CHAPTER - IV
CHARACTERIZATION STRATEGIES

4.1 Characterization

Characterization is the process of conveying information about characters in fiction or conversation. Characters are usually presented through their actions, dialect, and thoughts, as well as by description. Characterization can regard a variety of aspects of a character, such as appearance, age, gender, educational level, vocation or occupation, financial status, marital status, social status, cultural background, hobbies, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ambitions, motivations, personality, etc.

4.1.1 Direct vs. Indirect Characterization

There are two ways an author can convey information about a character.

4.1.2 Direct or Explicit Characterization

The author literally tells the audience what a character is like. This may be done via the narrator, another character or by the character himself or herself.
4.1.3 Indirect or Implicit Characterization

The audience must deduce for themselves what the character is like through the character's thoughts, actions, speech (choice of words, way of talking), looks and interaction with other characters, including other characters' reactions.

4.2 Characterization in Drama

Characterization in drama operates on the same basis as in literature with an identical purpose. In performance an actor has less time to characterize and so can risk the character coming across as underdeveloped. The great realists of dramaturgy have relied heavily on implicit characterization which occupy the main body of their character driven plays. Examples of these playwrights are Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov. Such psychological epics as The Seagull indirectly characterize the protagonists so that the audience is drawn into their inner turmoils as they are slowly revealed over the 3 hours of time spent with the characters. The actors taking on these roles must also characterize over a long period of time, to the point that there seems to be no direct statement of who the character is at any point, this realism in acting requires the actor to characterize from their own persona as a starting point. The audience therefore does not recognize a realistic characterization immediately.
However the playwright and actor also have the choice of direct characterization in a similar vein to the writer in literature. The presentation of a character for a sociological discussion only has to be as real as the discussion requires. In this way a character can be used as an iconic reference by a playwright to suggest location, an epoch in history, or even draw in a political debate. The inclusion of a stock character, or in literary terms an archetypal character, by a playwright can risk drawing overly simplistic pictures of people and smack of stereotyping however the degree of success in direct characterization in order to swiftly get to the action varies from play to play and often according to the use the character is put to. In explicitly characterizing a certain character the actor makes a similar gamble. The choice of what aspects of a character are demonstrated by the actor to directly characterize is a political choice and makes a statement as to the ethics and agenda of the actor and the play as a whole. Examples of direct characterisation are found in mime especially, and in Epic Theatre, yet also in the work of Berkoff, the Wooster Group, and Theatre de Complicite.

Both implicit and explicit characterization in drama can result in a problematic, politically unstable character, even a stereotype. And conversely both direct and indirect characterization can make complex and unique characters depending on the choices made by those doing the characterizing.
4.2.1 Fictional Character

A fictional character is any person, persona, identity, or entity whose existence originates from a work of fiction. The process of creating and developing characters in a work of fiction is called characterization.

4.2.2 Archetypes

A character may be based on a particular archetype, which is a common characterological pattern like those listed below. Jungian archetypes are modeled after mythology, legend, and folk tales. For example, both Puck from the William Shakespeare’s play ‘A Midsummer Night's Dream’ and ‘Bugs Bunny’ are examples of the Jungian trickster archetype because they defy established standards of behavior. When defined by literary criticism, archetypes fulfill a particular role in a story.

A single character may fulfill more than one archetypal role. A single character may also have many traits and feelings. A complex character may blend characteristics from different archetypes, just as real people embody aspects of each archetype according to one writer or psychologist.
Though in stories the archetypes are fragmented into individual characters, in real life each of us carry qualities of each archetype. If we didn't, we wouldn't be able to relate to characters who represent the archetypes we were missing.

4.2.3 Names of Characters

The names of fictional characters are often quite important. The conventions of naming have changed over time. In many Restoration comedies, for example, characters are given emblematic names that sound nothing like real life names: 'Sir Fidget', 'Mr. Pinchwife' and 'Mrs. Squeamish' are some typical examples (all from The Country Wife by William Wycherley). Some 18th and 19th century literature such as Les Misérables represent characters' names by the use of a single letter and a long dash (this convention is also used for other proper nouns, such as place names). This has the effect of suggesting that the author had a real person in mind but omitted the full name for propriety's sake. A similar technique was employed by Ian Fleming in his 20th century James Bond novels, where the real name for M, if spoken in dialogue, was always written 'Adm. Sir M'. It is still common to echo an adjective or idea, if slightly changed, to suggest qualities of a character; Mr. Murdstone of David Copperfield suggests 'murder' and unpleasantness.

A character's name will sometimes reference a real-world, literary, or mythological precursor. This can be as simple as calling a
character in love Romeo, or naming a character who seemingly comes back from the dead Phoenix.

4.2.4 Some Ways of Classifying Characters

The following are some ways in which readers sometimes classify characters.

4.2.4.1 Round vs. Flat

Round characters are characters which have been fully developed by an author, physically, mentally, and emotionally, and are detailed enough to seem real. A round character is usually a main character, and is developed over the course of the story. A flat character is its opposite, having hardly any development whatsoever.

A flat character is distinguished by its lack of detail. Though the description of a flat character may be detailed, the character itself barely has detail and usually just follows one characteristic. A number of stereotypical, or ‘stock’ characters, have developed throughout the history of drama. Some of these characters include the country bumpkin, the con artist, and the city slicker. These characters are often the basis of flat characters, though elements of stock characters can be found in round characters as well. The commedia dell'arte, a form of improvisational theatre which originated in Italy, consists of
performers acting as well-known stock characters in conventional situations.

Supporting characters are generally flat, as most minor roles do not require a great deal of complexity. In addition, experimental literature and postmodern fiction often intentionally make use of flat characters, even as protagonists.

In addition to people, characters may be aliens, animals, gods, an artificial intelligence or, occasionally, inanimate objects.

4.2.4.2 Dynamic vs. Static

A dynamic character is the one who changes significantly during the course of the story. Changes considered to qualify a character as dynamic include changes in [sight] or understanding, changes in commitment, and changes in values. Changes in circumstance, even physical circumstance, do not apply unless they result in some change within the character's self.

By definition, the protagonist is nearly always a dynamic character. In coming-of-age stories in particular, the protagonist often undergoes dramatic change, transforming from innocence to experience. Examples of dynamic characters include John the Savage.
of Huxley's 'Brave New World', Jay Gatsby of Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby', Luke Skywalker from the original 'Star Wars Trilogy', Elizabeth Bennet of Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice' and Harry, Ron and Hermione in the 'Harry Potter series'.

Antagonists, such as Salieri of Shaffer's Amadeus, are frequently dynamic as well.

In contrast, a static character does not undergo significant change. A static character is a literary character who remains basically unchanged throughout a work. Whether round or flat, their personalities remain essentially stable throughout the course of the story. This is commonly done with secondary characters in order to let them serve as thematic or plot elements.

Supporting characters and major characters other than the protagonist are generally static, though exceptions do occur.

A non-fictional character is a character that actually exists or existed in history, though their exploits in the story may differ from their historical activities.
Some works of fiction have attempted to portray a story without the use of characters (James Joyce's Finnegans Wake is one of the most famous examples). In animations and puppetry, different aspects of a given character are rendered separately using different modalities. In animation, for example, mannerisms and behaviour are rendered by animators, while voices are rendered by voice actors. In machinima, voices are sometimes rendered using speech synthesis.

4.2.5 Some Ways of Reading Characters

Readers vary greatly in how they understand fictional characters. The most extreme ways of reading fictional characters would be to think of them exactly as real people or to think of them as purely artistic creations that have everything to do with craft and nothing to do with real life. Most styles of reading fall somewhere in between.

4.2.6 Character as Symbol

In some readings, certain characters are understood to represent a given quality or abstraction. Rather than simply being people, these characters stand for something larger. Many characters in Western literature have been read as Christ symbols, for example. Other characters have been read as symbolizing capitalist greed (as in F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby'), the futility of fulfilling the American Dream, or quixotic romanticism (Don Quixote), or even
feminism (Lara Croft). Three of the principal characters in ‘Lord of the Flies’ can be said to symbolize elements of civilization: Ralph represents the civilizing instinct; Jack represents the savage instinct; Piggy represents the rational side of human nature; while Simon represents Jesus.

4.2.6.1 Character as Representative

Another way of reading characters symbolically is to understand each character as a representative of a certain group of people. For example, Bigger Thomas of Native Son by Richard Wright is often seen as representative of young black men in the 1930s, doomed to a life of poverty and exploitation.

Many practitioners of cultural criticism and feminist criticism focus their analysis of characters on cultural stereotypes. In particular, they consider the ways in which authors rely on and/or work against stereotypes when they create their characters. Such critics, for example, would read Native Son in relation to racist stereotypes of African American men as sexually violent (especially against white women).

In reading Bigger Thomas' character, one could ask in what ways Richard Wright relied on these stereotypes to create a violent African-American male character and in what ways he fought against
them by making that character the protagonist of the novel rather than an anonymous villain.

Often, readings that focus on stereotypes focus on minor characters or stock characters, such as the ubiquitous sambo characters in early cinema, since those are the characters that tend to rely most heavily on stereotypes.

4.2.7 Characters as Historical or Biographical References

Sometimes characters obviously represent important historical figures. For example, Nazi-hunter Yakov Liebermann in 'The Boys from Brazil' by Ira Levin is often compared to real life Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal, and corrupted populist politician Willie Stark from All the King's Men by Robert Penn Warren is often compared to Louisiana governor Huey P. Long.

Other times, authors base characters on people from their own personal lives. Glenarvon by Lady Caroline Lamb chronicles her love affair with Lord Byron, who is thinly disguised as the title character. Nicole, a destructive, mentally ill woman in Tender Is the Night by F. Scott Fitzgerald, is often seen as a fictionalized version of Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda.
Perhaps because so many people enjoy imagining characters as real people, many critics devote their time to seeking out real people on whom literary figures were likely based. Frequently authors base stories on themselves or their loved ones. Sometimes writers create composite characters based on two or more individuals.

4.2.8 Character as Words

Some language- or text-oriented critics emphasize that characters are nothing more than certain conventional uses of words on a page: names or even just pronouns repeated throughout a text. They refer to characters as functions of the text. Some critics go so far as to suggest that even authors do not exist outside the texts that construct them.

4.2.9 Character as Patient: Psychoanalytic Readings

Psychoanalytic criticism usually treats characters as real people possessing complex psyches. Psychoanalytic critics approach literary characters as an analyst would treat a patient, searching their dreams, past, and behaviour for explanations of their fictional situations.

Alternatively, some psychoanalytic critics read characters as mirrors for the audience's psychological fears and desires. Rather than representing realistic psyches then, fictional characters offer readers a
way to act out psychological dramas of their own in symbolic and often hyperbolic form. The classic example of this would be Freud's reading of Oedipus (and Hamlet, for that matter) as emblematic of the Oedipus complex (a child's fantasy of killing his father to possess his mother).

This form of reading persists today in much film criticism. The feminist critic Laura Mulvey is considered a pioneer in the field. Her groundbreaking 1975 article, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', analyzed the role of the male viewer of conventional narrative cinema as fetishist, using psychoanalysis 'as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form.'

4.2.10 Unusual Uses

Postmodern fiction frequently incorporates real characters into fictional and even realistic surroundings. In film, the appearance of a real person as himself inside of a fictional story is a type of cameo. For instance, Woody Allen's Annie Hall has Allen's character call in Marshall McLuhan to resolve a disagreement. A prominent example of this approach is Being John Malkovich, in which the actor John Malkovich plays the character John Malkovich (though the real actor and the character have different middle names).
In some experimental fiction, the author acts as a character within his own text. One early example is 'Niebla ('Fog')' by Miguel de Unamuno (1907), in which the main character visits Unamuno in his office to discuss his fate in the novel. Paul Auster also employs this device in his novel 'City of Glass' (1985), which opens with the main character getting a phone call for Paul Auster. At first the main character explains that the caller has reached a wrong number, but eventually he decides to pretend to be Auster and see where it leads him. In Immortality by Milan Kundera, the author references himself in a storyline seemingly separate from that of his fictional characters, but at the end of the novel, Kundera meets his own characters. Other authors who have manifested themselves within the text include 'Kurt Vonnegut' (notably in 'Breakfast of Champions'), Dave Sim, in his comic book series 'Cerebus', and Stephen King in his 'Dark Tower' series.

With the rise of the 'star' system in Hollywood, many famous actors are so familiar that it can be hard to limit our reading of their character to a single film. In some sense, Bruce Lee is always Bruce Lee, Woody Allen is always Woody Allen, Tom Cruise is always Tom Cruise, and Harrison Ford is always Harrison Ford; all often portray characters that are very alike, so audiences fuse the star persona with the characters they tend to play, a principle explored in the Arnold Schwarzenegger vehicle Last Action Hero.
Some fiction and drama make constant reference to a character who is never seen. This often becomes a sort of joke with the audience. This device is the centrepoint of one of the most unusual and original plays of the 20th century, Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot, in which Godot of the title never arrives.

4.3.1 Tragic Hero

A tragic hero is a literary character who makes an error in judgment that inevitably leads to his/her own destruction.

4.3.2 Characteristic Features

Aristotle once said that ‘A man doesn't become a hero until he can see the root of his own downfall’. An Aristotelian tragic hero must possess specific characteristics, five of which are below.

Nobility (of a noble birth) or wisdom (by virtue of birth).

Error in judgment. Either a mistake in the character's actions or in his personality that leads to a downfall.

A reversal of fortune brought about because of the hero's error in judgment.
The discovery or recognition that the reversal was brought about by the hero's own actions.

The audience must feel dramatic irony for the character.

Initially, the tragic hero should be neither better nor worse morally than normal people, in order to allow the audience to identify with him. This also introduces pity, which is crucial in tragedy, for if the hero were perfect we would either be outraged with his fate or not especially care due to his ideological superiority. If the hero were evil, then the audience would feel that he had gotten what he deserved. It is important to strike a balance in the hero's character.

Eventually the Aristotelian tragic hero dies a tragic death, having fallen from great heights and having made an irreversible mistake. The hero must courageously accept his death with honor.

4.3.3 Other Common Traits

Some other common traits characteristic of a tragic hero:

The hero must suffer more than he deserves.
The hero must be doomed from the start, but bears no responsibility for possessing his flaw.

The hero must be noble in nature, but imperfect so that the audience can see themselves in him or her.

The hero must have discovered his fate by his own actions, not by things happening to him.

The hero must see and understand his doom, and that his fate was revealed by his own actions.

The hero's story should arouse fear and empathy.

The hero must be physically or spiritually wounded by his experiences, often resulting in his death.

Ideally, the hero should be a king or leader of men, so that his people experience his fall with him. This could also include a leader of a family, like Allie Fox in The Mosquito Coast.
The hero must be intelligent enough to have the opportunity to learn from his mistakes.

The hero must have a weakness, usually hubris, a subtle but irreversibly tragic form of pride.

The hero must be faced with a very serious decision.

The suffering of the hero must have meaning.

A tragic hero's story generally follows a sequence of 'Great, Good, Flaw, Downfall.'

The Shakespearean tragic hero must die at some point in the story, for example Macbeth. Shakespeare's characters illustrate that tragic heroes are neither fully good nor fully evil. Through the development of the plot a hero's flaws, rather than his quintessential goodness or evil, cause him to make a mistake which leads to his tragic downfall.
The hero of classical tragedies is almost universally male. Later tragedies (like Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra) introduced the female tragic hero. Feminine portrayals of the tragic hero are notable because they are rare. Female protagonists in the Western literary tradition are generally portrayed as intrinsically good or intrinsically evil.

The 'intrinsic' nature of traditional female characters' morality undermines the possibility for female characters' tragic mistakes or flaws to contribute to plot development as protagonists. Rather, these two-dimensional characters contribute as an outside force influencing the actions of the 'real' protagonists.

4.3.4 Tragic Virtue

An alternative view of the tragic hero, especially in Renaissance British literature, is one in which he or she possesses a tragic virtue (as opposed to the Classical idea of Hamartia). In this paradigm the hero exhibits traits that would under other conditions be considered desirable but due to external circumstances cause their eventual undoing. For example Shakespeare's character Hamlet is often criticized for his contemplative nature. Hamlet's failure to act is cited as his tragic flaw.
4.4 Modern Fictional Tragic Heroes

In the Modernist era a new kind of tragic hero was synthesized as a reaction to the English Renaissance, The Age of Enlightenment, and Romanticism. The modern hero, rather than falling calamitously from a high position, begins the story as what appears to be an ordinary, average person. The modern hero's story does not require the protagonist to have the traditional catharsis to bring the story to a close. He may die without an epiphany of his destiny, and he may suffer without the ability to change events that are happening to him. The story may end without closure and even without the death of the hero. This new hero of Modernism is the anti-hero, and may not be a tragic hero at all.

4.5 Seth’s Characterization Strategy

4.5.1 Fragilities in Artistic Expression

In ‘An Equal Music’ Seth exposes the reality and the difficulties of coming to terms with flawed characters as imperfect as those in real life. Cadences and relations of music and of speech which one cannot always hear clearly when one’s hearing is not removed; beauties of art or of character which depend entirely on the beholder and his or her innate weakness, and a world in which the acceptance of the mediocre as the best, what one can achieve, is an act of courage,
"A recognition of the human condition and of all its frailties in its own artistic expression of itself" (Gill 2001)

The English reviewers have generally been happy with ‘An Equal Music’, which does not mean that the Indian reviewers will see the book in the same light. Several of the comments by the critics can be used on the jacket, ‘Seth gives the fullest portrait which have been ever read in fiction of a musician’s relationship to his music’, ‘An Equal Music’ is that most delicate of creatures; a narrative with, at its core the passion of an art form that lives outside language’ Gill (2001) finds that the book

“Pleases most in the ravishing refinement of it’s technique, it’s sure placing of scenes, and the unerring truth of its portrayal of a small, enclosed social world” (Gill 2001)

Reading ‘An Equal Music’ is a pleasure; the work may be a masterpiece. Seth, always an excellent writer, has been working towards this triumph. While his ‘The Golden Gate’ was called the great California Novel, its verse form and amusing hipness meant it was a virtuoso display lacking depth of characters. ‘A Suitable Boy’ had density and detail about the newly independent India. Seth’s view of life also works against the fullness of great art. A message of common sense, practically, living for the day, the pleasures of family
and conventionality, and a distrust of romantic excess as destructive together result in irony, comedy, and happy endings, which, being sensible, disappoint readers desire for profound passion and tragedy.

4.5.2 The Poor Musicians

In 'An Equal Music' the message is similar, but the method and story deepen the treatment of character. Here Seth has taken the classical European novel about the life of musicians and brought it up to date, setting it in the contemporary world as a time when comprehensive schools in England seldom teach classical music and when chamber music is losing its appeal and string quartets find it difficult to survive. This is partly a novel about economic survival as the world changes, but it is mainly about emotional survival as situation changes. There is no love, which cannot become destructive; excessive passions destroy.

'An Equal Music' will also test the English reader's response to an Indian born novelist locating his story in the Hyde Park and peopling his novel with non-Indian characters. Seth writing about Mrs. Rupa Mehra and the English Literary Society of Calcutta was one thing, but Seth capturing the emotions of Julia or reporting the functioning of the Maggiore Quartet is another. Still, he is perhaps constrained by Indian moderation. He does not make Julia and Michael to succeed in love against the eighteenth century French furniture or on the grand staircase.
In Vienna, the city of romance Michael meets and falls in love with Julia, a golden haired girl with ambitions to be a concert pianist. The rest of the story undergoes the ups and downs that any clinched love story does, but there a difference in its treatment of the ever tired theme of love. It is story, which reveals the strange, precarious, obsessive, joyous and difficult life bed by a professional musician. Seth is well versed in the ways of traditional and classical music His empathy for the fine craft gives the narrative a refreshing tone that invigorates the reader at every stance.

4.5.3 Popular Fictional Trend

Apparently Seth feels at home in any part of the world. A rare trait in an Indian author who resides in a world torn apart by post colonial identity rifts full of authors, desperate trying to reclaim their lost roots. His characters may sound European, but their essential sensibilities take on an universal tone in the book and the course of its events. There is no specific nuance that renders them as particularly English, France or any other nationality. In fact they could be Indian characters in an Indian sub context but still would create the same magic they have created as the characters they have been written out as.

On the whole in one’s view, ‘An Equal Music’ is a simple yet profound love story designed in the style of the current popular fiction trend, but it achieves literary status due to Seth’s unique treatment of
the generic form. He fuses the very essence of poetic prose with his extensive knowledge of chamber music, western classical style. The end product is four hundred pages of a very satisfying reading experience, which no avid reader can forget.

Salman Rushdie's 'The Ground Beneath Her Feet' and Vikram Seth's 'An Equal Music' were released on the same day. An Equal Music is not comparable in the complexity or the technical ingenuity of Rushdie's novel. It follows a straight narrative sequence. It does not use any of the gimmicks borrowed from the television. There is no coinage of hybrid words. The plot is graspable. There are no digressions and the characters are portrayed in a realistic manner.

4.5.4 Love in a Pupil called Virginia

The plot is simple 'An Equal Music' is the story of Michael Holme, narrated by him. Michael is second violin player in the moderately successful Maggiore Quartet. His is a story of music, of the relationships that make music, and of the hard – won hormonies that make life worth living. Michael, Billy, Helena and Piers, the members of the quartet, are united in what Michael calls on odd quadripartite marriage with a corresponding complexity of interactions which can be cordial or neutral or strained. An Equal Music is also a tear jerking love story. He once loved Julia in Vienna, when they studied the art of playing the violin together under the same master. Then, on an irrational impulse, he decided to sever his relations with
Julia and Vienna. He found compensation for his frustrated love in a pupil called Virginia. But Julia is unforgettable. The rest of the novel is an attempt to revive his love.

Julia has, in the meantime, got married and has a loving husband and son. Nevertheless the common link of music, especially the music of Schubert and Bach re-establishes a personal intimacy which leads to adultery. Julia gradually grows deaf. In spite of this serious handicap when they visit Vienna with the quartet, their performance is a great success. In fact, there is monotonous consistency in their success with the audience. After their Vienna experience they go to Venice. Their brief reunion serves to prove the impossibility of their romance, but at the same time the failure of romance enables Michael to think beyond himself, and to contemplate a large reason for being. It plays with variations on the theme of love. The visit of Venice of the reunited lovers forms the climax of the novel.

4.5.5 Mrs. Formby’s Death

The rest of the novel is a series of anti-climaxes. Michael and Julia return to London. Julia goes back to her family, and severs relations with Michael forever. Michael is not heart broken that he deserts his long and fruitful association with the quartet. The other love also is threatened, most ostensibly by the economic rationalism of Cedric Glover, nephew to Mrs. Formby, Michael’s elderly benefactor
and owner of the valuable Tononi that makes Michael the violinist he is. Fortunately the values of patronage prevail when Mrs. Formby dies, leaving Michael his borrowed violin in her uncontestable will. Although he loses Julia, with whose being he is irreparably imprinted, Michael retains his most constant companion. The old violin is the vehicle for music, which no man can possess absolutely. From the beginning Michael has wondered of the Tononi. Loneliness, according to Michael is the human condition. Music is consolation.

However, Michael finally has enough music including Julia’s music, to make life worth living. Michael is not a happy man, but he is blessed enough. Like the lonely narrator and the lonely John in ‘The Golden Gate’, Michael is not much good at romance – in fact, he is infuriatingly bad at it. But his failure in love is not the point of the narrative. ‘An Equal Music’, like ‘The Golden Gate’, is more concerned to discover alternatives to the fragile fictions of romantic love, which so preoccupy the West. Seth makes a firm decision in this novel to admit his national identity. He did this before in ‘The Golden Gate’, but there the narrator was a mere commentator on the action. In ‘An Equal Music’ the narrator is also the protagonist.

4.5.6 Rushdie and Seth

Comparing Seth with Rushdie is unavoidable. Rushdie never allows the reader to forget his origins. Seth has perfected the art of impersonation, but it cannot be a substitute for the real thing.
The limitation is that the novel presents a group of characters sealed off from the world outside. It moves in a historical vacuum. But there is the quartet performing and the response of the audience as in the ancient times. Everything else in either connected with musical or administrative details.

"An astounding aspect of Seth's work is the tremendous research that provides the backbone to his narratives. One has to only take note of Seth's acknowledgement to libraries and archives in 'An Equal Music'. In this note, Seth indicates the extent of the research that he had undertaken to get a sense of what it must be like to live, to have lived and to expect to continue to live in zones that lie at the intersection of the world of soundlessness with those of heard, misheard, of half-heard and of imagined sound' (Pandurang 155.)

"Where there shall be no cloud nor sun, no darkness, nor dazzling, but one equal light, no noise nor silence, but one equal music, no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession, no foes nor friends, but one equal communion and identity, no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity" (epigraph to the text). Seth (1999).
John Carey suggests that Donne’s phrase of leave taking yields apt meanings as it brings out the balance between the four instruments that the quartet aims at, and the unheard music in Julia’s head matching the sound of her playing. Michael’s love for Julia, however, is not characterized by the balance, harmony and tranquility marked by one equal communion and identity, also mentioned in Donne’s Valediction.

Michael is complex character who, while he perpetuates Western artistic cultural traditions, systematically rejects contemporary values in his search for meaning. Through music with others – he finds something better than community, something beyond the pain of self, something beyond language. But to find peace, he must discover that music exists without him. Finally, when he no longer able to perform, listening to Julia play the Art of Fugue, he is able to acknowledge his personal grief, let go of his desire for happiness, and accept the music that he hears as a sufficient gift.

To some extent, Michael might be read as a critique of Englishness. Virginie, Michael’s French student and convenient lover, is furious when she discovers that Michael has been lying about his renewed relationship with Julia. Virginie accuses Michael of Englishness: “Oh, I hate you English”. Be reasonable, be reasonable. You have hearts like cement” (165) Seth (1999). There is much that is wrong with Michael’s heart but it is not set and he is far from fixedly
rational. Michael is not typically English. Virginie’s admonition sits oddly in the text, unsetting assumptions readers may have about national identities, and underlining the potential for rethinking the category ‘nation’.

4.5.7 The Dual Love of Julia

Julia cannot come to terms with living in “dual words, which chafe each other”, (168) Seth (1999) and she is unhappy with her acts of deception. She realises that the records of withdrawal in her credit card will show that she had been in Venice and James will come to know of it. Filled with feelings of betrayal and guilt, at almost making love in the church, Julia decides to return home a few days earlier than planned. Michael also comes upon a private communication written by Julia to James. He reads it and reacts “like a thief who has entered a house to find in it goods stolen from his own” (291) Seth (1991). Michael is tormented that she could write a letter expressing her love for James just a few hours after their lovemaking. Intense jealousy make him brutal, both physical in his lovemaking, and callous with this tongue. Julia responds with rage and disbelief to his taunts. She cuts short her stay, and returns to London.

Julia admits that she loves Michael deeply but comes to a decision that her present and future are her family. Michael is the past, and she cannot continue to live there; “I, of all people, who have a before and an after, should have known that you can’t relieve your
life" (325) Seth (1999). Julia therefore ends the relationship with Michael. Her choice to opt for her dependable though unmusical businessman husband James over the volatile and moody Michael, and her denunciation of passion of the family and social order, is a thematic preoccupation once again repeated from ‘A Suitable Boy’ and ‘The Golden Gate’. James has stood by her “In the worst days, when I could hardly recognize myself in the mirror, I saw in this eyes that I was myself” (327).

Whereas in Michael’s presence, she becomes restless and uncertain; afraid and guilty. Julia has her Catholic faith, which is the foundation of her confidence. As a mother, she speaks of the need for stability for her son, and of her desire to extend the family by having another child, so as to provide emotional security for her son Luke “Luke needs someone to share me with, or he’ll grow up be as selfish as I am” (328) Seth (1999).

4.5.8 Seth’s Narrative Depth

Seth’s narrative, which could have explored the depths of Julia’s emotional distress in her transition from the world of sounds, music and creativity to the world of deafness, is constrained by the web of absence and vacant regret that a highly strung Michael weaves around his lonely, near psychotic existence. Paradoxically, no one knows Michael better than he knows himself. As the first narrator, he is constantly reflecting on his flaws, his restlessness and his inertia.
Michael is aware that Julia recognizes in him, what he sees in himself "a volatility, a sense of resistance, of skepticism, roughness, impulsiveness, even, at times, of dark panic, almost brainsickness" (81) Seth (1999). While Julia wants to move on with her life, Michael exists in the past, having monologues with himself, with his violin and with musicians and composers long gone: "I am consumed by past love; it's germs long embedded, half – contained have grown virulent again [...] I am eaten by futile pity, I make too much of much" (242). Seth (1999).

Mrs. Formby, the neighbour of Michael tells him that she has to consider her nephew's request to leave him the violin, so that he may set up an education trust fund for her three nieces. This compounds Michael's feeling of despair and depression. He accompanies Piers to a violin auction wherein bidding for a violin goes up to seventy six thousand pounds. Likewise, his beloved Carlo Tanoni is also worth thousands of pounds.

Seth's language slows down to capture Michael's loneliness, and his inability to swallow his sense of self. He is callous in his break up with Virginia. He chokes on his despair at his loss of Julia, yet once again, and the pain that he feels for her suffering. He views his self as having become "irreparably imprinted with the die of someone else's being" (166) Seth (1999). While the perceptive James McNicholl deals with the painful knowledge of his wife's affair with quiet
dignity, Michael has fits of melancholy and panic attacks. When the tone of nostalgic sentimentality does not let up, Michael’s narrative of personal complexities begin to grow tedious. Michael’s long winding self centered professions of loss and heartbreak begins to tire.

Michael returns to the small town of Rochdale on three occasions. The references to his childhood are important because Michael’s desire to escape his past his largely responsible for his present psychological state of mind. The son of a butcher, his parents had saved all they could to send their son to a university. His mother desired that her only child escapes life in Rochdale by means of a good education.

When Michael is nine years old, Mrs. Formby takes him to see a concert conducted by the small and ailing Barbiolli. Awe-struck, Michael decides that “More than anything else I want to be part of such a noise” (67). He begs his neighbour, Mrs. Formby to teach him to play the violin. His refusal to go the university leaves his parents “bewildered and betrayed and depraved of happiness that they were due”. (22) Seth (1999) Michael opts for music school in London and moves into a small enclosed rare-field world of classical music. In Manchester, he has to survive unsupported by an academic grant, and cannot help his parents financially.
4.5.9 A Narration on Rochdale

Meanwhile Rochdale becomes a victim to industrial planning “it is a town with its heart torn out” (71) Seth (1999). The council places a compulsory purchase order on his father’s butcher shop, and the shop gives way to a packing lot. His mother exhausts herself trying to nurse his father from a bronchial ailment, working as a dinner lady in a school, and also fighting the legal case. Michael has to live with the guilt of letting down his mother. Apart from his father who is widowed, his Aunt Joan and Mrs. Formby, Michael has no other ties with Rochdale. He is determined to cut off links with “the distressed and constrained town” (22) Seth (1999) in which he lived now that he has moved into “an urbane world far outside his ken” (23). And yet he wonders why he mourns for it so angrily. He puts off visiting Rochdale even after his upset and lonely father tells him about the death of his twelve years old pet cat, Zca-Zca. Nor does he take time to visit Mrs. Formby in hospital, or to attend her funeral.

Soon after Julia leaves him, Michael hears of Mrs. Formby’s death and realizes that he has just a few months left with his companion of twelve years “I’ve spent more time with it than with any living soul, but, well, it’s still not mine. And I’m not it’s” (127) Seth (1999). The intense feeling, with which he plays his violin in Vivaldi’s Church, the Pieta makes it an instrument with its own being.
Seth evocatively describes the sensuous relationship between man and instrument "with the back of my hand I touch its back, its belly. How long we have lived together" (56) Seth (1999). Michael agonises over life without his violin and cannot bear the thought of it lying "unplayed, unloved, unspeaking in a cupboard for years" (56) Seth (1999). The impending loss of violin only adds to the delicate state of Michael's mind, which is one the verge of breaking down under the unforgettable pressure of thoughts. There are instances of anxieties that reveal his fecklessness. He is given to moments of dark panic, that reveal his fecklessness. He is given to moments of dark panic, when things seem to be closing in such as the attack in Vienna after the performance of the Trout.

There is a reason for his fear of the claustrophobic. He relates these panic attacks to an incident that occurred on his sixth birthday. While playing a game of hide and seek, he hid himself in a fridge. The door clicked shut and he could not get out, unit someone happened to come into the room. He was brought out in state of suffocated terror. He tells Julia that is one reason why he lives where he does at Archangel Court, and pays a mortgage beyond his reach.

As self pity gnaws away the centre of his being. Michael reverts to the solitariness of his early life. There are warning signals that this futile self pity is gradually leading to a nervous breakdown. He becomes obsessed with finding out the animal in painting of
Carpaccio which Julia had taken him to see. He stalks Julia in order to tell her what they had thought was a god in an artist’s work was originally a stoat.

Julia goes back on a pledge never to perform the Art of the Fugue to anyone other than himself. This makes Michael ruthlessly disfigure the score of the first fugue that she had painstakingly copied with a dark brown ink, and presented to him for his thirty-eighth birthday.

With water on my figures I move along my part. Page after page, I hear my smudging notes. The staff dissolves, the heads and stalks blur into mire, the water in my glass grows turbid brown (347). Seth (1999).

Michael allows the outside world from which he had once been islander, to intrude onto his music while playing. He begins to lose concentration and suffers small panic attacks lasting a few seconds each when his hand and not his mind is on the notes before his eyes. Michael starts to suffer a different kinds of deafness: “the more tense I am, the less well I hear” (354) Seth (1999). Burned out and unable to practice he asks himself whey he should come to terms with the whole world.
He leaves the Maggiore, and is reduced to doing dog food jingles for advertisement companies, and background music for movies. He even contemplates suicide, and is desperate loneliness picks up a call girl Tricia from a card in a phone booth. When all seems lost, and as Michael descends into a personal hell, a registered letter from Rochdale arrives. But it is not the feared claim for custody of the violin. Rather, Mrs. Formby’s solicitor informs Michael that she has indeed bequeathed the Carlo Tanoni, Circa 1727, to him. Michael is filled with disbelief. “It was lost to me, that now is found” (361) Seth (1999).

After Mrs. Formby’s death, Michael has to deal with her nephew Cedric Glover who accuses Michael of disposing his three daughters of a better future. He sees the sale of the Tanoni as a possible source of income to meet the expenses of his daughter’s education and threatens to challenge Michael’s right to the violin. Michael suffers only a momentary twang of guilt. “And then there are his wretched, wretched daughters: can I really rob them of what is theirs by right and live in peace? What will I feel each time I raise my bow?” (363) Seth (1999).

He considers that the violin is more than an instrument. But for the violin, he would have “descended forever into endless night” (368) Seth (1999). In gratitude he asks the spirit of Mrs. Formby, is it the Violin alone you want to give me, or must I learn some lesson from
the World?” (361) Seth (1999). The violin returns Michael to life again. He starts taking lessons, has long walks, and plays the extra fiddle in an orchestra. He learns to live in a sexless calm and moves away from being a self-centered bastard. He begins to hear again “creaking, rippling, shifting, easing, crackling, and sighing; this is not something I have heard before. It is a soft sound, easy, intimate” (376) Seth (1999).

A year after he set eyes on Julia, Piers re-invites him back to the Maggiore. But the final home coming is in Michael’s decision to return to the family. He even contemplates living in Rochdale itself, and doing a bit of teaching, something linked to his own college. There is nothing to keep him London. “It is no longer, if it ever was my home” (378) Seth (1999). On a visit home, he places a white rose on his mother’s grave. As he plays the unfinished fugue from the Arts of Fugue in memory of Mrs. Formby, his spirit regenerates itself. He breathes freely once more; “my hands are not cold, nor my mind agitated. I am in no dark tunnel but the open moor” (379) Seth (1999).

4.5.10 Such Music is a Sufficient Gift

Michael musters enough courage to go to Julia at Wigmore. The novel ends with Julia playing the Art of Fugue to a packed hall, her husband and son in the audience. Michael, who has been watching her from his seat in the balcony, listens to her music. The music, which Julia played, is a beauty beyond imagination clear, lovely,
inexorable, phrase across phrase, phrase – echoing phrase, the incomplete, the unending ‘Art of Fugue’. It is ‘An Equal Music’ (380) Seth (1999).

Michael has made his peace with himself, and walks away, grateful for having had the privilege of hearing the excellence of Julia’s music. Michael concludes and more importantly he also adds his realization.

Music, such music, is a sufficient gift. Why ask for happiness; why hope not to grieve? It is enough, it is to be blessed enough, to live from day to day, and to hear such music – not too much, or the soul could not sustain it – from time to time (381) Seth (1999).

However by and large, as a writer, Seth remains apolitical and refuses to be apologetic about this state of avoidance. As a consequence of this lack of focus on any political assertions of representation, a novel like An Equal Music could be read as an attempt to supercede the restrictive boundaries of nationalism and distinct cultural registers through a philosophy of universal humanism and an overriding concern for the human race.
In today’s supposedly transnational world, borders will, inevitably, still have the uncanny knack of cropping up. Readers are yet to enter a humanist worldliness wherein questions of passports, green cards and permits of residence have been done away with. While Seth may reject the political and celebrate non-commitment, the critic from a region who continues to experience pain from economic and social under-development is compelled to ask if just the humane core of cosmopolitanism is enough. For such critics, whenever and wherever Seth writes form, the reality of his geographic roots will still remain an intruding factor while assessing his social contribution as a creative writer.

This calls for an examination of the geographic identity, or, as Katrak puts it, “the possibility of living ‘here’ in body and ‘elsewhere’ in mind and imagination”. (201) Seth (1999)
The simultaneity experience is of a specific kind for writers in English whose socio-intellectual displacement is one of choice and different in degrees from that of more economically displaced immigrants.

Seth is able to present a realistic non-mythical reconstruction of home in ‘A Suitable Boy’ inspite of the considerable number of years spent aboard. But he also produced a story set in London, exclusively peopled by Britishers in ‘An Equal Music’. Seth’s work does not convey the feeling of being trapped in an impossible in – between wherein he is denied the option of identifying with either an Indian or
a cosmopolitan or a metropolitan culture. As Ian Chambers put it: