CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The true function of literature is to interpret us to ourselves, our aesthetic, emotional or intellectual values and relate us to the country and the society in which we live. As every living literature is a record of human experience in its milieu in the given space and time, so is American literature, which speaks of American experience, culture and the society based on democratic vistas, and creating a new world of the mind of the common man and his aspirations and celebrating the 'loving comradeship' in American democracy.

The enlightened common sense of Franklin, the astonishing intellectualism of Hamilton, Jefferson arguing great causes, the communicable fire of Thomas Paine, the most effective pragmatist of modern times, the art of style of Irving, the great art of story-telling of Cooper, the sombre beauty of Hawthorne, the moral romancer, the fierce humour of Thoreau's individualism, the shrewed saintliness of Emerson who spiritualized self-expansion, the soul-plunging adventures of Melville's imagination, the prophecy of Whitman seeking new rhythms to sing of American democracy and of the future of common man, Henry James' looking both ways across the sea from an Atlantis of his own creation, Emily Dickson's
seeing eternity through the windows of Amherst, Mark Twain's
tasting the bitterness of uncharted freedom narrating the
tales of expanding America - have contributed in creating
modern America and in shaping and nourishing the American
psyche. The modernists in America both in prose and poetry
have pushed through the mists and illusions of romance and
idealism to give the readers pictures of psychological op­
pression and moral divergence in a society tremendously
transformed by industrialism. The 'new' and subtler strides
of spiritual change of the post-war writers have enlarged
boundaries of literary truth.

Poetry born of religious fervour in the colonial
period was less poetic. Patriotic songs and poems prop­
agating national sentiment sprang up during the revolutionary
period, Philip Freneau's 'Memorable Victory' and Hopkin's
'Battle of the Kegs' to mention a few. The First Frontier
of America of the seventeenth century that gave rise to a new
civilization composed of according to Spiller "almost all the
elements thrown off by a seething Europe",1 led to America's
first 'Renaissance' in 1840's pioneered by Emerson, Thoreau,
Melville, Whitman, Hawthorne and Poe. Modern America emerged
from the Second Frontier of America to form the Continental

1. Quoted in C.D.Narasimhaiah (ed.), Students’ Handbook of
American Literature, Kalyani Publications, Ludhiana, 1972,
p.311.
Nation in 1890 stretching from ocean to ocean and from Canada to Mexico. Of the beginning of the newer civilization that produced the second 'Renaissance', Willard Thorp said:

"Beginning about 1912, and continuing the Second World War, a new generation of writers brought about an extraordinary renaissance in Fiction, Poetry, Drama and Criticism." 2

The combination of the old European sophisticated culture with a "constantly receding wilderness" produced a people who came to be called "typically American." And he is always the individual enacting his individual vision. And American Culture is anchored in a belief that the individual is supremely important.

Americans became basically democrats, established their own cultural and literary traditions, and developed their own aesthetics and philosophical assumptions in a highly potential land of new hope and extreme individualism and positivism. The exuberant optimism of American poets and the growing nationalism made the country incredibly prosperous and helped in self-discovery of its rich and unique potentialities. And the expression of modern American writer's personal vision embodied the American 'message'.

2. Ibid., p.341.
American literature with growing 'isms' like Expressionism, Symbolism and Naturalism, with a tendency to be "superficially realistic in style, but mythic or symbolic in their underlying meaning", presented a distinct picture of America and its society as in the works of Melville, Hawthorne, Irving and in the poetry of Poe, Whitman and others that marked the beginning of new era with literary and critical traditions. The great psycho-analysts and Freud, that emphasised the importance of the subconscious in human motivation, William James' philosophy of Pragmatism 'try it - if it works, it is right', and Henry Adams' concern for growing materialism that affected idealism, - are the essentials of modern America that greatly influenced the contemporary American writing.

While the nineteenth century England was marked by new vistas, revolts, protest and 'iconoclasm' - the era of Shelley and Byron, as prophets of 'liberty, equality and fraternity', with lesser Victorians as their successors, in America the deep concern of writers like Emerson and Whitman gave way to pale romanticism. The New England Renaissance of the period from 1829 to 1860 impelled men of Boston and Cambridge, Concord and Salem, set forth their ideas and attitudes on various aspects of human life - religion, human nature, politics, economics, slavery, civil war, industry, science etc., - to check flabby moral fibre, the growing
materialism in the country. Emerson, the foremost among the transcendentalists who as the moral genius of America and as a believer in functional art exalted the role of poet like Carlyle in England with his poems, essays and talks emphasizing inward reality and individual intuition, dominated the literary scene of the day. He called poets 'liberating gods' for their illuminative imagination to discern meanings of sensuous facts. He himself expressed in lucid and serene poetry with Wordsworthian exuberance, the true, the good and the beautiful.

Humanism in Modern American Poetry: Humanism, in its strict sense, is the Renaissance literary cult of the so-called New Learning, a revival of Greek and Roman studies. "It was 'new' mainly in that it approached the classics for their own sake, rather than for their use to Christianity, and in that it believed that such studies, rather than religion, were the highest expression of human values and a means to developing the free, responsible individual".3 The term derives from the 15th century Italian humanista or teacher of the studia humanitatis, or humanities. Humanism in its broad sense is a concept as old as classical Greece and as modern as the 20th century. Subject to a wide diversity of expression it is basically a philosophical outlook centered on the autonomy of

the human being as a dignified, rational being, possessing the source of truth and right. Humanism's final court of appeal is human reason rather than any external authority, and its goal is the greatest good in this finite existence. Humanism may or may not be linked with religion, science, or any specific political system. Its spirit is secular, liberal, and tolerant; its method, education, free inquiry, and enlightenment.

The basic ideals of Renaissance humanism, summed up in the dictum of the Greek philosopher Protagoras "Man is the measure of all things", are a part of the rich legacy of Greco-Roman antiquity. That heritage was transmitted to the Western world partly through Byzantium and by Arabs in Spain but chiefly by the medieval church. Literary humanism took firm root in the early Middle Ages and was given new vigor in the 12th century. It has remained a vital ingredient of western thought. In the 18th century Enlightenment, Humanist Rationalism, Individualism, and Secularism were given a new dimension by their association with political and scientific outlook. Not until the late 19th and 20th centuries, however, in response to the dominant role of science and in reaction against the growth of naturalism did humanism reappear as an articulate movement. It assumed a bewildering variety

4. Ibid., p.553.
of forms. Scientific humanism aims to supplant religion and make scientific knowledge the instrument of freeing man and enhancing his life. To this end science and technology must be humanized and socialized, and man must be educated to respond positively to rapid change.

The humanism of Irving Babbit and Paul Elmer More in the 1930's was a reaffirmation of the humanist principle of man's innate ethical sense the "high will" pointing to a spiritual order beyond man. Babbit remained uncommitted about religion. More, ultimately finding in it a necessary dynamic and discipline, became an exponent of religious humanism, followed by Jacques Maritain, another religious humanist. Other 20th century expressions of so-called Christian humanism reject the traditional concept of God, the church, prayer, and worship as anachronistic. Ultimate reality, it is said, is to be found within human beings and expresses itself in a Christlike dedication to their total well-being. The term "humanism" is also claimed by pragmatists, existentialists, and Marxists.

Humanism in all its expressions, considering education as 'man's single and most important enterprise', means education in the humanities no less than in science and technology. And thus the 'living tradition' of human knowledge and wisdom can alone give direction to scientific development and prepare people for a change. The profound and
unique influence of Walt Whitman, who as a fiery humanist revolutionized American poetry, had touched every shore of letters and quickened every current of contemporary art, not only in America but also in England and throughout Europe. His implicit faith in life and living - its physical as well as spiritual manifestations - made Whitman view the cosmic and the commonplace synonymously. It is the large naturalism of 'Leaves of Grass', the magnum opus of Whitman, and his affection for all that is homely and of the soil that has set him apart from his fellow craftsmen as the first distinctive-ly American poet. Walt Whitman, seeing the richness and glory of the past has celebrated himself - hearty, gross, noble 'sane and sensual to the core', which is also a celebration of the entire humanity. It is Whitman's spirit of all-embracing love, over-vigorous optimism, and indiscriminate acceptance of both good and evil, beauty and ugly alike by the mystic, that assures him permanence as a great humanist.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century surfeited with sugared conceits and finespun delicacies, and squeamish overrefinements of popular taste, suffered by the growing instinctive distaste for the prevailing affectations. As the passionate urge had spent itself, the poetasters started writing verse that was precise, scholarly and patently echoing their literary tastes. The staggering growth of
materialism which offered Richard Hovey, Bliss Carman a swift way out, the war with Spain, the industrial turmoil, the growth of social consciousness and new ideas of responsibility made America look for fresh evaluations. Hovey took to self exploration and of his age. Around the turn of the century, a false dawn momentarily lighted up the gloom of the 'twilight interval' (1890-1912). Stephen Crane's free-verse experimented in "War is kind" (1899) showed great promise, a reformed state of poetry, Edwin Markham's poem "The Man with the Hoe" was fraught with the passion for social justice that was intensified later in poetry.

Modernism in American Poetry: The term "Modernism" is often used to identify what is considered to be most distinctive in concepts, sensibility, form and style in the literature and art since the First World War. It involves a deliberate and radical break with the traditional bases both of Western culture and Art. The modernist inheritance proclaims that unless there is a new mind there cannot be a new line. Important intellectual precursors of modernism are thinkers who questioned the certainties that had hitherto provided a support to social organization, religion, morality, and the conception of the human self-thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Marx, Freud, and James Frazer, who in The Golden Bough (1890-1915) stressed the correspondence between central Christian tenets and barbaric myths and rituals. From the prophetic chants of the Beats to the terza
rima of the formalists, from the dreamscapes of the surrealists to the intellectualized constructions of Black Mountain, from the whimsical games of the New York School to the emotional dreams of the confessional writers - in the last forty years, American poets have poured forth a rich variety of powerful poetry. The modernist revolt against traditional literary forms and subjects manifested itself strongly after the catastrophe of World War I and shook man's faith in the foundations and continuity of Western civilization and culture. As T.S. Eliot opined the inherited mode of ordering a literary work, which assumed a relatively coherent and stable social order, could not accord with the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. Like Joyce and Ezra Pound, Eliot experimented with new forms and a new style that would render contemporary disorder, often contrasting it within a literary work to a best order that was based on religion and myths of cultural past. In The Waste Land (1922), for example, Eliot replaces the standard flow of poetic language by fragmented utterances, and substitutes of the traditional coherence of poetic structure, leaving much to readers' imagination to discover or invent. Major works of modernist fiction, following Joyce's Ulysses (1922) and his even more radical Finnegans Wake (1939), subvert the basic conventions of earlier prose fiction by breaking up the narrative continuity, and thus departing from the standard ways of representing characters, and violating
the traditional syntax and coherence of narrative language. Such new modes of lyric and narrative construction were emulated and carried further by many poets and novelists. They have obvious parallels in the violation of representational conventions in the modernist paintings of Cubism, Futurism, and Abstract Expressionism as well as in the violations of standard conventions of melody, harmony, and rhythm by the modernist composers like Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and their radical followers.

A prominent feature of modernism is the phenomenon of avant-garde (a military metaphor "advance-guard"), that is, the undertaking by a small, self-conscious group of artists and authors, in Ezra Pound's phrase, to "make it new". Frequently avant-garde artists represent themselves as "alienated" from the established order, against which they assert their own autonomy, and aim to shock the sensibilities of the conventional reader and challenge the norms and pieties of bourgeois culture.

The term "Post-modernism" is sometimes applied to the literature and art produced after the World War II, when the disastrous effects on Western morale of the First World War were greatly exacerbated by Nazi Totalitarianism, mass extermination, the threat of the atom bomb, destroying life and natural environment, and by the formidable explosion of population and the consequent starvation and death.
Post-modernism is not only an extension of modernism, but also a diverse attempt to break away from it where it inevitably becomes conventional. It subverts the foundations of our accepted modes of thought and experience as to reveal the "meaninglessness" of existence and the underlying "abyss", on which our supposed security is precariously suspended. "Whatever may have been the case in years gone by", Whitman wrote in 1888, "the true use for the imaginative faculty of modern times is to give ultimate vivification to facts, to science, and to common lives, endowing them with glows and glories and final illustriousness which belong to every real thing, and to real things only".5

The "new" American Poetry with unexpected vigour and extraordinary variety, with William Vaughan Moody and Edwin Markham as its immediate forerunners and Whitman as its spiritual godfather, made its beginning in 1912 with the first issue of Miss Harriet Monroe's "Poetry: a Magazine of Verse" in Chicago. And other diverse practitioners of new poetry were W.B.Yeats, Ezra Pound, Vachel Lindsay, T.S.Eliot, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens and Edgar Lee Master. By 1917 the "new" poetry was ranked as "America's first national art". The reader could enjoy poetry and read it without

consulting a dictionary of rare words and classical references. Life became the glossary and the subject of poetry written in the people's language, also about the locale. The new spirit was a "revolt against Victorian Pruderies and reticences" making America discover itself in literature as Lloyd Morris noted with "a determination to express a reaction to experience in terms of the thought and feeling of our own time and country". It gave rise to a new kind of poetry which was terse, powerful purged of all extraneous emotion but with didactic comment on cosmic problems as experimented by a group of poets like F.S.Flint, Richard Aldington and the Americans, Pound and Hilda Doolittle with the compressed Japanese forms the "tanka" (thirty-one syllables in five lines) and the "hokku" (seventeen syllables in three lines) - in an attempt to write the kind of poetry T.E.Hulme thought of.

It seems ironical that the poetic achievement of the two poets - E.A.Robinson (1869-1935) and Robert Frost (1874-1963) who though not active in the new movement of imagism for some time, belonged to no coterie and signed no manifestoes, emerged as of high order. Robinson's poems though conventional in form were a strikingly new kind of

verse in America, realistic, psycho-analytical and using poetic diction close to the rhythms of actual speech.

"The new poets valued a simple concreteness over what they considered the old vagueness a simple sincerity over eloquence and rhetoric, intensity and concentration over wordiness and diffuseness, the language of contemporary speech over handed-down poetic diction, the freedom to choose any subject matter over the restriction of that old poetic order".7

Robinson's early poems in two volumes - The Torrent and the Night Before (1896) and The Children of the Night (1897) earned him the reputation of being "Browningesque". His The Children of the Night introduced brief sketches and the psychological element with unerring artistry and sureness of touch. Robinson's sensibility was modern throughout whether the subject matter was the New England rustics (Tilbury Town Poems) or even the anguished dilemmas of his medieval characters (the Arthurian trilogy that won him his third Pulitzer Prize). His poetic experimentation was not in stanzaic innovations but in the exclusive use of common speech rhythms. Though free verse was as much as anathema to him as to Frost, there was considerable diversity of form.

Robert Frost, the Pulitzer prize awardee, enjoyed popularity in his life as Longfellow. His poems according to

Willard Thorp "have helped to guide American thought with humor and wisdom, setting forth to our minds a reliable representation of ourselves and of all men". His second volume of poems North of Boston, conferred on Frost universal acclaim and made him "a symbol of America". Like Thomas Hardy, Frost too maintained throughout his poetic career, his style, his personal idiom, and his passion for nature and poetry. Louis Untermeyer remarked that Frost's "central subject is humanity". Frost's poetry and humanism are inter-related. Though he is regarded preeminently as a poet of Nature, man is the cynosure in his poetry. His poetry describes man as a unit, an essential unit in cosmos and his relation to Nature, society and fellowmen. As a humanist Frost probes into the meaning and moral dimensions of man's life.

Frost is more a stimulator than a teacher. He is "a sort of poetic radiator", exciting his readers and giving the same warmth of feeling. His simple vocabulary, keen observation, ideas in memorable phrases captivated the readership and reviewers within the country and overseas as well.

Commenting on the poetic genius of Frost, Randall Jarrell said:

"Frost's virtues are extraordinary. No other living poet has written so well about the actions of ordinary men: his wonderful dramatic monologues... are written in a verse that uses, sometimes with absolute mastery, the rhythms of actual speech".10

Further it was observed:

"His poems are salted with shrewd humour and penetrating wisdom. Although they seem easy to understand, there is complexity beneath the surface".11

Frost is more variedly successful than Robinson in using the cadences of common speech to regular verse patterns, in experimenting with various forms - the masque, the dramatic monologue and dialogue, and the satire in variety of meters - blank verse, heroic couplet terza rima, ballad meters, and sonnet and its variants - unsurpassed by any other modern poet.

MODERN AMERICAN POETRY: The two strongly opposed tendencies that influenced all American poetry after 1915 were the use


colloquial speech popularized by Sandburg, Lindsay, and Masters and heightened by Frost and others, a striking departure from both the consistent controversial tone and the traditional "poetic" language of E.A. Robinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay. There was abrupt break in idiom by T.S. Eliot under the influence of French writers like Laforgue, Valery and Rimbaud that used the technique of the Symbolist school. Some ventured, fascinated by some of his technical devices, to imitate T.S. Eliot.

"To reveal man in his complex relation to the universe the poet must show him not only concerned with the immensities but with the trivialities of daily life, with a sense of the past continually interrupting the present, and with swiftly contradictory moods disputing dream and action".12

And this could be achieved in effect by a variety of poetic devices; by rapidly changing images with a minimum of explanatory metaphors, liberal use of discords, juxtaposing tense images and prosy statements, following lyrical passages with deliberate banalities and by the use of free association of ideas charged with emotions, and overtones. Ezra Pound's "Cantos", Hart Crane's "The Bridge", and Eliot's "The Waste Land" are the most famous examples of mood 'mixing memory with desire'. This method had certain distinct advantages.

It enlarged the gamut of poetic devices and permitted a greater sensitivity of expression. But it was misrepresented even by its champions who were aware of its limitations. "The substitution of emotional for logical sequence", wrote C. Day Lewis, "may finally be classed as one of the manifestations of the general distrust of logic and dethroning of reason brought about by the great War".13 Such a poem as "The Waste Land" not only made one aware of "the nervous exhaustion, the exaggerated self-consciousness, the pathetic groupings after the fragments of a shattered faith" but also enlarged the poetic frontiers. As Eliot himself said, "the essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal; it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness, to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory."14

Eliot's 'Prufrock', a remarkably effective and prophetic work, in its ideology and metaphysical juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous images, is not just a portrait of personified neurotic impotency but also a picture of the cultural and spiritual decay of Eliot's time. His masterpiece "The Waste Land", the poem of Western culture between the two wars, has literally spawned a whole generation of

13. Ibid., p.21
poets in England (Auden, Spender, C. Day Lewis) and America (Tate, Hart Crane, Archibald Mac Leish). 'The Hollow Men' is another effective poem that gives somewhat different projection of the spiritual plight of Western man. Eliot's despair over the human situation in post-war time sinks to the nadir in 'The Hollow Men' (1925). Further, Eliot has ironically emphasized the hollowness of a life without purpose and without faith. The 'Ariel' poems - 'The Journey of the Magi' (1927), 'A Song for Simeon' (1928), 'Animula' (1929) and 'Marina' (1930) - gave the theme of rebirth and the possibility of salvation, which is also carried into 'Ash Wednesday' (1930). Eliot's poetic dramas - 'Murder in the Cathedral' (1935), 'The Family Reunion' (1939), 'The Cocktail Party' (1950), 'The Confidential Clerk' (1953) and 'The Elder Statesman' (1958) continue the explicit spiritual probings. His 'Four Quartets', a personal poem brings to a climax Eliot's speculations on philosophical and theological problems and on the art of poetry.

Of the poets between 1920 and 1950 only a few like Wallace Stevens (1875-1955) right earnestly responded to the call by Pound to make American Poetry 'new'. Wallace Stevens has distinct vision and new way of expression, never compromising with the limitations of his readers, but following the techniques of both the French Symbolists and the Imagists, and maintaining uniformly high standards for all his verse.
The most casual reading of "Harmonium" (1923) reveals that Stevens is a stylist of unusual delicacy, hypersensitivity and ingenious imagination.

"It is curiously ambiguous world which Stevens paints: a world of merging half-lights, of finicking shadows, of disembodied emotions".15

Stevens, one of the most original impressionists of the times as a painter, is fond of little blocks of colour to make his verses verbal mosaics in which syllables are used as pigments. Relating to any human struggle, 'Harmonium' emerges as a sort of "absolute" poetry, and depending on tone rather than on passion, it aims to flower in an air of pure aestheticism. But the very titles of verses betray this quality. For instance, 'Hymn from a Watermelon Pavilion', 'The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage', 'Frogs Eat Butterflies, Snakes Eat Frogs, Hogs Eat Snakes, Men Eat Hogs' have much for the eye, something for the ear, but they are too fantastic and dandied for common understanding. Stevens has his own conception of modern man. Nor does he like Eliot and Tate, express sorrow over the loss of a tradition or religious faith. He is a philosophical poet, less aesthetic and an exponent of ideas about the nature of reality, and imagination. He also derives pleasure through senses from the

15. Ibid., p.237.
nature around. Seasonal changes, the summer of 'bright and blue birds and gala sun', the auroras of autumn, and the winter of the snow man, are profoundly meaningful to Stevens.

Critics have called Stevens, philosopher, designer, and even creator. Some commentators have maintained that Stevens is obsessed with nuances, superficial shades of colour, infinitesimal gradations while others have acknowledged Stevens' endeavor to give new dimensions to American poetry. Comparing Stevens to Spencer, Milton, and Shakespeare, Delmore Schwartz has contended:

"Confronted by the need of conclusion or summary, one is impressed by how much more there is always to say about Stevens. No matter what aspect one begins, one has a sense of inexhaustible richness of significance and connection".16

Though many have admired his poetic qualities, some have found fault with his poetry saying that it lacks the element of drama, introducing occasionally that are hardly human beings. Wallace Stevens in line with Pound and Eliot wrote poetry that is more varied, more intellectualized and in a way more flamboyant making poetry the subject of his poem.

16. Ibid., p.239.
Post-War American Poetry: In the beginning the modern American poet became interested in what John Ciardi called "The capture of the American voice" and like earlier prose realists, he too found self-expression to be quite exciting. Certain poets notably Carl Sandburg continued after the World War I to stress the Americanness in poetry. In 1920, William Carlos Williams blamed his friend Ezra Pound and also T.S. Eliot for evincing little interest in true American poetry and for going to Europe for poetic inspiration and to be content with the connotations of their masters. But there was some truth in Pound's assertion to Williams in 1917 that the 'echt' American qualities were 'fizz, swish, gabble of verbiage', in other words, a fatal tendency to rhetoric, and a fatal suspension of the intellect, the shortcomings of which weakened Sandburg's work, and sometimes vitiated that of Williams himself, as far as intellect was concerned. Modern American poetry succeeded in blending the two streams of poetry - the imagist movement and the American preoccupation with the sometimes irreconcilable claims of yesterday and tomorrow together, which was perhaps America's great literary contribution to the period and to the medium of fiction.

The antithesis in modern American poetry had not been between America and Europe, but between innovation and conservatism, a related but by no means identical polarity. The idiom and colloquialism and self-consciousness of Louis Bogan's poem, 'Several Voices out of a Cloud', published in 1938, had influenced the controversial verse of W.H.Auden, a British poet who later captured the American voice. American poets like E.E.Cummings had introduced more ambitious innovations in poetry which Cummings had recorded in his book The Enormous Room (1922). The book revealed his contempt for authority, and his reverence for the individual epithets, strong verbs, and grammatical transpositions. Cumming's book of poems 'Tulips and Chimneys' (1923) was a dazzlingly fresh and vigorous expression of romantic anarchism. Some of his poems also celebrated love and joys of individuality as exuberantly as the castigated the boredom and degradations of those whom he later dismissed as 'most people'. His Collected Poems (1938) and Fifty Poems (1941) dealt with the traditional subjects like spring, love, life, roses etc. He had been to modern poetry what the American artist Alexander Calder had been to modern sculpture.

Marianne Moore is another most original poet whose work though individual and feminine, is careful with none of the haste, heat, errors and eccentricities that accompany 'originality'. Her Collected Poems (1951), a volume of
seventy poems, are short, in even stanzas, regulated by syllabic counting with rhymes pulled gently but firmly out of the poem and end-rhymes sometimes supplied by breaking a word in the middle:

"priorities were cradled in this region not for humility; spot/ that has high-singing frogs, cotton-mouth snakes and cot-/ton-fields ...."18

Her sense, runs across the formal pattern like a design painted on tiles with subjects that are an anthology of rare and unexpected things. It is a poet's scrap book of clocks and jewels and living creatures drawn from such sources as the Illustrated London News speaks of her own 'exaggerated tendency to visualize'. Her condensed meanings and her 'hybrid method of composition' in quoting directly from her sources, might give the impression that she has not fully assimilated her material. But she begins where the conventional lyric leaves off, rejecting an easy 'meaning' in favour of definitions that are at once more precise and more subtle. Marianne Moore's world is full of delicate, exotic objects. Her liking for them is akin to Whitman's rejoicing in 'the pismire .... and a grain of sand, and the egg of the wren' - except that her admiration emerges indirectly out of her meticulous commentary. Like Wallace Stevens, whose verse

18. Ibid., p.319.
has often been compared to hers, she is a difficult yet rewarding poet, who selects her unusual details with complete assurance and uses them to develop a deeply considered theme, not as embroidery. Indeed, in a poem like 'Those Various Scalpels' she seems to catalogue details but to query their ultimate value.

Hart Crane (1899-1952), though short-lived, ending life by suicide, has made a mark in the realm of modern American poetry. His tragic life is in many ways a paradigm of his poetry. Both reflect a tense and continuous oscillation between acceptance and rejection, between a vital affirmation and a turbulent rebellion. Unlike Eliot, Williams, Marianne Moore and Cummings, Crane is the veritable romantic poet, ardent, affirmative, intoxicated with words, able to write only when he is at fever pitch induced by alcohol and playing of records at full volume. Crane is a poet of the sea, of the modern city, of the machine age, and of the America of his own time. He has suffered more of Eliot's revulsion from modern life and thought it is for the poet's office to find spiritual values in the world around him. Yet he knows something of the mystic's desire for communion with the unknowable.

"Religious metaphors occur with such frequency in his verse that one can imagine that in an age less hostile to
religion he might have been a religious poet".19 Crane, a non-believer in God, has worshipped heroes instead - Columbus, Melville, Whitman and also Brooklyn Bridge (his bridge, he called it) beside which he lived and to which he turned when he sought a myth to unify his long poem about America. Crane's first book White Buildings (1926) is a verbal ingenuity, much of it roundly rhetorical but of a new order. Though he is influenced by Rimbaud, Poe, Eliot and Wallace Stevens - experimenters in tonal allusiveness and the colour-value of words. Crane often transcended his ingenuities. The very first lines of the book are illuminating:

"As silent as a mirror is believed
Realities plunge in silence by ...."20

Crane's long poem, 'The Bridge', one of the most ambitious works of the decade, a challenging comparison with Eliot's 'The Waste Land' has attempted a modern synthesis of the American experience. "It's central symbol is Brooklyn Bridge, an attempt at some kind of unity in diversity,


some kind of vision that transcends the vulgarity and com­mercialism and barbarity of Crane's America".21

Later American poets have preferred to stress the dissonances of modern life to casting about for a conciliatory formula. Stephen Vincent Benet (1898-1943), a popular American poet like Crane, tries to use American past in his poems. His long narrative poem about the Civil War 'John Brown's Body' (1928) is favoured by the general public. The poem shows how easily the idea of the American heritage could become standardised and sentimentalized. Archibald Mac Leish's 'Conquistador' (1932) is a verse narrative of the Cortes against the Aztecs. Some of his verse dramas are powerfully redolent of the decade, but his 'America Was Promises' (1939), has marked a decline from his excellence into hollow declamatory 'public verse'. In 'The Irresponsible' (1940) he has found fault with his literary brethren and exhorted them to stand up for true democracy. And by contrast, the chilly Californian nihilism of Robinson Jeffers is a refreshing tonic.

Loving the ocean and wild animals as much as he disliked humanity, Jeffers wrote grimly and memorably from his Western perch, he looked forward to a future with.

"The cities gone down, the people fewer and the hawks more numerous'/The rivers mouth to source pure; when the two-footed/Mammal, being someways one of the nobler animals, regains/The dignity of room, the value of rareness".22

Jeffers has often based his verse upon themes from antiquity, deriving from them "a more ideal and also more normal beauty" for he felt "the myths of our race were never developed, and have been alienated from us".23

Between a literature of obscure scholasticism and experiments in 'the vast and painful process of unthinking', the younger writers evolved a phase if not a philosophy of their own, which Malcolm Cowley, has summarized that:

"We ourselves have found that most of our philosophical difficulties can be solved not by philosophy itself, but by living on ... the war, which carried many of our generation into strange countries, had a partly intellectual, partly emotional effect that is generally disregarded. It destroyed our sense of dull security and taught us to live from day-to-day. It gave us a thirst for action and adventure".24

John Crowe Ransom, the stimulator of the school of 'The Fugitives', the most important group centered about

23. Ibid., p.324.
Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, gave a distinct style that was a curious fusion of the pedantic and the metaphysical. He is a master of an urbane grace and a mockery that masked a teasing tenderness. Ransom with his vocabulary and highly original technique has sounded the depths with a light and almost nonchalant touch. Sometimes he has failed to accomplish an integration of the sublime and ridiculous.

Donald Davidson's style is even less metaphysical and more emotional than Ransom's and his poems, particularly, 'The Tall Man' have revealed his concern with things rather than with abstractions. Though influenced by Ransom and Eliot, Davidson has found himself in his recreations and reveries of the War Between the States, spent much of his energies in teaching and reviewing. His longer poems have an almost epic breath.

Allen Tate is the most unpredictable and belligerent of the group with astonishing energy in him. He turned from poetry to biography, criticism, and controversy only to return to poetry with distinction.

Robert Penn Warren (1905-1989), the youngest and most fiery of the group, has forced strong feelings even through his simplest poems. The pictorial verses are surcharged with a plain-spoken force which seldom fails to
communicate its excitement. Even the metaphysical conceit, a favourite device of "The Fugitives" achieves an unexpected intensity in his image - ridden lines. In Warren's poetry, the critical and creative impulses are fused. Twenty-Six Poems (1935) and Eleven Poems on the Same Theme (1942) are charged with intensity, a sense of terror bred by the corruption of the modern world and a sharing world and a sharing of its guilt. Brother to Dragons (1953) is a horror story in verse, centering about a brutal murder, a psychological study of evil, in which Thomas Jefferson is one of the chief speakers. Promises (1957) and You, Emperors and Others (1960) testify to his unusual ability to synthesize the narrative and the lyric. In spite of Warren's productivity, his is not a facile poetry; it is complex and intricately co-ordinated. The reflections of experiences are intensified and analysed through the medium of a keen and disturbing sensibility.

Merrill Moore (1903-1957) is the most fecund of 'The Fugitives' and probably the most prolific of American poets, having both the charm and the handicap of improvisation, and inability to review his errors or revise a single unfortunate phrase.

The outstanding excellence of 'The Fugitives' is its free use of the discord - juxtaposing the traditionally poetic and the common colloquial and the establishment of a sharpedged diction. In thought as well as technique it has
emphasized intelligence and insisted on adult poetry as against the plethora of pretty, thoughtless, and immature verse. Its chief defect is a too frequent retreat into a remote classicism. With its predilection for the metaphysical the poetry has sometimes become recondite and even incomprehensible.

Randall Jarrell, W.R. Moses and George Marion O'Donnell, the so called "Neo-Fugitives" wrote in their highly stylized manner that was deceptive, adroitly elaborate and yet remote. Sometimes it outwitted its subject and was vague in its references and allusive pedantically.

Confessional Poetry: Robert Phillips opines:

"As with all good poetry, the best confessional poems are more than conceptions. They are revelations".25

Confessionalism arose without any preparation for it or preconception of it even in the mind of its practitioners. It did not become a literary movement in the conventional sense of the term as there were no manifestoes (as, for instance, in the case of surrealisme in France), no organized group activities such as publication of a periodical. But it so happened that in the sixties, not only

Lowell, but friends, colleagues, and students of Lowell began to write poems that read like confessions. Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton were among Lowell's students at Boston. Real or suspected insanity was also a common feature of some of the confessional poets. Obsessions about suicide or murder, a disproportionate insistence on violence in theme or imagery, arising from oppressive personal anguish, a sharpness of vision emerging as it were from a position of clean despair; these mark the more representative writings of these poets.

Confessional poetry emerged from the experience of the fifties in America when the country first used its mass media to probe and lament the lack of cultural continuity. Both Robert Lowell and John Berryman stand as crucial transitional figures of confessionalism, combining prodigious formal knowledge and skill with a kind of helplessness before the eruptions of the raw self, the flawed self, a self grappling with a congenital despair. The confessional force they released into their writing worked in direct opposition to the mannerly removal of poet as individual that characterized the mainstream poetry offered in the Hall, Pack, and Simpson anthology. And it opened the way for public and critical acceptance of others, more exploratory and affirmative manifestations of self in the works of poets such as Adrienne Rich, James Dickey, and John Logan and in all the significant movements of poetry of the sixties.
Confessional poetry originated in 1959 with the publication of *Life Studies* of Robert Lowell whose vision was considerably influenced by Baudelaire and Rilke the verses of whom Lowell translated and called *Imitations* (1961). Lowell took to the confessional mode because he had things to confess. The home truths about his father, mother, and above all himself had to be told. The late Theodore Roethke's *The Lost Son* (1948) in the confessional mode also influenced poets much later. Even W.D. Snodgrass' idiosyncratically personal poems making a journey between sentimentality and dignified vulnerability, had also influenced Lowell. Snodgrass's important volume of poems *Heart's Needle*, and Lowell's *Life Studies* helped in launching confessional poetry as a distinct genre. Coming at the head of a decade of cultural satisfaction marked by faith in science, God, and country. *Life Studies* broke new ground with its despairing yet elegant lucidity.

Where Lowell offered self stripped of illusion and internal stability but not of dignity, John Berryman offered the *Dream Songs*. Berryman does not confront pain in order to transcend it or to reposition the self. Rather he creates a persona out of his pain. The self in Berryman's poems is less naked than it is in Lowell's eventhough it is more aggressively neurotic. The "Dream Songs" woo us to accept the impossible where self is concerned. John Bayley states
that they offer no ideal but "the living as it has to be." Furthermore, he notes that Berryman's creation of beautifully wrought poetry out of a chronically imperfect self is a particularly American Understanding.

Both in Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton confessionalism is firmly grounded in a more direct and intense use of the personal. They have dealt straightforwardly, though in different ways and not exclusively, with their lives as women - the physical life of the body, the pull between that biological life and the mental life, the trickeries of love, the awesome or tyrannical presence of children, and the disturbing power still exerted by deceased parents. Both the poets have been obsessed with and drawn towards death, which they have exhibited extraordinary sensitivity nourished by daily observations and experience. In them this sensitivity took positive expression in dazzling and exact images, instant metaphorical fusions, and a prosody often stripped of all designs save for the insistent beat of strongly felt direct statement. Their poetry conveys the tremendous pressure of an inner reality demanding expression. As a result, though neither poet consciously intended to speak out for womankind, Plath and Sexton broke ground for women writers and also

expanded experiential territory for all writers by making female experience and sensibility not only viable but powerful subjects for poetry. The works of Lowell, Berryman, Snodgress, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton share qualities which define confessional poetry of the early sixties as a genre; a loosening if not a jettisoning of traditional aspects of prosody and form, aggressive candor, and direct confrontation with personal failure, emotional pain, and mental illness. Most of these poets have also shared a tragic inability to redeem the self in their personal lives, from the courageous but overwhelmingly painful process of self confrontation they have enacted in their poetry. Lowell succumbed to heart failure at the age of sixty-one after a long and debilitating struggle with mental illness, and Berryman, Plath and Sexton committed suicide. Nevertheless, they left behind them a poetry that in itself is alive and liberating, fuelled as it is by the wild to explore, control and reveal.

Robert Lowell (1917-1977) has been recognized as the strongest and most original voice among the many who have made the Post-World War II period an exciting one in American Poetry. His first slender book, Land of Unlikeness (1944), showed a Puritan Lowell in revolt. Technically he is remarkably resourceful. It is generally felt that Lowell's method is elliptical, but there is no escaping the moral purpose of his work. "His is a tortured outcry against the corruption
Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) is obviously a well-educated, disciplined writer who usually has avoided the sentimentalities of some female writers. She has written tidy poems, reminiscent of those by Richard Eberhart, Karl Shapiro, Randall Jarrell and Richard Wilber. Her first book of poems The Colossus and Other Poems, published in 1960, was well received. Ariel, her another collection of poems edited by Ted Hughes, her husband, attracted many readers. Sylvia Plath is greatly influenced by Roethke and Robert Lowell. Under the magnetic influence of Dylan Thomas, she identified herself with the Jews as archetypes of suffering. The power of her poetry springs from madness, which she endured so long, an expression of mental anguish. The madness she believed would bring awareness and inspire great art and the dramatic effect of which has influenced several American poets.

Post-War American Poetry emerged as a variety but full of contrariety, styles breaking out and changing rapidly with cliques of poets forming and disbanding different models, some as indigenous as Walt Whitman, others like Carl

Sandburg, or Robert Frost, rediscovered. Instead of the decorous and polyglot cadences of the modernist tradition, the rancorous sounds of American speech came into verse. Curiously enough, an aspect of the later Pound-idiomatic, immediate, discontinuous as the "Cantos" - is rediscovered together with the poetry of William Carlos Williams, who provides an informal paradigm, the accents and diction of urbane life, a poetry of experience. The rebellious romanticism of E.E.Cummings and the mystic tone of Hilda Doolittle, seem also apposite. Elegance, polish, precision, give way to assertions both more intensely personal and publicly more vociferous. The earlier tradition of Eliot, which becomes academic, yields to new styles of confession or protest, surrealism or bardic rage, claiming the ancestry of Whitman. Spiritually these styles look toward the Pacific but not Europe, look to Nature rather than culture. Certain schools or coteries began to acquire a name: The Black Mountain Poets (Charles Olson, Robert Creeley); The Beats (Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso); the San Francisco poets (Robert Duncan, Lawrence Ferlinghetti); the New York poets (John Ashbury, Kenneth Koch); and the Neo-Romantics (W.D.Snodgrass, Robert Bly). Many other poets, vaguely anti-formalists, fall in no category. The audiences of all these writers tend to be younger, more radical in politics, experimental in their cultural styles.
The romantic primitivism of Richard Eberhart, the close modulations of Stanley Kunitz, the complex irony and earthiness of Robert Penn Warren, and the rebellious prosody of Kenneth Rexroth all find their way into contemporary American poetry. It remains for the younger poets to reconcile the richness of their legacy to huge violence within their lives and without. Ravaged in their sensibility, sometimes to the point of derangement, they break into a post-humanist age.