CHAPTER III

DEFINITION OF SYMBOLISM
(1) History of the Symbolic Movement:

Seeds of symbolism may be traced in the allegories of Langland, Spenser and Bunyan, the poetry of the Metaphysical, William Blake and to some extent in the poetry of the Romantic poets. But that is a scattered kind of Symbolism except that of Blake. Moreover, a symbol is different from an allegory. An allegory is a product of fancy and is inferior to the symbolic technique. The symbol expresses a deep and complex spiritual phenomenon whereas the allegory provides a sense of fun and entertainment. It was Blake who first distinguished between symbol and the allegory. According to Blake a symbol is, indeed, the only possible expression of some invisible essence, a transparent lamp, a spiritual flame; while allegory is one of many possible representations of an embodied thing, or familiar principle, and belongs to imagination; the one is revelation, the other amusement.

According to Yeats also an allegory is a product of memory whereas a symbol embodies vision and represents reality which is unchangeable, and it is difficult to mention where one merges into the other. Symbolism, says Yeats, deepens the philosophy and enables the artist to grapple with divine reality, and that with the help of symbols deeper effects can be created and subtler indefinable shades can be expressed.
Symbolism as a conscious movement was born in France as a reaction against naturalism and precision, and exactitude of the naturalist school represented by Zola. Symbolism, as a school, therefore, was announced in a manifesto in the Figaro of 1886, by a group of writers known for twenty years as “Decadents,” to describe a mode of literary expression in which words are used to suggest states of mind rather than for their objective, representational or intellectual content. The French symbolists, led by Mallarme and Verlaine, condemned mere ‘exteriority,’ and laid great emphasis on the treatment of the sensations or the representation of the Vague, fleeting impressions that constantly pass before the mind’s eye. It meant a virtual withdrawal from life, a concentration on inner experience and its expression through the use of symbols.

The term ‘Symbolist’ applied to the first generation of French poets after Baudelaire, and rather more loosely to the first modern poets in other countries, suggests very idea: that the poet can best express the dream and drama of his intuitions, his feelings and uncertainties in the form of a symbolic legend. He uses an old myth or invents a new one as a means of revealing perception for which he cannot find direct language. Symbolism is a method of oblique statement suitable to an age that finds truth only in rare moments of intense vision: it is half-way to a parable.

(2) Symbol and Symbolism:

The word symbol derives from the Greek verb symballein, ‘to throw together,’ and its noun somnolent, ‘mark,’ ‘emblem,’ ‘token’ or ‘sign.’ It is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or ‘stands for’ something else. As Coleridge put it, a symbol ‘is characterized by a translucence of the special [i.e. the species] in the individual.’ A
Symbol differs from an allegorical sign in that it has a real existence, whereas an allegorical sign is arbitrary.

Scales, for example, symbolize justice; the orb and scepter, monarchy and rule; a dove, peace; a goat, lust; the lion, strength and courage; the bulldog, tenacity; the rose, beauty; the lily, purity; the Stars and Stripes, America and its states; the Cross, Christianity; the Swastika (or Crooked Cross) Nazi Germany and Fascism; the gold, red and black hat of the Montenegrin symbolizes glory, blood and mourning. The Scales of justice may also be allegorical; as might, for instance, a dove, a goat or a lion.

Actions and gestures are also symbolic. The clenched first symbolizes aggression. Beating of the breast signifies remorse. Arms raised denote surrender. Hands clasped and raised suggest supplication. A slow upward movement of the head accompanied by a closing of the eyes means, in Turkish, ‘no.’ Moreover, most religious and fertility rites are rich with symbolic movements and gestures, especially the Roman Mass.

A literary symbol combines an image with a concept (words themselves are a kind of symbol). It may be public or private, universal or local. They exist, so to speak. As Baudelaire expressed it in his sonnet ‘Correspondences’:

“La Nature est un temple ou de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L’homme y passé a travers des forets de symbols.........”
In literature an example of a public or universal symbol is a journey into the underworld (an in the work of Virgil, Dante and James Joyce) and a return from it. Such a journey may be an interpretation of a spiritual experience, a dark night of the soul and a kind of redemptive odyssey. Examples of private symbols are those that recur in the works of W. B. Yeats: the sun and moon, a tower, a mask, a tree, a winding stair and a hawk.

Dante’s *Divine Commedia* is structurally symbolic. In *Macbeth*, there is a recurrence of the blood image symbolizing guilt and violence. In *Hamlet*, weeds and disease symbolize corruption and decay. In *King Lear*, Clothes symbolize appearances and authority; and the storm scene in this play may be taken as symbolic of cosmic and domestic chaos to which ‘unaccommodated man’ is exposed. The poetry of Blake and Shelley is heavily marked with symbols. The shooting of the albatross in Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is symbolic of all sin and stands for a lack of respect for life and for a proper humility towards the natural order. In his *Four Quartets* T. S. Eliot makes frequent use of the symbols of Fire and Rose. To a lesser extent symbolism is an essential part of Eliot’s *Ash Wednesday* (especially pt. III) and *The Waste Land*.

In prose works the great white whale of Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (the ‘grand god’) is a kind of symbolic creature—a carcass which symbol-hunters have been dissecting for years. Much of the fiction of William Golding (especially Lord of the Flies, Pincher Martin and The Spire) depends upon powerful symbolism capable of more interpretations than one. To these examples should be added the novels and short stories of Kafka, and the plays of Maeterlinck, Andreyev, Hugo Von Hofmannsthal, Synge and O’Neill. In these
works we find instances of the use of a concrete image to express an emotion or an abstract idea; or, as Eliot put it when explaining his term ‘Objective Correlative,’ finding ‘a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula of that particular emotion.’

There is plentiful symbolism in much 19th century French poetry. In Oeuvres Complètes (1891) Mallarme explained symbolism as the art of evoking an object ‘little by little so as to reveal a mood’ or, conversely, ‘the art of choosing an object and extracting from it an état d’âme.’ This ‘mood,’ he contended, was to be extracted by ‘a series of deciphering.’ Mallarme’s follower Henri Regnier made the additional point that a symbol is a kind of comparison between the abstract and the concrete in which one of the terms of the comparison is only suggested. Thus it is implicit, oblique; not spelt out.

As far as particular objects are concerned, this kind of symbolism is often private and personal. Another kind of symbolism is known as the ‘transcendental.’ In this kind, concrete images are used as symbols to represent a general or universal ideal world of which the real world is a shadow. Sir Thomas Browne, long before theories of symbolism were abundant, suggested the nature of this in his magnificent neo-Platonic phrase: ‘The sun itself is the dark simulacrum, and light is the shadow of God.’

The ‘transcendental’ concept is Platonic in origin, was elaborated by the neo-Platonists in the 3rd century and was given considerable vogue in the 18th century by Swedenborg. In the 19th century there developed the idea that this ‘other world’ was attainable, not through religious faith or mysticism, but, as Baudelaire expressed it in
Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe, ‘a travers la poesie.’ Through poetry the soul perceives ‘les splendeurs situees derriere le tombeau.’

Baudelaire and his followers created the image of the poet as a kind of seer or voyant, who could see through and beyond the real world to the world of ideal forms and essences. Thus the task of the poet was to create this ‘other world’ by suggestion and symbolism: by transforming reality into a greater and more permanent reality.

The attainment, in transcendental symbolism, of the vision of the essential Idea was to be achieved by a kind of deliberate obfuscation or blurring of reality so that the ideal becomes clearer. This, according to symbolist theory, could be best conveyed by the fusion of images and by the musical quality of the verse; by, in short, a form of so-called pure poetry. The music of the words provided the requisite element of suggestiveness.

Theory and practice led the French symbolist poets to believe that the evocativeness and suggestiveness could best be obtained by verse forms that were not too rigid. The definitive manifesto of symbolism was published in September 1886 in an article in Le Figaro by Jean Moreas, contending that romanticism, naturalism and the movement of les Parnassians were over and that henceforth symbolic poetry ‘cherche a vetir l’idee d’une forme sensible.’ Moreas founded the Symbolist School whose progenitors were Baudelaire, Mallarme, Verlaine and Rimbaud; and whose disciples were, among others, Rene Ghil, Stuart Merrill, Francis VieleGriffin and Gustave Khan.
The main ‘heirs’ of the symbolist movement outside France are W. B. Yeats, the Imagist group of English and American poets (especially T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound), and T. S. Eliot; and, in Germany, Rainer Maria Rilke and Stefan George. The ideas of the French symbolists were also adopted by Russian writers in the 1870’s and the early years of the 20th century; notably by Bryusov, Volynsky and Bely.

[Cuddon, J. A., 1999, P. 884-888]

Symbolism was a late nineteenth-century art movement of French and Belgian origin in poetry and other arts. In literature, the movement had its roots in Les Fleurs du mal (The Flowers of Evil, 1857) by Charles Baudelaire. The works of Edgar Allan Poe, which Baudelaire greatly admired and translated into French, were a significant influence and the source of many stock tropes and images. The aesthetic was developed by Stephan Mallarme and Paul Verlaine during the 1860s and ‘70s. In the 1880s, the aesthetic was articulated through a series of manifestoes and attracted a generation of writers. The label “symbolist” itself comes from the critic Jean Moreas, who coined it in order to distinguish the symbolists from the related decadent movement in literature and art. Distinct from, but related to, the movement in literature, symbolism in art represents an outgrowth of the darker, gothic side of Romanticism; but where Romanticism was impetuous and rebellious, symbolist art was static and hieratic.

Generally, symbolism may be defined as the representation of a reality on one level of reference by a corresponding reality on another. According to Edmund Wilson symbolism is an attempt by carefully studied means—a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors—to communicate unequal personal feeling.
Because of this complexity and depth and power of the symbol, C. M. Bowra regards symbolic poetry as a kind of mystic poetry, a poetry in which the poet tries to convey his sense of the mystery of life. M. H. Abrams says:

“A symbol, in the broadest sense of the term, is anything which signifies something else; in this sense all words are symbols.”

[Abrams, M. H., 1996, P.168]

Symbolism is an important device in literature. It not only communicates the subtle and hidden ideas of a complex age but also as Meenakshi Raman writes,

“expresses and interprets the materialistic realities of life bringing out the mysteries of human existence.”

[Meenakshi, Raman. 2005, P. 147]

N. R. Pathak says:

“A symbol is something that exists in its own right and yet stands for or suggests something else. In a general sense, the use of imagery so that one object represents something else. The Cross, for example, is a symbol of Christianity; the lion is a symbol of courage.”

[Pathak N. R., 2009, P. 273]
“A thing conventionally regarded as typifying, representing, or recalling something esp. an idea or quality. The use of symbols to represent ideas.”

[Kindersley Dorling 1998]

“It is a sign or object that is used to represent something. A heart shape is the symbol of love.”

[Cambridge Learner’s Dictionary, 2003, P. 643]

Charles Chadwick in Symbolism (1971) remarks on the necessity of defining ‘Symbolism’ as a critical term by specifying the differences from a more general symbolism. He describes general symbolism variously as:

“any mode of expression which, instead of referring to something directly refers to it indirectly through the medium of something else,” or “the use of concrete imagery to express abstract ideas and emotions.” He arrives at a definition of ‘Symbolism’ as a movement in art in the following words:

“Symbolism can therefore be defined as the art of expressing ideas and emotions not by describing them directly, not by defining them through overt comparisons with concrete images, but by suggesting what these ideas and emotions are, by recreating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplained symbols.”

[ISSN, Quarterly Research Journal, 2010, p. 76]

Symbolism as a movement in art, as Fowlie remarks, demonstrates a
“difficult attitude toward nature and the familiar object of a room”.

[ISSN, Quarterly Research Journal, 2010, p.76]

(3) Precursors and origins:

Symbolism was largely a reaction against naturalism and realism, anti-idealistic movements which attempted to capture reality in its gritty particularity, and to elevate the humble and the ordinary over the ideal. These movements invited a reaction in favour of spirituality, the imagination, and dreams; the path to symbolism began with that reaction. Some writers, such as Joris-Karl Huysmans, began as naturalists before moving in the direction of symbolism; for Huysmans, this change reflected his awakening interest in religion and spirituality. On the other hand, certain of the characteristic subjects of the decadents reflect naturalist interest in sexuality and taboo subjects but in their case this was mixed with a stiff dose of Byronic romanticism and the world-weariness characteristic of the fin de siècle.

The symbolist poets have a more complex relationship with Parnassians, a French literary movement that immediately preceded it. While moving in the direction of hermeticism, allowing freer versification, and rejecting Parnassian clarity and objectivity, it retained Parnassianism’s love of word play and concern for the musical qualities of verse. The symbolists continued to admire Theophile Gautier’s motto of “art for art’s sake,” and retained—and modified—Parnassianism’s mood of ironic detachment. Many symbolist poets, including Stephen Mallarme and Paul Verlaine, published early works in Le Parnasse Contemporain, the poetry anthologies that gave Parnassianism its name. But
Arthur Rimbaud publicly mocked prominent Parnassians, and published scatological parodies of some of their leading lights, including Francois Coppee—misattributed to Coppee himself—in *L’Album zutique*.

**4) The Symbolist Manifesto:**

Symbolists believed that art should aim to capture more absolute truths which could only be accessed by indirect methods. Thus, they wrote in a highly metaphorical and suggestive manner, endowing particular images or objects with symbolic meaning. Jean Mores published the Symbolist Manifesto (“Le Symbolsme”) in *Le Figaro* on 18 Sept. 1886. Mores announced that symbolism was hostile to “plain meanings, declamations, false sentimentality and matter-of-fact description,” and that its goal instead was to “clothe the Ideal in a perceptible form” whose “goal was not in itself, but whose sole purpose was to express the Ideal.” The symbolist poets wished to liberate techniques of versification in order to allow greater room for “fluidity,” and as such were aligned with the movement towards free verse, a direction evident in the poems of Gustavo Kahn and Ezra Pound. Symbolist poems sought to evoke, rather than to describe; symbolic imagery was used to signify the state of the poet’s soul. The earlier Romantic movement of poetry used symbols, but these symbols were unique and privileged objects.

**5) Paul Verlaine and the poetes maudits:**

Of the several attempts at defining the essence of symbolism, perhaps none was more influential than Paul Verlaine’s 1884 publication of a series of essays on Tristan Corbiere, Arthur Rimbaud, Stephane Mallarme, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Gerard de
Nerval, and “Pauvre Lelian” (“Poor Lelian,” an anagram of Paul Verlaine’s own name), each of whom Verlaine numbered among the poètes maudits, “accursed poets.”

(6) Philosophy:

Schopenhauer’s aesthetics reflected shared concerns with the symbolist programme; they both tended to look to Art as a contemplative refuge from the world of strife and Will. From this desire for an artistic refuge from the world, the symbolists took characteristic themes of mysticism and otherworldliness, a keen sense of mortality, and a sense of the malign power of sexuality, which Albert Samain called a “fruit of death upon the tree of life.” Mallarmé’s poem Les fenêtres expresses all of these themes clearly. A dying man in a hospital bed, seeking escape from the pain and dreariness of his physical surroundings, turns toward his window but then turns away in disgust from Porn crates, by Feliciano Ropes. Etching and aquatint,

“......l’homme a` l’ame dure

Vautre dans le Bonheur, ou` ses seuls appetits

Mangent...

To offer to the wife suckling his children,”

[From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia]

(7) Symbolists and Decadents:

The symbolist movement has frequently been confused with decadence. Several young writers were derisively referred to in the press as “decadent” in the mid 1880s. A few of these writers embraced the term while most avoided it. Jean Moreas manifesto was largely a response to his polemic. By the late 1880s, the labels “symbolism” and
“decadence” were understood almost synonymously. Though the aesthetics of the movements can be seen as overlapping in some areas, the two remain distinct. The symbolists were those participants in the cultural current who laid emphasis on dreams and ideals; the Decadents cultivated précieux, ornamented, or hermetic styles, and dark or morbid subject matters. The subject of the decadence of the Roman Empire was a frequent source of literary images and appears in the works of many poets of the period, regardless of which label they chose for themselves.

(8) Literary World:

A number of important literary publications were founded by symbolists or became associated with the movement. The first was La Vogue founded in April 1886. In October of that same year, Jean Moreas, Gustavo Kahn, and Paul Adam began Le Symboliste. One of the most important symbolist journals was Le Mercure de France, edited by Alfred Valletta, which succeeded La Pleiades; founded in 1890, this periodical lasted until 1965. Pierre Louys founded La Conque, a periodical whose symbolist leanings were alluded to by Jorge Luis Borges in his story. Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote. Other symbolist literary magazines included La Revue Blanche, La Revue wagnerienne, La Plume and La Wallonia.

(9) Visual Arts:

Symbolism in literature is distinct from symbolism in art although the two overlapped on a number of points. In painting, symbolism was a continuation of some mystical tendencies in the Romantic tradition, which included such artists as Caspar David Friedrich, Fernand Khnopff and John Henry Fuseli and it was even more closely aligned with the self-consciously dark and private decadent movement. We find there
were several rather dissimilar groups of symbolist painters and visual artists, which included Gustav Moreau, Gustav Klimt, Mikalojus Konstantin’s, Odilon Redon, Pierre Pubis de Chavannes, Henri Fantin-Latour, Edward Munch, Felicien Rops, and Jan Toorop. Symbolism in painting had an even larger geographical reach than symbolism in poetry.

The symbolist painters mined mythology and dream imagery for a visual language of the soul, seeking evocative paintings that brought to mind a static world of silence. The symbols used in symbolism are not the familiar emblems of mainstream iconography but intensely personal, private, obscure and ambiguous references. More a philosophy than an actual style of art, symbolism in painting influenced the contemporary Art Nouveau movement and Les Nab is. In their exploration of dreamlike subjects, symbolist painters are found across centuries and cultures, as they are still today; Bernard Deville has described Rene Magritte’s surrealism as “symbolism plus Freud.”

(10) Music:

Symbolism had some influence in music as well. Many symbolist writers and critics were early enthusiasts of the music of Richard Wagner, a fellow student of Schopenhauer. The symbolist aesthetic had a deep impact on the works of Claude Debussy. His choices of libretti, texts, and themes come almost exclusively from the symbolist canon. Compositions such as his settings of Cinq poems de Baudelaire, various art songs on poems by Verlaine, the opera Pelleas et Melisande with a libretto by Maurice Maeterlinck, and his unfinished sketches that illustrate two Poe stories, The Devil in the Belfry and The Fall of the House of Usher, all indicate that Debussy was profoundly influenced by symbolist themes and tastes. The symbolist aesthetic also
influenced Aleksandra Scriabin’s compositions. Arnold Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire* takes its text from German translations of the symbolist poems by Albert Giraud, showing a link between German expressionism and symbolism.

(11) Theatre:

The characteristic emphases on an internal life of dreams and fantasies have made symbolist theatre difficult to reconcile with more recent tastes and trends. Augusta Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s drama *Axel* is a definitive symbolist play. In it, two Rosicrucian aristocrats fall in love while trying to kill each other, only to agree to mutually commit suicide because nothing in life could equal their fantasies. From this play, Edmund Wilson took the title *Axels’ Castle* for his influential study of the symbolist aftermath in literature.

Maurice Maeterlinck, also a symbolist playwright, wrote *The Blind* (1890), *The Intruder* (1890), *Interior* (1891), *Pelleas and Melisande* (1892), and *The Blue Bird* (1908). The later works of the Russian playwright Anton Chekhov have been identified as being deeply influenced by symbolist pessimism. Both Constantine Stanislavski and Vsevolod Meyerhold experimented with symbolist modes of staging in their theatrical endeavors.

(12) Impact:

In the English-speaking world, the closest counterpart to symbolism was aestheticism. The Pre-Raphaelites were contemporaries of the earlier symbolists, and have much in common with them. Symbolism had a significant influence on modernism, and its traces can be seen in the work of many modernist artists, including T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Conrad Aiken, Hart Crane, and William Butler Yeats in the Anglophone
tradition and Ruben Dario in Hispanic letters. The early poems of Guillaume Apollinaire have strong affinities with symbolism.

After the turn of the 20th century, symbolism became a major force in Russian poetry, even as it lost forward momentum in France. The Russian symbolist movement, steeped in the Eastern Orthodoxy and the religious doctrines of Vladimir Solovyov, had little in common with the French movement of the same name. It was the starting point of the careers of several major poets such as Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, and Marina Tsvetaeva. Bely’s novel *Petersburg* (1912) is considered the greatest monument of Russian symbolist prose. The symbolist painters were an important influence on expressionism and surrealism in painting, two movements which descend directly from symbolism proper. In Belgium, symbolism penetrated so deeply that it came to be thought of as a national style. Many early motion pictures also employ symbolist visual imagery and themes in their staging, set designs, and imagery. The films of German expressionism owe a great deal to symbolist imagery. The virginal “good girls” seen in the films of D. W. Griffith, and the silent movie “bad girls” portrayed by Theda Bara, both show the continuing influence of symbolism, as do the Babylonian scenes from Griffith’s *Intolerance*. Symbolist imagery lived on longest in horror film: as late as 1932, Carl Theodor Dreyer’s *Vampire* showed the obvious influence of symbolist imagery; parts of the film resemble *tableau vivant* re-creations of the early paintings of Edward Munch.

**(13) Symbolism in Literature:**

Symbolism in literature was a mid 19th to early 20th century European literary phenomenon that employed symbols and evocative suggestion in place of direct
statement. Symbolist poets tried to capture sensations and states of mind that lay beyond normal consciousness by disordering their senses, indulging in decadence, occultism, and opposition to sober bourgeois values. They rejected the pastoral tradition, and took their themes and images from city life, emphasizing it bleak, hallucinatory and illicit aspects.

(14) Importance of Symbolism:

Poets contributing to Symbolist literature include many of the important names of the period: Baudelaire, Huysmans, Mallarme, Rimbaud, Valery, Dario, Rilke, Blok, Verhaeren, Maeterlinck and the 90s poets. From Symbolism developed the many `isms of the 20th century: Modernism, Postmodernism, Futurism, Surrealism, Dada and the New Romantics. Many things had to be rejected to cultivate this inward consciousness: objectivity, normal grammar and syntax, logical successions of ideas and images—approach that painters and film-makers in turn found useful.

(15) Symbolism today:

Academics tidy the bewildering variety of literary composition into themes and movements, and no doubt college students study Symbolist literature as a precursor of Modernism. But Symbolism shaped the contemporary consciousness, and is far from dead. There exist contemporary schools of Symbolists, both in literature and painting. The wider concerns of the Symbolists—alienation from big business and materialism, the Cartesian split between mind and body, the biological association of thought and feeling—are not only pursued by contemporary writers and poets but by scientists and philosophers.
Symbolism is when the author uses an object or reference to add deeper meaning to a story. Symbolism in literature can be subtle or obvious, used sparingly or heavy-handedly. An author may repeatedly use the same object to convey deeper meaning or may use variations of the same object to create an overarching mood or feeling. Symbolism is often used to support a literary theme in a subtle manner.

The following are common symbols used in literary works:

- Symbols referring to damnation: Fire, flames, heat, hot temperature.
- Symbols referring to salvation: Crosses, angels, haloes, clouds, churches.
- Symbols referring to reincarnation or reinvention: Phoenix rising from flames, crosses, rainbows, passing storms, dawn, sunrise, broken chains.
- Symbols referring to death or endings: Gravestones, cemeteries, Grim Reaper, Day of the dead, skulls, candle blowing out, coffin, ringing of bell.

(16) Common Cultural Symbols:

- American cultural symbols: Red, white and blue colors; Bald Eagle; coin with “In God We Trust.”
- Indian cultural symbols: yogi, banyan tree, image of Indian god or goddess.
- Chinese cultural symbols: Bamboo tree, bonsai tree, yin/yang symbol.

Sometimes cultural symbols are more specific to a particular cultural group. A Mohawk haircut or an anarchy symbol indicates a punk rocker. Medals and swords symbolize a member of the military. Nets and ropes can symbolize a fisherman or sea captain.

(17) Image and Symbol:
At the outset, let us arrive at a workable description of image and symbol. An image is described in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* as one that covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, states of mind and any sensory or extra-sensory experience. An image does not necessarily mean a mental picture. Rene Wedlock and Austin Warren say that:

“An image........... if it persistently recurs both as presentation and representation it becomes a symbol........... A symbol is a famous of relationships. It is a hub of a wheel around which plot, characters, setting move to evoke the central theme of the drama.”

[Minoan K. Bhavnagar, 1996, P. 155]

This term is one of the most common and ambiguous in modern criticisms. Its applications range all the way from the “mental pictures” which, it is claimed, are experienced by the reader of a poem, to the totality of the elements which make up a poem. “Imagery” [that is “images” taken collectively] is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature. It is used, more narrowly, to signify only descriptions of visible objects and scenes, especially if the description is vivid and particularized. Most commonly, imagery is used to signify figurative language, especially the vehicles of metaphors and similes.

Symbols always lead us to the understanding of variety of meaning, suggestions and evocations to assess life in its intricacy of ever shuffling diversity. They also help us to know the hidden meanings in the words. The writers like T. S. Eliot, Hawthorne, Eugene
O’Neill, Walt Whitman, Melville, Poe and Arthur Miller have employed this technique extensively in their works. In the works of Eugene O’Neill, this technique particularly captures unique expression of life.

**18) Other Dramatic Techniques:**

Eugene O’Neill is ranked with the greatest European dramatists of the 20th century. He has made his personal experience as the basis of his plays. This makes an understanding of his life and character indispensable for proper appreciation of his plays. He began as a realist, but soon he fused realism with symbolic and suggestive modes. In order to communicate inner reality he used expressionistic techniques. O’Neill has also made the use of other poetic devices as aside, soliloquy, myth, legend, pantomime, masks etc., to give expression to his thoughts and ideas in his mind.

In the play, ‘The Emperor Jones’ there is the use of pantomime. It combines action and interpretation and reveals the theme of the play. This silent action serves a double purpose. It not only unifies the audience, but it arouses a questioning curiosity. It gives a symbolic suggestion of the struggle that is to follow, the action begins before the opening is over, and the play is on its way. There is also the use of song and music to accompany the pantomime. We have its use in his plays as *The Moon of the Caribbees*, *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

O’Neill has also used the expositions in his plays. The characters, the themes and the situations are introduced in such a way that the interest and curiosity of the audience...
are at once aroused. We find its use in *Desire under the Elms*. In the opening of the play we see,

“A door opens and Eben Cabot comes to the end of the porch and stands looking down the road to the right. He has a large bell in his hand and this he swings mechanically, awakening a deafening clangor.........

Eben: God! Purty!

He spits on the ground with intense disgust, turns and goes back into the house.”

[Desire under the Elms, Scene One, P. 137]

After that we have the men who were summoned by the ringing of the bell. They also look at the sky. The sky now becomes the inspiration for the next speech which is a reference to gold, and leads to the prospect of finding gold in California. This helps to date the play, and leads to the reasonableness of the following statement of facts. It makes a good beginning:

“Peter: Here—it’s stones atop o’ the ground —stones atop o’ stones—makin’ stone walls —year atop o’ year—him ‘n’ yew ‘n’ me ‘n’ then Eben —makin’ stone walls fur him to fence us in!”

[Desire under the Elms, Scene One, P. 138]

Expressionism was an artistic movement which began in Germany at the start of this century, under the strong influence of the Swedish dramatist Strindberg (1849-1912), and reached its height in the decade 1915-1925. It manifested itself in painting and
music, as well as in literature, where its most persistent influence has been in the theater. The central feature of expressionism is a radical revolt against realism. Instead of representing the world as it objectively is, the author undertakes to express inner experience by representing the world as it appears to his state of mind, or to that one of his characters—an emotional, troubled, or abnormal state of mind. Often the work implies that this mental condition is representative of anxiety-ridden modern man in an industrial and technological society which is drifting toward chaos.

These dramatists dislocated the time-sequence. They have used a stylized dialogue, masked characters and violently distorted stage sets, and exploited such modern devices as the revolving stage and special effects in lighting and sound. German expressionists included George Kaiser, Ernst Toller, and Bertold Brecht. This mode of German drama had an important influence on the American theater. Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* (1920) projected in a sequence of symbolic scenes, the individual and racial memories and the recurrent fantasies of a terrified modern Negro. This movement has had an important effect on the writing and staging of such plays as Thornton Wilder’s *The Skin of Our Teeth* and Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman.*

Another stage device used by O’Neill is the use of mask symbolism in his plays. It was developed in Renaissance Italy and flourished in England during the reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I. It was an elaborate form of court entertainment, combining poetic drama, music, song, dance, splendid costuming, and stage spectacle. In his *The Great God Brown* O’Neill has made the use of mask symbolism.
O’Neill has also made the use of ‘Aside’ and ‘Soliloquy’ as the symbols in his plays. Aside is a technical device used by poetic play-wrights like Shakespeare and others. It is essentially unrealistic and has been condemned as such by the advocates of the realistic prose drama, like Galsworthy. But we come to know that O’Neill has used this poetic device to impart psychological realism to his play, to portray effectively the soul of his characters. It has been most effectively used in *The Strange Interlude* and *Dynamo*. It is for him a kind of symbolism which enlarges the scope of the play. The aside is a passing thought uttered aloud by an actor. It is uttered by an actor in front of other characters on the stage. But the other characters on the stage are not supposed to hear it. It is the shortest form of the soliloquy which has the same function like soliloquy. His technique becomes a means by which he reveals the strange conflict between what man is in reality and what he is in relation to the social pattern of his life. He has also made the use of this technique to give a symbolic interpretation of man’s age-long struggle to find a meaning to life—a meaning to the meaningless.

In his play *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*, O’Neill has made the use of the soliloquy. It is the act of talking to oneself. In drama it denotes the convention by which a character, alone on the stage, utters his thoughts aloud; the playwright uses this device as a convenient way to convey directly to the audience information about a character’s motives, intentions, and state of mind, as well as for purposes of general exposition. Christopher Marlowe has used this stage device in his play *Dr. Faustus*. The best-known of all soliloquies, of course, is Hamlet’s speech, “To be or not to be.”
O’Neill has also made the use of Myth and Legend as the symbols to give a broad and universal significance to his theme, to make the particular dramatization of the human predicament general. In his play *Mourning Becomes Electra*, he used the Electra legend to achieve an approximation to the Greek sense of fate, such as would appeal to modern audiences.

After the consideration of the definitions made by various writers, we find that symbols are used in literature to express and convey the feelings, emotions, thoughts, hidden ideas, mysteries of human existence, realistic life of the man in a different way i.e. making the use of such words which have figurative meaning. And such meanings are understood only after studying the social, economic, political life of the people in a particular era. Eugene O’Neill has studied all these aspects in the life of a man and through his characters in his plays; he has conveyed the emotions, feelings, thoughts ideas of the particular communities in America. So I feel that the use of symbols in his plays is very appropriate and justifiable.
WORKS CITED:


