CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
Despite career-long unevenness in the quality of his work, John Berryman has emerged as an important American poet. His achievements and permanence of appeal go to make him a writer of the first rank. Alienation is one of the most dominant themes in the poetry of John Berryman. With his unique imaginative intensity, he conceives a large number of individual characters who are alienated from other human beings, from their society, from God and from nature.

Alienation is not an American invention. It is, in fact, inherent in human condition. It is a paradox that in our very loneliness we recognize our kinship to each other; lament our seclusion from them, which makes it a poignant and universal theme in world literature.

In his brilliant introduction to Richard Schacht's *Alienation*, Walter Kaufmann regards alienation as a central feature of human existence. The contemporary obsession with the term 'alienation', he admits, is justifiable on the ground that the modern
world holds a larger number of alienated individuals than ever before. The causes of such an unprecedented increase in the number of alienated individuals are complex. Schacht nevertheless feels that "The feeling of estrangement could be minimized by drastically reducing popular education, by brain-washing, by drugs, and even by frontal lobotomies."

Kaufmann argues that alienation is essential for the growth of individual personality. Only by keeping himself at a distance, man can have a chance to watch the world, the society, and even himself and have a correct view of them all. He adds:

Estrangement from nature, society, one's fellow men, and oneself is part of growing up. One has to detach oneself from the womb of one's environment in order to become a person, an individual, an independent being. Self-consciousness involves such detachment, one has to come to look upon oneself and others and the world as strange and perplexing.

The term 'alienation', which literally means separation or estrangement, has been invested with a

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2Ibid., p. xlvi.
new significance from Hegel onwards. In *The Phenomenology of Mind* Hegel makes manifold use of the term 'Entfremdung'. He holds that man feels alienated when he fails or is reluctant to identify fully with the social substance which is the objectification of the human spirit, in which the spirit finds the objective form that is essential for its actualization. At times Hegel uses the term 'alienation' to mean a discordant relation between the individual and the social substance. Sometimes he uses the term "self-alienation" to describe man's intentional surrender of his rights, his particularity, to get back his universality. Though Hegel's point of view is quite understandable, his uses of the term 'alienation' are no doubt intriguing.

Frederich Schiller holds that man feels alienated when he fails to harmonize his actual condition in time and his essential nature in idea, his nature and reason. Such a harmonization is not an end in itself, and man's spiritual development begins with the disruption of such harmony. Cultural and spiritual development can occur only piecemeal through concentration on different areas singly. "This antagonism of power", according to Schiller, "is the
great instrument of culture."³ Man, in order to contemplate the world, must be separated from it and must possess a distinct personality. This loss of immediate unity is an essential precondition to attain a higher and conscious unity.

More recently Martin Heidegger has expressed the view that to exist inauthentically is to be divorced from one's innermost being, to be alienated from one's own self. To live inauthentically means to be totally immersed in the present, to be guided by impersonal, social expectations and conventions. Heidegger observes:

This being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein into the kind of Being of the others' in such a way, indeed, that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the 'they' is unfolded .... Every kind of priority gets noiselessly suppressed ... . Everything gained by a struggle becomes just something to be manipulated. Every society loses its force. This case of averageness reveals in turn an essential tendency of Dasein which we call the 'levelling down' of all possibilities of Being.


'Dasein' loses its essence when it is lost in the multitude, and feels alienated from its Being. Sartre also opines that man feels alienated when he experiences the 'Other's Look' which discovers his determinate characteristics and not his innate possibilities as a free subject:

The difference of principle between the other-as-object and other-as-subject stems solely from this fact: that the other-as-subject can in no way be known nor even conceived as such... Thus the other-as-object is an explosive instrument which I handle with care because I foresee around him the permanent possibility that 'they' are going to make it explode and that with this explosion I shall suddenly experience the flight of the world away from me and the alienation of my being.

Karl Marx's views may also be mentioned here. He has considered the economic aspect of alienation. According to him, man is a species-being and accepts the species as his object and treats himself as a universal and free being. Man's physical and spiritual life is almost umbilically linked with nature. The forced labour for sheer survival, for exigency, in segregating man from nature, from himself, from his own

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active human functions, from his life activity, alienates the species from man. The animal is part and parcel of its life-activity; "But man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness."\(^6\) It is this conscious life activity that distinguishes man from animals. The forced labourer, however, ignores this distinction and turns his life activity, his essential being, into a means of his existence. As a result, man, says Marx, is alienated from the product of his labour, from his species-being, from other people, from his self, from spiritual quintessence.

Marx's view differs from that of Melvin Seeman.\(^7\) Marx does not hesitate to speak of alienated labour even in the absence of actual worker dissatisfaction. Seeman, on the contrary, considers anyone alienated from his work who does not find intrinsic meaning in it. People can be characterized as alienated from their work if they are not getting satisfaction from their work. The work must be engaging and rewarding in itself. Seeman, moreover,

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conceives of alienation in terms of 'powerlessness'. If a person is unable to influence the major socio-political problems and events of contemporary period, he is considered to be estranged from his socio-political scenario. The person so alienated feels that this world is governed by the few and that he has no part to perform in this vast world. Thus, both the feeling of meaninglessness of the work or work-dissatisfaction and the feeling of powerlessness in the world pave the way for alienation.

Paul Tillich⁸, an eminent theologian of modern times, considers the concepts of unbelief, concupiscence, and hubris as the marks of man's faith in the New Being. He believes that faith, love and surrender can help man get rid of the feeling of alienation. Erich Fromm⁹, however, analyses the condition of the alienated individual from psychological, sociological and philosophical perspectives. He contends that the modern man, who adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him

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by cultural patterns, does not have a sense of self except the one which conformity with the majority can give, and that in the process he ceases to be himself and suffers from a defect of spontaneity and individuality. For Tillich, an individual can be himself - can experience himself as a unique individual entity - only if he breaks away from the Circean influences of the society. In other words, the individual can realize his identity in all its particularity if he is able to maintain his individuality in the face of heavy odds and chooses to stay out as a nonconformist.

Fromm puts the individual above society and finds that the self-alienation of the modern man is the result of his total surrender to the ethos and norms of his society. He thinks that a scientific-technological society will aim at mass production and mass education and try to reduce the individual to a non-entity. The therapy which he prescribes is love. Unfortunately, even love has lost its meaning owing to its degeneration into sexuality.

Herbert Marcuse makes similar observations
about the predicament of the modern man. His analysis insists that there is a pressing need for qualitative change for society as a whole. It also affirms that the sweeping rationality of society, its union of productivity and destruction, and its brinkmanship of annihilation, which propel efficiency, contain a great deal of irrationality. The fact that an overwhelming majority of people accept such a society does not render it less reprehensible. Men can distinguish between true and false consciousness, between the real and the immediate interest, only if they feel the need to change their way of life. But society always tries to repress such a need in each of its members by imposing its rational ways. This, according to Marcuse, is an ambiguous situation. Modern man, under the circumstances, is left with two alternatives: either he would believe that the advanced industrial society can contain qualitative change for the future; or, he would believe that the society contains such forces and tendencies which are capable of undermining this facile containment and exploding the society. In the present society, Marcuse laments, the first tendency, i.e., that the industrial society can contain the qualitative change for the future, is dominant. And hence the modern individual's total and unconditional surrender to society.
Marcuse corroborates Fromm's view that modern man is alienated because he is made to identify himself completely with society, with its values and norms. Man is forced to believe that the so-called inner urge and individual uniqueness are mere hypothetical jargons and his salvation lies in gratification of biological needs and acquisition of fashionable, labour-saving gadgets. He feels reluctant to distinguish between his true needs and false needs and slinks into the realm of the peripheral and the immediate. The advanced industrial society, through intelligent manipulations, grafts needs and their easy satisfaction upon its individuals, thereby bringing them under the yoke of its administration and servitude, thus suffocating the "needs which demand liberation".11

Marcuse, like Kaufman and Fromm, believes that the increase in the number of alienated individuals in the contemporary society is a sign of an increased awareness of a sensitive individuals's protest against and refusal to capitulate before the Juggernaut of civilization. Recognition of illness is the beginning of health and recognition of the

11Marcuse, Reason and Revolution, p. 37.
retardation is the sign of growth. It has to be admitted, however, that alienation, unlike illness, is not the natural condition of man, and all those who are most aware of their link with the rest of humanity, are the persons to feel bitterly when that link snaps.

Ortega y Gasset contends that in a scientific, advanced society the individual is replaced by the masses: "There are no longer protagonists; there is only the chorus."12 The individual, to him, is the person who sets values on himself and is aware of his distinctness. He is actively engaged in the mission to excel, to perfect his faculties. On the contrary, the vast majority of people are only too glad and willing to be one in the flock and to drift along with the current. The individual makes "great demands" upon himself, "piling up difficulties and duties", and as for the masses, there is "nothing special of themselves" and for them "to live is to be every moment what they already are, without imposing on themselves any effort toward perfection", and they

behave as "mere buoys that float on the waves". It is characteristic of our times that the masses overwhelm and rule the individual by the sheer force of numbers. "As they say in the United States", Gasset adds, "to be different is to be indecent. The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select." Gasset seems to suggest that the self-conscious and sensitive individual is bound to feel alienated in a society dominated by the masses and that his alienation arises out of his dissatisfaction with and disapproval of the flock-mentality.

All the thinkers mentioned above - Kaufman, Fromm, Marcuse and Gasset - hold that it is the modern technological society that tries to smother up the growth of individual personality and that the individual who is sensitive enough to sense his retardation in such a society, is bound to feel alienated. An analysis of their views reveals that the term 'alienation' is descriptive of a peculiarly human phenomenon. While some writers consider it sinister.

13 Ibid., p. 10.
14 Ibid., p. 12.
some others dub it as the necessary transition for a fuller development of personality. Psychologists and sociologists have made extensive use of the term to describe the sickness peculiar to the advanced technological civilization. Alienation is considered as a perennial human problem. As F.W. Dillistone sums up,

... [for] Hegel the estrangement was to be found within the very structure of life universal. For Marx, it was to be found within the structure of man's conditions of labour which compelled him to be alienated from his work, from himself, and from his fellowmen.¹⁵

While theologists regard alienation as a sort of sin resulting out of man's strained relationship with God, existentialist thinkers brand it as a malaise caused by man's failure to connect his physical self with his spiritual, essential self, to achieve authenticity, to link himself significantly with his fellowmen and with the spirit of his milieu. But if we go deep into the sense with which this term has been used by these writers - from Hegel to Fromm - we find them agreeing on some fundamental premises: that

alienation implies some sort of disjunction of an individual from something very vitally essential for his spiritual growth and well-being; that the person so alienated feels a sense of loss; that such a feeling of loss impairs healthy functioning and manifests itself through various psychic symptoms; and that alienation is inimical and antagonistic to the full flowering of the self-hood. It is also interesting to note that writers like Marx, Gasset, Marcuse, Fromm and Kaufmann consider the modern industrialized society largely responsible for sensitive individuals feeling alienated. They suggest, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, that though it is better to feel alienated in such a commercial, mass-minded, dehumanized society than to take it lying down, it would perhaps be the best to have a perfectly healthy society that leaves no scope for alienation, and while giving man comfort and leisure, helps him grow up into a complete individual.

The evaluative approximation of the meaning of 'alienation' thus varies in its intensity and significance from writer to writer. As Richard Schacht has precisely put it,
... different writers find the separation they are concerned with significant for a great variety of different reasons. Some are considered morally or metaphysically undesirable, others developmentally important, some psychologically harmful, others socially disruptive; some personally unpleasant, others sources of insight. 

Schacht insists that if people choose to use the term 'alienation' in so many ways such as experiencing 'the other' (Sartre), feeling 'separated from' (Hegel, Heidegger and Schiller), being 'alien' (Fromm), feeling 'alien' (Marx) and feeling 'estranged from' because of powerlessness and meaninglessness of work (Seeman) in relation to the popular culture, basic values, behavioural norms of the society, friends and relations, one's works, things and environments, or natural world as a whole, they have to use 'alienated from' instead of simple 'alienated'. The term, he says, through its indiscriminate uses, has been reduced to simple, general, relational and descriptive meaning that is 'separation', because in the process the world no more means anything definite. But Schacht probably ignores the fact that all these various applications, though they do not mean exactly the same thing, refer to a distinct set of things that can be classed together without impairing the

16 Schacht, p. 36.
fundamentally applicability of the term 'alienation'. The phenomenon is complex but such complexity adds to, rather than diminishes, the viability of the term.

Though the term 'alienation' is often taken to signify a modern malaise, it is, in reality, as old as human history. The fact that man is an eternal stranger in this world, not of his own making, vouchsafes for the above opinion. The Biblical story of Adam and Eve can be illustrated as a yarn of alienation "from God and nature, alienation through conscience and reason, alienation from home or nature, [and] alienation in work and in marriage."\(^{17}\)

Man has no option but to feel alienated in his temporal existence in this world. In short, to be human is to be alienated: the very facticity of human existence implies alienation. No one comes into this world of his own volition; he is simply thrown into it. Of course, one can ascribe his creation to a Divine Providence. But this cannot be demonstrated ontologically. This essential dichotomy of human existence, unavoidable except in unifying mystical

experiences, causes existential alienation.

The twentieth century writers' concern with loneliness is not tangential but total. The human scene mirrored in contemporary writings is a multitude of isolated units - a lonely crowd or a crowd of lonely men. Men and women go on living and partly living; they collide but do not meet, talk but do not communicate. The bonds that tie man with man and with the larger physical and metaphysical scheme of things have given way and man seems to be doomed to drift in a void. His isolation is from within, not without. Modern man, as the Hungarian writer and critic Lukács points out, is "by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationship with other human beings." 18

According to Lukács, loneliness in traditional writings can be ascribed to certain factors in man or his predicament whereas in modern writings, it is an integral part of universal experience; it is in the very air he breathes.

Within the American literary tradition the experience of loneliness has remained constant, but its

nature has changed from generation to generation. To the nineteenth-century hero loneliness is the aura of his pride and distinction, but to the twentieth-century hero, it is his badge of defeat. The nineteenth-century hero seeks loneliness as a necessary precondition for self-fulfilment. He does not model his life; he is the model. The twentieth-century hero—however, views loneliness as a wall and barrier to self-fulfilment. Shorn of faith and self-confidence, he is a pathetic figure. The former established his identity by taking a lonely position whereas loneliness has robbed the latter of his identity.

Loneliness, like all subjective experiences, is easier to sense than define. It is a state of mind that touches upon a wide variety of feelings. It is variously experienced as separation, misunderstanding, lack of communication, unworthiness, failure and a sense of impotence and lostness. The list can be stretched indefinitely to include many other nuances of experiences. The experience is realized by a variety of men and women of different age-groups from different walks of life. Loneliness may visit a young boy in a small Ohio town who is about to cross into manhood, a dying mother whose life has been singularly starved of
affection, a business executive in a Chicago factory who is sick of leading a false life, a writer who feels that his creative talent has been corrupted by his wealthy wife, a soldier and a nurse whose desire to settle down as man and wife is thwarted by war, or an old stone-cutter with insatiable appetite for life defeated by time and disease. Outwardly, there is nothing that these people share in common. Even their response to loneliness and the panacea they seek are as diverse as their lives. What they seem to have in common, however, is a victim-psychology. The victim cannot locate the cause and source of his suffering. Metaphysically, the alienated person is "walled in", trapped or caged. Says Thomas Wolfe:

The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a curious phenomenon peculiar to myself and a few other solitary men, is the central and inevitable fact of human existence ... But I know that at the end, forever at the end for us - the houseless, homeless, doorless, driven wanderers of life, the lonely men - there waits for ever the dark visage of our Comrade, Loneliness.19

In his poetry John Berryman has treated the theme of alienation persistently. It would be

interesting to consider in detail his delination of various types of alienation, such as sociological, religio-philosophical and cultural. It would be instructive to find if there was anything in the life of the poet and the milieu which induced him to consider this issue in such a systematic way.