CHAPTER X

IMAGES OF LOVE IN MEET ME IN THE GREEN GLEN
Robert Penn Warren's ninth novel, Meet me in the Green Glen, throws light on love that makes or mars the lives of human beings. It shows us how dark and dry, barren and baneful the central character's life, which is devoid of love, proves to be and how the miraculous touch of love electrifies and makes her life meaningful and blissful. There is nothing like a love theme in the novel. We are made to realize that the lady at the centre of the novel Cassie Killigrew has a tortuous sort of life. She says:

I was young ... But it was only a little while. Then, of a sudden, I was old. There wasn't anything in between. What most folks have in between, what might have been in between for me — it was like somebody just blew it away. Puff! Like blowing off dandelion fuzz.¹

When, at school, she falls in love with Cy Grinder, whose admiration and adoration for Cassie keeps him away from her touch till such time when he becomes an engineer, which, he hopes, will make him equal to her in social status. He wants to be...translated out of himself, no longer the son of Old Budge, but an untarnished Adam walking the new earth with the breath of the Worldwide Correspondence School blown into him" (77).

His plans to rise above himself fall and his new self dies in the embryo itself. Mrs. Killigrew humiliates him and abuses him in public, exposing the shortcomings of his family. So he runs away. He fumbles, slips from the very first rung on the ladder of success and falls down. Mrs. Killigrew's tongue-lashing exposes the truth and he knows that "he had lived among shadows and delusions and that the words that fell from that bony apocalyptic face were the blaze of truth" (79). This truth leaves him with no high aspirations in life and he leaves the place to fulfil his destiny without even looking at Cassie and without leaving a single word. The unfortunate Cassie, who loves him to the core, feels hurt. She helplessly hears the harangue of her mother about Cy's people and hopefully looks at his stony face, which never turns to her:
If he had turned even once and looked at her, she would have risen from the bed, taped and plastered as she was and wearing that hideous white sack the hospital had put her in, and run after him and would never, never have left him. But he did not turn his head (79).

His "stiff - shouldered withdrawal" makes her think that "He loves something else better than me" (79). He leaves her "with the sense of having no role in the world, no identity" (81-82).

Having lost interest in life, Cassie finds no reason to go against the wishes of her mother, though she holds her responsible for the desolation of her self. She agrees to marry Sunderland Spottwood, who has already made his way to her bed, in a moment of unreality when she mistook him to be Cy. She leads a mechanical life in a dazed condition allowing herself to be used as a sexual object by Sunderland for four years. She never experiences the bliss of being herself. Her mother's funeral pyre melts her frozen feelings and instead of weeping she bursts out laughing. Her repressed feelings of hatred and her resentment at her bleak, loveless and lifeless life result in her losing her balance of mind and she stays in a mental sanitarium till Sunder suffers from a severe brain
stroke that cripples him. She is brought back to Spottwood to look after "the hulk that had been Sunderland Spottwood" (94). The news of Cy's marriage with Gladys Peegrum confirms her doubt and she lives unconscious of herself and others, mechanically attending to the needs of the bed-ridden Sunder for nearly twelve years "in the dark hollowness of the house" (4).

With no one to share her feelings, she seems to live in a void unable to think or feel. The narration begins with the arrival of Angelo Passetto, and as Cassie says:

He was coming down the road, it was like a torch coming through the rain, like a lightwood torch and the flame so pale you couldn't hardly see it in daylight, but I saw it, and the rain couldn't put it out. (297)

He helps her in dragging and dressing the buck and accepts to stay there and help her. This Sicilian, who is on the run from a vengeful pursuit, and his own sense of guilt, finds a fine opportunity as Spottwood looks unreal, and he decides "to hide himself more perfectly in this unreality" (46). His stay there is like a dream and he is sure that people "who belonged to the real world" can never "enter the privacy of a dream" (46). He cultivates "the blankness of being" (51)
by not allowing thoughts or images to enter his mind. He feels Cassie's eyes on him and thinks that "he could not stand it. He did not know what it was, but he knew that he could not stand it" (48). Still he knows that this is the place where he must stay as he has no other place to go.

The Arrival of Angelo sets Cassie's mind to thinking and, perhaps, his presence reminds her of her terrible loneliness and she finds herself burying her face on Angelo's pillow one night. This unexpected happening stirs Angelo's anger and he drags her down brutally, and "angrily drily, joylessly, almost without sensation" (71), performs the act. It is nothing but a blank act in the blankness of the house. As he contemplates everything he did in the house "...even in the instant of doing, was nothing more than the blank motions the shadow of your body made.." (123-24). He goes out "running blind, not from anything, not to anything, just blind, to be away" (111). Angelo's work, "which had been a flight, a refuge" (115) before, becomes a fury, a blind occupation. The routine continues without any change for five days. Later he finds "some relief, a sense of hope that life would offer something new, unexpected and even joyful, though what he could not know" (118). The ritual of copulation continues. He lives "in this world of changelessness, where
nothing had ever happened and nothing would ever happen" (125).

When Angelo sees Cassie for the first time, her "face, very white, seemed to be floating there, bodiless," and his movement is described as though "it would be only his body, not Angelo Passetto moving" (9). It is only the body of Angelo that enters her house and her life when she is locked up in her self, remaining blind to the existence of her body. Her sole aim seems to be rendering service to the paralytic Sunder. She appears as a symbol of self-sacrifice. Her loveless, dreary, lonesome life makes her absolutely dead to the world which implies the death of the body or the flesh in all its physical implications. It is at this moment that Angelo enters her life. He makes her experience "the pure joy that comes only with the full, free recognition of destiny, which is the recognition of the self" (94).

Murray Guilfort's warning to Cassie to send Angelo away as he is a convict on parole goes waste as she argues on behalf of Angelo and tries to prove him to be an innocent convict. She threatens him saying that she would consider him responsible and will never see him again "if they make him go away, or do anything to him" (144). She turns down his offer to move Sunder into the town, and Murray jealously
thinks, "She would stay in that falling-down house, just as it was, with Sunder - and that criminal" (142).

Cassie's discovery of the similarity between their lives makes her pity Angelo and go to his bed and talk "of how they locked you (Angelo) up and you lay there in jail at night." This reminds her of "how all my own life, it was like that, like being locked up, and lying in the dark," and she says, "I knew — I really knew — how you felt. It wasn't till I knew how I had been always locked up that I knew how you had felt." (148). Her sympathy and affection make her request him to feel free in the house to do anything and not "to feel caught and locked up" (149). Her care and concern, her assertion that he is innocent, her words full of tenderness touch him, and he reciprocates. He brings her a red silk dress, red ribbon and shoes. His interest in her makes him comb her hair, tie the ribbon, make her face up and show her face in a mirror. Never was she made to know that she was good-looking, beautiful and worthy of a man's dedicated love. Looking at her image, she cries out:

But I never felt pretty — not before — and a girl ought to feel pretty — and it's awful to be old and of a sudden feel pretty. And I'm old — I'll be forty-three forty-three, in two weeks, Angelo — Oh, Angelo! (163)
Cassie is thrilled and feels as though she is born anew. Although she is old, there is rejuvenation. She is given a new lease of life and it is here that we are made to realize that body by itself has a certain value. She is never made to realize what it is to be a woman and what the body needs. Her love for Cy receives a death blow before its fruition. She detests Sunder and remains only a sexual robot. In the beginning her relationship with Angelo looks unreal even to her: "He was no name, he was the shape with no name" (109). Later there is a kind of renewal and she understands love in terms of joy. She accepts her new identity.

Angelo, a character not at all lovable in a traditional value-oriented family, enters Cassie's life like a flame. The image of flame often occurs in Lawrence's fiction. It suggests the primordial energy and is a harbinger of life. It is Angelo who tells Cassie that she is beautiful. It is not clear whether he says it intentionally or from his heart or to abuse her. Though their life together begins as desire gratification, their sharing of their bitter past results in their understanding each other.

Angelo's sudden absence and his arrival broken and bruised, Arlita's shocking news of the love affair between
Angelo and Charlene, and her rude remark on Cassie's inability to keep hold of any man, shake Cassie. Her comment tortures her beyond endurance and she feels:

....the pain leaped up in her and clawed at her insides, trying to get out, like a cat in a sack. It was clawing upward, it was going to jump out of her mouth, and jump on his face with all its claws and tear it, and tear it, the poor hurt face that was so beautiful! -- Oh, Angelo! (206-07)

Her love for Angelo dominates her agony and she forgives him. She finds a new kind of happiness in holding his hand. Murray's final warning to send him away and Arlita's wish to kill Angelo but for the fear of being electrocuted draw her out of her idyllic illusion.

Whether it is indulgence or something else that makes him show his concern for Cassie, it makes her re-discover herself. Magnanimously, she gives Angelo money and tells him to take the car and the girl too. She tells Cy that "I loved him and wanted him to be happy for he had made me beautiful like I never was, and happy ... I was happy for I wanted him to be happy" (312).
Later she murders Sunder. Though she gives an incomplete narration of the events of the morning, the defence lawyer, Leroy Lancaster, takes pity on her and exempts her from thorough cross-examination. When everyone seems to conspire and declare Angelo to be the culprit, she cries out in the court, saying "I did it, I did it — I killed him!" (259). Her confession works out a miraculous change in Angelo and he understands what love is. Her confession and frantic efforts to save Angelo prove futile. The judge, the jury, Farhill, Murray, and the rest treat her confession as "the hysterical outburst of an overwrought woman" (279). Her failure to meet the Governor and her inability to save the innocent Angelo, in spite of the help rendered by Cy Grinder land her in an asylum. Forgetting the unpleasant past, she lives in the illusion of love. Her love evokes love in Angelo. His last letter from the prison affirming his love for Cassie and his decision to face death without any fear indicate his attainment of selfhood through love. She is happy believing that "He has gone away ... Somewhere far away, and he is happy. And I'm happy too, because I made him happy, for oh, I loved him —" (359).

Murray Guilfort, a classmate of Sunder is an ardent admirer of Sunder's sensuality and arrogant masculinity.
Caught between the feeling of attraction and repulsion for what Sunder is, he continues his friendship with him, in spite of his jealousy and envy for the legendary figure, who, like Old Jack Harrick of *The Cave*, would like to spend the energy of his flesh in veritable gross animality. Sunder's unabashed glorification of the supremacy of the body over the spirit leads to high blood pressure and the resultant brainstroke which makes him an invalid. Murray, who is introduced to the pleasures of the flesh by another lawyer, leads a corrupt and sensual life. His deep-rooted dissatisfaction with marital life leads him astray to cell-girls Sophee and Mildred. Though he has a strong body, he finds neither happiness nor peace of mind. His popularity in his profession does not help him understand himself. "His vision was inward, fixed, as it were, on a single point of acute light in the darkness of his being.... The point of light was, somehow, the idea of himself as a judge" (28). The more he stares at the light in his inwardness, the more is "his vision dimmed for the world of things around him," and he feels as though he was wandering in "the darkness of his own head" (29). The light and dark imagery in the preceding citation is in contrast with the image of the flame associated with Angelo. Haunted by a sense of nothingness, he flirts with women. A sense of not being loved troubles
him and he accepts illusion to be the only truth. His severe gastric disturbance puts an end to his flirtations and he diverts his full attention to his professional aspiration and towards Cassie. He sees Cassie for the first time when he goes to Sunder's house to attend the funeral of Josephine Killigrew Spottwood, Sunder's first wife. As soon as he sees her, he feels he knows his destiny. Somehow he feels that long ago he had known of what is going to happen. Questions like "Why did a man have to know ahead of time? Why wasn't the last knowing, when things finally came true, enough for a man to have to endure?" (33) trouble him. At the wedding of Sunder and Cassie, he tries to read the bride and feels as though "his heart had been stabbed with a pitying and clairvoyant, but unspecifiable, sense of her destiny, and his own" (85).

Murray has neither a significant past nor an eventful present, yet he hopes for a redeeming future. Sunder's bankruptcy and invalidity make him support Cassie and Sunder financially, pretending that the money is from an investment made by Sunder. Trapped in his own lie, he visits Sunder every month expecting something to happen but nothing happens. The bulk of Sunder gives rise to a "burst of cold, justifying joy" (44) in Murray. Perhaps this joy at
the fall of his rival makes him help them year after year.

Murray's words to Cassie,"... what you are doing isn't wasted, it has meaning — yes, we must find meaning in life —" (135) sound ironical as they come from the mouth of a man who fails to find meaning in life till the end. He saves the life of Cassie living in the lie that he has been in love with her for the last twenty years without knowing anything about her except remembering "... the white face of a girl floating toward him in the shadows of the house that belonged to Sunderland Spottwood, and that was all he had ever known: a dream" (367). But the love of Cassie for Angelo that shines bright in her face shatters his dream.

Miss Edwina's statement "She (Bessie) loved you" (369) brings the suppressed fact to the fore that her love for Murray is a truth which he had always believed but never dared to think. His failure to love and to be loved and Cassie's definition of love make him seriously think of love and what it means. "... trying to feel what it meant, not knowing what it meant, but thinking that, if so many people moved across the world as though they knew what it meant, it must mean something" (370). Murray feels sad and his heart cries that nobody told him the truth.
Murray's last visit to Cassie brings him face to face with the emptiness in his life. The unreality into which she withdraws makes her believe that Angelo is happy somewhere, and the resultant joy reflects in her face. Though he tries to flee "the luminous joy on the face" (360) of Cassie, her image with her hands "lifted as though to frame a face, caressing it," her body "as though surrendering to an embrace," and her hands "caressing the face that was not there, in the empty air that was not empty" (359) haunts him. Her ringing question "did you ever love anybody, Murray Guilford?" (357) and her metaphysic of love, he never forgets.

If you have loved somebody, You know how it is, you tear your heart out, just to give it away, and that is a great joy. Even if it hurts and even if they don't want it, even if they just look at it and laugh and drop it, like it was nothing, and walk on away... it doesn't matter ... because ... it belongs to them anyway. Even if they just drop it and walk away, you're happy. It may be terrible, but you are happy (358).

But till the end he remains a stranger to love. Unable to find meaning in life, unable to reach out to others in love he flees the world swallowing sleeping pills.
The love ethic of Cassie brings a drastic change in the defence lawyer, Leroy Lancaster, and Cy Grinder. It makes them realize that they have wives and they exist. From Cassie, Leroy learns the meaning of love and realizes that he behaves badly towards his wife Corinne Melford.

Cassie's confession, with the full shining of her face, brings home the truth to Leroy. He prays to God to forgive him, declaring "I have blasphemed against my own life" (278). He realizes that he stared unforgivingly at Angelo along with others "from the thorny shadow of their own deprivations, yearnings, and envies" (275). Cassie's love brings forth his inadequacy to the fore and he feels the urge to go home to his wife. Cy Grinder's love for Cassie receives a death blow in the hands of Mrs. Killigrew. After eight years of aimless wandering, he comes back to Spottwood valley. He loves neither the place nor Cassie. He marries a fat woman Gladys Peegrum but fails to love her. Cy comes out of unreality when the unexpected turn of events drive him to Cassie's help after nearly twenty years. After their failure to meet the Governor, they stop in a road house. In a reminiscent mood, Cassie thinks aloud of what they would have been had their wishes materialized. Perhaps, by now they would have been a happy couple returning after paying a
visit to their son at the university. Unable to bear the
agony, Cy comes out and thinks: "...if you could just live
now, no backwards and no forwards, you could live through
anything" (324). He finds it difficult to survive that
moment. He sees:

... a hand big enough to grab his heart
like a wet washrag and squeeze it into a
wad, and then that hand was tearing his
heart out by the roots while he stood there
trapped in that atrocity of anguish and could
not breathe. (325).

Cassie's harping on the murder she committed, her
desperate trials to save her lover Angelo, her deep-rooted
love for him, which drives her to the Governor's bungalow,
her preoccupation with the thoughts of Angelo's electrocution,
and her final withdrawal into herself, at the failure of her
frantic efforts to save Angelo's life bring change in Cy.

His chronic sleeplessness and the televised report
of Murray's suicide take him to the bedside of his daughter
and later to the bedside of his wife. The striking
resemblances between the two faces surprise him. He wonders
how he could adore one and hate the other. He feels as
though he had seen his wife for the first time.
With the image of the woman's face so clear in the darkness of his head, he began to wonder what she thought, what she felt; and his wondering was mysterious to him. He wondered what she had ever thought, what she had ever felt. He realized, slowly, that never, in all the years, had he wondered that before (376).

Cy's initial love for Cassie is an idealized one and it could not withstand the actualities of life. His life with his wife is devoid of love. He exploits her without trying to understand her. He lives in darkness without trying to come out of it. Cassie's love for Angelo sheds a bright light on the darkness in which Cy lives. "When the time came, he stepped out of the shadow of the tree. He looked up. There was the moon, with the sky, and the whole world, in its light" (376). This redeeming light shows a new vision of life. Stepping out of unreality, he hopes to lead a new life.

Meet Me in the Green Glen is not a continuation of the themes that have been touched on in the earlier novels. Instead of having a cumulative image like The Cave or Flood in terms of which each character measures himself or herself to which stage of growth he or she has advanced, we have a gentle and tender lady, Cassie Killigrew, at the centre of the
novel. We may compare Cassie to Amantha Starr in Band of Angels. Most readers may find something Lawrentian in this novel. Here, man-and-woman relationship is viewed as a stepping stone to an awareness of a different sort of life. We can recall a crucial incident in Women in Love, just to clarify some of the points. In Chapter V, the two friends Gerald Grich and Rupert Birkin board a train and talk about a number of things. Birkin asks Gerald the typical Lawrentian question whether he has found centre for his life and what the aim and objectives of his life are. Gerald finds it difficult to answer the question and finally admits that it is a question which hasn't come to his mind and he never speculated in that direction. But he admits that Berkin's question is significant because of the fact that there is no God. 2

The word "centre" is deliberately used here. The twentieth century climate seems to support the idea that God's death is not a metaphysical proposition but a metaphysical reality because there has been a vacuum since the death of God. Many isms have crept in to fill the void. Lawrence wants to posit something, something that guides man as the centre. Gerald finds no centre and he says life is artificially held together by the social mechanism. Birkin

says he would like to have the love of one man for one woman as the centre. Lawrence does not seem to justify the dichotomy between, body and soul. He likes to discover what is spiritual through the body. With this in mind, if we read Meet Me in the Green Glen, we see that it in no way comes near the love ethic of Lawrence. As the wife of a paralyzed husband, Cassie remains true to him, ignoring her body and taking little care of herself. In a way, she experiences living death too. As she says, she never loves Sunder: On the other hand, she hates him. In spite of that, she dedicates herself to the service of her invalid husband, and spends most of her time shaving, cleaning, feeding, and attending to his needs. This unloved and uncared for woman, though cut off from the rest of the world, shows a sense of supreme self-sacrifice in the midst of blankness, lovelessness, and lifelessness.

Angelo enters Cassie's life like a flame and infuses life into her dead world. For quite sometime they share bed but live in an emotional void. Love generates out of pity and she finds meaning in her life, which has been a void so far. Angelo's affair with Charlene makes her happiness short-lived. Proving herself to be large-hearted, she accepts their love but requests him to love her a little. The
bitterness she experiences when Angelo shuts his door to her, and the humiliation she is put to when she hears Sunder's comment about her through the mouth of his Negro mistress, Arlita, that she is not better than a bolster, perhaps provoke her to murder Sunder and betray her lover. At the right moment, she confesses the truth but fails to save Angelo's life. She becomes deranged for the second time and lives in the illusion of love, remembering only what she wants to, which gives her absolute joy. As the epigraph says, her love is born out of despair and impossibility. Though it is rare and strange, as it is the result of the real union of mind and body between an aged and seemingly lifeless woman and a young man, it makes her life meaningful.

The title Meet Me in the Green Glen taken from John Clare's poem is, perhaps, the unheard cry from the heart of Charlene, who takes to dope addiction after the electrocution of her lover, Angelo. This Negro girl, who refuses to respond to his love and even threatens to call the Sheriff if he follows her, falls madly in love with him at a later stage. Her mother says:

That gal, she gone crazy. This mornen, I beg her. She won't listen. I locks her up, she beat the door with her haid till it
bleed. I say I whup her she see him agin, and she walk to the kitchen stove and git ready to lay her finger on the stove lid to show me she doan mind me hurten her, and I know she gonna do it (204).

Love mars the life of Charlene. The death of Angelo or the disappearance of love from her life makes her lose interest in life. Amantha Starr, with all her questions, could never think of love though a number of men enter her life. Cassie Killigrew stands as a symbolic fusion of love and sacrifice and seems to stress the necessity of love for a quintessential understanding of the self. In a way she resembles Hardy's Tess more than any Lawrentian character. By killing Alec Tess symbolically kills the male-ego that struggles to enslave women. By extending the analogy further we may say that Cassie's killing of Sunder is a symbolic enactment of the emancipation of the Southern lady from the chivalric tradition sedulously promoted by the patriarchal society to keep her confined to the four walls of a house.