CHAPTER II

Edwin Muir's *An Autobiography* : A 'Double Vision'
Muir's An Autobiography, an extended version of The Story And The Fable published in 1940, does not answer to any set type or pattern and is difficult to categorize. Muir's self-narration obviously differs in form and content from the confessional pattern of the autobiographical writings of St. Augustine, or St. Teresa. And yet, the reverential tone and attitude of the confessional autobiographies at times find their way into Muir's An Autobiography (1954). The sort of monologue employed in confessions, assuming God to be the listener, examining or justifying one's deeds to God, is not to be found in Muir's autobiography. As Muir plainly states in a letter he wrote to one of his friends, while compiling his life-history:

"... I have no wish to confess ... for the sake of confession; I am too old for that: I want some knowledge; it really comes to that.

It becomes clear, then, that Muir's motive in writing his autobiography is not a religious one, but it is to gain "some knowledge."

Among the chief features of An Autobiography is the wide canvas Muir makes use of to paint his portrait.

The canvas stands out prominent against a backdrop of Heaven, Hell, the Earth, the past, the present and the future, man, animals and angels - all accommodated together without in the least making it look over-crowded. For Muir has a clear perception that allows him to space them out in accordance with their proper significances.

Muir is acutely aware of the problems faced by autobiographers in the modern times. As he states:

"The problem that confronts an autobiographer even more urgently than other men is, How can he know himself? I am writing about myself in this book, yet I do not know what I am .... I know something of the society which dictates many of my actions, thoughts, and feelings .... But I know all this in an external and deceptive way, as if it were a dry legend which I had made up in collusion with mankind."

An extract from a diary (covering the years 1937-1939) speaks of the explorations he has yet to make about his own self. He observes:

"The problem: to discover what I am, and to establish what my relations should be to other people. The first is an inward problem, the second an outward problem."

This division between inner and outer or, to put it in larger terms, the private and public selves become urgent with Edwin Muir and also with Stephen Spender and C.Day

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Lewis. It is interesting to watch Muir approach his task of self-portrayal. That he is not rigidly going to follow the conventional chronological order becomes clear in a statement he makes in his autobiography:

"It is clear that no autobiography can begin with a man's birth, that we extend far beyond any boundary line which we can set for ourselves in the past or the future, and that the life of every man is an endlessly repeated performance of the life of man." (An Autobiography, pp. 48-49)

The perspective adopted here is perhaps the result of wide-ranging, deep-felt and varied experiences Muir had during his early upbringing on a farm land in Orkney as well as his experiences later in Glasgow, Fairport, and in London. Besides, his rich store of personal qualities - his intellectual approach, his poetic sensitivity, his keenly observant nature - are among the factors which add to the significance of Muir's work as an autobiographer.

While Muir looks upon his life in retrospect, he finds the task difficult but finds it interesting as well. He wrote to a friend about his autobiography: "I have been writing my life, ... a curious labour, almost as difficult as living itself, but interesting at least."\(^4\)

Amongst his other difficulties in approaching his task as an autobiographer is the complexity involved in portraying one's relationships, as is evidenced from a letter he

\(^4\) Selected Letters of Edwin Muir, p. 115.
wrote to a friend:

"... I am taking notes for something like a description of myself, done in general outline, not in detail, not as a story, but as an attempt to find out what a human being is in this extraordinary age which depersonalises everything ... I have found at last a form that suits me; ... I have begun to note myself, anyway, and I find that in doing that I am noting other people too, and the world around me ... the problem is to discover what you are, and then what your relation is to other people; I am starting from that and it takes me in ever so many directions, inwards and outwards, backwards and forwards; into dreams on the one hand, and social observation on the other; into the past by a single line, and over the present by countless lines."  

Muir deliberately chose the autobiographical form rather than the autobiographical novel in speaking about himself. He explains to a friend: "I'm writing a sort of autobiography; that suits my style better, I think, than an autobiographical novel." The choice is made not

5 Ibid., p.118.
6 Ibid., p.100.
7 Ibid., p.107.
only because the style of an autobiography suits him better, but also because he wants to avoid "all make-believe;" the arranged patterns of modern novels give him "a stale, second hand, false and tired feeling." Despite this preference, he comments in his autobiography: "If I were recreating my life in an autobiographical novel I could bring out these correspondences freely...." (An Autobiography, p.48) He asserts again: "I could follow these images freely if I were writing an autobiographical novel. As it is, I have to stick to the facts and try to fit them in where they will fit in." (An Autobiography, p.48) Roy Pascal, in his discussion on autobiography and the autobiographical novel cites individual preferences of writers for both the forms of writing. He mentions Edwin Muir's preference for the autobiographical form and says that for Muir, "the important thing in his life was a subterranean spiritual unity, often unrelated to his actual activities...." Muir's aim is not to present an "outward life" or "ordinary routine" of every day life, for which the novel form would have suited his purpose well. Muir is interested in bringing out the "images" that have left a lasting impression on his mind along with the transient ones. He, it appears, saw the merits and

8 Ibid., p.101.
9 Ibid., p.101.
demerits, limitations and freedom allowed in both the forms.

As Muir sticks to the facts of life and "fits them" where they will, one finds him hovering between two planes — the temporal and the Eternal. J.C.Hall, in his evaluation of Edwin Muir's poetry has referred to the "double vision" that has always haunted Muir and points out that it is because of his "double vision" that his poetry covers the themes of "innocence and experience, mortality and immortality, tyranny and freedom, love and hate, relating these dualities both to the life of the individual and the history of mankind." In his autobiography this "double vision" leads him on to an exploration of both the temporal world and the permanent world, the story and the fable. It is his aim to conjoin the "conscious mind" with the fable which Muir defines as "what we are not and can never be, our fable, ..." (An Autobiography, p. 49) This "double vision" has certainly enriched Muir's vision of life and it also becomes the central theme of his autobiography.

In his attempt at pouring out his experiences, Muir has felt the need for a frame-work. This frame-work he found primarily in the fable of the Fall which lies at the core of the Christian vision of life. This is how he

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12 Ibid., p. 22.
would hold the whole of the firmament which contains his essential self. The confessional urge of the bygone days has been replaced in Muir's case by an analytical impulse and an intellectual curiosity to be acquainted with his true self and in due course with the whole of the universe. This process involves to a certain extent a re-enactment on his part of some of the motives which condition the life of a Christian. The experiences of his life which he lays bare in his self-history, have a close resemblance with the Christian motifs of Original Sin and the Fall. Along with religious motifs, a progression of worldly affairs also find an equal say. The religious and the secular impulses are closely, and deliberately, interwoven in his work:

"My belief in immortality, so far as I can divine its origin, and that is not far, seems to be connected with the same impulse which urges me to know myself. I can never know myself; but the closer I come to knowledge of myself the more certain I must feel that I am immortal, and, conversely, the more certain I am of my immortality the more intimately I must come to know myself." (An Autobiography, p.54)

An Autobiography is a typical self-narration exemplifying the condition of man in the present world. On the one hand, the modern man is made aware of the dehumanizing, demoralizing elements confronting him and, on the other, there is an effort on his part to get away
from it all - looking forward to some "promised land."
It is this hopefulness of being redeemed finally that
guides him in his quest of some final peace and solace.

II

Though Muir has not firmly aligned himself with any
one of the modern literary movements and stands somewhat
isolated, as a literary figure, his autobiography makes
interesting reading. In his other writings as well,
including his poems, Muir moves with the times, and
achieves a universal appeal. As a creative writer, Muir
has an individuality of his own. The tendency in modern
writing to turn inwards, and to probe into the inner reaches
of the human mind is a feature which is amply discussed. 13
With Muir, this process of introspection works itself out
in a manner which is individual and unique. In An
Autobiography, Muir stands as an embodiment of the self
confronting various afflictions that, at times, are
almost on the verge of robbing him of his mental sanity.

13 See for instance works like Bruce Maslish's
"Autobiography and Psycho-analysis," C.B. Cox's "The
Twentieth Century Mind: History, Ideas and Literature
in Britain: 1918-1945 (Vol.II), Leon Edel's The
Psychological Novel: 1900-1950 (London: Rupert Hart-
Davis, 1955), Lionel Trilling's The Liberal Imagination:
Essays on Literature and Society (New York: Doubleday
How bravely he faces these inner and outer conflicts raised by political, moral and religious pressures, without losing his integrity or being self-estranged, is of special interest.

II (i)

One characteristic of modern autobiography is that it presents a picture of how the self-narrator brings about a congruence between his private and public selves, a consonance between his inner and outer life. Muir in his autobiography, accordingly sets out not only to understand his own self, but also his relation to other people. His self-narration records both the inner problems he has had to face at various stages, and also the outer problems. What is commendable about him is the way in which he has been able to maintain a mental balance and preserve his self-integrity.

The general awareness of a need for the betterment of mankind came to Muir chiefly as a result of the trying times he witnessed in Fairport and Glasgow. As a sufferer and a victim of the faulty social system prevalent during those years, he felt an acute need to rectify. This general consciousness awakened among all classes in society — intellectuals as well as workmen, aristocrats as well as the
proletarians, the employers as well as employees, an urgent and a felt need to change the social structure. This general climate asking for some alteration affected Muir too. In Glasgow, at the age of twenty-one, a work-boy named Bob awakened in him an interest in Socialism. About his political leanings during the time, he states in his autobiography:

"... my conversion to Socialism was a recapitulation of my first conversion at fourteen. It was not, that is to say, the result of an intellectual process, but rather a sort of emotional transmutation; the poisonous stuff which had gathered in me during the past few years had found another temporary discharge. I read books on Socialism because they delighted me and were an escape from the world I had known with such painful precision." (An Autobiography, p.113).

He likens this conversion to the one he experienced in Kirkwall when he joined the group of the "saved," and felt then that everyone joining the group would be saved. The same feeling of closeness and oneness, came to him as he "stepped into a fable which was always there, invisibly waiting for anyone who wished to enter it." (An Autobiography, p.114)

His political convictions underwent changes and he revised his preferences at times. At the age of twenty-two, he was drawn towards Nietzsche. Muir accounts for his attraction to Nietzsche to a friend:
... when I first became acquainted with Nietzsche (when I was about 22) I have been more attracted to him than to any other writer. He has spoken to me as no one else has... The kind of life I had lived before I met him also pre-disposed me, ... to listen.  

He wrote this letter when he was drowned in his own miseries (death of four near ones and his own bad health). Nietzsche seemed to offer some solace, a suggestion of how his miseries could be tackled with a superpower within himself. He recounts in his autobiography: "My Socialism and my Nietzscheanism were incompatible..." (An Autobiography, p.126) This infatuation for Nietzsche too was not a lasting one, and later on Muir reflects that Nietzsche brought him only one good effect, viz., a "passionate love for music." (An Autobiography, p.152) When he looks back upon his attraction for Nietzsche, he recalls that he came only "by chance, under the influence of Nietzsche." (An Autobiography, p.280)

Muir was also drawn towards Communism at a certain stage in his life, though he did not become a confirmed Communist. His wooing of the Communist Party was not to be a lasting one. He agreed "with the ends of Communism completely, but the philosophy, the historical machinery,"

15 Ibid., p.98.
deeply repelled him. He goes to the extent of saying:
"I cannot think of it except as a coffin of human freedom." 16

Many intellectuals of the 'thirties were attracted by the
tenets of Communism, but most of them were to snap off ties
with the party at some time or the other, realizing that
this system denied human beings freedom and dignity.
Stephen Spender and C. Day Lewis for instance, broke off
from the Party for the same reasons. Muir explains to
Spender his chief objection to Communism. He writes:

"The whole impulse to Left literature, which is
an impulse of pure humanity, ... seems to me in
danger of being dehumanised, formalised,
throttled by an automatic ideology, which denies
humanity except in a great bulk, so huge that it
has no immediate relation to our lives: the
'masses,' for instance, not as a collection of
men and women, but as an instrument, dehumanised
as an army, a single objective mass possessing
the attribute of force, and able, to act only as
a force." 17

This explanation comes very close to a passage in An
Autobiography. He shows his dislike for both Socialism
and Communism. Where Socialism offers him a "reign of
freedom, justice and brotherhood," (An Autobiography, p. 234)
Communism offered him "the victory of a class, and
substituted the proletariat for a moral idea ... what the
heart had conceived as love and peace had been transmuted
into anger and conflict." (An Autobiography, p. 234) He

16 Ibid., p. 98.
17 Ibid., p. 98.
further explains:

"What claimed our love and compassion was misshapen humanity in all its forms, and we looked forward to the great release. Instead, Communism presented itself as a strange, solidly made object, very like a huge clock, with metal bowels, no feelings, and no explanation for itself but its own impenetrable mechanism; ..." (An Autobiography, p.234)

Muir also strongly objects to the Communist mechanism because "in the Communist scheme there is no place for forgiveness, ..." (An Autobiography, p.235) He could not accept a system where ordinary men (husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, friends, children and lovers), would remain "unforgiving" and "unforgiven," for, according to the Communists, it was a sin to "forgive an enemy."

(An Autobiography, p.235) Muir's repulsion for the system is very natural. He visualized the evil effects of the system - demoralizing and dehumanizing human beings and turning men into unfeeling machines.

In An Autobiography, Muir does not dwell at length on the major public issues that engulfed Europe during the 'thirties, like the February Uprising of 1934, the Spanish War and the two World Wars. Why Muir gives only a brief account of these events is not far to seek. Muir's vision is different. He has a greater depth of perception, with

the result that the account of crises in Europe given by him is brief but intense.

Muir was not concerned only about the immediate problems or current events confronting people. His worries were more about the perennial problems of the whole of mankind. In his case, the immediate gave place to permanent problems. His deep penetrating mind could extend his limit furthest back into the past and the future as well.

When the Spanish War broke out, Muir confesses that even though he did not know much about the situation, he joined the Republican side. Emergency brought a number of people together—Liberals, Socialists, Churchgoers, etc. He knew the choice in taking sides was made blindly: "We were, of course, right to be against Franco, but wrong to take the other side so self-righteously." (An Autobiography, p.243) Muir was suffering from an acute inner tension at the time, for though he took part in political discussion at the meetings of a certain small intellectual group, he was not happy or satisfied with himself. He was too keenly absorbed in his own self to be an enthusiastic or genuine participant in affairs that concerned the masses. His involvement was partial and not total.

Muir's visit to Vienna after the political upheaval in February 1934 did bring him close to the suffering of
mankind. In his autobiography, he recalls a street scene where he saw a miserable man in a very awkward posture, "half-sitting, half-lying" (An Autobiography, p.219) on the wet pavement. He kept on trembling and mumbling to himself "My head! My head!" (An Autobiography, p.219) Muir was shocked to see the Viennese people pass by without being in the least bothered about his condition. This incident was enough to make Muir realize "how much Vienna had suffered when a people naturally kind could pass with indifference someone in such distress." (An Autobiography, p.219)

When Muir was posted at Prague as the Director of the British Institute, his visit to the place was a second one. On his way to Prague, he went there via Belgium and Germany. His travel through Germany brought him close to a picture of the destruction caused by war. He found:

"Nothing unmarked by the war: the towns in ruins, the roads and fields scarred and deserted. It was like a country where the population had become homeless, and when we met occasional family groups on the roads they seemed to be on a pilgrimage from nowhere to nowhere." (An Autobiography, p.251)

On reaching Prague too, he found the changes that war had brought about. The people who were at first "noisy" and "somewhat unruly" hardly spoke now. "The crowds in the streets looked undernourished and apprehensive;" (An Autobiography, p.255) He says, he found the city "the
same and yet not the same, whose streets I or someone very like me had walked many years before." (An Autobiography, p.255) Though he was not directly involved in the war, the thoughts of war brought to his mind a feeling of terror and misery and "pictures of air raids and smashed limbs." 

The response of a man's reactions to public affairs varies from person to person. In Muir's case, his reactions to the public issues at large, are very acute and keen. He does not remain a detached observer, for his attachment to humanity is great and therefore he feels at one with the sufferings or miseries of others. His vision of current events is a deep-seated one, and it is this deep insight into the core of things that leads him on to vaster issues of mankind at large. This shift in emphasis in his concerns, as though makes him oblivious of the immediate present. For he knows that the current events are transitory and can be got over with the passage of time. He therefore looks forward to some solution of the permanent issues, the realization of which, he feels, is more urgent. His concern is for things that Time cannot destroy.

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19 Edwin Muir, The Story & the Fable, p. 255.
An autobiography, ideally speaking, fulfills one basic expectation on the part of the reader, viz., the curiosity to know the autobiographer's intimate feelings, likes and dislikes, eventually leading to the innermost chamber of his mind. Muir fulfills this condition, breaking through the "iceberg" of his own "mental processes" and laying bare unhesitatingly his 'conscious' and 'unconscious' mind. Muir's interest in psychology and, in that connection his re-enactment of the process of peering through his own mind, is of utmost importance, for it connects his work with a major strand of twentieth century writing. When he sets down to analyse his own self, Muir declares:

"No autobiography can confine itself to conscious life, and that sleep, in which we pass a third of our existence, is a mode of experience, and our dreams a part of reality."

(An Autobiography, p. 49)

Muir's purpose here appears to be to connect dream and reality, to discover a link between the conscious and the unconscious mind. This accounts for the large role played by dreams in his autobiography. He explains: "If

I describe a great number of dreams in this book I do so intentionally,. .." (An Autobiography, p.54) Muir was not unacquainted with Freud and Jung and their theories, and therefore he allows the reader a free entry into his conscious and unconscious mind through a series of dreams and waking trances he has had. In his effort to reconstruct his life imaginatively, he is trying to fit it with certain stages in the 'fable,' which he can recognize. Since he knows that "dreams go without a hitch into the fable," (An Autobiography, p.115) they become requisite to the whole form. "Waking trances" also fit into his own story (one such trance he describes as "the most strange and most beautiful experience," he has ever had); he therefore wanted "to put a number of these things into his self-story.

The workings of Muir's unconscious mind are laid bare in a series of dreams he describes in his autobiography. His dreams are rich in range and variety. The dreams occasionally centre round three mysteries that possess our minds:

'BWhere we come from, where we are going, and, since we are not alone, but members of a countless family, how we should live with one another."' (An Autobiography, p.56)

21 Selected Letters of Edwin Muir, p.102.
22 Ibid., p.102.
The comment in fact describes the chief preoccupation of Muir. It points to the central issue of his autobiography, viz. to be enlightened about oneself and others, past, present and future, the conscious and the unconscious mind.


In course of his self-narration, Muir tries to analyse and interpret his own dreams with the help of some knowledge of psychology current in his days. While he himself was undergoing psycho-analytic treatment, he was not ready to believe what his psychiatrists sometimes told him about the inner workings of his mind. For instance, the episode describing Freddie Sinclairs chasing him across
the field traces a feeling of terror he experienced then. This feeling of terror is released only thirty years later when Muir uses the incident as a theme of one of his poems. He recaptures this theme in the poem "Ballad of Hector in Hades," by moulding it into mythical figures of "Achilles Chasing Hector" round Troy. He knows that a psychologist would perhaps interpret the dream as a result of the suppression of his knowledge of cowardice, but he is not ready to accept this explanation. He interprets the dream in his own way:

*there must be a mind within our minds which cannot rest until it has worked out, even against our conscious will, the unresolved questions of our past; it brings up these questions when our will is least watchful, in sleep or in moments of intense contemplation. My feeling about the Achilles and Hector poem is not of a suppression suddenly removed, but rather of something which had worked itself out."

An Autobiography, p.44

Throughout his life, his obsession with time, feelings of guilt, fear, degradation he experienced, kept on recurring to him in forms of dreams narrated in his autobiography. It may be noted that many of his dreams also found an outlet in his poems.23 Muir came in touch with Orage and his The New Age at an appropriate time when limitless dreams occurred to him. The New Age had been at the time publishing articles on psychology and the theories

23 To name a few: 1) "The Annunciation," 2) "The Face," 3) "The Combat," 4) "The Helmet."
of Freud and Jung were often discussed. "The conception of the unconscious," (An Autobiography, p. 157) threw new light on every human problem. Orage by now was aware of Muir's precarious mental state and therefore introduced him to an analyst friend. This finally led Muir on to undergo a course of psychoanalysis. Of course, he did not, at that time, admit that he was a neurotic. But later on he did acknowledge his debt to the analyst: "I have been glad ever since that I did, and will always feel grateful for the kindness of the analyst." (An Autobiography, p. 157)

The "Glasgow" and "Fairport" chapters in An Autobiography acquaint the readers with Muir's condition of mind in these places. The squalor, the stench, the sweat, the degradation, stagnation and filth that he met with, were also a part of the experiences deposited in his unconscious mind. In his autobiography, these experiences are tapped from that source and the work serves to help the reader towards a better understanding of the effects those experiences had on him. The unhappy associations of those days, he says, had "eaten into my mind and filled my dreams." (An Autobiography, p. 136) While asleep he "turned to images of stagnation and decay." (An Autobiography, p. 136) He re-experienced them in dreams, as though in order to overcome them. It was a sort of labyrinth he found himself trapped in.
Muir's marriage helped him to gain some strength of mind, but even then, he was not free of dreams and waking trances. In fact, his waking trances were so frequent and strange that his psychiatrist was worried about his mental state. Muir himself felt then that he was "too close at this stage to the border-line between sanity and insanity; ..." (An Autobiography, p.165) When Muir realized that he could let these waking dreams "go on or stop them" (An Autobiography, p.165) at his will, his psychiatrist strongly advised him to stop them and they did stop at last. It appears that Muir's state of mind during those years was quite precarious and he had nearly reached a stage of self-estrangement specially during his days of being "uprooted" from Orkney to a city life. But as is evidenced in An Autobiography, he did get over these problems and was able to regain his mental health with the passage of time.

II (iii)

Next, to turn to Muir's religious convictions. Muir, though he appears sceptical at certain junctures in his life, was a deeply religious man at heart. His self-history gives a picture of a man whose preoccupation is to hold on to the central tenets of Christianity. Brought up by
religious-minded parents, he attended church, sang hymns, 
read the Bible. In spite of this, he did not accept God 
unquestioningly. It is perhaps for this reason that at an 
earlier stage in life, he did not join the group of 
'saviors.' At the age of fourteen, he underwent a 
'conversion' experience when he joined those 'saved' by 
Christ. This experience of 'conversion' is recorded in 
his autobiography:

"A sort of purification had taken place in 
us, and it washed away the poisonous stuff which 
had gathered in me during that year; but it was 
more a natural than a spiritual cleansing, and 
more a communal than a personal experience, for 
it is certain that if the whole audience had 
not risen that night I should not have risen." 
(An Autobiography, p.87)

As he recalls the incident years later, he sees it only as 
a sort of mechanical action, devoid of real devotion or 
understanding of religion. For at that age the knowledge 
of sin, and the need for salvation, were not yet clear to 
him.

It is true that Muir did not want to commit himself 
to any particular sect in religion. As he says: "my God 
is not that of the churches; and I can reconcile myself to 
no church." A year later he wrote to another friend:

"I have the faith, but that I cannot belong to 
any one Christian community. I believe in God,

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in the immortality of the soul, and that Christ is the greatest figure who ever appeared in the history of mankind. I believe in the Fall too, and the need for salvation. But the theological dogmas do not help me; I can't digest them for my good; ... \( ^{25} \)

On the subject of the place of religion in the modern world, and the presence of good and evil in life, Muir's position is uncertain. An Autobiography gives one the impression that he has been contemplating a lot on the individual's involvement with religion, and on problems of good and evil. Muir is keen on tracing the roots of sin in the so-called civilized life. The "problem of evil seems insoluble"\(^{26} \) to him. He feels that perhaps the problem could be got over, if "we set out to discover what we are and there is a necessity in us, however blind and ineffectual, to discover what we are. Religion once supplied that knowledge, but our life is no longer ruled by religion." (An Autobiography, p.51)

While treading his own religious path, Muir perceives that even in his case, there have been moments when he felt like rejecting religion altogether. This is seen for instance during his 'Glasgow' period when he "did not believe in the immortality of the soul...;" (An Autobiography, p.115).

\(^{25}\) Ibid., p.115.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., p.112.
or when he felt his prayers go unheeded during the four consecutive deaths in the family. Nevertheless, all throughout the work one finds Muir trying to affirm his belief. He does not over-state his case regarding God and religion, nor does he make his views sound as moral preachings from a raised pulpit. In meditating upon these questions, he thinks in pictures, pictures of the Millennium, the Garden of Eden, the Fall. This is an aspect of the mythopoeic faculty peculiar to him.

Muir is not reticent about his religious convictions. On one occasion he calls himself an "illicit christian, a gate-crasher, hoping in my way to slip in ..." 27 Again, an extract from his diary he inserts in his life-history, is a clear indication that he did not firmly adhere to church rituals, but he was not a sceptic. Again, during Willa's illness he writes: "I suddenly found myself reciting the Lord's Prayer in a loud, emphatic voice - a thing I had not done for many years." (An Autobiography, p. 246) He further clarifies his stand here: "I had believed for many years in God and the immortality of the soul..." (An Autobiography, p. 246) His belief, he confesses, receded for some time but it was there all right in an "unimaginable distance," "in a place of its

27 Ibid., p. 116.
own." (An Autobiography, p. 247) He further states, "Now I realized that, quite without knowing it, I was a Christian, no matter how bad a one." (An Autobiography, p. 247)

An Autobiography gives one the impression that it is a story of a man undertaking a spiritual journey. Along with this spiritual journey, the writer tries to intersperse details of his worldly affairs. Thus the two journeys go on simultaneously, merging the religious viewpoint with the secular one. Muir's pilgrimage through life has shown him the path to salvation, and to eternal peace. He finds evidence of the Incarnation everywhere, and specially during his visit to Italy, late in life. The realization has come to him at last that "Christ showed himself on the earth," (An Autobiography, p. 278) and also that "Christ was born in the flesh and had lived on the earth." (An Autobiography, p. 278) In keeping with his own religious convictions, he rounds out his autobiography on a note of reverence, thereby acknowledging on his part the "necessity of faith."

III

Like the poets, novelists and dramatists of the present century, the autobiographers have kept pace with the modern climate of thought. What Lillian Feder, for
instance, says of modern poets like W.H. Auden, Edwin Muir, T.S. Eliot, is equally true of autobiographers. As Feder observes, the modern poets bear witness to "the threat to or loss of faith, the mechanization of society and the consequent dehumanization of man, the contest of the self with a world that seems to deny the integrity of the individual consciousness."  

Muir's concern with the problems of man and his place in society and the world at large is demonstrated for instance in his poetry and his autobiography as also in his essay "The Natural Man and the Political Man." In this essay, he pictures a society in which the "natural man" has no spiritual battle to fight whereas in the past the "man of religion" was not regarded as human in the complete sense, until he put up a spiritual struggle. The only trial the modern man has to face is the evils of the present world brought about by "the imperfection of our political and social system." As is evidenced here, Muir's awareness and gradual acceptance of a specific

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30 Ibid., p. 150.
31 Ibid., p. 150.
concept of man and society has helped him to see things in a fresh perspective. He has learnt that conflict or struggle is no longer to be seen as an obstacle in one's path of development, but in fact it has become an essential factor for the development of an individual. 32

As he sets about his task of being acquainted with his true self in relation to others in his autobiography, Muir cannot refrain from giving an account of events in his life that have contributed to the development of his inner and outer selves. To read Muir's autobiography is but to read an account of the self passing through various phases like "loss of faith," and "contest of the self with the world," that almost threatened his self-integrity, but which ended ultimately in his regaining it.

In the pre-modern period, autobiographical writing had its source mainly in the confessional impulse. This is no longer the case now and the motive for writing an autobiography varies from writer to writer, though of course, a common feature emerges in modern autobiography,

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32 Roger Knight in Edwin Muir: An Introduction to his work, says of his poetry: "Indeed as Muir grew older (all these poems were written in his fifties) he saw more clearly the necessity of conflict, the naturalness of its place in human life" (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1980), p.100.
viz., an autobiographer today is bound to be influenced as much by the current concept of man as by his own individuality. Muir's *An Autobiography*, on the one hand, bears testimony as to how the current events affected him, and on the other, it points to the peculiar manner in which he tried to interpret it on a wider scale, viz. that of his link with the outside world.

Muir was led by a search for wholeness and this process of self-integration, in his case proceeds in a specific direction. As he puts it: "What is left to say when one has come to the end of writing about one's life? Some kind of development, I suppose, should be expected to emerge, ... If there is a development in my life - ... it has been brought about more by things outside than by any conscious intention of my own." (*An Autobiography*, p.280) It was crucial for him in this connection to relate the fragmentary record of his own past to a wider framework of fable and the story which could comprehend and transcend it.

Muir does not stand alone in this search for wholeness. Modern literature provides plenty of instances of a struggle on the part of writers to preserve their
Muir's autobiography presents the picture of a man who in his earlier years of life stood on firm ground, or in a "solid world" (An Autobiography, p.25) as Muir calls it, and then gradually lost foothold due to a shift to an urbanized setting. It records the desperate attempt he makes to preserve his own integrity. The direction in which his autobiography moves is, therefore, a movement from disintegration to integration, self-estrangement to self-realization, self-division to a sense of wholeness.

The source behind this inner-strength is worth examining. His early life in Orkney, which was smooth, secure and snug, definitely had much to contribute to the solid foundation on which he built up an edifice of a self, and remained undaunted in the face of hazards. The happiness that Orkney life provided him, brought to him a picture of Eden - from then onwards, he had been on the move to other stages of the fable.

The next stage of his life brought about drastic changes for the worst - it was as though he had plunged

33 Lionel Trilling discusses works like Diderot's Le Neveu de Rameau, and Goethe's The Sorrows of Young Werther where characters like Rameau and Werther are facing an internal conflict - viz. the choice to preserve their own integrity or to cause disintegration of his own consciousness. (See Sincerity and Authenticity, particularly Chap.II).
into purgatory. For the experiences in Glasgow and Fairport brought him close to death and decay. He was confronted with dehumanizing and demoralizing situations. He constantly suffered from "a feeling of degradation" (An Autobiography, p. 132) in Fairport. He was "in a state of chronic reprobation, always in the wrong, among the filth and the stench, grinding out the profits." (An Autobiography, p. 133) Recalling those days he writes to a friend: "My life had been a continuous enemy of my inner development." These events left a very bad influence on him, making him "absent-minded, morose, and solitary." (An Autobiography, p. 133) His earlier experiences in Glasgow provide no better picture. Even here, he underwent a series of humiliating situations.

It was a life so different from the comfortable life of Orkney. Glasgow, brought to his mind, a sense of alienation that he had never experienced in Orkney. The financial difficulties that his family faced there, aggravated his miserable state of mind. Roger Knight commenting on Muir's wretched condition of mind during that time, says: "In Glasgow, he could see, could hear, smell and touch the savagery of Time's work, everywhere a

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34 Selected Letters of Edwin Muir, p. 35.
wasteland in which the traditional virtues had been inverted." Muir found such contrast between Orkney and Glasgow, as one might draw between Heaven and Hell. It was "such a meaningless waste of inherited virtue," (An Autobiography, p.93) that even later on those memories brought to his mind a sense of anger and grief. Muir's sudden removal to strange and unfamiliar places had a bad effect on his mental as well as his physical condition. It shook him so completely that he began to lose confidence in himself and in humanity.

A feeling of disintegration had already set in. One might recall Roger Knight's words again on this aspect of An Autobiography: "The dislocation was total. Indeed An Autobiography must be one of the last possible testimonials in our culture to the experience of such dislocation." It is a case of dislocation from the good to the bad state, from Eden to Hell. He desperately tried to free himself from those suffocating places, which were almost crushing him to hopelessness, and destroying both his body and soul. When he looked about for some refuge he found it in socialism, Nietzscheanism, communism by turns, till he learned how to save himself from the "tenth-rate Hell" (An Autobiography, p.96) he was plunging into.

35 Roger Knight, Edwin Muir, p.18.
36 Ibid., p.18.
Michael Hamburger in his discussion on Edwin Muir, also refers to this wretched period by observing: "The disparity between the two phases led not to integration, but to self-division, self-estrangement and traumatic fears."  

Muir did get over his personal crisis with great courage and determination. This was perhaps the result of the wide perspective of things that he held. He perhaps drew strength also from a certain religious faith he held on to, nearly all his life. Hence spiritual starvation or deprivation or stagnation he experienced disappeared with the passage of time.

His marriage again helped him gradually to gain stability of mind. In An Autobiography he confirms the fact: "My marriage was the most fortunate event in my life." (An Autobiography, p.154) Psychiatric treatment was another factor that helped him move on to normality of mind. An Autobiography depicts how he moved from total dislocation to complete integration. The process is slow, yet a sure one, in his case. Marriage was the first step 


38 Michael Hamburger says: "... his moral vision and his imaginative vision were not in conflict, and both were integral parts of his nature. Yet he achieved and maintained this integrity in the teeth of circumstances..." Ibid., 46.
to cure him of his neurotic state. His sincere gratitude to his wife is reflected in a letter he wrote to a friend during that time: "... my wife, but for whom I might still be in that melancholy circle. She shook me out of my unavailing struggle, ..." 39

Then began his onward journey towards regeneration. Muir's faith in Christianity led him to liken his life to a spiritual pilgrimage. He himself is a pilgrim in search of a final destination. But before he achieves it, he has to face the inevitable cycle of life. His 'renewal' or 'regeneration' began with his travels across Europe, gradually relieving him of his frustrations, frigidity, fear, sense of guilt, obsession with time. His mental complexities that he had been shrouded in, began to thin down as he comes to a better understanding of himself, of mankind and of God. Muir's reconciliation with the world and with his own self came, as seen earlier, with his acceptance of a new concept of man and society.

The final passage in An Autobiography is note-worthy, for it reminds the readers once again that as Muir looks back on the "part of the mystery which is my own life, my own fable, what I am most aware of is that we receive more

39 Selected Letters of Edwin Muir, p. 36.
than we can ever give; we receive it from the past, on which we draw with every breath, but also - and this is a point of faith - from the Source of the mystery itself, by the means which religious people call Grace." (An Autobiography, p.281) These words are a clear indication of the fact that Muir is a man who has learnt to live a meaningful life, bringing about a synthesis between the past, the present and the future, a congruence between his inner and outer life, a consonance between himself and humanity, a link between the temporal and the eternal world. In short, his autobiography presents a study of a man who has a "double vision," "a vast and wide canvas presenting metaphysical possibilities." Muir's goal was to discover himself and his relation to other people, but he has also made many more discoveries and ultimately achieved a sense of oneness with himself and with others. This "secular salvation" that he achieves has been recognized for instance by T.S.Eliot when he says he was much impressed by Muir's complete integrity, when he saw him during the last years of his life, and was also appreciative of his utter honesty with himself and the world. Michael Hamburger, too, for instance, praises Muir's utter lack of pretension, which he feels was due to a wholeness,

IV

On examining Edwin Muir's autobiography in relation to his poems, it becomes clear to the reader that Muir, the man, does not differ from Muir, the poet. As a sincere writer, both in his poetry and his autobiography, he was only trying to express what was there in his mind, the conscious as well as the unconscious. Hence a close affinity exists between his autobiography and his poems.

Muir's An Autobiography is a chronological account of his life and the various phases described there obviously coincide with his poetic career. What guides Muir in his autobiography and his poetry is the same central urge towards a pattern, and a remarkable feature about his autobiography is that it gives a clue to his growth as a poet. This, notwithstanding the fact that in his

41 Michal Hamberger says: "As a poet, as a critic, and as a man he was equally unassuming and his utter lack of pretension was due to a wholeness, an integrity" - in "Edwin Muir" Encounter, Vol.XV/ (1960), 46.

42 J.C.Hall says: "He has told the story of his life in An Autobiography, a book of rare beauty and honesty of
autobiography itself Muir is rather reticent about his poetry unlike Stephen Spender and C. Day Lewis.

In both, his autobiography as well as his poetry, Muir proves himself a Neo-Platonist projecting a recurrent pattern that not only he, but Everyman enacts knowingly or unknowingly. Therefore, in his separate capacities as a poet and as an autobiographer Muir endeavours to "resuscitate the Eternal Man," as a diary entry shows: "The Eternal Man is what has possessed me during most of the time that I have been writing my autobiography, and has possessed me too in most of my poetry." Such an observation leads one to read both, Muir's autobiography and his poetry putting them alongside and to seek how the image of the 'Eternal Man' guides him on in his work.

feeling which is second only to his poetry as a literary achievement. In it he tells us little about his work as a writer; yet, indirectly, this book leads us to the very source of his inspiration and is indispensable to a full understanding of his work: Edwin Muir, p.8.

43 "Edwin Muir is a natural Neoplatonist, though he seldom mentions philosophy. His Life is not only a record of a particular life, but an attempt to discover what life itself is" – Kathleen Raine in "Books in General," Section. The New Statesman and The Nation (27 Nov. 1954), 711.


46 About both his works, Roger Knight says: "To read the books in conjunction with the poems is to enrich both" in his book Edwin Muir: An Introduction to his Work, pp.31-32.
Muir's poetic canvas is a large one, being the same as the one he also makes use of in his autobiography. In An Autobiography, he links up his own "story" i.e. "the external accidents of his life," with his 'fable' by which he means a universal pattern that every man must re-enact. In An Autobiography he deals with periods beyond Adam's world and further into the dark and uncertain future. To turn to his poetry would mean to bring to one's mind the same themes he handles in his self-narration. The themes of his poetry are familiar to all of us, being "the archetypes that lie latent in each of us." In his autobiography as also in his poetry, Muir makes use of myth, legends, heraldic figures, Biblical themes. He does this

47 About Edwin Muir's poetic canvas, Kathleen Baine says: "The themes of major poetry are epic, and cosmic; Muir wrote no epic ... yet an epic sense haunts his work," - Edwin Muir: An Appreciation," in the Texas Quarterly, IV (1961), 245.

48 Appeared in "The Times Literary Supplement" under the title "Time's True Servant" (12 Nov. 1957), 720.

49 'In The Story and the Fable Mr. Muir sought to distinguish between the external accidents of his life - "the story" - and the pattern of fable to which, in some universal way, his individual life corresponded.' - Ibid., 720.

50 "From his first book of poems to the last, previously collected pieces, he explored a single theme, the relation of the individual life to the whole of life, past, present and future." Michael Hamburger makes the observation in "Edwin Muir," Encounter, Vol.XV (1960), 48.

not to get away from reality (for Muir is a "visionary, but not an escapist"\(^52\)), but to bring home the fact that lives of human beings will forever remain the same, inspite of the changing social order in any given time and place.

Strikingly enough, the various phases delineated in *An Autobiography* as well as in his poetry, are the same. The broader curve adopted by the writer, in both, suggests the direction in which Muir was constantly moving — beginning with his early childhood experiences in Orkney, through the dark phase of Glasgow and Fairport, to the final arrival at a point of rest in Italy. This direction was, in Muir's case, specifically towards certain governing symbols or myths, especially those of the Garden of Eden and the Fall. What Roger Knight says of his poems is also true of his autobiography: "His poems may be seen as incarnation of the phases of this growth, their increasing fullness of vision enabling him and us to know the shape of that real self — whose reality goes beyond the personal self and includes us all — 'the eternal man'!"\(^53\)

Muir's "First Poems" (1925) reflect the first phase of his childhood in Scotland. The experiences of fear, awe, guilt, his close contact with animals there, a feeling of a

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 7

\(^{53}\) Roger Knight, *Edwin Muir: An Introduction to his work*, p. 42.
sense of being - form the theme of his early poems. His infatuation for the rugged scenery of Scotland and the secure and snug life he experienced there during his childhood, is reflected in poems like "The Childhood" where he recalls:

>Long time he lay upon the sunny hill,
To his father's house below securely bound.
Far off the silent, changing sound was still.
With the black islands lying thick around.\(^{54}\)

Or again his close association with animals during his stay on farm lands in the Orkney islands is expressed in poems like "Horses" - the animals he watched with great fear, awe and rapture:

>Those lumbering horses in the steady plough
On the bare field - I wonder why, just now,
They seemed terrible, so wild and strange,
Like magic power on the stony grange.\(^{55}\)

To turn to his autobiography, one sees the same Orkney world in the first two chapters ('Wyre' and 'Garth'), which form the Orkney period that extends over the same phase of happy innocent childhood. The Orkney world for Muir was full of stories of 'fairicks,' 'horseman's word,' 'ship-wrecks,' disappearing 'three-master' vessel, 'witches,'\(^{56}\) to keep the children full of awe, wonder and

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55 Ibid., p.19.
joy. His close association with cows, pigs, horses is given due place in An Autobiography. This may have been the result of his early upbringing. He realized that man's association with animals is a part of his daily life.

Later on when he went to live in cities, Muir could not altogether forget his kinship with the animal world and the torture and ill-treatment the animals met at the hands of men. He often dreamt about animals. Animals figure in Muir's autobiography and in his poetry as heraldic images or mythological figures, or simply as ordinary animals of the farm, witnessing the changes around in silence. He speaks about two things involving animals and men in An Autobiography. "... our relation to the animal world, a relation involving a predestined guilt, and our immortality. All guilt seeks expiation and the end of guilt, and our blood-guiltiness towards the animals tries to find release in visions of a day when men and beasts will live in friendship and the lion will lie down with the lamb." (An Autobiography, pp. 54-55) His further anxiety is to find out how we should live in harmony with

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57 J.C.Hall, among other critics has a word of praise for these particular chapters in An Autobiography, where he says: "The opening chapters of An Autobiography brilliantly recreate these early years ... one of the most perceptive accounts of childhood in modern literature." Edwin Muir, p. 9.
animals. This association is brought out in many of his poems.

The earlier years of Muir's life spent in this 'Eden' of his own making, clearly indicate that his roots were firmly planted in his beloved Orkney and the place had much to contribute to his well-being as a poet and a man. Though he travelled a good deal during his life-time, he went to his dearly loved islands for relaxation and rest. The happy innocent period which Muir was tempted to liken to Eden, comes to a close with the family moving out to neighbouring industrial towns to earn a living.

With this sudden uprooting or dislocation from his native place, begins a second major phase in Muir's life, full of struggles and tribulations, the phase recorded in the 'Glasgow' and 'Fairport' chapters in his autobiography. This sudden displacement to the industrial towns had a

58 J.C.Hall comments on this aspect of his work: "There is one aspect of Muir's poetry which has been scarcely mentioned by other critics, although it is the subject of some remarkable poems and of central importance in his work. I mean his conception of man's relationship to the animal world." Ibid., p.26.

59 P.H.Butter observes: "It would be sentimental, and reactionary, to identify Eden with a remote pastoral community and the fallen world with the modern world of industrialism. At times he was tempted to do so, to let Orkney stand for innocence and Glasgow for experience;" Edwin Muir: Man & Poet (London: Oliver & Boyd Ltd., 1966), p.12.
great impact on Muir's mind. His firm footing in his native island began to give way. The "perfectly solid world" (An Autobiography, p.25) was replaced by an utterly strange, selfish and inhuman world. The "vast, boundless calm" (An Autobiography, p.25) he enjoyed in Orkney was no more to be got back. It was a period of gloom and wretchedness. Even later on when he recollected those years, it was not without grief and anger that he did it. From then on began his quest for some solution to the hopeless situation that was thrust upon him.

The same dark phase of his life featured in his poems Variations on a Time Theme (1934), Journeys And Places (1937), The Narrow Place (1943) and The Voyage (1946), perhaps, is the most significant for him; for this stage which begins with inner conflicts leads him on to get rid of them and to gain knowledge of himself and also of others. While reviewing his years of uncertainty, instability and insecurity during his early adolescence and manhood periods, the realization has come to him that this problem of dislocation and its after-effects, in its broadest sense, is not a personal problem alone, but one that almost everyone experiences in life at some time or the other in the present age.

Variations on a Time Theme (1934) contains the bitterness and tension he experienced during the 'thirties
in Europe. He takes those sufferings for granted, as he knows that there is no escape from things that are destined to happen. The pre-chalked out pattern of human life that he so often refers to, in his autobiography, is echoed in the following lines:

"We sit where others have sat before us
And others will sit after us." 60

Muir's changed outlook on life comes to light in An Autobiography, in the chapters entitled 'London,' 'Prague' and the 'Interval' and in his work Variations on a Time Theme. He no longer loses himself in nostalgic thoughts about the lost land of Orkney but now it is an onward journey to a "promised land." 61 As he states in a poem:

"Now I walk the sand
And search this rubble for the promised land." 62

A continuation of the same chain of thought is reflected in lines like:

"There is a stream
We have been told of. Where it is
We do not know. But it is not a dream,
Though like a dream. We cannot miss
The road that leads us to it. Fate
will take us there that keeps us here.
Neither hope nor fear
can hasten or retard the date

60 Edwin Muir: Collected Poems, p.41.
61 Ibid., p.43.
62 Ibid., p.43.
Of our deliverance; when we shall leave this sand
And enter the unknown and feared and longed-for

This same concern is reduplicated in his life-history, where he shows his concern for the future world of mankind in general.

By the time he writes *Journeys And Places* (1937), *The Narrow Place* (1943) and *The Voyage* (1946), one finds a definite development in Muir, the poet as well as man. Because with the poetic maturity that he achieves now, he is able to get rid of inner turmoils and is able to look outside himself — at Scottish history, at war, at some philosophic and religious theme. This perhaps is the result of his travels across Europe as is evidenced in the second-half of his autobiography and also of a 'double vision' he has acquired to view his own self as well as the world.

For Muir, the movement from innocence to knowledge, from uncertainty to certainty, from immaturity to maturity — is a difficult journey. The interregnum between these two extreme states, is dotted with dark blotches representing the odds that came his way, as described in his poetry as

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64 Edwin Muir was very much impressed by his visit to Rome and calls it "right setting in the life of mankind" (*An Autobiography*, p.277)
well as his autobiography. For instance, his stay in Glasgow and Fairport made him a victim of utilitarianism, and, in course of time he became conscious of time and began to feel tied down to time. His obsession with time during this phase stands very much in contrast to the "sense of timelessness" (An Autobiography, p.18) he enjoyed during his earlier years of life. This awareness of the passage of time came with the long hours of hard labour he had to put in, and the tedious journeys to and fro to his place of work. These experiences find expression in verse:

"Time's a fire-wheel whose spokes the seasons turn,
And fastened there we, Time's slow martyrs, burn." 65

Or again, he felt too much tied down by the shackles of time, but if he could, he would

"... leap time's bound or turn and hide
From time in my ancestral wood." 66

Corresponding references to Muir's fascination for Nietzscheanism are to be found in Muir's autobiography and his poems that come midway between the two extreme stages in his life, viz., between innocence and experience. Muir's Nietzscheanism made him feel proud to belong to the "master class." (An Autobiography, p.126) As he observes in An Autobiography: "... they gave me exactly what I wanted:

65 Edwin Muir, Collected Poems, p.49.
66 Ibid., p.59.
a last desperate foothold on my dying dream of the future." (An Autobiography, p.126) His heart swelled when he read words like "Become what thou art" (An Autobiography, p.126) and "what does not kill me strengthens me." (An Autobiography, p.126) But Muir explains in his autobiography that the psychiatrists called this bent of his a "compensation." (An Autobiography, p.127) They explained that he was unable to face life as it was and thus took refuge in the fantasy of the Superman. He denied Nietzsche's theory later on and his poem "The Recurrence" bears evidence to this:

"All things return, Nietzsche said,
The ancient wheel revolves again,
Rise, take up your numbered fate;

But the heart makes reply ...  
this is only what the eye
sees and sees and cannot tell why,

Else the Actor on the Tree  
Would loll at ease, miming pain,
And counterfeit mortality" 67

Edwin Muir declares in his autobiography that his marriage was the happiest event in his life and he also acknowledges the fact that it was because of his wife that his life became much balanced. 68 As far as his verse is concerned, his love for his wife is expressed rarely in

68 His married life is dealt with in one of the earlier sections.
his poems. "Time Held in Time's Despite" is one such poem, where he speaks of a feeling of warmth and complete detachment from all, when in his wife's company:

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Now there is only left what time has made
Our very own in our and time's despite,
And we ourselves have nothing, but are stayed
By lonely joys and griefs and blank delight."
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Poems like "The Confirmation," "The Commemoration," "Love's Remorse," "Song" are intended for his wife. He says in his life-history that he was able to get out of the morbidity that he was plunging into. And perhaps it was because of his wife's encouragement and enthusiasm that he got rid of his inner complexities and stepped out into the outer world. Willa helped him to keep a fast pace with her in their path of life together, whereby he achieved a sense of recovered wholeness.

Another bleak picture Muir brings in, while delineating his own story is the mental ill-health he was suffering from and gives a frank account of the psychiatric treatment he underwent. Dreams have an important place in his autobiography because, as seen earlier, he recognizes the equal role that the conscious and the subconscious mind plays in a man's life. In keeping with his psychiatrist's advice he kept a record of all his dreams. Many of his

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70 This aspect of his autobiography is discussed in one of the earlier sections.
dreams are also incorporated in his poetry. And in his attempt to combine dream and reality, the conscious and the unconscious minds, the ideal and the real, he often sets about to analyse, interpret or to narrate his dreams in his autobiography. A close study of some of his poems reveal the same dreams depicted also in An Autobiography. As for instance, poems like 'The Helmet', 'The Transfiguration', 'The Combat', 'The Annunciation' have corresponding narrations in the self-history.

By the time one comes to The Labyrinth (1949) and One Foot In Eden (1956), one marks a definite stage of development of Muir, the poet and the man. In Labyrinth, for instance, the poet felt the need to look back upon his whole life – his journey through the labyrinth of time. The passage through various mazes left him bewildered at times. The images presented in the poems are symbolic. The picture of "the tall and echoing

71 Kathleen Raine comments about the way, Muir blends dream and reality: "Edwin Muir's poems have at once the strangeness and the deep familiarity of those houses and landscape that we visit in certain deep dreams, bathed in celestial light or haunted by inexplicable terror," in the article "Visionary Poet" in Observer (7 Aug., 1949), 7.

72 As for instance 'Helmet' is re narrated in An Autobiography, (p.260) 'The Trans figuration' is reduplicated in An Autobiography. (p.115) 'The Combat' finds its prose counterpart in An Autobiography, (p.65) and 'The Annunciation' finds its counterpart in An Autobiography. (p.278)
passage" of labyrinth or the "maze itself revolved around" him or the following picture:

And then I'd stumble
In sudden blindness, hasten, almost run,
As if the maze itself were after me
And soon must catch me up...

are obviously the dark years of his life he spent in Glasgow. The maze is a symbol of the squalid life there. But he knew that there was an outlet from the labyrinth, for the soul has "birdwings to fly free" from it.

One Foot In Eden, (1956) like most of his other poems, presents the whole of cosmos. Greek myths are often taken up to suit his purpose. The first section of One Foot In Eden is a presentation of the Fable and it is only in the second section that he approaches the story and the poems are more personal. Lines like:

Make me to see and bear that I may know
This journey and the place towards which I go

point out that he has not yet been able to find out his destination.

Muir's An Autobiography and his poetry show a great degree of congruence because they deal with his own story

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73 Edwin Muir, Collected Poems, p.163
74 Ibid., p.164.
75 Ibid., p.164.
76 Ibid., p.165.
77 Ibid., p.252.
as well as with that of mankind in general. They deal with Everyman’s fable. Kathlene Raine observes about his poetry: “In Muir’s poetry the personal gives immediacy to the universal, which in turn gives meaning and stature to the personal.” The same could be said of his autobiography as Muir himself confirms: “... I have believed for many years in the immortality of the soul; all my poetry springs from that in one form or another;” This accounts for the metaphysical concerns that lead him to dwell upon questions embracing the whole of humanity in his poetry, and this remains the central issue also in his life-history. And one might agree with Thomas Merton when he explains why Muir wrote poetry. He explains it as “a psychological and spiritual necessity for him” and one might assuredly say that it was the same urge that led him on to attempt a self-portrait in another genre. And one sees how “through his poetry and in his autobiography he explored his own way back from exile to a sense of his authentic self.”

81 Roger Knight, Edwin Muir: An Introduction to His Work, p.2.
The autobiographical account itself offers more palpable clues to some of the poems only in its concluding portion. By a kind of an inner necessity, the arrival at a certain set pattern of a unifying myth over his life-history now viewed in the light of retrospect as an autobiographer. And, on the other hand, it is the same increasing sense of having arrived at a vantage point which brings the sense of coherence and clarity to his poetic work. There is a logic governing Muir's growth both as man and poet at once, and it is this logic which makes the concluding pages of An Autobiography read like a commentary on Muir's later poetry.

82 "Each of his best poems stand at the end of some long avenue of development which only now, as it were, debouches into poetry." "Edwin Muir" in The Times Literary Supplement, (12 Nov. 1954), 720.