"Poets", as Ezra Pound observed, "are the antennae of the race". T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' (1922), Wallace Stevens's Harmonium (1923), William Carlos William's Spring and All (1923), and Pound's A Draft of XVI Cantos (1925) have recorded the violent disjunctions characteristic of twentieth century life. Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass, 'a language experiment', has given a 'new' kind of poetry breaking the conventional versification and poetic tradition and making every territory of life, living and humanity its province. Robert Frost with his 'loose iambic' and characteristic tension between verse meter and speech rhythms as in A Boy's Will (1913), is an intermediary between Wordsworth and William Carlos Williams. Frost's A Masque of Reason (1945) and A Masque of Mercy (1913), aiming at extended composition and venturing into poetic and his Complete Poems (1967) reflect contemporary American imagination. The secret of Frost's wide appeal seems to have been that his poetry, from the beginning, caught fresh vitality without recourse to the limitations of modern experimental

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techniques. He carried on his own distinct experiments, emphasizing speech rhythms and 'the sound of sense'. He regarded 'form' as something essential to poetry in general, in every age. Form in poetry is modulated by the relation, and the balance of emotion and thought, of the image and metaphor, of the transient and the permanent. Giving form in poetry is employing that intricate method of conveying organization, shapeliness, fitness, to the matter or substance of context or meaning of the poem. Frost has asserted that this formal fusion of distinct elements shall achieve the personal idiom of the poet's expression without sacrificing that happy correspondence which must exist between its own experience and the experience of the reader of the poem. He thought that the present moment would serve as an agent to revive afresh similar experience lost in memory with deep emotional intensity. To him the poem is but a synthesis of impulse and art. He valued both spontaneity and lyricism as essentials in poetic artistic expression. For Frost poetry is a metaphor. He has created dramatic situation with many twists in most of his poems through speakers and characters involved in the progress of action of the theme.

Wallace Stevens does not use the pastoral mode of Frost to disguise his sense of desolation. His early poems 'The Snow Man' and 'Domination of Black' (Harmonium, 1923)
created a soulscape, the void which was Stevens' self-chosen task until his death in 1955, and which he wished to fill with structures of imaginative invention, with delight. His enterprising venture can be viewed as heroic, as it is a brilliant attack against le malaise du fin de siecle i.e., against the emptiness of Heaven, where "the death of one God is the death of all".2 And in the wake of the withering religious faith the twentieth century poet has only the impoverished earth and 'the gaiety of language' as his patrimony. Stevens' poems are all elaborations of the theme of Coleridge's 'dejection ode': how to make poetry, how to invent joy, in the absence of a consoling sacred text or a divine being which Frost has also questioned in his little poem 'The Oven Bird' - "what to make of a diminished thing".3

The contemporary poetry sometime ago was considered decadent, showing the decadence of the Wordsworthian tradition. It was some sort of escapism entirely cut off from the facts of real life, and failing to adapt itself to the changed environment. Industrialization and urbanization changed the character of life and poetry in America. T.S.Eliot’s pronouncements, emphasised the need to establish

a new poetic tradition which he himself practised. According
to Eliot's famous theory of impersonality in poetry the two
constituents that go into the making of a poem are (a) the
personal element, i.e., the feelings and emotions of the
poet, and (b) the impersonal element, i.e., the 'erudition',
the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the past acquired by
the poet. Great art is objective. Eliot points out that poet
can achieve impersonality and objectivity by finding some
'objective co-relative' for his emotions. He defines objec­
tive co-relative as a 'set of objects', a situation, a chain
of events which shall be the formula', for some particular
emotion of the poet. He considers poet as an artist whose
primary function is to maintain the pattern of tradition and
who at the same time redesigns it creatively. He rediscovers
what has been found before, and adapts it to the contemporary
needs.

Most of Eliot's poetry is governed only by rhythm,
not by strict meter, stanza-pattern, and rules of accentua­
tion. The music of poetry, according to Eliot, is based on
the following factors :

(a) Interrelation of sound and sense
(b) A return to common speech
(c) Transitions between passages of greater and lesser
intensity, to give a rhythm of fluctuating emotion, essential
to the musical structure of the whole.
(d) A musical pattern of sound and a musical pattern of the secondary meanings of the words which compose it so that these two patterns are indissoluble and one.

(e) The sense of rhythm and the sense of structure.

(f) The use of recurrent themes.4

Eliot has a penchant for beauty of sound and richness of connotation. In 'The Four Quartets' Eliot is seen constantly preoccupied with words and their meanings and with music generated out of them.

"The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre -
To be redeemed from fire by fire"5

Robert Penn Warren, the youngest of Fugitives, moving from formality to more flexible style, wrote with belief in poetry as public discourse, in rational organisation of the poem, in strict meters and formality of diction in a stance of ironic lyricism. His poetry is a distillation of the troubled contemplation of history. His searching compassionate poems explore both sides of that mirror-experience and memory, with their strangely syncopated rhythms of feeling. Of public and historical experiences as well as of the family ghosts in 'I Am Dreaming of White Christmas', Warren could say,


"All items listed above belong in the world
In which all things are continuous,
• • • • • • • • • a * * * * * * * * * * * * •
May be converted into the future tense
Of joy".6

Lowell’s poems have the assimilation of the cultural to the personal. Many of the poems in Lord Weary's Castle, contrast the spiritual desolation of earthly time with the almost impossible hope of eternity. The poet's visionary Catholicism is used as an instrument of accusation and judgment of his American - and specifically his New England - inheritance. In 'In Children of the Light', he writes,

"Pilgrims unhoused by Geneva's night,
They planted here the Serpent's seeds of light".7

The light of their heresy has now become the 'pivoting searchlights' of the Air Defense Command, whose shining shocks 'the riotous glass houses' of those who let candles gutter by deserted altars,

"And light is where the landless blood of Cain
Is burning, burning the unburied grain".8

8. Ibid., p.34.
- an illusion to the disposal of surplus wheat while postwar millions starved abroad. In poem after poem Lowell fired his dense metaphorical charges against the 'riotous' secular culture in which even observance of the Puritans' pieties would be bootless, since their inheritance is corrupted by acquisitiveness and stained with the blood of 'the Redman's bones'.

Roy Harvey Pearce has observed that:

"American Poems record the discovery, rediscovery, and again and again the rediscovery of the Fall into Existence - American Existence".9

Lowell's poetry microcosmically recapitulates that repeated rediscovery. Lowell once commented that American literature looks like "a bravado of perpetual revolution",10 and so indeed he does his own poetic career. He successively appeared as the passionate young rhetorician - prophet of Lord Weary's Castle (1946); the Frost - or Browning - like storyteller of The Mills of the Kavanaughs (1951), the cold-eyed, witty memoirist of Life Studies (1959), narrating his family history with an art disguised as Candor; as the translator of Imitations (1961); the playwright of The Old Glory (1964) and Prometheus Bound (1967); the Jeremiah of Near the Ocean

10. Ibid., p.3.
(1966); the historian-on-the-run of Notebook (1970) and History (1973); the verse novelist-autobiographer of The Dolphin (1973), recounting his quest for an elusive creature of joy; and, finally, the aging and introspective diarist of Day by Day (1977). Yet for its dynamism, the poetic œuvre is unified. At its centre is Lowell himself, discovering, altering and creating the conditions of his own existence.

Lowell valued most quick changes of tone, atmosphere and speed, which he wanted to adopt and perfect in his own work. He observed that:

"The times have changed. A drastic experimental art is now expected and demanded. The scene is dense with the dirt and power of industrial society".11

Lowell wished to restore to poetry the presentation of actuality, the concrete particularity of Flaubert and Chekhov.

Another donnee of this new psychological frankness is that in his poems Lowell now unabashedly 'faced the Kingdom of the mad', Where Roethke had written of this aspect of his own suffering, in 'In a Dark Time'.

"What is madness but nobility of soul
At odds with circumstance?"12


restating the Romantic assertion that in madness is wisdom - Lowell, in such poems as 'Waking in the Blue', 'Home After-Three Months Away', and 'Man and Wife', dramatizes his mental illness not as a divine revelation but as moral suffering. When he writes,

"We are all old timers, each of us holds a locked razor".13

his illness is extended beyond the walls to the rest of society. From his poems on the world about him we can infer that society itself is mad; the suffering poet in a mental hospital looms as a Promethean hero for our sick age:

"My heart grows tense as though a harpoon were sparring for the kill. (This is the house for the 'mentally ill')"14

Life Studies is the fulcrum of American poetry after the war, the turning point not only in Lowell's own career but also in the works of many younger poets. What he had accomplished here - the breakthrough from received to provisional rhythms and forms - corresponded to a widely sensed change in feeling, in the expectations of readers of poetry. Lowells's new subjects placed the poet's personality

at the center of his art and at the center of his audience's interest in his work.

From the first, Lowell had built his poems outward from inward experience, but had done so by mythologizing experience, as in the early elegy for his grandfather Winslow. But now, in another family elegy, 'My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereaux Winslow', there are no rhymes, no regular stanzas, no religious or classical or historical allusions, as the five-year-old boy regards his doomed uncle:

"While I sat on the tiles and dug at the anchor on my sailor blouse, Uncle Devereux stood behind me. He was brushed as Bayard, our riding horse. His face was putty. He was dying of the incurable Hodgkin's disease".

What are given are the bare facts of experience, not a bill of lading of High Culture. In the place of conventional sonnet's devices, Lowell provides a freer rhythm, a more open flow of association, sudden alteration between close observation and slashing images that render states of feeling. His last book of poems Day by Day (1977) consists of poems related to middle age, his third marriage, the birth of a son, residence in England, illness and hospitalization, his

return to the United States and the memories of his earlier life which formed autobiographical poems of the most painful honesty. Poems end equivocally:

"Is getting well ever an art, or art a way to get well";16 "if we see light at the end of the tunnel, it's the light of an oncoming train".17

Yet even this joyless view of life Lowell makes the ground for the affirmation of a new style, which becomes a kind of deliverance, as he tells in 'Epilogue':

"Those blessed structures, plot and rhyme - why are they no help to me now I want to make something imagined, not recalled?"18

His turbulent autobiography in his poem, is a life study of his time.

Several poets associated with French surrealism and action painting like Frank O'Hara, John Ashberry, Kenneth Koch introduced solipsistic aestheticism almost new to American poetry. Obsessive themes like those of Sexton became for Sylvia Plath the fuel and the all-consuming fire that would flare with frightening intensity in her poems. Her first book of poems The Colossus (1960), showed an expertise in the

17. Ibid., p.31
18. Ibid., p.127.
poet's craft that was widely praised, but only in retrospect did it seem to forecast the fearful asymmetry of her later work. Robert Lowell, whose Boston University Poetry classes she occasionally attended, recalled in his foreword to her posthumous second book Ariel (1965), "I sensed her abashment and distinction, and never guessed her later appalling and triumphant fulfillment".19 Just like W.S. Merwin and Ted Hughes, her husband, Plath broke away from stanzaic, conventional forms into new improvisatory styles. Poems poured out of her in a torrent, poems of fierce rhythms and violent images that had the stamp of inevitability about their jagged shapes and searching themes.

Ariel, edited by Ted Hughes, proved but a part of Sylvia Plath's legacy which extended in Crossing the Water (1971) and Winter Trees (1972) but did not greatly alter its scope. Ariel, as Lowell wrote, "Everything ... is personal, confessional, felt, but the manner of feeling is controlled hallucination, the autobiography of a fever".20 Sylvia Plath "made herself the subject of her own art, its energy, its achievement nourished by her will to self-destruction".21 Discussing her work, M.L. Rosenthal has observed that

20. Ibid., vii.
21. Ibid., p.viii.
"a genuine confessional poem has to be superbly successful artistically if it is to achieve (its) fusion of the private and the culturally symbolic".22

The poems of Plath have this power. Poetry of this kind is universal in meaning. Plath's work is genuine authoritative, but extremely narrow in the range of experience, feeling, and human possibilities it can embody.

The poetry of Post-War American poets like Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Robert Lowell, Robert Penn Warren and Sylvia Plath is considered 'modern'. The term 'modern' derived from 'modo', "just now" means simply that which is up to the moment. But the Modern Movement is both reactionary and radical, conservative and revolutionary, packaging its puritanism in the latest fashions. The modernists are both the 'avante-garde' and the guards of the 'derriere', usually in one and the same person. The Modern Movement is a conservative movement using revolutionary techniques, everything about it implying tension, mediation, paradox. Modernism performs a kind of mediation between past and present by mythic method. Henry Levin has argued that the modernists felt both 'belated and up-to-date

simultaneously', that they worked 'experimental transformations into traditional continuities. Although the term 'modernism' has been current for most of this century, it still evokes disparage images for those who use it. The term generally reminds one of experimental forms in all the arts - the fragmented image of Picasso's cubist paintings, the barbaric sounds of Igor Stravinsky's Rite of Spring and the puzzling juxtapositions of T.S.Eliot's 'The Waste Land'.

Modernism suggests a special relationship of the past with the present and the new, and refers to some historical phenomena relevant to the time. The basic assumptions that constituted modernism are that work of art is unbounded by the conventional requirements, not obliged to represent the external world above, rather it should create and represent its self-contained world and that the literary work should be something unique and part of the cultural avant-garde of modernist. And every artist should attempt at novelty like Pablo Picasso, a great pioneer who developed a series of distinctive styles, and a famous writer like James Joyce who attacked new formal problems in each of his works. Novelty reflected in stylistic and formal innovations, as painters indulge in distortion and fragmentation of the tradition and the writers of fiction disrupting conventional chronological presentation within a fixed point of view. 'Juxtaposition',

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is a term used mostly in discussing poetry, in which the poet unifies the fragmented form through the underlying logic of association caused by the juxtaposition of lines and sections of a poem as in Eliot's 'The Waste Land' (1922) where the five sections are harmoniously blended together with a unifying theme.

The various interpretations of schools of critical theories have also influenced the new insights into modernism. By the end of fifties, a series of theoretical importations from Europe began to dominate American literary scholarship. The schools of phenomenological criticism (Georges Pouler) and structuralism (Claude Levi-Strauss) dominated much innovative critical thought in the 1950's. Deconstruction (Jacques Derrida), another French intellectual importation, dominated the 1970's and much of the 1980's. Most recently, feminist theorists, heavily influenced by Freudian and neo-Freudian (particularly Jacques Lacan) psychology, have become an increasingly influential force in contemporary criticism and in the study of modernism. What has impressed everyone about modernist poetry is its "differentness". Randall Jarrell observes: "Modernist poetry - the poetry of Pound, Eliot, Crane, Tate, Stevens, Cummings, MacLeish, et cetera - appears to be and is generally considered to be a violent break with romanticism; it is actually, I believe, an extension of romanticism, an end product in which most of
the tendencies of romanticism have been carried to their limits".23

As observed by Randall Jarrell the following are some of the general characteristics of modern poetry:

(i) A pronounced experimentation: 'originality' is everyone's aim, and novel techniques are as much prized as new scientific discoveries as in the poetry of Sylvia Plath, Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens to mention a few:

"Eyes seeking the response of eyes
Bring out the stars, bring out the flowers,
Thus concentrating earth and skies
So none need be afraid of size.
All revelation has been ours".24

(ii) Language is deliberately disorganized, meter becomes irregular or disappears; the rhythmical flow of verse is broken up into a jerky half-prose 'collage' or 'montage'. The following lines illustrate the irregular meter:

"What I love is
The piston in motion -
My soul dies before it.
And the hooves of the horses,
Their merciless churn".25


(iii) Heightened emotional intensity; violence of every sort. The placidity of emotion becomes exhilarating:

"Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air".26

(iv) Obscurity, inaccessibility: logic, both for structure and for texture, is neglected. The poet's peculiar erudition and allusiveness consciously restrict his audience to a small, highly specialized group, as in the following lines:

"The heraldic center of the world
Of blue, blue sleek with a hundred chins,
The amorist Adjective aflame".27

"For fire flames but in the heart of a colder fire.
All voice is but echo caught from a soundless voice,
Height is not deprivation of valley, nor defect of desire,
But defines, for the fortunate, that joy in which all joys should rejoice".28

(v) Conversational-colloquial verse:
e.g.

"I didn't see it.
Are you sure -"
"Yes, I'm sure!"
"It was a face"29


A preoccupation with the unconscious, dreams, the stream of consciousness, the irrational:

T.S. Eliot in 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock' writes:

"When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table".30

When Stevens in 'The Man with Blue Guitar', speaks of wanting to "reduce the monster to/Myself"31 and defines the monster as "Nature", it is clear that he is entertaining the Surrealist idea of gaining power over the irrational by becoming the irrational.

Irony of every type: Byronic, Laforguian, dryly metaphysical or helplessly sentimental.

e.g.

"My grandfather found
his grandchild's fogbound solitudes
sweeter than human society".32

Use of simple diction:

e.g.

"I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away

(And wait to watch the water clear, I may): I sha'nt be gone long - you come too"33

(ix) Individualism, isolation, alienation:

Robert Frost recognizes the inevitable loneliness of man. In the poem 'Desert Places', he writes:

"The loneliness includes me unawares".34

In the poem 'Electra on the Azalea Path', Sylvia Plath wrote:

"Oh pardon the one who knocks for pardon at Your gate, father - Your hound - bitch, daughter, friend.
It was my love that did us both to death".35

The poet felt alienated when her father abandoned her in death when she was only eight years old.

(x) Condemnation of science, industrialism:

In the poem 'Why wait for science', Frost hints at the dark aspect of science. He not only refers to 'her complacent ministry of fear 'but also the possibility of the total extinction of mankind as a result of the use of deadly

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34. Ibid., p.386.
scientific inventions. The poet is sarcastic in his treatment of science.

"Sarcastic Science she should like to know, 
In her complacent ministry of fear, 
How we propose to get away from here 
When she has made things so we have to go 
Or be wiped out ........."36

The post-war American poetry has also been influenced by the philosophical and literary movements like transcendentalism, imagism and symbolism.

(a) Transcendentalism:

According to Kenneth Burke "transcendence involves dialectical processes whereby something HERE is interpreted in terms of something THERE, something beyond itself".37 In brief, something in the natural world is viewed in terms of its corresponding essence in the spiritual world. To Burke, transcendentalism has a symbolic function. And according to Samson Reed poetry is the human analogue of divine creation

"all those illustrations of truth by natural imagery, which spring from the fact, that this world is the mirror of Him who made it. Strictly speaking, nothing has less to do with fiction than poetry".38


Poetry is not fictional because it presents truth correspondentially, "only dressed in the garments which God has given it". (GMRS, p.42) Reed, perhaps under the influence of Swedenborg, praises Baconian science for its focus on fact, on the simple truths of the visible world. The activity of the imagination, when coincident with Divine Being, results in creation. This coincidence with higher being is achieved by aligning the mind "with things as they exist, or in other words, with the truth". (GMRS, p.42) According to Reed, therefore, the "true poetic spirit ...... is the soul of science" (GMRS, p.43), and the poet is concerned with "the image of God which is stamped on nature". (GMRS, p.43)

Through the perception of correspondences, the mind penetrates the illusion of separation between internal and external, nature, man and God, visible and invisible, the particular and the universal. Unlike the pure mystic, the transcendentalist generally does not seek to annihilate the visible world in a striving after unutterable reality. Instead, he seeks to unify his divided vision in order to see things as they really are - which, for him, means to see them as pure forms or as 'things as they are' in relation to other 'things'. For the transcendentalist, nothing in the plenum exists except by virtue of its relation to the Infinite. Emerson speaks of this in the epigraph (a version of an excerpt from his poem 'May Day') to the essay 'Nature':

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"A subtle chain of countless rings
The next unto the farthest brings;
The eye reads omens where it goes,
And speaks all languages the rose;
And, striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form".39

Here the cosmos is represented in terms of a spiralling interconnections from lowest to highest. Emerson's state of transcendental awareness, when he finds himself 'a transparent eyeball', shows how the mind contemplates itself its own process. The intellect is self-reflexive, as for example, we find it in some of the best poems of Wordsworth. Though Eliot does not seem to be directly concerned with 'philosophical systems' or proofs or demonstrations, he is concerned with exploiting and giving expression to an emotional or spiritual vision, embodying in it all its particularity and immediacy in an individual form. MacCarthy tracing out the Indian themes in T.S.Eliot says: "The key intuition of Buddhism is that of the unshakable reality of impermanence and the deep-rooted and all-encompassing character of suffering .... that in Eliot's poetry, the intuition of impermanence and suffering plays a dominant role. Sometimes, it is permanence, flux, or change which is stressed; sometimes suffering is stressed".40


The theme of impermanence as it characterizes the natural world, is given profound poetical expression in the opening lines of 'East Coker'.

"In my beginning is my end. In succession houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf".41

According to Buddhist doctrine, in the never-ending flux of events, the eye vanishes or becomes a victim of all pervasive impermanence. In 'The Cocktail Party', similar theme finds expression:

"Ah, but we lie to each other daily
What we know of other people
Is only our memory of the moments
During which we know them.
And they have changed since then". (TCPTS, p.384)

Suffering is omnipresent and Harry declares openly:

"People change and smile but the agony abides".
(TCPTS, p.187)

Eliot's '... prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action' are a sort of five-fold path to emanicipation which remind us of the eight-fold path of Lord Buddha. The detachment advocated by Eliot all the time, is from self, from

things and from persons. It is the core of Eliot's vision and the vision of Buddhism.

Eliot's poetical expressions directly allude to Indian mythology, philosophy and religion. In 'The Waste Land' he says:

"Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered for distant, over Himavant.
Then spoke the thunder
(Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata)
Shantih Shantih Shantih".42

Here, there is a direct reference to the Ganges, Himavant (one of the names of the Himalayas), the story of the Brihadaranyak Upanishad and uttering of the pious word 'Shantih' thrice which is a formal ending to an 'Upanishad' or any scripture of great importance.

There are many significant statements, made by Eliot in his poetry that are in perfect unison with the vital concepts of Bhagavad - Gita. Such striking correspondence has been found in the interpretation of the third section of 'The Dry Salvages'.

"O Light Invisible, we praise thee!
Too bright for mortal vision".43


Krishna gives superhuman power to Arjuna to have a vision of God, the Great Light, that ordinary eyes cannot witness.

Brahma is light in all Indian Scriptures. The images of light is a crucial one in Eliot. The halo of light behind the heads of Hindu Gods and Goddesses is significant. The halo appears like a wheel and indicates motion. In the 11th and 8th chapters of the Bhagavad-Gita, Brahma is described as resplendent, radiant, glowing like the blazing fire and the brilliant Sun, with eyes of the Sun and the Moon. Eliot in his poetry too regards God as Light, the Biblical context charged by these dimensions:

".......... yet surrounded
By a grace of sense, a white light
still end moving". (CP, p.191)

".......... the light is still
At the still point of the turning world". (CP, p.194)

"O Greater Light, We praise Thee for the less;
O Light Invisible, we worship Thee!"  
(CP, p.183-184)

"My life is light, waiting for the death - wind".  
(CP, p.111)

The following lines convey the equilibrium of mind and attainment of eternal bliss and joy as in the Bhagavad-Gita:

"We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion".  
(CP, p.203-207)
Eliot succeeds in his quest for a spiritual realization. In 'Ash Wednesday', he turns away from earthly pleasures and renounces the life of the flesh, foregoing all attachments and willing to lose his existence in divinity. He turns inward and grows ascetic. In 'Ash Wednesday' and other poems, Eliot turns away from the world towards God. He works out his own salvation. He attempts self-examination, self-exploration and heart-searching. This poem represents the struggle between flesh and spirit, the World and Divinity. He submits to the divine will:

"I no longer strive to strive toward such things
I renounce the blessed face
And renounce the voice.
For what is done, not to be done again". (CP, p.95-96)

"Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair,
Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind over the third stair
Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and despair,
Climbing the third stair". (CP, p.99)

"Emptying the sensual with deprivation
Cleaning affection from the temporal". (CP, p.192)

(b) Imagism:

C. Day Lewis states that an image is a picture made out of words, and that a poem may itself be an image composed from a multiplicity of images. Wallace Stevens observes that
imagism "is something permanent".44 Hilda Doolittle, the American poet, along with Richard Aldington, D.H.Lawrence, F.S.Flint and John Gould Fletcher, proposed the doctrine of Imagism in six explicit rubrics in the first Imagist anthology issued in 1915. They are:

1) Imagists must use the language of common speech and employ the exact word.

2) They must create new rhythms. Since free verse is not the only poetical form, poets must be accorded the right to use new rhythms.

3) There must be absolute freedom in the choice of subject.

4) Poetry must render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities.

Clauses five and six called for poetry that is hard and clear and concentrated in its effect.

Stevens observes: "The image must of the nature of its creator".45 It is the representation of a person or thing drawn or painted, the visual impression of something produced by a mirror. In literature, it is really complex of associations brought to light by the use of metaphors or similes. It aims at describing or delineating or portraying a thing vividly.


45. Ibid., p.118.
Most commonly imagery is used to signify 'figurative language', especially the vehicles of metaphors and similes. Imagery has become the essential component in poetry, and as a major clue to poetic meaning, structure, and effect. Ezra Pound suggests: "An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time".46

Further he adds: "It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation, that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art".47

In Eliot's poetry the 'water images' are very central. In 'The Dry Salvages' the river is the individual time, the time in the life of an individual, the time measured up by a clock and calendar and the ocean, the universal Time or Eternity.

"The river is within us, the sea is all about us; its hints of earlier and other creation".48

47. Ibid., p.4.
London, 'unreal city' covered with smoke and fog is in total ignorance as to what is the central truth of human life and human world. Images of 'city-streets' and Prufrock's going out into them are, in fact, aimless wanderings, carrying a sense of pointless existence.

Eliot makes liberal use of fascinating and sometimes startling imagery. The image in 'The Rhapsody on a Windy Night' is vivid, unusual and startling, to convey the nightmarish mood of the scene. "Regard that woman/Who hesitates, toward you in the light of the door/Which opens on her like a grin".(CP, p.26)

It is startling to find an open door being likened to a 'grin', and the image carries with it the suggestion that the 'grin' might develop into a 'diabolic laughter'. Equally suggestive and startling is the image in 'The Waste Land'.

"One of the low on whom assurances its
As a silk hat on Bradford millionarie".(CP, p.72)

Eliot has also captured the very rhythm of modern life:

"The human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting".(CP, p.71)

At other times, Eliot's images are over-elaborated in the manner of the metaphysical conceits. The best example of such a conceit is the image in 'The Love Song of J.Alfred
Prufrock' in which fog is compared to a cat. "The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,/The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,/Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening". (CP, p.13)

Equally characteristic is Eliot's use of what may be called Ironic-satiric images. For example, "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" (CP, p.14), the beginning is grandiose, but the prosaic end creates an ironic effect. The ironic-contrast between the past and the present in 'The Waste Land' is worth noting:

"O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water". (CP, p.71)

Similar contrast is noticed in the subsequent lines:

"When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone". (CP, p.72)

Such images are Eliot's ironic comment on the spiritual sterility, futility, ennui and boredom of contemporary civilization.

The 'Stairs' in 'Ash Wednesday' signify stairs of spiritual exercise. To escape the flesh, the poet ascends these stairs (three in number). On the first stair, he shuns to think of himself in human shape; on the second one, the image of the old age forces him to relinquish the life of the
flesh and on the third one, he relinquishes what is most
dear, the sensual perceptions. He attempts to work out his
salvation, by turning away from the world towards God and he
finally turns into an ascetic in this major transitional
world.

Women in Eliot are associated with images represent­
ing both sensual cravings and spiritual solidity. The
lady ('Portrait of a Lady') is seductive and elusive but not fatal. The woman in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' is fatal. The woman of 'Gerontion' is deceitful and is a shadowy female. To this category of sensual women belong Princess Volpone, Marie, Madame Sosostris, Belladonna and Lil. Some of the women are spiritual in their temperament. The Hyacinth girl, the Blessed Virgin Mary (highest in rank), Marina, Agatha, Celia and Monica are such women who are spiritually awakened and enlightened in the Indian sense as representing various aspects of Shakti.

'Journey' is the recurring image in Eliot's poems. Human life is a cyclic journey through birth and death and rebirth according to one's Karma i.e., his or her deeds and actions. 'Four Quartets', has the image of journey through sea.

"O voyagers, O seamen,
You who came to port, and you whose bodies
Will suffer the trial and judgement of the sea,
Or whatever event, this is your real destination". (CP, p.211)
'Mirror' representing multiplicity is another image of importance, Indian in content and form. "A wilderness of mirrors" (CP, p. 41) of 'Gerontion' reflects multiple things. Multiplicity is the essence of Maya for Indians.

Frost's imagery is unique. In "My November Guest", sorrow is personified as a loving woman. She walks with the poet through the sombre and dark beauties of the autumn countryside, and showing her melancholy pleasure in the brown, grey, and black hues of Nature.

"She's glad her simple worsted grey
Is silver now with climbing mist".49

'Mowing' concludes with the lines:

"The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make".50

Here the scythe is personified to become some kind of metaphor. 'Fire and ice' impresses the reader by its bold metaphors. By the linking of desire to fire and hate to ice, human emotions are transformed into vast, impersonal forces.

In the poem 'Farewell to Florida', Wallace Stevens employs the image of snake. It embodies Stevens' concept of

50. Ibid., p. 25.
transcience, his perpetually changing of self and world. The image is used in 'The Auroras of Autumn', suggesting order in disorder:

"This is form gulping after formlessness".51

The wilderness, the vivid blooms, the sun, the leaves, the sea, the colors are all associated in Stevens' poems with a physical world evoked by the word 'south'. He has employed the female image of woman to suggest the fecund and sensual south. Stevens' woman is not an ideal but the earth itself. "She is as she was, reality, /The gross, the fecund..." (WCP, p.322).

She appears in "In the Carolinas" as the timeless mother:

"Timeless mother
How is it that your aspic nipples
For once vent honey? (WCP, p.4)

Death is intimately involved with the mother image. He chooses mortality as origin and end of life:

"Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfilment to our dreams
And our desires". (WCP, p.68)

By confronting the archetype, one is able to accept the 'earthly' mother as part of something larger, an endless process of birth and death:

"Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
Within whose burning bosom we devise
Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly".
(WCP, p.69)

In "The Course of a Particular", by personifying the leaves, he fills the winter void with the image of man: "The leaves cry... One holds off and merely hears the cry. /It is a busy cry, concerning someone else./ "And though one says that one is part of everything".52

'Light' imagery is vital to Stevens. Light is motion, change, and cheerfulness. For its evanescent appearances the poet has developed a special 'vernacular of light', of which he gives us a glimpse in 'Variations of a Summer Day':

"Words for the dazzle
Of mica, the dithering of glass,
The Arachne integument of dead trees
And the eye grown larger, more intense".53

Stevens' image of sun represents the thoughtless physical life, but in its life-giving power it is allied with human creativity. The moon, the traditional 'romantic' image of the imagination, more often suggests the weakening effects

of contemplative thought, 'feminine', whereas the sun is consistently masculine.

In 'End of Season', Robert Penn Warren uses 'water' imagery signifying time. "For waters wash our guilt and dance in the sun:/ And the prophet, hairy and grim in the leonine landscape ./........................../
Time clucked like the darkling ape;/ And Dante's duca, smiling in the blessed clime,/ With rushes, sea-wet, wiped from that sad brow the infernal grime".54

In 'The Ballad of Billie Potts' Warren presents some richly suggestive imagery evoking awareness of the immobility and unchangeableness of the past, describing people who once lived:

"Beyond your call or question now, they move ....
 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Sainted and sad and sage as the hairy ass, who bear
History like bound faggots, with stiff knees . . ."55

'Beast' image is the master metaphor of the dramatic poem Brother to Dragons with its two major subsidiary metaphors, the Lewis house (the house of the psyche) and the twice-recurring winter setting (the winter of philosophic naturalism). Like Melville's whale Warren's beast has a different

55. Ibid., p.273.
meaning for each of his characters. The 'flat, black' serpent rising from "earth's inner darkness" represents the unconscious self.

The recurrent images in Lowell's poetry can be seen to fall into three basic categories: the natural world - the world of violent seasons, blighted vegetation, and trapped animals; the social and psychological landscape in which man dwells - the world of noise, speed, and pollution, whose symbol is the automobile and whose terminus is the hospital, the prison, or the graveyard; and the historical or human landscape in which the self struggles for fulfilment - the world of time, place and person. Unlike Wallace Stevens, for whom a bird's "scrawny cry" heard "At the earliest ending of winter", can bring intimations of the 'Colossal sun' of spring, Lowell is a poet for whom "the seasons' ill", regardless of the time of year. "All day", muses the speaker of 'Winter in Dunbarton', "The wastes of snow about my house stare in/Through idle windows". In 'Terminal Days at Beverly Farms', the imminent death of the poet's father is prefigured by the image of the "scarlet late August sumac,/multiplying like cancer/ at their garden's border".

In 'Man and Wife' the poet, 'tamed by Miltown' after a night of fearful insomnia, notes that the "blossoms on our Magnolia ignite/the morning with their murderous five days' white".59 The poet reads his own sense of futility into the activities of the insect and animal world. In 'Fall 1961', the speaker exhausted by the "chafe and jar/ of nuclear war", exclaims, "I swim like a minnow/ behind my studio window," and concludes that "we are like a lot of wild/spiders crying together,/but without tears".60

Sylvia Plath has a striking gift for the metaphorical extension of an idea and in making these metaphors central to her poems' development she is able to create a strong climate of feeling without explicitly arguing for her perspective. 'The Colossus' speaks directly of her sense of herself and her destiny as shaped by the inheritance of a particular relationship with her father. The father-figure is identified with the huge Colossus of Rhodes, the giant statue that stood by the harbour, but which appears in the poem as ruined. The poem is addressed to the father who is no more and recounts the vain attempt made by the poet to find a meaning for her own life trying to rebuild the image of her father:

59. Ibid., p.87.

"Thirty years now I have laboured
To dredge the silt from your throat,
I am none the wiser."

She crawls "like an ant mourning/Over the weedy acres of your brow" (CP, p.129) and at night she squats "in the cornucopia/Of your left ear". (CP, p.129) 'Hardcastle Crags' is about a woman who walks out at night beyond the village and to the moors as an escapist. And her isolation and her angry mood of alienation from the people around her are caught in the explosive imagery of fireworks:

"Flintlike, her feet struck
Such a racket of echoes...
....she heard the quick air ignite
Its tinder and shake
A firework of echoes..."

(c) Symbolism:

Symbols are images which are connotative, emotive and evocative. In addition to their simple meanings, they call up before the mind's eye, a host of associations connected with them. Symbols make the language rich, expressive and suggestive. Pure sensations or the poet's apprehension of transcendental mysteries or his unique personal feelings, can only be properly expressed through symbols. For example,


the word 'lily' merely connotes a 'flower', but it also evokes images of beauty and innocence. It also carries with it the emotional overtone of pity, resulting from suffering or oppression. That is why C.M. Bowra regards symbolic poetry as a kind of mystic poetry, a poetry in which the poet tries to convey his sense of the mystery of life. Edmund Wilson defines symbolism as, "The Medley of images: the deliberately mixed metaphors, the combination of the grand and prosaic manners: the bold amalgamation of the material with the spiritual". 63 Symbolism is essentially an oblique or indirect mode of expression which suggests much more than is actually described or asserted. It deals with the Infinite and the Absolute, and expresses the spiritual and the abstract through the physical and the concrete.

'Myth' is a symbol in the sense that it describes a real primeval miracle which happened once upon a time and created a holy precedent, a holy paradigm which is since repeated and reconstructed in rituals, acts of cults and ceremonies. When told in words, it is only story. T.S. Eliot's direct reference to the myth of the Brihadaranyak Upanishad (Chapter Fifth, Second Brahman) in 'The Waste Land' is of great significance in this context.

"Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves 
Waited for rain . . . . . . . . . . . .
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata
Shantih Shantih Shantih".64

Eliot fuses the myth of Holy Grail (of the Knight Parsifal) parallel in the myth of Ganga and Bhagirath. The Brihadara- nyak Upanishad shows gods, men and demons, understanding the 'DA' as Dayadhvam (compassion), Datta (sacrifice), and Damyata (restraint) respectively.

Symbols may be of two kinds (1) Traditional and (2) Personal. Traditional symbols are stock symbols which have been in general use. For example, 'rose' is a traditional symbol of beauty, and has been used by poets from the earliest times. Eliot's symbols are predominantly traditional, rather than subjective or personal, drawn from the literature and mythology of the past. In 'The Waste Land', 'dry bones' signify spiritual decay and desolation, and 'rats' - the ugliness and horror of modern civilization. In the same way, 'dry grass', 'cactus land', 'rocks', 'winds singing dryly' are all symbols of spiritual sterility, from which results the desolation of the contemporary waste land as well as of the waste lands of the past. The 'staircase' in 'Ash Wednesday' symbolises the difficulties to be surmounted by

one who aspires for the spiritual way of life. Similarly, 'rose' symbolises variously Virgin Mary, the Church, and Divine grace. 'The three leopards stand for the world, the flesh, and the Devil', symbolizing pleasure, Ambition and Avarice, all obstacles in the way of spiritual quest. The 'Lady' may stand for the Virgin, for a saint, or for an idealised beautiful woman. In 'Dry Salvages', the sea represents time, by its continuous flow or flux, and the river represents the time of individual life.

"The river is within us, the sea is all about us".65

Robert Frost enriches his poems through symbols which add deeper meaning to particular situations, events and happenings. The emotional outbursts of the mother in 'Home Burial' and the emotional breakdown of the servant in 'The Death of a Hired man' are symbolic of the emotional stress of people in all ages and in every situation. The 'wall' in the poem 'Mending Wall' becomes the symbol of all kinds of man-made barriers. The poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' is also rich in symbolic overtones.

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep.66

65. Ibid., p.205.
The woods which the poet admires are opposed to the promises that the poet has to keep. Further, the poet tells that he would like to sleep only when he has kept his promises, when sleep becomes a reward of a well-earned toil. In 'West-Running Brook' the brook symbolizes the descending cosmic energy.

Stevens' 'Ploughing on Sunday' celebrates sun as a symbol of the active virile life. The woman in 'Sunday Morning' stayed home from church to meditate in the "comforts of the sun". For Stevens, human power and solar power are reciprocal, even at times identical ("His self and the sun were one...") and the sun is a constant reminder of his own light and warmth giving responses that may lie dormant under the cold winter sky.

In 'Audubon: A Vision', Warren describes the gold watch of Audubon, which is a symbol not only of time but also of the woman's lifelong deprivation. "It is gold, it lives in his hand in the firelight, and the woman's/ Hand reaches out. She wants it /.../ Her body sways like a willow in spring wind. Like a girl".

68. Ibid., p.532.
In 'Skunk Hour' Lowell ironically suggests the absurd brand name of 'Tudor (pun on two-door) Ford'. The name epitomizes for the reader the pretentiousness and vulgarity of the modern sensibility that longs for a perfect combination of streamlined efficiency and old-world glamor. The poet's attempts at finding love are often placed in the ironic perspective of insect images: he and his beloved "are quivering and fierce ... simmering like wasps/in our tent of books!"70 or like "Two walking cobwebs, almost bodiless".71

Plath's poem 'Words' is highly symbolic. The words are axes that echo through the wood of our lives, "travelling/off from the centre like horses".72 What the words express is the cause of the wound in the tree from which the sap 'Wells like tears'. "The sap/Wells like tears, like the/Water striving/To re-establish its mirror/Over the rock"73

71. Ibid., p.67.
73. Ibid., p.270.
Thus in modern American poetry symbol serves to combine the poet's heart and intellect. The poets like Eliot, Frost, Lowell, Plath, Stevens and Warren seek life and vividness. They all have been desperately sincere in portraying the world about them truthfully and appealingly.