ALLEGRO AS A LITERARY MODE

Chapter III

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An acknowledged fact of literary history is that each country, nation or race provides its own art uniquely expressive of its will. The *Sui generis* character of each literature is predicated on the urgencies and contingencies located in the spiritual and moral life of its people. In this sense, the American writings have emerged as a profoundly sensitive seismograph of American life and lore of its cultural compulsions and contradictions. Idealism and pragmatism constitute the spiritual basis and moral health of the American nation and a continual “unsleeping dialogue” between the ideal and the real has become the archetypal strain in American imagination. “The idea of the New World as the Biblical land of promise has remained, in one guise or another, the most enduring theme in American art and literature” 51 (*Darshan Sing Maini.2*). The earliest settlers happened to be Protestants with a distinctly Calvinistic world view. And naturally, the American imagination remained close to the value system stemming from
the Calvinistic canons of pre-destination According to Calvinism Man's salvation rests with God, It is Gods' "Grace" and "Election". God's ways are devious. Men only have to work hard and pray. Basically, Puritanism is a conservative ethic, an ethic of work and rigour and righteousness. The logical outcome of these Protestant values, is affluence.

On close examination, one can find that beneath all the materialistic facade of life in America, there persists a strong and visible undercurrent of the voyaging spirit, or of the questing self, with the dark intensity of a religious commitment. The American puritan conscience was, often resonant enough to create moral beauty and was concerned with sin and salvation. However, side by side with this spiritual affirmation, a saner and more pondered view of wealth also has drawn its sanction and energy from Protestantism. The pursuit of money was a religious vocation, in an extended sense; and the creation of wealth through work and commitment was at bottom a spiritual activity. "Somewhere in our mental constitution" says Trilling "is the demand for life as pure spirit" (Lionell Trilling,90). Thus, the strong religious base of American life and thought is to be underscored. In literature this religious sense is often expressed through the mode of allegory.
"The origins of allegory," as stated by John Mac Queen, "are philosophic and theological rather than literary"\textsuperscript{53}(John Mac Queen.1). The Christian community had a sense of history as purposeful allegory. The Jews in sixth century B.C had considered themselves to be the chosen people, through whom the divine purpose would operate in history. M.H. Abrams describes allegory as

"a narrative fiction in which the agents and actions and sometimes, the setting as well, are contrived to make coherent sense on the literal or primary level of signification and at the same time to signify a second correlated order of agents, concepts and events"\textsuperscript{54} (M.H. Abrams.4)

Mainly, two types of allegory are easily distinguished — political allegory and allegory of ideas. Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel" (1681) is an allegorisation of the political crisis in the contemporary England of Dryden. In this work King David represents Charles II and Absalom represents his natural son the Duke of Monmouth. The second type, is the allegory of ideas in which the literal characters represent abstract concepts, and the plot usually, exemplifies a doctrine or thesis. Bunyan's \textit{Pilgrim's Progress} allegorizes the Christian doctrine of salvation, by telling how the
character named Christian flees the city of destruction and makes his way laboriously to the celestial city, encountering on his way characters called Faithful, Hopeful and the Giant Despair and passes through places like the Slough of Despond, the valley of the Shadow of Death and Vanity Fair. *Pilgrim's Progress* is a work in which the allegory of ideas, is sustained throughout.

Allegory, as such, is a narrative strategy which may be employed in any literary genre. The Pilgrim's Progress is a moral and religious allegory in a prose narrative. Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96) fuses the moral, religious, historical and political allegory in a verse romance. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the voyages to Laputa and Lagado (1726), is an allegorical satire mainly directed against philosophical and scientific pedantry. Sustained allegory has been written in all literary periods and this method of writing, invariably, contained an element of didacticism.

Various literary narratives like the fable, the parable and the exemplum can also be classified as allegories as they describe a coherent set of circumstances which signify a second order of correlated meanings. A fable is a narrative in prose or verse that exemplifies an abstract moral thesis or principle of human behaviour. Usually, in its conclusion the moral is stated either by one character or by the narrator himself in the form of an epigram.
A parable, also, is a short narrative about human beings. The narrator brings home to his audience a general thesis or lesson, with the help of a tacit analogy or parallel. The parable is one of the favourite devices used in the Biblical narrative as a powerful didactic mode endowed with “literary beauty” and “instructive power”. Instead of the mode of abstract reasoning the handling of this literary vehicle produced desirable consequences: it helped to win ready attention, stimulated the listener’s aesthetic senses and thus created an ultimate appeal to the intellect. The daily life of the ordinary peasants and fishermen in its original freshness got reflected in the parables. The lilies, the sparrows, the Shepards, all had their prominent places in the narrative. But these aesthetically activating elements were on most occasions, pointers to the spiritual reality of God and divine life.

The general notion about the Biblical use of the parable is that it aimed at a simplified version of the assumed heavenly truths through direct presentation in the ordinary language of the people. The attempt in the Biblical narrative is to give instruction through illustration. The Gospels of Mathew and Mark give evidence to the fact that their narrative is purposefully devised to effect a powerful, quick and lasting impact on the readers through parables.
The political milieu of the time when Biblical narrative got shaped might have demanded the garb of parabolism, partly making truth plain and partly shrouding it in mystery. The Jews who longed for a political emancipator would be shocked to despair, if they suddenly realized the Messiah to have born only to preach of a spiritual kingdom. Hence there was an urgent need to conceal his message by an outer wrapping. There is plainness and obscurity simultaneously in their particular parabolic device. Obscurity is purposefully created to evade opposition and protect one's message against immediate censorship. The parable thus seemed to be a safer and more effective method of presentation. The content was communicated only to those within the cultural codes. The parable wielded a mechanism of revealing and not revealing the truth simultaneously.

An exemplum, like the parable and the sermon is moralistic. It was a popular device in the Middle Ages. 'The Pardoner's tale' is an exemplum based on the theme "Greed is the root of all evil". Three drunken revellers set out to find Death and find a Heap of gold instead. Each attempts to gain sole possession of the treasure and in the effort everyone gets killed.

Allegory has always had the potential to become an instrument of satire, even political satire. It is the more effective for the imaginative vigour
of the image in which it is embodied. The generalities of allegory acquire power over the moral sense and imagination. The peculiarities of the satire equally acquire relevance when they are seen in terms of a system of moral ideas. Allegory and satire are intimately connected. Very often one gains a better understanding of an allegory by considering it as a satire. William Blake has created many examples to demonstrate the possibilities of the coexistence of allegory and satire. The poems in the Experience section are specifically capable of erasing the distinction between allegory and satire.

I wandered Thro’ each chartered street
Near where the chartered Thames does flow
And mark in face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

London here is both the allegory of a state of mind and an actual city whose way of life totally offended Blake’s religious principle.

Most of the western and eastern religions have found their most perfect expressions in myth—a narrative, a series of narratives—which serves to explain those universal facts which most intimately affect the believer, facts such as times, seasons, crops truths, tribes, cities, nations, birth, marriage, death, moral laws, the sense of inadequacy and fashion. These myths were transmitted orally at first, then in rituals and at a later stage by way of written word. Often they are mysteries, the interpretation
of which is revealed only to a priesthood. Such worthwhile narratives contained the Kernal of their vital meaning concealed beneath a shell of fiction and often improbable story. The shell of classical poetry consisted of myth about gods. The Kernal was the allegorical meaning which underlay the shell. The allegoric device, as we have seen is eclectic by nature. It trespasses into numerous literary expressions like the simile, metaphor, parable, synecdoche, metonymy, fable and proverb. Used as a trope, an incidental rhetoric device or ornament, allegory expresses something savoury under the veil of its narrative.

In the classical world of Greece and Rome, the myth of Demeter and Persephone or Ceres and Proserpine, respectively, began as an allegorical explanation of the process of sowing and harvesting corn. By an almost inevitable extension, it became an allegory of human immortality or perhaps rebirth after death.

A later myth which was central to the mystic and philosophic, orphic cult in classical Greece is that of the search through the under world by the musician Orpheus for his wife Eurydice. The search in the earlier versions was successful, but in later versions Orpheus failed, when at the very instant of success he glanced backward. Orpheus and his music represents the higher intellectual and redemptive powers of the human soul. Whereas Eurydice
represents, the lower and more appetitive power, which are particularly subject to evil and death. The sufferings of Orpheus represent the sacrifices necessary if the soul is to redeem the lower self which it loves and without which it cannot find salvation. This emphasis on redemption or salvation made it easy for the theologians, at a later date, to treat the myth as an allegory of the Christian notion of redemption.

Under the Orphic influence, the allegorical journey through the underworld came to be stressed as an essential part of the classical myths. In Virgil’s Aeneid, Aeneas arrives in Italy, stained with his passionate involvement with Dido at Carthage. To obtain purification and enable him to carry out the divine purpose of founding Rome, it is necessary that he should make the descent into Hades and return purified. The descent of Aeneas is an allegory of the experience of the dark night of the soul, which inevitably precedes the dawn of success.

Plato is also an effective founder of many aspects of the allegorical tradition. As a philosopher, he was aware of the limitations of human reason and knowledge. As a consequence, many of his dialogues include, “myths, allegorical narratives or developed metaphors which serve to image truth beyond the reach of the discursive intellect.”
Throughout the ancient world, the allegorical mode was the one most commonly advanced form of poetic narrative. Homer, Virgil, Ovid and Statius were all writers who had a palpable allegorical design in whatever they had written. As Gilbert Murray remarked, "All Hellenistic philosophy from the first stoic onward is permeated by allegory". To the ancient Greeks the whole material world is only a great myth, a thing whose value lies not in itself but in its spiritual meaning\textsuperscript{55}(Mac Queen.13).

Boccaccio called such connected utterance "a fable" which reveals its author's purpose only when the shell of fiction has been removed. The fables formed a four-fold species to him. The first category in which brute beasts or even inanimate objects are made to represent human situations and literal truth. A typical author of this category is Aesop. The second species mingles the fabulous with truth. The most ancient poets whose task it was to cloak with fiction, divine and human affairs alike, invented the legends. According to such a legend the sailor Acestos and his comrades were turned into fish for manoeuvering to kidnap Bacchus.

The third species resembles a historical fact rather than any fable. Homer in his Odyssey writes about how Ulysses was tethered to the mast of the ship lest he should succumb to the song of the Sirens. Even if the incident has no historical basis, it is still probable or possible.
The fourth species is old women's tales. They possess absolutely no surface of hidden meaning.

Tracing the origin and development of allegory in his book, Mac Queene states that, in the Roman context, Quintilian understands the word allegory in a broader sense. Allegory, he observed, presents either one thing in words and another thing in meaning or else something absolutely opposed to the meaning of the words. Under the first category he discusses the use of metaphor, simile and riddle in a way which bears a direct relation to the modern use of the term "allegory". Under the second, he discusses figures which produce the same effect by an element of irony, or of sarcasm or contradiction.

Dante makes his statement of the theory of allegory in the second tractacle of his "Convivio". According to him, writings can be understood and ought to be expounded in four senses. The first is called the 'literal' which does not go beyond the strict limits of the letter. The second is named 'the allegorical' by him, where a truth is hidden under "a beautiful lie". In the story of Ovid, Orpheus with his lyre made the beasts tame and made the trees and stones move towards him. That is to say that the wiseman by the instrument of his voice makes cruel beasts grow mild and humble. The third sense is called 'moral'. In the Gospel, when Christ ascended the Mount
to be transfigured, he took with himself, only three apostles out of the twelve, morally signifying that for the most secret affairs we ought to have few companions. Dante terms the fourth sense anagogic ie above the senses. This occurs when a writing is spiritually expounded. Classical myth and the Bible furnished Dante's requirements of "truth hidden under a beautiful fiction," when he wrote Convivio and The Divina Comedia. Purgatorio II gives a picturesque description of the arrival of the ship of the redeemed souls at the foot of Mt. Purgatory. Here, Dante makes ample allegorical use of the Biblical text.

Dante's use of the Biblical allegory is exemplified thus by Mac Queen in his book Allegory:

"The redeemed souls after death compared themselves to the Israelites after their departure from Egypt, typologically they celebrate their redemption through Christ, tropologically their conversion from the sorrow and misery of sin to the state of grace; anagogically, their passage as sanctified souls from the bondage of corruption of their world to the liberty of everlasting glory."

(Mac Queen.55).

In the Middle Ages when the allegorical writings dominated
literature, the emphasis tended to move from the external to the internal. The allegoric tradition which persisted in the Middle Ages passed on to the Renaissance period. The abstract plot receives body as it were from the parallel historical and tropological narrative. When the objective was salvation, the dominant image in the narrative device became a pilgrimage—the pilgrim's progress from this world to that which is to come—as John Bunyan puts it. When arrived at a restricted courtly audience, the emphasis fell on the knightly quest.

Allegory, as defined by Harry Shaw in his Dictionary of Literary Terms, "is a method of representation in which a person, abstract idea or even stands for itself and for something else." The author intends characters and their actions to be understood in terms other than surface appearances and meanings. The sub-surface or extended meanings involve moral or spiritual concepts more significant than the actual narrative itself.

Forms of such two-level narratives are the parables in which a story is told primarily to express a religious truth, and a fable in which animals by their speech and actions reveal supposed truths about mankind. Symbolic fictional figures and actions are used to convey truths and generalisations about human condition or experience. Like the metaphor, allegory also
expresses spiritual, psychological or abstract intellectual concepts in terms of material and concrete objects. By assigning to each feature of a text a hidden symbolic or mystical meaning beyond the primary meaning that words convey in their literal sense, the allegorical interpretation seeks to make that text more comprehensive, acceptable and relevant to the present. Thus in the fourteenth century poem, *Piers Plowman*, when the author describes himself to be afraid to bell the cat he actually states his views on the House of Commons' unsuccessful attempt to curb John of Gaunt's depredations. In "Absalom and Achitophel" Dryden reveals under scriptual disguise, the characters of politicians involved in an attempt to alter the method of succession to the English throne. Allegory both conceals and reveals. When an author ventures into political allegory he may protect himself by the element of disguise and at the same time make satirical revelations through the implied comparison. Several of these methods are combined by George Orwell in his *Animal Farm* (1945), which under the guise of fable about domestic animals who take over a farm from their human oppressor, expresses the author's disillusionment with the outcome of the Bolshevik Revolution and shows how one tyrannical system of Government in Russia was merely replaced by another. Perhaps the most original use of allegory in the twentieth century is to be found in the works
of Franz Kafka whose enigmatic fantasies about the predicament of the individual is an incomprehensible situation, are not susceptible to any precise interpretation. He allows them various simultaneous possibilities of explanation. *The Trial* and *The Castle* are typical examples in this respect. These novels are at once satires on status-quo and authority. They are also philosophical and psychological allegories.

The allegorical method as developed in the post-Biblical times, allowed an interpreter great latitude for subjective speculation. It is marked by a superficial simplicity and straightforwardness. The allegory, as has already been stated, is eclectic by nature, acting at once as a sign, symbol, image, myth and fable. Generally, it is transparent. But more often than not, it hangs in the horizon of the mind with an open-endedness or inconclusiveness, as “there is plainness and obscurity side by side in this device”.58 (*Miami Raphael.7*). Human life provides the plot for allegory. It denotes a simple meaning but connotes grave truth or wisdom. The form and the content are the two inseparable units of any work of art especially any literary work. Out of the fusion of the two emerges a quality which is neither form nor content but a by-product of the fusion. John Crowe Ransom called this extra-quality “texture” and the fusion which it produces is “structure”. Meaning lies embedded in the structure of a work of art and
neither of them exists without the other. In the climate of New criticism even though the critics treat a literary work only as ‘a verbal artifact’ or as an autonomous entity free of any independent and articulated system of thought, Dan Otto Via argues that “all literature contains inherently even though implicitly and indirectly a thought dimension” (Dan Otto Via.71).

In modern literature the allegory is re-incarnated into a new form. While it has retained all the aesthetic elements like the imagery, metaphor, simile and the like, it has shed its overt pedagogic overtones. At the same time it upholds its intellectual and aesthetic aspirations. It provides aesthetic delight. The narrative, the descriptive and the dramatic elements which the mode of allegory contains are not mere embellishments. The perfect fusion of thought and feeling insisted upon by T.S. Eliot while defining the concept of the unified sensibility, is what is aimed at in an allegory too. Going beyond ‘the statement’—the explicit meaning—the reader has to get at the real sense. Employing a deceptively simple style, it demands both denotative and connotative comprehension from the reader. The form of a literary work is primarily a structure of meanings. Thus an artistic creation is a “reconciliation of diverse impulses”, statement and suggestion, simplicity and subtlety, denotation and connotation. As Cleanth Brooks argues “there is a sense in which paradox is the language appropriate and
inevitable to poetry” (David Lodge. 292). The basis of poetic expression is irony or paradox because “what it says is different in kind or degree from “what it means”. In discursive writing what is said tends to approximate ideally to become identified with what is meant.

A work of literary art contains a variety or sequence of meanings. Interpretation is not a simple one-level activity. Words represent an image or memory, representing a sense experience. As Schlovsky, the Russian Formalist, has pointed out, “Art is thinking in images”. Whenever we read, we find our attention moving in two directions simultaneously. One direction is outward or centrifugal. We move from the individual words to the things they mean, the conventional association between words and their meaning. The other direction is inward or centripetal, in which we try to develop from the words a sense of the larger verbal pattern they make. In that case, the verbal pattern becomes a symbol or sign. In all literary verbal structures the final direction of meaning is inward and standards of outward meanings are secondary. Such literary structures of inward meaning are self-contained verbal patterns having to do with the realm of pleasure, beauty and interest. The word “signified” shows that the literal meaning is the simplest kind. It is in the second order semeiotic system of signification, i.e. in the plane of denotation, the language comes to mean something other
than what is said. This is the concept or the idea which may be called a literary image. Formal criticism begins with an examination of the imagery of a work of art and attaching of ideas to the structure of the imagery. We have actual allegory when a poet explicitly indicates the relationship of his images to examples and precepts. A writer is being allegorical whenever it is clear that he is saying "by this I also (allos) mean that".

Saussure the structuralist had insisted that meaning is always the result of a division or difference. Derrida the post-structuralist goes one step further and speaks of deferring. Meaning, according to him is not only a matter of difference (which is spatial) but also deferment which consists in a postponement (which is temporal). Thus the signifier is divided from the signified and the sign becomes a matter of what it is not. Its meaning is always absent from it, which only means it cannot be fixed. A word has several meanings and each meaning becomes a signifier which in its turn leads to more signifiers, thus opening up an unbounded space for the play of signification. According to Paul de Man too, literature is not "a definite unit of referential meaning that can be decoded without leaving a residue. "Its code is unusually conspicuous, complex and enigmatic".

Works of literature move in time and spread out in images. Allegory is translation of ideas into images. Symbols are substitute images. T.S. Eliot's
“Objective correlative” is a kind of image that sets up an inward focus of emotion and substitutes itself for an idea. In that sense, all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery. Richard Blackmur calls allegory “the highest form of putative imagination” because it objectifies the realm of possibilities. Allegory, as pointed out by C.S. Lewis in *The Allegory of Love*, is “a mode of expression”\(^6\). It is analytic. As Northrop Frye says it is in allegory that the writer “explicitly indicates the relationship of his images to examples and percepts”\(^6\). Good allegory never tells in so many words what the images mean. Images are the products of imagination and allegory gives us insight into the life processes of those images. The existence of the material or visible aspect—the things that are accessible to senses—leads to the existence of non-visible, through the labyrinth of ambiguity, guided by the lightning flashes of linguistic implications. Allegory, thus is an extended metaphor which very often serves as a mirror of the fallen condition of human being in a Biblical sense. Classical theorists linked allegory with irony. The writer is ironic at his own expense and also at the expense of the blundering mankind. Irony and allegory are methods of self-correction. Hence, didacticism is a special kind of response that allegory exacts from its readers. The most satisfying and interesting allegory is that which is ingenious in
contriving clues that will lead the reader to the very core of the meaning and allow his resourcefulness its full scope. Every work of imagination presents the reader with a vision, not the personal vision of the writer, but a far greater impersonal vision of a decisive act of spiritual freedom. A work of art communicates with a group of universal symbols, which are images of things common to all men and "therefore have a communicable power which is potentially unlimited". These images which include food and drink, the quest or journey, light and darkness percolate into the stream of writing. Writing is not merely a deliberate or voluntary act of consciousness. It includes processes which are sub conscious or pre-conscious, half-conscious or unconscious as well. This emphasis on the impersonal content has been developed by Jung and his school where communicability of archetypes is accounted for by a theory of the collective unconscious.

The "mental space" of the work of art, where imagination inhabits, where all artificial boundaries collapse, has thus, historical, metaphysical, visionary and mythical dimensions. Most writers on the subject of allegory have been inspired by fairy characters in poems like the \textit{Faerie Queene}. For Frye Fairy, "land is a world of moral realisation".\textsuperscript{63} (Northrop Frye.118) For Roche, it is the ideal world of the highest, most virtuous human nature. All these descriptions point to a state of ideality, the realisation of the
possibilities inherent in human nature and history. The fairyland is a part of vision of man's life as an effort to reconstruct and anticipate his true heavenly home.

It has been made somewhat clear

"that allegory never produces a "definitive" much less a "perfect" text. It is always pointing toward a goal that lies beyond it. In the process while it encourages the readers to aspire toward some world of perfect fulfilment, it reminds them of the limited world of which they are a part" \(^{64}\) (Sankaran Ravindran.137).

Allegory becomes pertinent when we consider the kind of commerce that can exist between the limited material resources and the impalpable truth apprehended by imagination. It is the open endedness that is built into allegory formally and theoretically that invites the readers to correlate what it "unfolds" with certain facts and realities. The fusion of the complimentary and the contradictory elements is what makes it an effective device for evasive presentation of the subject matter. As the befitting vehicle for subtle expression, it is the most suitable mode for the prophets, poets and playwrights living in a skeptical world of shifting values.