CHAPTER - 5

CONCLUSION
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Historically, the nineteenth century proved a turning point for American society in many ways. It was to usher in the Age of enlightenment, a greater awareness of equality and democracy, pioneering westward and industrialization. As a nation, the social fabric consisted of all these changes as inter-related aspects. But whatever the changes, one dominant factor that persisted was "the millenialistic self-imagery that was prepared for the New World by centuries of European imagination which transmogrified into the Christian contexts of Paradise regained and the City on the Hill the older Classical contexts of the lost Golden Age", in the words of Milton Stern. Stern further adds that the "assumptions underlying our (American) Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights translated the older Puritan providential imagination into radical eighteenth-century visions of America as a special and redemptive force in history" and that "although the nineteenth century" differed from "the two preceding centuries as they did from each other, it, too, replaced culturally exhausted language and concepts in order to forge new ones to express the continuing idea of America as a special symbol."

One of the off-shoots of the notion of Paradise resurrected

2 Ibid., p.52.
3 Ibid., p.52.
in the New World, was the notion of a New World Adam and a New World Eve. This was doubtless a religious myth that had persisted and had found its way from Europe to America. Though the notions about women had undergone changes, over the centuries, one notion that persisted was that of Eve, who had caused Adam's 'fall'. Though the status of woman had changed considerably since the interpretations of religious texts by the Church Fathers, the notion of woman as seductress persisted though there were other images of women too, woman as mother and woman as saviour. But while the image of Eve thus underwent metamorphosis while retaining the original 'temptress' notion too, the image of man as Adam persisted even in the New World and even in the wake of the nineteenth century. Regarding the notions about women in nineteenth-century American society, Judith Fryer writes:

Eve in the New World Garden, despite Adam's wish to ignore her, restrict her role or enshrine her on a pedestal, is the most important phenomenon in nineteenth-century America...A woman of mystery, connected to Time as Adam is not, she is like a prism...turn her this way and you see one facet, turn her that way and you see another. Sometimes she is threatening, alluring, yet dangerously suggestive of Adam's fall from purity, like Eve the original temptress...Sometimes she is Eve before the Fall, the pure and asexual preserver of American society. Sometimes she is the mother of us all, a manipulating and possessive figure... 4

Thus at one extreme was the image of woman as temptress, or Eve of the original garden of Eden and at the other was the image of woman as saintly and pure, the 'sexless blonde' or Eve the Virgin of the New World garden of Eden, that is America. In between was the image of woman as mother, sturdy helpmate and keeper of the home and hearth. This was the approach to women in the nineteenth century in America and we find this reflected in the literature of the times too as we trace the literary trends of the time.

As a result of the Age of enlightenment, at the turn of the century, there was an awakening in every field of life combined with a spurt of nationalistic fervour. The literary scene too found a revival and there was a search for a mode or trend which could not only be considered entirely and originally American, but which could be a vehicle for the intense nationalism of the times. But just as England and Europe had taken the lead in the industrialization process, the literary trends that were prevalent too had originated in England and Europe. So in order to have a form which they could call their own and originally American, a hybrid of the Gothic tradition of Europe and Richardsonian tradition of England was evolved.

The Richardsonian tradition had actually been first emulated by writers in England and later, by American writers. But it was very short-lived as it was heroine-oriented and
catered to the aristocracy; England and Europe which were the first to take the bourgeois sentimental novel of Richardson, realized the need for a middle class male protagonist at the centre of the novel. However much Richardson may have realized that women needed to be given the pride of place at least as a myth, the European and English societies to which his style mainly catered, were still male dominated. This was also the time when, with the rise of industrialization in the eighteenth century, the middle class or the 'anti-bourgeois' was gaining ground. So European writers must have felt the need to create a new form of the novel, wherein the middle class could be represented, and the Protestant tradition with a male world-view upheld too. This led to writers like Goethe and Rousseau to resort to the Gothic or Romantic tradition wherein the male protagonist was the central figure. To describe this change in trend Leslie A. Fiedler in Love and Death in the American Novel writes:

When the full impact of Prevost was felt, it contributed in both England and France to a reversion to that "improbable and marvelous" which Richardson had abjured, to the rebirth of the romance in the revolutionary, sadist, highbrow form of the Gothic novel; but where it existed balanced against the domestic and puritanical realism of Richardson, it helped to produce the anti-bourgeois sentimental novel of Goethe and Rousseau.  

If the Richardsonian tradition considered the heroine as being seduced by a man, the Gothic or Romantic tradition held the hero or protagonist as being tempted by a woman. Every literary tradition, however short-lived, certainly leaves an imprint. Thus the Richardsonian tradition succeeded, if not in continuing, in creating an archetype of ideal womanhood, a stereotype that could not be shaken off from literary themes. She was the ideal of womanhood. Similarly the Gothic form had created an archetype of the temptress, a figure that could not be shaken off either. The American Gothic, which was a combination of these two traditions, figured a male protagonist at the centre, in keeping with the Puritan - Protestant male world view. In addition this tradition also featured two heroines - the temptress or 'dark' heroine and the pure, virgin stereotype, or 'fair' heroine. This pair of opposites symbolized the 'dark-fair' contrast, the 'dark' symbolizing one set of notions or ideas and the 'fair', the opposite ones.

At the beginning of the nineteenth-century, the link between novelists and writers, and society at large, was a major area for development because literature could form a powerful medium to convey nationalism. At this time, not only was there a definite awareness of feminine consciousness, but a move towards industrialization, pioneering and the inclusion of women as co-breadwinners with a definite status in society. Also the Puritan stronghold had weakened, giving
way to Protestantism but at the same time, retaining the Puritanical work ethic for striving towards prosperity and individual happiness. But while this was the reality of the nineteenth century, the realities of the previous centuries could not be erased from memory. The first English and Dutch settlers had come as Puritan 'dissenters' after having undertaken a hazardous journey across the Atlantic with the hope of escaping the religious persecution they had faced in England and Europe, as also of establishing a democratic society in the New World. They had carried with them the hope of founding a "City on a hill", a new garden of Eden with the new American Adam and the new American Eve living out a life of harmony and peace.

But the reality that faced them in the new land was that it was untamed wilderness and their right as the prime owners was false, as the land was already peopled by the 'Indians' and the Spanish settlers. This meant that they had to harness their strength physically and morally - for the double task of taming the wilderness to their advantage and of quelling the American Indians and driving out the Spanish settlers, before calling the land their own. In addition, they had to strengthen their religious ties with one another in order to justify the "City on a hill" concept and the millenial notion that were deeply etched in their minds. This was sought to be resolved by driving the Spanish settlers far south, quelling the American Indians, and establishing a Puritan theocracy to govern the new social order in the new "garden of Eden."
By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the wilderness had been tamed along the east coast, the American Indians subdued, and a new move westward beyond the Alleghanies had begun. The British yoke had been severed, with the American War of Independence, and, added to the westward pioneering, industrialization had spread from Europe to America. These changes brought with them, the conflicting notions of a sense of inevitable tie with Europe and an intense need for independent national identity and a surge of patriotism.

The American Romantic tradition was a convenient vehicle for writers of the nineteenth century, like Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville, who sought to project nationalism and the millenial idea. But while this was the conscious effort, the truth of what they held through centuries of acculturation, also appeared unconsciously. The conscious effort was to portray America as the heaven on earth, the second garden of Eden, the unattainable "City on a hill". The unconscious portrayal was all that had gone into America's making - the European past, the taming of the wilderness, the quelling of the American Indians, the Puritan theocracy, the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant dominance, and slavery of the negroes. Writing of Cooper, Hawthorne, Poe and Melville, and their use of the literary mode of American Gothic to present their contradictory notions, Milton R. Stern comments:

...whatever the idio-syncratic, creative, psychological centers of our writers' lives were, the common, cultural, creative, center
of their lives was what really is a deeply political act; their attempt to mediate between the truth they wanted to tell their society and their society's unexamined assumptions. It was their attempt to mediate between their vocational and social identities...6

He further adds:

... in large outline, the fiction of the four major writers... is in each case a complex and profoundly instructive history of the conflict. Another way of stating the proposition is that our greatest fiction writers of the Romantic period were, like Poe, so romantically transcendental that they repudiated the actualities, or like Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville, they were philosophically anti-Romantic.7

The American Gothic tradition with the male protagonist at the centre and the two polar opposites of 'fair' and 'dark' heroines could well represent these conflicts in the writers' minds. Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville used the 'dark' heroine to symbolize what was socially unacceptable but which could not be ignored, as part of the American cultural history. They used the 'fair' on the other hand, to symbolize all that was socially popular and admissible including the idea of American superiority and the New England ideal. Since these notions were portrayed through the 'dark' and 'fair' heroines, the temptress stereotype or Eve of the Old World garden of Eden stood for the 'dark' aspect and the saviour, innocent-maiden stereotype for the 'fair' aspect.

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7 Ibid., p.57.
Since the 'fair' aspect was invariably synonymous with the glory of "the city on a hill" that was within reach of only the White Anglo Saxon Protestant who was the ideal all-American, the 'fair' heroine was usually portrayed as a sexless, innocent, pure maiden, the WASP stereotype, or Eve of the New World garden of Eden. The 'dark' aspect was synonymous with any part of American history that was impossible to be ignored by the writers as it was compulsively part of their own heritage, and so the temptress stereotype which could provide a cloak to express the truth but which could nevertheless insulate the writers from social ostracism for exposing any unpleasant part of the social history. Cooper, Hawthorne as well as Melville were caught between a facet of the past and a facet of the present. For Cooper, it was a dilemma between the European Past and the American Present; the Jeffersonian Past and the Jacksonian Present; the subduing of the wilderness as well as the American Indians in the Past, and the prosperous, democratic, and well-settled American society in the Present.

In Hawthorne's writings, the dilemma has appeared between his Puritan ancestry, an occurrence in the Past, which he could neither disown nor remember happily, and the Present nineteenth century American society, with its more liberal views, of which he was a part.

For Melville, it was a dilemma between the notions of religion that he had imbibed in his growing years and the
notions of man's innate depravity that had to be sublimated, for a higher ideal to be attained. Thus for each of them, there was a conflict between an inherited notion and the reality of their times. These conflicts were sought to be resolved unconsciously through a double image of woman - the 'fair' and the 'dark', amounting to an ambivalence towards them. So in effect, the ambivalence towards women was a result of a deep introspection on the part of the writers, an attempt to reconcile the past with the present on the racio-religious, socio-economic or socio-religious plane. The past was represented by the Old World Eve stereotype and the present by the New World Eve stereotype.

The real picture of ideal womanhood had come a long way since the early Judeo-Christian notions of women as symbols of passion, sex or sin had been formed. With the advent of industrialization and pioneering in America, women had risen to the status of co-breadwinners, as well as respectable wives and mothers. But almost all the heroines, both 'fair' and 'dark' in the novels of Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville except Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* are unmarried. This is a deviation from what was prevalent as a social reality in the nineteenth century because there was a change in the attitude towards women's status, and these attitudes were quite different from the Judeo-Christian notions on women. This deviation in the representation of women in the novels and the reality of a social
change also makes, for an ambivalence towards them.

Of the 'fair' heroines, the descriptions by Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville correspond to the WASP stereotype whom Fiedler calls the "sexless females" and the "blue-eyed", "blue-veined", blondest of all possible "Snow Maidens". She is Cooper's Alice or Louisa or Mabel or Ellen or Hetty Hutter. She is Hawthorne's Pearl or Priscilla or Phoebe or Hilda. She is Melville's Yillah or Lucy. The descriptions used by all the writers are the same - blue eyes, blonde hair, fair 'Saxon' or 'Welsh' complexion. Apart from these physical descriptions, they share "innocence", "purity" and a certain saintly or bea - fic aspect. Of the 'fair' maidens, Alice, Priscilla, Lucy and Yillah are depicted as the most helpless, innocent and pure. They may differ in the extent to which their frail and innocent persons are subjected to unpleasant experi - ences, but they are still the 'pale maidens,' the WASP stereo - type. Alice, the 'fair' heroine of Cooper's The Last of the Mohicans, is abducted by Magua the 'bad' American Indian but is allowed to be released and to join Duncan Heyward, whom she is affianced to be married to. Priscilla, the 'fair' maiden of Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance, falls a prey to Westervelt's machinations as well as Hollingsworth's domination. Lucy, Melville's 'fair' heroine of Pierre, is rejected by Pierre, the protagonist in favour of Isabel, the 'dark' maiden of the story. Yillah, the 'fair' heroine of
Melville's *Mardi* is imprisoned by Aleema, the pagan priest and is rescued by Taji the protagonist. But Yillah flees Taji and eludes him till the end. Here, Melville's use of the 'fair' maidens Lucy and Yillah is to project the dark side as well as the bright side of human nature. As long as the human heart, represented by Pierre and Taji harbours sensuous and earthly desires, the higher values are either forsaken by the heart or they elude the heart. Thus in portraying the 'fair' maiden, Melville differs from Cooper and Hawthorne representing the 'fair' aspect as something that repels the higher instincts, which finally may be extinguished or lost.

The other 'fair' heroines Cooper's Louisa, Mabel, Ellen and Hetty and Hawthorne's Phoebe and Hilda are examples of the educated, urbanized women who are the New World Eve stereotypes, closer to the nineteenth-century real women. They all represent the plebeian aspect of society, the middle class anti-bourgeois WASP stereotype. Of these, Hilda is almost like the 'pale maiden' Lucy or Alice in her appearance, but is a 'new woman' stereotype, being an artist in Rome - the symbol of the liberated woman. Hetty is depicted as innocent and "dull-witted", the religious and saintly maiden, who is best left as a "sinless", "sexless" being who attracts no one. Thus all the 'fair' heroines are symbolic of notions or aspects that had best be left in their pristine purity - the ultimate in social as well as personal idealism.

The 'dark' heroines are Judith, Cora, Elizabeth, Inez,
Dew-of-June, Esther, Tachechana, Hester, Miriam, Zenobia, Nepzibah, Hautia and Isabel. Of these Judith, Cora, Elizabeth, Inez, Dew-of-June, Tachechana, Miriam and Isabel are portrayed as women who have a non-WASP antecedent or are illegitimate daughters. Esther is the sturdy helpmate and the coarse-tongued American mother and quite a contrast to the educated, urban women like Ellen or Hilda. Hester is different from the others as she symbolizes deviance from norm a social order. Zenobia is more the experienced new woman stereotype who tries to dominate man by her superior intelligence. Hautia is the temptress who tries to draw Taji to her by her tantalizing ways and reflects Taji's own passionate nature. They all have 'dark' eyes, 'dark' hair and beauty that tempts the flesh. Of these 'dark' heroines, Dew-of-June, Tachechana and Inez are assigned a subordinate role to the corresponding 'fair' heroines Habel and Ellen based on a racial plane. But Inez stands as the 'fair' maiden when compared to Tachechana, the racially 'inferior' American Indian woman. Isabel, Melville's 'dark' lady of Pierre while sharing an incestuous relationship, nevertheless brings out Pierre's noble sacrificial instinct, and his compassion.

Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville used polar opposites while portraying pairs of women to project their inner conflicts regarding socially accepted norms and personal notions, stemming from values and traditions of the present and
past on various sociometric planes. Cooper's conflict was between the European past and American present, the 'White' Americans and the 'Red' Americans, Urbanization and Agrarianism and between Jeffersonian and Jacksonian tenets. He was deeply influenced by the Jeffersonian tradition but was equally conscious of the Jacksonian tradition that was prevailing in the industrialized nineteenth century America. The conflict between the old and the new values, the millennial myth and the transcendent reality, the past and present on a socio-economic or racio-religious plane, came out in the form of an ambivalence towards women. This is reflected in the portrayal of Natty Bumppo the rustic hero of The Leatherstocking Tales, who could never marry any of Cooper's 'fair' or 'dark' heroines.

In Hawthorne, it was his preoccupation with his Puritan-past and his awareness of the changes around him in the nineteenth century. He could neither shake off his Puritan inheritance nor acknowledge his ancestors' faults towards society. This posed a continuous struggle for a reconciliation between the past and the present on a socio-religious plane and it was this that was portrayed in The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables, The Blithedale Romance and The Marble Faun, through his ambivalence towards the women characters in the novels.

In Melville, it was the preoccupation with man's potentiality and his ability to use this potentiality within
the framework of social mores and traditions. His conflict was between the innate passions and baser instincts in man that had to be sublimated in order to realize the nobler qualities that lay within the human heart. His conflict was between the eternal struggle between good and evil, within oneself and between the idea of personal commitment and socially accepted values.

These pairs of conflicting notions in the writers’ own minds, get projected through a ‘fair’–‘dark’ representation of women. In the context of the present social conditions, these notions about women would also seem to be an ambivalence both from the point of view of restricting portrayals to merely stereotypes and from the point of interpretation. The symbols that appear to us as merely fictional stereotypes, may have had different and real connotations for the authors, as for example Miriam, who is modelled on Hawthorne’s own accounts of a Jewish lady he had met. This would also make for an ambivalence, since symbols can have different connotations in different cultures at different times. Thus, Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville express an ambivalence towards women, thereby reflecting subconscious and deep-rooted conflicts of their own minds.