Chapter 3

The Fluid

"Now let us see what the next one says. See, there is only a single character. It is the barbarian character war, but it has other senses too. It can stand for vengeance, and, if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read justice. There is no knowing which sense is intended. This is part of Barbarian cunning."

(J.M. Coetzee, Waiting For the Barbarians 122)

Generally speaking it can be stated that femininity has always been used to signify an otherness which has effectively been essentialised as the disruption of the legitimate. This otherness has itself been variously expressed as the repressed other, the hysterical body, the semiotic, the pre-oedipal, ecstatic, fluid, the maternal body. Women, however, have no privileged access to it, though several male avant-garde writers can speak of it.

Amelia Jones opines that from a particular perspective art history could be seen to be part of a broader patriarchal project of reinforcing as 'natural' man's control over his own creative 'seed'. According to this point of view, patriarchy's investment in systems that ensure proof of
authorial possession result from the necessity of overcoming male anxiety over the ultimate uncertainty of biological paternity. Although the woman always knows she is the mother --through her physical connection with the developing foetus--the man never knows for sure that he is the father, and thus has a high stake in maintaining a system by which he can claim paternal 'ownership'. This argument that the insistent employment of a paternal authorial origin is motivated by a biological lack on the part of men in particular could be viewed as dangerously recuperable into essentialist notions of gender identity. Whether or not we accept the argument, however, from a psychoanalytic point of view, at least it is evident that lack, for both male and female subjects, motivates coherent and fully intentional subjectivity. In the modern West, according to a feminist reading of Freud and Lacan, it is male lack--male fear of castration--that motivates men's efforts to dominate women, the signifiers of castration, in the sphere of the social. The work of Lucy Irigary has been exemplary in framing this feminist and critical conception of psychoanalytic paradigms of gender identity. The production of subjectivity as a masculine category takes place in the specific context of the modern story of gender relations in the West, a story narrativized in psychoanalysis.
Psychoanalysis offers a universal theory of the psychic construction of gender identity on the basis of repression. In doing so, it gives specific answers to the question of what constitutes subjectivity, how we acquire gendered subjectivity and internalize certain norms and values. It offers a frame from within which femininity and masculinity can be understood, and a theory of consciousness, language and meaning. The feminist consciousness is the consciousness of victimization and as a philosophy of life, it seeks to discover and change the more subtle and deep-seated causes of women's oppression. It is a concept of raising of the consciousness of an entire culture.

Initial feminist response to Freud were far from positive. Kate Millet, for example, in her influential Sexual Politics, recognised the contradictions in Freud's texts, but chose to focus on his theory of femininity, in which anatomical difference directly affects the structure of the feminine character. This reading emphasized anatomical determination at the expense of other more productive aspects of Freudian theory. Although Sexual Politics begins with a carefully argued reading of Freud, it goes on to collapse the feminine into the female and the psychic into the biological, undermining the more progressive aspects of Freudian theory.
In *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1975), which did much to restore feminist interest in psychoanalysis after Kate Millett’s onslaught, Juliet Mitchel argues that Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis provide a useful conceptual framework for understanding the construction of human sexuality. Freud, she held, was not prescribing but describing the patriarchal world; if that world he describes was not ideal, perhaps he located some mechanisms that kept it in place. She suggests that the apparent phallocentrism of psychoanalysis is descriptive of the state of society rather than a precondition of human sexuality. Mitchel avoids confronting the anatomical determination in psychoanalysis which leads women to be defined in terms of lack. Instead *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* concentrates on the symbolic status of phallus, the Law of the Father and subject positions within the symbolic order. Although the phallus is the signifier of sexual difference, Mitchel argues that it is not necessarily tied to particular patriarchal social relations.

Many feminists have attempted to make psychoanalytic theory the key to understanding the acquisition of gendered subjectivity. Recent feminist writing has taken up the Freudian model of psychosexual development as a basis for understanding female sexuality, femininity and the repre-
sentation of women in film, literature and the media. The work of Helene Cixous focuses on the relationship between feminine libido and feminine writing. She looks to feminine writing for challenge to the patriarchal order. Another more extensive description of the effects of early exclusive attachment to the mother was Nancy Chodorow’s Reproduction of Mothering (1999) which argued that what is involved is not just a child’s relation to father and mother but his or her relation to any object at all. Consequently, it is also a question of his or her existence as a self, that is as a being separate from other beings. What is involved in a pre-Oedipal stage, Chodorow argued, is more primary than sexual identification or role modeling which are typical of the Oedipal stage of development. The child’s ability to think of itself as a subject and to form the idea of stable objects outside the self must be accompanied through the mother-child relation.

Chodorow began with the Freudian concept of primary narcissism. The child at first does not distinguish between self and anything outside. There is no self and no perception of self. The establishment of ego boundaries is, however, essential for the later health of the personality, and because it is the mother who is the custodian of the child, it is in the relationship with the mother that these
boundaries must be established. Chodorow argued that because Freud neglected this crucial stage in development, the phenomenon of penis envy, admittedly traumatic, is not sufficiently explained. If he had examined the pre-Oedipal stage more carefully, Freud would have found a reversal of his hypothesis of an obvious female inferiority. There, because of the exclusive attachment to the mother, someone with whom the male can never identify, the male core identity, not the female's, is conflictual. Like the girl, the boy experiences an early non-verbal oneness with the mother, a sense of identity with her and consequently a femaleness. His later maleness must always be asserted against the challenge of that primary identification. He must learn in a difficult fashion to be not feminine, and the mother must, because of his maleness, treat the boy differently. Whether or not a sexual attraction exists, he is not, in the end, like her and so is left out of the female world she creates with her daughters. Given the precarious, insubstantial status of his masculinity, the male must work hard to create an identity, establishing rigid and stereotypical differences between what is male and what is female. He must constantly alienate himself, not to escape the mother's sexual designs, but to establish against her positive identity a precarious maleness.
Feminists influenced by Lacan have stressed that both sexes can take up the masculine and feminine places; they shift and slide—no one has the phallus. Yet the tie between phallus and penis exists and persists. Andrea Nye comments:

In Freudian Analysis there is no primal unitary self of subject. Instead the point of analysis is to undo and remake the self, to rediscover the structuring and destructuring that leads to psychic function and dysfunction. Nor is there any primal identity, sexual or other. Identity is produced in society and that production can easily miscarry, as Freud's neurotics and borderlines illustrated. The assertion of selfhood or subjectivity is not given; it is an achievement and a precarious one. As an achievement it has a history and it is that history which psychoanalysis is to reopen, undo or redo. For both masculine and feminine sexuality, the analytic task is the same: to show how polymorphous fragmentary infantile sexual excitations are transformed to fit narrow perimeters of normal genital expression focussed on acceptable sexual objects(122)
French feminism is meant to be about the insistence that women are different, and a challenge to phallogocentric thinking and patriarchal structures of language. Its Anglo-American counterpart is characterized by the insistence that women are equal and its concern with the real world. British feminists and especially Juliet Mitchell have defended Lacan and Freud. French women theorists/psychoanalysts (Lucy Irigary chiefly, Helene Cixous and others) have tried to find ways around to make male dominance implied by Lacan’s symbolic law. The challenge to Lacan is often read as, or reduced to, the challenge is patriarchal structures of language and phallogocentrism. But Lacan’s theory is not only about a patriarchal order of language. It is also about psychical organization: it is an argument that the symbolic is the condition of sanity. For Mitchell the problem with the attempts to undercut the symbolic is that without a symbolic law human beings cannot function. The symbolic places human beings in relation to others, and gives them a sense of their place in their world, and the ability to speak and be understood by others. The real problem is that Lacan’s symbolic makes patriarchy seem inevitable. The symbolic’s patriarchal nature relies on the interlocking functions of the symbolic father intervenes in the imaginary ties between mother and child. For Lacan the actual father matters infinitely less than his
structural, symbolic position as an intervening third party.

Irigaray's renowned explicit attention to the female body can be read, not as the celebration of the body for its own sake, but as a psychoanalytically informed argument, intended to counter the centrality of the penis in psychological differentiation. From the early 1980s on, leading British feminists have endorsed Lacan's theory as a non-essentialist one: non-essentialist because it theorized femininity as a non-biological construction; because it claimed that femininity had no content, and because it made the feminine position available to both sexes, although in a highly qualified sense.

Lacan stressed that the anatomical distinction between the sexes provides the cultural form through which subjects come to recognize their position on either the male or female side of sexual difference. Repeatedly, Lacan's exeget's stress that, for him, anatomy is not destiny. Instead, the imagined presence or absence of the penis provides the acknowledged framework in which the subjects seek--but necessarily fail--to adopt a settled position on either side of the sexual divide. That is why Lacan insists that any attempt either to be or to have the phallus rests on an imposture. Given that the Lacanian subject desires precisely because of lack, it can never remain complete in
the sexually differentiated position it strives to take up. Even if the male side may provide the illusion that masculinity has the phallus, it only does so by covering over the male subject's constitutive lack. Conversely if the female side may suggest that femininity can be the phallus, then it does so only in the form of a 'masquerade'. Considering how women are under pressure to make themselves into desirable objects, Lacan argues that, in the process, femininity has to reject as essential part of itself. It is for that which she is not that she wishes to be desired as well as love. But in Lacan's later writings, femininity is not always subjected to the masquerade demanded by the reigning phallus. To show that femininity might elude phallic law, he returned in the mid-1970s to aspects of the vexed debate on femininity that absorbed Freud's attention some fifty years before, and which has remained a source of interest to modern feminist theory. In the essays by Lacan and his students brought together in Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne, there are several statements that indicate how the phallus might not have complete dominance over all aspects of sexual difference. Lacan focuses our attention to the notorious difficulties into which Freud ran when attempting to settle the riddle of femininity. Lacan aims to explain how and why the phallus erects itself on a fantasy of woman, or -- more vividly --
- 'The Woman'. To expose how 'The Woman' is a myth, Lacan deletes the definite article in both the title and text of his seminar. Instead of 'The Woman', he explores the jouissance of 'woman', a phenomenon that confounds, defies and exceeds the phallic order. Such jouissance --a word which remains extremely hard to paraphrase in English-- captures the exhilarating bliss and intensity of sexual experience.

For Lacan culture is always patriarchal, that it is in the exchange structures described by Levi-Strauss that the essential order of the Sym~olic can be found. The Law of the Father is seen as being identical with the law of language, the symbolic order which has as its entry the Oedipus situation and which structures all interactions--even those between mother and child, made primary by object relations theorists. It is because of the Law of the Father that biological differences between male and female come to be the principal axis along which development occurs: in other words, patriarchy institutes a chain of meanings which define the individual and into which s/he is inserted, but because patriarchy structures reality it appears to be all-embracing, 'natural' and biologically ordained.

If language is primarily a male dominated system, those who find themselves outside it not primarily on the
basis of biological sex but on the costructed gender posi-
tions and attributes are bound to face the partial or
complete absence of tools to effectively signify with. What
'Lies' (Kathakal 25-8) with its linguistically rich and
semantically dense texture shows is the ways in which
gendered permutations and combinations decide one's rela-
tive self and thus becomes an instance wherein gender
becomes secondary in determining one's (relative) subject
positions and in casting identity. A close-reading of the
story highlighting a preponderance of certain linguistic
items and features inevitably leads to significance and
signification which together show this clearly.

In the story the focalization of that of a male child
who is trying to 'fix' words, narratively stabilise meaning
and to narrate and to conclusively prove an incident that
has left him in temper tantrums (the illicit sexual rela-
tion that his father had with a woman called Stella when his
mother was away) coupled with his wrath for the father who
is functioning an an agency of seperation between his
mother and himself, and paving the way for his entry into
the symbolic order. As Nancy J.Chororow argues, persons
take their place in the world as a subject only through
entry into the symbolic, into language and culture. This
acquisition of subjectivity takes place through the inter-
vention of a third person or term, into the imaginary mother-child dyad, which is conceived to the conceptually and emotionally outside of language and culture. The father, symbolized by his phallus (which in turn symbolizes the prohibition of desire for the mother and the threat of castration), institutes and constitutes this symbolic intervention. The phallus thus stands for entrance into the symbolic. In this view, then, subjectivity is sexuality, and sexuality is defined exclusively in terms of sexual difference, in terms of presence or absence of the phallus. Sexuality and subjectivity, rooted in the unconscious are precarious for both sexes, as they hinge on resolution of the castration complex (187-8).

Contrary to his expectations and despite his attempts, the narrator does not get the right word to express himself and unsaid as well as uncertainties abound in his desperate attempts to define himself in terms of the existing syntax. We, as decoders of the system, get oscillated between fixities and fluidities, between the stereotypes of gendered language and the more heterogeneous implications that prevent closure of signification. The shift can and should be approached in terms of the narrator's various and varying responses to the determinate and the indeterminate experiences of his life, thus deriving a philosophy
of openness, of voices in contention.

The very first thing that raises questions and doubts as to the veracity of his narrative is the different scales of time referred to in the story. The calm and quite mother most convincingly states that he has left him just for a couple of days, a period that becomes "so many days" for the boy. At another point the father tells him that the measures of time are different for the young and the old:

His father got up and said, closing the windows near his feet

'Stella will leave as soon as night falls'

'Is not it night already?'

'For kids, yes. But for adults it is going to be evening' (26).

In both instances we have no proof or obligation to believe that what the old ones say is 'right' and Appu, the boy, is 'wrong'. The net result is that Appu miserably fails in making any sense within the system. He is generating meaning or trying to do so within the bounds of an enemical linguistic and cultural system that is pre-existing and decides his essential existence and actions. This order that exists even before his entry into the world of signs and symbols lands him in a state of confusion.
According to Lacan syntax is pre-conscious. But what eludes the subject is the fact that his syntax is in relation with the unconscious reserve. When the subject tells his story, something acts, in a latent way, that governs this syntax and makes it more and more condensed in relation to what Freud, at the beginning of his description of psychical resistance, calls a nucleus. To say that this nucleus refers to something traumatic is no more than an approximation. We must distinguish between the resistance of the subject and that first resistance of discourse, when the discourse proceeds towards the condensation around the nucleus. For the expression resistance of the subject too much implies the existence of a supposed ego and it is not certain whether--at the approach of this nucleus--it is something than we can justifiably call an ego (Four Fundamental 68).

In the story the relation between the father and the mother is neither problematic nor mysterious from the perspective of the little boy though the same simplicity and linearity is missing in the relation between the father and the son is not so. For the boy the father is an epitome of repression and desire: "Let mom understand how cruel dad is. Then, perhaps, mom won't forget him when dad comes from office in the evening" (26). The father makes the mother
sit on his lap. This action irritates Appu very much. For him the presence of the father, who serves as an interdiction to the child not to enjoy complete possession of the mother, is the introduction of a third term in the heretore child/mother duality, and it is the introduction of the third term that constitutes his entry into language which is not known to him: “Stella and dad talked in a language unknown to him for long, and laughed a lot”(28).

This obscure language--it can be English, French or the sexual language--is the possibility, indeed the necessity of representing (as in a drama) one’s desires. It is important to realize that desires can only be represented in and through language, as in the metonymic flow of the signifying chain, and that it will remain impossible to articulate the object of one’s desire, which is by definition inaccessible and insatiable. It is the same predicament that Appu has found himself in--an alien world with different ethos, manners and modes of articulation and above all overshadowed by the figure of the father who deftly takes advantage of his privileged relative subject position. Like an omnipotent and omniscient phantom or all-presiding deity, the father, the phallic symbol of paternal authority retains its preeminence by hiding within the structures it governs. Even Appu’s mother is under the
spell cast by this master signifier. The only way open to him is to accommodate himself in the system he does not like and to assimilate its structures. Appu, in the vocabulary of Lacan:

... is not simply mastering his privation by assuming it, but that here he is raising his desire to a second power. For his action destroys the object that it causes to appear and disappear in the anticipating provocation of its absence and its presence. His action thus negatives the field of forces of desire in order to become its own object to itself. And this object, being immediately embodied in the symbolic dyad of two elementary exclamations, announces in the subject the diachronic integration of the dichotomy of the phonemes, whose synchronic structure existing language offers to his assimilation; moreover, the child begins to become engaged in the system of the concrete discourse of the environment, by reproducing more or less approximately in his Fort! and in his Da! the vocables that he receives from it (Lacan Ecrits 103)
Given that the appropriate partner for jouissance is lack, a symptom puts in place of something else, a substitute, an element proper to incarnate jouissance, the alienation and substitution that Appu makes becomes a prerequisite is his transformation as a 'successful' unit of the cultural fabric. The first consequence of this step is that he ceases to be a subject without a symptom or one in the imaginary order. The node of the privileged jouissance of the subject is fixed by the new symptoms which are concomitant with the new order. It is the symptom that makes the singularity of the subject, subjected otherwise to the great law of want-to-be. The symptom is a function—a logical function—of exception relative to the infinite work, the infinite ciphering of the unconscious. A symptom snows in, nails in, jouissance, while the unconscious displaces jouissance. According to Lacan in the symptom, the signifier is marred, so to speak, of something else, and finds itself transformed accordingly. Desperately seeking to find a place within the Imaginary, the subject is forever siege from Lacan's second order, the Symbolic. Fluctuating, disjointed, heterogeneous, the Symbolic outdoes and overreaches the subject's desires to find stable point for its identity in the Imaginary. For the Symbolic is shared by all subjects, providing the realm of signification where everyone has access to the pronoun 'I'. The
subject—frustrated and alienated as a result of castration and the Oedipal drama—is constructed by and through language, and phallic signifier articulates the dialectic of desire. As Gayatri C. Spivak says:

...in Lacan’s gloss on the oedipus complex, it is through the discovery of the ‘name of the father’ that the son passes the Oedipal scene and is inserted into the symbolic order or the circuit of the signifier. Upon that circuit, the transcendental signifier remains the phallus (173).

The master signifier that Appu begins to search by surrendering himself to its unquestionable authority is always elsewhere and is deluding. He has access to the higher order and the ultimate goal only through the Other. The culmination of the Oedipal moment arises with the introduction of the father into the mother/child dyad. The Lacanian cutting of the mother-daughter dyad offers one level on which the literal cutting of the body reverberates. For the daughter to become a subject, she must reject her Mother, cut herself free, as it were, and enter the Symbolic -- particularly since this mother, like many, tries to keep her child down with her in the Imaginary. She uses language, narration, precisely to release herself from the Imaginary Mother. As a boy Appu identifies with
the condition of a girl and experiences all the pains of this separation. It is through narration—a manifestation of language which creates the system he lives in—that he attempts to establish himself. But his narrative is far from adequate and invariably fails him.

Among the fixities of the story are his very attempts at word-fixing, trying to systematically narrating what happened in the psychically prolonged absence of the mother and the ways in which the father ill-treated him. He is torn between 'natural' and 'unnatural' (choices nevertheless determined by an already constructed framework of socially, ideologically and linguistically constructed reality) events, definite views and blurred visions, and finally between the limits of his linguistic freedom defined by sexual freedom. It is the complacent certainties of a patriarchal culture that bring him to a significatory fix. His own logics and rationalizations lead him to the aporia. The narrative line becomes zig-zag, is variously lighted by unanswered questions and negatives: "Who is lying? Father or myself? Were my action of mounting the horse and Stella's arrival were dreams?" (28).

Narration, being transhistorical and transcultural, is of universal importance especially in the context of the feminine as the solw mode of expression and in the case of
characters like Appu who despite their gender maleness are rivetted into the groves ascribed to the female by a dominating male order. As Judith Roof observes, narrative constantly reproduces the phantom of a whole, articulated system, where even the concept of a system is a product of narrative, where the idea that there are such things as parts and wholes is already an effect of a narrative organizing. As a pervasive sense of the necessary shape of events and their perception and as the process by which characters, causes, and effects combine into patterns recognised as sensical, narrative is the informing logic by which individuality, identity, and ideology merge into a cooperative and apparently unified vision of the truths of existence. As a set of ordering presumptions by which we make sense of perceptions, events, cause/effect relations (and even the idea that sense can be produced by a notion of cause/effect), and life, narrative permeates and orders any representation we make to ourselves or to others. As a cultural, psychological, ideological dynamic, narrative aligns disparate forces and elements into productive configurations of differences and opposition. These configurations produce the perpetual opportunity for synthesis, for totalizing, cathartic gestures linked to insight, knowledge, reproduction and temporary stability (213).
One can read the instability or temporary stability in the discourse of Appu as 'female' by a privileging of this fluidity. Women writers often establish a subversively different focalization by undermining definiteness of judgement and fixity of focus like the cultural construct which sees female sexuality as subversive, heterogenous and open. The radical disruption of modernity's ostensibly static significatory patterns in the texts of Mallarme and the surrealists Artaud and Bataille have often been associated and connected with the feminine. The dissociation of signifying closure is analogous to the free-flowing 'pre-Oedipal' stage of imaginary union between infant and mother before phallic law (the Lacanian 'Symbolic') imposes itself on this presumably full relationship" (Jones 26). In other words what decides the gender attributes is not the biological sex but the spatial and linguistic configurations in which one finds himself or herself. Gender ceases to be absolute and becomes highly determined by the unconscious and the signifier as the relation of the subject to the signifier is the reference point because "it is as primary and constitutive in the establishment of analytic experience as it is primary and constitutive in the radical function of the unconscious" (Four Fundamental 138).

The phenomenon of male domination is universal. Gen-
esis symbolizes this by depicting Eve as made from a super-
numerary bone of Adam. Aristotle believed that the female
is a female by virtue of certain lack of qualities: accord-
ing to him we should regard the female nature as afflicted
with a natural defectiveness. Plato thanked God that he was
created a man not a woman. St. Thomas considered woman to be
an imperfect man, an incidental being. St. Augustine de-
clared that woman is a creature neither decisive nor con-
stant. The morning prayers of the Jews 'Blessed be God. .
. that he did not make me a woman' reflect the status of
women vis-a-vis men (Kaur 103).

Just as in 'The Lies', the maddening question of
signification or the lack of it is closely tied up with the
epistemological puzzle of the blurred and often impercep-
tible line of demarcation between the real and the nonreal
informs the famous story 'The Smell of the Bird' (Sandal
Trees). Being one abounding in surrealistic images in the
broadest sense of the term, it is an attempt to come out of
the discourse regime of the unsaid and the ineffable, a bid
to come into to grips with the fluidity of signification.
Lacan's observation that we must return to the works of the
Dutch surrealist painter Hieronymus Bosch for an atlas of
all the aggressive images that torment mankind and for the
prevalence that psychoanalysis has discovered among them
of images of a primitive autoscopy of the oral and cloacal organs has engendered the forms of demons (Ecrits 11) holds equally good for the story under consideration.

It is through the focalization of a smug woman that the story unfolds itself. She is living in an imaginary order, ensconcing herself on a perfect image offered by the mirror, or in a world of narcissistic illusion, as opined by Lacan about the intricate mechanisms of the mirror stage and the imaginary order:

She opened her bag, took out her pocket mirror and examined her face. She decided she was 'good looking'. What if she demanded eight hundred rupees? The would be lucky to get an employee like her--with education, status, and the experience gained through travelling in foreign countries. ..

(The Sandal Trees 53-54)

It is amidst a lot of worries and problems that she finds this emotional refuge in an imaginary world generated by the mirror. For instance she fails in finding another person of her sex ("But she could not see a single woman there" 52); cruel and dominating male gaze irritates her much and she feels she is the sole object of their gaze
("All eyes were on her, she felt. I shouldn't have come" 53). For Lacan the gaze is not simply an empowering panoptic tool wielded by an unequivocally masculine, unified, viewing subject to objectify the viewed figure of woman, but a reciprocal function constituting a nonfixed subjectivity in relation to a fantasized other. The gaze, in Lacan's terms 'photographs' the subject:

What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which -- if you will allow me to use a word, as I often do, in a fragmented form-- I am photo-graphed. . . . Only the human subject--the human subject, the subject of the desire that is the essence of man-- is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is gaze. The screen is here the locus of mediation (Four Fundamental 10-17).
The gaze does have a sudden and palpable impact on her. She begins to regret the action of coming there though she knows that a return is impossible and out of question: "Why did I get into the middle of these men drowned in sweat? Even if I get a thousand rupees I can't come to this building every day for work...But she couldn't go back" (53).

In her case, the gaze is dialectical as her desire to be recognized is clear and telling though she does not have the cultural prerogative to return the gaze, and as a logical fallout lets herself to be reduced into a mere object to be looked at helplessly as if ordained by Fate. As Laura Mulvey observes, in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy on to the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. Woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle. The female figure poses a deeper problem. She also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat
of castration and hence unpleasure. Ultimately, the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the visually ascertainable absence of the penis, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organisation of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father. The woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified. The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the reenactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object; or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence overvaluation, the cult of the female star in films) (179-81).

Despite sincere attempts she cannot find her target from among the labatythine contours of the building ("She walked and walked, moving past a number of doors, but she couldn't find the board she was looking for" The Sandal Trees 53); and finally and most crucially she is subjected to a pivotal mis/reading or mis/signification ("And there was a board on which was written: 'Dying'. She found the
spelling error amusing. She asked herself: Instead of dyeing textiles, is it death that takes place here?" 53). These crises, imperfections and indeterminate significations push her into a symbolic realm from which she tries to find emotional refuge in an imaginary world. This is an extended realm of identificatory misrecognitions inaugurated at the mirror stage and shares a most subtle as well as volatile relation with the Symbolic. As Malcom Bowie holds:

The Imaginary grows from the infant's experience of his 'specular ego' but extends far into the adult individual's experience of others and of the external world: wherever a false identification is to be found -- within the subject, or between one subject and another, or between subject and thing -- there the Imaginary holds sway. Although the two orders are distinct and opposed, the Symbolic encroaches upon the Imaginary, organizes it, and gives it direction: the false fixities of the Imaginary are exposed, and coerced into movement, by the signifying chain (114-5)

The signifying chain that exposes the false fixities of the imaginary and forces the subject into movement lands her in a nonreal world characterized by paradox, duality
and dialectical relations. Paradigmatic variations of the binary attraction/revulsion ('devil's house' / 'terrible charm') are to be found in the whole body of the story. She feels the pangs and passion of being caught between the different world orders of death/life and purity/sin. For her who knows the smells of death, the relation with the young man who symbolizes or is death is highly equivocal, paradoxical and flux:

He lay back in his chair, winked at her and smiled. She felt that white smile suddenly spreading in her eyes. Her knees trembled.

She ran towards the door. But her sweaty hands couldn't open it. Her eyes had turned moist. ... He rose from the chair and came towards her. He was very tall. She said: “Please let me go. I never wanted to come here”

“It is a lie. How many times have you tried to come here! And how many times have you yearned for a comfortable end! Aren’t you like the river which craves to fall into the sea that’s full of tender waves and heaves a great sigh, to merge into it lazily, indolently? Tell me, my love, don’t you love to feel that endless caress? (The
Sandal Trees 54-56)

The story is rich in the case of olfactory, visual and vocal images. The smell of putrid wounds, the sweet smell of fruit groves, the smell of incense; her action of watching yellow flowers and oleanders; and the roaring, clamouring darkness that heralds death. These images greatly enhance the surrealistic and fluid nature of the story and reduce the decoder into an equally fluid situation.

Sea is an image of uncertainty, mystery, fluidity, unpredictability and similar qualities which are generally attributed to women as a gender group and the sea appears in a good number of poems and stories of Kamala Das. Does this mean that the sea is a/the symbol of a universal consciousness that biologically or psychologically feminine at the conscious and unconscious level? Lacan poses a major problem for contemporary thought by asking whether there might just be a 'universal'. Lacan returns with one more version of the unconscious, including how maps of unconscious formations are structured (ordered), thus giving rise to subjectivity and to culture. But Lacan's picture of the unconscious as an absence whose effects are present does not culminate in elements that are characteristic of post-structuralist thought: pluralism, rejection of hierarchies, and denials that anything is decidable
(Natoli 42). The features of plurality and undecidability are interspersed in the works of Kamala Das in various measures and degrees.

Prominent among other works that concern themselves with the delicate and fluid relation between life and death are the poems 'The Invitation' and 'Suicide'. In the first instance it is a "garrulous" sea that the narrative voice has as the addressee which in turn becomes her own eccentric alter ego--one characterized by the incoherent coordinates of space and time. She is well aware of the absurdity in waiting for the lover who has left her for good. However, gains and losses and inextricably intertwined like a Mobious strip and often become the psychic manifestations of the same emotion: "Your losses are my gains". But ultimately the narrator, despite her conscious attempts to desist from the lure of death, is tempted by the primordial wish to embrace death, a space free from the masquerades of language and culture and symbols, as desire is beyond conscious articulation since it is barred or repressed from articulation. Its production through repression being one of the constitutive marks of the unconscious upon which it bestows its signifying effects, desire undermines conscious activity and speaks through demand, operating as its underside or margin. Desire requires medi-
tation, is intrinsically inter-subjective and desires the desire of an other. Desire is thus a movement, an energy which is always transpersonal, directed to others (Grosz 64-5). Thus the desire in the poem becomes an unconscious quest for death, not an urge to possess a material object or own a person, but one to transcend the present order. The functioning of the unconscious has an embedded element of surprise too. Lacan says that the unconscious is always manifested as that which vacillates in a split in the subject from which emerges a desire that can be situated in the denuded metonymy of the discourse in question where the subject surprises himself in some unexpected way (Four Fundamental 28). It is such an unexpected decision that we come across at this juncture:

The tides beat against the walls, they
Beat in childish rage. .
Darling, forgive, how long can one resist? ('Invitation' 26).

In 'Suicide' too the universal image of sea is the interlocutor cum other. The poem is generally read as a revolt against the masculine character of our civilization but at the same shows the poet's restlessness with woman's passive acceptance of servility as their appointed lot
The poem begins by depicting the paradox of being torn between the states of soul without body and body without soul moves on to see life and death not as binary opposites but as stages or phases of the same chain:

Bereft of soul

My body shall be bare,

Bereft of body

My soul shall be bare.

Which would you rather have

O kind sea?

Which is the more dead of the two? (Only the Soul 86)

What follows is an impassioned description of the concomitant pangs of the symbolic order which is simultaneously the product and precondition of language and culture. The degree of mockery aimed the entire situation and system is clear from the repeated use of the imperative 'must'. Visibly, even if a woman is not happy either as a woman or as a wife, she must pretend that she is happy. It is as if you slap a child and order him to smile as a response to it. But there is no option, no choice for the
woman. She must 'pose', 'pretend' and 'act' her satisfac-
tion with her position as the 'inessential', the 'acciden-
tal', the 'Object', the 'Other' (Kaur 106). What the
narrator needs is a new system that is above and beyond the
already existing one, the entry into which coincides with
the conception of sexual difference organized around the
presence or absence of the phallus, the privileged signi-
fier, and which is preeminently symbolic. The symbolic (and
therefore syntax and every linguistic category) is a social
effect of the relation to the other and is "established
through the objective constraints of biological (including
sexual) differences and concrete historical family structures"
(Kristeva 'Revolution' 70). What the narrative voice looks
for is an order capable of transcending the current con-
structs of the symbolic and the cultural:

"O sea, I am fed up/I want to be simple" (Only the Soul
87).

'Composition' is a poem that has copious and conspicu-
ous components of infantile innocence--so to say--and the
purity of the imaginary order as in the previous works
analyzed. The sea, the most potent symbol of flux, mystery
and uncertainty, plays the role of the mute spectator and
patient listener here too. The description of the sea has
echoes of the sea in the Genesis of the Old Testament: "In
the beginning/the sea was only the wind’s/ceaseless whisper in a shell" (Only the Soul 21). This signifies the universal human desire to return to the pure and pristine state of affairs, an order that is believed to have existed before the intervention of cultural constructs viz. the law of the father and the inevitable entry into the empire of language, the symbolic order:

That was long ago,

Before the skin,

intent on survival,

learnt lessons of self-betrayal.

Before the red house that had

stood for innocence

crumbled...... (Only the Soul 21).

As indicated earlier the narrative voice expresses wishes about a soft and cozy extended imaginary order: "Perhaps my innocence is not/ all that lost" (21). The voice continues to philosophize that the essential tragedy in life is never death but the inescapable growth into the symbolic order. In the hustle and bustle of this psychophysical evolution we consciously or unconsciously forget
our innate inadequacies:

The tragedy of life is not death but growth,

the child growing into adult

and, growing out of needs,

discovering

that the old have black-rimed nails

and scalps from which emanates

a sweet, mouldy smell (22)

For the narrative voice which finds it virtually impossible to rationalize the phenomenon of growth, the task of defining or describing her sexual identity within a frame of fixed relations becomes an equally daunting task. The mysterious laughter that she receives from her husband as the only explanation to her doubts as to whether she is a homosexual, a heterosexual or one suffering from sexual frigidity points to and culminates in a highly universalized as well as socialized sensibility informed by the Lacanian perspective that such profound questions are answered only outside language (which is characterized by
flux and missignification all the more for the woman who is alienated from the process of signification as a result of the lack of phallus which is the symbol of the unconscious castration complex that has the function of a knot in the dynamic structuring of symptoms in the analytic sense of the term and in the installation in the subject of an unconscious position without which he would be unable to identify himself with the ideal type of his sex (Ecrits 281). This relative absence or lack is treated as a universal feature:

We are all alike,

we women,

in our wrappings of hairless skin.

All skeletons are alike,

only the souls vary

that hide somewhere between the flesh

and the bone (Only the Soul 24).

It is through a few binary opposites that the poem graphically charts the transformation from one order into the other. Paradigmatically signified are the binary opposites purity/carnal desire, learning/lust, young/old, child/
lust through the pairs of soul/bone, school/brothel, sun/greying hair and toys/roaring night. Differentiating itself from the longing to go back to the pristine imaginary order, the poem then displays a resigned attitude, thus giving up the attempts to transcend the cultural constructs that mould and sustain our sensibilities:

Husbands and wives

here is my advice to you.

Obey each other's crazy commands

ignore the sane (25).

'The Motif in the Mirror' is a poem in which appear the mirror, image and endless repetition directly, at the semantic level. The narrator and the lover step into another order once rain, the agent and symbol of fertility, creation and change, abates: "Outside, the rain had ceased/We closed the verandah door" (Only the Soul 37). Then their embrace which functions as a potent signifier of eternity and emotional security and purports to transcend death is repeated endlessly in the mirror. As Samuel Weber says with the entry of the subject into the language of the signifier--into verbal language in this case--it enters into a structure of articulation in which direct identification
no longer functions: the subject can never again hope to find itself in the signifier, because the latter only receives its identity by virtue of its place in the signifying chain. Signifiers 'are' only by virtue of their difference. The subject is thereby split between the 'said' and the 'saying', between the enunciated and the enunciation: it is described in a structure of representation that cannot be traced back to an original presence, but is instead constituted by an irreducible movement of repetition (134-5).

The reader who is denied the direct experiences of gaze and cognition ("You have not seen") finds himself in a Derridian postmodern moment where the differentiation between real and unreal or original and copy becomes a veritable mirage. This condition has close resemblance with the idea of simulacra as postulated by Baudrillard. His theory of simulacrum refers to a situation where the images produced by and communicated through mass media substitute reality, or blurs the limits between real and non-real. Since everything is endlessly produced at the end of reproducibility:

The real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced. The
hyperreal. . . . hyperrealism is the limit of art, and of the real, by respective exchange, on the level of the simulacrum, of the privileges and prejudices which are their basis. The hyperreal transcends representation only because it is entirely in simulation. . . . Hyperrealism is made of an integral part of a coded reality that it perpetuates, and for which it changes nothing (186).

For Lacan even the phallus, so often designated as the referent of a dream image, is not the organ itself but the simulacrum of the ancients and itself a signifier. According to him, the mirror stage locates the constitution of the ego in a dimension of fictionality and of self-deception, which will have an alienating effect on the subsequent existence and development of the subject. In other words the mirror stage "describes a specious representation of false integrity, in which the mother presents her own vision to her infant" (Frosh 133). In this stage the child identifies with a vision that comes from elsewhere. The heroine just like that --caught in the mazy and hazy contours of imagination and oblivion:

When we embraced, we fell in their
Cerulean pools as a deathless motif, repeating, repeating,
Repeating this reflection of a reflection, this shadow of
A shadow, this dream of a dream and I knew him then by
knowing

who

I was, and knew myself more by knowing who he was (Only the Soul 37).

In the mirror phase is a cozy narcissistic relationship between the Self and the Image. When this bond is interrupted and blurred, a social being is born. It is not absolutely and in itself that the speaker identifies herself but with through in the matrix of the extrinsic as the unconscious is the discourse of the other ("knew myself more by knowing who he was"). Laura Mulvey observes that it is images that constitute the matrix of the imaginary, or recognition/misrecognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the I, of subjectivity. This is a moment when an older fascination with looking (at the mother's face, for an obvious example) collides with the initial inklings of self-awareness. Hence it is the birth of the long love affair/despair between image and self-image which has found such intensity of expression in film
and such joyous recognition in the cinema audience. Quite apart from the extraneous similarities between screen and mirror (the framing of the human form in its surroundings, for instance), the cinema has structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing it. The sense of forgetting the world as the ego has come to perceive it (I forgot who I am and where I was) is nostalgically reminiscent of that pre-subjective moment of image recognition. While at the same time, the cinema has distinguished itself in the production of ego ideals, through the star system. For instance, stars provide a focus or centre both to screen space and screen story where they act out a complex process of likeness and difference (the glamorous impersonates the ordinary) (178).

However, this state which stands close to the moment described by Mulvey where notions of physical time and space cease to exist is a mere deviation or digression from the all-pervading Law which is enacted within the symbolic law. The man returns to the Symbolic the very moment his libidinal energy is exhausted but the woman lingers in the cozy order captured lured by the pleasure and comfort of the extended imaginary and is ultimately brought back to reality through a severe cultural reminder by the man:
but he said,

Rising from my side, it is eight, get up 'sweet wife', I'll take you home (Only the Soul37).

‘Looking Glass’ is a poem in which appears the image of the mirror with a purely physical presence but with a high degree of psychic signification. Social dimensions and ramifications of lack that stand apart from the world of bliss and soothing ob1:tion are the staple of the poem. This sensibility, at leat peripherally, is slightly different from that of the previous examples. The hinge on which the whole poem revolves is the physical and psychical recognition and consolidation of the irreducible difference between sexes. It is with the help of an external agency--the Other, the mirror-- that the narrator and the man see and form ideas about themselves through gaze:

In the scopic relation, the object on which depends the phantasy from which the subject is suspended in an essential vacillation is the gaze.

. . . From the moment that this gaze appears, the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure. Furthermore, of all the objects in which
the subject may recognize his dependence in the 
register of desire, the gaze is specified as 
unapprehensible. That is why it is . . .
misunderstood (méconnu), and it is perhaps for 
this reason, too, that the subject manages, for-tunately, to symbolize his own vanishing and puncti-form bar (trait) in the illusion of the 
consciouness of seeing oneself see oneself, in 
which the gaze is elided (Four Fundamental 83).

The network of gazes triggered by the mirror serves 
to concretize and cement the relative and arbitrary physi-
cal superiority of man and the aesthetic superiority of 
woman which are revealed through a distributive binary 
structure laced with a few cultural constructs:

Stand nude before the glass with him

So that he sees himself the stronger one

And believes it so, and you so much more

Softer, younger, lovelier . . . Admit your

Admiration. Notice the perfection

Of his limbs, his eyes reddening under
Shower, the shy walk across the bathroom floor,

Dropping towels, and the jerky way he

Urinates. All the fonds details that make

Him male and your only man. Gift him all,

Gift him what makes you woman (Only the Soul 55)

Yet another poem conspicuous by the presence of the sea, mirror and a strong sense of loss is 'Smudged Mirrors'. The narrative voice whose gender identity cannot be ascertained by the textual evidence is one fully alienated by the dominating male gaze and is facing the flux and fluidity of language:

Thoughts do not seem to jell...

Words turn their backs on me

as strangers do, embarrassed

by the intimacy of a stare (Only the Soul 128).

The impeccable mirror has become history for the narrator now and the frothy seas and rice stalks parting in the wind are the elements of an old story that exists as mere figments of imagination. It is with a bird that has lost the skill of flying and now scratching in the mud that the
narrative voice identifies itself. At this juncture the voice sheds the limits and limitations imposed by the first person narrative, identifies with a camera like vision and consequently tries to present a comprehensive picture through a few verbal representations resembling the quick movement of montages. Now the vision of the narrative voice comes to identify with the camera to see the ideal picture of the scene as in a classical film where everything is narrated as if from the point of view of an observer capable of moving about the room (Heath 188). As in the previous poems, the images and concepts like the sea, bird and gaze occur in plenty here too. But they are different from them it is with a highly pessimistic and resigned note that the poem ends:

For what bizarre purpose I live on

my calves forever aching,

and traitors of sense deceiving? (Only the Soul128).

'Wood Ash' is a poem that can best be summarized as a manifesto of fluidity at the semantic and thematic dimensions. The use of small letters to the exclusion of capital ones and the absence of punctuation marks that render the poem a long uninterrupted sentence remind one of a poem by e.e.cummings. The blurred past, wild fire and trees de-
stroyed by it and the presence of sea make the poem transcend the barriers of localized culture and, on the other contrary, invests it with universal structures and paradigms. Exactly as in the previous poems there was a time before the havoc wreaked by the fire and it is only after the tragedy that the narrator finds him/herself in a world fraught with imperfections and lack. This incident is neither a rarity nor a stroke of chance but just a link in the long and inevitable chain of subjectification and social conditioning. This poem shares the Lacanian musings about language and the futility of images in literary writings in a paradoxical and dialectical manner. Lacan argued that images always block truth since grammatical language and images merely produce the illusion of a consistent universe. But the unconscious disrupts these illusions by dissociating meaning that only seems full from our pretenses that it functions smoothly. The unconscious produces, instead, a glimpse of the void underlying our sense productions. On the other hand, truth does show up in spoken language, just as in dream or literary language, when it is linked to the object a as they lean against chains of signifiers. Lacan taught that signifiers lean against the primordial objects of desire and enable us to think against a backdrop of desire. If language is infiltrated by object a, it becomes clearer what Lacan meant
when he described truth as that which makes knowledge stumble. Fiction may have the structure of truth, but it is not truth in a theological or essentialist sense. Such an acute sense of the loss or lack of coherence and determinate signification that the subject experiences in the new world inhabited by signs is betrayed here:

in this new world i lack coherence

listen differently for what i have to tell

let your blood listen abd from with

your descendents shall hear me

the wild fire destroyed the flowering shrubs

the wild fire burnt down the trees

the wild fire then burnt itself down and in the blood of my ancestors the embers lay cooling

on those days of flux the mixed fragrance. . . .(Only the Soul 28).

‘Feline’, a poem partly written from the perspective of a writer laments the lack of the new as everything is a cyclical or linear repetition of the already felt and experienced:
We have so few symbols to use as motifs in our creations. We weave the fabric of our art, settling and unsettling an ancient design, the earth, the sun, the yellowed leaf, pain. . .

The anguish over the inescapability of repetition and refashioning lands the voice in a regime of despondency through the detailing of void space and "myriad unknowns" that govern us. This state of darkness and ignorance is one that all of us have experienced before our evolving into a material form: "before the womb's embrace". Despite our earthly existence and the epistemological advancements we often boast about, it is the aforesaid space of the unknown and the mysterious that hovers above us in waiting and takes over the very moment our physical being comes to an end:

the spaces that shall contain us

after the closure of graves or the red fire's rapid repast, the deciduous ferns that we ignored while we wandered plucking short-lived
This epistemological scepticism and pessimism exposited through the picture of the human being groping in the dark before and after his existence comes close to the Lacanian conception of the fragmented self as it is through another—the Other—and the Oedipal moment that one realizes oneself and carves a niche in the symbolic order:

Another lives in me, I fear, a twin left unborn,

Unnamed, unacknowledged, bitter with defeat. (35).

The subject for Lacan is nothing more than the effect of the combination of the signifiers and his aim in postulating the subject in this fashion is to reveal how complex tensions within signification comprise the field where the subject must battle for its destiny. Identity, in Lacan’s world, always remains precarious, and that is because the subject seeks to consolidate itself through process of misrecognition. The historicization of the subject attempts to see the subject not as a harmony of faculties, working towards a self-identical end but as the strife of warring parts at odds with one another. It is for this reason that Lacan focuses on the split subject—the wars among need, demand and desire. Oscillating between anticipation and belatedness, Lacan’s subject is by defini-
tion a subject of desire, constantly launching itself into the field of other where it seeks to know what it might have become. Moreover, this subject, is compelled to desire because it is by definition a subject of lack for this subject has to enter the field of the other to discover what it may become. The Lacanian subject has to discover that the mother does not have the phallus. Likewise, this subject may well seek to be the phallus when returning the mother’s desire. Sexual identifications, therefore, are arranged around this primary signifier.

Lacan holds that this signifier represents the father, the Name-of-the-Father which sustains the structure of desire with the structure of the law. Name-of-the-father is a formulation which unites the classical Freudian account of the Oedipus complex and the castration anxiety to the essentially linguistic discovery of the distinction between the paternal function itself—the term ‘father’ and that individual biological parent to whom he has hitherto related in a more properly imagined mode. This is, then the Oedipal moment, in which a tripartite structure emerges against the background of the dual structure of the Imaginary, when the Third (the Father) intrudes on the imaginary satisfaction of dual fascination, overthrows its economy, destroys its fascinations and introduces the child
to what Lacan calls the Symbolic Order, the order of objec-
tifying language that will finally allow him to say: I,you,he,she or it, that will therefore allow the small child to situate itself as a human child in the world of adult thirds.

The poem 'The Stranger and I' concerns itself in a very intensive manner with the above mentioned dialectics of subject formation. It can perhaps best be described as a subtle and succinct poetic statement of the Lacana
notion that the Other is the precondition of the construc-
tion of the split-self and the unconscious. In the poem it is through the picture of the other that the narrator realizes him/herself. This is not a personal experience and predicament but a universal condition that no one can be free from in the world ruled by Signs:

Stranger with despair in your eyes

I've met you not here alone, but

In alien towns, where even the streets

You walked on, looking, no, not at

Faces, but at signs over shops, were

Roofed with hostile skies;... (Only the Soul 39).
It is through words (most of them adjectives) like despair, alien, hostile, grey, loneliness, smoke-filled, joyless, trembling, wound, downcast and sulking that the narrator's disenchantment with the present order is revealed. At last the root cause of the miseries becomes perceptible with the bitter realization that the stranger is not "alien" but a part of the narrator itself:

I know you too well

Not to recognize (39).

Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'William Wilson' has close resemblance with 'The Stranger and I' structurally and thematically. The narrator--whose real name eternally deludes the reader--in the story comes across a student who continually chases him. They have the same name, age, appearance, voice, gait, nativity and join and leave the school on the same day. He chases the narrator everywhere—from Dr. Bransby's academy, Eton, Oxford, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Moscow, Naples and Egypt. The relations between them is confused and complicated. His real feelings towards him formed a motley and heterogenous admixture;—some petulant animosity, which was not yet hatred, some esteem, more respect, much fear with a world of uneasy curiosity (102). The narrator becomes subjected to moral corrections to his
irritation and the other peeps into the depths of his otherwise sealed soul and into his formative years of identity in the mirror stage, in fancy:

I discovered, or fancied I discovered, in his accent, in his air, and general appearance, a something which first startled, and then deeply interested me, by bringing to mind dim visions of my earliest infancy--wild, confused, and thronging memories of a time when memory herself was yet unborn (105).

Later the 'nagging' other appears at crucial moments, exposes his follies and forces him flee--in vain. The finale of this strange relationsgip comes when the narrator is attempting to culturally refashion himself--he was attending a masquerade--and on the verge of committing adultery with a respected woman. The Other materializes from nowhere and in a fit of fury and frustration the narrator stabs him and realizes through a mirror like experience (which does not seem to have a material existence) that the other was he himself:

A large mirror--so at first it seemed to me in my confusion--now stood where none had been perceptible before; and as I stepped up to it in extrem-
ity of terror, mine own image, but with the features all pale and dabbed in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait.

.. .It was my antagonist...It was Wilson. .. he said: You have conquered, and I yield. Yet henceforward art thou also dead--dead to the World, to Heaven, and to Hope! In me didst thou exist--and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself (117).

It is the Lacanian sensibility of seeing language as imperfect, dangerous, fragmenting but inevitable that informs and distinguishes the poem 'Words'. The beginning of the poem-- "All round me are words, and words and words"-- resembles the words of Hamlet, a character that has provided critics and psychoanalysts material for endless discussions and debates. The narrator sees language as a dynamic as well as mysterious phenomenon that functions not as dictated by humans but as decided by nature:

They grow on me like leaves, they never

Seem to stop their slow growing

From within  (Only the Soul 36).
The narrator too can descriptively understand and follow the aspects and dimensions of this movement and though s/he fails to accurately gauge its frontiers and terrains comprehensively, the bitter realization that no one can be free from it does not go unnoticed. The voice realizes that the primordial urge to express oneself and the tools like words (and language) are born not from articulation but from silence. The Lacanian view that physical and psychic changes, movement from one order to the other, are characterised by alienation, otherisation and that the precondition of existence called language is an ever evolving process is hinted at here:

Words are a nuisance, but

They grow on me like leaves on a tree,

They never seem to stop their coming

From a silence, somewhere deep within (36).

The presence of words is omnipresent in the present symbolic order. Desire too acts in the symbolic, in the language-based unconscious, in which signifiers relate to other signifiers, where the object of desire in continuously and endlessly deferred as well as continually unachievable. It is a desire for an other which exists not
in the Real but in discourse. The lack which characterises
desire is the same lack which is the consequence of the
chaining of signification in language. It is at this point
that the Lacanian claim the unconscious is the discourse of
the Other becomes relevant. This discourse arises in the
entry of the child into the symbolic, and this, in Lacan's
schema, is a function of the process of Oedipus, the
separation from the mother and identification with the
father. It is not the discourse of an abstract Other, but
of the father, whose sins and mistakes are recapitulated in
the child and acted out in his desire, attitudes to author-
ity, values and beliefs. This oedipalization of desire
turns all desire and relations with others into recapitu-
lations of Mother-Father-Ego. It is the same recapitula-
tion, this repetition, which in the psychoanalytic session
is repeated back to the analyst, although the client does
not realize that it is a repetition, and possibilites the
very working of psychoanalysis.