moore refers to the two conflicting emotions as he re-read Lewis: "...annoyance at the shallowness of his writings, by his list of places seen and things done, attempt to capsule whole areas of emotion and render them in a single paragraph of reportorial neighbourliness, by his caricature-characterizations and feeling of sympathy for the grotesque people he created which led the critic to the man Lewis himself" (1962, P.163).

Life of the American middle class sans Soul:

Whatever be the levels of Lewis's success, his indictment of the

American middle class is suggestive of a dissatisfied generation given over to disillusion. The dreams of the American middle class did not prove to be as glossy as they seemed to be in the pre-War days. As Vernon.L.Parrington remarked, "his pages are filled with the doings of automata...not living men, but simulacra of men, done with astonishing verisimilitude, speaking an amazingly realistic language, professing a surprising likeness; yet nevertheless only shells from which life has departed, without faith, or hope or creative energy, not even aware that they are dead" (1962,P.69).

The new realism of Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis, Alfred Kazin argues, was only formally related to the struggle for realism in America, which was practised in the eighties and nineties of the previous century. The new realism was the result of the fresh current of emancipation in the post-War period. It had no need to struggle for its life. Though it shared the old challenging rebelliousness of the pre-War realism, it was essentially remote from naturalism, and the romances against which it was rebelling. But this rebellion was only domestic;

...it was basically a rambling and homespun realism which was instinctive in nature. It was a realism that had emerged out of the struggle for freedom of conduct, a realism concerned not with the conflict of great social forces that had dominated the first naturalist generation, but with the sights and sounds of common life, with transcriptions of average experience, with, reproducing, sometimes parodying, but always participating in, the whole cluster of experiences which made up the native culture (1962,P.120).

By the twenties, realism had become a familiar method of writing in America, and the realists like Lewis gave the American novel over to the widest possible democracy of subject and theme.

CHAPTER III

JOHN STEINBECK AND REALISM IN THE 1930s

If Sinclair Lewis was the most significant American novelist of the 1920s, Steinbeck can be considered the most important writer of the 1930s. The decade which applauded him as a major writer, mostly favoured sympathetic writings on the dispossessed, and broad and optimistic statements about the people. Writers like Archibald MacLeish and Carol Sandburg who tried in their works to put together the epic and realistic strains easily became popular, but only to become dated in later years. Steinbeck, too, had a similar experience at the hands of readers and critics. Harry T Moore, the author of the first book on Steinbeck (1939), publicly repented his youthful enthusiasm for the novelist in his epilogue to the second edition of *The Novels of John Steinbeck: A First Critical Study*. Besides falling out of fashion, he fell out of touch, too. As he himself confesses in *Travels with Charley*, "I did not know my own country,... I had not felt the country for twentyfive years. I was writing of something I did not know about, and it seems to me that in a so-called writer, this is criminal" (1962, P.5).

I propose to examine here two novels by Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Winter of Our Discontent*, to study how he has used the realistic mode in them. The reasons for my choice are obvious: *The Grapes of Wrath* is Steinbeck's masterpiece and the author himself regards *The Winter of Our Discontent* as the third peak of his achievement. Moreover, while Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962, the spokesman of the Nobel Prize Committee, Dr. Anders Osterling, had mentioned this work along with his pre-War novels as a reason for awarding him the prize.

Steinbeck, often considered as a realist and naturalist, held the view that the writer must "set down his time as nearly as he can understand it", and must serve as "the watch dog of society ... to satirize its silliness, to attack its injustices, to stigmatize its faults" (1948, P.27, P.64). *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) has for its background the Great Depression of the 1930s and *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1960) is a study of the deteriorating moral standards of American life towards the beginning of the 60s.

Novel as Social Document:

Steinbeck, who enjoyed reputation as a proletarian writer of the 1930s, was primarily a novelist with a social purpose. While discussing his work, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Peter Lisca tells us that his chief interest lay in the depiction of the social and political problems of the Great Depression. Just like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, *The Grapes of Wrath* also is often placed among novels that had had considerable political impact (1982, Pp 48-62). Leonard Lutwack points out that *The Grapes of Wrath* is a thoroughly didactic, epic novel in which an exploited group of people realizes that they are being exploited, that they form a new class in society, the proletariat; individuals within that class discover the manner of exploitation and grope for the means to combat it, or at least, protect themselves against it; and the reader of the book, presumably, discovers that an alarming world economic condition is now making itself felt in America. The novel has a two-part theme, the education of a people and the education of its emerging leaders, and a three-part action, the dispossession, the migration and the resettlement of a people (1982, Pp 63-75).

George Bluestone, in his article on *The Grapes of Wrath*, lays emphasis on the socio-political implications of the story of the Joads haunted by the deputies in the payroll of the landowners, bankers and fruit-growers (1972, Pp 102-121). Earl Birney points to the didactic conclusion of an impending revolution, which he felt was implicit in the narrative (1939, P.95). According to James N Vaughan, "*The Grapes of Wrath* is a monograph on rural sociology, a manual of practical wisdom in times of enormous stress, an assault on individualism, an essay in behalf of a rather vague form of pantheism, and a bitter, ironical attack on that emotional, evangelistic religion which seems to thrive in the more impoverished rural districts of this vast country"(1949, Pp 341-342).

The Grapes of Wrath was accepted, and sometimes attacked also, as a social document, rather than as a novel. The book was published in a decade in which the line of distinction between social documentation and novel writing had been very hazy, a decade that brought forth works such as Dorothea Lange's and Paul.S.Taylor's *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*, Archibald Mac Leish's *Land of The Free*, Margaret Bourkewhite's *You Have Seen Their Faces* and the WPA collection of case histories called *These Are Our Lives*, and motion pictures like Pare Lorentz's *The River and the Plow that Broke the Plains*. All these were successful works of social documentation rather than works of art. Moreover, social fiction always faces the vulnerability of being taken for factual happenings.

Just like Sinclair Lewis, Steinbeck also did a lot of homework before he set down to write. After writing *Of Mice and Men*, in September 1936, he visited the squatter's camps near Salinas and Bakersfield from where he collected materials for his next book, *In Dubious Battle*. In this book, he looked into the

sad plight of the migrant farm labourers of California. When he had finished writing *In Dubious Battle*, he made a tour of Hoovervilles, the itinerant workers' camps in the Salinas and San Joaquin valleys. His observations on the life and working conditions of the migrant drifters were reported to the *San Francisco News*, and were later published in a series of articles entitled "Harvest Gypsies" (1936). Later on, in 1938, these articles were issued together in a pamphlet form under the title *Their Blood is Strong*. Many of these materials went into his book *The Grapes of Wrath*. Before writing this book, in June 1938, he had finished writing a sixty thousand word novel *L'affaire Lettuceburg*, which he did not send to the publisher at all. On his way back from New York and Pennsylvania in the fall of 1937, after working on the stage version of *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck drove through Oklahoma and joined the migrants who were moving west and worked with them in the fields in California. Thus, the realism of *The Grapes of Wrath* becomes a combination of his own experience and direct observation. On September 16, 1938, Steinbeck sent Pascal Covici, the book's title "*The Grapes of Wrath*" saying that he liked the soft with the hard.

The novel was subjected to severe criticism based on its facts. *Grapes of Gladness: California's Refreshing and Inspiring Answer to John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath*, a book by Marshal V. Hartranft, appeared within two months. It was the story of a family of migrants who came to California poverty-stricken, and prospered well there. The farmers and the Banks in California welcomed them all with open arms giving them free land and lending them enough money to come up in life. In an addendum to the soap opera, the author tries to challenge some of Steinbeck's "facts". Another book, *The Truth About John Steinbeck and the*

Migrants, written by George Thomas Miron speaks of the Author's own experiences during a journey he made, disguised as a migrant. Here also, the experiences are in total contrast to the experiences narrated by Steinbeck in his novel. In an essay that prefaces this book, the author decries *The Grapes of Wrath*, as "a novel wherein naturalism has gone berserk, where truth has run amuck, drunken upon prejudice and exaggeration, where matters economic have been hurled beyond the pale of rational and realistic thinking" (1939, P.5). This author also accused Steinbeck of having promoted the idea of class war in the book. Anyway, the hollowness of this accusation was exposed by Stanley Edgar Hyman who said that "actually a careful reading makes clear, the central image of *The Grapes of Wrath* is an appeal to the owning class to behave, to become enlightened, rather than to the working class to change its own conditions" (1942, P.195).

That Steinbeck had no intentions whatsoever, to give a call for organized revolt, is evident from the series of articles he wrote for the *San Francisco News* in October 1936. The first of these articles ends with the warning that "California is gradually building up a human structure which will certainly change the state, and may, if handled with inhumanity and stupidity that have characterized the past, destroy the present system of agricultural economics" (1936, P3). In the last of this series of articles, he puts forward three suggestions: (i) The migrant labourers be allotted small substantial farms on which they can live and work when there is no call for migrant labour, (ii) a Migratory Labour Board be created to help allot labour where needed and to determine fair wages, (iii) vigilantism and terrorism be punished. The article also gives the warning: "If on the other hand, as has been stated by a large grower, our agriculture requires the creation and

maintenance of a poor-class, then it is submitted that Californian agriculture is economically unsound under a democracy" (1936, P.8). It is quite obvious that the author has not in his mind any intention of starting a class war on Marxian lines.

Defences of the book's accuracy were no less vehement. Professors of sociology, ministers and many other government officials strongly supported Steinbeck. The topic was discussed in Radio Programmes called 'town meetings,' and the book was publicly reviewed before mass audiences. Darryll Zanuck the producer of the movie version of *The Grapes of Wrath*, before starting his work, sent private detectives to ascertain the accuracy of the book's details, and found that the conditions were even worse than those described by Steinbeck.

The Grapes of Wrath deals with the sociological, political, economic and agrarian aspects of Joad family's existence during the Great Depression of the 1930s, as well as its inner life, the emotional, intellectual, ethical and spiritual states of its members. It was with the work of critics like Frederick.I.Carpenter, Chester.E.Eisinger, Joseph Fontenrose, Warren French and Peter Lisca that the book came to be evaluated as a work of fiction.

According to Frederick I Carpenter, the novel brings together, for the first time in the history of American literature, three great skeins of American thought. It begins with the transcendental oversoul, Emerson's faith in the common man and his Protestant self-reliance, and then takes on Walt Whitman's religion of love of all men and his mass democracy, and combines these mystical and poetic ideas with the realistic philosophy of pragmatism and its emphasis on effective action. From this, it develops a new kind of Christianity – not

other-worldly and passive, but earthly and active (1941, Pp.324-325). *The Grapes of Wrath* develops the old idea of transformation of the Protestant individual into the member of a social group, from 'I' to 'we', the passive individual turning into the active participant and the idealist becoming the pragmatist. In many earlier works, emphasis has generally been on the individual above the group. But Steinbeck believed that the beginning of reconstruction lay in a change of stress from 'I' to 'we'. The old society was split and the Protestant individuals were wandering aimlessly. At the beginning of the novel, we have a group of individuals, all, members of a family, but alienated from each other. They are either rooted in themselves, or, at the most, in the family. Such a group needs a new nucleus to save itself from chaos and utter nihilism.

In the past, the unit of human love was the family. *The Grapes of Wrath* suggests that love of all people shall supersede love of the family. Not only the Joad family, but all the migrants feel the importance of the comfort of the family, and so, they constitute themselves into a large family. In the course of their camping along route 66, one evening, "a strange thing happened, the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home one loss, and the golden time in the west was one dream" (P.164). To the Okies who were struggling in an alien land, the family of man was more than a sentimental phrase; it was a practical and necessary fact of existence, the movement from 'I' to 'we'.

Jim Casy is the preacher who abandons conventional Christian faith, and embraces a new faith, a faith which is the love all the people, a faith in the total soul of humanity, in which all men participate. His is a case of transcendental

pragmatism that seeks to generalize the problems of the Okies and to integrate them with the larger problem of industrial America. The solution that he offers is group action guided by conceptual thought and functioning within the framework of democratic society and law. When he is killed, his faith is inherited by Tom, who can now say, looking back to Casy, "But I know now a fella ain't us good alone" (P.570). Edwin.T.Bowden remarks that "this is the central point of the novel, and this is the conviction on which the overt social protest of the novel is based (1982, P. 22).

The first significant change in the family's attitude comes with the life in the weed patch government camp where the family-feeling withers and the larger community-feeling replaces it. In the final meeting between the mother and the son, Tom tells her: "Well, may be like Casy says, a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but only a piece of a big one an' then Then it don't matter. Then I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where - wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there.... An when our folks eat the stuff they raise, an' live in the houses they build - why, I'll be there" (P.572).

To Tom who becomes a trade union leader, winning a strike is not as important as making the people think in terms of action, action in terms of the whole rather than a particular individual. What Steinbeck stresses in the novel is that to act is the most important thing in life. The grapes of wrath must be trampled to make manifest the glory of the Lord. The incipient wrath of the defeated and the dispossessed farmers described at the beginning of the novel is repeated at the end also. "And where a number of men gathered together, the fear went from their faces, and anger took its place. And the women sighed with relief.... The break would never come as long as fear could turn to wrath" (P. 398). Then the wrath could turn to action.

Summing up his essay, "The Philosophical Joals", Carpenter observes that the fundamental idea of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is that of American transcendentalism. "All men have got one big soul. It means that every individual will trust those instincts, which he shares with all men even when these instincts conflict with the teachings of orthodox religion and of existing society.... But whatever happens, the American will act to realize his ideals, that is, he will seek to make himself whole, that is, to join himself to other men by means of purposeful actions for some goal beyond himself" (1941, P.329).

As a realist, a technique that Steinbeck frequently employs for the depiction of reality is the use of past works as frames of reference in his novels. Most of his novels are written to represent modern life in terms of ancient myths. For example, we have *Mort d' Arthur* as a frame of reference for *The Pastures of Heaven*. In *Tortilla Flat* also, he returns to the Arthurian cycle for theme and structure, even though the book itself is by no means a modern version of the Arthurian legend. The title and epigraph of *In Dubious Battle* are taken from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden*, the Bible provides the frame of reference. The author makes extensive use of the wasteland myth in *The Winter of our Discontent*.

Peter Lisca, in his essay, "The Grapes of Wrath as Fiction" (Donohue, 1968, Pp.166-181), identifies the three sections of *The Grapes of Wrath* with the three divisions in the Old Testament. The first section (Chapter I-Chapter X) which gives us an account of the drought which drives the Oklahomans away from their land corresponds to the oppression of the Hebrews in Egypt; the second part (Chapter XI-Chapter XIII) describing the journey of the migrants

corresponds to the Exodus, and the third part (Chapter XIX-Chapter XXX) narrating the life of the migrants in California to the sojourn of the Hebrews in the land of Canaan (Case book, Pp.166-181). Of course, there is only the grand design of the parallel, and it is not possible to work out all the details. Nevertheless, there are many of points of similarity.

Eric.W.Carlson refutes the view that *The Grapes of Wrath* is Christian in spirit. He thinks it to be truly secular; "From the first chapter to the last, *The Grapes of Wrath* theme represents the indomitable spirit of man - that spirit which remains whole by resisting despair and resignation in the face of the drought of life, physical privation, exploitation, persecution, the tyranny of name-calling and uprooting of the very way of life itself" (as in Donohue, 1968, Pp.96-102).He tells us that, out of the shared miseries, there develops a strong feeling of resistance to the possessive egotism of absentee ownership, and out of this non-conformity emerges a sense and need of group action. He argues that the novel is not Christian in spirit for two reasons: it is not an expression of Christian humility and resignation, and if one grants that the Christian spirit may, on certain occasions, be assertive and militant, the title theme has its origin in the character and the experience of the people, rather than in a body of religious concepts and beliefs. Jim Casy is a fine example of a deeply rooted American liberal democrat. He gives up his conventional Christian faith, and his new faith is founded on four major beliefs: a belief in the brotherhood of man, manifesting itself as love and compassion, a belief in the spirit of man as the oversoul or Holy Spirit shared by all men in their outgoing love, a belief in the unity of man and nature, and an acceptance of all life as an expression of spirit.

The Grapes of Wrath doesn't so much tell the story of the Joad family's journey from Oklahoma to California and its experience there, as depict the total situation of the Great Depression years. This is strictly in conformity with the realist tradition of portraying the life of one's time, something similar to the task Balzac and Stendhal had undertaken in the nineteenth century. If it was the Bourbon Restoration and the July Monarchy that had figured in the minds of the two French masters, it was the Great Depression that moved Steinbeck's imagination. Steinbeck sought to depict the totality, not by bringing in a vast number of characters, but by employing the technique of alternative chapters as a way of filling in the larger picture. Peter Lisca, in his essay, "The Grapes of Wrath as Fiction" (Donohue, 1968, Pp.166-181), draws the parallel between Steinbeck and Tolstoy with regard to the structural problem experienced by both in writing their novels. Tolstoy wanted to put into *War and Peace* the adventures of three families, the Bezukhovs, the Rostovs, and the Bolkonskis. Along with their adventures, he wanted to include in the novel another important topic, the Napoleonic wars. He combined these two blocks of material to make his plot, but still there was enough of the Napoleonic wars left over. He put this in separate philosophic inter-chapters. Steinbeck had, before him, on the one hand, the adventures of three families: the Joads, the Wilsons and the Wainwrights, and on the other, the Great Depression. Just like Tolstoy, he too, had material left over, that was to form separate philosophic inter-chapters.

The novel contains sixteen inter-chapters out of a total of thirty. But these sixteen chapters come to less than a hundred pages, only about one sixth of the book. In none of these chapters do the Joads, the Wilsons or the Wainwrights appear. The inter-chapters serve two important functions: provide the

social climate about the Joad family's actions, and give us information about the economic aspects of the social lag. The important structural task confronting Steinbeck was to see that the inter-chapters did not sunder the novel into two distinct parts. How does the author integrate these inter-chapters with the longer narrative section of the novel? One technique used for this purpose is juxtaposition. The material of the inter-chapter is related to the events of the main narrative. Each inter-chapter is so placed that its content is most pertinent to the action in the chapter that precedes or follows it.

Percy Lubbock's *Craft of Fiction* discusses the scenic and panoramic methods in the writing of fiction: "... whenever the story is too big, too comprehensive, too widely ranging to be *treated* scenically, with no opportunity for general and panoramic survey.... These stories, therefore, which will not naturally accommodate themselves to the reader's point of view, and the reader's alone, we regard as pictorial than dramatic, meaning that they call for some narrator, somebody who knows to contemplate the facts and create an impression of them" (1968, Pp.254-255). The story in *The Grapes of Wrath* is certainly what Lubbock would have described as "big" "Comprehensive" and "wide ranging". Steinbeck employs both "pictorial" and "scenic" techniques in the work. At the same time, he is very meticulous in ensuring that the two techniques do not result in any kind of structural split. The cross reference of detail, the interweaving of symbols and dramatization are designed to make the necessary "pictorial" sections of the novel tend toward the "scenic". Conversely, the "scenic" tending to "pictorial" can be seen if we compare *The Grapes of Wrath* with an earlier Steinbeck novel, *In Dubious Battle* which has a straightforward plot and an involved action.

In no other novel does Steinbeck make use of such a variety of prose styles as in *The Grapes of Wrath*. In simplicity of diction, balance, concrete details, summary sentences and reiteration, Steinbeck's style deserves comparison with the Bible. This style also helps him in the structural integration of the book. For instance, Chapter VII dealing with used cars has a harsh staccato prose style: "Cadillacs, LaSalles, Buicks, Plymouths, Packards, Chevies, Fords, Pontiacs, Row on row headlights glinting in the afternoon sun. Good Used Cars" (P.61). Chapter IX, which presents the loss and despair of people forced to abandon their household goods, takes on a mood of dazed resignation. Steinbeck has the style suited to this mood: "The women sat among the doomed things, turning them over and looking past them and back. This book, my father had it. He liked a book. *Pilgrim's Progress*. Used to read it. Got his name on it And his pipe still smells rank...." (P.82). At times, as in the description of the folk dance in Chapter XXIII, the language becomes real chameleon-like: "Look at that Texas boy, long legs, loose, taps four times for ever' damnstep. Never see, a boy swing aroun' Like that. Look at him swing that Cherokee girl, red in cheeks and her toe points out" (P.302). Summing up his discussion on Steinbeck's prose style, Lisca comments: "The rapid shifting of prose styles and technique has value as Americana and contributes to a "realism" far beyond that of literal reporting" (1968, Pp.166-181). This rapid shifting also helps in the integration of inter-chapters with the main narrative.

Two opposing themes are interwoven in the novel: the circumstances of destitution and deprivation faced by the Joads, and the decline of the family unit versus the attainment of spiritual exaltation and embracing the larger community in place of the family. When the Joads start their journey, they have \$154.00,

their household goods, two barrels of pork, a serviceable truck and good health. As the novel progresses, they become more and more impoverished, until at the end, they are destitute, without food, shelter and any hope of work. Their truck and the goods are abandoned in the mud. The material decline is followed by a decline in the family's strength. As the family declines morally and materially, the family unit also breaks up. Grampa's death comes even before the family leaves Oklahoma. He is buried in a nameless grave. Granma is buried a pauper. Noah deserts the family. Connie gives up Rosasharn. Rosasharn's baby is still born. Tom turns a fugitive. Al is planning to leave as early as possible. Casy is killed, and the Joads are forced to abandon the Wilsons. The negative downward movements are counterbalanced by two positive upward movements. Even though the family unit is breaking up, the fragments go to make up a larger group. A sense of community life grows steadily. All through the narrative, a sense of community-feeling steadily grows. The Wilsons, Wainrights and the Joads all come closer and shed their individualistic concerns. Along with the general awareness of the people en masse is the conversion of Tom and Casy. Tom who started as an individualist: "I climb fences when I got fences to climb"(P.137), asserts his spiritual unity with all men towards the close of the novel. His final meeting with his mother takes place under conditions reminiscent of the pre-natal state. It is a cave the mouth of which is overgrown with black vines and the interior is damp and completely dark. When he comes out announcing his conversion, it is as though he were reborn. And when he says that when the folk eat what they raise and live in homes that they build (P.307), he is paraphrasing Isaiah: "And they build houses and inhabit them, they shall not build and another inhabit, they shall not plant and another eat" (LXV, 21-22). From a conventional Christian preacher, Jim Casy transforms into a social prophet and pragmatist. Both move from stasis to action.

The last chapter of the novel condenses and re-enacts the whole drama of the Joad's journey in one uninterrupted continuum of suspense. The rain continues to fall; the little mud levee collapses; Rosasharn's baby is still born; the boxcar has to be abandoned. They get to the highway to search for food, but they couldn't eat any food there, instead they had to feed a starving old man who was on the verge of death. Rosasharn saves the old man from death by giving him to suck from her own breasts. This sublimest moment of Rosasharn's life brings together two counter themes of the novel in a symbolic paradox. Out of her own need she gives life; out of the profoundest depth of despair comes the greatest assertion of faith.

Clifton Fadiman is highly critical of this final gesture by Rosasharn. He call it "the tawdriest kind of fake symbolism" (1939, P.181). Anthony West attributed it to the novel's astonishingly awkward form (1939, Pp.404-405). There is a close parallel between the last chapter describing the rains and the first chapter describing the drought: "The women studied the men's faces secretly.... After a while, the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity, and became hard and angry and resistant. Then the women knew that they were safe and that there was no break" (P.6). "The women watched the men; watched to see whether the break had come at last.... And where a number of men gathered together, the fear went from their faces and anger took its place. And the women sighed, with relief, for they knew it was all right - the break had not come" (P.592).

Steinbeck's realism depends heavily on symbolism, and for any deep understanding of his work, we have to look for the symbols, through which he

often speaks. The grapes in *The Grapes of Wrath* are not sweet grapes of joy, but the bitter ones of God's wrath. What the author is driving at here is the moral lesson that perversion in human nature shall result in perversion in the nature around him also, and then nature can't bear wholesome fruits. The grapes, under such circumstances, can only be bitter and poisonous. Under such perverse conditions, the solution to the problem lies not in augmenting the growth or making the distribution fair and even, but in making serious and sincere efforts at curing the perversion. This is what Steinbeck does in *The Grapes of Wrath*. At the beginning of the novel, none of the Joads have a healthy or wholesome mind. They are all socially, spiritually and morally alienated; love has dried up in them all. They are merely symbols of hoards that become migrants, and travel to other places. Perversion has taken root in them and has rendered them rootless in their own land. The physical conditions described by Steinbeck are only a counterpart of the disintegration and degeneration of human nature. Thus, the drought, the dust, the red and grey earth, the pale sky, the tedious path, the ruined houses, the dying dog, the prowling cat are all symbols of the decay and death that has permeated human nature, just as the cruel banks and the mechanical tractors represent the destructive forces in the physical world. The tractors do not plough, but rape the earth, rape methodically and without passion. The land bore under the iron, and gradually died under it too.

The Joads fail to recognize the real dimensions of the wasteland from which they are trying to flee. In describing the journey of the migrant families along route 66, Steinbeck is drawing the parallel with the exodus of the Israelites,

thereby telling that men in large numbers flee from a place of want to a place of plenty. But, California proved not to be a paradise for the migrant families. The fertile lands, there, were owned not by men, but by large companies, which hired labourers at low wages and ill-treated them. The Californian valleys were fertile, and there were trees bearing fruits in plenty. But, there was no happiness among workers; corruption and decay pervaded the whole atmosphere. The fruits rotted on the trees; oranges, corn and potatoes were dumped in heaps and destroyed. There was stagnation and rottenness at the heart of plenty. The landowners were more concerned with profits than with the richness of the harvests. Thousands of labourers starved even when the coffers of rich farmers heaved with the wealth from the harvests. "The fields were fruitful, and starving men moved on the roads. The granaries were full and the children of the poor grew up rachitic ..." (P.95). Corn was burnt to keep the houses warm, and coffee was burnt as fuel in the shops. The grapes of wrath were filling the souls of the people.

The much-awaited moral and spiritual regeneration comes with Rosasharn's final gesture of the sublimest humanness. Upon getting a silent suggestion from her mother, she saves an old starving man from death by giving suck to him from her full breasts. She is here symbolically transmuting her maternal love to the love of all people. The real beauty and significance of this scene is derived chiefly from the fact that it symbolizes the main theme of the novel, that is, the prime function of life is to nourish life and not to poison or prevent it. Rose's final act is also like a ritual. She, who cannot ever be the mother of a family, adopts the newly collective person as represented by one of the people who sat huddled together in the barns when winter storms came. In primitive adoption rituals, the adopting mother offers her breast to the adopted child. Rose in the novel has mostly been a weak, silly, selfish and sentimental woman, an ironic contrast to the idealized Rose of the "Song of Solomon".

Another symbol for the indomitable life force in the novel is the turtle, which is first presented, in the inter-chapter III. The life force that urges the turtle forward, drives the Joads, and in the same direction, southwest. As the turtle picks up seeds in its shell and drops them on the other side of the road, so the Joads pick up life in Oklahoma and carry it across the country to California.

Steinbeck was very much interested in biology, and just like most other naturalists, he too, makes profuse use of animal and machine imagery in his works. In fact, a very important event in Steinbeck's life was his meeting in 1930, with Edward Ricketts, owner and operator of a small commercial biological laboratory, and this stimulated his interest in biology. Steinbeck's works abound in the use of animal imagery. For instance, a tractor pulls down a shed giving it a shake like a dog shaking a rat. Muley tells about Joads crowding in a house as gophers in a winter burrow.

This preoccupation with biology is accompanied by a love of the earth. From the opening sentence which tells us how, to the red country and part of the grey country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently without cutting the scarred earth, to the last scene of desolation, the land imagery is very conspicuous. The earth motif, woven very closely into the texture of the novel, mainly serves two purposes: It signifies love and endurance. Men's attachment to their land is often so intense that it almost borders on sexual love. Soon after the family leaves its native soil, Grampa dies of a stroke. Oklahoma had produced and sustained him. When land goes, everything else goes. And, love of the family parallels love of earth. Ma Joad is the cohesive force that keeps her brood intact. The deprivation of the native land and the alienation of the new, become more

than economic disasters; they threaten the only social organization upon which Ma can depend. The fertility of the land and the integrity of the clan are no longer distinct entities, both are essential for survival.

One of the favourite devices Steinbeck employs to convey his message is epitome. The author gives a description of some object or event, apart from the main movement of the narrative, which symbolically sums up something central to the meaning of the narrative. The most significant use of symbolic epitome is the land turtle. The turtle's persistent forward movement fore shadows the progress of the Okies, and the progress of the Okies itself symbolizes the persistence of the life force of men at large. The wary mongrel at the camp represents the timorous doubts of the Okies; the arrogant skunks that prowl about in the night remind one of the imperious deputies and owners who intimidate the campers. The Okies are driven like animals, and frequently the treatment that they get from their employers is meaner than the one given to the animals.

As a realist, Steinbeck was very much conscious of the growing influence of machine on man and his life. Like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, he favoured the widespread ownership of land holdings, and believed in the dignity and virtue of the independent farmer who can live by the fruits of his labour. In this concept of small scale farming, he was influenced by the back-to-the-soil movement advocated by Maurice .G. Kains in his popular book, *Five Acres and Independence*. He opposed the indiscriminate mechanization and industrialization of agriculture with its concomitant absentee ownership. The *Grapes of Wrath* tells us the story of how the machines broke the bond between man and nature, and how the tenant farmers were made redundant and consequently forced off the

land to become migrant labourers. In California, the Joads are confronted with a situation in which they realized that the frontier is closed and all their dream of owning a piece of land must be buried as wishful thinking. The tractors are "snub-nosed monsters raising dust and sticking their snouts into it, straight down the country, across the country, through fences, through door-yards, in and out of gullies, in straight lines.... The man sitting in the iron seat did not look like a man: gloved, goggled, rubber dust mask over nose and mouth, he was part of the monster, a robot in the seat" (P.33). But Steinbeck did not think that machines are inherently evil. Though generally they are instruments of misfortune, they are simply symptoms of unfair exploitation. In Chapter XIV, he asks: "Is a tractor bad? Is the power that turns the long furrows wrong?" (Pp.205-206) He knows well that machines can be useful to man only if there is human understanding and co-operation. Also, he is not against science and technology. In Chapter XXV, he praises the achievements of chemistry, experimental farming and modern technology in agriculture.

Robert Con Davis in his "Introduction" to the *Collection of Critical Essays on The Grapes of Wrath* (1982), speaks of the novel's elaborating specific ties between people and objects and expressing a definite attitude toward work. During the Joad family's journey from Oklahoma to California, their car breaks down. Tom Joad buys spares from a wrecking yard, and repairs the car with the help of Al and Casy. The novelist describes how the oil is to be drained, how the engine must be dismantled, and how piston rings must be fashioned from wire. The apparent realism, here, is highly specialized, for, implicit in the structure of the scene is an insistence that "objects" may signify a pre-determined human purpose. In other twentieth century novels, the function of such objects is very

much different. In Theodore Dreiser, for example, objects are never mere things, they have indeterminate social and economic implications. In *Sister Carrie*, the clothes Carrie wears, the rocking chair she sits on, the buildings she walks around, and the machine she works at are all "objects" that tell the reader of her social and economic world. But in the car repair scene of *The Grapes of Wrath*, like many other work scenes of the novel, objects are merely objects without any specific associations about them. The connecting rod is just a connecting rod and the dark crank case oil has no associations at all except as an engine lubricant.

Warren Motley, in his analysis of *The Grapes of Wrath* points out Steinbeck's preference for matriarchy over patriarchy as a likely solution to the egotistical influence of Protestant individualism in the American society. Steinbeck, he argues, heavily leans on the anthropological theories like those of Robert Briffault, which present mother's growing power as a source of communal strength sheltering human dignity from the anti-social effects of individualism. There is no domination by women in a matriarchal system similar to the paternal domination found in the patriarchal system. The relationship between people in a matriarchal system is based on co-operation rather than power. The very foundations of a social organization are the result of prolonged maternal care and any form of familial feeling and group sympathy has no existence apart from it. Patriarchal family based on sexual coupling took the place of matriarchy and this change in system brought in a change in values also. The most conspicuous change was the emergence of individualism.

Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* urges people to become members of a

community rather than remain separate individuals. Co-operation and competition, he believed, is necessary to save the society from disintegration. Joad, the patriarch, is represented as senile, ineffective and lacking in discipline and direction. The stubborn individualism of the senile patriarch blinds the Joads to the necessity of collective action. As the landowner's tractor cuts across the family homestead, Grampa Joad cannot offer any effective resistance. He stands up alone against his enemy with only a gun to guarantee his independence. The bank puts down the individual family as effortlessly as the tractor rams into the house. With the older Joads turning more and more ineffective, Ma Joad acquires more significance. She dares challenge the patriarchal decisions, which she knew would fragment the family. When the men fail to get a job at the government camp and had to forfeit their patriarchal roles, Ma Joad takes the bold decision to move on. When Tom has avenged Casy's murder, she helps him to escape from the peach-ranch. Her matriarchal role assumes really great proportions, when, towards the close of the novel, she urges Rosasharn to suckle the starving old man.

Steinbeck thinks that under the new economic conditions of migration, survival depends on co-operation and the collective security of the matriarchal society rather than on patriarchal self-reliance. Steinbeck has no illusions about extending this matriarchal system to the lives of the American people at large. Nevertheless, the author strikes a note of optimism at the end of the novel, and Ma Joad passes the legacy to Rosasharn and to Tom, and thus, by extension, to a future generation of Americans: Rose inherits her mother's sense of community life through her womb and Tom through his mind.

In *The Winter of Our Discontent* written in 1960, the frame of reference is

T.S.Eliot's *The Wasteland*. The author discusses corruption in terms of both Christian and patriotic ethics. The novel is an expanded form of a short story, "How Mr.Hegan robbed a Bank", written by him for *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1956. The story narrates the execution of a well-thought out plan by a grocery clerk, John Hegan to rob the local bank in an industrial community during Labour Day Weekend, 1955. While he successfully perfects his scheme, his son wins a National Essay contest titled, "I Love America". Hegan gets 8320 dollars from his robbery, and he hides the money ironically in the leather -case that holds his Knight Templar's uniform. He takes only two five-dollar bills to be made as a gift to his children. Steinbeck has sought a non-teleological view- point in this story. The success of the story was that the author was able to achieve here the complete objectivity associated with a non-teleological approach even while avoiding the pitfall of making the work a mere report. It is a satire on the increasingly dehumanizing *automatization* of America's economic man. The robbery is made possible only because of the bank employees following a steady, undeviating routine. But, when the story was expanded to a novel, the fun and charm of the work were lost. In the novel, Mr.Ethan Hawley substitutes Hegan, and his aim in perfecting the robbery is to make some money, and not to see whether it could be accomplished without hanky-panky.

Donna Gerstenberger, in an article in the *Modern Fiction Studies*, calls *The winter of our Discontent*, Steinbeck's American wasteland (1965,Pp.59-65). In this wasteland, the hero of the novel, Ethan Allen Hawley is the quester who seeks corruption in the moral wasteland of a small New England town. His quest is to free his family from the shackles of poverty that has brought sterility and failure into his life. The town's Madame Sosostris, Mrs.Young urges him on to sin. The

fortuneteller with her tarot pack predicts that Ethan would turn rich. The secrets of success come to him not from the merchants of Smyrna, but from a traveling salesman who offers him a bribe. He receives the final set of lessons from the respected town banker who unveils the world of modern ethics to him on Easter day. Ethan's mind is disturbed. He stays in the dark store, reciting from the Bible, prayers relating to Luke's version of Christ's Passion. Next day is the Holy Saturday, the only day when God is dead to the world. Ethan goes to a cave-like recess in the old deck beside the bay. This is his descent to hell. The following day is Easter, when Ethan is resurrected. He undergoes a storm of change and takes some decisions. He would save himself and his family from poverty through possessions. First, he would acquire the store at a low price from Marcello and denounce him to the Government as one who had made an illegal entry into the country. Then, he would get the desired site of the town's future airport from its owner who is an alcoholic and a boyhood friend of his by name Danny Taylor. Danny was in need of some money for purposes of treatment, and Ethan would lend him money.

The shocking incident that arouses Hawley is the news of his son's winning a national essay contest, "I Love America," by plagiarizing from speeches by some past national leaders like Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson. To the boy, this was the only use of the promise represented by the past. Ethan leaves for a secret cave intending to kill himself in a meaningless sacrifice, a "decent, honourable retirement, not dramatic, not punishment of self or family – just good by, a warm bath, and an opened vein, a warm sea and a razor blade" (1961, P.311). However, as Ethan reaches for the razor blade, he finds in his pocket, instead, a tangible fragment from the past, his childhood talisman, a polished

ancient stone brought from China by some seaman-ancestor, with a carving that goes around a serpent with neither head nor tail, nor beginning nor end. This magic stone acts as a light-bringer to Ethan and he is made to fight his way out of his tiny cave. He returns to his house. Hawley had undergone a vicarious suffering, and so, the ritual death and rebirth associated with Easter service has special significance for him.

The Wasteland echoes become more pronounced as the novel draws towards its end. Ethan seeks his remote cave by the seaside as a means of effecting some communion with the past and of a temporary respite from the present. But, he is intercepted by Margie Young Hunt who presumes that now he is ready for the game of lust and infidelity. She promises him relief in the form of a "tall cold drink from a tall, hot woman"(P.298). But he, still a victim of spiritual aridity, takes from her not life-giving water, but two gin-and-tonics. She is only one of Steinbeck's stereotyped good whores. The pathos and irony of once-dreamed of pleasure dome kept by an ageing, despairing Sibyl drives Hawley back into the night, back into the world. With this, Hawley's experience of evil is complete. His quest has led him to the heart of corruption, which, daily affords the inhabitants of his New England Wasteland their portion of hypocritical reality. As Gerstenberger writes, "the way out is not as clear as the way in, however, and the novel ends as does the poem, with the arid plain much in evidence, the quest having altered little except the individual's own knowledge of the meaning of experience... past and present. The solutions are not easier, it would seem, in 1961 as they were in 1922" (1965,P.65).

The novel was written in 1960 at a time when Hawaii, the first state with

an overwhelming Caucasian population, was admitted to the union after a long acrimonious struggle. "In this time of a seeming new seriousness, Steinbeck chose as his theme the difficulty of maintaining the purity and integrity of the individual in a world of cunning and avarice", observes Warren French (Pp.66-74). Ethan Hawley, the hero of the novel, confronted with poverty and loss of fortune, decides to rise above lethargy, not by challenging or fighting against the hypocritical life of the city, but by playing the same game. Warren French remarks that the book might borrow an epigraph from Eliot's "Gerontion": "I have lost my passion: why Should I need to keep it. Since what is kept must be adulterated?" (1972, P.33).

Warren French compares Ethan Hawley to the protagonist in Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and remarks that both are failures in the critical eyes of their own societies and both are disillusioned protagonists. In the end both are reluctantly reconciled to the corrupted world against which they were trying to rebel. According to Joseph Fontenrose (1963,Pp.135-136), the book gives us an example of an inverted myth in which the betrayer 'Judas' passes through passion and resurrection. By this inversion, Steinbeck drives home the fact that American religion is one whose churches are business houses and banks. We are told how on a Good Friday morning Ethan went to the grocery store where he saw a reflected Cathedral light filling the store and how Ethan paused to admire it and the organ pipes of canned tomatoes, the capels of mustard and olives and a hundred oval tombs of sardines. Ethan is chanting counterfeit Latin, "*Unimum et unimorum*," in something like the Black Mass. While the grocery is a mere cathedral, the bank is described as the real holy of holies where as the clock strikes nine, Father Banker genuflects and opens the safe where all bow down to

the great God Currency. Joey refers to Mr. Baker as God Almighty. It may here be pointed out that, more than a hundred years ago, Balzac remarked that it is not the King but his image on the coin that rules the country.

Drawing a parallel between *King Richard III* by William Shakespeare and *The Winter of our Discontent*, Fontenrose observes that in the new American religion, Judas is the saviour and people like Richard III can be heroes. The glorious summer made by this "Son of York", following the "winter of our discontent" is the American prosperity that came after the Depression and the War. The incident of Clarence's imprisonment, which was the result of Richard's word to King Edward about a prophecy, is parallel to Marcello's arrest following Ethan's word to the Immigration service. Danny, who was almost literally drowned in the whiskey bought with Ethan's money, can remind one of Clarence being drowned in a butt of malmsey by Richard's agents. Summing up his discussion of *The Winter of our Discontent*, Fontenrose quotes Granville Hicks as remarking that Steinbeck does not solve the problems he raises, and he fails to dip beneath the surface of society as he does not probe the social and economic reasons for the decay of moral standards. Hick's argument is that a novel aiming at indictment of the moral depravity should deal with a representative person in a representative situation, and Ethan Hawley, according to him, is not one such character.

Although Steinbeck's fame as a realist and naturalist is unquestioned, his mode has never really been consistently realistic. He consciously employed what Robert Scholes and Robert Kellog called "fictional" as opposed to "empirical" forms (1966, Pp. 13-14). Steinbeck's preference for allegory, pastoral and fable can thus be explained as not an attempt to escape from reality, but an effort to create a world within the work. Robert Scholes's argument in *The Fabulators*, is that these

different modes are again becoming dominant in the most exciting contemporary fiction. Anyway, Steinbeck's novels can never be classified as exciting fiction. Even though Steinbeck makes use of allegory and fable, it is not because of any excitement or desire for experiment in fiction, but because these are more suitable modes for his preference for past works as frames of reference. His over-dependence upon these past works is itself sufficient proof of the fact that he is incapable of portraying, on his own, a world suffering from barrenness and spiritual sterility. Thus viewed, it can be stated that Steinbeck's fiction runs counter to the main trend in the writing of modern fiction in the twentieth century American literature, namely, the experimental tradition. This means that Steinbeck is not ready to welcome the trends that appear to erode settled novelistic practices, and discover new literary forms by rejecting the authority of the past.

CHAPTER IV

TOWARDS TRUTH AS FICTION : NEW DIMENSIONS OF REALITY IN KEN KESEY

America, in the 1950s, looked really prosperous and relatively less affected by wars. It was mostly a decade of peace, quietude and conformity with a silent generation of students and youths raising their critical, yet sober voice against conservatism. In direct contrast to this, was the decade that followed, a decade of turbulence, social unrest and political assassinations. The youthful optimism ushered in by John F. Kennedy's election as the President of the U.S.A. and his vision of a New Frontier didn't last long; the patriotism engendered by America's space programmes passed off with the nation's involvement in the Vietnam War. There were voices of dissent and protest, and a waning of confidence in American leadership, American values, and models of happiness. The hippy movement and the communes enthusiastically started spreading a counter-cultural vision and the campuses witnessed widespread political activism. Radicalism was becoming more and more manifest in most large American cities; the gap between the Black urban core and pure White suburbs grew wider and wider.

The growth of mass society, the revelations about the unconscious and the supremacy of scientific realism gave new dimensions to reality. Man's grip on reality was becoming more and more tenuous, and as a result, there was frequent blurring of fact and fiction. This trend became more and more pronounced in the novels of the 60s, in *A Bad Man* by Stanley Elkin, *A Singular Man* by J.P. Donleavy, *The Magic Christian* by Terry Southern, *The Movie-goer* by Walker Percy and *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater* by Kurt Vonnegut(Jr.). If Kerouac seemed to be the spokesman of the curiously restive passiveness of the 50s, Ken Kesey seemed

to capture in his actions and reflections the frantic spirit of the 60s and 70s. Ken Kesey achieved the stature of a hero of the notoriety cult during the 60s, and the publication in 1968, of Tom Wolfe's pop biography, *Electric Kool Aid Acid Test*, brought his fame to a peak. His realism has very little in common with the realism of the first two decades of the century. He had a natural and lively curiosity about what the human mind is capable of, and he was particularly interested in visions, inspirations and creative consciousness that might lie just beyond ordinary thinking and dreaming. When he was a student at Stanford University in 1958, he offered himself as a volunteer at the Veteran's Hospital, Menlo Park, where experiments were being conducted with psychomimetic drugs. Kesey was perhaps more interested in the experiments than those who conducted them, and he possessed an unusual ability to register and record his impressions. By precipitating a temporary mock psychotic state in himself by psychomimetic drugs, Kesey was able to render credibly his first novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* from the point of view of a schizophrenic. Bromden's narration is a singular stylistic achievement of the novel. Fact and fantasy alternate and complement each other in this work: "... in the distorted world inside the Indian's mind these people (McMurphy and the Big Nurse) are exalted into a kind of immortality. To do this you need fantasy. You need to jar the reader from his comfortable seat inside convention. You need to take the reader's mind (to) places where it has never been before to convince him that this crazy Indian's world is his as well" (as in Tanner, P.23).

With all his penchant for fantasy, Kesey as a novelist was also committed to verisimilitude in his writings. His two major works, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), and *Sometimes A Great Notion* (1964), were written after a series of

first hand experiences. When Kesey had concluded his experiments with psychomimetic drugs at the Veteran's Hospital, he started working there as a psychiatric aide. During his four-week training period as an aide, he engaged in conversations with friends, black aides and nurses. Kesey himself has said that McMurphy, the superhero of the *Cuckoo's Nest*, was inspired by the tragic longings of the real men he worked with in the ward. According to Tom Wolfe, he arranged for someone to give him a clandestine shock therapy. The novel was mostly written during the spare time he got while he was on duty in the night shift hours in the hospital. Some of it was written under the influence of drugs.

After the success of the *Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey sublet the cottage at Perry Lane, and moved to Oregon. In the summer that followed, he went to the logging country of Western Oregon where he lived in a vacant house that belonged to a widow, whose husband, a friend of Kesey's parents, had recently committed suicide. The house was bordered on one side by Mercer Lake, and Kesey had the feeling that he was the last human on earth holding out against the marauding wilderness that could possibly usurp his sanity. It was in this house that he started writing his second novel, *Sometimes A Great Notion*. He moved with loggers to know them, and frequented bars at night. After four months of stay there, he went back to Perry Lane, where most of the writing of this novel was done.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest is renowned for the breadth of its appeal. It has achieved success in three forms: novel, play and film. The film version starring Jack Nicholson turned out to be a box office hit winning six Academy awards. The novel, published in 1962, gives us a paradigm of the predicament of

the modern man. James E. Miller (Jr.) tells us that the entire world is here depicted as a nut house, with the Big Nurse in her stiff, starched white, imposing her power through the use of all her gleaming, glittering, flashing machinery. The dehumanized victims under her cruel supervision are classified into chronics and acutes (1973, P.399). According to Gilbert Porter, "the central importance of the novel as a classic text is mainly two fold: it embodies in modern form, a long-standing tension in American life and literature, between the individual and the society, and between optimism and pessimism, and it affirms heroism in the face of universal absurdity, alienation and overwhelmingly, destructive forces" (1988, P.5). He goes on to point out how there has always been in American life, a historical polarity between the many versus the individual, the oppressive versus the oppressed optimism versus pessimism. Natty Bumppo and Huckleberry Finn trekking westward to escape from the encroachment of civilization on their individual liberty, are earlier examples in this regard. In *Cuckoo's Nest*, we have McMurphy representing the non-conformist individual in the midst of conformists who are willing to submit to authority. The Big Nurse and the combine stand for the oppressive forces, and the inmates of the asylum stand for the oppressed. McMurphy, through his own example, teaches the lesson that pessimism won't help, and man has to fight through to win against the forces of oppression. Kesey was fully conscious of the disturbing effects of dehumanization in modern society. But he held the view that the real enemy was the failure of self-reliance growing out of fear, men submitting bird-like to the snake-eyed hypnosis of social and institutional forces, and so the real solution lies in regaining self-reliance.

Barry H. Leeds thinks that a closer understanding of the work shows clearly

that the central thematic thought of this novel strikes even closer to the heart of the American experience now than it did in 1962: "The question of a monolithic bureaucratic order, the rejection of stereotyped sexual roles, the simultaneous awareness that healthy sexuality and a clear sense of sexual identity are pre-requisites for human emotional survival, the recognition and rejection of hypocrisy, the devotion to the expression of individual identity—all these leap into sharp focus through a study of Kesey's technique" (1981, Pp 13-54).

The novel's wide popular appeal and interest is due to its concern with a wide variety of topics, issues and disciplines. The official organ of the International Academy of Law and Science, *Lex et Scientia*, devoted an entire hundred page double issue to essays on *Cuckoo's Nest*, which the editor describes as the cornucopia of source material from disciplines so numerous and varied as to challenge the mind and imagination. The disciplines touched include psychology, psychiatry, medicine, literature, human relations, drama, art, cosmology, law, religion, American culture and folk culture. The sociologists find special interest in the book, because, as Dr. Spivey in the novel points out, the Big Nurse's ward is a little world inside that is made to scale the prototype of the big world outside. The variety of interests is paralleled by the variety of responses it has evoked as evidenced by phrases and topics shown up in treatments of the *Cuckoo's Nest*: the patterns of romance, comedy, tragedy, black humour, the absurd, the hero in modern dress, the comic Christ, folk and western heroes, the fool as mentor, the Grail Knight, attitudes towards sex, abdication of masculinity, the politics of laughter, mechanistic and totemistic symbolization, the comic strip, ritualistic father figure, the psychopathic saviour, and so on.

The book is dedicated to Vic Lovell, who, Kesey says, told him that dragons did not exist and then led him to their lairs. While explaining this later, Kesey said that Lovell had argued against the existence of spiritual dragons, or in other words, a spiritual realm of experience, one transcending ordinary life and rational explanation. Ironically, it was Lovell who introduced him to the drug experience, which Kesey believed, opened the doors to a new realm of experience. The dedication is a reflection of his persistent fascination with the transcendent, his impatience with the attitude that dreams are only dreams and imaginative experiences are mere fictions. In this novel, the author draws upon the American folk tradition and popular culture.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest can best be described as a study of the disturbing effects of dehumanization in modern society. The opposition between Nature and Machine constitutes the primary conflict in the novel. Nature is represented by Bromden who is half Indian, and now a patient in the institution, a victim of the combine. The forces of technology and manipulation are represented by the Big Nurse. The combine has many arms, and the ward of the combine is a factory where mistakes made in the other arms of the combine like school or church are rectified. Leslie Fiedler in his book, *The Return of the Vanishing American*, tells us how it was necessary for Kesey to come out of Oregon one of the last American Wests, to introduce the Indian Chief Bromden: "Look at him, a giant janitor. There's your Vanishing American, a six foot, eight sweeping machine, scared of its own shadow...."(1962, P.65). He is a former foot ball player and combat veteran of World War II. A combination of pressures from the twentieth century American society deprives him of his identity and sanity so that when we see him at the opening of the novel, he is totally cut off from

even the most rudimentary communication. He feigns to be a deaf mute, and the medical experts judge his disease as incurable. He is made to do all the menial jobs and even the orderlies ridicule him as "Chief Broom". The nickname is doubly significant as it can refer to the nature of his job as well as his father who was a tribal chief, once a powerful leader whose Indian name meant "The Pine That Stands Tallest on the Mountain." The fact that he accepted his mother's maiden name Bromden is sufficient proof of his father's hen-pecked nature. From Bromden, we learn that his father abandoned his land to some white American manufacturer only because of the pressure from his wife. The white American society deprives the American Indians of their pride in their own heritage. This, Kesey feels, is at the heart of the problem of the twentieth century American Indian, and in the plight of the American Indian, he tries to identify the predicament of the American individualist in a highly distilled form. The artificial identities of Bromden and Chief Broom imposed upon Bromden by the matriarchal and mechanistic elements of society, diminish him considerably. While the matriarchal system deprives him of his masculine pride and racial identity, the mechanistic society robs him of his very humanity. The inner message of this account is the realization that our own identities as self-determining individuals have been terribly eroded and are further threatened by a fully computerised civilization. McMurphy acts as confessor and psychiatrist to Bromden. Through different stages, he brings Bromden closer to the freedom from fear that constitutes his salvation. Gilbert Porter observes that Bromden's transformation into a courageous, self-reliant, strong defender of other weak souls is testimony enough of the humanistic power of McMurphy, the salvific nature of love and validity of heroism. Imbued with the spirit of McMurphy,

Bromden moves from one battleground into another, from passiveness on the mental ward to active conflict in the tribal village by the site of the government's new hydroelectric dam, to do for others what has been done for him by McMurphy, to change fearful drunks into resistant men, to inspire each self to achieve its own true stature (1982, Pp 8-9).

In the *Big Nurse*, we have a combination of the two levels at which the combine functions: the mechanistic and the matriarchal. Her name, Miss Ratched, sounds truly mechanistic; it is rather ratchet misspelt, and means a mechanism of notched wheel the teeth of which engage with a pawl, permitting motion of the wheel in one direction only. She walks stiffly, her gestures are precise and automatic; each finger is like the tip of a soldering iron. To Bromden, she is an expensive piece of precision-made machinery, marred in its functional design only by a pair of too large breasts—ironic reminders of a renounced sexuality. They also turn to be the palpable symbol of her vulnerability, as towards the end of the novel McMurphy exposes them by ripping open her starched uniform. According to Fiedler, to understand her in her full mythological significance, we must recall that seventeenth century first White Mother of Us All, Hannah Duston, and her struggle against the Indians who tried to master her. From that time onwards, Hannah identified herself with those forces, chiefly female and matriarchal, that resisted any form of incursion of savagery into the American society. Only by the turn of the twentieth century was Hannah's assault realised, first in Freudian terms and then, in psychedelic ones. McMurphy knew that she was not pecking at one's eyes, but at the ever loving balls and that this she was doing by not hitting below the belt, but above the eyes. McMurphy's castration was by frontal lobotomy (1973 Pp. 372-381).

According to Stephen Tanner, (*Ken Kesey 1983*), the novel falls into four parts. At the beginning of Part I, the Big Nurse is in full control and Bromden pretends to be deaf and dumb. The extent of Bromden's insanity is revealed in his paranoid fantasy of the fog and in his olfactory sense registering only the smell of oil and heated machinery. With the entry of McMurphy into the ward, Bromden starts feeling that he gets the smell of sweat and work, of dust and dirt from the fields. All the patients have been using the fog machine as an escape mechanism to seek shelter from the terrifying realities of life: "Nobody complains about all the fog; I know why now, as bad as it is, you can slip back in it and feel safe. That is what McMurphy can't understand, us wanting to be safe. He keeps trying to drag us out of the fog, out in the open, where we'd be easy to get at" (P. 123). Part I comes to an end with the episode of the voting on the TV World Serial, in which Bromden feels that McMurphy has put some kind of hex on it with his hand when he shook his hands on the first day. This episode in which McMurphy scores his first victory, comes just after his abortive attempt to lift the control panel.

After the voting incident, Bromden realises, perhaps for the first time in his life, that he could see and smell clearly and exactly. The man of nature is returning to his true self. This is reinforced by the dog motif. The narrator and the dog hear and watch a flight of wild geese overhead. But the dog runs away and the narrator holds his breath as he hears a car approaching, and before he could understand what was happening, he was dragged back to the bed by the nurse and her orderly. The symbolic significance of the scene is that the dog (nature) and the car (machine) are on a collision course. On the last page of the novel, we are told how Bromden, after escaping from the hospital, took the same direction which the dog had taken.

The Big Nurse's threat of indefinite confinement makes McMurphy lose his self control: "...and the cards splash everywhere like the deck exploded between his two trembling hands" (P. 176). His unconcern for his social commitment continues till Cheswick's drowning. This incident jolts him back to his sense of social commitment. He knew that it was he who had pulled the inmates out of the fog and thus increased their vulnerability, and therefore, it was his duty to continue his campaign against Miss Ratched. At the close of Part II, there is the ringing sound in the narrator's head which works up to a high pitch, and stops immediately after McMurphy defiantly smashes the window of the Nurse's station. He has made his choice, and that is to save the patients without considering the perils it involved.

The climax of the novel, the deep-sea fishing trip, comes in the third part. Laughter and outdoor nature are the dominant features of this climactic section. Here Bromden tells us how he began feigning deafness: "... it wasn't me that started acting deaf; it was people, that first started acting like I was too dumb to hear or see or say anything at all" (P.197). It started when he was a boy and a team of three whites led by an old white haired woman in a stiff and heavy outfit came to his father to persuade him to give up his land and enable the whites to build a dam there. This old woman, he says, resembled Miss Ratched, and like her, she knew how to make gains through cold manipulation. She uses all her influence with Bromden's mother to achieve her aims. A contrasting parallel situation from McMurphy's childhood, which comes a few pages later, tells how he, as the only child in a group of bean-pickers, was ignored, and how subsequently he gave up talking for four weeks. But, after that he broke his silence and told them all off and lost the job, but felt it was worth it (Pp. 206-207).

At the beginning of the deep-sea fishing trip, all except McMurphy are scared and ill at ease. But the tension is slowly released as they go into the sea, and when they get to the deep sea, they have the feeling that they are far, far away from the combine's stronghold, and then they start sensing the process of salvation through laughter. McMurphy observes the group's uninhibited outdoor activity—the enthusiasm over the fish caught, the tangled lines, the shouting and cursing. He begins to laugh, and the laughter spreads till it becomes infectious and assumes cosmic proportions in a moment of epiphany:

It started slow and pumped itself full, swelling the men bigger and bigger. I watched past of them, laughing with them—and somehow not with them. I was off the boat, blown up off the water, and skating the wind with those blackbirds, and see myself and the rest of the guys, see the boat rocking there in the middle of those diving birds, see McMurphy surrounded by his dozen people (his disciples) and watch them, us, swinging a laughter that rang out on the water in ever-widening circles, farther and farther until it crashed up on beaches all over the coast, on beaches all over the coast, in wave after wave after wave. (P. 238).

After this incident, McMurphy's team was no longer a bunch of weak-knees from a nuthouse. To Bromden, it was an experience strengthening himself: "I noticed vaguely that I was getting so's I could see some good in life around me. McMurphy was teaching me. I was feeling better than I'd remembered feeling since I was a kid, when everything was good and the land

was still singing Kid's poetry to me" (P. 243). As Bromden and others grow strong, McMurphy turns weaker. The sacrificial the pays price for his sacrifice. The Big Nurse continues her manipulations by telling the patients that McMurphy is neither a martyr nor a saint, but one who had only selfish motives, as evidenced by winning the bet money from the patients.

The last part brings the resolution of all main themes and patterns of imagery. When some girls and liquor are smuggled into the ward, the inmates laugh, thereby proving that they can laugh not only in the freedom of nature outside, but carry it to the stronghold of the combine. It also signifies the defeat of the Big Nurse: "Every laugh was being forced right down on her throat till it looked as if any minute she'd blow up like a bladder" (P. 297). McMurphy's last defiant act, the ripping open of the Big Nurse's uniform exposing her breasts, "bigger than anybody had ever even imagined, warm and pink in the light" (P.305), is the final attempt to release the natural from the perverted restrictions of a regimented and mechanistic system. Though she returned in a new white uniform, "in spite of its being smaller and tighter, and more starched than the old uniforms, it could no longer conceal the fact that she was a woman" (P.306). McMurphy's exposure of the Big Nurse could not be completed, because, before that, he was dragged away by her aides. He was then lobotomized; and his end comes with the mercy killing by Bromden. Bromden's salvation is complete, and he can now stand the test of shock treatment: "It's fogging a little, but I won't slip off and hide in it. No...never again...this time I had them beat" (P.275). As he makes his escape smashing the window by throwing the control panel through it, "the glass splashed out in the moon, like bright cold water baptising the sleeping earth" (P.310). Bromden has been in the asylum for the longest

period and, so his recovery is of special significance. He is also the one who is most closely identified with nature.

Kesey's second novel, *Sometimes A Great Notion*, did not turn out to be a popular success like his first book, mainly because the massiveness of its scope rendered it difficult reading. As Stephen Tanner observes, "many novels are rich enough to warrant multiple readings but they probably render more upon first reading than does *Great Notion*. Its non-sequential time-scheme, its multi-voiced narrative mode, and its use of various cinematic narrative devices, necessitate rereading" (1983, P. 55). Kesey's notes also speak of the massiveness of its scope: "My book is being, may be, too goddamn much trying to encompass a man, a family, a town, a country and a time—all at once, simultaneously, and work them into a story and have the story say something important: Awful much; Awful much"(as in Tanner, P. 53).

The main action of the novel takes place in a few weeks in 1961. Hank is running the family logging business with the help of his cousin and best friend, Joe Ben. Old Henry incurred a serious injury while working in the woods, and he is unable to work. The union loggers are on a strike, and Hank is in a tight corner, as he has to fulfill a contract of supplying logs to a big lumber company. Hank sends a letter to his younger brother Lee asking him to return home. Lee was doing his degree course in literature at the Yale University. After his mother's death, he had virtually become a wreck, taking to drugs and suffering from paranoia. When he got Hank's letter, he had just managed to escape from an attempt to gas himself. He did not know what to do. Nevertheless, having all this time kept in a remote corner of his mind a desire to have revenge against his

brother, he took a bus to Oregon. Hank was at first a bit upset at his younger brother's arrival, but after some time, he welcomed him whom he had always identified with the weak grandfather, Jonas.

A combination of pressures from all sides put Hank in the midst of a whirlpool of problems. Joe Ben has drowned himself, Old Henry meets with an accident in which one of his arms is severed. Disillusioned with the Stampers' refusal to yield to the union, one of the townsmen has committed suicide. Hank decides to give in, but this decision instead of bringing salutary effects, invites the disillusionment of the community which finds itself weakened with the loss of strength of its opponent. Hank comes home only to witness his younger brother Lee holding his wife, Viv in a post-coital embrace. A fierce fistfight between the two brothers ensues. None is beaten, both, rather gain from each other. Lee decides to accompany his brother in his venture to take the logs down the river, and Viv decides to leave both the brothers and begin a life of her own.

The theme of this novel, as that of *Cuckoo's Nest*, is taken from a statement by Ken Babbs which captured Kesey's imagination, and was quoted by him a number of times: "A man should have the right to be as big as he feels it's in him to be". This is probably in direct contrast to the Balzacian view that a person who applies himself to the concentration of his powers is likely to render himself incapable of earthly existence. Balzac's *Louis Lambert* which gives us the portrait of a youthful prodigy testifies to the Balzacian view of obsession with an idea. The difference between the two writers is that while Balzac's aim was to give the tragedy of obsession with an idea an intellectual dimension, Kesey wanted to portray the daring spirit of the frontier hero trying to seek newer

frontiers. Desire, thought, and will which are synonymous in Balzac, represent different aspects of a fantastically aggressive power over the world. Kesey, through the protagonists of his two novels, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes A Great Notion*, is trying to prove his point about the newer frontiers. The expression of individual identity in the face of repressive forces forms the dominant theme of both the novels. In *Great Notion*, it is done in terms of wider human possibilities than in *Cuckoo's Nest*. Hank has parallels with McMurphy, but he can learn more and change more profoundly from Lee's influence, than McMurphy can from Bromden or Harding. Hank ultimately learns that not mere sensitivity and cerebration, but humility and even the admission of weakness, are sometimes necessary for the development of a man.

Kesey's themes are embodied in the characters, setting and events of the novel. His artistic process like that of most other novelists, consists primarily in creating characters, events, settings, symbols, and motifs that reveal, illuminate and establish his theme. Kesey is one of those who vigorously insist that all elements be oriented toward the theme, and his achievement in both his novels, is to attain the unity, coherence and intellectual thrust provided by ideas without sacrificing vitality and apparent spontaneity in character and situation. The theme of Machine versus Nature is made inseparable from the theme of conformism in *Cuckoo's Nest*. The Big Nurse, who controls the ward, stands for the mechanistic culture of the modern society. Her wicker bag contains a number of spare parts which she uses in the treatment of the inmates of the ward. She thinks that the very purpose of the asylum is to persuade men like McMurphy to accept and function in the world of rewards and punishments, which he has rejected and fled from. To do this, she has only to

convince him that he is only a "bad boy", and persuade him to give up his bad ways. But, whereas in similar cases in the past, as for example, with Huckleberry Finn, the mother demanded that the boy give up smoking, shall wear shoes and go to school, in *McMurphy's* case the mother asks him to be sane. All that he has to do is to admit that he was wrong, to indicate and demonstrate rational contact, and then the treatment would be stopped immediately. The point Kesey makes is that the choice is between sanity abjectly accepted and sanity imposed by tranquillizers and shock therapy *McMurphy* doesn't choose either. Instead, he opts for aggravated psychopathy and an alliance with his totally schizophrenic Indian comrade, "an alliance with all that his world calls unreason, quite like that which bound Henry to Wavatam, Natty Bumppo to Chingachgook, even Ishmael to Queequeg" (1973, P.376). Referring to Bromden's killing of *McMurphy* in a caricature of the act of love-- "The big hard body had a tough grip on life...I finally had to lie full length on top of it and scissor the kicking legs with mine...I lay there on top of the body for what seemed like days...until it was still a while and had shuddered once and was still again"--(*Cuckoo's Nest*, P.270),

Fiedler says: "It is the first real Liebstd in our long literature of love between white man and coloured, and the first time surely, that the Indian partner in such a pair has outlived his white brother. Typically, Chingachgook had predeceased Natty, and Queequeg Ishmael; typically Huck had been younger than Jim, Ike than Sam Fathers" (P.377). The novel concludes with Bromden's return to nature and to the remnants of his own tribe who "have taken to building their old ramshackle wood scaffolding all over the big million dollar...Spillway" (P.272).

Cuckoo's Nest re-defines the American theme of the frontier hero. Leslie Fiedler comments that "it seems clear that in it for the first time the New West was clearly defined: the west of Here and Now rather than There and Then—the west of Madness" (1973,P.377). He points to how Europe has always considered the westerning impulse as blasphemous or crazy, and, to Dante's description of Ulysses sailing through the Pillars of Hercules toward the world without peace. Columbus's dream of a passage to India was mocked as crazy, and later, when the American mainland was discovered, a further west was looked upon as near madness. "It is only a step from thinking of the West as madness to regarding madness as the true West, but it took more than four centuries and a half to take that step" (P. 379).

Hank in *Sometimes A Great Notion* is also a product of frontier culture. While explaining the reason for her husband's stubbornness, Viv tells Draeger that it will have to be traced back to two or three hundred years, Draeger represents the rationalistic desire for a world rendered simple, precise, and predictable, whereas Hank is above the purely rationalistic tradition. Hank becomes symbolic of a pattern of distinctively American values that seem threatened to be eclipsed by the values of technological, collectivist society. Hank was the first of the Stampers to complete the full circle west. He had gone to Korea as a soldier: "West, west, sailing out of San Francisco, west and after two years, landing on the Eastern sea-board where his ancestors had set foot"(P.17). On his return, Hank learns that the frontier is gone. According to Stephen Tanner, "Viewed from the larger perspective of the American experience, Hank represents a last stand for the independent, self-reliant perseverance characteristic of frontier values" (1983,P.70).

The title of the novel, *Sometimes A Great Notion*, comes from the song, "Good Night, Irene," and the great notion is "to jump into the river and drown". The author is preoccupied with the relation between the long periods of cloudy, rainy days in the North West and the rate of suicide. Even though he tried to relate both these together, he learned later that the rate of suicide is higher during fair weather than in rainy season. People use all their energy to fight out bad weather, and succumb to despair in fair weather. Teddy the bar-tender makes it clear that though rain generates fear within the people of Wakonda, it is an unseasonable period of sunshine that produces, "absolute, unspeakable, supreme, terror" (P. 572).

One important concern of the novel is the nature of strength and weakness, and the conflicts between kinds of strength and kinds of weakness as exemplified by Hank and Lee, Henry and Jones, Hank and the community. As in *Cuckoo's Nest*, the principal value is self-reliance. Like Bromden, Lee also is psychologically disturbed, because his self-esteem has been undermined by a family in which mother plays a key role. Hank, like McMurphy, is self-reliant, strong and independent, and capable of helping the weak confront fear by his own example of stubborn perseverance. Draeger is like Miss. Ratched, in that he manipulates human beings by exploiting their fear. Both novels convey the message that the individual must come to terms with himself and eliminate self-deceiving phantasms before he can establish a satisfactory relationship with the society.

Hank lives out the motto, "NEVER GIVE A INCH", nailed over his crib by his father, Henry. Like his father, he also believes that "If we don't get him this

round, we'll get him the next" (P. 192 & P. 238). Hank knows well that to stop fighting means to start dying. His battle against the river signifies the battle against all forces that erode freedom and the will to live. Hank's will to live is manifested in his vital response to simple pleasures of the senses—milking the cow, watching sunset after a day's work, etc. Being strong, Hank has to contend with the pressure of the meek striving to inherit the earth, the meek who try to confirm and justify their meekness by their desire to see the strong defeated. In order to cope with their feelings of guilt and frustration, the weak find fault with the strong for all their problems and unhappiness. Many often they are supported by their phantasms in this. Hank and Lee approach meaningful communication several times before the climax of the novel, but Lee's paranoid phantasms prevent him from understanding Hank. Two headquarters constitute the poles of conflict between strength and weakness: the Stamper house and the Snag. At the Stammers' work is going on uninterrupted. Hank is shoring his foundation against the drift toward death. At the Snag, there is only fear, inaction and cowardly recrimination. Hank's encounters, be it with Tommy or Evenwrite, or Big Newton, are symbolic of larger encounters, such as the one with the River in which Hank, as the representative of the will to live, is pitted against the temptation to give in to death. To Lee, Hank's facing the town is, "as good a way to get dead", but Hank thinks to himself, "it's as good a way as any to stay alive" (P. 322). Hank faces problems head on as a way of affirming life; Lee runs from them toward death. Due to his excessive self-reliance, Hank fails to communicate emotions like love and tenderness. Viv's pressing need to help and comfort is frustrated by Hank's refusal to admit pain or need.

The test of Hank's strength and determination is the centre of the story,

and the source of tension and suspense. Only when confronted with insurmountable pressure, Hank decides to give in. He helplessly witnesses Joe Ben's death, leaves his dying father at the hospital. He is viciously beaten by the thugs hired by Evenwrite, and as he returns home he misses the boat and so has to swim across the river with his last measure of strength. At last, as he makes home, he finds his wife Viv and his brother Lee lying together in bed. Lee speaks to him the same words he himself had spoken to the twelve year old Lee as he left Oregon, with his mother Myra: "Musta been something godawful rich to make you so godawful sick" (P. 502). Quite contrary to Lee's hopes, the revenge didn't bring him happiness. It was for him a great moment of disillusionment:... "I had very successfully completed my ritual of vengeance; I had accurately mouthed all the right mystical words...but instead of turning myself into a Captain Marvel...I had merely created another Billy Batson" (P. 503). Here we have one of the central thematic concerns of Kesey: winning by strength as contrasted with winning by weakness. In *Cuckoo's Nest*, he draws the distinction between those who win by making themselves stronger and those "ball-cutters", who win only by making their adversary weaker. In *Great Notion*, Lee undermines Hank's confidence in strength: "Yet it took nothing more than my kid brother coming to spend a month with us to show me that there are other ways of winning—like winning by giving in, by being soft, by not gritting your goddaman teeth and getting your best hold...And show me as well that there's times when the only way you can win is by being weak, by losing, by doing your worst instead of your best" (P. 111).

The fistfight teaches the two brothers useful lessons. Hank's is the more dangerous lesson because in learning the true nature of strength, he nearly loses confidence in strength altogether. As he decides to give in, he tells himself:

"There ain't really any true strength...No, not the strength I always believed in...not strength like I always thought I could build....But, if strength ain't real...then the weakness sure enough is. Weakness is true and real....No, you can't ever fake being weak. You can only fake being strong" (P. 523,P.527). Lee who is fighting back for the first time learns the lesson of strength from his brother. Hank needs a dressing down: he needs to learn the limitation of his strength; this he gets from Lee. Lee, on the other hand, needs to learn the lesson of strength which he gets from Hank. It is a lesson, which the entire town learns from Hank.

One of the most revealing passages in the novel is the one which explains a last and sure stronghold which the author takes up for discussion in the course of exploring the theme of strength versus weakness:

For there is always a sanctuary more, a door that can never be forced, whatever be the force, a last stronghold that can never be taken, whatever the attack; Your vote can be taken, your name, your innards, even your life, but that last stronghold can only be surrendered . And to surrender it for any reason other than love is to surrender love. Hank had always known this without knowing it and by making him doubt it briefly, I made it possible for both of us to discover it. I knew it now. And I knew that to win my love, my life, I would have to win back the strength I had bartered away years before for a watered down love" (Pp. 622-623).

Kesey here says that to surrender this last stronghold without just cause

is the way of weakness, and produces a life of fear, envy and despair. To refuse to surrender it for any cause, even love, is likewise damaging, and produces a life of lonely alienation. If, in *Hank*, Kesey explores the nature of strength, its values, obligations and costs, in *Lee*, he looks into the nature of weakness, its sources, manifestations and consequences.

Irwing Malin speaks of two ways in which the stupefying unreality is dealt with in modern realism: the Gothic, which disrupts our rational world view through violent juxtapositions and distortions, and the poetic method which makes use of a great deal of imagery (1962, Pp 81-84). Kesey is a novelist who liberally makes use of the poetic method in his writings.

The *Cuckoo's Nest* makes use of the poetic first person point of view and of synecdoche. As a synecdochist, he seeks to make a whole out of scattered parts. Thus, *McMurphy's* mission is to restore to wholeness the fragments of men in the ward. Kesey uses motifs of significant parts: laughs, hands, faces, each motif being developed and tightly integrated into the novel's central design. The demonstrated power of the combine and Bromden's growing sense of insignificance lead him to cultivate his dumbness and deafness as a psychological defence. Whenever things get difficult or troublesome for him, he escapes into his mental fog. That he reports the fog accurately, or slips into it in the form of a blank page, is a measure of his reliability as a narrator despite his feigned insensitivity and fragmented vision. Bromden's images, metaphors and analogies are consistent with his character and appropriate to the figures or events he describes, and his movement to mental health is of a piece with the renewal of his senses and his poetic sensibilities.

Bromden is a rhymer. Rhyming means an impulse to order and it has always been a part of his consciousness. The novel's title comes from a rhyming game Bronden learned from his grandmother:

"Tingle, tingle tremble toes,
 She's a good fisherman
 Catches hen
 Puts'em inna pens
 Wireblier, limberlock,
 Three geese inna flock...
 One flew east, one flew west,
 One flew over the cuckoo's nest" (P. 239)

Gilbert Porter tells us how the synecdochist works: "Focussing with this fragmented vision,... [the] synecdochist works his way toward completeness of character, and vision, and thus validates Kesey's thesis that broken men however frightened, beleaguered, splintered and dehumanized can be restored to manhood and wholeness" (1982, P.21). In *Sometimes A Great Notion* hand is an index of character. When Hank and Lee meet after a lapse of twelve years, they understand that they cannot shake hands with each other. Hank loses two of his fingers in a logging accident and this loss makes his swimming clumsy. As Lee watches his brother thus swimming clumsily, he tells himself that Hank may now be pulled down more easily.

Another motif, Kesey makes use of, is the face. McMurphy's face is studied by him in its responses to other faces, to learn the nature of heroism in him. At the time of his arrival at the ward, he has his face and neck and arms the colour

of oxblood leather from working for long in the fields. He has no heroic intentions at that time; his intention is only "to bring...fun and entertainment around the gaming table" (P. 17). After the incident of the breaking of the glass walls of Big Nurse's cabin, Bromden notices the increasing contrast between the two faces of McMurphy, the fearless face of the hero he presents, to inspire men, and the exhausted face of the over-extended man he tries to keep hidden from them as he pays the price of super human heroism. On seeing Billy Bibbit dead with his face bloodied by his own hand, McMurphy cannot but attack the Big Nurse and thus invite lobotomy. Having doled out his life for others to live, he has emptied his own. Over McMurphy's lobotomised husk, Bromden pronounces the depletion: "There's nothing in the face" (P. 269).

Physical size is another metaphor used repeatedly to signify self reliant strength and dignity. Bromden's father is called "The Pine that Stands Tallest on the Mountain". When McMurphy enters the ward he appears too big for Bromden. However, after his death, when he tries McMurphy's hat, it is too small for him. Bromden feels ashamed of having tried it, because his master McMurphy himself had once told him that each one has to find his own identity. In a moment of realization of his real strength, Bromden lifts the four hundred pound control panel and flings it through a window to make his final escape from the *Cuckoo's Nest*. Bromden has excelled his master in his capacity to survive in American society and to maintain personal identity in spite of the combine.

As a fragmented man grown whole in McMurphy's image, Bromden is strong enough to leave the microcosm of the ward for the macrocosm outside. According to Gilbert Porter:

Bromden's documented growth from fog to clarity from chronic to man, from vanishing American to resistant hero embodies and thus validates the novel's theme that what is good in man, properly nourished, can overcome what is evil in him. To witness Bromden's transformation through the influence of McMurphy is to believe in the principle that transforms him and the vehicle that reveals the change. The principle is love. As a dedicated lover from the age of ten, McMurphy is driven by love of freedom, friendship, and life to lay down his life for his friends--and "greater love hath no man than this"--Doing so, he transcends caricature, moving from conman to saviour, self love to brotherly love" (1982,P. 33).

The novel ends not on McMurphy's sacrifice of his own life, but on the reclamation of the lives of others, especially Bromden's. Summing up his discussion of Bromden as synecdochist, Porter writes: "His movement from fragmented patient to whole man is captured in his splintered, yet almost systematic examination of those isolated parts of other men that reflect his own fragmentation: laughs, hands, faces. Synecdoche is a most important part of his progression to wholeness, as is his exchange of the microcosmic ward for the macrocosmic outside world" (1982 P. 34).

Kesey employs the poetic method in *Sometimes a Great Notion* also. The tree symbolism forms one of the major themes of this novel. Tree is viewed as a totem of survival in the North west, the timber industry being a major industry of the region. The working man finds the tree as a worthy opponent capable of immense resistance and death, dealing blows as from a swinging green fist. In contemplation, it is a thing of quiet beauty. As beast and beauty, opponent and spirit of nature, the tree is a source of awe. The loftiness of the tree upright is

a standing challenge; the fallen tree's peaceful recumbency stirs elegiac feelings of vague loss. This ambivalence toward the tree is equated in the novel with the ambivalence toward Hank, whom Lee remembers as "diving into the river, naked and white, and hard as a peeled tree" (P. 65).

The Absurd and Black Humour in Kesey's Works:

Kesey, like most other twentieth century writers, deals with the question of the absurd in his works. Modern man's absurd condition, as defined by Eugene Ionesco, is "that which is devoid of purpose...cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless" (as quoted in Esslin, 1969, Pp 5-6). Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* tells of the nausea or the absurd growing out of man's desire to find meaning in things and his disappointment in a universe that is divested of illusions and lights. The absurd refers to man's attempt to use reason to comprehend the unreasonable, his efforts to make sense out of a mad world.

Joseph Waldmeir considers Ken Kesey and Joseph Heller as the two modern American novelists, who transport the readers to the realm of the absurd in their works. This realm has been quite often traversed by dramatists like Albee, Adomov and Ionesco, and by novelists like Norman Mailer and Ralph Ellison. "But it is only with Heller and Kesey that we are enthusiastically ferried across to the realm of the absurd" (1964, Pp. 192-204).

If *Catch-22* is loose and unfocused, *Cuckoo's Nest* is tightly organised and well-directed:

The novel's greatest strength lies in Kesey's refusal to throw his people away for the sake of comic effect. All the characters in *Cuckoo's Nest* are one way or other, associated with a lunatic asylum as either inmates or keepers. They are all funny but not in the way Heller's people are. They are not truly mad; nearly all of them are voluntarily committed—they are "touched", tipped toward differentness by idiosyncrasy or physical disability. The differentness is preposterous at the surface level. But, as one looks deeper, it becomes clear that the differentness is actually normality aggravated and extended. That is to say, what appears as madness in Kesey's characters, is there in each one of us, either in sublimated form or dormant, always waiting disconcertingly close to the surface. (Waldmeir, 1964, Pp. 192 - 204).

In *Cuckoo's Nest*, McMurphy's growth from con-man to hero to saviour can be considered as a paradigm of the successful struggle of the individual against the forces of an oppressive society, man's innate weakness, and his cosmic indifference to his wishes and welfare. As Gilbert Porter, observes:

That McMurphy is finally willing to sacrifice his life to restore life to others is testament to values more important than mere survival—freedom, dignity, pride, love, courage—and thus an imposition of human significance on the absurd....The message of *Cuckoo's Nest* is that something can be done about absurdity. The liberation of Bromden at the end stands for the liberation of Everyman from the clutches of intimidation, fear and bad faith.

Such optimism is rare in a sea of nay-sayers, but it has a long tradition in the bipolar canon of American literature and Kesey earns his positive vision by his unflinching documentation of the forces aligned against affirmation and heroism in the modern world (1982, P.14).

The absurdist vision is apparent in *Sometimes A Great Notion* also. The description of an arm dangling from a pole outside an upper window of the Stamper house with all its fingers except the middle one, tied down seems to make a gesture of grim and humourous defiance at the absurd universe as well as the hostile Wakonda towns people, who support the lumber union. Again Joe Ben drowns despite Hank's great efforts to save him. As Joe drowns, "a bubbling of hysterical mirth erupted in Hank's face just as he was bending to deliver another breath to Joe [whose mouth was] open and around with laughing" (P.488). W. D. Sherman comments on this: "Joe's laughter, Kesey indicates, shows his perception of the absurd and his attempt to face it, but ironically, the open mouthed laughter also causes his death" (1971, P. 296). Elaine B. Safer, in his article on *Sometimes A Great Notion*, points out the multiple levels of absurdity in the story.

The metaphysical indicates that treacherous impermanence of nature, whose rivers overflow all apparent boundaries on the water-soaked Oregon coast: the historical reveals that the memory of Hiroshima destroys heroic potential in a post World War II society; the psychological shows the bizarre ramifications of an Oedipal situation in which Hank Stamper has an affair with his step-mother, Myra, mother of Hank's young half-brother Lee,

who flees Wakonda at the age of twelve and seeks revenge; the social demonstrates that the absurd man "secretes the inhuman as he uses the machine of a labour union to fight the independent activity of the Stamper Lumber Company. Acting always as background for all other ramifications of the absurd is the painful awareness of man's mortality, the realization that tomorrow brings each person closer to death" (1983, P.234).

In '*Quest Surd & Absurd*', James E. Miller tells us how "our recent writers portray the universe as a vast practical joke and the joke is on everybody, novelist, characters, and readers alike. In such a universe any quest at all is the quest absurd" (1967, P.26). *Sometimes A Great Notion* portrays this absurd quest in many places. Examples are: Hank's defiant struggle following his attempt to save Joe's life, the final pilgrimage by Hank and Lee to the Stamper house, the awkward family boat trip before the Eastern journey by Myra and Lee in their pshychological quest for a new life.

Black Humour:

A very prominent feature of the American fiction of the 1960s is the kind of comdey of outrage it contains. This is born out of the way in which these works mix the ingredients of stark tragedy with the heavy dashes of the modern ironic sensibility. This kind of humour can be seen in the pre-War novels like *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner and *Bartleby or Confidence Man* by Herman Melville. But the blacknes in those works has not been as bleak or the comedy as savage, as that in the novels of the 60s.

Raymond M. Olderman describes black humour as "a kind of comedy that juxtaposes pain with laughter, fantastic fact with calmly inadequate reaction and cruelty with tenderness" (1972, P.27). The merging of the animate and inanimate is central to the grotesque aspect of black humour. We have this kind of merging in Joe Ben's recollection of the date stamped into his father's face, like an expiration date stamped into a borrowed book, or in the passage in which, the moon seems to take on animation as young Lee looks at it after falling into a deep dune stovepipe hole (255, P.561).

Supermen, Comic strip Heroes and Popular Culture:

Kesey shares the post-World War II youth's craze for the new style supermen like Captain Marvel. He was also much interested in comic-strip heroes. All his works reveal his love of popular culture and supermen. Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* tells us how Kesey believed them to be honest American myths. Like all adolescents, Kesey also considered comic book superheroes like captain Marvel, Superman, Plastic Man and the Flash as true mythic heroes. During his Stanford University and Perry Lane days, which formed the gestation period of the *Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey was very much interested in the comic strip world. This grew further in the Merry Prankster days when he wore superhero's costumes to mirror transcendent human possibility. He was in a Flash Gordon like garb when he went to Vietnam in 1965. According to Leslie Fiedler,

The adventures of psychedelic supermen, as Kesey had dreamed and acted them, however—his negotiations with Hell's angels, his being busted for the possession of marijuana, his

consequent experiences in court and as a refugee from the law in Mexico — all this, like the yellow bus in which he used to move up and down the land taking an endless, formless movie, belong to hearsay and journalism rather than to literary criticism challenging conventional approaches to literature even as it challenges literature itself (as in Pratt, 1973, P.378).

Popular culture manifests itself in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. For example, the Big Nurse's ward is described as having "that clean orderly movement of cartoon comedy" (P. 34); the patients' conversation is like "a cartoon world, where the figures are flat and outlined in the black, jerking through some kind of goofy story that might be real funny if it weren't for the cartoon figures being real guys" (P. 31). Bromden's perspective as to the size of the characters resembles a visual technique often used in cartoons.

Terry G. Sherwood stresses the noteworthy use of popular culture in a serious novel like *Cuckoo's Nest*. Harding, a weak character, in the novel, recognizes in McMurphy a comic strip hero whose bullet annihilates Evil and liberates the victims of the combine from the clutches of the monster, the Big Nurse Kesey's method is one of calling together the caricaturist, the cartoonist, the folk artist, and the allegorist. As in the comic strip, action in Kesey's novel turns on the mythic confrontation between Good and Evil, an exemplary he-man versus a machine-tooled castrating matriarch (1971, Pp 96-109). The comic strip elements are reinforced by other materials from popular culture. For example, the novelist draws on folk songs in the initial stage of McMurphy's characterization where he quotes from "The Roving Gambler" and "The Wagoner's Lad". Again, the

novelist refers to McMurphy as the cowboy hero. As he advances to break the nurse's glass window, Bromden says: "He was the logger again, the swaggering gambler, the big, red-headed brawling Irishman, the cowboy out of the walking down the middle of the street to meet a dare" (P. 189).

The author's dependence on comic strip and popular culture results in simplifying matters as he throws his lot too uncritically in defence of the Good as opposed to Evil, thereby bringing in a moral vision rooted in a clear-cut opposition between Good and Evil, between natural man and organised society, between an older mode of existence honouring, physical life, and a modern day machine culture, inimical to it, between the Indian fishing village and the hydroelectric dam. The spiritual residue of the American Old West opposes the machine culture; but the West as such is doomed like McMurphy. Modern machine culture is the most recent manifestation of society's threat to the individual.

The Lone Ranger's mask mysteriously separates McMurphy from other men; his origin is uncertain and his silver bullet has supernatural powers. Bromden's vision of him as a saviour giant recalls air-borne superheroes like Superman and Captain Marvel miraculously helping others in one fell swoop. McMurphy is also sacrificed on the cross-shaped electro-shock table. To Kesey, the heavenly Christ and the supernatural comic book hero stand on a common mythic ground as images of human potential. McMurphy's self-regarding and independent pursuit of physical pleasure, his defiant laughter, and the gambler's unconcern for security—all these place him on a plane above the ordinary, and free him from society. That he can do the impossible is substantiated by his fishing trips against the Big Nurse's wishes, and healing sick men with his fists. As in the

case of Christ, the magnitude of his potential threat to society forces his crucifixion. The Big Nurse is like a comic strip villain. She controls the modern technology from her glass room, which is the ward's electronic nerve centre. Her giantism is evident from the nickname Big Nurse. Like the villain of the comic strips, she never claims or enjoys our sympathies, even when rendered voiceless and physically weak by McMurphy's uncavalier assault following Billy Bibbit's suicide.

The comic strip is essentially a pictorial representation of stereotyped moral and psychological truths for unsophisticated readers. The Lone Ranger's mask, the image of this mysterious separateness, and Freddy Freeman's crutch, the image of his mortal half—all these pictorially express constants in their natures. Kesey's characterization of McMurphy and the Big Nurse emphasises similar repeated details. The Irishman's volatility in McMurphy is repeatedly stressed by his scarred fists, his ready valour, his red hair and his energy as a worker, and the Big Nurse's inhumanity is brought out by her militaristic, starched, stiff uniform, which covers the sexual and maternal potential of her admirable bosom. She is part of a machine attempting to level even sexual differences.

Motifs from popular culture are exploited in *Great Notion*, too. Captain Marvel and Wolfman are played off against each other to show Lee's ambiguous feelings about his transformation from weakness to strength, from meekness to power. Lee feels jealous of captain Marvel's strength in Hank, but decries or hates his brute powers and animal vitality that remind him of Wolfman. He wants to search for the magic word that would make him invulnerable and enormous; he has a hunch that he may find it not in Captain Marvel, but in Billy Batson

and it proved true when he spoke the magic words after his revenge against his brother Hank.

If in *Cuckoo's Nest* McMurphy acts with the full conviction that a superhero's metamorphosis from mortal weakness to supernatural strength is possible, in *Great Notion*, Lee learns fully well how futile is the fantasy of magical matamorphosis, whether into Captain Marvel or a Werewolf. He embraces, with patience, the natural process of maturation and growth as a human being. The choice to fight rather than flee from life's problems is emphasised by a recurrent symbolic pattern which is echoed in the novel's epigraph:

"Sometimes I get a great notion
To jump into the river....an' drown"

Narrative Techniques:

As a novelist, Kesey was very much concerned with point of view, and he was very prudent in selecting his narrative techniques. In a letter to his friend Ken Babbs, he wrote: "I'll discuss point of view for a time now. I'm beginning to agree with Stegner that it truly [sic] is the most important problem in writing" (as in Leeds, 1981, P. 58). In *Cuckoo's Nest*, he dwells on third person and first person narrations:

I was not free to impose my perception and bizarre eye on the god-author who is supposed to be viewing the scene, so I tried somebody that will be extremely difficult to pull off, and to my knowledge, has never been tried before—the narrator is going to be a character. He will not take part in the action, or ever speak

as I, but he will be a character to be influenced by the events that take place, he will have a position and personality and a character that is not essentially mine (though it may, by chance, be). Think of this: I, me, Ken Kesey, is stepped back another step, and am writing about a third person author writing about something. Fair makes the mind real, don't it? (as in Pratt, 1973, P 338).

Kesey began writing *Cuckoo's Nest* by trying a conventional first person narration. Later, in a letter to Kirk Douglas, he wrote, how Bromden's point of view became necessary:

... to make the characters *big enough* to be equal to their job. McMurphy, as viewed from the low-angle point of view of the Chief, is a giant, a god, he's every movie show cowboy that ever walked down a mainstreet toward the OK Corral, he's every patriot that ever died for his countrymen on a scaffold in history books. The Big Nurse is seen more clearly by the Indian than by anyone else, as that age old ogre of tyranny and fear simply dried in nice neat white. Of course, McMurphy

and the nurse are also people in human situation, but in the distorted world inside the Indian's mind these people are exalted into a kind of immortality. To do this you need fantasyYou need to take the reader's mind [sic] places where it has never been before to convince him that this crazy Indian's world is his as well (as in Tanner, 1983 P. 23).

McMurphy is the hero of event and Bromden a hero of consciousness. When the two are juxtaposed, each is better delineated. John W. Hunt points out that "Kesey's use of the single narrator who is telling a story deeply important to his own understanding of himself, forces the reader to follow a double story line, one centering upon the tale told and the other upon the teller and the telling" (as in Tanner, P. 23). The question whose story this is, had come up in earlier novels, like *The Great Gatsby*, *Moby Dick* and *Absalom, Absalom* also. As Bromden narrates McMurphy's story, he acquires more and more self knowledge, and at last, regains complete self control to get away from the cruel clutches of the combine, and to boldly face the world once again. There is an exchange of visions taking place in the novel, a clash between the originally tragic view of Bromden to which hope has been added and the hopeful view of McMurphy which becomes completely qualified by tragedy from the day he signed on, for the whole game.

The narrative structure is similar to the one in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. The narrator in both is chosen by the protagonist and is torn by ambivalent feelings of admiration for, and disapproval, of the master. The tutelary example of the protagonist's life teaches the narrator useful lessons which enable him, after the protagonist's death, to take on the strength of the protagonist while avoiding a similar downfall and death. Bromden develops into a synthesis of his own latent strength and abilities, and all that is best in McMurphy, in the same way as Nick Carraway develops into a synthesis of his latent strength and Gatsby's capabilities. This narrative structure provides the novelist with the advantages of both the first person and the third person points of view. The growth process of McMurphy and Bromden move in opposite directions. As McMurphy's strength

wanes, Bromden grows strong. McMurphy's friendly overtures make Bromden recollect episodes from his own past. The precipitation of more and more traumatic memories puts him back to a position in which he is able to face his own problems, and begin to retrieve his lost manhood.

In *Great Notion*, Kesey was not ready to limit himself to either the third person or the first person narrative. As Gilbert Porter observes:

If the first person narration by the Narrator Chief Bromden is the integrating principle in *Cuckoo's Nest*, in *Great Notion*, it is a frequently shifting, though tautly controlled multiple point of view which moves skillfully from the omniscient voice of what I call the Tutelary spirit, who provides the epigraphs to each chapter and much of the internal commentary to conventional third person omniscience, to the individual characters revealing their own perceptions in various persons and tenses. This multiple narration is designed to embody the novelist's complex themes: the ambivalence of Nature, the strong/weak polarity, the intricate way time and place and people shape each character and determine destinies and the nature and function of heroism in human events (1982, Pp. 36-78).

Kesey's notes make a list of narrative techniques at his disposal; "Third person past, First person past, Third person present, First person present, second person (old man talking to the writer), paranthesis, italics". (as in Tanner, Pp. 52-88). All these techniques, except second person narrative, were incorporated into the narration. The very first chapter of the book warns the reader about his narrative method:

STOP! DON'T SWEAT IT. SIMPLY MOVE A FEW INCHES LEFT OR RIGHT TO GET A NEW VIEWPOINT. Look....Reality is greater than the sum of its parts, also a damn sight holier. And the lives of such stuff as drawn are made of may be rounded with a sleep, but they are not tied neatly with a red bow. Truth doesn't run on time like a commuter train, though time may run on truth. And the scenes Gone By and the scenes to come flow blending together in the sea-green deep while News spreads in circles on the surface. So No, don't sweat it. For focus simply move a few inches back or forward. And once more....look (P.14).

An entry in Kesey's notes for *Sometimes A Great Notion* deserves special mention:

I have a story being told by three people, me, Hank and Lee. Lee's style will come ...Hank will come if I can keep him from being chief or McMurphy. But My style is the important one. Me - the Big Story Teller - picking up, tying ends Together, moving along with the spinning of my tale. About Drake having to return to Portland. About the feeling in town. About Joe Ben and his kid. About the Real Estate man. Making it obvious, I know that Hank is up there, but, in for rouble and I'm getting around to it just as fast as I can. I can throw in pertinent bits and pieces, smatterings of dialogue and action - all pertaining to the Make It Tough On Hank theme that I'm developing (as in Porter, 1982, P.40).

As the novel developed, the three-fold point of view opened out into the multiple point of view. Every character in the novel, at one time or other, is presented

through this multiple point of view. The Big Story Teller in Kesey introduces fictive balls, Indian clubs, eggs and flaming torches into his narrative flash backs, songs, deferred disclosures, contrasting visions, letters, streams of consciousness, tag typography and strategically juxtaposed lines and scenes.

The Tutelary Spirit, like the Greek chorus, instructs, meditates, corrects, reflects, sets up scenes and plays freely with aesthetic distances. Each of the eleven unnumbered chapters has an epigraph in which the Tutelary Spirit sets the tone of the episodes to follow. For example, in the very first chapter of *Sometimes A Great Notion*, the Tutelary Spirit introduces the readers to a panoramic vision of the Oregon Coastal Range. The Tutelary Spirit speaks directly to, or about, the characters themselves. For example, when Jonas in 1898 professes not to know why his son Henry disturbs him so deeply, the Tutelary Spirit accuses him of self-deception. The distinction between conventional third person omniscience and the Tutelary voice is marked:

He turns to mount the hot iron steps and sees again that look as Henry passes from the landing into the car. Lord, have mercy, he whispers without knowing why. *No, admit it; you did know. You knew it was the family sin come back from the pit, and you knew your part in it; you knew your part as surely as you knew the sin.* A born sinner, he mutters, 'born cursed' (P.15).

In the departure scene of Myra and Lee, Hank looks back to his affair with Myra. After fourteen years of stay at the Stampers', Myra is leaving with her twelve year old son Lee. The omniscient narrator describes the scene objectively, but the subjective voices of most of the principal characters, including the ghost of Old

Jonas, punctuate the narrative in a tricky syncopation of sliding tense and shifting person. Kesey uses typography to key the voices: standard print for 'dialogue' (Old Henry, Hank, Lee, Joe Ben), and description as reported by the omniscient narrator for 'the historical present' and for 'topical allusion in the narrative present' (the logger, the arm, the woman). Italics is employed for Lee's reflections, detached in time from dialogue and for the 'ghostly' commentary of Jonas; italics in paranthesis is used for the Tutelary Spirit's 'internal observations' punctuating the dialogue in the historical present, and standard print in paranthesis for Hank's 'reflections twelve years later on the episode in the boat' (Pp. 38-40, *Sometimes A Great Notion*). ***

Cinematic technique:

Kesey makes effective use of cinematic techniques in his novels. His notes usually abound in usages like "now the camera directs toward..." and "the camera then cuts to..."(see Tanner,1983, Pp.52-88). The novel depicts simultaneous action; we are told what various characters in various places are doing at a particular point of time. The narrative begins and ends on Thanks Giving Day, 1961, the climatic day when Viv leaves Oregon, and Hank and Lee begin the attempt to transport the cut logs down the Wakonda Auga river. In between, the focus moves constantly back and forth between the beginnings of the Stamper family history and the present. This in itself is not unusual, but the almost cinematic rapidity, smoothness and clarity with which Kesey presents these shifts are noteworthy. Chapter 1 of the novel stresses circularity, and points out that truth doesn't run on time even though time may run on truth. The relationship between time and reality is later elaborated upon:

Time overlaps itself. A breath breathed from a passing breeze is not the whole wind, neither is it just the last of what has passed, and the first of what will come, but is more—let me see—more like a single point plucked on a single strand of a vast spider web of winds, setting the whole scene atingle. That way it overlaps. As a shiny new ax, taking a swing at somebody's next year's split level pinewood pad bites all the way to the civil war. As proposed high ways break down through the stacked strata of centuries (P.200).

Here is an example of how his narrative works: a situation involving six characters stretching over a period from 1898 to 1961, is described in the present tense, as though it were all happening right now:

Jonas pulls, straining at the fog. Joe Ben goes into a state park with a brush knife and an angel's face, seeking freedom. Hank crawls through a tunnel of blackberry vines, seeking thorny imprisonment. The arm twists and slowly untwists. The logger sitting up in the mud calls curses across the water: "I am hollowed out with loneliness: The woman cries. The water moves (P. 41).

As the novel develops, these disparate elements are united: Kesey identifies the river with time and it becomes a unifying presence in the book.

Photographs and pictures of reality figure prominently in Kesey's narrative. Photography treats people as objects; it is a substitute for living

relationships. Photographs and films catch and fix the individual, disregarding the full dimensions of his living uniqueness. In *Great Notion*, Viv's name is suggestive of life itself. Both Hank and Lee think they love her. Actually, Hank wants Viv to strictly conform to his conception of what she should be. He tells her about the dress she shall wear, how she shall cut her hair and conduct herself before others. He is not much bothered about what is going on in her mind. Lee's love for her is more sensitive and sympathetic, but he gives himself away when he asks her for permission to take with him a photograph of hers, which we learn later, is an early photograph of his own mother. Thus, the two brothers look at her through their own conceptions of reality, while her own reality has remained unperceived and thus unsolved. This is the result of the inability to recognise and communicate with other people's reality. Before Viv sets out with Hank as his wife, she has a last look in her mirror to kiss her reflection good-bye--a gesture which appears once later in her thoughts: "It means this is the only way we even see ourselves; looking out...."(P.198). Unlike the two brothers, she can rise above narcissism and look out at other people and really see them and their needs. Yet, her generosity cannot anyhow prevent her from going away from the brothers; her whole being cannot be devoted to simply being what other people need her to be. She gets on the bus, simply to move on, with no destination in mind. It is a bid to escape from the images that have been imposed on her by others, and leave the photographs behind.

Americanism of Kesey's Protagonists:

McMurphy and Hank, the protagonists of the two Kesey novels examined here, are more peculiarly American than European, drawing their strength from the American myth rather than the classical one. As John A. Barsness writes:

They both are virtuous, hardworking yeomen and Jacksonian images of the Central American figure, from whose agrarian roots all the democratic values are drawn. In their strength, they are kin to Mike Fink and Paul Bunyan rather than to Gargantua; in their practical ambition they adhere to Henry Ford or John D. Rockefeller rather than Robin Hood; and in their moral structure in spite of their earthiness, they imitate the Virginian or John Aldan rather than Lancelot (1969, P.31).

Both the heroes are intuitive in action, non-intellectual in habit, anti-social, anti-urban, and full of the freedom and strength inherent in nature. The enemy they fight is society, and artificial complexes, institutionalised civilization, the very same enemies fought against by Huckleberry Finn and the Virginian. Barsness's essay points out that Kesey's heroes seem to carry out the old fashioned American dream of defining its typical myth by cutting the American off from the corrupt and civilized Europe, sending him into the wilderness to hack a paradise out of the limitless forests. The hero, though he may or may not survive, will triumph. In *Cuckoo's Nest*, though McMurphy the hero dies, his heroism is rewarded through Bromden's action. *Sometimes A Great Notion* culminates in the triumph over life's tribulations, and not capitulation.

Like Stendhal's heroes, McMurphy and Hank feel superior to, and alienated from, the others with whom they come into contact. But, whereas in Stendhal, this superiority and alienation make the hero more and more of a solitary figure without any serious feelings of commitment to society, in Kesey they are increasingly drawn into the problems of society. Stendhal's heroes,

who are romantically at odds with society, die before the ending. They struggle against society, condemn it and move out in arrogance. In Kesey, their superiority intensifies their feelings of responsibility towards society. McMurphy and Hank are quite conscious of their superiority to others and they also feel alienated from the rest, yet their superiority or alienation doesn't stop them from fulfilling their sense of responsibility to those around them.

Kesey himself is much of a hero, but his brand of heroism is that of a "psychic outlaw", a term coined by Norman Mailer in 1959 which helps in understanding many protagonists in contemporary fiction. Elaborating on this point, Barry H. Leeds tells us how in earlier works of fiction, picaroons like Tom Jones, after living for quite some time in the periphery of his society, could ultimately find a place within that society in the resolution part of the novel. However, in modern times, a mounting disaffection with the hypocritical society, renders such resolutions less attractive (1981 P.7). McMurphy in *Cuckoo's Nest* and Hank in *Great Notion* choose to challenge the structures of a regimented society which attempts to hem them in. Kesey was only proud to proclaim himself an outlaw. As he was fleeing to Mexico, he said that if society wanted him to be an outlaw, then he would be a damn good outlaw. He secretly re-entered the U.S. in late September 1966, posing as a drunken cowboy singer riding a horse. Back in California, he taunted law enforcement authorities by making surprise public appearances, and granting clandestine newspaper and television interviews. In one such interview, he said, "I intend to stay in this country as a fugitive and as salt in J. Edgar Hoover's wounds" (see Leeds, 1981, P.8).

Kesey: Critical Responses:

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, published in 1962, was almost immediately acclaimed as a critique of the American society as consisting of a lonely crowd of organization men, offered affluence only if willing to pay the price of strict conformity. This critique continued to suit the mood of 60s and 70s, as society, almost overwhelmed by technological advancement turned into a kind of repressive authority, and man became a victim of rational, but lawless forces beyond his control. The obvious message of the novel that people should get back in touch with their world, and open their doors of perception to enjoy spontaneous, strenuous experience, and resist the manipulative forces of a technological society, was equally appealing to all sections of American society, because, an admiration for self reliant action has always been deeply entrenched in the American psyche. Describing the book as the juggernaut of modern matriarchy, Stephen Tanner observes:

By skillfully drawing upon proven conventions within the literary tradition—a time-worn yet timeless pattern of myth, a conscious and elaborate manipulation of images, a standard conflict-and resolution plot, with hero and villain—Kesey has created a novel that in terms of the social and cultural tradition is highly unconventional. His degree of formal skill is noteworthy among recent novelists and gives *Cuckoo's Nest* a significant place in recent fiction (1983, P.44).

William Peden enthusiastically welcomes Kesey to the guild: "His story telling is so effective, his tyle so impetuous, his grasp of characters so certain

that the reader is swept along in McMurphy's boisterous wake....Mr. Kesey, in short, has created a world that is convincing, alive and glowing within its boundaries and in terms of his own ground rules" (as quoted in Porter, 1988, P.16).

The novel puts into sharp relief some important issues concerning feminism and literature. Many feminists concede that the novel is artistically successful, but they are outraged by the sexism they see in it. This raises questions as to whether the problem lies with Kesey or with a narrow feminism. The anti-feminists have counter arguments. Ronald Wallace observes: "To fault Kesey for his treatment of women and blacks is to miss the comedy of a device that has informed comic art from Aristophanes..." (as in Tanner, 1983, P.45). Michael Boardman considers the work as a tragedy in which the conflict between the Big Nurse and McMurphy is only a reflection of a conflict between two opposed principles in McMurphy's being (Tanner P.46). Just like Hamlet, McMurphy has become something other than what he was before the disaster or tragic victory. Thus viewed, there is no room for a feminist criticism of the way the Big Nurse is treated by Kesey. For the sake of dramatic propriety, the Big Nurse and all the forces opposing McMurphy are made to look like incarnations of evil, injustice and cruelty. Kesey doesn't agree with the feminist criticism of sexism and insists that his motives, conscious or unconscious, were not those attributed to him by the feminist critics. One of the Kesey tapes has recorded a conversation in which Kesey and a patient of the Veteran's Hospital testify to the hard and tough nature of the white nurses there. The kind Japanese nurse has her origin in the black nurses he knew (Tanner P.46).

Raymond Olderman in his study of the novel interprets it as a romance centering on the *Wasteland* theme in which McMurphy is a successful Grail

Knight who frees the Fisher King, Bromden and the human spirit for a single symbolic and transcendent moment of affirmation. The Big Nurse is Madame Sosostriis the false prophetess, who perverts the holy words, *Datta*, *Dayadhvam*, *Damyata*, that are the key to coping with the wasteland. When she gives, she emasculates, when she sympathises, she reduces, and when she controls, she destroys. As McMurphy learns to give and sympathise, he moves toward death while the Chief moves toward rebirth, blown up to full size by McMurphy's sacrifice and gift of self-control (1972, P.27).

Bruce Carnes in his pamphlet on the Western Writer series, asserts:

Kesey in his *Cuckoo's Nest* presents a world of moral extremes in which the enemy and the hero are clearly distinguishable; he shows us a society which though it has not yet succeeded in stifling every individual, nevertheless, controls most aspects of human behaviour. In that world, heroism, though very difficult, is both necessary and possible and can lead to the salvation of society. Kesey's *Cuckoo's Nest* shows that the American dream is still valid: One can be what he wants to be and can do what he wants to do (1974, P.6).

Notwithstanding all these diverse interpretations of the *Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey himself has indicated that he sees the novel in a less complicated way than most of his critics. He considers it as a Christian allegory that deals with good and evil in which McMurphy is the Christian character, the powerful Western hero, willing to put his life on the line for the downtrodden. The evil is a sickness in the American consciousness that Kesey symbolises in the

'combine'. The attempts to identify the evil, the sickness in the American consciousness, to trace its sources, and to explore its contexts, forms, and ramifications have led critics of the novel – both apologists and detractors – to discover that the *Cuckoo's Nest* goes well beyond simple allegory.

Though *Cuckoo's Nest* is the most popular among Kesey's works, *Great Notion* is a far more artistically impressive work on several levels – in terms of structure, point of view, theme; it is more ambitious, more experimental and ultimately more successful. It is significantly larger in scope as well as in number of words, technically more complex, containing a greater range of prose styles. Kesey himself called this a dangerous book because of the risks involved in trying to convey a situation comprehensively by radical manipulation of time, point of view, and narrative techniques. In his notes, he refers to the spark of danger, the tingle of experiment, the fantasy of greatness, and the chance of doing something better than he could possibly do with the best utilization of all present methods and techniques. To Gordon Lish's questions, "Where are you going in *Great Notion*? What is it you are testing?" Kesey answered . "For one thing, I want to find out which side of me really is the woodsy, logger side—complete with homespun homilies and crackerbarrel corniness, a valid side of me that I like—or its opposition. The two Stamper brothers in the novel are each, one of the ways I think I am" (Tanner, P.54).

Bruce Carnes observes that the looseness of the novel reflects a loss of assurance on Kesey's part that experience is readily comprehensible and malleable. Experience and life are not, in fact, simple to understand. Patterns are not so easy to perceive as they were in *Cuckoo's Nest*. The second book qualifies

the confidence and optimism of the first: even if action is possible, it may be futile and meaningless. Hank's decision to run the logs down the river to Wakonda Pacific lumber mill may lead to death or to victory. But what really matters is the action in itself and not its utility or futility.

There has been no feminist criticism against *Great Notion*. There is no unsympathetic treatment of any woman character in the novel. According to Kesey himself "Women's lib was the real issue in *Notion*. I didn't know when I wrote it, but think about it: It's about men matching egos and wills on the battleground of Vivian's unconsulted hide. When she leaves at the end of the book, she chooses to leave the only people she loves, for a bleak and uncertain, but at least equal future" (as quoted in Tanner, P.87). This scene has often been compared to Nora's slamming of the door towards the close of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

After *Sometimes A Great Notion*:

Sometimes A Great Notion was followed by two more significant works from Kesey: *Kesey's Garage Sale* and *The Demon Box*. *Kesey's Garage Sale* (1973) is strikingly similar to Norman Mailer's *Advertisements for Myself* (1959). Both are unorthodox collections of fragments, interviews, and other short pieces, and given unity and focus through the author's candid statements about his evolving attitude toward art. Kesey's book derives from the "Prankster era" described in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test*, and consists of an "Introduction" by Arther Miller and five other Hot Items, namely, Who Flew Over What? Over the Border, Tools from My Chest, a Miscellaneous Collection and an Impolite Interview with Ken Kesey. "Who flew over What?" is an essay that describes Kesey's introduction to drugs, his work as an aide at the V A Hospital Menlo Park

and the writing of his first novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. "Over the Border", which forms nearly half of the book is a screenplay, a fictionalized account of Kesey's flight to Mexico. It is profusely illustrated with drawings by Paul Foster. "Tools from My Chest" is a collection of articles that first appeared in Last Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalogue, which Kesey had edited with Paul Krasner. These are short comments on people, books and things that Kesey considered significant. "The Miscellaneous Collection" consists of notes made by Kesey while he was in jail, a short essay on creativity, an interview, a letter from Neal Cassady, poems by Hugh Romney and Allen Ginsberg. The fifth item, "An Impolite Interview with Ken Kesey", is done by Paul Krasner. At the end of the book is a 'surprise bonus', an exchange of correspondence between Kesey and Lawrence Gonzales of *Tri-Quarterly*, much of which had earlier appeared in underground magazines.

Critics seem to agree on the point that the book is a thrown-together combination of recycled spare parts designed to make money. Kesey's account of his volunteering work at the V A Hospital makes interesting reading. The screenplay has flashes of genius and some fine comic moments and "Tools from My Chest" contains a few memorable passages. But, on the whole, these merits are more than counterbalanced by a considerable amount of dross. The importance of the book lies in its revelations about Kesey's interests and values, his relationship to the 1960s counter culture and his gusto for expanded consciousness. Stephen Tanner tells us of the two poles of Kesey's career and personality and the tensions between them: "On the one hand there are California and the frontiers of a drug culture, on the other, there is his Oregon home with its contrasting values" (1983, P.105).

The Demon Box: Exorciser as Form, described by the author himself as a form in transit, is a highly personal assessment of the selected steps and missteps that have led him to mid-life and to uncertainty about his art. It is a kind of journalistic autobiography in which there is much unburdening of the self, making it closer to newspaper reporting than to fiction writing. The problem years in the author's life between the publication of the *Notion* in 1964 and the author's moving to a farm in Pleasant Hill in 1968 form the topic of this work. His experiments with drugs and group-living that sometimes exploited family and friends, the vision of altering consciousness and establishing revolution, the lure of power, the scrapes with the law, the rasping polarities of freedom and responsibility, the frustrating attempts to establish universal connections—all these are dealt with in the *Demon Box* which consists of five parts: Abdul Ebenezer, The Day After Superman Died, Over the Border (from Kesey's Garage Sale), The Thrice-Thrown Tranny Man (from Spit in the Ocean, First Issue), and SEVEN PRAYERS by Grandma Whittier, six sections of which had appeared in separate issues of *Spit in the Ocean*. According to Gilbert Porter, "a critical assessment of the work is problematic because of the nature of the work. It has a bulky size of a catch-all-fund raiser and anachronistic trappings of a 40s Hey-Gang-Let's-Put-On-A Show musical" (1982,P.88). Despite its shortcomings, it shows Kesey working out some personal sore-spots through literary gymnastics and trying to get a few laughs between heavy huffing and puffing.

Kesey's mood as he wrote *The Demon Box* is made clear in his notes:

After two successful novels and ten times two successful fantasies, I find myself wondering "what to prove next? I've shown

the buggers I can write, then shown them I can repeat and better the first showing, now what do I prove?". The answer seems to be "prove nothing". A clever challenge, chaps, and one, I confess, that stirs the fight in me. Now anyone can crank out a nice compact commercial, slide it between covers, and vend it as literature, but how many are there capable of advancing absolute proof of nothing? Not many, no, not so very. "Then, by Jingo, "Slapping his thigh vigorously" Let's do it!" (as in Porter, 1982, P.101).

According to Tony Tanner, *Sometimes A Great Notion*, points out the limits of human perception of configurations of reality. Whether it is reality arrested in photographs or put in verbal conceptual systems, we must be conscious of the fact that these temporary arrangements and fixities are far from the whole truth. We must always be willing to look round the edge of the fixed image, to the flow behind it. Just like Viv in *Great Notion*, we must know that there are bigger forces from which our own forces get whipped (1976, Pp.372-392). At the opening of "Chapter IV" of *Great Notion*, the author tells the story of a squirrel that lived in a davenport, the inside of which was completely known to it so that it could always escape being sat over. When the outside of the davenport became worn out and was covered with a red blanket, the squirrel could no longer be certain about the insides. Instead of trying to incorporate the red blanket into the scheme of his world, he moved to a drain pipe and was drowned in the next fall of rain--probably still blaming that blanket. What Kesey is driving at here is that we must keep our schemes of reality flexible so that they can be expanded to

incorporate any new phenomenon which the outside world may present. Our notions are only our notions, while the flow is more than we can ever know.

Tanner finds special significance in three words recurring in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* : "games, movies, and flow". Kesey thinks that people are always trying to get you into their games or movies. Writers like Burroughs and Saul Bellow also agree on the point that other people are always keen on recruiting you to their version of what is real, and that apparent reality is only a thin film. When Kesey was in jail, he realised that the prisoners there were not talking their language, but the language of the cops, the guards and the judges. In *Kesey's Garage Sale* , a book that leads the reader to the "Prankster era" described in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test*, the Merry Pranksters take delight in fouling up other people's movies with their far-out clothes, multi coloured bus, and their weird antics on the roof of their bus. Their aim is to upset the people by upsetting their picture of reality. Kesey wanted to live in his own fantasy to avoid being drawn into other people's fantasies. He had the fantasy of rising out of comic books, turning into Captain Flag, Captain America, and Captain Marvel. When the police were moving in on him, he countered by acting as Pimpernel. The group fantasy was that they could all be super-heroes.

As the Merry Pranksters travelled from one end of America to the other, they shot a long movie, putting the whole of America into their movie. They did so to avoid themselves being put in someone else's movie. However, in such cases, there is also the possibility of getting trapped in one's own movie. Kesey knew about this possibility and so told the other Pranksters about the time lag

between perception and reaction: "The present, we know is only a movie of the past, and we will never be able to control the present through ordinary means. That lag has to be overcome some other way through some kind of total breakthrough" (Tonny Tanner, 1976, Pp.372-392) . This search of the absolute now, to pass beyond all structurings of reality, was the motive behind Kesey's LSD experiments also.

One of the Prankster slogans recurring throughout Tom Wolfe's book is 'go with the flow' which can mean to escape from the imprisoning and limiting structures of society which frame and screen out so much of reality. It can also mean to attempt to get out of the subtler entrapments of language. Writers, Kesey believed, are trapped in syntax and artificial rules. People live in language as a kind of shadowy substitute for life, distracted by any number of symbols from the thing itself. The Pranksters held the view that their experiences could not be labelled, hence their indiscriminate use of the word 'thing' to refer to anything at all. This is meant to counter the illusion of definitions and distinctions which language propagates.

The flow, then, is the only reality, which is felt to lie on the other side of the screens and networks of society, and language. This notional flow, Tanner says, can be viewed in two different ways: the loss of all distinction and differentiation involved in the flow could be a stage in that entropic process which will one day bring life to one great level lake of sameness. From the Eastern point of view it may be called nirvana, that final state of universal quietude which is the goal of existence, and which also betokens the end of all distinction, differentiation and individuation. Kesey ruled out the acceptance of

any Buddhist tenets and attitudes. The path he was treading with the Pranksters was intended to turn the ordinary American youths into superheroes and their cry was 'Go with the Flow'. Kesey's LSD experiments taught him how the barriers between ego and non-ego would disappear and how consciousness and environment would begin to merge, and the self and the world would start to flow together in a way which could release an intense feeling of enhanced powers.

Kesey, like most other modern American novelists, is well aware that 'fidelity' to some concept of ordinary experience is almost impossible, as the modern man's everyday experience is mostly marked by the explosion of the fabulous. Bromden's statement in *Cuckoo's Nest* that "it is the truth even if it didn't happen" (P.181), and the author's guiding the reader in *Sometimes A Great Notion* with the statement "Besides, there are some things that can't be truth even if they did happen" (P. 70), testify to the fictionality and fabulousness of everyday experience. In order to contain this kind of experience, Kesey's novel-writing continues the dominant pattern of the 1960s; the movement away from realism, toward a contemporary version of romance. Since the novelist himself sees fact as fabulous, social realism has no basis, for believability and a unity of social response can never be plausible. From *Cuckoo's Nest* to *The Demon Box*, the growth of the realist in Kesey is borne out by his own statement: "... passing off what-might-be-true as fiction seems a better vocation to me than passing off what-is-quite-possibly-fiction as truth" (as in Leeds.1981,P.89).

CHAPTER V

A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH IN POST-MODERNIST FICTION: KURT VONNEGUT (JR) AND THE RE-INVENTION OF THE NOVEL

The 1960's which proved to be a decade of efflorescence of novelistic talent in the American literature after the Twenties, witnessed a great deal of experimentation in the writing of fiction. The horrific and phantasmagoric realities of this decade called for a new aesthetics that brought with it a catastrophic diminution of audience and a crisis of faith in the very objective of literature. David Cowar, in his essay, " Culture and Anarchy: Vonnegut's Later Career", tells us how the theories of language and discourse that demonstrate the invalidity of value, reference and meaning tended to undermine the works of contemporary writers, who by attempting to base their work on such theories, often turned apologists for a form of artistic nihilism. One author, he points out, who has made a career balancing between nihilistic despair and humanist affirmation is Kurt Vonnegut. Recognising the limits of stylistic self indulgence, Vonnegut has devoted his artistic energies to defining the cultural malaise and attempting responses to it (as in Merrill, P. 1991, P.170).

Vonnegut, like many other American writers, has experienced what William Rodney Allen calls "a virtual roller coaster ride of literary reputation—from obscurity to international fame to being dismissed by critics as a mere popular writer to regaining some critical respect for his most recent work(1991,P.1). Starting his literary career as a writer for family magazines and also as a science fiction writer in the Fifties, he wrote four innovative works in the Sixties: *Mother Night* (1962) *Cat's Cradle* (1963), *God Bless you Mr. Rose water*

(1965) and *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), which were followed by three lighter works, *Breakfast of Champions*, (1973), *Slapstick* (1976), and *Palm Sunday* (1981), and four serious novels thereafter: *Jailbird* (1979), *Deadeye Dick* (1982) *Galapagos* (1985) and *Bluebeard* (1987). Over- sentimentality and naivete in his writings are the main reasons why critics are reluctant to consider him on par with his contemporaries like John Barth or Samuel Beckett, but these are essential to his works and make them adaptive and always appealing to both *avant garde* critics and common readers. "The key to Vonnegut's genius", observes Jerome Klinkowitz, "is the unique ability to fashion a work of art, out of ordinary, middle class life" (1977, P33).

William Rodney Allen tells us that the two contradictory images of Vonnegut, namely as a writer of non-serious fiction and a post-modern experimental metafictionist have co-existed with, rather than undercut each other, and that since Vonnegut is at once simple and complex, he has appealed to both a popular and an academic audience. His simplicity can be traced to his background in journalism, commonsense, unpretentiousness and the desire to reach as wide an audience as possible: "I am not inclined to play Henry Jamesian games because they will exclude too many people from reading the book...I have made my books easy to read, punctuated carefully with lots of white space" (1988. P.48). In *Palm Sunday* he writes: "It has been my experience with literary critics and academics in this country that clarity looks a lot like laziness and ignorance and childishness and cheapness to them" (1981 P.320). His complexity arises from his scientifically sophisticated view of the world and the innovative way in which he conveys it through his writings. In Vonnegut's own words, "We all respond with a sort of shriek to the ghastliness of news today...It is typical of

people who have a gruesome history, who have seen many invasions, a large number of dead people, and many executions" (1989,P.1).

Vonnegut's importance as a Novelist

Vonnegut's importance as a novelist can be understood only if we try to assess his relevance and significance against the backdrop of Ronald Sukenick's views on the death of the novel which were much publicised at the very same time Vonnegut shot into fame as a novelist. At the beginning of his novella, "The Death of the Novel", Sukenick tells us how the conventional realist and even modernist fiction, that is, the narrative grounded in social manners, natural science, psychology and myth had run its course, leaving intellectual writers with little hope beyond silence. "Reality", he says, "is simply our experience, and objectivity is, of course, an illusion. And literature does not exist. There is only reading and writing, which are things we do, like eating and making love, to pass the time, ways of maintaining a considered boredom in the face of the abyss" (1969,P.41). Sukenick's views on the fictionality of all discourse, seem to agree with the modern theory of language propounded by theorists from Saussure to Derrida. According to Jerome Klinkowitz, "Vonnegut's fiction of the 1960s deserves consideration as a popular artifact expressing the American cultural changes of those times" (1982,P.16).

Vonnegut: A Writer with a Realist's Concern

Vonnegut can never be called a realist in the sense in which the term is applied to Balzac, Standhal or Zola. But, even though he does not share the realist's creed, he has always been a writer with a realist's concern for whatever is happening around, and his writings have always shown an engaging

interest in the sociological problems of the day. He believes that he has to act as a "Shaman", a kind of spiritual medicine man whose duty it is to expose the various forms of societal madness. He once described himself as "a canary bird in the coal mine," whose function is to give warnings about the dehumanised future of our race (1975, P.92).

All his early novels can be called protest novels, conceived in the spirit of social protest. Vonnegut once remarked that his motives as a writer are political: "I agree with Stalin and Hitler and Mussolini that the writer should serve his society. I differ with the dictators as to how writers should serve. Mainly, I think they should be—and biologically have to be--agents of change (1975, P.237). *Player Piano*, his first novel written as science fiction, discusses the most important issues of the Fifties: conformity, boredom and mechanization. He turned from science fiction to World War II in *Mother Night*, to an anthropological analysis of religion in *Cat's Cradle*, and to a critique of social injustice in *God Bless you, Mr. Rose Water*. *Slaughterhouse -Five* tries to bring together all that Vonnegut has been saying about the human condition and contemporary American society, and to relate those broad commentaries to the central traumatic moment of his life: the destruction of Dresden.

Vonnegut has always been highly critical of the U.S. Government and its lack of any genuine concern for the people of the country: "We Americans have guided our destinies so clumsily, with all the world watching, that we must now protect ourselves against our own government and our own industries. Not to do so would be suicide. (1981, P.71). *Breakfast of Champions*, even while being the startling pinnacle giving an overview of the important crises of the author's

spiritual evolution, affords us a panoramic view of the massive critical human problems that have resulted from the promiscuous over-development and over-employment of the machines before man has comprehended their social effects, or, learned to deal with their wastes. In his last four novels, *Jailbird*, *Deadeye Dick*, *Galapagos* and *Bluebeard*, Vonnegut turns his attention to social issues like civil liberties, preservation of earth's ecology and arms control.

One important distinction between the social novels of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the novels by writers like Vonnegut and other absurdists is the difference in the novelist's perspective regarding the relation between society and the individual. The social protest novels portray man as a victim of the ills of society. The Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath* would have remained decent people had they not been stripped of their land by the commercial banks. The social protest novelists had still faith in the masses, and they believed that the problem was with the social system and not with the individual. But, according to Vonnegut and most contemporary novelists of the absurd, although the individual is often victimised by a technologically oriented society, he can seldom attribute his vile, mean-spirited nature to that society. In other words, these writers view not man's institutions, but man himself as absurd.

Notwithstanding all his realistic concerns and many of his realistic writings, no critic would ever venture to call Vonnegut's writings realistic. Even the two novels *Jailbird* and *Bluebeard* in which he does not use the fantastic mode, rely upon improbable coincidence and circumstance that one may doubt whether the generic designation "realistic" can be applied to them at all. Commenting upon Vonnegut's work, Raymond M. Olderman writes :

The particular power of Vonnegut's work—especially in the four books which develop his distinctive voice, all published in the 1960's – is in the deceptively simple way he deals with the extraordinary nature of contemporary fact. Vonnegut is a master of getting inside a cliché and tilting it enough off centre to reveal both the horror and the misery that lies beneath the surface of the most placidly dull and ordinary human response (1972, P.191).

In terms of socio-historical background and theme, Vonnegut's novels are far more concerned with the very real here and now than they are often given credit for. History and current affairs, whether in fact or in principle, often form the basis of his fiction. Events like World War II, the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti and the Great Depression figure prominently in his fictional world. Thus, as Leonard Mustazza comments, though Vonnegut's vehicles are always contrived and often quite unrealistic, his tenors are invariably real.

Vonnegut as a Mid-Westerner:

James Lundquist believes that Vonnegut shares with Sinclair Lewis certain mid-western traits like emphasis on self-respect and a belief in the necessity of pacifism. Vonnegut's work, he says, testifies to John.T.Flanagan's description of the characteristic mid-western attitude; "... individualism, self-reliance, a practical materialism, skepticism of custom and tradition... political intransigence and isolationism explained and heretofore justified by the geographical barriers and almost antagonistic apathy of the old world" (1945, iii).

Other mid-western writers like Sherwood Anderson and Mark Twain also share this feeling. But in Vonnegut's case this feeling becomes more urgent and immediate because of his sense of an imminent apocalypse.

Peter Petro (1982) calls *The Breakfast of Champions* an anti-American satire and compares this novel with Lewis's *Babbitt*. Midland city of *Breakfast*, he says, is Zenith of Lewis's *Babbitt* brought up to date. The change from the 1920s to the 1970s is seen in the change in the protagonists, Babbitt and Hoover. Hoover is the representative of an advanced stage in the economic development of America. While Babbitt is a real estate agent who symbolises the extensive economy of an expanding, though not fully developed country, Hoover is a car-dealer, and symbolises the intensive economy of a fully developed country.

Clinton S. Burhans Jr's article, "Hemingway and Vonnegut: Diminishing Vision in a Dying Age," dwells upon the similarities and differences between the two novelists: "Their lives and careers overlap; and in their similarities and even more, in their differences, they offer particularly exciting and valuable reflectors of twentieth century thought and art, highlighted mile-markers on the road to western civilization, indicators of where we have been and where we may be going" (1975, P 174).

Hemingway, he tells us, marks the flowering of the tremendous and probably irreversible change in the direction and content of human consciousness which began in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and culminated in the middle and late nineteenth century: the secularization and internalization of reality which is the true significance of those much misused

terms, realism and naturalism. Vonnegut, too, reflects the new reality, but reflects it more specifically and with much different emphases and attitudes. For Vonnegut, as well as for Hemingway, reality has no supernatural, divine, transcendent or absolute dimensions; reality to them is entirely secular, internal and human. But unlike Hemingway, Vonnegut has no awareness of the external world as objective reality including men and shaping his consciousness. Reality, to him is entirely within man, in the mysterious process of belief and behaviour. "Everyone now knows", says the narrator of *The Sirens of Titan*, speaking from the future, "how to find the meaning of life within himself" (1971, P 7).

Both the writers agree about the futility and purposelessness of the human destiny. But Hemingway still retains a sturdy, and perhaps, essentially nineteenth century conviction that man can find or create patterns of meaning, order and value. But , to Vonnegut, the empty and meaningless universe is both source and measure of repetitive vaguely fatalistic and utterly futile state of man. "Everything that ever was, always will be", says Winston Niles Rumfoord, "and everything that ever will be, always was" (1971, P.287).

Multiple Modalities in Vonnegut:

Vonnegut is a writer who cannot be pigeon-holed to any single mode of fiction. He draws on novels of manners, confessional novels, detective novels as well as devices from soap operas and slick magazine stories of the 1950s. William Rodney Allen divides Vonnegut's literary career into three major phases: science fiction, metafiction and neo-realism. "All the three", he says, "are attempts to reflect the anxiety of our age as our paradigms of nature change" (1991,P11).

Right from the beginning of his literary career, Vonnegut started moving away from the realistic mode. His first novel *Player Piano*, was written in the science fiction strain, which was primarily a revolt against the realistic mode, or the single and simple reality fiction of the nineteenth century which held the view that the whole universe could be easily explained in terms of certain formulas. As Norman Spinard writes in the "Introduction" to his anthology, *Modern Science Fiction*:

Today, after Einstein, Freud, psychedelics, quantum mechanics, McLuhan, cybernetics, the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, systems analysis and a few other little vision-expanders, we're back where we were before the Victorians defined reality as a rigid Tinker Toy construct, we know that a literature that pretends that it is somehow more relevant to the real world... because it deals with the 'here - and now', is putting itself on. There is no fixed 'here' and no fixed 'now', only the continuous kaleidoscopic explosion of the evolving human mind in a total space-time universe that is itself revolving new realities around us faster than we can catch our breath (1971, Pp 4-5).

Vonnegut himself tells us how he started with science fiction: "There was no avoiding it, since the General Electric Company was Science fiction" (1988, .P.199). After his World War II service, he joined the General Electric as a public relations man. The G.E. was science fiction in the sense that it quickly transformed the imaginable into the real, pure science into applied technology. As a genre, science fiction does much the same thing. Since it is based on

science, its essence is adherence to fact, but at the same time, it is fiction which can ignore fact in its free play of imagination.

Although Vonnegut cannot be, in the strict sense, called a science fiction writer, he makes very liberal use of motifs from that mode as metaphors of his own humorous vision. Leslie Fiedler writes that science fiction is to Vonnegut, "not a kind of restriction, but a way of releasing his own sentimental ironic view of a meaningless universe redeemed by love" (1970,P198). The common science fiction motifs like time travels, visits by extra terrestrials, flying saucers, and glimpses into a nightmare future are used by him to make the readers more and more aware of the absurdity of man's place in the universe. "But if the science fiction metaphor offers Vonnegut his greatest freedom in demonstrating his negative vision", G.K. Wolfe writes in the *Journal of Popular Culture*, "it also offers the reader the greatest anaesthetic against this vision. In a context of fantasy, the idea of haphazard forces governing human life seems less frightening than when rounded in an identifiable historical context" (1972,P169). Lundquist too observes that science fiction serves as a mitigating element in Vonnegut's fiction as well as a means of carrying off many of the jokes that run through and structure his novels" (1977,P39).

Player Piano:

Player Piano is a negative utopia and its success, as pointed out by Thomas Hoffman, comes from "the pervasiveness with which the machine is shown to have infiltrated society and robbed people of their sense of usefulness, meaning and dignity". (1983,Pp124-135). A futuristic satire on the impact of a high tech society on man's individuality, *Player Piano* differs from the other anti

utopian models like the *Brave New World* and *1984* in that its world is simpler and more familiar to the reader. "His Americans", writes Jerome Klinkowitz, "are neither drugged nor thought-controlled, they are simply bored....People act the same, think the same, and have neither more nor less trouble with political repression than they had before" (1982, Pp35-36). Though set in the future, ten years after that staple of science fiction, the Third World War, the world described by the author is only an extension of 1952, an America drowned in a sense of plenty. We have a page-long inventory of detritus, running from air-conditioners, amplidynes, analyzers, arc-welders, batteries, belts to water-heaters, wheels, x-ray spectro-genionmeters, zymometers (Pp. 290-291). The title of the novel is suggestive of the inversion in the relationship between man and machine. A piano player is one who consciously uses a machine to produce aesthetically pleasing patterns of his own making, but a player piano is a machine that has been programmed to produce music on its own, thus making human presence redundant.

The machines determine human destiny on the basis of the computer, achievement and aptitude profiles. Schatt Stanley comments that the setting of the novel in Ilium is designed to highlight the contrast of the demeaning and unheroic role of man in a technocracy with the glory and grandeur of Homer's Troy. The height of the technological progress of the country is the computer called EPICAC which suggests that the only epic to which man can look forward in the post-Christian technological age is the one found on computer paper (1976, Pp.15-42). He also points out how in the opening sentence of the novel, the author parodies Julius Caesar's Commentary on the Gallic Wars: "Ilium, New York Is Divided Into Three Parts." In the north-west are the managers and the

engineers and civil servants and a few professional people, in the northeast, are the machines and in the south across the Iroquois River, is the area known locally as Homestead, where almost all the people live" (P.9).

Paul Proteus, the protagonist, a careerist of the corporate system of the 1950s, is the most important man in Ilium. He is the manager of Ilium Works. In a speech to his peers, he explains how the First Industrial Revolution, resulting in the production of powered machines, displaced many manual labourers in the nineteenth century, and the Second Industrial Revolution in the second half of the twentieth century, through computers took over mental work displacing millions of white collar workers. In *Player Piano* all those workers keep to the other side of the river, idling in bars and killing their time with some make-work assignments in the Reconstruction and Reclamation Corps (the Reeks and the Wrecks). They are alienated and rendered useless by machines and are ripe for revolution, waiting for the right leader to emerge to mobilise them and focus their anger. The Third Revolution has taken over abstract thought resulting in the displacement of managers. The corporate ladder is becoming narrower and narrower, dropping rung after rung, as automation proceeds at a galloping pace. Paul is, nevertheless, disappointed at the ways machines have made men obsolete. The main theme of the novel is machine-made loneliness and Paul's story is used more to highlight the problems and actions of an entire society, than that of an individual. Lawrence R. Broer (1989, P.18) observes that through Paul's plight – isolation from all that gave meaning to his life in the past: his dear and near ones, his job--the author represents the plight of the society as a whole. Since the machines do all the hiring and firing, and positions are irrevocable, these people either exist in

self-hatred and contempt for their enslavers, or they commit suicide or anesthetize themselves to the pain of uselessness and alienation with clichés of well-being provided by governmental propagandists. Paul's wife Anita, is the true corporate wife of the 1950s, scheming and manipulating, to come up in life. Her obsessive concern is to secure for her husband the topmost position in the executive cadre. Every quarrel between the husband and wife is patched up by a mechanical mutual exchange of "I love you Paul" and "I love you Anita". Paul is really frustrated in both his public and private lives, as in both spheres he has to be satisfied with the counterfeit aspect and not the real life. He is always torn between a desire to revolt against the mechanization of human life and a reluctance to part with the comforts of the very same mechanization. His two superiors, Kroner and Baer, together make the system whole. Baer embodies the knowledge and technique of industry, while Kroner personifies the faith, the near-holiness, the priceless quality of believing in the system and making others believe in it too. "...together they made an approximately whole man" (P. 38), Paul's friend, Ed Finnerty, a very efficient executive, has deserted the system and encourages Paul to follow suit. He tells Paul why he left the job: "I want to stay as close to the edge, you can see all kinds of things you can't see from the center" (P.73).

Player Piano is a warning against Mc Carthyism. "Whose side are you?" was a question relentlessly asked in the post-World War II America. Senator Joseph Mc Carthy and his followers did all they could to ferret out communists who had reportedly infiltrated every level of American government. Paul Proteus is exactly the sort of potential subversive who would have been mercilessly pursued by Mc Carthyites in the 1950s. In the novel, he is deputed by the

authorities as a double agent to infiltrate the Ghost Shirt Society. *Player Piano* is an inversion of the values of Mc Carthyism, because here the boosters and supporters of the American system are the villains, and the subversives are the heroes. Vonnegut's sympathies are with the intellectual pragmatism of the Ghost Shirt Society members. Paul Proteus rebels against mechanisation, first by trying to retreat to a farmland-life, and then by working in unison with James Lasher, the minister, and his Ghost Shirt Society, a society which has as its main objective the retrieval of America from the whites to its native blacks. Both his attempts fail, and Paul realizes how futile it is for a living man to rebel against the efficient technological system of his country. Paul had an inkling of this truth at the beginning of the novel, and this is brought out in one of the most revealing symbolic episodes of Vonnegut's novels in which we are shown how a cat wandering in the Ilium Works is caught by the machine and thrown down a chute into a freight car outside the factory, and when Paul runs desperately to save it, the cat scrambles up the side of an electrically charged fence, and with a pop and green flash, is sent sailing high into the air, "dead and smoking, but outside" (Pp. 20-21). Paul understands the message: the omnipresent machinery of the whole system is deadly to living beings, and the possibility of escaping its influence is very minimal. His fate also is going to be like the cat's, and he too will be gobbled up by the omnipresent emotional vacuum cleaner, the corporate personality.

After the failure of the revolution by the Ghost Shirt Society, Paul is recaptured by Kroner's men and subjected to a Mc Carthy-esque trial in which he confesses he was a leader of the movement. But the prosecuting attorney tells

him that he had not really gone to the other side, and his real problem was an unresolved Oedipus complex: his anger toward the state is only an extension of his anger toward his father. As the novel concludes, Paul Proteus observes that the people who went on a rampage, indiscriminately destroying the machines were now trying to re-assemble the very same machines that had once made them obsolete. James Lasher, one of the leaders of the revolution, is quite optimistic about the consequences of the revolution. Even though they were not successful, they were at least able to register their protest, and the precedent set by them will pave the way for later rebels to alter the entire American social structure. But Vonnegut himself is not so optimistic, and in the mob's attempt to re-assemble the orange drink machine, he recognises the basic character of the American psyche: "the restless erratic insight and imagination of a gadgeteer" (P.2). Paul Proteus is true to his name; he can assume any form, and after the abortive revolution we find him at the close of the novel, once more engulfed by the corporate state.

The Shah of Bratpuhr intensifies the irony of the novel by repeatedly asking the question "What are people for?" When he is taken to the supercomputer EPICAC XIV, which is the pride of the whole corporate system, he asks a riddle to the computer. His religion has taught him "a great, all-wise God will come among us one day.... And we shall know him, for he shall be able to answer the riddle...." (P. 106). Since the computer cannot answer the riddle, the Shah is now quite sure that technology is not the god that will liberate mankind.

The difference between Vonnegut and other anti-technologists like D. H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner and Norman Mailer is that he

does not share their view that man's corruption by machine is to be overcome by throwing off the trappings of civilization and retreating to a natural, organic, non-mechanical relationship with the land. Conversely, he wants man to direct his course intelligently and humanely and thus move up the evolutionary ladder and not down, questioning, though not always condemning, mechanical and material change, using our brains to determine when such change is valuable, when destructive, and to learn to act more compassionately to each other.

Schatt Stanley, in his book on Vonnegut, comments that *Player Piano*, despite being Vonnegut's most conventional novel, foreshadows his later development as a major innovative novelist. The novel's structure consists of a series of plots and subplots similar to those in Huxley's *Point Counterpoint*. Vonnegut does not tie his plots together. His plot is not strictly linear; it evolves into sub-plots and then to digressions. Peter Reed's criticism that Vonnegut's "sub-plots and digressions often weaken the central narrative" (1972, P 29), seems to ignore the fact of the author's conscious breaking of the rules of a conventionally structured novel in an attempt to find a narrative mode more conducive to his story and his temperament. James Mellard suggests that in *Player Piano*, Vonnegut's technique is "the overthrow of the accepted literary conventions of visual imagery, continuous plotting, connected characterization, uniform point of view—all the mechanical aspects of pictorialism associated with Henry James and the mimetic novel (1973, P 180).

Black Humour:

Like Ken Kesey and the other writers of the 60s, Vonnegut also is a master of black humour which can be described as the defining characteristic of

the writings of the second half of the twentieth century. Black humour, or "cosmic irony", as Lundquist calls it in his book on Vonnegut, is the way the writers of the 60s chose to confront the pervasive absurdity of man's life. He traces its origin to a state of mind that has prevailed throughout most of the 1960s and received its impetus from televised body counts, assassinations, campus riots and the drug culture. The actual roots, he says, go back to the absurdities of the cold war, the disappointments of Korea, the rise of Mc Carthyism, the Kefauver Crime Hearings, Nixon's Checkers -speech, the race-riots in Little Rock etc (1977,P 18).

Black humour as a critical term first appeared in an article by Conrad Knickerbrocker titled "Humour with a Mortal Sting" in *The New York Book Review*, 27 Sept. 1964. The term won wide currency with the publication, in 1965, of *Black Humour* edited by Bruce Jay Friedman. According to Friedman, finding humour in such grim subjects as holocaust and cosmic indifference to human concerns is a characteristic of a school of writing which included authors like Terry Southern, J.P. Donleavy, Edward Albee, Joseph Heller, John Barth and such like. But Vonnegut traces black humour further back: "Freud had already written about gallows humour which is middle European humour. It's people laughing in the middleof political helplessness...It's humour about weak, intelligent people in hopeless situations. And I have customarily written about people who felt there wasn't much they could do about their situations" (1988,Pp 90-91).

Robert Scholes (1967,P 45) argues that black humourists are fabulators and not satirists, and that the rhetoric of moral certainty so prominent in satire is

decidedly absent in black humour. Black humour doesn't reform us; it only makes us thoughtful; its primary instrument is not invective but laughter. Fabulative satire is less certain ethically, but more certain aesthetically than traditional satire. The black humourists, he says, reject the traditional satirists' faith in the efficiency of satire as a reforming instrument. They have a more subtle faith in the humanizing value of laughter. The only changes they hope to work in their readers are the admittedly evanescent changes inspired by art, which need to be continually renewed, rather than the dramatic renunciation of vice and folly postulated by traditional satire.

Black humourists share the existentialists' view of the purposelessness of universe. Charles B. Harris points to two kinds of illusions in Vonnegut's works: one fostered by nationalism and the Great American Success Illusion, dealt at large in works like *Player Piano*, and the other, the illusion of a purposeful universe, the idea that there is a plan, order, and meaning in things. Vonnegut invents a new religion called Bokononism in his novel *Cat's Cradle*. This religion is founded on the purposelessness of the universe:

In the beginning God created the earth and he looked upon it in his cosmic loneliness. And God said, "Let us make living creatures out of mud, so the mud can see what we have done." And God created every living creature that now moveth, and one was man.

Mud as man alone would speak. God learned close as mud as man sat up, looked around and spoke. Man blinked.

"What is the purpose of all this?" he asked politely.

"Everything must have a purpose?" asked God.

"Certainly", said man.

"Then I leave it to your to think of one for all this"

He went away (P. 177).

Peter Reed writes about Vonnegut's existentialist creed:

In him no identifiable meaning or purpose of existence is presumed. The workings of the cosmos remain inscrutable. Where man comes from, why he is here, where he goes to, remain unanswerables. So man continues self-consciously alone, reluctant to accept the fact of his being without knowing why, anxious to find reason, purpose, and order in the universe, and in his relationship to it, but seeing instead, only that things happen, unpredictably, pointlessly and cruelly (1972,P 206).

Like most other black humourists, Vonnegut also has his misgivings about how far our systems, metaphysical, theological or psychological, are successful in comforting us or giving purpose to our lives.

Although both the existentialists and the black humourists view the world as purposeless, they differ as to the way they confront the dilemma of the human situation. The best response to the human condition, Camus believed, is scorn. The black humourists consider laughter as a better weapon to confront the human situation. At the end of Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, Bokonon gives one of his last disciples a little bit of advice: "If I were a younger man, I would write a history of human stupidity and I would climb to the top of Mount Mc Cabe and lie down on my back with my history for a pillow; and I would take from the ground some of the blue-white poison that makes statues of man; I would make a statue of myself, lying on my back, grinning horribly and thumbing my nose at you know who" (P. 231). As Robert Scholes elucidates in his book, *The Fabulators*(1967), a

joke is a key to the fabulative impulse, especially the impulse behind black humour. To present life as a joke is to acknowledge its absurdity as well as to show how that very absurdity can be encompassed by the human desire for form.

Leonard Leff (1971, Pp29-30) points to Vonnegut's use of cosmic irony to bring out one of his major concerns, that is, how to deal with problems of identity, individuality and dehumanization, and comparing him to his contemporaries like Bernard Malamud and John Barth, he observes that Vonnegut's characters are different in that they are not so much forced into their crises by internal forces as by external ones: automation in *Player Piano*, space travel in *The Sirens of Titan*, Nazism in *Mother Night*, Science in *Cat's Cradle*, the power of money in *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater*, and Dresden bombing in *Slaughterhouse -Five*. That Vonnegut's work is structured around cosmically ironic jokes is best illustrated towards the close of the novel, *The Sirens of Titan*, in which we are told of the purpose of history. In this connection Robert Scholes comments that "this novel suggests that the joke is on us every time we attribute purpose or meaning that suits us to things which are either accidental or possessed of purpose and meaning quite different from those we would supply" (1967, P 45).

Man as Agent - Victim:

Vonnegut, like Kesey, is interested in looking into the modern man's predicament of playing his role as agent and victim. Tonny Tanner argues that man's peculiar status as "agent-victim" is Vonnegut's recurring subject, as he sees man's dreams or illusions as not only resisting but also contributing to his own victimage. Paul Proteus, the protagonist of Vonnegut's first novel, *Player Piano*, is a double agent. His superiors who form the top brass of the technocracy,

want him to infiltrate the revolutionary society called Ghost Shirt Society, and act as a double agent; the revolutionaries, on the other hand, insist that he act as a false Messiah who will send out to the simple - minded people the messages they will dictate to him. Paul is the typical American hero in that he wants to find a place beyond all plots and systems, some private space, or "border-area" - a house by the side of the road of history and society. He would like not to be used, not to be part of someone else's plan, but invariably gets disillusioned as he comes to realise how impossible a dream it is. Malachi Constant or the Faithful Messenger in *The Sirens of Titan* and Howard W. Campbell in *Mother Night* are also victims and agents. Vonnegut wrote in the "Introduction" to the 1966 edition of the novel: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (P v).

Madness at the Centre of the Human Affairs:

"To writers like John Barth, Joseph Heller, Thomas Pynchon, and Kurt Vonnegut, lunacy becomes a disturbingly literal estimate of the human situation of the latter half of the twentieth century", writes Lawrence R. Broer in *Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut* (1989, P 1). He points out that madness in contemporary fiction may belong to two varieties: the "psychic outlaw" or "sexual adventurer" described by Norman Mailer in his essay "The White Negro" and exemplified by the rebel victim con-man of J. P. Donleavy and Joseph Heller, and the walking dead of Samuel Beckett and Kurt Vonnegut.

The vicious class system engendered by the demonic world of free enterprise, the cold and ruthless efficiency of big business which is totally indifferent to human suffering, the indiscriminate destruction of natural

resources, the insanity of irresponsible mechanization, the piling up of highly, sophisticated nuclear weapons in the pursuit of peace, the mad quest for God and spirituality through material acquisitions – all these have contributed to the present-day insanity that has become the compelling metaphor of the American society of the second half of twentieth century. The distinctions between the schizoid individual and the psychotic, between sanity and insanity, have all become problematic. As John Del Vecchio's character in *The Thirteenth Valley* puts it, one "could be both sane and crazy. In these days nobody can tell which is which" (1982,P 496).

Vonnegut's first schizoid protagonist, Paul Proteus has got the idealism necessary to oppose mechanization, but lacks the will and courage to act according to his awakened conscience. His positive voice asserts, but the pessimistic voice nullifies it, creating a kind of spiritual stalemate, and in the end he becomes an "unclassified human being". *Mother Night* is an attempt to expose the capacity for cruelty and moral blindness within every human soul. *Cat's Cradle* shows a world so devastated by forms of mechanistic insanity that only a cynical religion like Bokononism can make existence tolerable. As regards *Slaughterhouse- Five*, "this is a novel somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore, where the flying saucers came from" (P 85). In *Breakfast of Champions*, Vonnegut addresses his creative craziness directly and tells us in a dialogue with himself that he is afraid of killing himself in the manner of his own mother. "Here in the cocktail lounge peering out through my leaks at a world of my own invention, I mouthed the word: schizophrenia. The sound and appearance of the word has fascinated

me for many years - I did not and do not know for certain that I have that disease - I was sick for a while though I am better now. Word of honour: I am better now" (P 210).

Metafictional Approaches:

Vonnegut's fiction, notwithstanding his realistic concerns, differs vastly from realistic writing. "Reminding the reader that fictions are provisional realities, and not bed-rock truths is the essence of Vonnegut's work: his one enduring theme and the metafictional centre for each of his novels", writes Jerome Klinkowitz in his study of the author (1982,P17). Among Vonnegut's works, *The Sirens of Titan* shows evidences of metafictional techniques like prefacing the chapters with epigraphs from imaginary books, satirizing book reviewers by quoting imaginary reviews of those imaginary books, placing the whole novel inside an editorial framework of the distant future, and insisting that all persons, places and events in the book are real. *Mother Night* extends the metafictional experiments begun in *The Sirens of Titan*, and prepares the way for the radical self-reflexive quality of *Cat's Cradle*. Metafiction draws attention to its own artificiality in order to question the implicit claims of realistic writers that they are describing a stable world that exists outside of language. Allen observes :

Vonnegut shares the post-modernist view that one can know the world only through language and that linguistic systems are perpetually prone to arbitrariness, incoherence and outright deceit and that one alters that supposedly stable "outside" world simply by describing it. These ideas are the literary equivalent

of Werner Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle in Physics, which says that it is impossible to discover a particle's position and velocity at the same time, since, the very act of observing these conditions alters them. *In Mother Night* linguistic systems range from the most idealistic to the most evil: from Campbell's romantic plays and erotic diary celebrating his marriage to Helga to the vile propaganda he turns out for the Nazis and to Eichman's memoirs, which seek to evade his responsibility for the murder of six million Jews (1991, P 52).

Vonnegut's metafictional construct, Kilgore Trout, is a science fiction writer who provides the author with a Borgesian canon of unwritten, yet eminently quotable, works addressed to immediate human needs. Klinkowitz tells us how in four of Vonnegut's works since 1965, *Cat's Cradle*, *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater*, *Slaughterhouse- Five* and *Breakfast of Champions*, Kilgore Trout is "free to do what Vonnegut himself does only by implication: to re-examine the facts of life and see how they have changed, and then help modify our perception of that provisional reality in order to make it meaningful. Reality is a description; this was the discovery average-Americans made in the 1960s, as age-old myths of personhood and national character were overturned" (1982, P 18). *In Slaughterhouse- Five*, the author himself is a character, and in his next novel, *Breakfast of Champions*, he appears talking to his fictional alter ego, Kilgore Trout, whom he finally sets free.

In Bluebeard, the metafictional technique takes an unexpected twist. In his earlier novels the author establishes his fictive existence by entering the

story directly. But in *Bluebeard* he doesn't make such an appearance. As Lawrence Broer observes, (1989,P 174)he seems to be more interested in stressing his reality, or wholeness, than his existence as a literary fragment standing in opposition to his artist hero. Instead of splitting the identity of Rabo the created ,and Vonnegut the creator, as he does in *Breakfast of Champions*, Vonnegut becomes Rabo Karabekian, the most complete and human of all Vonnegut's creations.

There is no suspension of disbelief in Vonnegut's works. Patricia Waugh, in her book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*, discusses defamiliarization in Vonnegut's novels. She presents two contrasting aspects of automation in *Player Piano*: Kroner, the high priest of industrial efficiency extolling the miracles wrought by the Second Industrial Revolution, and Ed Finnerty, the rebel commenting that drug abuse, alcoholism and suicide, are increasing in direct proportion to the growth in automation, and concludes that these contrary perceptions of reality function as a process of defamiliarization (1984,Pp 8-9). If Bertholt Brecht through his concept of '*Verfremdung*' aimed at alienation and keeping the audience away from illusions, Vonnegut's defamiliarization is aimed at satirizing the tall claims of an inhuman mechanization. "Vonnegut's relationship to the universe", Kathryn Hume writes, "is metaphorically akin to that between Menelaus and Proteus. Menelaus in his eagerness to learn what he must do in order to reach home, struggles with the ever-changing Old Man of the Sea and conquers him and wrests from him what he wants. Vonnegut is not able to exert brute force against his universe. It still twists and writhes in his grasp, as it has ever since he wrote his first book whose hero was named Paul Proteus" (1982,Pp208-224).

Film and Television Techniques:

Vonnegut's realism exploits the two dominant artistic media of the time, viz, film and television. For example, in *Slaughterhouse- Five*, Billy's time-travel is very much similar to what happens to a film-goer, who settles back at the movie-house and becomes one with the shifting time-frame of the film. Films, conventional or experimental, are physically expressed in an ongoing present tense. Unlike the grammar of language which permits a wide variation among past, present and future, a film passes before the viewer's eyes as a continual present. When the action of the film pertains to 1750, the year becomes 1750 for the audience. Even techniques like flash back and flash-forward are portrayed as taking place in a physical present, because the medium of film is such like that it can only show action as it happens and space as it is being occupied at the moment. Billy Pilgrim is presented in Chapter II as "unstuck in time", with "no control over where he is going next," "living in a constant state of stage fright", because "he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act next" (P.20). He will walk through one door in 1955, come out of another in 1941, then return through that same door and find himself in yet another place. All these acts take place in a continual present, because even though on one side of a door it can be 1955, and on the other side 1941, Billy experiences both sides as "present".

Innovative Techniques in Vonnegut's Fiction:

Right from the beginning of his novelistic career, Vonnegut develops new innovative techniques. *Player Piano* shows the author moving away from the strictly linear mode and presenting sub-plots along with the main plot. After *Player Piano*, the movement is farther and farther away from the Aristotelian

linearity and the Jamesian mode of mimesis. If *Player Piano* had at least a coherent centre, his second novel, *The Sirens of Titan*, is thematically diffused and inconsistent in terms of characterisation and tone. The action centres on two characters: Malachi Constant and Niles Rumfoord, and it takes place at a time when "men did not know that the meaning of life was within themselves... mankind, ignorant of the truths that lie within every human being looked outward - pushed ever outward" (P. 7). Rumfoord knows the future because he has already experienced it and tells Malachi: "Everything that ever has been will always be, and everything that ever will be always has been" (P. 26). Here we have the first instance of the non-linear conception of time that was to pervade Vonnegut's subsequent fiction and be so thematically important in *Slaughterhouse- Five*.

The importance of *The Sirens of Titan* is less in itself than for the seeds it contains of later techniques and thematic concerns of its author. Its satire and religious fundamentalism looks forward to the radical cultural relativism of *Cat's Cradle*. This work gives us the distinctive Vonnegut style—short paragraphs consisting of only a sentence or two, plenty of jokes and metafictional techniques. Whole sections of the book are, in fact, structured to lead to a punchline. *Mother Night* makes use of the first person point of view. The success of the novel is mainly due to Vonnegut's ability to convey a depth of emotion which he could not do in the two earlier works. The novel carries forward the stylistic features that he had tried in *The Sirens of Titan*. The author moves from science fiction to the spy-novel; he creates his own variation of this form by adding punch-lines to the traditional spy-novel with double identities, mixed loyalties, complex intrigues, suspenseful danger and hair-breadth escapes. Commenting on the importance

of *Mother Night*, William Rodney Allen writes:

In *Mother Night*, then, Vonnegut was first coming to terms with the sources of what can only be called his essential pessimism – coming to terms with not in an abstract, philosophical sense through the genre of sci-fi, but through the more direct medium of autobiographical fiction. The title comes from Goethe's *Faust*, from a passage in which Mephistopheles proclaiming that darkness gave birth to light, meaning that it is non-being that is primary, being itself is only secondary. The threat of annihilation that is inherently present in Vonnegut's novel, comes not only from man-made folly of war, but from the nature of the universe itself. For Vonnegut, as for many scientifically oriented writers of his generation such as Joseph Heller and Thomas Pynchon, the ultimate source of his pessimism is the principle of entropy--that over time, complex systems fall apart (1991, Pp48-49).

"*Cat's Cradle*", says Klinkowitz, "is a mock-apocalyptic novel satirizing such doomsday books as *On the Beach* and *Seven Days in May*, and combines Vonnegut's newly perfected form (short sentences, short paragraphs, three-line jokes) to confront the largest possible issue mankind's threatened self-destruction" (1982, P 52). Here Vonnegut gives up the representational form of the novel. The opening sentence of the novel reads: "Nothing in this book is true". In the Introduction to *Mother Night* he had written: "Lies told for the sake of artistic effect....can be, in a higher sense, the most beguiling forms of truth" (P ix). Tony Tanner describes post-modern American literature as the exploration of two conflicting views of

the universe: that it is absolutely patterned, or absolutely random, both of which seem threatening in their entirety. *Cat's Cradle*, he thinks, presents us a pattern somewhere in between utter shapelessness and absolute rigidity. The first part of the book tells us how modern science has brought mankind to the point of self-destruction, and the second part is about the author's provisional psychic escape from the impossible situation in which mankind finds itself in the post-nuclear age. Both *Mother Night* and *Cat's Cradle* deal with Vonnegut's concern with fiction as a form of play that can be constructive or destructive.

Breakfast of Champions belongs to the Dresden phase of his experience, the phase that produced *Slaughterhouse -Five*. The two novels are together considered as one book and the author compares it to a mixture of oil and water; when he had decanted *Slaughterhouse - Five*, what was left was *Breakfast of Champions*. The book contains drawings and pictures of what he sees on the "side-walk strewn with junk" of American culture (P. 6). He draws pictures of a chicken, a crow, a hamburger, a Holiday Inn, and most infamously, of his rectum. Like all Vonnegut novels, it is also an expose of the flaws of a society supposedly providing freedom and justice to all. The American landscape presented here is polluted, strip-minded and made horridly ugly with all kinds of advertisements. The novel's title itself comes from the advertisement slogan of a breakfast cereal.

A striking feature of Vonnegut's fiction in the Nineteen eighties, is the abandonment of science fiction in favour of social realism. *Jailbird* and *Deadeye Dick* are first person accounts by melancholy old men who had committed crimes in their boyhood, crimes that haunt them all through their life; both are intricately tied up with historical events of the twentieth century America, and both

present Vonnegut's alternative vision of the meaning of that history. *Jailbird* tells us that the Constitution has been consistently violated by the authorities, in the form of anti-labour hysteria epitomized by the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in the early years of the twentieth century, the anti-communist fervour witnessed in the McCarthy era, in the Watergate incident of the 1970s and many other disgraceful events. *Deadeye Dick* contains an implicit plea for arms control. It gives Vonnegut's interpretation of American history as it intertwines political concerns with fascinating, inventive accounts of the protagonist's experience. Here also we have Vonnegut's by-now standard autobiographical introduction, and the author uses the strategy of intentionally diffusing suspense by announcing that "I will explain the main symbols in the book" (P xii). Vonnegut knew well that the U.S. Government had lied to its citizens in the past and will do so again. So, he wants the Americans to be watchful against their own government.

Among his novels of the '80s, only *Galapagos* stands out as an anomaly in that it is a highly fanciful history of mankind and narrated by a ghost, covering a span of one million years. The book shows Vonnegut's familiarity with the works of scientists like Carl Sagan and Stephen Jay Gould and often reads like a textbook in evolutionary biology. But for its supernatural narrator, it clearly belongs to the scientific-realistic pole of science fiction. *Bluebeard* is a fictionalized autobiography of a writer's career. In this, Rabo Karabekian sums up his strength and weakness and the way he was treated by the public and the critics.

Slaughterhouse- Five

Until Vonnegut wrote *Slaughterhouse- Five*, he was not considered a

serious writer; his fame was rather as an author of popular pulp fiction, and as one who contributed articles to slick magazines. As he was searching for an appropriate medium to give expression to the central event of his experiences, the Dresden holocaust, a new genre of literary prose was being invented: the non-fiction novel or the new journalism. This new genre was attempting to describe reality using the techniques that traditional novelists had discarded as inadequate.

Tom Wolfe tells us how the discredited techniques were taken up by the new journalists. When he came to write for the *Herald Tribune* in the 1960s, "the most serious, ambitious and presumably talented novelists had abandoned the richest terrain of the novel: namely, society, the social tableau, manners and morals, the whole business of 'the way we alive now' in Trollope's phrase" (1973, Pp23-36). Instead of going for Tom Wolfe's way of saving the novel by transforming it into new journalism, Vonnegut preferred to accept Sukenick's suggestion to commit oneself to rebuilding the novel as an artistic vehicle adequate to post-modern times. Sukenick feels that, as the most fluid and changing of literary forms, the novel should respond to immediate experience and therefore, the greatest danger to which it is exposed is its getting frozen into a particular model. "People no longer believe in the novel as a medium that gets at the truth of their lives" (1985, P 241). Nevertheless, the fact that a particular form is inadequate in capturing the experience of one's times, doesn't necessarily mean that writers should pack up the methodology of this form and rename it "the new journalism". They should rather attempt to re-invent the novel.

Leslie Fiedler remarks that when Sukenick made the point about the death of the novel, he must have meant the death of the art novel in the Proust-Mann-Joyce tradition that was read only by an elite audience. But, in modern times, Eliot's conception of culture and modernism as a matter that concerns only an elite group capable of appreciating highly allusive, symbolic art has given way to more popular forms like the western, science fiction and pornography. "Vonnegut does belong to what we know again to be the mainstream of fiction, it is not the mainstream of High Art, however, but of myth and entertainment, a stream which was forced to flow underground over the past several decades, but has now surfaced once more"(1970,P196). Fiedler considers him as a transitional figure at a time when elitist literature by writers like T. S. Eliot was rejected or left behind, and pop which had been hitherto considered as a vice of the masses began gathering attention as a fantastic and valuable storehouse of dreams, longings and ancient myths. What Vonnegut says of Hunter S. Thompson can be applied to himself also: "He makes exciting moving collages of carefully selected junk. They must be experienced. They can't be paraphrased (1975,P 235).

Slaughterhouse- Five is a meatlocker two storeys underground where Vonnegut lived when he was taken a prisoner by the Axis powers in the Battle of the Bulge. It was in Dresden, a neutral city like Paris, mutually agreed as an enclave that won't be fortified by the Axis powers and hence considered not a legitimate target of attack by the Allies. The population of the city swelled with wounded soldiers, orphaned children and families that had fled from the Russian advance in the East. On the night of 13-14 Feb. 1945 the city was subjected to a massive air raid by the Allies, creating an intentional firestorm of cyclonic winds

that destroyed its central area and killed between 135,000 and 250,000 inhabitants nearly all of whom were non-combatants. By comparison, the German bombings of England resulted in less than 60,000 civilian deaths for the entire war. It was the largest massacre in military history, outstripping even the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that were to come later that summer. As Vonnegut emerged from his meatlocker, he saw Dresden (or did not see, because there was practically nothing to catch his eyes) in total ruin. He decided that it would form the subject of his first novel, but later realised how this holocaust was somehow beyond expression in human language. *Slaughterhouse -Five* doesn't give any description of the Dresden bombing, but in *Mother Night* Vonnegut writes about the British and American bombers trying to obliterate the city of Dresden through the meticulous and scientific creation of a firestorm:

There were no particular targets for the bombs. The hope was that they would create a lot of kindling and drive the firemen underground. And then hundreds of thousands of tiny incendiaries were scattered over the kindling like seeds on freshly turned loam. More bombs were dropped to keep the firemen in their holes, and all the little fires grew, joined one another, became one apocalyptic flame. Hey presto firestorm. It was the largest massacre in European history by the way(1971,P vii).

In *Slaughterhouse- Five*, Vonnegut at last comes to a direct confrontation with his Dresden experience, and brings together many things he was talking

about in his first five novels, not as an extended joke, but as Peter J. Reed puts it:

“as an attempt at integration, an effort to bring together all that Vonnegut has been saying about the human condition, and contemporary American society, and to relate those broad commentaries to the central traumatic, revelatory, and symbolic movement of the destruction of Dresden. The event itself, of course, is not the problem. The difficulty lies in trying to say all that the fire-raid means to one man, to each individual man, to all men collectively (1972, Pp172-173).

Considering the scientific and historical circumstances of the Dresden raid, Vonnegut himself should have died. But he lives squarely and self-consciously within the culture that enacted this unimaginable act of destruction. From his own war-time experience, he felt the need to write about what everyone else was declaring to be beyond words. How to put in words the thematics of war-time death was certainly a challenge to the author. Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* says that World

War I was such a great shock to man that the only response he found adequate to describe it in literature was a searing irony. Wilfred Owen's poem, "Dulce et Decorum Est" contrasts Cicero's martial phrase that it is "sweet and proper" to die for one's country with the grotesque, panic stricken death of soldiers in a mustard gas attack. But Vonnegut knew that searing irony would no longer be an adequate response to the war in which he fought. He had to find

a new way to convey the horror, a new form to reflect a new kind of consciousness, by altering the fundamental processes of narration. According to Rodney Allen, "more than a conventional reminiscence of war, *Slaughterhouse -Five* is an attempt to describe a new mode of perception that radically alters traditional conceptions of time and morality"(1991,P 81). Lundquist observes that this novel "functions to reveal new view points in somewhat the same way that the theory of relativity broke through the concepts of absolute space and time (1977,P 71).

Combined with the difficulty of expression of his war experience was the aesthetic issue of writing any form of fiction, because Vonnegut was writing this novel at a time when critics and literary theorists were declaring that the novel had died. Klinkowitz observes, "social commentators would argue that the boundlessness of contemporary life, and its unchecked potential for rude surprises—be they the atomic bombings in 1945, the commercialization of popular culture in the 1950s, or the rash political assassinations and societal disruptions from 1963 through 1968 -- made it impossible for novelists to present, in any fair sense, an orderly appraisal of reality" (1990,P 7). Life and our knowledge about it is too large whereas the novelist's attempt to contain it all within a few hundreds of pages is too brief and beset with lots of limitations. Besides, the theorists of language were airing the view that the novelist's claim of portraying the world around him was by itself a false claim, as words that form the most important tools used by them did not have a one to one correspondence with the things they described. Language was now looked upon as a self-contained system, describing not the world itself, but merely a series of differences among linguistic signals. "Therefore, Kurt Vonnegut's frustration to speak about Dresden", observes Klinkowitz, "was simply an extreme example of how any

novelist in the post-modern world would find his or her attempts to deal with a universally recognizable content blocked by a supposedly unbridgeable chasm between word and thing. The importance of the book lies in the success Vonnegut achieved by delivering a fully realized literary work to cross the chasm" (1990,P 7).

Klinkowitz calls *Slaughterhouse - Five* a milestone in post-modern American literature, a mode of narration that created " a radical reconnection of the historical and the imaginary, the realistic and the fantastic, the sequential and the simultaneous, the author and the text (1982,P 69). This is the book, he tells us, that held just the type of reinvention that Sukenick called for in post-modernist fiction. *Slaughterhouse - Five* by itself does not contain any message; its structure and theme are identical; no meaning exists beyond the book's own being. When the theme and structure become one, the meaning of fiction lies in the process of writing rather than in the static finished product. This process is kept alive by the reader's part in the novel's act of being: "In Vonnegut, the signs of conventionally realistic or fantastic fiction are used in unconventional ways, they become like so many referents in contemporary fiction, things in themselves" (1982,P 19).

***Slaughterhouse- Five* as a Novel of Social Protest**

An important reason why *Slaughterhouse Five* received wide acclaim in America was because it was published at the height of the conflict in Vietnam, and so it delivered its anti-war message to a most receptive audience. There is a scene in the novel in which the protagonist Billy Pilgrim stops at a traffic light in a burnt-out ghetto where a black man tries to talk with him. Vonnegut is here obviously responding to the incredible social tensions of the 1960s which saw the burning of the major portions of several American cities in race riots, the

assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King (Jr.) and Robert Kennedy, and the seemingly endless acceleration of the war in Vietnam. The passage at the end of the autobiographical, Chapter X of the novel reads: "Robert Kennedy, whose summer home is eight miles from the home I live in all year round, was shot two nights ago. He died last night"(P. 182). One of Robert Kennedy's promises in his Presidential campaign was to stop the war, and when he died, that hope seemed to die with him. For Vonnegut and for Billy, it must have seemed that Dresden was happening all over again in Vietnam.

James Lundquist remarks that the Dresden holocaust of 1945 was to Vonnegut "not simply a matter of Nazi or Allied cruelty, but many other things, too - run away technology, inflated views of human destiny, amoral science, distribution of wealth in America, the senselessness of war as a continued and never ceasing experience, the insanity in Midland city and so on" (1977,P 68). In an article in the *Saturday Review*, the eminent critic, Granville Hicks compared *Slaughterhouse- Five* with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Mysterious Stranger*: "Like Mark Twain, Vonnegut feels sadness as well as indignation when he looks at the dammed human race, yet he does not allow his deep compassion to stifle, the necessary outrage all humans must feel at the needless destruction caused by war" (1969,P 25). Dresden, like Sodom, was destroyed by an intentional firestorm. Pointing to the book's sub-title, "The Children's Crusade", Robert Scholes comments :

...the cruellest deeds are done in the best causes. It is as simple as that. The best writers of our time have been telling us with all their imaginative power that our problems are not in our institutions, but in ourselves.

Violence is not only (as Stokley Carmichael put it) "as American as an apple pie". It is as human as man. We like to hurt them in a good cause. We judge our pleasure by their pain. The thing that offends me equally in our recent Secretary of State (Dean Rusk) and his most vicious critics (in the anti-war movement) is their unshakeable certainty that they are right. A man that certain of his cause will readily send a bunch of kids off to rescue his Holy land. His rectitude will justify any crimes--Revolution, war, crusades--these are all ways of justifying human cruelty.

It may seem that I have drifted away from considering Vonnegut's book. But I haven't . This is what his book keeps whispering in its quietest voice. Be kind. Don't hurt-Death is coming for all of us-anyway, and it is better to be Lot's wife looking back through salty eyes than the Deity that destroyed those cities of the plain in order to save them (1969,P 1).

Vonnegut's refusal to take sides and his presumed quietism have been attacked by critics. Thomas Hartshorne comments that his war novel surrenders its social duty to a deterministic and even helpless response (1979,Pp17-33). Tonny Tanner also points to the quietistic impulses in *Slaughterhouse- Five*. The prayer on Billy's office wall reads: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom always to tell the difference"(P. 52). Later, the author qualifies this statement: "Among the things Billy Pilgrim could not change were the past,

the present and the future”(P. 52) Dresden has happened, is happening and will always happen. That is to say, the appropriate response to human condition is one of resigned acceptance.

Slaughterhouse- Five is a book about death, but every time someone dies, Vonnegut writes: “So it goes” “The paradox in *Slaughterhouse- Five*”, writes Rodney Allen, “is that it appears to offer acceptance and even indifference as responses to the horrors of the twentieth century, when in fact it is a moving lament over those horrors, a piercing wail of grief over millions of dead in World War II. A phrase that brings out this paradox is: “So it goes”, which is repeated over 100 times in the novel, every time someone dies, from Wild Bob to Valencia to Billy Pilgrim himself to Robert Kennedy” (1991,P 96). Charles B. Harris thinks that the main idea emerging from *Slaughterhouse -Five* seems to be that the proper response to life is one of resigned acceptance(1971,P 69). Notwithstanding all such critical remarks, to label *Slaughterhouse- Five* as a work with definite quietistic impulses would be against what Vonnegut has said in published interviews and his earlier works. Even at the beginning of *Slaughterhouse- Five* the author refers to Mary O’ Hare’s warning to him not to write anti-war novels. She tells him that it is as futile as writing an anti-glacier book.

Malashri Lal calls *Slaughterhouse-Five* “a brilliant amalgam of political criticism, reminiscence, history, humanitarian philosophy and science fiction”(1984,P195) ,and points out how Vonnegut uses science fiction to comment upon the ironies of war and the tragedy of an ordinary soldier caught in the violence of a politically aggressive world. “Very skilfully, historical data ***from that chapter of the war is interspersed with the ‘escapist’ passages of science fiction until the reader is aroused to the shock of recognition that the

anonymous 'they' of international politics can dehumanize individuals and justify the rampant destruction of civilization by deceptive propaganda" (1984,P 197). Vonnegut stresses the fact that Dresden was not militarily important, and therefore, no justification, whatsoever, for the allied bombing, seemed convincing. This is amply supported by David Irving's thoroughly researched account, *The Destruction of Dresden*:

Clearly, the political leaders of the West would be hard pressed to bargain from a position of strength when the Yalta conference opened. In the circumstances, it was natural that the Allied Governments should have turned in the final synthesis to their by-now massive bomber weapon as a means of impressing upon the Soviet Union that although sections of the western front were wavering on the German "home front", the Allied offensive was as crushing as any mounted by Soviet armour in the East (1964,P 86).

How to give expression to the Inexpressible:

As Vonnegut returned home after his war service, he thought of writing a novel about his war experiences which had left a deep and indelible impression in his mind. But when it came to the actual writing, he understood how difficult it was to write about something he knew so very well. He did not experience this difficulty when he wrote about it in a letter to his father: "I have been a prisoner of war since December 1944, when our division was cut to ribbons by Hitler's last desperate thrust through Luxemburg and Belgium....The other American Divisions on our flanks managed to pull out. We were obliged to stay and fight. Bayonets aren't much good against tanks. Our ammunition, food and medical

supplies gave out and our casualties outnumbered those who could still fight—so we gave up (as cited in Klinkowitz, 1990, P 99). The same letter describes their miserable accommodation:

“...locked up sixty men to each small unventilated, unheated box-car. There were no sanitary accommodations – floors were covered with fresh cowdung. There wasn’t room for all of us to lie down. Half slept while the other half stood. We spent several days, including Christmas Eve. The Royal Air Force bombed and strafed our unmarked train. They killed about one hundred and fifty of us...On about February 14th, the Americans came over, followed by the R. A. F; their combined labors killed 250,000 people in twenty four hours, and destroyed all of Dresden – possibly the world’s most beautiful city. But not me.

The phrase “so it goes” of the novel *Slaughterhouse -Five* is anticipated by expressions like “but not me” and “but I didn’t” in the letter. In Alex Vonnegut’s letter of 4 July 1945 to Ella Stewart Vonnegut, the Senior Kurt’s first cousin, young Kurt is described as a spell-binding story teller who was trying to narrate the inexpressible war experiences as he was being driven home from the Atterbury camp by his own kins.

To Vonnegut, writing a novel about his Dresden experience seemed almost like an obsession, as the firebombing of Dresden was the largest massacre in the history of Europe, and he, a person of European extraction, was present there on that occasion. He tells us about his early attempts to write about it: “I came home in 1945, started writing about it, and wrote about it ,and *wrote about it*, WROTE ABOUT IT... .The book is a process of twenty years of this

sort of living with Dresden and the aftermath" (1988, P 163). It was not at all easy for an American to write about it, because it was deliberately planned by the Allies to kill as many German civilians as possible, and executed with staggering efficiency. Vonnegut's attempts, after the war, to collect information about the incident were frustrated by the government saying that it was classified. So it took many years for him to understand the massiveness of the destruction on the night of February 13, 1945.

Vonnegut had read the war novels written in the post-war America and so he knew that another work by him in the same strain would only be redundant. When he visited his old war buddy, Mary O' Hare, the hostess of the house told him plainly that distortions of truth as seen in popular and successful war novels contributed only to the self-glorification of popular film heroes like John Wayne or Frank Sinatra, and would only encourage others to fight wars that should not be fought. The conclusion he draws from all this is that his duty now is to tell war stories in a totally different manner. He leaves Mary's home with a sense of mission that is equal to what he felt when he left Dresden in 1945. If in 1945 his dedication was to content, now it was to form and structure. The author's motive is not to reduce the unparalleled catastrophe to the rational limits of language, thereby diminishing its magnitude and conveying the false belief that its reality is, after all, manageable. To do so would have amounted to deluding the readers into thinking that the Children's Crusade of World War II was really not so bad after all and that wars of the future will also be as manageable as that. Klinkowitz comments that "the impetus to his novel's First Chapter is his inability to memorise the central event, that is the Dresden massacre, and from this inability follows his treatment of his struggle to write about the war as he

encounters and rejects his culture's preferred ways of speaking about the unspeakable. By not portraying the event itself, the author is able to recast it not as a describable entity, but as an unanswerable question: What do you say about a massacre" (1990, P 48). As Vonnegut himself writes:

As a trafficker in climaxes and thrills and characterization and wonderful dialogue and suspense and confrontations, I had outlined the Dresden story many times. The best outline I ever made, or any way the prettiest one, was on the back of a roll of wall paper. I used my daughter's crayons, a different colour for each main character. One end of the wall paper was the beginning of the story and the other end was the end, and then there was all that middle part, which was the middle. And the blue line met the red line and then the yellow line, and the yellow line stopped because the character represented by the yellow line was dead. And so on. The destruction of Dresden was represented by a vertical band of orange cross-hatching, and all the lines that were still alive passed through it, came out of the other side" (Pp. 4-5).

Vonnegut's difficulty in finding an appropriate response to his Dresden experience is paralleled by Billy's struggle on a more familiar level. Billy's aged mother living in an old-age home is suffering from pneumonia. The dutiful son sits by his mother's bedside, nursing her, ready and anxious to attend to her needs. She has one question, only six words long, but the author takes one full page to bring the question out of her mouth. Almost all of her remaining energy

and most of Billy's and the reader's patience to listen are spent before the question comes out: "How...?" She can't go further. The son who is very eager to answer the question, prompts his mother to complete the question. "How, what mother?", he asks. Vonnegut here gives us a description of their inability to communicate: the mother's difficulty to complete the question and the son's eagerness to answer the question he has not yet got. Finally, after intense physical labour that taxes her entire body, the question comes out. "How did I get so old"? (P. 38). Billy has no answer to this question, nor has the reader, but their inability cannot discredit the query or lessen the responsibility to respond. This question can make the reader feel the same emptiness that Vonnegut felt when confronted with his Dresden experience. "This narrative strategy", comments Klinkowitz, "thus defines an absence without having to fill it in with all the considerations that would make it an occupied site – and therefore not an absence any more. Silence is thereby given a voice beyond the physical nature of human articulation" (1990, P 50). Vonnegut's inability to respond to the Dresden massacre and Billy's inability to answer his dying mother's question both form what philosophers call, a double proof: explaining an abstract metaphysical principle by making reference to an equivalent condition in the natural world.

Deviation from the Traditional Form:

Vonnegut didn't want to write in the traditional manner because he was quite sure that the characters' lives, like those of real people, never proceed in a single direction. One makes his backward journey through memory and forward journey through anticipation. Vonnegut's own life, as well as Billy Pilgrim's, is characterised by an obsessive return to the past. He cannot help looking back in the same way as Lot's wife, who was turned to a pillar of salt. She stands for one who courts death for one's love of the past. To get to the heart of

the Dresden story, Vonnegut felt, he had to set aside the writer's bag of chronological tricks – suspense, confrontations, climaxes – and proceed by a different logic toward the future of the novel form. Thus, he speaks of the climax of the novel in the very first paragraph: the stealing of a pot by Edgar Derby. The readers learn early in the novel, that Billy, the protagonist, is going to be kidnapped to the planet, Tralfamadore, in 1967 where he would be learning about the Tralfamadorian view of the universe. Again, the reader learns that Billy is going to be shot to death on February 13, 1976 by Paul Lazarro, a paranoid sadist who had been his one-time co-prisoner of war and also that the universe is going to be blown up by the Tralfamadoreans in the course of one of their experiments with a new kind of rocket fuel. Thus, the narrative progresses not along a straight line, but more like an ascending, widening spiral. Vonnegut also uses the usual technique of science fiction writers: pushing the reader's perceptual horizon, as far as he can, toward infinity, toward the union of all time and all space where there is no suspense, but only mystery. This cosmic, non-linear narrative is created by using fragments from all sorts of traditional narrative forms. Rodney Allen compares it to a bird's nest which is very much different from a sum of its parts. As Giannone observes, "Graffiti, war memos, anecdotes, jokes, songs, light operatic and liturgical-raw statistics, assorted tableaux flash before the reader's eye"(1977, P. 84).

Moving away from the traditional realistic conventions of narrative order and character presentation, Vonnegut uses other means: haunting verbal repetition, distilled recurrent images, key definitions that pull the narrative sequences together in an almost subliminal way. The Russian prisoners surrounding the British have pale faces "like radium dials"(P 78); the motif is

also attached to the face of young Billy's father's watch (P 77). The prisoner's train and the party tent at one of Billy's post-war family celebrations are painted with orange and black stripes.

The Tralfamadorian Concept of the Novel:

The reinvention of the novel's form is attempted by Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse- Five* using what he calls the Tralfamadorian literary theory. Tralfamadore which is an anagram of 'OR FATAL DREAM', is an imaginary planet introduced by the author for the first time in *The Sirens of Titan*. In that novel, Winston Niles Rumfoord possessed the Tralfamadorian ability to view time simultaneously. But, yet he remained "a surprisingly parochial Earthling at heart" (P 273). In *Slaughterhouse- Five*, Billy, on the other hand, has learned his Tralfamadorian lessons properly, and has, so, become completely resigned to the inevitability of events. On the night of his daughter's wedding, Billy is kidnapped to Tralfamadore in a flying saucer, and later in a time warp. He learns from the Tralfamdorians that when a person dies, he only appears to die. He is still very much alive in the past, so it is very silly for people to cry at his funeral. All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist. Although the Christian view holds that after one's death the soul proceeds forward in time to heaven or hell, the Tralfamadorians teach him that the soul, after one's death, proceeds backward in time, back into life. Twenty years after the publication of *Slaughter house- Five*, theoretical physicists like Stephen F. Hawking have become more convinced that there is no reason why under some circumstances the arrow of time might not point from future to past rather than from past to future. If such a view can be accepted, then Vonnegut's famous description of a backwards movie in which war-planes suck up bombs into

themselves from the ground and fly backwards to bases, where soldiers unload the bombs and ship them back to the factories where they are disassembled might well be more than a wistful fantasy of a peaceful world.

Lawrence R. Broer points out that the Tralfamadorian pessimism is often confused with the author's own thinking. He substantiates his argument by quoting from Vonnegut's address at Benington College in 1970: "I thought scientists were going to find out exactly how everything worked and then make it work better. I fully expected that by the time I was twenty one, some scientists, may be my brother, would have taken a color photograph of God Almighty and sold it to Popular Mechanics magazine. What actually happened when I was twenty one, was that we dropped scientific truth on Hiroshima" (1975, P 161).

The literary consequence of the Tralfamadorian conception of time is the Tralfamadorian novel, which consists of "brief clumps of symbols read simultaneously" (P 76). Unlike an ordinary novel on earth, the Tralfamadorian novel is to be read simultaneously. There is a scene in which Billy shares a hospital room with Eliot Rosewater, a character from Vonnegut's previous novel. Eliot quotes from the novels of Kilgore Trout explaining how once a classic like *The Brothers Karamazov* seemed to explain life, and how such works fail at present in the face of the horrors of modern life. People need other imaginative possibilities to help them. Vonnegut thinks that science fiction can help men in reinventing themselves and their universe because imagination can be anti-illusion as well as illusion, a mode of inquiry. As Vonnegut tells of Billy and Rosewater: "They had both found life meaningless, partly because of what they had seen in war... So they were trying to reinvent themselves and their universe. Science fiction was a big help" (P 87). *Slaughterhouse -Five* can be called an anti-illusionist science fiction. In a Tralfamadorian novel, we are told, there

is not any particular relationship between the messages except that the author has chosen them carefully so that when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful, surprising and deep. "There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvellous moments seen at one time"(P.76).

According to Klinkowitz, it is with this kind of a concentrated image of life that Vonnegut is trying to confront the historical horror which formed the basis of the experience he wanted to put in his book. He knows well that direct mimetic devices of chronology, suspense and a conclusive moral won't be of any help in a world where behaviour has outstripped all measures of the nineteenth century order and realism. "He has to view war as the great destructive moment shaping the emptiness and psychic disorder of the times by reinventing the novel and its methods of order and reference so that it can remain, in fact, a form of realism, true to contemporary life (Klinkowitz,1982,P 68). The reader of a conventional novel who is used to a sequence of events may soon feel disappointed with a novel like *Slaughterhouse -Five*. The novel, so to say, jumps about in a hopeless confusion of time and space, and demands of the reader, different standards and suspended judgements. In a conventional novel, the reader gets a sense of accumulation of things or events proportionate to the number of chapters read. But *Slaughterhouse -Five* does not offer any such accumulated sense till the end. When its process of being has ceased, the novel suddenly takes on its meaning.

"The Tralfamadorian structure", writes Klinkowitz, "sanctifies the creative resources of the human imagination as a constructive force, capable of

recovery in horror, developing a certain childlike humanism, selecting from chaos those necessary moments in time in which it is best to dwell" (1982,P.69). Rodney Allen considers the Tralfamadorian experience as Vonnegut's attempt to deal with the problem of mortality through writing fiction:

Billy's journey to Tralfamadore, then, is more of a metaphor than a literal description of events. This is only a way for Vonnegut to describe the growth of his own imagination out of the Christian linear vision of time to the cosmic perspective of time as the fourth dimension. If *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a combination of the traditional narrative and the Tralfamadorian novel, it is also a synthesis of Christian and Tralfamadorian morals: the reader is not so much urged to choose the latter over the former as to superimpose the two (1991,P 95).

Klinkowitz concludes that Billy's time-space travel to Tralfamadore is a mode of escape from the sheer horror of life he experienced in Dresden during World War II. William E. H. Meyer holds a different view about the Tralfamadorian experience: "The Tralfamadorians introduced into the novel are simply the radicalization of our evolving American/Emersonian transparent eye-balls who see all. All in all, Vonnegut is trying to nudge us toward a radically American anti-verbal literature wherein there is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral no causes, no effects" (1988,P 98).

The Tralfamadorian or the near-Tralfamadorian structure of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is apparent: chapters divided into short sections which can be taken for clumps. The time-tripping both by Billy and the narrator produces an effect somewhat similar to the one achieved in a Tralfamadorian novel, that is, to see

many moments all at once. Another purpose served by the time-tripping is to eliminate suspense. We know far in advance, about the incident of Billy's assassination before it actually takes place; again, incidents like the execution of Derby which forms the climax of the novel come to us well before their incidence in the novel. The conclusion that the author makes after examining the causes and effects of the Dresden massacre is that there indeed is no moral, only the "Poo-tee-weet" of the bird call that Billy hears as he emerges from *Slaughterhouse -Five* to discover that the war in Europe has ended and he wanders out into the shady streets of Springtime Dresden. The Tralfamadorian structure enables the author to embody a new reality which had been his major obsession ever since his Dresden days.

James Lundquist observes that Vonnegut's methods are well-suited to the major changes in the conception of physical reality in contemporary science. Jerry H. Bryant, commenting on the relationship between twentieth century Physics and recent fiction says: "Change, ambiguity and subjectivity (in a sense, these are synonymous) thus become ways of defining human reality" (1970, P.22). Vonnegut, however overcomes this frustration with his Tralfamadorian scheme which helps him in solving problems like change, ambiguity and subjectivity involved in objectifying the events and the involvement of Billy and the author in them. Lundquist too notes that the paradoxical conception of Billy that Vonnegut develops, more or less, agrees with Bertrand Russel's view that matter is an event and not something that has a definite entity in time and space: "An event does not persist and move, like the traditional piece of matter, it merely exists for a little moment, then ceases. A piece of matter will thus be resolved into a series of events... The whole series of these events make up the whole

history of the particle, and the particle is regarded as its history, not some metaphysical entity to which things happen" (1925, P. 209). Billy seems to be an entity to which things happen: he participates in the Battle of the Bulge, is captured by the Germans along with Roland Weary, survives the Dresden massacre, marries; he is the only survivor of a plane crash, is kidnapped into the imaginary planet, Tralfamadore, appears on crackpot talk-shows and is finally shot down in Chicago. But his constant movements back and forth in time make him his own history. It is as if he is an electron. "And this gives his novel", comments Lundquist, "an atomic structure. Billy whirls around the central fact of Dresden, the planes of his orbit constantly intersecting" (1977, P 74).

Vonnegut's characters, from Paul Proteus (whose very name is suggestive), onwards, can be seen as aspects of a protean reality. With *Slaughterhouse -Five*, he develops a way of fully representing the context of that reality. "Vonnegut's reluctance to depict well-developed characters and to supply them with conventional motives for their actions serves as a conscious burlesque of the whole concept of realism in the novel", writes Charles B. Harris in his study of the contemporary novel of the absurd (1971, P. 74). But, with *Slaughterhouse -Five*, the burlesque is diminished because the author has come to grips with the concept of realism or reality.

In his experiments in fiction-writing Vonnegut differs from his younger colleagues in that he doesn't make use of radically combative methods to distance himself from traditional fiction; his innovative techniques are drawn from common enough sources with the result that his novel seems more like a part of life than an obvious revolt against it. At the same time Vonnegut frankly admits of similarities of form between himself and Donald Barthelme and Ronald Sukenick:

Well, I suppose we're all trying -- to-One thing we used to talk about-- when I was out in Iowa (teaching at the University of Iowa writers' workshop) was that the limiting factor is the reader. No other art requires the audience to be a performer. You have to count on the reader's being a good performer, and you may write music which he absolutely can't perform - in which case it's a bust. Those writers you mentioned and myself are teaching an audience how to play this kind of music in their heads. It's a learning process, and *The New Yorker* has been a very good institution of the sort needed. They have a captive audience and they come out every week, and people finally catch on to Barthelme, for influence, and are able to perform that sort of thing in their heads and enjoy it. I think the same is true of S.J. Perelman: I do not think that Perelman would be appreciated if suddenly his collected works were to be published now to be seen for the first time. It would be gibberish. A learning process is required to appreciate Perelman, although it is very easy to do once you learn how to do it. Yeah, I think the readers are coming along; that's a problem; I think writers have tried to do it always and have failed always because there's been no audience for what they've done; nobody's performed their music" (1974, Pp.203-204).

At the opening section of the novel, the author elaborates on the various questions that got in his way as he sat down to write a novel about what he thought he knew so very well. Why was Dresden, a neutral city, decimated by

bombing? Why did the Americans and the British do all they could to cover up the facts about the raid? What does the Dresden holocaust imply about American and British civilization? And, most importantly, why was his life always pointed toward what he saw as he emerged from the meatlocker on that fateful night of Feb. 13, 1945? All these questions made his mind a battleground of conflicts. Lundquist (1977, P. 75), compares Vonnegut's conflict to the conflict between H.G. Wells and Henry James as to the genre of novel itself. While James felt that the novel should be mimetic, realistic and should relate human experience as accurately as possible through detailed characterization and careful construction, Wells believed that social pronouncements and ideas are more important and that the form should be subordinate to both. Wells's influence is clearly perceptible in the science fiction form and James's influence in the mainstream of art-novel. Vonnegut, Lundquist feels, is caught somewhere in the middle of the debate. His earlier novels, are mainly novels of character written to a thesis, an approach that leads to the direct statement of a moral in *Mother Night*, but in *Slaughter house- Five*, he begins neither with characters nor with ideas, but with his own experience. Here, two structural possibilities strike him. The first is suggested in the song:

"My name is Yon Yonson,

I work in Wisconsin

I work in a lumbermill there

The people I meet when I walk down the street

They say, "What's your name?"

And I say,

"My name is Yon Yonson,

I work in Wisconsin..." (Pp. 2-3).

When people ask him what he is working on, Vonnegut says that he has been, for years, telling them the same thing - a book about Dresden. This repetitive song suggests also the tendency of many people to return to a central point in their lives in reply to the question of identity: "What's your name?"

As a novelist, Vonnegut knows that repetition won't help him in his writing. Therefore, he considers another possibility: making an outline of the story on a wall-paper using his daughter's crayons, a different colour for each character. But, this too, is not successful because some of the lines come to a sudden stop when the characters represented by them die. So, Vonnegut comes up with a structure that includes both the Yon Yonson story and the wall paper outline. It is as if he rolls the wall paper into a tube so that all the characters and incidents are closely layered, and are, in effect, one unit, and the reader has to look at them from the side. The tube then becomes a telescope through which the reader looks into the fourth dimension, or at least, into another dimension of the novel. "The story goes around and around, yet it still leads somewhere, and yet the end is very close to the beginning" (Lundquist, 1977, P.77).

The Author-Reader and Writing-Reading Relationship Reinvented:

Slaughterhouse-Five is not only an attempt to bridge "the increasing gap between the horrors of life in the twentieth century and our imaginative ability to comprehend their full actuality", it also tries to rework the relationship between writing and reading and the author and the reader. The second half of the twentieth century felt the need for a new form to reflect the new consciousness conveying the horrors of war and the cataclysmic changes taking place in America and other different parts of the world. Alongside this feeling,

was the felt need for changes in men's reading habits. These changes were being initiated by the information revolution through television and other forms of highly technologized mass communication systems. This meant that the writer was not merely to be concerned with the form and content of his writing, but also with the relationship between his writing and the reader's response to whatever he wrote.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five* Vonnegut doesn't tell the story in an aesthetically distanced manner, but in a voice clearly identified as his own. He is not merely a part of a series of events, which gives him a definite or specific role, but he is a living record of the book taking shape before him as well as the readers. The author who is quite conscious of the reader's expectations, is very careful in thwarting them. The author and the reader must work together to get the story down on paper, and thus make their way through the 186 pages of the book. The writer is the subject of his writing just as the reader is a self-conscious participant in the act of putting the book together and forcing its completion. The autobiographical notes in the book are very similar to the experiences of the reader's own life, because most of Vonnegut's experiences appear to be a familiar story of the American middle class: education, some odd jobs, an abortive career in one of the big post-war corporations, and eventually, a more rewarding profession surrounded by the paraphernalia of family life. Vonnegut appears on the first page of the book as the man in the process of writing. The terms of the partnership between the author, character and reader are simple: the author himself is a common middle class American trying to make an honest living. Billy Pilgrim, too, is presented as an unexceptional character with no trait of heroism in him. The readers are expected to know nothing more

than the average American like Kurt Vonnegut or Billy Pilgrim. As the author and Billy perform the tasks assigned to them as writer and soldier, the reader is expected to fulfill the task assigned to himself: to see the author struggling with Dresden and see Billy caught speechless at his mother's bedside, and to come to grips with the fact that all men and women being born of mortal parents are susceptible to such trauma.

Autobiographical Fiction:

Slaughterhouse-Five is as much a book about writing a novel, as it is an account of Billy Pilgrim and Dresden. In fact, from the 1966 "Introduction" to the revised version of *Mother Night* onwards, Vonnegut's fiction started turning more and more autobiographical. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, he does not put his personal details in any "Preface" or "Introduction", but instead, makes himself a real-life character. Klinkowitz considers this as the most arresting feature of the novel: the author's presence as the narrative's central character at the opening and close of the novel, and three times in the course of action from Chapters II to IX of the novel. The beginning of the novel presents the difficulties the author experienced in his pilgrimage through time and space in writing the novel. By detailing his frustrations, Vonnegut is trying to conceptualize his own life, the way he later does Billy's, in terms of the Tralfamadorian time theory. The structure of the chapter about writing the novel prefigures the structure of the novel itself. As the author lists these difficulties:

... other interests intrude, moving himself and his readers back and forth in time and space, with the concerns of one era impinging on the interests of another, until the entire personal narrative begins to blur together into one

continuous present in which the writer, in the living presence of the reader, draws on several eras of the past to present a novel that has not yet been written (and of course not yet read either (Klinkowitz, 1990, P.28).

The author wants to keep himself inside his writing so that he can prevent traditional styles and structures of false feeling and false writing from intruding upon the silence and immensity of his central experience, that is, the Dresden fire bombing, from over-simplifying the unspeakable and unimaginable. The First Chapter comes to us not in the form of a "Preface", where the author makes some cursory or routine statements about the book, but as an essential part of the text. Both the autobiographical Chapters and X remind the reader that *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a book about writing and that it is now being written. Moreover, there are occasional references to the author in the other chapters which help to establish both the presence of his own narrative voice and the means by which he displaces his story into fantasy. Thus, the relation between himself and the chief character Billy Pilgrim is not merely autobiographical, that is to say, Billy's story is not Vonnegut's but rather the story of his imagination.

Authorial intrusion is not a distinct invention or contribution by Vonnegut. Even at the early stages of the development of the novel, writers like Henry Fielding and Lawrence Sterne had tried this method, The omniscient narrator in *Joseph Andrews* tells the reader, of his own manipulations of the plot, and *Tristram Shandy* gives us proofs of the author's personality and whimsical fantasies at the centre of its action. But Fielding, even while breaking the illusion that the reader is participating in real life, maintains the pretense that

the narrator is telling a true story, and Sterne, though he relies on a readerly consensus that accepts his role in his writing, adopts a mode that allows him to present something the literary artist has always presented: an imitation of an action. *Slaughterhouse-Five*, however, begins and ends not with an imitation of an action, but with real life itself: it begins with the author's recounting of all his struggles in the writing of the novel and ends on the day after Senator Robert Kennedy, another historically verifiable person, was shot to death in public spotlight. Vonnegut was writing the last pages of *Slaughterhouse -Five* when he heard of the report of Kennedy's death. The reader can recall what they had been doing right at that moment. Thus a shared experience becomes part of the literary work.

The author, in a few episodes, presents himself, as one who wants to write about Dresden. The first episode of "Chapter I" is about his trip to Dresden where he meets his old war buddy Bernard O'Hare and they together meet Gerhard Muller who tells them his story. The episode culminates in the author's receiving Muller's Christmas greeting card. The second episode presents Vonnegut's search for other infinitely circular texts and this takes him back to 1945, and then in a few words, he shuffles back to the present, as he says what he has been doing all this time: "working on... a book about Dresden" (P.3) With almost the very same words, "working on my famous Dresden book" (P.3) the third episode leaps forward to 1964 explaining the author's late night long distance phone calls and his stinking himself with alcoholic drinks. In the fourth episode, we have the author attempting to outline his story's action on a roll of wall paper. The four episodes are linked together not by chronology or by geographical space, but by the singular presence of Kurt Vonnegut himself. As

the first four episodes review the past, both the author and the reader have come to realize one thing: conventional methods of story telling like action, character, suspense and even irony, are ineffective in telling anything meaningful about Dresden.

As for the reader, what can be done is to read. The readers find the author telling all they need to know about his own past, both in war and in the struggles of writing that have engaged him for over two decades. They have also seen him play with structures, structures of his war novel and structures of his life. The author himself then turns into a reader rummaging through the family library to read about the real Children's Crusade. He takes notes from what he reads. Vonnegut tells us how he was influenced by the French writer Louis Ferdinand Celine whose war novels convinced him that death was too common and predictable to lose oneself in grief every time it occurred, and that a phrase like "so it goes" would be the most appropriate response to it. Another book the author reads is a Gideon Bible, something that is very common in any hotel or motel in America. In the passage describing the devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah, what catches his attention is not the destruction of the cities, but the fate of wife "because it was so human" (P 19). Vonnegut also risks the fate of looking back at his own past. But as pillar of salt or not, he has survived both the event and its re-telling.

What Vonnegut confronts at the end of the book is himself. He works along with Bernard O'Hare (from "Chapter I") and Billy Pilgrim (from Chapters II-IX) to exhume the dead and cremate them. In the "Introduction" to a 1976 edition of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut writes about the ultimate irony of the

Dresden story. The irony is not simply that after the holocaust Edgar Derby got executed for the crime of stealing a tea-pot, but that there has been only one beneficiary to the entire Dresden story. According to the military historians, the Dresden attack did not destroy German resources significantly or disrupt their communications or sap their will to fight, nor did it in any way aid the Russian advance. It didn't also help the American army's drive to the East, or improve the lot of the inmates of Nazi concentration camps, or save any British, American or Russian life:

The Dresden atrocity, tremendously expensive and meticulously planned, was so meaningless, finally, that only one person on the entire planet got any benefit from it. I am that person. I wrote this book which earned lots of money for me and made my reputation, such as it is. One way or another, I got two or three dollars for every person killed. Some business I'm in" (1976,unpaginated).

According to Klinkowitz, "the formal achievement of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is the restructuring of the reading experience" (1990, P.86). Its briefness and non-chronological order make it non-additive and non-progressive in its impact, which turns out to be more juxtapositional. As such, *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a system rather than an entity, a combination of differences rather than identities, and this formal achievement suits the special nature of Vonnegut's theme: the struggle to say something about a massacre can only be frustrating because there is nothing sensible to speak of a massacre. That is to say, what cannot be said fills the central void and constitutes the novel's formal parts.

Articulating the inability to articulate forms an eloquent experience to the author and his central character Billy.

Just as Kesey felt after writing *Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes A Great Notion*, Vonnegut also felt that he had completed an important task when he had finished writing *Slaughterhouse-Five*:

Well, I felt after I finished *Slaughterhouse-Five* that I didn't have to write at all any more if I didn't want to. It was the end of some sort of career... So I had a shutting off feeling, you know, that I had done what I was supposed to do and everything was OK. And that was the end of it. I could figure out my missions for myself after that" (1988, P.107).

This contented feeling proves that Vonnegut has accomplished the new task of the novelist prescribed by Sukenick in his article "Innovative Fiction/Innovative Criteria":

The great advantage of fiction over history, journalism, or any other supposedly "factual" kind of writing is that it is an expressive medium. It transmits feeling, energy, excitement. Television can give us the news, but fiction can best express our response to the news. No other medium-- especially not film, can so well deal with our strongest and often most intimate response to the large and small facts of our daily lives. No other medium, in other words, can so well keep track of the reality of our experience. But to do this successfully the novel must

continually reinvent itself to remain in touch with the texture of our lives. It must make maximum expressive use of all elements of the printed page, including the relation of print to blank space. It must break through the literary formulas when necessary, while at the same time, preserving what is essential to fiction: incident, feeling, power, scope and the sense of consciousness struggling with circumstance (1985, P 242)

CONCLUSION

The question as to whether the novel is still a living form or not has assumed serious proportions ever since T. S. Eliot remarked in the 1950s that the novel came to an end with Flaubert and James. Whether the novel died with Flaubert and James, or with Joyce and Proust, we are not sure. What we are quite certain about is that, with the advent of the mass media like cinema and television, the novel's popularity and importance have gone down considerably. Writing in 1965, Alberto Moravia commented: "When I think of the number of literary genres which seemed likely to live for ever and yet have died out, I cannot help wondering whether the novel, the last of the series, is also doomed to the same fate" (1965, P. 64). Cyril Connolly in *The Unquiet Grave* says almost harshly that "Flaubert Henry James, Proust, Joyce and Woolf have finished off the novel. Now all will have to be reinvented as from the beginning" (1961, P 21). According to George Steiner, traditional novel is in a vanishing phase of history:

Following on the epic and verse drama, the novel has been the third principal genre of Western literature. It expressed and, in past shaped, the habits and feelings and language of the western bourgeoisie from Richardson to Thomas Mann. In it the dreams and nightmares of the mercantile ethic of middle class privacy and of the monetary sexual conflicts and delights of the industrial society have their monument. With the decline of these ideals and habits into a phase of crisis and partial rout the genre is losing much of its vital bearing (1967, Pp 421-22).

The death of the novel was a much-discussed issue of the 1970s. Leslie Fiedler remarked that it is the art-novel or the avant-garde novel which is in the process of being abandoned or becoming extinct. The novel, he says, is the first successful form of Pop-Art which is different from both the traditional High Literary Art (which is an art dependent on limited literacy) and from Folk Literary Art (which is an art dependent on mass illiteracy). Fiedler thinks that it is not related either to the epic on the one hand, or to the folk ballad on the other, in fact to nothing which preceded it, but perhaps only to much which followed: the comic strip, the comic book, cinema and television. Like these latter, it is an art form which tends to make the classic distinction between literacy and illiteracy meaningless--or at least challenges it in ways disconcerting to traditional humanists, for it is a product of the Industrial Revolution, and of the political shifts in power which have replaced aristocratic or class-structured societies by one version or another of the mass society (1974, P.189).

Unlike the other art forms, novel which is a product of the Industrial Revolution, has been right from the beginning linked to the development of modern technology and modern means of mass distribution. The printing press was the first mass production device of the modern society, and novel was the first literary form invented to be reproduced by it. It was not a literary form which came to be thus reproduced after having been invented for oral transmission or recorded in painfully copied manuscripts. Its history has changed with the invention of linotyping, stereotyping and other means of reproducing texts and illustrations more cheaply and quickly. When cheap paper was made available, "penny novels" were printed. Again, the stage coaches with their dark interiors and jolting motion made reading difficult, if not impossible, but the train

provided exactly the setting, and airplane has perfected it with focussed reading lights etc. for reading books intended to lighten the tedium of travel.

Fiedler explains how novel has become in post-capitalist societies, an important commodity sold in the market places, and so has become disconcertingly independent of its medium. The machine is the shaman of our culture and "the machine produced commodity, novel, is therefore, dream literature, mythic literature, as surely as any tale told over the tribal fire. Its success, too, depends on the degree to which it responds to the shared dreams" (1974, P 191). All the attempts to raise the novel to the level of High Arts, Fiedler says, were misdirected. These attempts began with Flaubert and reached a climax in writers like Joyce, Mann and Proust. Even today, art-novels continue to be read and relished, but only by an elite audience and the writing of such books "is more of an act of desperation or a bit of charming eccentricity" (1974, P 193).

Robert Scholes argues that even the realistic faith is at present being questioned. In Joyce, he says, we have a multiplicity of styles, but this is a function of his awareness of the problem of notation. He knew that each aspect of reality needed a different language. But the very fact that Joyce persisted in the proliferation of codes in *Ulysses* indicates that he still subscribed to the realistic faith and was only resorting to extreme measures to preserve it. What we can no longer accept is precisely this Joycean faith in the transcribability of things. "It is because reality cannot be recorded, that realism is dead. All writing, all composition, is construction. We do not imitate the world, we construct versions of it. There is no mimesis, only poesis" (1975, P.7).

The failure of realism as a faith, Scholes says, is balanced by another failure, that is, the failure of fantasy. If we must acknowledge that reality inevitably eludes our human languages, we must also admit that these languages can never conduct the human imagination to a point beyond this reality:

If we cannot reach it, neither can we escape it. And for the same reason because we are in it. All fiction contributes to cognition, then, by providing us with models, that reveal the nature of reality by their very failure to coincide with it. Though this distortion may be greater or lesser, there is always distortion. If there were not, there would only be reality and us writing it as the fish is in the sea and the sea in the fish" (1975, P 10).

Scholes and Kellogg point out how literary realism is getting modernised under pressure from modern culture. The writer pursued the reality of the individual experience deeper and deeper into the subconscious or the unconscious and consequently, the common perceptual world recedes and the concept of the unique person dissolves, and the writer finds himself in a region of myths, dreams, symbols and archetypes that demand 'fictional' rather than 'empirical' modes for their expression. The mimetic impulse towards the characterization of the inner life dissolves inevitably into mythic and expressionistic patterns upon reaching the citadel of the psyche. On the other hand, if the writer persists in seeking to do justice to the common phenomenal world he finds himself today in competition with new media such as tape and motion pictures, which can claim to do this more effectively.

Scholes further takes up this argument in *The Fabulators*, as he writes:

The cinema gives the *coup-de-grace* to a dying realism in written fiction. Realism purports--has always purported--to subordinate the words themselves to their referents, to the things words point to. Realism exalts life and diminishes art, exalts things and diminishes words. But when it comes to representing things, one picture is worth a thousand words and one motion picture is worth a million. In the face of competition from cinema, fiction must abandon its attempt to represent reality and rely more on the power of words to stimulate the imagination (1967, P 7).

David Lodge tells us that the camera in human hands is no more neutral than language, and therefore the camera or the film cannot render literary realism redundant. The situation of the novelist, according to him, is that of a man standing at crossroads. Although realistic novels still continue to be written even today, "the pressure of scepticism on the aesthetic and epistemological premises of literary realism is now so intense that many novelists, instead of marching confidently straight ahead, are at least considering the two routes that branch off in opposite directions from the crossroads. One of these routes leads to the non-fiction novel and the other to what Mr. Scholes calls fabulation (1971, P.19).

Bernard Bergonzi speaks of three separate areas in which nineteenth century realism depended for its relative stability: the idea of reality, the nature of the fictional form and the kind of relationship that might predictably exist between them. He illustrates his point by citing a passage from Anthony Trollope's

autobiography in which he quotes some laudatory remarks from Nathaniel Hawthorne: "Have you ever read the novels of Anthony Trollope ? They precisely suit my taste-solid and substantial, written on the strength of beef and through the inspiration of ale, and just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth, and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going about their daily business, and not suspecting that they were being made a show of" (as in Bergonzi, 1979, P.125). At the early stages of the novel, it had genuine concern about its form and its ability to convey reality. This concern sprang from the simple temerity about the very enterprise of writing a novel. Thus, many of the eighteenth century novels pretended to be travel accounts, collections of letters and faithful histories. In the sixteenth century, Cervantes, the author of the first modern novel, tried to give his work the stamp of authority by making it out to be originally written by the imaginary Arab historian called Cide Hamete Benengeli. The authorial voice and presence are integral to the story in the eighteenth century novels. By the nineteenth century, as the novel grew in maturity, it became more self-confident and evolved its own formal justifications. The author's presence became less and less important; gradually the author became a commentator obtruding from time to time through the chinks in an increasingly autonomous narrative, to offer reflections or speculations on the action. As the novel came to maturity in the works of master craftsmen like Flaubert, Conrad, James, Ford and Joyce, the obtrusive narrator was virtually banished, and the novel became a self-contained and self-sufficient work of art. The author, like the Great Creator, remained within, behind, or beyond, or above his creations. Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* projects novel as a narrative as well as an object. It is a tale told by some one. Even in impersonal works, the author is implicitly present as the implied narrator.

In his *Experiment in Autobiography* published in 1934, H. G. Wells observes that the nineteenth century assumptions no longer seemed adequate for the twentieth century novelists:

Who would read a novel if we are permitted to write biography - all out? Here, in this autobiography I am experimenting-though still very wildly, with biographical and autobiographical matter. Although it has many restraints which are from the artistic point of view vexatious, I still find it so much more real and interesting and satisfying that I doubt if I shall never again turn back towards the Novel (1954, P. 503).

Ortega Y. Gasset, writing in 1968, remarks that the novel is like a vast but finite quarry, and that as a result of excessive mining, the present day writers are confronted with the fact that only narrow and concealed veins are left for them(1968, Pp 58-59). Robert Scholes is of the opinion that this comparison is inept and careless. A literary genre, he says, is not like a quarry with only so much rock in it, but is a variable structure that waxes and wanes through its relationship with other cultural variables. The novel as a genre has, in fact, always been linked with certain other cultural phenomena. Capitalism as an economic system and novel as a literary form or genre, have grown from the same branch of the same tree. "If the novel is in trouble, as a form, and I think it is, this is because the culture of enlightened Protestantism is itself in trouble, because capitalism is in trouble, and because social democracy is in trouble, for the ethical paradigm of which the novel has been an expression is precisely that of Protestant, Capitalist democracy (1988, P 191).

Georg Lukacs, in his *Essays on Realism*, compares the general cultural and ideological conditions of modern times with that of the earlier epochs. In the period prior to the present decadence, he says, philosophy and natural science continuously cross fertilized each other. In modern times, philosophy does not promote the genuine development of the natural sciences, and in particular, the elucidation of their method and basic concepts, but rather inhibits this. The great progressive effect the theory of evolution had on Goethe and Balzac contrasted with the devastating influences of Nietzsche, Freud and Spengler on the present day writers best illustrates the point he makes.

Even though realism is said to have had its day in the West, it is nevertheless a fact that with an overwhelming majority of novels, including those we continue to regard as worthy literature, the criteria of realism still hold good. Raymond Williams in *The Long Revolution* remarks: ... "novel is not as much a literary form as a whole literature itself. A form which, in fact, includes *Middlemarch* and *Auto da Fe*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Rainbow* and *The Magic Mountain* is indeed, as I have said, more like a whole literature"(1975, P.304). The experience of isolation, of alienation, and of self-exile is an important part of the contemporary structure of feeling, and any contemporary realist novel would have to come to terms with it. Raymond Williams makes a fourfold classification of the contemporary novel: novel of social description, social formula, personal description and personal formula (P.312). The pertinent question to be asked, he says, is whether these kinds correspond to some altered reality leaving the older tradition as really irrelevant as the hansom cab, or whether they are in fact the symptoms of some very deep crisis in experience. The crisis, as he understands it, is too deep for any simple

explanation. He believes that the realist novel needs a genuine community, a community of persons linked not by one kind of relationship-work, or friendship or family-but many, interlocking kinds. Another relevant factor, he says, is the characteristic experience of our century: asserting and preserving an individuality. This is in utter contrast to the characteristic nineteenth century experience of finding a place and making a settlement. The Victorian novels usually ended with a series of settlements and engagements and formal relationships, whereas a twentieth century novel ends with a man going away on his own, having extricated himself from a dominating situation and realising his true self in that process. Williams points to the need for a new kind of realism: "The achievement of realism is a continual achievement of balance, and the ordinary absence of balance in the forms of the contemporary novel can be seen as both a warning and a challenge. It is certain that any effort to achieve a contemporary balance will be complex and difficult, but the effort is necessary, a new realism is necessary, if we are to remain creative" (P.316).

Lukacs argues that the apologetic character of the bourgeois literature during the period of its decay produced psychologism, the main task of which was the psychological depiction of private fates and feelings. But, gradually, psychologism became unsuited to tackling, in any way, the great and general questions of our time and then it was replaced by reportage. Reportage is an absolutely legitimate and indispensable form of journalism, and, at its best, it makes the right connection between the general and the particular, the necessary and the contingent that is appropriate to its particular purpose. Its method is depicting reality by eyewitness journalism. But it can give us only a part of the reality, and that too, without any insight into the overall processes and their interconnections.

The Unreal Reality:

The unreality of present-day reality is a cliché in almost all critical discussions. Bernard Bergonzi believes that we are unable to write now as Tolstoy did "because we have no common sense of reality. We are saddled with all kinds of relativistic structures of consciousness. We do not believe in there being one reality out there as undoubtedly Tolstoy did"(1969, P.200). Gerald Graff, in his *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas and Modern Society*(1979), quotes a passage from the American novelist and critic, William Gass, in which it is suggested that the world has become, for many novelists, a place not only vacant of Gods but also empty of a generously regular and peacefully abiding nature on which the novelist might, in large, rely. Modern reality, he says, is more horrible than anything that has gone before: it is more vast and complex; it is pre-digested in a manner that has no historical precedent, by the organs of the mass media; human artefacts now intervene between man and nature to an extent not previously, seen, so that the individual's environment is rapidly changing and man-made rather than remaining a stable, natural one. In a world with a population of trillions, where science progresses at such a rate that even ten years seem to be a geological era, no one can even believe that he shall be able to make sense of the world, or that his sense of reality can withstand critical scrutiny. When every moment of the day, television, radio and newspaper mediate between man and reality, no artist or writer can ever trust his own perceptions. Citing precedents like the Black Death, the Thirty Years War and the American Civil War, Graff argues that revolting cruelty and indiscriminate use of technical advances are not a twentieth century invention. What makes the recent horrors more revolting is the fact that they are less excusable

because man believes that the world is, or at least, should be more civilised than it used to be before. Contemporary reality is more shocking because its excesses and atrocities are more widely known(1979,P.10).

The idea that reality was, in the past, considered a seamless continuum is the result of the critics' attempt to discover organic unity in literary works. This organic unity was taken as reflecting the unified consciousness or unified world-view of the author. The present trend reverses this method and tries to explore literature with the aim of demonstrating the inconsistencies in it. Graff observes that sentimental rhetoric about organic unity and coherent vision has been replaced by an opposite rhetoric that would persuade us to the view that works of literature are distinguished by their total incoherence(Pp. 14-15). Raymond Tallis, takes a different approach in this regard. He criticises Philip Roth's argument that the present day American reality is stupefying, sickening and highly infuriating, and comments that when Stendhal read about the newspaper report of a woman who cradled her lover's decapitated head as she drove from the guillotine, he too, must have found it stupefying and sickening, or again, when Tolstoy read the newspaper report of a woman who committed suicide because of the collapse of an illicit love affair, it would not have been easily understandable to him. "Why should we believe that contemporary reality is such that it can be televised and newspapered, but is not amenable to reflective, analytical, compassionate and indignant treatment in a serious realistic novel?...Reality is as realistic as it ever was, or rather, reality remains neither real nor unreal: it simply, inexorably, is"(1988, P.20).

Modernism and Modern Reality:

Any discussion of contemporary fiction has to take into account the common bias that equates literary realism and reality. Arthur M. Saltzman speaks

of two divergent lines that the tradition of realism has produced, namely, the tradition of Tolstoy, Zola, Dostoevsky, George Eliot and James, which is intensely mimetic in its content and which espouses theories of character, plot, motivation etc., a tradition which implies an absolute vision of reality, and the tradition of Cervantes, and Sterne, a tradition which doesn't attempt to depict the world, but tries to become a self-contained competing world (1985,P.92). According to Ronald Sukenick, the form of the novels of social realism "is a metaphor for a society that no longer exists"(1975, P.429). To Austin Warren, "the distinction is not between reality and illusion, but between differing conceptions of reality and between differing modes of illusion" (1949, P.220).

The debates between John Gardner and William Gass were an important event in the American fiction of the 1970s. In his book, *On Moral Fiction* (1977), Gardner upheld the realistic tradition set by Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Tolstoy, which delivered models of behaviour and affirmed truth and goodness by rejecting chaos. He opposes a host of contemporary writers like Sukenick, Gass, Doctorow, Purdy, Barthelme, Barth and Vonnegut who, he believes, waste their energy in obscurantism or faddish despair. Either they pointlessly waste our time saying and doing nothing, or they celebrate ugliness and futility, scoffing at good(1977 P.16). To Gass, the only reasonable demands upon a given work of fiction are internal; a novel is an elaborate verbal object, not a depiction of the outside world, but a world unto itself, whose structural laws must be derived from its own particular ambitions and processes. The only moral of a work of fiction, he thinks, is the richly realised work itself(1979,P.28).

John Halperin names six European critics whose works have been influential in shaping modern trends in novel criticism: Jos Ortega Y. Gasset,

Georg Lukacs Victor Shklovsky, Roland Barthes, Georg Poulet and Alain Robbe Grillet. According to Gasset, modern art is brazenly set on deforming reality, shattering its human aspect, dehumanizing it. "All great periods of art", he says "have been careful not to let the work revolve about human contents. The imperative of unmitigated realism that dominated the artistic sensibility of the last century must be put down as a freak in aesthetic evolution"(1948,P.25). He substantiates his argument by drawing parallels from other disciplines like physics and philosophy. From Kant to about 1900, he says, there was apparently a determinate tendency in theoretical thought to eliminate substances and to replace them by functions. In ancient Greece and in the Middle Ages, it was believed that *Operari Sequitur esse* (actions follow and derive from being). The nineteenth century may be said to have established the opposite principle: *Esse Sequitur Operari*—the being of a thing is nothing else than the sum total of its action and functions. He considers the novel as an autonomous genre, which is, or at least should be, incompatible with outer reality. The novel, in the act of establishing its own inner world, must dislodge and abolish the surrounding one, must free us from our own world and allow us to transmigrate to the fictional world and then keep us there, not allowing, or even prohibiting us from returning there. It shall make us forget any reality other than that of the novel. Everything must be shown and not told.

Lukacs's approach is essentially political and historical rather than moral, and his perspective is philosophical. Both *Studies in European Realism* and *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* tell us that no work of art can remain impervious to the historical and political milieu in which it is written. Fiction, Lukacs thinks, reflects rather than imitates. It is acted upon, often, disruptively,

by contemporary reality, which, in large measure, determines literary structure. We begin with the outside world and end with a novel. In traditional mimetic fiction, the process is reversed, that is, the novelist begins with a fictional world which grows to resemble the outside world as the novel progresses.

Robbe Grillet argues that literary realism should concentrate not on depths but on surfaces, for surface is all that is there. When realism fails to be "realistic", it is because it fails to elucidate and admit this truth. Reality, he thinks, is so intangible, so incapable of definition, that we cannot even call it absurd. Why, he asks, must everything be something? Reality simply is. To make the sentence longer is to distort it. "I do not transcribe, I construct. This had been the old ambition of Flaubert: to make something out of nothing, something that would stand alone, without having to lean on anything external to the work...out of this, a new kind of narrator is born: no longer a man who describes things he sees, but, at the same time a man who invents the things around him and who sees things he invents. Once these hero narrators begin ever so little to resemble "Characters", they are immediately liars..."(1963, Pp. 162-163). For Robbe Grillet, the artist invents without a model. Art expresses no *a priori* truth, but only itself, and this is sufficient. Art neither imitates, nor means, nor teaches, it simply is.

Raymond Federman thinks that fiction shall not serve as a mirror redoubling on itself; it shall rather add itself to the world, creating a meaningful reality that did not previously exist. Fiction is artifice, but not artificial. As Ronald Sukenick writes in one of his letters, "...what we bring into the world is per se beyond language, and at that point language is of course left behind....The word

is necessary once it is spoken, but it has to be spoken. Meaning does not pre-exist creation, and afterward it may be superfluous" (as quoted in Federman, 1975 P.4). Federman believes that fiction is still very much alive today. He disapproves of the very common charge against fiction: that fiction is no longer possible because real fiction is happening everyday in the streets of our cities, in the spectacular hijacking of planes, on the Moon, ... and of course on television. He is interested not in the commercially successful novels. Fiction, he says, is called experimental out of despair. Works by Beckett, Borges and Joyce, works that are called experimental, are all quite successful, finished works:

And so, for me, the only fiction that still means something today is that kind of fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction that challenges the tradition that governs it; the kind of fiction that constantly renews our faith in man's imagination and not in man's distorted vision of reality—that reveals man's irrationality rather than man's rationality.

This I call SURFICTION. However, not because it imitates reality, but because it exposes the fictionality of reality. Just as surrealists called at level of man's experience that function in the subconscious SURREALITY, I call that level of man's activity that reveals life as a fiction SURFICTION. Therefore, there is some truth in the cliché which says that "life is fiction", but not because it happens in the streets, but because reality as such does not exist, or rather exists only in its fictionalized version (1975, P.7).

Federman explicates the statement that life is fiction. Fiction is made of understanding, which for most of us means primarily words, either spoken or written. If one admits that no meaning pre-exists language, and it is language that creates meaning as it goes along, then, to write would mean to produce meaning and not to reproduce a pre-existing meaning. Thus, fiction can no longer be reality, or a representation of reality, or an imitation, or even a recreation of reality, it can only be A REALITY – an autonomous reality whose only relation with the real world is to improve that world. To create fiction is, in fact, a way to abolish reality, and especially to abolish the notion that reality is truth(1975,P.8).

Reality in itself is true, but spoken or written reality, which is ordered differently from it, is false. Reality has to be ordered, or structured, before it can be narrated. This order or structure is alien to reality itself. A narrative is, therefore, an artefact, whose shape and structure, whose internal connectedness, is quite different from that of reality as it is actually experienced. "Narration, in short", says Raymond Tallis, "inevitably distorts reality, and the so-called realistic fiction, which conceals the extent to which a story is a construct upon, rather than a representation of reality, is therefore, a confidence trick. Verisimilitude, fidelity to a world outside of the text, is an illusion, to use Barthe's phrase a mere *effect de reel*"(1988, P 21).

The Post-Modernist Perspective:

If the nineteenth century realism was, in many ways, an attempt to bring order out of chaos, the post-modernist attitude is almost the reverse of it. As the avant-garde composer, John Cage spells out clearly: "Our attention is to affirm this life, not to bring order out of chaos, nor to suggest improvements in

creation, but simply to wake up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord"(as in Bergonzi, 1979,P.44).

The fiction of the last 150 years, David Lodge says, can be broadly classified into three phases: classic realism, modernism and post-modernism with all overlaps, chronological as well as formal. There can be more delicate and discriminating sub categories, too. For instance, we have in post-modernism, categories like transfiction, surfiction, metafiction, new journalism, nonfiction novel, faction, fabulation, *nouveau roman*, *nouveau nouveau roman*, irrealism, magic realism and so on. Lodge distinguishes between classic realism and post-modernism:

The mode of classic realism, with its concern for coherence and causality in narrative structure, for the autonomy of the individual self in the presentation of character, for a readable homogeneity and urbanity of style, is equated with liberal humanism, with empiricism, commonsense and the presentation of bourgeois culture as a kind of nature. The confusions, distortions and disruptions of the post-modernist text, in contrast, reflect a view of the world as not merely subjectively constructed (as modernist fiction implied) but as absurd, meaningless, radically resistant to totalizing interpretation(1990,P.26).

According to Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth... the post-modern narrative belongs to that critique of Western discourse which has been gaining strength for a century, and which, from

Friedrich Nietzsche to Luce Irigaray, entails a critique of metaphysics, of transcendence, of dialectics of identity and the subject (the 'self', the 'same' and the other), in short, a critique of the intellectual underpinnings of that cultural formation, that began with (roughly) the Renaissance and its redeployment of the Greeks(1987, P.645).

Plato considered epic as a mixed form of diegesis and mimesis . The novel has the potential for a much more complex mixing or even a fusion of the two modes. Volsinov and Bakhtin focus on the way the novelistic treatment of reported speech tends towards an intermingling of authorial speech and character's speech, of diegesis and mimesis. To Volsinov, naturally influenced by the Russian literary theory, the rise of the novel virtually coincides with the development of the pictorial style of reported speech in which author's speech and character's speech, diegesis and mimesis, interpenetrate.

The rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century began with the discovery of the new possibilities of mimesis in prose narrative through the use of characters as narrators. The classic realism of the nineteenth century followed the example of Fielding and Scott in maintaining a fairly even balance between mimesis and diegesis, showing and telling, scene and summary, but it also broke down the clear distinction between diegesis and mimesis in the representation of thought and feeling, through what Volsinov called the pictorial style of reported speech.

According to Bakhtin there are three main categories of literal discourse:
 (i) the direct speech of the author: this corresponds to Plato's diegesis, the

author himself speaking, not the character nor the narrator, (ii) represented speech, including Plato's mimesis and the reported speech in the pictorial style, (iii) doubly oriented speech, that is, speech which not only refers to something in the world, but also to another addresser. The third category can further be subdivided into four categories: stylization, parody, *skaz* (the Russian term for oral narration) and calls dialogue.

Lodge attempts to look at classic realism, modernism and post-modernism in the light of the discourse typology of Plato, Volsinov and Bakhtin. He concludes that the classic realist text was characterised by a balanced and harmonised combination of mimesis and diegesis, reported speech and reporting context, authorial speech and represented speech. The modern novel evolved through an increasing dominance of mimesis over diegesis. Diegesis does not completely disappear from the modernist novel, but impersonality, dramatization, "showing" rather than "telling", become the cardinal principles of modernist fictional aesthetic. Post-modernism seems to say: You cannot altogether abolish the author; you can only suppress or displace him. So why not let him come back into the text? The narrators of post-modernist fiction are more likely to be explicit about the problems and processes involved in the act of narration, and very often the narrators are the writers themselves. (Eg:- Vonnegut (Jr) in *Slaughter house - Five*). Lodge observes that in the post-modernist fiction we have a "revival of diegesis not smoothly dovetailed with mimesis as in the classic realist text, and not subordinated to mimesis as in the modernist text, but foregrounded against mimesis(1990 P. 41).

The New Realism:

The theorists and practitioners of the new novel persisted in their search for ways to go beyond the stock of the inherited fictional techniques to convey

their own perceptions of the new realities, brought in by the incredible advancements in science and society. The fiction written by novelists like Robbe Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, and Michael Butor is generally considered as constituting the *nouveau roman* or new novel challenging the reputation and influence of writers like Sartre, Camus and the French writers of the preceding generation. Nathalie Sarraute seems to think that there exists a human reality, given once and for all, which, writers, like scientists, explore one after the other, thus creating from one generation to the next, a mere shift of interest towards new sectors, which then have to be explored as the old problems are solved. Thus it is because Balzac and Stendhal analyzed the psychology of the character and, by the very same fact, generalized and depreciated it, that later writers like Joyce and Proust didn't find any interest in such psychology, and therefore turned to finer and subtler realities, thus opening a way that the novelists of today must in turn strive to achieve. According to Grillet, there is no immutable reality in the human domain. On the contrary, the essence of human reality is itself dynamic and it changes through history; moreover, this, change is, to an unequal degree, of course, the work of all men and, although writers play their part, it is neither an exclusive nor a preponderant one. The history and psychology of the character are becoming increasingly difficult to describe, not because writers like Balzac, Stendhal and Flaubert have already described them exhaustively, but because we are living in a different society, in which the individual as such and, implicitly, his biography and psychology, have lost all their truly primordial importance, and have fallen to the level of mere anecdote.

The new novel, according to Robbe Grillet's theory, is one in which the

reader will find more of the gratification to be had from sham causality, falsely certain description, clear story. It repeats itself, bisects itself, modifies itself and contradicts itself, without even accumulating enough bulk to constitute a past and thus a "story" in the traditional sense of the word. The reader is not offered easy satisfaction, but a challenge to creative co-operation. In his *Les Gommages*, rival versions of the same set of facts can co-exist without final reconciliation. In *La Jalousie*, the narrator is explicitly unconcerned with chronology, perceiving on that here and now in which memory, fantasy, anticipation of the future, may intrude though without sharp differentiation. A new element, he asserts, now separates us radically from Balzac, as from Gide or Mme de La Fayette: it is the destitution of the old "myths" of "depth". "The revolution which has occurred is in kind: not only do we no longer consider the world as our own, our private property, designed according to our needs and readily domesticated, but we no longer believe in its "depth". While essentialist conceptions of man met their destruction, the notion of "condition" henceforth replacing that of "nature" the surface of things has ceased to be for us the mask of their heart, a sentiment that led to every kind of metaphysical transcendence" (as in Lodge, 1991, Pp.471-472) .

Frank Kermode uses the terms "Chronos" and "Kairos" while discussing the concept of time in his *The Sense of an Ending*. "Chronos is the "passing time or waiting time", that which according to the Revelation shall be no more, and "Kairos" is the season, a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end(1967,P. 47). Even though the Bible doesn't make any distinction between the two, we normally associate reality with "Chronos", and a fiction which entirely ignores this association, we might

consider silly, or even mad. Any novel, however realistic, involves some degree of alienation from "reality": Fielding, for example, felt at the beginning of *Tom Jones* that he had to reject the Richardsonian method of novels by epistolary correspondences although he made sure that, in the midst of voluminous detail intended to ensure realism, everything became "Kairos" by virtue of the way in which letters coincided with critical moments. "Since the form of the novel requires that the realism of the ego and the desires of the lower mind be simultaneously satisfied", Kermode writes, "the novel has to modify the paradigms organise extensive middles in concordance with remote origins and predictable ends, in such a way as to preserve its difference from dreaming or other fantasy gratifications"(1967,P. 56).

Ronald Sukenick, in *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories*, writes how the contemporary writer is forced to start from the scratch, as to him, reality or time or personality doesn't exist. He thinks there is no point in pushing ahead with fiction; we might as well go ahead with autobiography or documentary, social criticism and other "how to" books. He proposes a new tradition for the novel, a tradition that he calls the *Bossa Nova*, which "has no plot, no story, no character, no chronological sequence, no verisimilitude, no imitation, no allegory, no symbolism, no subject matter, no "meaning". *The Bossa Nova* is non-representational it represents itself. Its main qualities are abstraction, improvisation and opacity"(as in Federman,1975, Pp. 43-44).

Julia Kristeva considers anti-realism an inescapable feature of the realistic novel "...from its very beginning, the novel has contained the seeds of anti-novel and has been constructed in opposition to various norms... it is

certainly striking that when structuralists write about classical texts, they end by discovering gaps, uncertainties, instances of subversion and other features which it is rather too easy to consider as specifically modern”(as in Tallis, 1988, P.178) Works like *Don Quixote Gargantua and Pantagruel* and *Tristram Shandy* prove that even in its infancy, the novel contained elements of anti-novel. According to Barthe’s this is a feature of the totality of the Western art: “in the West, at least, there is no art which does not point to its own mask... the whole of literature can declare ‘*Larvatus Prodeo*’ (As I walk forward, I point out my mask) (1967, P .41).

Robert Scholes, in *The Fabulators*, argues that the novel is moving towards disintegration, and that since it is no longer possible to maintain a synthesis of the empirical and fictional modes, it is better for the novel to exploit the fictional mode. David Lodge opposes this argument and observes that it is equally possible for the novel to move in the opposite direction, that is, towards the empirical and narrative modes, and away from the fictional. The non-fiction novel is one such form. The term was first coined by Truman Capote who used it to describe his book, *In Cold Blood*, which is an account of the brutal multiple murder committed in Kansas in 1959. Every detail of this book is “true”, discovered by painstaking research. Capote spent many hours with the murderers in prison to know about their character and background. In Norman Mailer’s *The Armies of the Night*, subtitled ‘*History as Novel--The Novel as History*, the first part is an account of the Anti-Vietnam War March on the Pentagon in 1967.

While discussing the complex relationship between fable and reality, Scholes points out how John Steinbeck, one of America’s finest writers in the

realistic/naturalistic tradition, was during the last decade of his writing career, engaged in a serious artistic struggle through which he sought to come to terms with fabulation. He observes that from 1956 till his death, Steinbeck tried to produce a modern version of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d' Arthur*, the unfinished manuscripts of which were published in 1976 as *The Acts of King Arthur and his Noble Knights* along with excerpts from some of his letters that prove his long struggle to become a fabulator. Scholes concludes that what moved Steinbeck towards fabulation was the same impulse that was moving younger writers in the same direction: the sense that the positivistic basis for traditional realism had been eroded and that reality, if it could be caught at all, would require a whole new set of fictional skills(1979, P 14).

According to Scholes, modern fabulation grows out of an attitude which may be called "fallibilism", just as nineteenth century realism grew out of the earlier attitude called positivism. Fallibilism, in any way, is not a new term. More than a century ago, the brilliant pragmatist philosopher, Charles Saunders Peirce, considered this as the most appropriate intellectual position for a human being with regard to his notion of the real: "On the whole, then, we cannot in any way, reach perfect certitude nor exactitude. We never can be absolute sure of anything, nor can we with any probability ascertain the exact value of any measure or general ratio"(as in Scholes, 1979, P.8). Fabulation, Scholes observes, means not a turning away from reality, but an attempt to find more subtle correspondences between the reality which is fiction and the fiction which is reality. He divides the whole body of fictional form into four: Fiction of Forms (romance), Fiction of Existence (novel), Fiction of Ideas (myths), and

Fiction of Essence (allegory). Fiction of Ideas does not mean novel of ideas, but fiction, which is most directly animated by the essential ideas of fiction. The Fiction of Ideas is mythic fiction as we find it in folk tales, where fiction springs most directly from human deeds and desires. The Fiction of Forms is fiction that imitates other fiction. After the first myth, all fiction became imitative in this sense, and remains so. The Fiction of Forms is usually labelled as "romance" in English criticism, for, the distinguishing characteristic of romance is that it concentrates on the elaboration of previous fictions. Fiction of Existence seeks to imitate not the forms of fiction, but the forms of human behaviour. It is mimetic and it seeks to represent reality. But the reality here is a behaviouristically observable reality. This behavioural fiction is a report on manners, customs, institutions and habits. The Fiction of Essence is concerned with the deep structure of being, just as the fiction of behaviour is concerned with its surface structure(1979, Pp. 105-113).

Scholes compares Malamud and Vonnegut as fabulators of history. *The Fixer* by Malamud is based on the long neglected trial of the Jew, Mendel Beiliss, for the ritual murder of a Christian boy in Kiev, Russia in 1913, and the final acquittal of Beiliss. The author follows the actual pattern of events leading up to the trial. Of course, he does not include the trial itself. "The major technical problem Malamud faced in writing the book," Scholes says "must have been the self-imposed problem of passing from history into fiction. History and imagination here obstruct one another, with factual research intruding awkwardly into imaginative conversations and imaginative material clashing with our (reader's) sense of actual probabilities. The central problem of the historical novel--how to make fact and imagination reinforce each other--is one

which Malamud could not successfully solve in *The Fixer*.

In *Slaughterhouse Five*, Vonnegut looks-back-or tries to look at his wartime experience. His humour enables him to contemplate the horror that he finds in contemporary existence: "His comic prose reduces large areas of experience to the dimension of a laboratory slide. The pathos of human beings enmeshed in the relentless triviality of contemporary American culture has never been more adequately expressed"(1979,Pp 204-05). Scholes remarks that Vonnegut's more fabulative approach to history solved the problem better than Malamud's attempt to be more faithful to fact and probability.

Josephine Hendin (1978) divides the post World War II fiction into the holistic and the anarchic. The holistic, she says, stresses the virtues of management, wholeness and reason, while the anarchic stresses the mystical values, self-effacement and disintegration. One aims at a solution through personal durability and turmoil-free performance, the other at dismantling the performer. They are opposite sides of the will to minimise the frustration inherent in the human condition. Hendin cites John Barth as a writer of holistic novel in which the individual may be seen as a fabricated thing, and Vonnegut as the author of anarchic novels in which the individual may be seen as a series of disassembled parts.

James M. Mellard, in his brilliant study of the American novel, *The Exploded Form: The Novel in America* (1980), speaks of the naïve, critical and sophisticated phases in the narrative development of the modern novel. The modernist element in literature, he says, has been associated with those philosophical positions identifying human consciousness as the basis of the

meaning of the external world. Like modern philosophy, modern science has lost its naïve objectivity, at first replacing it with critical empiricism or pragmatism, later replacing these with a more sophisticated, personalised and subjective epistemology. By naïve he identifies those innovative authors who create many effects using quite radical techniques, but who do not have clear consciousness or awareness of all they are doing. By critical, Mellard means a stage in which the writers become conscious of the manifest content, and act on the knowledge; the term also applies to their imitators who analyze the innovator's accomplishment, and often erect credos upon the purely objective achievements of the originators. The meaning of the term "sophisticated" is to suggest the stage of consciousness at which critical understanding becomes separated from belief in its objectives. "Much of the history of the novel", writes Mellard, "is a product of the influence of world hypotheses or of metaphors from science and technology/philosophy upon the mimetic premises of the genre" (P 1980,P.(xi)). He speaks of two strains of modernism that competed for dominance early in the epoch: the objective, iconic print mode (as in Eliot and Joyce) and the performative mode (as in Hemingway, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos William). The performative mode survived and is being renewed in the works of the post modernist writers like Kurt Vonnegut (Jr), Richard Brautigan, Jerzy Kosinski: and others. A truly adequate new realism which must come with a new cultural, epistemological frame work, Mellard says, has to acknowledge two conditions of contemporary existence: that consciousness and its governing structures are inextricable aspects of any human "reality" and that any reality that we define shall, therefore, be provisional and indeterminate. He thinks that the most recent fiction that makes any claims toward realism might best be described by Ihab Hassan's term *indeterminance*.

Mellard attempts to define his critical paradigm by proceeding along two lines: one involving a proto-metaphoric paradigm identifying the perspectival

aspects of modernist fiction , and the other involving a metaphoric narrative model, one representing what has happened to the author's attitude regarding the form of the genre and the other representing what has happened to the form itself. In the very history of the genre of the novel, there is a perceptible movement from the naïve to the critical to the sophisticated in the early practitioners like Bunyan, Richardson, Fielding and Sterne. A similar pattern can be discerned in the romanticism of Wordsworth, the Victorians, and the modern literature.

Northrop Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism*, observes that an epochal mode is known by the metaphors it keeps. The shift from novel-as-genre to modernist modes of the novel can be observed in a shift of metaphor. The habitual metaphors of the "low-mimetic historical mode", Frye says, characterise the triumph of the novel-as-genre, and those of the "ironic historical mode" characterise the triumph of the modernist forms. The low-mimetic mode projected a philosophy of generation and organism, and those made the concept of evolution the basis for the nineteenth century novel's conventional critical metaphor. The metaphor of evolution had assumed such proportions of power, that by the end of the nineteenth century, it became part of the fabric of reality itself. Hamlin Garland writes in 1893:

Evolutionists explain the past by means of laws operative in the present, by survivals of change. In an analogous way, we may infer (broadly, of course) the future of society, and therefore, its art, from changes just beginning to manifest themselves. Fiction already commands the present in the form of the novel of

life. It already outranks verse and the drama as a medium of expression. It is so flexible, admits of so many points of view, and comprehends so much (uniting painting and rhythm to the drama and the pure narrative), that it has come to be the highest form of expression in Russia, Germany, Norway and France.... Taking it as it stands today in America, the novel not only shows its relation to the past and the present, but it holds within itself prophecies of impending change. No other medium of art expression is so sensitive to demand. Change is sure. What will it be? (as quoted in Litz, 1963, P. 27).

Harry Levin tells us that "the novel-as-genre of the nineteenth century rested on the assumption that the epistemological and the ontological modes were congruent, not only with each other, but also with the world. Indeed what established this type of fiction-as-genre was its triumphant assumption that the ways we can know the world in that type are a function of what we can know; what we can know, a function of the ways known" (as in Hugo, 1962, P. 189).

The modernist novel emerges with the historical mode Frye calls irony. Since this new ironic epoch projects a philosophy not merely different from, but totally alien to the traditional novels, the old generic form was necessarily warped out of shape, much as traditional verse was reshaped in the movement from the high mimetic neo-classicism to the low mimetic romanticism. The change in form of the genre is necessarily accompanied by change in theme and values. While the traditional novel had fostered growth, attachment, assimilation and disintegration, the modernist novel reverses these and presents decay, detachment, alienation, disintegration. A new metaphor replaces the old. Mellard

reminds us that the potential shift lies in the differential between the cosmic model of evolution as propounded by Herbert Spencer and the metaphysic based upon the thermodynamic concept as it had stood since the work of Clausius and Rankine, and publicized by William Thompson (Later Lord Kelvin) in the early 1850s, well before Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859). "The persistent optimism of the nineteenth century and the novel-as-genre is reflected in the essentially low-mimetic aspects of evolution, the regnant pessimism of the twentieth century modes of the novel is reflected in the decidedly ironic features associated with the Second Law of Thermodynamics" (1980 P11).

The present crisis in the novel, Mellard writes, is the result of the failure of both Newtonian and Darwinian metaphysics to account for the novelist's "world" in the twentieth century. "We have long since withered", insists Frye, "the Newtonian crisis separating mythological from natural space, and the Darwinian crisis separating mythological from natural time. A third crisis, more difficult and subtle is succeeding it: the distinguishing of the ordinary waking consciousness of external reality from the creative and transforming aspects of the mind (1975, P.211).

According to Mellard, the modernist novel in America, rooted in Melville, Twain and James, begins in the essentially naïve modernist works of Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner; it develops into the critical consolidations of the modern authors like Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, Joseph Heller, John Updike and William Styron, and culminates in the sophisticated modernist innovations of John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Richard Brautigan, Robert Coover, William Gass, Kurt Vonnegut(Jr) and many others. While discussing the modernist novel in America, Mellard observes that so many different concepts of

the novelistic mode have become necessary in the modern phase because the novel today has thrust the authority not only for meaning but also for synthesis and organization upon the reader. In the traditional novel-as-genre the relationship among author, text, universe and audience was quite different: authors through novels imitated the world, and readers tested them against that world. "That texts have contents, which in turn are carriers of meaning, was until the arrival of modern art, almost an uncontested assumption," writes Wolfgang Iser (1974, P.xiv). According to Iser, for the modernists, the ontological being of a work stands, not between the text and the world, but in the gap between the author's text and the reader's consciousness. The more the texts lose determinacy, the greater become the reader's possible interpretations.

The metaphor, around which *The Exploded Form* is organised, is the familiar view of the beginning of the universe with an unimaginably violent explosion of condensed matter and all the millions of galaxies still riding the thrust of that explosion, and that, at present the law of entropy is in operation. Nevertheless, there is the optimism that the entire process is cyclical rather than linear, and so, after a time, it will reverse itself and start over again. Mellard observes that it is likely that the novel's primal form, modified as it must be, by the vicissitudes of history, will return to a central place in the poetics of the near future, but that form, he is quite sure, can never again be as innocent as it once was.

Towards the second half of the nineteenth century, the intense subjectivity of idealist philosophy had created a pressing problem for the novel, not an ontological or a metaphysical problem, but an epistemological one. Until then, it was common knowledge that there was an unchanging substance or unchanging substratum beneath the appearance of change in nature. By 1859,

the nineteenth century writers were confronted by two important ideas: evolution and entropy, both bringing major metaphysical consequences. In the new world of post-Darwinian and, particularly, post Einsteinian cosmology nothing could be regarded as changeless, neither the farthest reaches of the astronomical universe, nor the smallest unit of subatomic physics. In the novel of modern times, mimetic representations of an objective universe have been replaced by the epistemological problems of consciousness. As Wolfgang Iser puts it, the twentieth century novel is concerned with "the functioning of our own faculties of perception"(1974,P.xiv).

Mellard asserts that for both science and the arts, the modernist questions asked now are about the object of study or representation, the mode of analysis or presentation, and even the ability of man himself—as agent or recipient—to come at the object of knowledge(1980, P.136). The materialistic physics had permitted the essentially monistic nineteenth century view to retain its grip on metaphysics well into the twentieth century, but eventually, atomic physics forced the abandonment of that tidy, simplistic materialism. "Science," writes Werner. Heisenberg, "no longer confronts nature as an objective observer, but sees itself as an actor in this interplay between man and nature. The scientific method of analysing, explaining, and classifying has become conscious of its limitations which arise out of the fact that by its intervention science alters and refashions the object of investigation. In other words, method and object can no longer be separated". (as in Mellard, 1980,P.140).

Mellard believes that the novel's generic form is predicated upon the same notion that underlies true science: that a congruence or isomorphism can exist between the frames of investigation (scientific hypotheses, paradigms, models)

and the object investigated (nature), between the method of imitation (language, the generic form) and the object of imitation (life, reality, history) (1980, P.176). But, even for science, reality has changed over the centuries, and as the model of reality has changed, so also has the form of the novel. After having been erected upon one model of the world in the eighteenth century, the novel was forced to exchange epistemes twice during the next two centuries: the first with the development of a romantic picture of reality and the second with the coming of Einstein's theory of a relative non-material cosmos of energy and forces. The romantic picture was largely the result of the influence of the idealist philosophy and art, and it was forced to compete with the picture given by the modern materialistic Newtonian science, and this conflict gave us the prose-romances of the nineteenth century -- German and American fiction. The relativity model has brought greater harm to the traditional realist forms than upon the romantic forms. The modernist novel is no longer a single, and clear, monolithic form; it is "comprised," rather of fragments gleaned from the exploded forms of traditional novels as well as romance.

Nineteenth Century Realism Reversed: Ken Kesey and Kurt Vonnegut:

Both Vonnegut and Ken Kesey have only scant respect for the nineteenth century positivistic attitude or for the view that man can find meaning and value in his experience of life. Vonnegut recognises the fact of man committing sins against himself, and he has chosen the fabric of the fable to dress this perception. The reason for this choice is the fact that it requires a certain degree of willing suspension of disbelief in order to go on living in a world dominated by science, slaughter and an infinite number of irresponsible and responsible everyday atrocities.

Kesey, after his two successful works, began his experiments in a new direction: in the direction of technologically complex sign systems. Tom Wolfe tells us how he resolved to pass beyond writing, into new forms of expression. The result of his experiments is a sort of multimedia performance art, bordering on guerilla theatre, using spoken texts, film and video, rock music and psychedelic lighting effects, and evoking the spontaneous participation of everyone present without distinction between the performer and the audience. These experiments, William C. Baurecht points out, have got similarities with the experiments in other recognisable art works of the same period – Warhol, Cage and the San Francisco Mime Troupe and such like (1982, Pp.279-293). Baurecht further remarks that in its most banal form, Kesey's work is primarily an attempt to re-enact a new psychic state, to recreate the unprecedented experience of the LSD trip, an altered state of consciousness produced by an advanced technology of psychotropic drugs unknown before 1950s. But that substance and that experience are treated by Kesey and his friends as no more than a medium, a specialised lens through which consciousness itself will be perceived in a new way – what Wolfe calls the "Now". At the central point of the narrative, Kesey solemnly lectures to his disciples about the need to enter into an absolute present, to bypass the neutral lag, the delay in perception that itself figures a whole array of social and psychological lags, gaps, and divisions within the subject, preventing psychic wholeness .

Kesey's bizarre experimentation was marked by its technological texture – with electric guitars, basses, flutes, horns, light machines, movie projectors, tapes, mikes, hifis. Lyotard observes that closely related to this incorporation of technologies is a tendency already perceptible in Kesey's written work, to assimilate the popular and the populist products of mass culture. For this purpose he uses the medium of the novel which itself is one of the earliest

products of mass culture. Much of what Kesey was doing in the mid 60s entered the mainstream of commercial culture, a few years later. In short, Kesey's work, despite its bizarre, perhaps, radical aesthetic assumptions, proved to be highly assimilable to mass commercial culture, in part because it took its inspiration from some of the technologies and tendencies already at work in the cultural sphere.

Comparing Kesey's experiments with the earlier European experiments, Lyotard writes:

Whereas earlier European instances of avantgardism could take place along side of and within, serious movements to transform the entirety of social relations, such a possibility never really existed in the U.S. of 960s despite all the revolutionary-utopian rhetoric to the contrary. That absence of political possibility is what makes this specific instance of avantgardism post-modern. The fated commodification of the counterculture demonstrates the assimilative power of that "official" culture and its concealed dominance over even the most evidently adversarial cultural practices(1984, P.76).

Tony Tanner uses the term the "Edge City" to describe the fantasy that Kesey and his friends were living out; it is a state in which movies end and the flow begins, where definitions and versions give way to the thing in itself:

It points perhaps to a point at which the structurings of society, language, accustomed habits of perception, individual identity,

begin to fall away. The Buddhists aim to reach a station, where there is neither perception nor non-perception, where consciousness and self-consciousness are at the very margin of disappearance. This could also be called the Edge City. But, unlike the Buddhist Edge City, Kesey's Edge City has no theology or creed or enlightenment or ecstasy about it; it stands at the margin of the very idea of "structure". Perhaps, it could be a freedom-land of bliss, that final emancipation from all definitions and limits; but perhaps it could also be insanity, chaos, a nightmare beyond control. Only men who, like Kesey, believe that a man should move off his sure centre out into the outer edges and test the limits of life, are likely to find out (1976, Pp. 379-392).

According to Tanner, Kesey's singularity lies in his attempt to move beyond writing and set out for Edge City in person, and the multi coloured bus was his third novel, only this time he was inside it and at the wheel. Tom Wolfe helps to clarify the split between the East and West Coast attitudes in America today by distinguishing between the Buddha's direction and Kesey's direction. The point about Edge City, Tanner writes, is that it is a place, a state of consciousness, an experience in which one may learn something new about the relationship of individual identity to the flow—and from which one can return, perhaps, to tell the tale, perhaps to have the tale told, as Wolfe tells it about Kesey. There is a passage in Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* in which the rebel, Ed Finnerty, tells the uncertain conformist, Proteus about his decision to give up his job and refusal to consult a psychiatrist: "He 'd pull me back into the centre, and I want to stay as close to the edge as I can without going over. Out on the

edge you see all kinds of things you can't see from the Centre....Big, undreamed of things, the people on the edge see them first" (P.73). By aiming to live at the edge, Kesey identifies himself as one of those who hope to see more things and see them first.

"There is no novelist who will be remembered as the novelist who captured the Sixties in America or even in New York," writes Tom Wolfe, "in the sense that Thackeray was the chronicler of London in the 1840s and Balzac was the chronicler of Paris and all of France after the fall of the Empire" (1973, Pp. 23-36). Balzac, it may be recalled, even considered it a matter of pride to be known as the secretary of the French Society. No American writer certainly would like to work as a secretary of his society; he would look upon the role as rather menial. Balzac, like many other nineteenth century thinkers, believed the eighteenth century thought had ended up in the disorganization of society, and its reorganization was the main task of the realists of his generation. The Saint Simonians even gave the title, *L' Organisateur* to their journal. Balzac's collected works, taken in their most grandiose terms are a titanic attempt to impose a cosmos on the chaos of contemporary life. Emile Zola also followed Balzac's example and went on collecting factual information before he wrote his *Rougon Macquart* series. American realists like Sinclair Lewis and John Steinbeck also did a lot of homework by making notes of the factual details they collected before they set down to write their novels of social criticism.

Vonnegut reverses the process set by all these realists. He never considers adherence to truth as sacrosanct in the portrayal of reality. Bokononism, a religion introduced by him in *Cat's Cradle*, always keeps its members aware of the artificial drama they are playing and through this parallel

the author draws attention to the artifice of the novel itself. The worshipper and the reader shall keep free of the danger of mistaking their activity for bedrock, solid truth. Only when Bokononism has lost its control, there are religious wars and persecutions. Similarly, only when novels are asked to be read as history, is their transformative power sapped. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim learns from Tralfamadore, the lesson regarding the absence of any cosmic purpose: "Why you? Why us for that matter? Why anything?... There is no why" (P. 60). Vonnegut is here telling that man's power of understanding is limited and most things are beyond his control. True wisdom lies in acknowledging the lack of universal purpose or meaning or direction. The purposelessness of universe is explained in his earlier novels like *Cat's Cradle*, *Mother Night* and the *Sirens of Titan* also.

In *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, we are given a great deal of factual information regarding Eliot, but all these facts, help us very little in ascertaining the motives for his actions. He leaves Rosewater as suddenly and mysteriously as he arrived. Dr. Ed. Brown, a young psychiatrist gives the explanation that Eliot left Rosewater because he contracted samaritrophia, defined by him as a hysterical indifference to the troubles of those less fortunate than oneself. The doctor's absurd diagnosis throws into relief Vonnegut's burlesque that human actions do not always correspond to readily ascertainable motives. The belief that human actions proceed from certain sociological, and psychological causes, and that these responses can be measured and even predicted, simply constitutes another illusion man has erected to block out the reality of a directionless and chaotic universe.

As Robert Scholes has pointed out, the novelists of the past century or so assumed that a "readily ascertainable thing called reality exists and that we all live in it" (1967, Pp. 136-137) Thus, reality became the only thing to write about. This reality extended to characters also and thus, the early humorous caricatures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave way to "rounded characters," which were psychologically valid. Vonnegut rejected all formulations of reality whether they be religious, philosophical, scientific or literary. Psychology, he believed, is simply another delusive attempt to explain and sympathise the inexplicable and the chaotic, for man is as absurd as his universe. The well-rounded character whose actions proceed from clearly stated causes, then, represents a falsification. "By peopling his novels with over simplified, two-dimensional figures, Vonnegut mocks the belief that human beings can be understood in all their chaotic complexity much less captured on the printed page" (Scholes, 1967, P.75).

James Lundquist is emphatic as he states that Vonnegut's novels represent an adaptation to chaos : " He moves steadily away from old-fashioned stories of the sort that lead readers to believe that life has leading characters and minor characters, important details and unimportant details, lessons to be learned in order to pass tests of physical, psychological or spiritual strengths, beginnings, middles, ends" (1977, P. 101). By the time Vonnegut gets to *Breakfast of Champions*, he has resolved to avoid story-telling in favour of a kind of writing in which all persons are equally important and the only moral that one can consider, is to learn to adapt oneself to the requirements of chaos, rather than the requirements of an orderly universe:

Once I understood what was making America such a dangerous unhappy nation of people who had nothing to do with real life, I resolved to shun story telling. I would write about life. Every person would be exactly as important as any other. All facts would also be given equal weightiness. Nothing would be left out. Let others bring order to chaos. I would bring chaos to order, instead, which I think I have done. If all writers would do that, then perhaps, citizens not in the literary trades will understand that there is no order in the world around us, that we must adapt ourselves to the requirements of chaos instead. It is hard to adapt to chaos, but it can be done. I am living proof of that: "It can be done" (1975, Pp. 209-210).

In writers like Kesey and Vonnegut the distinctions between the imaginary and the real, the conscious and the subconscious, the past and the present, truth and untruth, cease to exist. Their works corroborate the views that the primary purpose of fiction is to unmask its own fictionality; they dispense with all feignings of passing for reality or for truth. Fiction of this kind can no longer be considered as a mirror of life, or as a realistic document that informs us about life, it cannot be judged on the basis of its social, moral psychological, metaphysical or even commercial value, but only on the basis of what it is and what it does as an autonomous art form in its own right.

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