

CHAPTER THREE

THE STRATEGY OF BINARY OPPOSITES IN POETRY: A HISTORICAL SURVEY

“Without contraries is no progression”¹

William Blake

The statement hints at something very prominent in nature, the binaries which form an integral part of the world we live in. Things whether animate or inanimate exist in pairs. Binaries permeate at various levels of perception and deception, as the presence of something is usually realised by the absence of the other. There are opposites like the body and the soul, male and female, true and false, and black and white, which hardly have an independent existence. They are often defined by comparing them with their respective antonyms. Blake’s statement asserts the fact that contraries are essential for life to progress. This dual nature of the world has inspired poets of all times and ages. Thus we can say that the history of binary oppositions is not something very new. Writers, philosophers and poets have been using this device to rediscover the force which governs nature and art in one way or the other.

In the poetry of the metaphysical poet, John Donne (1572-1637), one finds an abundant use of metaphysical conceits. These conceits are marked by the unusual comparisons between two things which have *prima facie* nothing in common. T.J. Bachus says :

John Donne...was declared by Dryden to be the greatest of English wits. He was a representative of the highest type of the extravagances of his age. His ideal of poetical composition was fulfilled by clothing every thought in a series of analogies, always remote, often repulsive and inappropriate. His versification is singularly harsh and tuneless, and the crudeness of his expression is in unpleasant contrast with the ingenuity of his thinking.²

His poems are known for their abrupt beginnings and extraordinary use of conceits. In “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”³ he has used the image of a compass to show the difference of emotions between him and his beloved. He says that his beloved is the fixed leg of a compass whereas he is the moving counterpart. He moves all around her, just to make a full circle and to come back. There is a union in this sense of wandering.

The lover wanders to revert to its origin. But this union emerges out of the binaries which is conveyed by the image of the “twin compass”, of which one end is fixed while the other keeps moving. The lines containing binary words are mentioned below:

Thy soule *fix'd* foot, makes no show

To *move*, but doth, if th' other doe

And though it in the centre *sit*,

Yet when the other far doth *roam*

It *leans*, and hearkens after it,

And grows *erect* as it comes home.

And makes me *end* where I *begunne*.

The binary pair of words in the above poem include:

Move	Fixed
Sit	Roam
Leans	Erect
End	Begun

In “The Sunne Rising” he compares his beloved to the Indian spices and also uses hyperbolic statements like, “She is all states and all princes I”. Comparison of her beauty to Indian spices, her eyes to the sun and love to princely states, underscores Donne’s preoccupation with paradoxes and conceits. They have nothing in common, but in the world of the poet, all walls crumble to pave way for conceits. According to a critic,

His vision of a mystical coherence in all experience leads one to believe that Donne was primarily interested in making a study in contrast and that the subjects fascinated him only for their being mutually antithetical. But the qualities of contrariness and anti-thesis served him only as a handle to set in motion, mystical mechanisms of his mind which revealed to him a natural coherence in all experience.⁴

This statement is true of the poetry of Donne who uses contrast to portray uniformity or homogeneity. There is binary in this thought which reveals sameness with the help of opposites, like the two legs of the compass which do not meet, yet they make a perfect circle which symbolises love without a beginning and end, a uniform, complete circle. For example:

Thy *beams*, so reverend, and strong

I could *eclipse* and cloud them with a winke

If her *eyes* have not *blinded* thine

Look and *tomorrow* late tell mee

Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st *yesterday*

All *honor's* *mimicque*

This bed thy *center* is, these walls thy *sphere*.

The list is as follows:

Beam	Eclipse
Eyes	Blind
Tomorrow	Yesterday
Honour	Mimic
Center	Sphere

In poems like, "Canonization" the main conceit lies in the title which has religious connotations yet the poem talks about love.

Love in Donne's poetry is a physiological fact, susceptible of all kinds of metaphysical interpretations; his love verses are abstruse alternations between

the fact and its metaphysical renderings; and that element in which most love poets dwell, the exquisite intermediate psychology, is all but wholly omitted.⁵

In “Canonization”, he also uses the conceit of the Phoenix riddle and states that just like a Phoenix which is born out of its own ashes, lovers too, are reborn with death because their love transcends the barriers of time and death. “All sense of duality disappeared because ‘thou’ and ‘I’ merged into one common entity and the true lovers could claim with some justification”⁶ :

The Phoenix riddle hath more wit

By us, we two being one, are it.

The journey from “two” to “one”, once again confirms the uniformity which Donne highlights by his use of conceits and contrasts. Binaries appear in the following lines :

With *wealth* your state, your minde with *Arts* improve

Or the Kings *reall*, or his *stamped* face

Call her one, mee another *flye*

We are *Tapers* too, and at our own costs die.

And wee in us find the *Eagle* and the *Dove*

We can *dye* by it, if not *live* by Love

You to whom love was *peace*, that now is *rage*

By us, we *two* being *one*, are it

The list of binary opposite words in the poem are :

Wealth	Arts
Real	Stamped

Fly	Taper
Eagle	Dove
Die	Live
Peace	Rage
Two	One

“Andrew Marvell is as great a poet as Donne and Herbert, but remains a party-of-one, an original creator without English literary antecedents, and no affiliation to the metaphysicals,”⁷ says Harold Bloom. Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), remains an equally popular name after Donne, who made an extensive use of satire and conceits in his poems. Bloom further says that Marvell is “an unclassifiable poet, (who) has nothing in him of Donne or of Herbert...and is an unique poet, without precursors in English...Marvell matches Donne in variety and has also a rich strangeness entirely unique to him.”⁸Indeed, Marvell’s “rich strangeness” is entirely unique to him, yet his use of metaphysical conceits places him in the category of Donne and Herbert. One of his famous poems, “To his Coy Mistress”, is a *carpe diem* poem which deals with the age old theme of the brevity of life. But the poet gives it a new colour when he asserts that though life is short but man can overcome its brevity with the help of his passions. It is a combination of two contradictory emotions: levity and classical elegance soaked in paradoxes and conceits. The poet compares himself and his beloved to “amorous birds of prey” who are full of energy. When these birds mate in the air, they conjoin themselves like a circle or ball. The ball symbolises perfection in the poem. The poet desires a similar perfection and completeness where the lovers would defeat time by being like that ball, perfect and complete. The poet knows the fact that time never stops for anyone, but he still hopes that in the lover’s microcosm world, love shall transcend all boundaries.

William Blake (1757-1827), wrote in his famous book, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that, “Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate are necessary to human existence. From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is

the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell”⁹. This predominance of evil and good, heaven and hell forms the essential line of difference between the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience*. In these two volumes, we find a unique use of symbols like the rose, urizen, night, lamb, tiger, etc. These symbols are peculiar to Blake since they are not universal but personal symbols. Most of the symbols used in *Songs of Innocence* have their opposite in the *Songs of Experience*, as for example, the Lamb and the Tyger. One could easily differentiate between the worlds of Innocence and Experience by the titles of the poems and the symbols employed by Blake. *Songs of Innocence* is replete with the fragrance of wreaths and flowers whereas in its counterpart artificial incense is found. In the former, themes of freedom, childhood games, shepherds, dew, spring, wild birds, green grasslands etc. are found. Tigers, chains, wolves, roses with thorns, nets, cages, arrows, cankers, worms etc. form the symbols in the latter. Likewise, the *Songs of Innocence* are introduced by a Piper, who has absolutely no experience of the world and lives for the moment whereas the *Songs of Experience* are introduced by a Bard, who “present, past and future sees”¹⁰. The innocent Piper stands in a sharp contrast to the Bard, who has an experience of the ‘Holy World’.

Some poems in both the books have same titles, for example, “Holy Thursday”, “Nurse’s Song”, “The Chimney Sweepers” etc. Despite having same titles, the thrust of the poems varies. In the “Nurse’s Song” in the *Songs of Innocence*, the nurse calls the children inside their homes, because evening is approaching. But the children are happy in their own games and seek some more time. The nurse happily allows them to play till the “light fades away”. There is innocence and beauty in the attitude of both the nurse and the children. The nurse is happy to see the children playing with their friends. On the contrary, in the “Nurse’s Song” in the *Songs of Experience*, as the nurse watches the children playing outside, she gets jealous. She is reminded of her own age and her face grows, “green and pale”. Finally she cries in abhorrence:

Your spring and your day are wasted in play

And your winter and night in disgust

The attitudes of the nurses in both the poems are sharply contrasted. In the former, the hills echo with children’s laughter and everything around them seems happy and contented whereas in the latter, the children are seen “whispering” among themselves.

A similar contrast is found in “The Chimney Sweeper” which like the “Nurse’s Song” appears in both the books with the same title. The chimney sweeper in the *Songs of Innocence*, is unaware of the hell in which he is forced to work. He was sold by his own father to work as a sweep, but the innocent child does not realise the tragedy of his life. He knows that his work is worship and “if all do their duty, they need not feel harm”¹¹. On the other hand, the chimney sweeper in the *Songs of Experience*, cries in misery. He knows that his life is full of darkness and soot. He blames his parents, the society and Church for his condition. Once again we see the difference between both the poems with same titles but binary themes. The chimney sweeper in the former poem has a hope that things will be fine and this hope arises from his faith in God. On the other hand, the chimney sweeper in the latter poem is disillusioned who believes that God “makes up a heaven of our misery”¹²

The poems in the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* are not only contrasted against one another but there are binaries within them. Let us take the example of the poem, “The Tyger”. One can see how the tone of the poem suddenly changes into something very opposite in the last two lines. As the poem begins, the poet is full of praise for the Creator whose creation is so symmetrical and beautiful. The poem appears as if it is a hymn in praise of the all powerful God who created an animal so ferocious and beautiful at the same time. But these praiseworthy statements are suddenly contrasted when Blake questions:

Did He who made the Lamb

made thee?¹³

It seems as if the poet had been singing praises of God willingly, to reach this desired conclusion, where he would juxtapose the meek lamb with the awesome tiger. Blake’s question stirs man’s faith to the extent that one is bound to think that how could the Creator be so indifferent to His own creation? How could He create an animal, so gentle, modest and passive like the Lamb and a beast as fierce and barbaric like the tiger, eventually to feed on the lamb. The poet, however, does not seem to appreciate the idea of diversity or the law of the jungle where the strong preys on the weak but he is rather unhappy over the bias. His statement not only hints at his dissatisfaction but also confirms his earlier belief that evil is dominant in a world where good aspires to

dwell. Once again it becomes clear that things always have their binary or opposite around them; one needs to be sensitive to identify them :

In such a dualistic world, Blake does not encourage us to remain innocent, however. In his later writings, most notably in “The Book of Thel”, Blake suggests that naive innocence must of necessity pass through and assimilate the opposite state of experience and reach the third state called “organised innocence” which comprehends but transcends the first two states, if one is to arrive at perfection.¹⁴

The reference to perfection and the “organised innocence” brings him closer to Hegel’s philosophy of duality, where opposites combine to create a perfect whole. Perhaps this perfection can be achieved in the poet’s imagination. Blake’s poems are full of such symbols and examples which come under the category of binaries:

They laugh at our <i>play</i>	(The Echoing Green)
Are ready for <i>rest</i>	(The Echoing Green)
When we all <i>girls</i> and <i>boys</i>	(The Echoing Green)
Among the <i>old</i> folk	(The Echoing Green)
In our <i>youth</i> time were seen	(The Echoing Green)
From the <i>morn</i> to the <i>evening</i> he strays	(The Shepherd)
But I am black, as if <i>bereaved</i> of light	(The Little Black Boy)
All round my golden tent like lambs <i>rejoice</i>	(The Little Black Boy)
And I am <i>black</i> , but Oh! My soul is <i>white</i>	(The Little Black Boy)
All flowers and trees and <i>beasts</i> and <i>men</i> receive.	(The Little Black Boy)
<i>Sound</i> the flute	(Spring)
Now its <i>mute</i>	(Spring)
<i>Day</i> and <i>Night</i>	(Spring)
Tho’ the morning was <i>cold</i> , Tom was happy and <i>warm</i>	(The Chimney Sweeper)

Can I see another's <i>grief</i> ?	(On another's sorrow)
He doth give his <i>joy</i> to all.	(On another's sorrow)
The Little Boy <i>found</i>	(The Little Boy Found)
The Little Boy <i>lost</i> in the lonely fern	(The Little Boy found)
Who <i>Present, Past</i> and Future sees.	(Introduction)
Your <i>spring</i> and your day are wasted in play	(Nurse's Song)
And your <i>winter</i> and night in disguise.	(Nurse's Song)
If I <i>live</i>	(The Fly)
Or if I <i>die</i>	(The Fly)
Then let Lyca <i>wake</i>	(The Little girl Lost)
If my mother <i>sleep</i>	(The Little girl Lost)
And build's a <i>Heaven</i> in <i>Hell's</i> despair.	(The Clod and the Pebble)
So sung a little <i>Clod</i> of Clay	(The Clod and the Pebble)
But a <i>Pebble</i> of the Brook	(The Clod and the Pebble)
I was angry with my <i>friend</i> .	(The Poison Tree)
My <i>foe</i> outstretched beneath the tree.	(The Poison Tree)
That so many sweet <i>flower</i> bore	(The Garden of Love)
And binding with <i>briars</i> my joys and desires	(The Garden of Love)
The Sun does <i>arise</i> ,	(The Echoing Green)
The sun does <i>descend</i>	(The Echoing Green)
To the bells' <i>cheerful</i> sound	(The Echoing Green)
Till the little ones, <i>weary</i>	(The Echoing Green)

The list is as follows:

Old	Youth
Play	Rest
Girls	Boys
Rejoice	Bereaved
Beast	Man
Cold	Warm
Present	Past
Wake	Sleep
Heaven	Hell
Flower	Briar
Morn	Evening
Laugh	Cry
Spring	Winter
Live	Die
Clod	Pebble
Friend	Foe
Black	White
Day	Night
Sound	Mute
Joy	Grief
Lost	Found
Arise	Descend
Cheerful	Weary

Man's mortality and its contrariness to Nature's eternity is a common theme for the Romantic poets. In the poetry of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries one finds themes where life is placed against death, death against rebirth, and permanence against change. This thematic binary is summed up in the poem of Lord Alfred Tennyson, whose Brook sings the song of its eternity against man's temporal existence:

For men may come and men may go

But I go on forever.¹⁵

“I” here refers to the Brook but actually it alludes to Nature which never dies but changes forms. The brook continues to flow in order to meet the sea. The meeting may diminish the existence of the brook but it will always be there in the water of the sea in some way or the other.

When Percy. B. Shelley wrote, “Ode to the West Wind”¹⁶ in 1819, the entire generation of readers waited in anticipation for the prophetic words to disperse and watched in awe as the words cast their spell over them. The message of humanity and hope reached everyone as the fire in the poets’s heart rekindled the ashes in the hearts of the readers. His final announcement to the world brought the chaos to an end:

“If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”¹⁷

“Ode to the West Wind” like all other odes, begins with the invocation of the subject—the West Wind. In the poem, the West Wind is the centre of all praise and appeal, it is the charioteer which drives the dead leaves until the “azure sister of spring” blows. This may be the reference to the East Wind or the one which blows in spring unlike the West Wind which blows in autumn. The colours mentioned in the first stanza like, yellow, black, pale and hectic red symbolise death whereas the reference to the east wind contrasts the colours of death with “living hues and odours plain and hill”¹⁸. Amidst the very visible binaries between the east and the west winds, spring and autumn, yellow and green, a major binary appears. The West Wind is described both as a destroyer and as a preserver : Destroyer as it takes away all the dead leaves which had been sticking to the branches and preserver because it also becomes a carrier of seeds which shall be buried under the soil and will be reborn in spring. Thus he alludes to the fact that to every end a new beginning always awaits. Once again, “tameless, swift and proud”¹⁹ wind, is contrasted against the life of the poet who is nearing his end. The wind shall always remain mightier but the poet is afflicted by the ravages of age and time. Finally the poem ends at a positive note where the poet is hopeful of a new beginning:

“If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”

The meaning of the line emerges from the binary opposition between spring and winter. The entire poem is based upon the interplay of binaries, where seasons are contrasted and death and rebirth are placed against the mortality of man. The lines containing binaries are as follows:

If *Winter* comes can *Spring* be Far behind?

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep *sky's* commotion

Loose clouds like *earth's* decaying leaves are shed

Destroyer and *preserver*; hear, oh hear!

Thou who didst *waken* from his summer dreams

And saw in *sleep* old palaces and towers

Of the *horizon* to the *zenith's* height,

Shook from the tangled boughs of *Heaven* and *Ocean*

All overgrown with azure *moss* and *flowers*

The impulse of thy strength, only less *free*

A heavy weight of hours has *chain'd* and bow'd

Like wither'd leaves to quicken a new *birth!*

Drive my *dead* thoughts over the universe.

The list is as follows:

Winter	Spring
Earth	Sky
Destroyer	Preserver
Sleep	Waken
Heaven	Ocean

Zenith	Horizon
Moss	Flowers
Chained	Free
Birth	Dead

John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"²⁰ is a perfect example of binaries which affirm art's eternity against man's life which is time bound. The Urn in the poem becomes a symbol of art which has surpassed the limitations of time and death. The people carved on the urn or the artist who carved them may have died long ago but the urn is there to narrate the history of the past. Jack Stillinger comments:

On the painted surface of one side of the urn (the subject of stanzas 2–3), the piper's melodies are imagined to be "unheard" and therefore "sweeter"; the piper never tires; the lovers, pursuing and pursued, never age or lose their beauty ("She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss, / Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair!"); the "happy" trees never shed their leaves (it is eternal "spring"). Everything is "far above" the "breathing ... passion" of living humans, who are subject to "a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd, / A burning forehead, and a parching tongue." On the other side of the urn (stanza 4), a sacrificial procession of "mysterious priest," lowing heifer, and townsfolk is stopped forever on the way to some "green altar"; they will neither reach their destination nor go back to their "little town" (though the heifer will never reach the altar, and the people, like the lovers, will not age or die). This is different from the process of life in the real (the poet's) world.²¹

This highlights the huge point of difference between the life of man and life of 'art'. The urn belongs to the latter category which is not subject to decay. However, it can be a boon and a bane at the same time. The timeless quality of the inscription on the urn can also be a reminder that things drawn there will not change. The piper will always be playing the pipe, the lovers will forever be trapped in one state of expression and the trees will never be bare and hence will never experience the beauty of autumn or winter. For them it will be spring always. Thus it can be concluded that Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is a perfect example of binary oppositions which demarcates the difference between the mortality of man and immortality of art :

What *men* or *gods* are these? What maidens loth?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those *unheard*
Are sweeter;

When *old* age shall this generation waste, or ever *young*;

Of deities or *mortals*, or of both,

Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth *eternity*

For ever *warm* and still to be enjoy'd,

Cold Pastoral!

A list of binary words in the poem is as follows:

Man	Gods
Heard	Unheard
Young	Old
Warm	Cold
New	Old
Eternity	Mortal

In “Ode to a Nightingale”²² Keats plays upon the binaries like appearance and deception, imagination and reality, life and death, pain and pleasure, freedom and bondage, and permanence and change. The song of the “immortal bird” drags the poet out of his sleep and brings him to a half waking situation where he is standing between unconsciousness and consciousness, life and death. The bird is not immortal but its song makes it so. The song hurls the poet into a “drowsy numbness”²³ and compels him to question whether he “wakes or sleep?” The condition between waking and sleep

hints at the subconscious state of existence where the song of the bird exists. The nightingale may be a figment of his imagination or may be a reality but Keats's words do not bring out the truth. The binary between the reality visible to the naked eye and the invisible nightingale forms the crux of the verse.

Fled is that music:—Do I *wake* or *sleep*?

Was it a *vision*, or a *waking dream*?

Here, where men sit and hear each other *groan*

Still wouldst thou *sing*, and I have ears in vain—

Or *emptied* some dull opiate to the drains

O for a beaker *full* of the warm South,

But being too *happy* in thine

Where but to think is to be full of *sorrow* happiness,—

The *weariness*, the fever, and the fret

But being too happy in thine *happiness*,—

The list of binary words in the poem is as follows :

Wake	Sleep
Vision	Waking Dream
Emptied	Full
Sing	Groan
Happy	Sorrow
Happiness	Weariness

By the mid of nineteenth century the Romantic age was nearing its end and it was marked by the gradual decline in man's religious faith. The publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) challenged man's conviction. It gave scientific explanations to most of the occurrences in nature and the evolution of man. Precisely known as the Victorian age, the later nineteenth century witnessed spiritual crisis and chaos. This wind of change mostly affected writers and poets who were the sensitive and educated lot. This is visible in the poetry of Matthew Arnold, Lord Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning, to name only a few. In Arnold's "Dover Beach"²⁴ the receding sea waves symbolise man's weakening belief in the 'sea of faith'. There is a pervading sense of serenity in the verse. The calmness of the sea, the description of the receding waves, the moon blanched land echoes with silence and peace:

The sea is calm to-night

The tide is full, the moon lies fair

Upon the straits; - on the French coast the light

Gleams and is gone.²⁵

But as the poem reaches the last two lines, the mood and tone is completely changed. From a surreal world of romance one is suddenly thrown into the present day where "ignorant armies clash by night"²⁶. Arnold's world is a world of 'make belief' where the land meets the sea amidst promises made by lovers. The reader is amused by the picturesque description of the sea waves but the tranquillity is juxtaposed with the sudden reference to war zones and armies. This contrast between the serenity of the seascape and chaos highlights the trauma and tragedy of the age where man is trapped between religion and modernity.

Begin, and *cease*, and then again begin,

Where the *sea* meets the moon-blanched *land*,

Hath really neither *joy*, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for *pain*;

List of the binary opposite words is as follows:

Begin	Cease
Sea	Land
Joy	Pain

Like William Blake, W.B. Yeats too, uses symbols peculiar to him. His symbols are not universal but personal ones. In many of his poems one can find use of symbols like Roses, Stones, Gyres, Mythological figures, Water and imaginary places like Byzantium and Innisfree. “The contrast between the colonised and the coloniser, between Ireland and the British Empire, the dominated and the dominant further underscores the crisis in contemporary society depicted in the poetry of W.B. Yeats”²⁷ says Mozumder. In him one witnesses a lost soul who wanders in the wilderness of the city to search for an ideal place to live in. He loved contrasting the past with the present, the ancient with the modern, the moving with the static, youth and age, body and soul, being and becoming, and the dancer and the dance. Though Yeats is a modern poet, he had the soul of the bygone era. His poems celebrate the glorious past of Ireland, which he always missed. This innate desire in him for perfection and peace is seen in poems like “Lake Isle of Innisfree” and “Wild Swans at Coole” etc. The scenic description of Innisfree seems similar to Thoreau’s *Walden*. The poet’s heart is sick of the city life and he wishes for an escape to a place where he would stay in ‘a mud house with bee hives and flowers shedding dew drops, amidst the song of the cricket’. The poem begins with a sudden statement : “I will arise and go now”²⁸, which suggests that the poet is in a hurry to leave his present state and occupation and reach his ideal dwelling place. This stands in a sharp contrast to the first line of the second stanza, where, “peace comes dropping slow”²⁹. The hurried anxiety in the poet is contrasted with the slow dropping of the dew drops in the lines. Also, the pervading sense of tranquillity in the poem is shaken by the introduction of the present in the last two lines.

From Innisfree one is pulled into a busy world of traffic jams and pavements, full of people. Yeats created a perfect place for modern man's escape in the form of the imaginary city of Innisfree. He establishes a contrast between today's busy world and the busy world of bees, both sounding similar but diametrically opposite to one another. When the poet stands amidst a, "roadway or on the pavement grey"³⁰ his heart misses the serenity of Innisfree. The lines containing binaries are :

There *midnight*'s all a glimmer, and *noon* a purple glow,

I will arise and go now, for always *night* and *day*

Here are the binary pairs of words:

Midnight	Noon
Night	Day

In "Wild Swans at Coole"³¹, the poet establishes a contrast between the life of swans and human beings, and also hints at the difference between their ways of life. On a beautiful autumn day when the poet visits a place where he used to go long ago, he is taken aback by memories. He imagines and relives all the gone years in a few moments. The swans used to come to the place with their mates and the poet had been observing their companionship, love and youth for a very long time. He would come to watch them, "paddle in the cold companionable streams or climb the air". But this time his heart grew sore. David Ross asserts: "Yeats counts 59 swans upon the lake, and he cannot but reflect that it has been 19 years since he first made his count: thus opens the poem's movement of elegiac retrospection."³² Though he was nineteen, still he felt that he was wearied of life and its responsibilities. Perhaps life had taken away his youth much before time and the swans were still youthful and beautiful. They had not changed over the years unlike the poet. Their beauty and mysterious youth transcended the barriers of time and age. Finally the poet concludes that perhaps it is because, "their hearts have not grown old". The contrast in the lives of these swans and the life of the poet forms the central theme of the poem. Unlike the poet, the swans lived for the moment and enjoyed life to the brim. The binaries emerge from the fact that both the creatures had been experiencing joy and warmth at Coole but their approaches change with time. The swans remain the same even after the passage of many years whereas

the poet's life has completely changed. He no longer derives happiness from their joy, but is concerned about the transitoriness of things and also of this experience. Man cannot live for the moment because he is trapped in a web of culture, tradition and family whereas the swans lived for the moment because perhaps they had no memory to lament and no hopes for the future.

Like Yeats, T.S.Eliot too, has used a number of binary opposites at the level of language and theme. "The Wasteland" is a perfect example which portrays a long list of contraries like Fertility/Sterility, Life/Death, Past/Present, Love/Lust, Silence/Speech etc. To highlight the fragmented and disjointed society of the twentieth century, he adopts a style which itself uses fragmented sentences and thoughts to mirror the crisis. This style very much symbolises the existential problem of the modern man. Eliot's contrast between life and death demonstrates that the people of Wasteland are more fascinated with sterility, lust and death, than with fertility, love or life. Life is actually lifeless for them; they survive for the sake of survival. According to Cleanth Brooks, "Life devoid of meaning is death; sacrifice, even the sacrificial death, may be life giving, an awakening to life"³³

Water is a universal symbol of life and rebirth but in the Wasteland, the Phoenician sailor dies by drowning in water and the London Bridge falls in water. Thus, 'water' in the Wasteland symbolises death. Like water, the opening lines of the poem contain words like, 'memory', 'desire', 'dull roots', 'spring rain', which suggest binaries. Gabrielle McIntire remarks :

Eliot's terms forcefully conjoin the incommensurate temporal pulls of memory and desire while highlighting the "cruel[ty]" of such a mixing: memory is intrinsically backward looking – it casts its gaze to what is sealed off "in time," even as it insists that the rules of temporality and closure are unpredictable – while desire pushes to the future for its realization. In Eliot's poem, "April is the cruellest month" because it links what are otherwise potentially disparate (birth and death, "Memory and desire," "dull roots" and "spring rain") through a sudden revolution of the earth's cycles."³⁴ Eliot's use of binaries and their realisation by the reader is difficult since his technique is very complicated. The paradoxes, binaries or antinomies used by him, though borrowed from nature and human nature, they never fail to shock the reader instead of surprising them. In, "The Hollow Men", the repetition of the words, "Hollow/Stuffed" suggests

the binary levels on which the poem operates. According to S. Mozumder, “This duality of human mind creates a crisis in society and gradually leads it to the dissection of its bond. In the fifth part of the poem the poet shows the opposition between ‘idea/reality’, ‘motion/act’, ‘conception/creation’, ‘emotion/response’, ‘desire/spasm’, ‘potency/existence’ and ‘essence/descent’...³⁵

While talking about a philosophy where opposites collide to give meaning to absolute wholes, the poetry of Walt Whitman cannot be overlooked. His philosophy of dualism which emerged out of his inspiration from the Transcendentalists gave way to his masterpieces soaked in binary oppositions and paradoxes. In “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”³⁶, he discusses the past, present and future of America with the to and fro motion of the ferry. Each traveller who crosses the river has his own point of view regarding the journey but according to the poet there is a symmetry in their thoughts. Thus, once again it is seen that there is uniformity in contradiction:

The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day

The simple, compact, well joined scheme, myself disintegrated, everyone disintegrated
yet part of the scheme.

Lines highlighting the binaries in the poem are as follows:

Crowds of *men* and *women* attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me!

The simple, compact, *well-join'd* scheme, myself *disintegrated*, every one disintegrated
yet part of the scheme,

The similitudes of the *past* and those of the *future*,

Others will see the islands *large* and *small*;

Just as you feel when you look on the *river* and *sky*, so I felt,

In the *day* among crowds of people sometimes they came upon me,

In my walks home late at *night* or as I lay in my bed they came upon me

Live, old life! play the part that looks back on the *actor* or *actress*!
 Play the old role, the role that is *great* or *small* according as one makes it!
 Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out *questions* and *answers*!

The list of binary opposite words in the poem is:

Men	Women
Joined	Disintegrated
Past	Future
Large	Small
River	Sky
Day	Night
Actor	Actress
Questions	Answers
Great	Small

In another very evocative poem, “Out of the Cradle endlessly rocking”³⁷, Whitman uses the sea as a symbol of death which keeps on rocking the cradle of life. The endless process of birth and death marks the central theme of the poem. The word “cradle” evokes images of baby or birth, and the word “endless” in the title suggests something eternal. Thus, the title as a whole implies the endless process of birth. However, on the contrary the poem is about death and how the death of something may result in the birth of something else.

Out of the endless movement of the sea waves, the poet is reminded of a lost childhood memory. He remembers how as a child he was affected by the death of a bird and the song of its mate stirred his inner self to an extent that he started identifying himself with it. The song of the bird transcended barriers of life, death and language. Once

again Whitman explores his philosophy of dualism through examples like life, death and after life. The death of the bird causes the birth of a poet. The sea which rocks the cradle of death, becomes a witness to his birth. The lines having binaries are quoted below :

Down from the shower'd halo,
Up from the mystic play of shadows

From your memories sad brother, from the fitful *risings* and *fallings* I heard,
 A *man*, yet by these tears a *little boy* again,

I, chanter of *pains* and *joys*, uniter of here and hereafter,

Winds blow *south*, or winds blow *north*,
 Day come *white*, or night come *black*,
 And every day the *he-bird* to and fro near at hand,
 And every day the *she-bird* crouch'd on her nest, silent, with bright eyes,
O madly the sea pushes upon the land,

Silent, avoiding the moonbeams, blending myself with the shadows,
 Recalling now the obscure shapes, the echoes, the *sounds* and sights after their sorts,

High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves,
Low-hanging moon!
Delaying not, *hurrying* not,

I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of *here* and *hereafter*

The list of the binary opposite words is as follows :

Up	Down
Risings	Fallings
Man	Little Boy
Pains	Joys

Here	Hereafter
He-bird	She-bird
South	North
Day	Night
Sound	Silent
Black	White
High	Low
Land	Sea
Delaying	Hurrying

Thus it can be seen that the history of binary opposites in poetry is not something new. Poets belonging to different ages and nationalities had been using this device, either in the form of conceits like Donne and Marvell, or in the form of paradoxes and juxtapositions like Blake. Poets like Keats, Shelley, Yeats and Eliot used symbols to express this and others like Arnold and Whitman presented the duality in their own solemn and subtle ways using Nature as a metaphor. Whatever the theme or inspiration may be, the strategy of binary opposition in poetry kept inspiring poets from centuries and still continues to do so, thus affirming that things can be explained in a better way by referring to what they are not or by comparing or contrasting them with their opposites.

¹ Willaim Blake, *Wikipedia*

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Marriage_of_Heaven_and_Hell>

² T.J.Backus, *John Donne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. A.J.Smith, Routledge, 1996, New York, p.25

³ John Donne, “Valediction : Forbidding Mourning” Poetry Foundation

<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44131/a-valediction-forbidding-mourning>>

⁴ Masood ul Hasan, *Donne’s Imagery*, Faculty of Arts, Muslim University, Aligarh, 1957-58, p.85.

⁵ John Donne: The Critical Heritage, ed. A.J.Smith, Routledge, 1996, New York,

⁶ Ibid, pp5

⁷ Harold Bloom, *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, Bloom's Literary Criticism, p.xv

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Willaim Blake, *Wikipedia*

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Marriage_of_Heaven_and_Hell>

¹⁰ S. Sen, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience- A Critical Evaluation*, Unique Publishers, Noida, p.89

¹¹ William Blake "The Chimney Sweeper", *Songs of Innocence*,

<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43654/the-chimney-sweeper-when-my-mother-died-i-was-very-young>>

¹²William Blake, "The Chimney Sweeper", *Songs of Experience*,

<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43653/the-chimney-sweeper-a-little-black-thing-among-the-snow>>

¹³ Ibid, p.103

¹⁴ Chung-hsuan Tung, "Blake's Dialectical Vision", in *Journal of The College of Liberal Arts*, Vol27, June 1997, p.193

¹⁵ Alfred Tennyson, "Brook", Poetry Foundation <

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-brook-2/>>

¹⁶ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind", *Fifteen Poets*, Oxford University Press, p 339

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind", *Fifteen Poets*, Oxford University Press, p. 339

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn",

Bartleby,<<http://www.bartleby.com/101/625.html>>

²¹ Jack Stillinger, "The story of Keats", *John Keats*, ed. Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, New York, 2007, p.220

²² John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale", *Fifteen Poets*, Oxford University Press,p.359

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach", *Fifteen Poets*, Oxford University Press, p483

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶Ibid

²⁷ Subrata Chandra Mozumder, “The Theme of Crisis in the Poetry of Yeats and Eliot”
Journal, Vol4, 2013, Metropolitan University, p.67

²⁸W.B. Yeats, “Lake Isle of Innisfree” Poetry
Foundation<<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43281/the-lake-isle-of-innisfree>>

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ W.B.Yeats, “Wild Swans at Coole”, Poetry Foundation <
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43288/the-wild-swans-at-coole>>

³² David.A.Ross, A Critical Companion to William Butler Yeats, p.287

³³ Cleanth Brooks, “The Wasteland: Critique of the Myth”, *T.S.Eliot: The Wasteland*,
ed. C.B.Cox and Arnold.P.Hinchliffe. Macmillan, London, p.129.

³⁴ Gabrielle McIntire, *Modernism, Memory and Desire : T.S.Eliot and Virginia Woolf*,
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³⁵ Subrata Chandra Mozumder, “The Theme of Crisis in the Poetry of Yeats and Eliot”
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³⁶ Walt Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” Poetry.org
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