Three

Nobel as a Social Epic
Edmund Wilson published his book, *The Wound and The Bow* in 1941. Discussing the book in one of his letters, Wilson said that "the book I propose to write is to be hung on the Philoctetes myth of the man with the incurable wound and the invincible bow". As in his earlier book, here also Wilson restates in a more complex way his views on literature and the role of artists. In *Axel's Castle*, his approach to the theme is direct and historical. In this book, it is mythical and Freudian. In the former book, Wilson does not say anything about the psychological impact of the artists's personal sufferings on his work, but, in the latter, he discusses how artists can effectively shape their sufferingselves to give depth and social meaning to their creations. The six writers discussed in this book--Dickens, Kipling, Casanova, Edith Wharton, Hemingway and Joyce--instead of lamenting their personal sorrows, make a critique of their societies, although, all of them do not do so in the right way.

The myth of Philoctetes, and his terrible wound, which prevents him from using his god-given skill is rooted in the mental and moral history of man.
Wilson makes use of the play of Sophocles as the basis for his essay, "Philoctetes: The Wound and the Bow". In the myth, Heracles, before he dies, gives his bow- the bow "which never misses its mark" and was in turn a gift from Apollo- to Philoctetes. Thus, Philoctetes thereby becomes a valuable asset to the Greeks in their plan to seize Troy. But, on their way to Troy, the Greeks had to stop at the tiny island of Chryse to offer their prayers to the local deity. Philoctetes approached the shrine first, and he was bitten in the foot by a snake. The infection became peculiarly virulent and the groans of Philoctetes made it impossible to perform the sacrifice. The bite began to suppurate with so horrible a smell that his companions could no longer bear to have him near them. They removed him to Lemnos, a neighbouring island which was much larger than Chryse and inhabited, and sailed away to Troy without him. After ten years of unsuccessful efforts to take Troy, the Greeks' needed his great bow. Troy cannot be conquered without it. The crafty Odysseus seeks ways to use- to exploit - the weapon. He plots to steal it from Philoctetes. Odysseus sends Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, a mere youth, to steal the magic bow of Philoctetes. The youth approaches the wounded man with understandable caution and diffidence; the stench is overpowering, and yet he is eager to accomplish his mission. What he discovers, with the quick empathy of his years, is a suffering human being- whom he has been asked to rob. Something holds him back. He endures the horror of the wound, he nurses Philoctetes through delirium, he sees the blister break and drain and experiences the agony of his prey. Out of his deep sympathy comes recognition. The guile of Odysseus had overlooked a fundamental fact. The unique bow needs its unique Bowman. Neoptolemus cannot bring himself to cheat or steal. He faces the wrath of the suffering man by confessing his proposed treachery. The better solution he feels
is to help the archer, instead of stealing the instrument of his craft. Edmund Wilson here observes:

It is in the nature of the things of this world where the divine and the human fuse - that they cannot have the irresistible weapon without its loathsome owner, who upsets the processes of normal life by his curses and his cries, and who in any case refuses to work for men who have exiled him from their fellowship.¹

Wilson interprets the fable as follows:

The victim of a malodorous disease which renders him abhorrent to society and periodically degrades him and makes him helpless is also the master of a superhuman art which every body has to respect and which the normal man finds he needs. A practical man like Odysseus, at the same time coarse-grained and clever, imagines that he can somehow get the bow without having Philoctetes on his hands or that he can kidnap Philoctetes the bowman without regard for Philoctetes the invalid. But, the young son of Achilles knows better. It is at the moment when his sympathy for Philoctetes would naturally inhibit his cheating him--so the supernatural influences in Sophocles are often made with infinite delicacy to shade into subjective motivations - it is at this moment of natural shrinking - that it becomes clear to him that the words of the seer had meant that the bow would be useless without Philoctetes himself... How then is the gulf to be got over between the ineffective plight of the bowman and his proper use of the bow, between his ignominy and his destined glory?

And as Edmund Wilson suggests:

Only by the intervention of one who is guileless enough and human enough to treat him (Philoctetes), not as a monster, nor yet as a mere magical property which is wanted for accomplishing some end, but simply as another man whose sufferings elicit his sympathy and whose courage and pride he admires. 2

Wilson thinks that, the play is "a parable of human character", and that its argument is that "the conception of superior strength is inseparable from disability" (TWB. P. 235). He considers the modern treatment of the play by Andre Gide which too affirms that "genius and disease like strength and mutilation, may be inextricably bound up together" (TWB. P. 237). In simple words, the wounded archer stands for the suffering artist and the bow for his art. Wilson in his book, *The Wound and the Bow*, studies six writers - Dickens, Kipling, Hemingway, Casanova, Joyce and Edith Wharton - and tries to establish the crucial connection between the psychic wound which each of these artists appears to have suffered and the "gift" - the wisdom, insight and the artistic power - which the wound make possible. He discusses how these six writers, have effectively given shape to their sufferingselves to give depth and social meaning to their creations, though all of them do not do so in the right way. Tacitly identifying himself with the hero of the title essay, Wilson tells us what he has been doing as an intellectual and critic.

As early as 1945, Lionel Trilling wrote a note on the relationship between art and neurosis. Perhaps, he is the only critic who has clearly explicated Wilson’s thesis in the book. Explaining Wilson’s ideas on genius and

disease, Trilling says that, all that Wilson means is that "personality is integral and not made up of detached parts". Wilson does not explicitly say, argues Trilling, that the wound is the price of the bow, or that without the wound the bow cannot be drawn or possessed.

Developing his argument further, Trilling says that, if we accept that the wound and bow (neurosis and art) are related to each other, then, we will also have to accept that all intellectual achievements are a result of neurosis. Yet, the fact is that neurosis can also be the result of intellectual failure and of mediocrity. In fact, it is more likely, says Trilling, that neurosis is the common fate of most men and not the peculiar characteristic of a genius. Trilling adds that, even if we admit that a creative writer, as distinguished from other men, is the victim of a mutilation and that his fantasies are neurotic. We cannot say that his ability to express them and impress us with them is neurotic because that ability is precisely his power. If we consider the artist as a neurotic, Trilling continues, then his neurosis should be reflected in his work in its crude form. But, this is not the case. An artist has the ability to control his fantasies. He shapes his fantasies, he gives them social form and reference. Concluding his argument, he says that "whatever elements of neurosis he (the artist) has in common with all his fellow-citizens, the one part of him that is healthy, by any possible definition of health, is that which given him the power to conceive, to plan, to work and to bring his work to completion".

By talking about the personal sufferings of the artists, Wilson also tries to point out that only great artists can transform their personal miseries to produce socially significant works. His The Wound and the Bow theory had immense relevance to the contemporary European and American situation. Most
of the symbolists of the twenties failed to socialize their miseries, so did the exiles. As artists, they should have been responsible like Philoctetes because theirs was a time when the country was recklessly rolling in wealth and pleasure. Instead of fighting its vices, they indulged in their own desires and thus misused their creativity. In *The Wound and the Bow*, therefore, Wilson discusses how artists can respond to their times even when they are either neglected or ill-treated. Thus, writers like Dickens, though their wounds were more personal than those of the symbolists or the exiles, did not shun their society. They tried to give a new shape and meaning to their bitter experiences in their works and thus, used their art to criticize their times. It was not the feeling of vengeance that made them do this but, an earnest desire to bring about reform. But, as pointed out earlier, all of them were not successful in giving aesthetic and impersonal shape to their pains. Wilson gives the example of Rudyard Kipling as a failed artist. By making a contrastive study of the six authors - Dickens, Kipling, Joyce, Hemingway, Edith Wharton and Casanova, Wilson is advising his fellow writers to be conscious of their duties as reformers, by providing a socio-ethical base for his contemporaries.

II

(i)

Edmund Wilson's "Dickens - The Two Scrooges", tries to evaluate the entire corpus of Dickens by combining the biography of Dickens coupled with a few insights from Freud. Wilson tries to appreciate him as an artist. Dickens who has been admired by Taine as "the master of all hearts" has been made into "one of those Victorian Scarecrows with ludicrous Freudian flaws". Chesterton asserted that time would show that Dickens was not merely one of the Victorians,
but incomparably the greatest English writer of his time. Shaw coupled his name with that of Shakespeare and Wilson observes that Dickens "was nevertheless the greatest dramatic writer that the English had since Shakespeare, and he created the largest and most varied world" (TWB. P. 3). Wilson would like to "exorcise the spell which has bewitched him into stuffy piece of household furniture and to give him his proper rank as the poet of that portiered and upholstered world who saw clearest through the coverings and the curtains" (TWB. P. 9).

Charles Dickens had a very unhappy childhood. As a boy he enjoyed all the advantages of a gentleman: had good schooling, excellent education and elegant manners. But, as a result of his father's debts, who was imprisoned, he was forced to work in a bottling company. He was so shocked of the situation, and could not digest his yearning for school. Dickens suffered from nervous fits in his earlier childhood.

These experiences produced in him a trauma which he was to suffer all his life but also made his seizures reoccur. Dickens' himself wrote of his days as "My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man, and wander desolately back to that time of my life" (TWB. P. 6). Wilson observes that, "Dicken's seizures in his blacking bottle days were obviously neurotic symptoms",... and these "lasting depressions and terror may be caused by such cuttings short of the natural development of childhood" (TWB. P. 6).
Taking these biographical details into consideration, we approach *Pickwick papers*, a set of interpolated short stories. Though these stories are mostly bad and deserve little literary attention, and though there is the element of conventional and popular and the school of Gothic horror, we are surprised to find rising to the surface, the themes, which were to dominate Dicken's later work. "In The Old Man's Tale About the Queer Client" (Chapter XXI), Dickens' obsessions appear most plainly; when we are confronted with Marshalsea prison. Dickens is one of the greatest humorists. It represents:

A laughter which is never vulgar but which discloses the vulgarity of the revered - a laughter of the human ecstasy that rises like the Phoenix from the cinders to which the dismal denizens of the tribunals have attempted to reduce decent human beings.³

It represents, "like the laughter of Aristophanes, a real escape from institutions" (TWB. P. 12). But Wilson, noting the difference between Dickens and Aristophanes, observes that:

The humour of Dickens does differ from such humour as that of Aristophanes in being unable for ever to inhabit an empyrean of blithe intellectual play, of charming fancies and biting good sense. Dickens' laughter is an exhilaration which already shows a trace of the hysterical.⁴

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³. Ibid., P. 12
⁴. Ibid., P. 12.
It dramatises gloom dispelling humour and this sort of humour often recurs in the later fiction of Dickens.

The ideal of *Pickwick Papers* is a kindly retired business man, Mr. Pickarirh piloted through a tough and treacherous world by a shrewd servant Sam-weller of watchful fidelity, who perfectly knows his place. And as Dickens begins to write *Oliver Twist*, this picture gives way to the figure of a parentless and helpless child - a figure of which the pathos itself. It is a story of a disinherited boy, consigned to a workhouse which is virtually a jail and getting away only to fall into the hands of a gang of burglars, pickpockets and prostitutes. The narrative build up and Dickens' peculiar sort of humour are fused in the lot of *Oliver Twist*.

(iii)

Dickens showed very keen interest in prisons and prisoners. He visited prisons where he even went and wrote extensively about executions. There is a vivid description of a guillotining in *Pictures from Italy*, and an impressive episode, developed on a formidable scale, of the hanging of the leaders of the riots in *Barnaby Rudge*. Analysing the reasons for this, Wilson, takes the bio-critical clues into consideration and says:

For the man of spirit whose childhood has been crushed by the cruelty of organised society, one of two attitudes is natural: that of the criminal or that of the rebel. Charles Dickens, in imagination, was to play the roles of both, and continue up to his death to put into them all that was most passionate in his feeling.  

5. Ibid., P. 13.
One feels that Dickens was more concerned with those unfortunate persons who wittingly or unwittingly land themselves in prisons. Commenting on the identification of Dickens either with the thief or the murderer, Wilson points out that:

The man of a powerful will who finds himself opposed to society must, if he cannot upset it or if his impulse to do so is blocked, feel a compulsion to commit what society regards as one of the capital crimes against itself. With the anti-social heroes of Dostoevsky, this crime is usually murder or rape; with Dickens, it is usually murder.6

The criminal and the rebel are peculiarly combined in *Barnaby Rudge*. Though *Martin Chuzzlewit* is most interesting from the point of view of his deeper artistic intentions, *Barnaby Rudge* was a deliberate attempt to find expressions for the emotions and ideas that possessed him. Dickens handles the subject of Gordon Riots in an equivocal way. Though, on the surface, he repudiates Lord George Gordon and their rioters for their fanatical or brutal intolerance, Dickens implicitly exploits certain legitimate grievances of the people: the neglect of the lower classes by a cynical eighteenth-century aristocracy, and especially the penal laws which made innumerable minor offences punishable by death.

The formula of *Barnaby Rudge* is more or less reproduced in his other two novels - *Hard Times*, (1854) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). In *Hard Times*, Dickens deals sympathetically with the working-class protest against the intolerable industrial conditions. And, at the same time, he lets himself out from supporting the trade union movement. To achieve this, he resorts to a special

and rather implausible device. Stephen Blackpool, an honest old textile worker, is made to argue the cause of the workers before the vulgar manufacturer, Bounderby. But, he refuses to join the union because, he had promised the woman he loves, that he would do nothing to get himself in to trouble. He is thus placed in a singular position of being both a victim of the blacklist and a scab of the trade union leadership, which is represented with a comic fidelity, recognizable even today to a certain type of labour organizer, whose single aim is to get hold of the labour money. Old Stephen, wandering away to look for a job elsewhere, falls into a disused coal pit, which had already cost the lives of many miners. He thus becomes a martyr simultaneously to the employees and the trade union movement.

In *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), the moral of history is not judge as it is in *Barnaby Rudge*. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, there is no doubt a lurking fear, the English fear of the second empire after Napoleon-III's Italian campaign of 1859. But there is in this book, as it is in the other two, the exposition of the contemporary problems of the society; and the possible fall out of it, if it were neglected. Wilson observes: "If the British upper classes, Dickens seems to say, will not deal with the problem of providing for the health and education of the people, they will fall victims to the brutal mob. This mob Dickens both sympathizes with and fears". (TWB. P. 21).

Dickens's awareness of the power structure in the society of his time and hierarchy, in industry and economy, and the consequences of the policies of the government are superbly dramatized in *Hard Times*. Analysing this aspect of Dickens, Wilson suggests us the main principles of Dickens'
characterization, motives and how they perform the principal functions of modern drama. He states that:

In his novels from beginning to end, Dickens is making the same point always: that to the English governing classes the people they govern are not real. It is one of the great purposes of Dickens to show you these human actualities who figure for Parliament as strategical counters and for Political Economy as statistics; who can as a rule appear only even in histories in a generalized or idealized form. What does a work-house under the Poor Laws look like? What does it feel like, taste like, smell like? How does the holder of a post in the government look? How does he talk? What does he talk about? how will he treat you? What is the aspect of the British middle class at each of the various stages of its progress? What are the good ones like and what are the bad ones like? How do they affect you, not merely to meet at dinner, but to travel with, to work under, to live with? All these things Dickens can tell us. It has been one of the principal functions of the modern novel and drama to establish this kind of record; but few writers have been able to do it with any range at all extensive. None has surpassed Dickens.7

This concrete way of looking at society had its limitations. Dickens was not interested in politics and was unaware of the political strategies. His lack of political tactics led him to mistake the actual significance of the legislation which he was so prompt to criticize.

Dickens was disappointed with his American visit. He resented the American lack of ceremony and was annoyed by the American publicity. He did

not fit in the United States even so well as he did in England. Yet, his picture of the U.S in 1842 has a unique and permanent value. Macaulay had complained that Dickens did not understand the Manchester school of utilitarian economics which he criticized in *Hard Times*. But Dickens here tries to tell us how the practicing believers in Manchester utilitarianism behave and how their families are likely to fare. His picture is strikingly collaborated by the autobiography of John Stuart Mill. He was brought up as the shadow of Bentham himself. In Mill, choked with learning from his childhood, overtrained on the logical side of the mind, he collapsed into illogical despair, when the lack began to make itself felt of the elements of education he had neglected. The tragic moral of Gradgrind system is brought out with a striking obviousness which some may think as an exaggeration of facts. Wilson points out:

This very distrust of politics, however is a part of the rebellious aspect of Dickens. Dickens is almost invariably *against* institutions: in spite of his allegiance to Church and State, in spite of the lip-service he occasionally pays them, whenever he comes to deal with Parliament and its laws, the courts and the public officials, the creeds of protestant dissenters and of Church of England alike, he makes them either ridiculous or cruel or both at the same time.⁸

(iv)

In the early phase, Dickens imaginative focus was on crime and murder. At this point Dickens is interested in those who rebel against the human and social malaise. In this phase, Dickens may appear as an opponent of the Victorian prosperity and affluence. His novels are freshened by breezes from an

England of coaching and village taverns, of an England where everything is always in order, where every city clerk aims to dress finely and drink freely, to give an impression of openhandedness and gallantry. From this Dickens was to foresee a full length industrial town depicted in *Hard Times*. In that age, the industrial, commercial civilization had not yet been the norm, and it seemed a disease which had broken out in spots but which a sincere and cheerful treatment would cure.

After his American visit, a new kind of character begins to appear in Dickens' novels. Starting as an amusing baffoon he grows steadily more unpleasant and more formidable. Peckniff, the provincial architect in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1845), Dombey, the big London Merchant in *Dombey and Son* (1948), Murdstone, the Wine merchant in *David Copperfield* (1900), all these figures stand for the same thing that Dickens was pillorying, abstract faults in the manner of comedy of humours. But, as Wilson suggests:

The truth was that he had already begun an indictment against a specific society: the self-important and moralizing middle class who had been making such rapid progress in England and coming down like a damper on the bright fires of English life - that is, on the spontaneity and gaiety, the frankness and independence, the instinctive human virtues, which Dickens admired and trusted. The new age had brought a new kind of virtues to cover up the flourishing vices of cold avarice and harsh exploitation; and Dickens detested these virtues.9

The curmudgeons of the early Dickens-Ralph Nickleby and Arthur Gridle, Anthony and Jones Chuzzlewit are old fashioned money lenders and

mizers of a type, that must have been serving for decades in the melodramas of the English stage. The whole hearted and outspoken meanness gives them a certain cynical charm. In a world of mercenary ruthlessness, always justified by rigorous morality, it is natural that the exploiter of others should wish to dissociate himself from the exploited and to delegate the face-to-face encounters to someone else who is paid to take the odium. Karl Marx had demonstrated that "this system, with its falsifying of human relations and its wholesale encouragement of Kant, was an inherent and irremediable feature of the economic structure itself. (TWB. P. 29) Mr. Spenlow of *David Copperfield*, always blames his supposedly implacable partner for his mean exactions, Casby of *Little Dorrit*, the benignant and white haired patriarch basks in the admiration of his tenants, while he turns over the rank renting bullterrier of an agent, Pancks; and Fledgeby in *Our Mutual Friend*, makes his way into society while the harmless old Jew Riah is compelled to play the cruel creditor. From this analysis, Wilson reaches the conclusion that, "the ideal- the domestic unit which preserves the sound values of England is located by Dickens through this period in the small middle-class household" (TWB. P. 30).

Dickens, working always through the observed interrelations between highly individualized human beings rather than through political or economic analysis, attempts to trace the anatomy of the society. Though *Hard Times* conducts the same kind of inquiry in a smaller scale, *Bleak House* (1852) realizes this information to perfection. Wilson now points out that:

For this purpose Dickens invents a new literary genre (unless the whole mass of Balzac is to be taken as something of the sort): the novel of the social group. The young Dickens had summed up, developed and
finally out grown the two traditions in English fiction he had found: the picaresque tradition of Defoe, Fielding and Smollett, and the sentimental tradition of Goldsmith and Sterne.\textsuperscript{10}

But Dickens doesn't stop there. In his critical appraisal of classics like Dickens, Wilson doesn't stop by inter-relating the themes and the socio-cultural milieu. His sense of the past is a clue that he tries to place Dickens in the tradition and convention of the English novel. According to him, there are two traditions in English fiction - the Picaresque tradition of Defoe, Fielding and Smollett, and the sentimental tradition of \textit{Barnaby Rudge}. For the industrial studies in \textit{Hard Times}, Dickens owes to Scott and Miss. Gaskell. In \textit{Bleak House}, the masterpiece of the middle period, Dickens discovers a new use of plot, which makes possible a tighter organization. As Wilson observes, "the significant aspect of Dickens of this period is that, he has out-grown all his predecessors, and has created a fictional genre of his own, which is now rediscovered and is called "thriller" in America". In this context, Wilson aptly observes:

He creates the detective story which is also a social fable. It is a \textit{genre} which has lapsed since Dickens. The detective story—though Dickens' friend Wilkie Collins preserved a certain amount of social satire and has dropped out the Dickensian social content; and the continuators of the social novel have dropped the detective story. These continuators—Shaw, Galsworthy, Wells—have of course gone further than Dickens in the realistic presentation of emotion; but from the point of view of dramatizing social issues, they have hardly improved upon \textit{Bleak House}. In Shaw's case, the Marxist analysis, with which Dickens was not equipped, has

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., P. 31.
helped him to the tighter organization which Dickens got from his complex plot.  

Although most plots of Dickens are melodramatic and take on the character of a thriller, they easily blend with socio-political reality of the time. In novels which are mostly written under the conventions of realism, there may not be any strong symbolism which takes us away from the situation on hand to a visionary plane, as it often happens in poetry. A symbol in a novel often takes us into the interior of the plot and action so as to soak the reader in the narrative reality and atmosphere. At this point, Wilson goes a step further and argues that it is a mistake to think that Dickens' novels have no symbolic orchestration and significance. In our times, critics talk of the symbolic dimension of Kafka, Mann and Joyce. From our knowledge of these later fictionalists, we turn to Dickens *Bleak House*, and find that it is in no way lacking in rich symbolic meaning. So Wilson says:

We may be surprised to return to him and find in him a symbolism of a more complicated reference and a deeper implication than these metaphors that hang as emblems over the door. The Russians themselves, in this respect, appear to have learned from Dickens.  

Each novel of Dickens has some autobiographical origin. Wilson sees the clues of *David Copperfield, Little Dorrit, The Old Curiosity Shop*, in Dickens' embarrassing domestic life after his marriage. In his assessment of Dickens, Wilson seems not to have forgotten his studies in Freud. He comments that:

11. Ibid., P. 32.
12. Ibid., P. 34
The important thing to note in *Little Dorrit*—which was originally to have been called *Nobody’s Fault*—is that the fable is here presented from the point of view of imprisoning states of mind as much as from that of oppressive institutions. This is illustrated in an startling way by *The History of a Self-Tormentor*, which we find toward the end of the book. Here Dickens, with a remarkable pre-Freudian insight, gives a sort of case history of a woman imprisoned in a neurosis which has condemned her to the delusion that she can never be loved. There is still, to be sure, the social implication that her orphaned childhood and her sense of being slighted have been imposed on her by the Victorian attitude toward her illegitimate birth. But her handicap is now simply a thought-pattern, and from that thought-pattern, she is never to be liberated.13

After discussing how a Dickens novel is the fusion of biographical, historical, socio-political and moral factors, Wilson offers a formula to assess the entire corpus of Dickens. As Wilson puts it:

The world of the early Dickens is organized according to a dualism which is based—in its artistic derivation—on the values of melodrama: there are good people and there are good people, there are comics and there are characters played straight. The only complexity of which Dickens is capable is to make one of his noxious characters become wholesome, one of his clowns turn into a serious person.14

In Dickens’ characterization, sometimes a clown becomes a serious person. A classic case in this context is the reform of the scrooge in *A Christmas Carrol*. A reader may consider scrooge as a piece of Christian

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13. Ibid., PP. 50-51.
14. Ibid., P. 55.
folklore transformation. But "scrooge" represents a principle fundamental to the
dynamics of Dickens world and derived from his own emotional constitution.
Dickens' biographer tells us that emotionally Dickens was unstable. This is the
clue to interpret the dualism - good transforming itself into bad, bad into good,
that runs all through Dickens. Wilson adds to this another trait of Dickens, his
habit of making the comic side of his novels a kind of parody on the sentimental
side. We note this in a novel like Nicholas Nichleby.

Dickens' unfinished novel The Mystery of Edwin Drood, seems to
have attracted the attention of Wilson more than any other book. In Dickens'
cannon, largely because of its possibilities and anticipations, the thematic focus
in the novel is on the fusion of good and evil in a single person. According to
Wilson, the subject of Edwin Drood is a single person. "Poe's William Wilson,"
the subject of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the subject of Dorian Gray. It is also the
subject of that greater work than any of these, Dostoevsky's Crime and
Punishment. Making a comparative stance, Wilson remarks that:

Dostoevsky, who owed so much to Dickens and who was probably
influenced by the murder in Chuzzlewit, had produced in 1866 a
masterpiece on the theme at which Dickens is only just arriving in 1869.
Raskolnikov-raskolnik means dissenter-combines in his single person the
two anti-social types of the deliberate criminal and the rebel, which since
Hugh in Barnaby Rudge have always been kept distinct by Dickens.
Dostoevsky, with the courage of his insight, had studied the states of mind
which are the results of a secession from society: the contemptuous will to
spurn and to crush confused with the impulse toward human brotherhood,
the desire to be loved twisted tragically with the desire to destroy and to
kill. But the English Dickens with his middle-class audience would not be able to tell such a story even if he dared to imagine it. In order to stage the 'war in the members', he must contrive a whole machinery of mystification: of drugs, of telepathic powers, of remote oriental cults.15

Wilson's criticism of Dickens' and Kipling establishes the basic relevance of these writers to the Greek myth of Philoctetes. This mythically scaffolded reading of Dickens and Kipling occupies three fourths of the book, *The Wound and the Bow*. This doesn't mean that the significance of a writer depends on the pages which the critique would like to allot to a writer. In a sense, the two readings of the two popular fictionists Dickens and Kipling serve as props to Wilson's comments on the other American and European novelists. The most significant aspect of the artistic aesthetic selves of Dickens and Kipling is their childhood, which became an inseparable part of their creative development. Before we draw into this framework two different novelists like Hemingway and Joyce, let us make a rapid review of Wilson on Kipling.

(iii)

Rudyard Kipling finds a place in *The Wound and The Bow*, as he attracted Wilson's attention as an artist in whom suffering and creativity complimented each other. Wilson makes use of the bio-critical clues to sketch a portrait of the artist under study. In order to understand the eclipse of his reputation as a craftsman, Wilson, in his preface to "The Kipling That Nobody Read" observes:

Who was Kipling? What did he express? What was the history of the remarkable talent which gave him a place, as a craftsman of English

15. Ibid., P. 89.
prose, among the few genuine masters of his day? How was it that the art of his short stories became continually more skillful and intense, and yet that his career appears broken?16

Some of these issues mentioned in citation are to be tackled from a historical and biographical perspective. Rudyard Kipling, son of an English artist and Scholar was born in India, and spent his early six years in India happily. Later, he was taken to England and put under the governance of his Aunt. Kipling had a nightmarish childhood because of the excessive piety of his governess, who tried to instill into his mind not fertility but an acute sense of depression and fear. Kipling who "petted by natives of India, was bullied with the Bible, pursued with suspicions and broken down by cross-examinations". Kipling suffered from a sense of isolation and could not understand why his parents had deserted him. Describing the agonizing experiences, Kipling's sister had this to say, "he was thwarted at every turn by Aunty and the odious Harry, and inhibitions were his daily bread" (WB.99). These traumatic experiences, produced in Kipling a severe nervous breakdown, accompanied by partial blindness and made horrible by hallucinations. Recalling his childhood experiences Kipling himself felt that, it was a "kind of spiritual imprisonment that would affect our dreams" (WB.98). Wilson observes that : "actually the whole work of Kipling's life is to be shot through with hatred" (WB.99). His public school experiences in England associated with floggings, vengeful emotions, catastrophic jokes were more disturbing, than his childhood and boyhood. But, the Kipling of these early years is a lively and sympathetic figure. In Wilson's view, the young Kipling is:

16. Ibid., P. 95.
A newspaper man who has access to everything, the son of a scholar who has studied the natives, he sees the community, like Asmodeus, with all the roofs removed. He is interested in the British of all classes and ranks—the bored English ladies, the vagabond adventurers, the officers and the solidiers both.  

Kipling was an acute observer and easily discriminated between various ethnic populations he came across. His soldier stories not only dramatize the ethnic peculiarities but present a picture of individuals involved in grabbing opportunities in a vast empire whereever they went. "The Courting of Dinab Shadd," admired by Henry James, is one of the stories of Kipling which sticks closest to unregenerate humanity. Kipling had a better understanding of natives of various colonies than most Britishers. Certainly he presented them in literature as nobody ever did. The Hindu otherself of his childhood takes us through into its other world. Wilson suggests that:

The natives Kipling probably understood as few Englishmen did in his time; certainly he presented them in literature as nobody had ever done. That Hindu otherself of his childhood takes us through into its other world. The voices of alien traditions - in the monolques of In Black and White - talk an English which translates their own idiom; and we hear of great lovers and revengers who live by an alien code; young men who have been educated in England and, half- dissociated from native life,find themselves impotent between two civilizations; fierce Afghan tribesmen of the mountains, humble people who have been broken to the mines; loyal Sikhs and untamed mutineers. It is true that there is always the implication that the British are bringing to India modern improvements and sounder

17. Ibid., P. 103.
standards of behaviour. But Kipling is obviously enjoying for its own sake
the presentation of the native point of view, and the whole Anglo-Indian
situation is studied with a certain objectivity.\footnote{Ibid., PP. 104-105.}

Although these years of school and of newspaper work, Kipling
worked staunchly at mastering his craft. Kipling after visiting the Paris exhibition,
even contemplated to write a colonial \textit{Comedie Humaine}. Henry James who
wrote an appreciative preface to a collection of Kipling's early stories, observed
that Kipling "contained the seeds of early English Balzac". Wilson analyzes why
this English Balzac, and the author of the brilliant short stories never developed
into a significant novelist. Wilson quotes Kipling, in order to clarify Kipling's failure
to find a place in the English novel tradition. Analyzing Kipling's two books,
\textit{Stalky \& Co} and \textit{Kim}, which deal with his school days and his youth in India,
Wilson suggests Kipling's failure to produce a classic as:

These works are the products of the author's thirties, and \textit{Kim}, at any rate,
represents Kipling's most serious attempt to allow himself to grow to the
stature of a first-rate creative artist. Each of these books begins with an
antagonism which in the work of a greater writer would have developed
into a fundamental conflict; but in neither \textit{Stalky} nor \textit{Kim} is the conflict ever
permitted to mount to a real crisis. Nor can it even be said to be resolved
: it simply ceases to figure as a conflict.\footnote{Ibid., P. 108.}

\textit{Kim} is a more ambitious and a better work of Kipling. It was
Kipling's successful long story and a first rate book. In this book, we find Kipling
giving his sympathies of imagination a free rein to explore. Kipling in this novel
has dramatically and effectively established for the reader the contrast between
the east - with all its mysticism and its sensuality, its saintliness and roguery - and the English - with their superior organization, their confidence in modern method, and their instinct to brush away the native myths and beliefs. We are shown two entirely different worlds existing side by side and neither really understanding each other. For Kipling, the parallel lines never meet. Wilson observes that:

The fiction of Kipling, then, does not dramatize any fundamental conflict because Kipling would never face one. This is probably one of the causes of his lack of success with long novels. You can make an effective short story, as Kipling so often does, about somebody's scoring off somebody else; but this is not enough for a great novelist, who must show us large social forces, or uncontrollable lines of destiny, or antagonistic impulses of the human spirit, struggling with one another. With Kipling, the right and the wrong of any opposition of forces is usually quite plain at the start; and there is not even the suspense which makes possible the excitement of melodrama.  

The transformation of the early Kipling from an explorer of the various races and creeds of the empire to that of an imperialist may be explained as follows. His early childhood taught him negative emotions like hatred and dislike; which were not dissolved by any higher vision of life. He did not nurture his imagination on anything impersonally oriented and humanly authenticated. Any writer as he develops into a mature one would affirm the values of life. Kipling's visit to America, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and Southern India did not bring him the required human experience, which was later shown by globe-trotters like Forster, Huxley, Greene and Anthony Burges. His appreciation of America and its institutions made him marry an American lady.

20. Ibid., P. 113.
As Wilson humorously observes, "thus the impulse on Kipling's part to assimilate himself to the Americans was neutralized in some degree by Mrs. Kipling's desire to be English."

Apart from these, Kipling was slightly unnerved by the lawlessness of America. His family life in England was one of the docile domesticity. On his first visit to the States, he seems to have said, "I love this people". His love for the American people seem to have altered as he grew up into a staunch imperialist. He very much desired to see America pay tribute to England and identify her interests with those of his mother-land. Nervous and unsteady by temperament, Kipling broke down when he lost his son in the Great War. Some of the poems written before the war do convey the feeling that he was more attracted in dramatizing the loyalty of the colonials to the British Empire, than in the colonials themselves. This attitude made him not an emotionally satisfied artist but a craftsman whose tools produced readable verses and stories. As Wilson observes:

> It is the paradox of Kipling's career that he should have extended the conquests of his craftsmanship in proportion to the shrinking of the range of his dramatic imagination. As his responses to human beings became duller, his sensitivity to his medium increased.21

Although Wilson pays a complement to Kipling's use of language, his sense of both sound and word; he regrets Kipling's incapacity to convey his feelings in terms of a better imaginative base.

His later stories and writings may be classified into five categories: Tales of hatred, practical jokes, studies in neurotic cases, tales of fellowship in

21. Ibid., P. 138.
religion and tales of bereavement. In spite of the success he achieved in some of these writings of his last phase, they remain oddly in contrast with the early writings including Kim, which show a sensitive response to an uncertain human predicament.

The foregoing diagnostic summary of Kipling's major ideas and attitudes gives Wilson the necessary clue to present graphically Kipling's predicament as a writer of the British colonialism. Now, we shall compare Kipling with other Anglo-Indian writers to clarify Wilson's stand.

When we read Kipling and his South-African affiliations, we remember Conrad and his classic, Heart of Darkness. Kurtz in the novel experiences a change in himself not because of the guilt of plundering ivory but from the bad conscience associated with the native rights. Even before reaching Europe, he dies muttering "Horror! Horror!". The conradian method of narration or Conrad's technique is not divorced from the human problem in the novel. The human experience of the novel is intensely felt because of the narrative method.

E.M. Forster's A Passage To India, dramatizes the conflict between the emotional Dr. Aziz and the sober teacher, Fielding. In between, there is Godbole, the mystic and the other British officers. The novel doesn't support any attitude or any religious creed or political ethic. Whether Forster likes India or he is ironical about it, is difficult to say. But, the major symbols of the novel do suggest that harmony between human beings is possible. Graham Greene did not visit India nor like Kipling he is interested in the imperial institutions. But, in novels like the Commedians, the quiet American travels with his aunt, he relegates to the background his catholic interest and dramatizes the possibilities
of harmony available to an agonized humanity. Anthony Burges transactions with Islamic culture did not bear a mature fruit. But, it enlarges his vision dramatized in novels like *The Tremor of Intent*.

The foregoing review of Englishmen whose international affiliations brought them a mature vision of life shows that, the authority behind a classic work of fiction is not a technique or craftsmanship but the vision that the technique conveys. The sum and substance of Wilson's title, "The Kipling That Nobody Read", reminds us of C.S.Lewis's comment on Bacon. Lewis says "everybody has read Bacon, but nobody is found reading Bacon". What Lewis meant was that Bacon is not a well thumbed author. For example, an essay like on "Marriage and Single Life" is not seriously taken by a married man. An adolescent may read it but he may not read it after his marriage. Both Kipling and Bacon are undoubtedly the masters of English prose but they don't have the necessary vision that makes a novel a work of art.

Making a comparative study of Kipling and Hemingway, regarding some of their assumptions of the society, Wilson has the following observations to make:

They have much the same split attitude towards women. Kipling anticipates Hemingway in his beliefs that 'he travels the fastest that travels alone' and that 'the female of the species is more deadly than the male'; and Hemingway seems to reflect Kipling in the submissive infra-Anglo-Saxon women that make his heroes such perfect mistresses. The most striking example of this is the amoeba - like little Spanish girl, Maria, in *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. Like the docile native 'wives' of English officials in the early stories of Kipling, she lives only to serve her lord and
to merge her identity with his; and this love affair with a woman in a sleeping-bag, lacking completely the kind of give and take that goes on between real men and women, has the all-too-perfect felicity of a youthful erotic dream. One suspects that Without Benefit of Clergy was read very early by Hemingway and that it made on him a lasting impression. The pathetic conclusion of this story of Kipling's seems unmistakably to be echoed at the end of A Farewell To Arms.22

Wilson pays a great compliment to Dickens as an artist who turns his wound to a mastery of the bow. Wilson considers Kipling as a writer who missed greatness largely because he failed to transform his wounds into a constructive positive vision of life and affirming the values of life.

IV

Joyce attracted the critical attention of Wilson not as a modern writer but as a Symbolist. In The Wound and the Bow, Wilson discusses Finnegans Wake. The question now is, whether the critical assumptions that sustained Axel's Castle would also help Wilson in interpreting Finnegans Wake. After giving a summary of Ulysses in terms of the Homeric parallel, Wilson observes: "really like- of its but to describe the book in such a way gives no idea of what it is really like - of its psychological and technical discoveries or of its magnificent poetry" (WB P.163).

The preceding observation makes it clear that, Wilson is interested in Ulysses for its poetic rendering. In order to make the reader a part of his characters consciousness, Joyce availed himself of the methods of Symbolism.

22. Ibid., P. 213.
According to Wilson, "Joyce" in "Ulysses," exploited together, as no writer had thought to do before, the resources of both Symbolism and of Naturalism" (WB.P.165) Unlike Proust, Joyce logically executed the plan of his novel and supported it by a sound documentation of detail. In a A Potrait Of An Artist As A Young Man, the development of Stephen Deedalus is dramatized in terms of a variety of styles, so as to highlight a particular aspect of his development as hero.

In Ulysses, Joyce presents a variety of characters, whose consciousness he dramatizes in terms of a successive Symbolistic poems. But, as in a Symbolistic poem, the naturalistic details of place and atmosphere are not rigorously excluded. Thus, Wilson suggests that:

In order to understand what Joyce is doing here, one must conceive a set of Symbolistic poems, themselves involving characters whose minds are represented Symbolistically, depending not from the sensibility of the poet speaking in his own person, but from the poet’s imagination playing a role absolutely impersonal and always imposing itself all the Naturalistic restrictions in regard to the story it is telling at the same time that it allows itself to exercise all the Symbolistic privileges in regard to the way it tells it.23

It is this quality of imaginative re-creation and selective representation that makes us think that Ulysses creates a "living social organism". The form and structure of Ulysses, Wilson seems to say, were the fusion of Flaubert’s narrative methods and Mallarme’s poetic strategies. Speaking about Flaubert’s influence, Wilson Says:

The example of the great prose poet of Naturalism has profoundly influenced Joyce—in his attitude toward the modern bourgeois world and in the contrast implied by the Homeric parallel of "Ulysses" between our own and the ancient world, as well as in an ideal of rigorous objectivity and of adaptation of style to subject—as the influence of that other great Naturalistic poet, Ibsen, ... But Flaubert had, in general, confined himself to fitting the cadence and the phrase precisely to the mood or object described; and even then it was the phrase rather than the cadence, and the object rather than the mood, with which he was occupied— for mood and cadence in Flaubert do not really vary much: he never embodies himself in his characters nor identifies his voice with theirs, and as a result, Flaubert's own characteristic tone of the sombre-pompous-ironic becomes, in the long run, a little monotonous. But, Joyce has undertaken in "Ulysses" not merely to render, with the last accuracy and beauty, the actual sights and sounds among which his people move, but, showing us the world as his characters perceive it, to find the unique vocabulary and rhythm which will represent the thoughts of each. 24

Like most Symbolists, Joyce maintained a deliberate distance between himself and society or the city of Dublin. But, ironically enough, it is about the Dublin he disliked that Joyce writes. The loneliness of the artist and the sacrifice he makes to apprehend the image are very well illustrated in Wilson's study of *Ulysses*. Wilson describing Joyce as the master craftsman of the English language, says that:

The more we read "Ulysses", the more we are convinced of its psychological truth, and the more we are amazed at Joyce's genius in

24. Ibid., P. 164.
mastering and in presenting, not through analysis or generalisation, but by the complete recreation of life in the process of being lived, the relations of human beings to their environment and to each other; the nature of their perception of what goes on about them and of what goes on within themselves; and the interdependence of their intellectual, their physical, their professional and their emotional lives. To have traced all these interdependences, to have given each of these elements its value, yet never to have lost sight of the moral through pre-occupation with the physical, nor to have forgotten the general in the particular; to have exhibited ordinary humanity without either satirising it or sentimentalizing it--this would already have been sufficiently remarkable; but to have subdued all this material to the uses of a supremely finished and disciplined work of art is a feat which has hardly been equalled in the literature of our time.25

Comparing *Ulysses* with *Finnegans Wake*, Wilson at the outset of his discussion in *The Wound and the Bow*, says:

In *Ulysses*, the reader was allowed to perceive the real objective world in which the Blooms and Dedalus lived, and their situation and relationships in that world, so that its distortions or liquefactions under the stress of special psychological states still usually remained intelligible. But, in *Finnegans Wake*, we are not supplied with any objective data until the next to the last chapter, when the hero--and then only rather dimly--wakes up for a short time toward morning; and we are dealing with states of consciousness which, though they sometimes have something in common with the drunken imaginations of the Night Town scene in *Ulysses* or the free associations of Mrs. Bloom's insomniac reveries, are even more

confused and fluid than these; so that it becomes on a first reading the reader’s prime preoccupation to puzzle out who the dreamer is and what has been happening to him. And since Joyce has spent seventeen years elaborating and complicating this puzzle, it is hardly to be expected that one reading will suffice to unravel it completely.  

As the title *Finnegans Wake* suggests, the novel is about a state of dream and a state of wakefulness. But, most of the time as Wilson rightly points out, the reader is in contact with the dream. The dreamer is a Scandinavian called Humphrey Chimpdean Earwicker. The reader is not interested in the Scandanavian pub owner of Dublin. That, the novel is a triumph of language nobody denies. As he usually does, Wilson locates the triumph of Joyce in his use of language and approves of Eliot’s remark that the Joyce is the greatest master of language in English, since Milton. Stretching Eliot’s point a bit further, Wilson observes:

Now Joyce through a large part of his adult life has been almost as blind as Milton; and he has ended, just as Milton did, by dealing principally in auditory sensations. There is as little visualization in *Finnegans Wake* as in *Samson Agonistes*. Our first criticism, therefore, is likely to be that nothing is seen in Earwicker’s dream. It is, after all, not uncommon in dreams to have the illusion of seeing people and places as clearly as when we are awake; and in the dream literature with which we are already familiar—*Alice in Wonderland, La Tentation de Saint Antoine*—the dreamers are visited by plain apparitions, not merely by invisible voices. But we must assume with *Finnegans Wake* that Earwicker’s imagination, like Joyce’s, is almost entirely auditory and verbal. We have been partly prepared by *Ulysses*, in

which we listen to the thoughts of the characters but do not see them very distinctly.\footnote{Ibid., PP. 228-29.}

The foregoing citation is very significant and suggestive. Milton transformed the agony of his blindness into \textit{Samson Agonistes}. Samson's unmatched physical strength is made useless by his blindness. Milton, the great creative artist, created out of it a dramatic poem or the heroic vengeance of Samson. Joyce's semi-blindness served a creative purpose. He compensates his lack of vision (a weakness or a wound physically felt) into a rich panorama of things and thoughts, and became a master of scintillating linguistic presentation. Unlike the French Symbolists, Joyce is not unaware of human misery and suffering. His grasp of the image or the Symbolist symbol is thorough and exact. While Wilson considers him a Symbolist poet in \textit{Axel's Castle}, he considers him as a wounded creative writer in \textit{The Wound and the Bow}, who turned his wound in the magical rhythms of the \textit{Finnegans Wake}. Always writing criticism which satisfied one's sense of social, moral and spiritual reality, Wilson is very much aware of the limitations of Joyce. But, he ends his critique of Joyce with a suggestive note:

Yet, with all this, \textit{Finnegans Wake} has achieved certain amazing successes. Joyce has caught the psychology of sleep as no one also has ever caught it, laying hold on states of mind which is difficult for the waking intellect to re-create, and distinguishing with marvellous delicacy between the different levels of dormant consciousness. There are the relative vividness of events reflected from the day before; the nightmare viscosity and stammering of the heavy slumbers of midnight; the buoyance and self-assertive vitality which gradually emerge from this; the half-
waking of the early morning, which lapses back into the rigmaroles of
dreams; the awareness, later, of the light outside, with its effect as of the
curtain of the eyelids dropped between the mind and the day.28

V

The American novelists who attracted the attention of Wilson have
become a part of the American classics were Henry James, Gertrude Stein, Scott
Fitzgerald, Edith Wharton and Hemingway. In my introductory chapter, I made
reference to the comments of Wilson on Henry James and Fitzgerald. In the
context of my argument, I would like to analyze Wilson’s criticism of Gertrude
Stein, Edith Wharton and Hemingway, to illustrate the critical problem in The
Wound and The Bow. (1941). When Wilson wrote Axel’s Castle (1931), he did
not make the distinction between verse and poetry seriously. He was of the
opinion that prose fiction also is sometimes poetic. Joyce’s Ulysses was
discussed in Axel’s Castle from the point of view of its poetry and well articulated
claim of symbols.

Discussing Gertrude Stein, a student of psychology and medicine,
as a symbolist, Wilson says that, she was considered by William James’ as his
“most brilliant pupil”. Her first book of fiction, Three Lives, acquired a silent
reputation because the few copies of the book were loaned from hand to hand.
It was prefaced by a quotation from Julius Laforgue. It deals with the lives of
three women, two of them German servant girls and the other was a mulatto girl.
Wilson thinks that the novel is processed through a novel kind of realism. A great
distance both in time and ethos separate the narrator from her subject. In a style
which does’nt owe any debt to any school, Stein captures the very rhythms of

28. Ibid., P. 239.
her women character's mental life. Wilson observes that, "behind the limpid and slightly monotonous simplicity of Gertrude Stein's sentences, one becomes aware of her masterly grasp of the organisms, contradictory and indissoluble, which human personalities are" (AC. P. 191).

Her lengthy novel, *The Making Of Americans*, written between 1906-1908, and was published in 1925. Wilson thinks that the novel's interest largely consists in style but its lack of clearly outlined action, well developed characters makes the reader drop the book in the middle. The rhythmic repetitions which were successful in *Three Lives*, to portray the "recurrences, the gradual unwinding of life, and in the dialogue they produced the effect of the speech of slow minded people" (AC. P. 192). But, in this novel, this has been carried to immoderate lengths to suggest some technique of mesmerism. Wilson suggests that:

> With sentences so regularly rhythmical, so needlessly prolix, so many times repeated and ending so often in present participles, the reader is all to soon in a state, not to follow the slow becoming of life, but simply to fall asleep. And the further we get, the more difficult we find it to keep our mind on what we are reading. 29

Her political satire, *Have They Attacked Mary He Giggled* (1917) although it is a genre by itself, its success depends on its use of language in which colourless words are made to serve in a classic way in embodying a classical meaning, in the sense, as something which does'nt strike immediately, but can be felt on a re-reading of a passage.

Always emphasizing the idea that a Symbolist poem uses suppressed symbols and words disguised as symbols, Wilson suggests that, the Symbolist use of language and narrative technique of Stein are symbolist in origin, but not directly derived from the Symbolists. Summing up his central thesis on the Symbolist movement in modern literature, Wilson observes:

The original Symbolists supposed themselves to be defending the value of suggestion in literature as against the documentation of Naturalism and the logic of rationalism-- and both they and their opponents seemed to tend to take it for granted that the suggestion was all on one side and the sense all on the other. We have already noted this tendency in Valery, in Eliot and in Yeats, and we have stumbled over the difficulties it leads to. Now, as a matter of fact, all literature, all writing, all speech, depends equally upon suggestion; the "meaning" of words is what they suggest. Speaking accurately, it is impossible to say that one kind of writing suggests, where as another kind proves or states. Any literary work, if it accomplishes its purpose, must superinduce in the reader a whole complex of what we are accustomed to call thoughts, emotions and sensations-- a state of consciousness, a state of mind; it depends for its effectiveness upon a web of associations as intricate and in the last analysis as mysterious as our minds and bodies themselves. Our words themselves are the prime symbols, and the only originality of the Symbolists consisted in reminding people of the true nature and function of words. It is of course possible to think of words abstractly so that they shall seem to have pure definite meanings, but the fact remains that as soon as we begin to use them, we cannot help pouring them full of suggestion by our inflections, our pauses, our tones or by their order and
Whether the enunciative modalities of symbolist aesthetic outlined by Wilson in the preceding citation can be brought into a narrative work is exemplified in Joyce's *Ulysses*. The success of Joyce depends not on metaphor, but on metonymy, which indicates not the relationship of things, but the contiguity of things. As a symbolist novelist whose selective dramatization of peculiar states of consciousness, nervous stability and debility, Stein showed to a novelist like Hemingway how to catch the banal rhythms of life, and the incessant defeat of the human heroics through a language and a dialect popularized by Mark Twain.

VI

Edmund Wilson's review of Hemingway's fiction in "*Hemingway: A Gauge of Morale*", affirms that he maintained an inseparable bond with society and mitigates the charge that he was indifferent to social and human relationships. His whole work is a criticism of society responding to every pressure of the moral atmosphere of the time, and he felt at the roots of human relations, with a sensistivity almost unrivalled. Whatever he achieved in the world, political as well as atheletic, depends on personal courage and strength. With Hemingway, Wilson feels that, "courage and strength are always thought of in physical terms, so that he tends to give the impression that the bullfighter who can take it and dish it out is more of a man, and that the sole duty of the counter revolutionary socialist is to get the counter-revolutionary gang before they can get him.

30. Ibid., PP. 195-96.
But, ideas, however correct, will never prevail by themselves: there must be people who are prepared to stand or fall with them, and the ability to act on principle is still subject to the same competitive laws which operate in sporting contests and sexual relations. As Wilson, observes:

Hemingway has expressed with genius the terrors of the modern man at the danger of losing control of his world, and he has also, within his scope, provided his own kind of antidote. This antidote, paradoxically, is almost entirely moral. Despite Hemingway’s preoccupation with physical contests, his heroes are almost always defeated physically, nervously, practically: their victories are moral ones. He himself, when he trained himself stubbornly in his unconventional unmarketable art in Paris, which had other fashions, gave the prime example of such a victory; and if he has sometimes, under the menace of the general panic, seemed on the point of going to pieces as an artist, he has always pulled himself together the next moment. The principle of the Bourdon gauge, which is used to measure the pressure of liquids, is that a tube which has been curved into a coil will tend to straighten out in proportion as the liquid inside it is subjected to an increasing pressure.31

Hemingway’s book, *In Our Time*, was an odd and original book. It has the appearance of a miscellany of stories and fragments, but, actually, the parts are hung together to produce a definite effect. There were two distinct series of pieces which alternated with one another, one a set of brief and brutal sketches of police shootings, bull fights, cries, hanging of criminals, and incidents of the army, and the other, a set of short stories dealing in its principal sequence

with the growing up of an American boy (Nick Adams). For Hemingway, it is not that life is'nt enjoyable. As Wilson points out:

The brutality of life is always there, and it is somehow bound up with the enjoyment... The condition of life is pain; and the joys of the most innocent surface are somehow tied to its stifled pangs.

The resolution of this dissonance in art made the beauty of Hemingway's stories. He had in the process tuned a marvellous prose out of the colloquial American speech, with its simple declarative sentences and its strings of Nordic monosyllables, he got effects of the utmost subtlety.32

It is a commonplace of Mark Twain and Hemingway's criticism that Hemingway and a host of other writers owed their stylistic alchemy to the Mississippi slang of Mark Twain. Comparing Hemingway with a Russian writer like Turgenev, Wilson says that, he, "has brought to an immense and wild country the freshness of a new speech and a sensibility not yet conventionalized by literary associations" (TWB. P. 192). In the same time, writers like Ring Lardner, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, were using American language for irony, lyric poetry or psychological insight. Hemingway seemed to have learned from them all. As Wilson suggests, "he is now able to charge this naive accent with a new complexity of emotion, a new shade of emotion: a malaise. The wholesale shattering of human beings in which he has taken part has given the boy a touch of panic" (TWB. P. 194).

In his next book, The Sun Also Rises, all the things that are wrong with human life are there, the feeling of insecurity has deepened, and the young

32. Ibid., P. 192.
American now appears in a seriously damaged condition, and has been incapacitated sexually through the wounds received in the war. Commenting on the style, Wilson points out that, "Here the membrane of the style has been stretched taut to convey the vibrations of these qualms. The dry sunlight and the green summer landscapes have been invested with a sinister quality which must be new in literature" (TWB. P. 195).

"We suffer and we make suffer, and everybody loses out in the long run; but in the mean time we can lose with honour" (TWB. p. 195). This code still markedly figures and still supplies a dependable backbone in Hemingway's next book, *Men Without Women*. As Wilson observes:

Here Hemingway has mastered his method of economy in apparent casualness and relevance in apparent indirection, and has turned his sense of what happens and the way in which it happens into something as hard and clear as a crystal but as disturbing as a great lyric. Yet, it is usually some principle of courage, of honour, of pity -- that is, some principle of sportsmanship in its largest human sense -- upon which the drama hinges.³³

Thus, the Hemingway of the middle twenties expressed the romantic disillusion and set the favourite pose for the period. It was the moment of gallantry in heartbreak, grim and nonchalant banter, and heroic dissipation.

The novel, *A Farewell To Arms*, followed *Men Without Women*. Though in a sense it was not so serious an affair, it was beautifully written and quite moving. No other book has caught so well the strangeness of life in the

³³. Ibid., P. 196.
army, for an American in Europe during the war, as this one. The new places to
which one was sent, of which one had never heard, and the things as one saw
them, when one was quartered among them or obliged to perform some
common work with them, the pleasure of which one managed to cheat the war,
intensified by the uncertainty of horror, and the horror almost taken for granted,
the love affairs always subject to being suddenly broken up, yet carried on while
they lassed in a spirit of irresponsible freedom which derived from one's having
forfeited control of all one's other actions - this Hemingway could get into his
book under an aspect fully idyllic.

_A Farwell To Arms_ is a tragedy, and the lovers are shown as
innocent victims with no relation to the forces that torment them. They
themselves are not tormented within by that dissonance between personal
satisfaction and the suffering one shares with others. It is, as the author once
said, a _Romeo And Juliet._

- Elaborating the point, Wilson says:

We are confronted with the paradox that Hemingway, who possesses so
remarkable a mimetic gift in catching the tone of social and national types
and in main his people talk appropriately, had not shown any very solid
sense of character, or indeed, any real interest in it. The people in the
short stories are satisfactory because he has only to hit them off: the point
of the story does not lie in personalities, but in the emotion to which a
situation gives rise. This is true even in _The Sun Also Rises_ , where the
characters are sketched with wonderful cleverness. But, in _A Farwell To
Arms_ , as soon as we are brought into real intimacy with the lovers, as
soon as the author is obliged to see them through a searching personal
experience, we find merely in idealized relationship, the abstractions of a lyric emotion.\textsuperscript{34}

*Death In The Afternoon,* shows a new development for Hemingway. He writes a book not merely in the first person, but, in the first person in his own character, and the results are unexpected and disconcerting. *Death In The Afternoon,* had its value as an exposition of bullfighting, and Hemingway is able to use the subject as a text for an explicit statement of his conception of man eternally pitting himself against the animal force and the odds of death. The book is infected by a queer kind of maudlin emotion, which sounds at once neurotic and drunken. He overdoes his glorification of the bravery and martyrdom of the bullfighter. He offsets the virility of the bullfighters by anecdotes of the male homosexuals and that excitement of the spectacle into the mouth of an imaginary old lady. The whole thing becomes a little hysterical. This hysterical tone leads to the exaltation of the image of the hero and his code. Wilson now observes that: the master of that precise and clean style now indulges in purple patches who goes on spreading for pages.

As Wilson suggests:

We are compelled to recognize that as soon as Hemingway, "drops the burning-glass of the disciplined and objective art with which he has learned to concentrate in a story the light of emotions that flood in on him, he straightaway becomes befuddled, slops over".\textsuperscript{35}

In the mean time, he publishes *Winner Take Nothing.* It deals more effectively with the theme of contemporary decadence which is implied in his

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., P. 199.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., P. 200.
panegyric of the bullfighter. The stories constitute one of the finest examples in keeping up a code of decency in the face of the hazards and pains of life.

Now, Hemingway begins to indulge himself in personal exhibitionism. This is a phase in which he is occupied with building up his public personality. His characters also run out of fortitude and bravado. Hemingway has already become a legend, as Menceken as in the twenties. As Wilson says: "He is the Hemingway of the handsome photographs with the sportsman's tan and the outdoor grin, with the ominous resemblance to Clark Gable, who poses with a giant marlin" and he exploits this personality for profit.

*Green Hills Of Africa,* owes its failure to falling between two genres of personal exhibitionism and fiction. Hemingway does not try to present his own role objectively, and the sophisticated technique of the fiction comes to look artificial. Wilson feels that, "certainly some deep agitation is working upon Hemingway the artist. Craftsmanship and style, taste and sense, have all alike gone by the board. The negative attitude toward human beings has here become definitely malignant (TWB. P. 205). His critics of the left has been complaining, that "he shows no interest in political issues, but his interest in his fellow-beings seems actually to be drying up. Thus, the disquiet of the Hemingway of the 'twenties' had been, as Wilson had said:

Undruggable - that is, in his books themselves, he had tried to express it, not drug it, had given it an appeasement in art; but now there sets in, in the Hemingway of the 'thirties', what seems to be a deliberate self-drugging. The situation is indicated objectively in The Gambler, The Nun and the Radio, one of the short stories of 1933.36

36. Ibid., P. 204.
With his little epic, *To Have And Have Not*, "there did rush into this vaccum the blast of the social issue, which had been roaring in the wind like a forest fire" (WB.P. 204). In this, Hemingway has exploited deliberately the impotence of a decadent society against the background of homosexuality, impotence and masturbation among the wealthy holiday makers in Florida - Popeye-Morgan is shown gratifying his wife with the same indefatigable dexterity which he has displayed in his other feats. In *To Have And Have Not*, is the idea that in an atmosphere in which man has been set against man, in which it is always a question whether your companion straightforward American will turn suspicious and cruel. Wilson succinctly puts it that:

Again Hemingway, with his barometric accuracy, has rendered a moral atmosphere that was prevalent at the moment he was writing - a moment when social relations were subjected to severe tensions, when they seemed sometimes already in disintegration. But, the heroic Hemingway legend has at this point invaded his fiction and, inflaming and inflating his symbols, has produced an implausible hybrid, half Hemingway character, half nature myth.37

Hemingway had not himself particularly laboured this moral of individualism versus solidarity, but, the critics of the left laboured it for him and received his least creditable piece of fiction as the delivery of a new revelation. *The Fifth Column*, which is the story of a Fascist conspiracy, is an exceedingly silly production. It is in the nature of a small boy's fantasy, and would probably be considered extravagant by most writers of books for boys. Wilson observes that:

37. Ibid., P. 206.
He has progressed from grass-hoppers and trout through bulls and lions and kudus to Chinamen and Cubans, and now to Fascists. Hitherto the act of destruction has given rise for him to complex emotions: he has identified himself not merely with the injurer but also with the injured; there has been a masochistic complement to the sadism. But now, this paradox which splits our natures, and which has instigated some of Hemingway's best stories, need no longer present perplexities to his mind. The Fascists are dirty bastards, and to kill them is a righteous act. He who had made a separate peace, who had said farewell to arms, has found a reason for taking them up again in a spirit of rabietic fury unpleasantly reminiscent of the spy mania and the sacred anti-German rage which took possession of so many civilians and staff officers under the stimulus of the last war.38

In *The Fifth Column*, the drugging process has been carried further still. The hero who has become finally indistinguishable from the false or publicity Hemingway, has here dosed himself not only with whisky, but with a seductive and desirous woman, for whom he has the most admirable reasons for not taking any responsibility, with sacred rage, with the excitement of a bombardment, and with indulgence in that headiest of sports, for which he has now the same excellent reasons, the bagging of human beings.

But, his short stories of this period have a great deal more body - they are longer and more complex - than the comparitively meagre anecdotes collected in *Winner Take Nothing*. Here are his real artistic success with the material of his adventures in South Africa, which makes up for the miscarried *Green Hills*. *The Short Happy Life Of Francis Macomber* and *The Snows Of Kilimanjaro*.

38. Ibid., P. 209.
The emotion which principally comes through in Francis Macomber and The Snows Of Kilimanjaro, and also in The Fifth Column is the growing antagonism towards women. This antagonism of Hemingway is found running throughout his work. Wilson's comparative study of this antagonism in Kipling and Hemingway, and probable influence of Kipling's work on Hemingway has been already mentioned in the section on Kipling.

VII

While Edmund Wilson's assessment of Hemingway shows his liking for the novelist, his critique of Edith Wharton is very professional. Wilson would like to assess the achievements of Mrs. Wharton, during the years of 1905-1907, which made her important, when there were few American writers worth reading for the technical triumph and the clarity of thought. The influences of Paul Bourget and Henry James seems to have presided at the birth of her talent. All her early stories take place either in a social void or in Italy or France and have the character of an expensive upholstery.

With her publication of The House Of Mirth (1905), Edith Wharton emerged as an historian of the American society of her time. For a period of fifteen years she produced work of considerable interest for its realism and its intensity. Mrs Wharton seriously began writing fiction after marriage during a period of nervous breakdown. Her husband had some mental disease which gradually began to grow worse. She depended on her writings through her difficult years which became more and more painful. As Wilson observes:

Her work was, then, the desperate product of a pressure of maladjustments; and it very soon took a direction totally different from that
of Henry James, as a lesser disciple of whom she is sometimes pointlessly listed. James's interests were predominantly aesthetic: he is never a passionate social prophet; and only rarely-as in The Ivory Tower, which seems to turn to have derived from Mrs. Wharton -does he satirize plutocratic America. But a passionate social prophet is precisely what Edith Wharton became. At her strongest and most characteristic, she is a brilliant example of the writer who relieves an emotional strain by denouncing his generation.  

In all her books, she is as pessimistic as Hardy or Maupassant. Her volume of poems, Artemis To Acteon, published in 1909, is the pure expression of hopelessness. The catastrophe in Edith Wharton's novels is almost the upshot of a conflict between the individual and the social group. Analyzing this conflict, Wilson suggests that:

Her tragic heroines and heroes are the victims of the group pressure of convention; they are passionate or imaginative spirits, hungry for emotional and intellectual experience, who find themselves locked into a small closed system, and either destroy themselves by beating their heads against their prison or suffer a living death in resigning themselves to it. Out of these themes she got a sharp pathos all her own.  

Edith Wharton had a great hand with all kinds of American furnishings and their concomitant landscape-gardening. Her first book was a work on interior decoration. As Wilson opines, "no other writer of comedies of any other place or time had depended so much on stage sets and, especially, on

39. Ibid., P. 176.  
40. Ibid., P. 177.
stage properties (TWB. P. 178). For Wharton, the decors become the agents of tragedy, and “the people of Edith Wharton are pursued by them as by spirits of doom and ultimately crushed by their accumulation” (TWB. P. 178). She is not only “one of the great pioneers, but also the poet, of interior decoration” (TWB. P. 176).

_The Custom Of The Country_ (1913), Edith Wharton’s next novel about the rich, where "she piles up the new luxury of the era to an altitude of ironic grandeur, like the glass mountain in the Arabian Nights, which the current of her imagination manages to make incandescent" (TWB. P. 179). _The Custom Of The Country_ opens the way for Lewis, who dedicated _Main Street_ to Edith Wharton. The other side of this world of wealth, which annihilates every impulse toward excellence, is a poverty which also annihilates. Though Edith Wharton knew the top strata better than anything else, both in _The House Of Mirth_ and _The Fruit Of The Tree_, she is always aware of the pit of misery which is implied by the wastefulness of the plutocracy, and the horror of this pit is one of the forces that determine the action. Wilson suggests that, "there is a puritan in Edith Wharton, and this Puritan is always insisting that we must face the unpleasant and the ugly" (TWB. P. 181).

_Ethan Frome_ _Bunner Sisters_ and _Summer_ is parallel to the above series. Edith Wharton had escaped from the hopeless situation created by her husband’s insanity. _Bunner Sisters_ is a transposition of this, and in _Summer_, the relief of tension is evidently the result of the new found freedom. She finally was detached from marriage and took up her permanent residence in France. Now her blinding bitterness gradually subsides, and now as the American background fades from her work, the intensity dies from her work. Though the themes are
related to earlier works, now Wharton is able to contemplate it without quite the same rancour, and soften it with a poetic mist of distance. Unlike Henry James, who could make a balanced comedy of this in the conflict in Europeans, Edith Wharton still "feels an active resentment against the pusillanimity of the provincial group" and "a special complaint against the timid American male who has let the lady down" (TWB. P.184).

From The Age Of Innocence, through The House Of Mirth To Ethan Frome, the typical masculine figure in Edith Wharton's fiction is a man set apart from the neighbours by education, intellect, but lacking the force or the courage either to impose himself or to get away. Commenting on the heroes of her novels, Wilson says that:

These men are usually captured and dominated by women of conventional morals and middle-class ideals; when an exceptional woman comes along who is thirsting for something different and better, the man is unable to give it to her. This special situation, Mrs. Wharton, with some conscious historical criticism but chiefly impelled by a feminine animus, has dramatized with much vividness and intelligence. There are no first-rate men in these novels.41

Wilson analyzing Mrs Wharton's career, and that everything that is valuable in her work lies within a quite sharply delimited area-between The House of Mirth and The Age of Innocence.

Wilson observes that:

It is sometimes true of women writers - less often, I believe, of men - that a manifestation of something like genius may be stimulated by some

41. Ibid., P. 185.
exceptional emotional strain, but will disappear when the stimulus has passed. With a man, his professional, his artisan's life is likely to persist and evolve as a partially independent organism through the vicissitudes of his emotional experience. Henry James in a virtual vacuum continued to possess and develop his *metier* up to his very last years. But, Mrs Wharton had no *metier* in this sense.\(^{42}\)

As Edith Wharton settled down in the congenial society of Paris, she became comfortably adjusted, and with her adjustment, the real intellectual force she had exerted through a decade and half evaporates almost completely. Her grimness melts rapidly into benignity. She even loses the style she has mastered. As Wilson points out,

"Beginning with a language rather ponderous and stiff, the worst features of the style of Henry James and a stream of clichés from old novels and plays, she finally- about the time of *Ethan Frome*, worked out a prose of flexible steel, bright as electric light and striking out sparks of wit and colour, which has the quality and pace of New York and is one of its distinctive artistic products. But, now not merely does she cease to be brilliant, she becomes almost commonplace".\(^{43}\)

*The Glimpses of The Moon, The Writing of Fiction and A Backward Glance* were found to be disappointing. Her later works show a dismay and a shrinking before what seemed to her the social and moral chaos of an age which was battering down the old edifice that she herself had once depicted as a prison.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., P. 185.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., P. 186.
Wilson commenting on her greatness says that:

Her culture was rather heavy and grand— a preponderance of Goethe and Schiller, Racine and La Bruyere— but it was remarkably solid for an American women and intimately related to her life. And she was one of the few Americans of her day who cared enough about serious literature to take the risks of trying to make some contribution to it. ... Though, she herself in her later years was reduced to contemptuous complaints that the writers of the new generations had ‘abandoned creative art for pathology’, she did have the right to insist that she had ‘fought hard’ in earlier days ‘to turn the wooden dolls’ of conventional fiction, ‘into struggling, suffering human beings’. She had been one of the few such human beings in the America of the early nineteen- hundreds who found an articulate voice and set down a durable record.44

After completing his study of Edith Wharton’s fiction, Wilson observes that, there is a difference between her American writing and what she wrote in France. She seems to have missed the nutrition, the native roots supply, to one’s creative effort.

All the three American writers, we have been discussing neither entirely confirm to the myth of Philoctetes nor do they entirely and thoroughly exemplify the symbolist aesthetic as it developed in America. One of the traits of Wilson’s criticism is to bring to a central focus themes and ideas. It is this principle that draws him to Casanova; who is not taken seriously by the English speaking countries. Most readers know him as a notorious character in the history of illicit life and a purposeless traveller in the history of travel literature. His

44. Ibid., PP. 188-89.
Memoirs, which Wilson reviews in a brief study is not a well thumbed book. Most episodes in the Memoirs, have a novelistic play and presentation. Rossetti's Confessions, as Wilson observes is similar to Casinova's book in some respects. If one considers Memoirs a novel, it appears as if Casinova added a new dimension to fiction. The great quality of his writing is it does'nt trivialize a given experience. Sentimentality and false sympathy one does'nt come across in Casinova. It tells more about Wilson's method of marshalling a critical argument than the uniqueness of Casinova's Memoirs and his personality. As a critic, Wilson is fond of rescuing neglected books from utter obscurity.

VIII

In his essays, in The Wound And The Bow, Wilson tried to establish the crucial connection between the psychic wound which each of these artists appears to have suffered and the "gift"- the wisdom, insight and the artistic power- which the wound made possible. As Wilson turns the Philoctetes myth into a parable of the artist and the society, readers may be tempted to see Wilson as a symbolic figure of the critic - Neoptolemus. Leon Ednel's argument, in his introduction to the Twenties is pertinent in this context.

The myth of Philoctetes, and his terrible wound, which prevents him from using his god-given skill, is rooted in the mental and moral history of man. Aeschylus and Euripides had treated it; but only incomplete accounts remain of their plays on this theme. The extant play of Sophocles served Edmund Wilson as the basis for his book, The Wound And The Bow. It is not difficult to see why Wilson was drawn into this myth out of all the myths of the Greeks, although few modern writers were attracted by it. Andre Gide had written into it characteristic intellectual version, linking mystical experience with the homoerotic overtones of
feeling between Philoctetes and the youth Neoptolemus. Wilson's war experiences had injured him to all kinds of wounds. He was drawn to both principal characters: to Philoctetes as the supreme craftsman who is prevented by his wound from exercising his craft; and to the youth Neoptolemus, for particular reasons which we must examine. Aware of his own hurt, he grasped the deepest symbolic significance of the Sophoclean play.

The reader sees a delicate question of "identification". It is not easy to identify with Philoctetes; he is a creature of pitiable suffering; he is ill, ostracized, turned in on himself. A reader's identification tends to be with health, not sickness. The wound is physical, and symbolic. Edmund's wound was psychological. Leonel Ednel says that the former stretcher-bearer and stauncer of soldiers' wounds, the caretaker of the dead and the dying, felt a profound link with Neoptolemus, even while his intellect focussed on the craft and dilemma of Philoctetes" (Twenties, X). Explaining the role of the young man, Edmund Wilson says:

Only by the intervention of one who is guilless enough and human enough to treat him, (Philoctetes) not as a monster, nor yet as a mere magical property which is wanted for accomplishing some end, but simply as another man, whose sufferings elicit his sympathy and whose courage and pride he admires. When this human relation has been realized, it seems at first that it is to have the consequence of frustrating the purpose of the expedition and ruining the Greek campaign. Instead of winning over the outlaw, Neoptolemus has outlawed himself as well, at a time when both the boy and the cripple are desperately needed by the Greeks.45


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Neoptolemus, in this re-creation, becomes a kind of archetypal critic, as Philoctetes represents the archetypal artist. He reflects even more than the archer, the image and vocation of Edmund Wilson. We can notice in this essays, biographical depths the double identification of the triple thinker: the Edmund Wilson whose wound prevented him from being poet, playwright, novelist on the scale of his contemporaries, and the Wilson whose fight of intellectual penetration and of sympathy made him one with the "common humanity" of art and society, one with Neoptolemus. Edmund Wilson tells us that "in taking the risk to his cause which is involved in the recognition of common humanity with the sick man, in refusing to break his word, he dissolves Philoctetes' stubbornness, and thus cures him and sets him free, and saves the campaign as well. "In defining Neoptolemus, Edmund Wilson defined himself" (Twenties, XLI).

The vision came to Edmund Wilson by degrees. He made himself a mediator between art and the world, between the cunning of men like Odysseus, who "used" art, and those who were dedicated to true creation. He had tested the arts and tried his hand at poem, story and play. He had moved from the high flying life of the 1920's to the "proletarian" era of the economic depression. At the beginning of the new World War, with heightened vision he was able to merge his diverse weapons into the single, powerful bow of human criticism. He accepted himself at last for the supreme critic he was, and entered into the role with a renewed vigour and all his acquired authority. As Leon Ednel observes:

No other of our critics had served quite so long in preparing himself; beside Edmund, the much respected Desmond MacCarthy in England, with his fineness of mind and delicacy of spirit, seemed a gentleman
amateur; the brilliant V.S. Pritchett came closer, but he was more specialized. Van Wyck Brooks was more historian than critic; and then he disliked the moderns. ... The far ranging criticism of Edmund was Edmund's particular bow, the one right instrument created by the necessities of his particular life experience. He could lend himself in a true humanistic spirit to the literary arts in America; and with his extraordinary skills of reportage, to politics and society as well. He could practice the "sympathy and judicial detachment" he described in his father. He could offer himself - even if it made him an outlaw - as a "general touchstone" and be neither a judge, a school master, nor a dilettante, but a helper, a brother of the artist. More than intermediary, such a critic partakes of the law of the healer as well as the philosopher. He becomes the enemy of the deceivers and the entrepreneurs. To be such a truth bearer, it was necessary to be open to language, psychology, history: he must understand the strivings even of the little men of art... quite as much as the protean artists who transcend place and time and speak to the entire world. Art, an obstinate record of man's imagination, far from being a magician's sleight of hand, becomes in this light the fullest expression of the artist's being, his despair, and his serenity; it was the duty of criticism to see the grand lines, the sweep of a great work, its impact upon society and its time, and on posterity.46

The objections to this linking of genius and psychological wound are predictable. In his patient and sympathetic study of Wilson, Charles Frank argues that "regardless of his validity as an explanation of the genesis of a work of art", the theory is "unnecessary and suspect in literary explication - and

46. Ibid., P. XLIII.
worthless in evaluation". Frank is right in one respect, in the sense that Wilson has reduced art to its causes. But, to conclude that Wilson is unaware of the implications of his thesis would be a mistake; and one has to turn to "Marxism and Literature", and "The Historical Interpretation Of Literature" from the *The Triple Thinkers*, where Wilson carefully points out that regardless of what the work may have meant for the artist in terms of his own conflicts, the meaning of the work for the audience is by no means restricted in this way:

In art ... a sort of law of moral interchangeability prevails: we may transpose the actions and the sentiments that move us into terms of whatever we do or are ourselves. Real genius of moral insight is a motor which will start any engine. When Proust, in his wonderful chapter on the death of the novelist Bergotte, speaks of those moral obligations which impose themselves inspite of everything and which seem to come through to humanity from some source outside its wretched self he is describing a kind of duty which he felt only in connection with the literary work which he performed in his dark and fetid room: yet he speaks for every moral, aesthetic or intellectual passion which holds the expendiencies of the world in contempt.\(^{47}\)

In *The Historical Interpretation Of Literature*, Wilson faces directly the problem of evaluation. The literary analyst and the literary critic have different aims: the analyst "is of course not concerned with the comparative values of his patients any more than the surgeon is" : He cannot tell you why the neurotic Dostoevsky produces a work of immense value to his fellows while another man with the same neurotic pattern will become a public menace. Freud himself emphatically states in his study of Leonardo's that his method can make no

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\(^{47}\) Wilson, Edmund : *The Triple Thinkers*, (Boston, North Eastern University Press, 1984), P. 205.
attempt to account for Leonardo's genius, the problems of comparative artistic value still remain after we have given attention to the Freudian psychological factor just as they do after we have given attention to the Marxist economic factor and to the racial and geographical factors. As Wilson suggests:

No matter how thoroughly and searchingly we may have scrutinized works of literature from the historical and biographical points of view, we must be ready to attempt to estimate, in some such way as Saintsbury and Eliot do, the relative degrees of success attained by the products of the various periods and the various personalities. We must be able to tell good from bad, the first-rate from the second-rate. We shall not otherwise write literary criticism at all, but merely social or political history as reflected in literary text, or psychological case histories from past eras, or, to take the historical point of view in its simplest and most, academic form, merely chronologies of books that have been published.48

How are we to tell good art from bad? Wilson's answer to this question is rather flat, rather disappointing, and quite possibly true, We follow the judgements of a sensitive, informed elite (their judgement in turn rests on an "emotional reaction"). How do we identify this elite? Wilson suggests that:

Well, it can only be said of them that they are self-appointed and self-perpetuating, and that they will compel you to accept their authority. Imposters may try to put themselves over, but these quacks will not last. The implied position of the people who know about the literature (as is also the case in every other art) is simply that they know what they know, and that they are determined to impose their opinions by main force of eloquence or assertion on the people who do not know.49

48. Ibid., P. 267.
49. Ibid., P. 268.
The ultimate issue is thus the cause of the emotional response that determines our recognition, that is, by the elite of valuable works: Wilson further opines that:

In my view, all our intellectual activity, in whatever field it takes place, is an attempt to give a meaning to our experience—that is, to make life more practicable; for by understanding things we make it easier to survive and get around among them. The mathematician Euclid, working in a convention of abstractions, shows us relations between the distances of our unwieldy and cluttered-up environment upon which we are able to count. A drama of Sophocles also indicates relations between the various human impulses, which appear so confused and dangerous, and it brings out a certain justice of Fate...Upon which we can also depend... some writers (as well as some scientists) have a different kind of explicit message beyond the reassurance implicit in the mere feat of understanding life or of moulding the harmony of artistic form. Not content with such an achievement as that of Sophocles... Such writers attempt, like Plato, to think out and recommend a procedure for turning it into something better. But other departments of literature—lyric poetry such as Sappho's, for example—have less philosophical content than Sophocles. A lyric gives us nothing but a pattern imposed on the expression of feeling; but this pattern of metrical quantities and of consonants and vowels that balance has the effect of reducing the feeling, however unruly or painful it may seem when we experience it in the course of our lives, to something orderly, symmetrical and pleasing; and it also relates this feeling to the more impressive scheme, works it into the larger texture, of the body of poetic art. The discord has been resolved, the anomaly subjected to
discipline. And this control of emotion by the poet has the effect at second-hand of making it easier for the reader to manage his own emotions.50

The above citation completes the argument begun in *The Wound And The Bow*, that art is not merely the expression of psychological tensions, and it may also help to relieve the tensions. Wilson anticipates the objection which must be raised when one locates the sign of literature in the emotional response of a literature of the trashiest kind? Wilson explicates this problem by suggesting that:

They are: crude and limited people do certainly feel some such emotion in connection with work that is limited and crude. The man who is more highly organized and has a wider intellectual range will feel it in connection with work that is finer and more complex. The difference between the emotion of the more highly organized man and emotion of the less highly organized one is a matter of mere gradation. When I was speaking of the genuine connoisseurs who establish the standards of taste, I meant, of course, the people who can distinguish Grade A and who prefer it to other grades.51

In any event, Wilson’s concept of criticism is by no means the most interesting part of his work. What matters is the way in which he performed the duties of the critic as he saw them, forming and directing the taste of his readers, for over forty astonishingly productive years. Alfred Kazin’s tribute to Malraux—that he “aroused the reader on behalf of the imagination that had aroused him” -

50. Ibid., P. 269-270.
51. Ibid., P. 270.
is supremely true of Wilson as well. In this respect, he is the finest critic America
has yet produced. Wilson's sobriety as a critic is characterized by his conviction
that any literary genre does'nt exist in a vaccum. He does'nt seem to subscribe
himself to the Kantian idea of the purposive purposelessness of art. Literature as
art has its own significance which can be conveyed in a critical jargon. But its
significance as a human activity can be conveyed in a language that is plain and
straightforward. Not only in *The Wound And The Bow*, but in *Axel's Castle* and
*The Triple Thinkers*, Wilson seems to consider novel as a Social epic, whether it
is interpreted in terms of the myth of Axel or Philoctetes. Its roots are in human
activity and atmosphere. It is in this sense that while the symbolist novels are
densely metaphorical and merge towards poetry, the Dickensian novel tries to
draw into its field the metonymic manifestations of socio-economic institutions.