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AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN POETRY

1. Pre-World War II American Poetry

According to *The Princeton Handbook of Multicultural Poetries*, "The often idiosyncratic strength, boldness, and ambition of American poetry derive from two interrelated factors: its problematic and often marginalized relation to American society, and the lack of a defined and established literary class, culture, and audience" (Brogan ed., 1996: 23). In a way, the first of these factors has been true of poetries of many nations, particularly in the twentieth century.

The second factor is specific to the emigrants' experience in countries such as the United States of America, Canada, Australia and others. However, in the American context, one of the consequences of this scenario has been the development of American poetry through a dialectic between a sense of indebtedness to and derivation from British antecedents and a simultaneous drive to resist these antecedents.

This resistance has been visible in the poetry of some of the greatest of American poets. Besides, these poets also exhibit the twin tendency of conforming the British poetic tradition to peculiarly American circumstances and evolving out of these circumstances the forms and motifs expressive of a distinctive sensibility.

Notwithstanding the settlers' experience of a harsh, alien wilderness, severance of ties with the Old World, the ever-westward expansion of the frontier, the self-made, self-promoting prosperity of the colonizers and the rough-and-tumble economic progress through nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is important to take note of a paradox prevailing in the New World. This paradox is: "American materialism and expansiveness were inseparable from a strain of introverted, self-analyzing idealism just as deep. ...American poetry—marginalized economically but essential to psychological, moral, and religious life—played a powerful part in that act of self-creation and self-expression". It might, thus, seem odd but it is undeniable that American poets, even those who affiliated themselves with groups and movements, conceived their task in painfully personal and private terms. At the same time, they felt "their plight, however agonized, to be one connected with national destiny.

Their words, however private, expressed the consciousness of their fellow Americans" .

American poetry, as per general critical consensus, can be studied under four distinct phases, namely, the Colonial Period, Nineteenth-Century Romanticism, Modernist Poetry — 1900-1945 and the Post-War Period.

The Colonial Period did not see very many poets of significant ability or accomplishment until Philip Freneau from the middle Atlantic states and Edgar Allan Poe from the southern states appeared on the scene. In New England, however, the intensity of Calvinist piety prompted a number of well-read Puritans to write poetry. *The Bay Psalm Book*, which translated biblical texts into a plain style and was brought out in 1640, was the first book printed in English in the New World.

From among the Puritans, two poets of abiding importance were Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor. Bradstreet wrote long, conventional, didactic poems on the four elements, the four seasons and the four ages of history. Many of these poems were published in 1650 under the title *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America*, often regarded as the inaugural book of American poetry. Bradstreet, however, is now better known for poems on various personal themes published posthumously in 1678. These comprise love lyrics addressed to her husband, poems on the birth and death of her children, an elegy for her father and a meditation on mortality after the burning of the family house. "The emotional depth and honesty of these lyrics convert the conceits and metres of Renaissance verse into personal statements affirming love in the face of loss, faith in the face of tribulation". And yet, Bradstreet, virtually the first American poet, is often ruefully ironic about her situation as a woman in a male world of letters.

When Edward Taylor's 400-page manuscript was discovered in 1937, it brought forth the work of this major poet. Taylor, who was a Harvard graduate and a staunchly orthodox minister in a frontier hamlet, wrote for his own spiritual needs and not for publication. His poems, preserved nevertheless, consist of two long sequences, *God's Determinations Touching His Elect* and *Preparatory Meditations*

Before My Approach to the Lord's Supper. These poems are marked by directness of diction, the nervy quirks and risks of metaphorical leaps, the burly colloquiality and the rough rhythmic emphases of the poet's questions. Despite Taylor's indebtedness to the English metaphysical poets, one begins to hear the idiom and temper of American poetic speech distinguish itself from the more restrained and refined tradition of English poetry.

Most of the writing in early colonial America was prose. It consisted of sermons, spiritual journals, tracts and letters in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, however, the political focus overtook the religious aspect as the tempo for the Revolution gained momentum.

Notwithstanding the political differences with the mother country, the models for seventeenth and eighteenth century poetry were unabashedly English. Even the poetry of Phillis Wheatley, the first African woman to become known as a poet, reflects her English reading more than her African experience. According to *The Princeton Handbook*, "The first "school" of American poets was the "Connecticut Wits" of Yale and Hartford" (24) who collaborated in Popean couplets on a number of satiric projects. Some of these poets wrote in the styles of Swift and Butler. In Timothy Dwight's epic, for instance, called *The Conquest of Canaan*, published in 1785, the journey of the Israelites under Joshua to the promised land can be read as the advance of the Americans under Gen. Washington to nationhood. Later, Dwight also wrote *Greenfield Hill* in post-Miltonic blank verse to ostensibly demonstrate that the new republic could also produce pastoral poetry of philosophical seriousness worthy of the great English masters. This poem concludes with a visionary prospect of America's future happiness and prosperity, representing an early instance "of the recurrent American effort to project for the unstoried nation a myth of the future commensurate with its size and ambitions".

Another significant poet of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was Philip Freneau. While at Princeton, Freneau wrote 'The Power of Fancy' and co-authored 'The Rising Glory of America' which exhibited early the combination of preromantic feeling and patriotic fervor which characterized his work. Freneau enthusiastically supported the Revolution and edited newspapers attacking the

Federalists and advocating Jefferson's republicanism. "In the heady excitement of the new republic, Freneau had high hopes for American literature and for himself as the first American poet of stature" (24). Although this did not happen, yet Freneau did achieve public acclaim as the Poet of the Revolution.

To conclude, the poetry of the Colonial Period was, expectedly enough, imitative. "The question of literary nationalism—i.e., of whether American poetry was or ought to be original or derivative, part of the European (and particularly the English) tradition or a native development with the power of its rudeness—did not become urgent until the professionalization of literature in the second quarter of the 19th century" (24-5).

Neoclassicism was not strong enough in the United States to precipitate a vehement romantic reaction against it. Instead, Puritan Calvinism remained quite strong in the North as well as the South. By the time the rejuvenating spirit of romanticism reached Boston, New York and Charleston in the 1820s and 30s, it defined itself not against neoclassical rules and constraints but rather "in terms of the lingering aesthetic and epistemological assumptions of Puritanism. Thus American romanticism adapted the transatlantic stimulus from Coleridge and Wordsworth and Carlyle, Rousseau and Mme. de Stael, Kant and Fichte and Goethe to its own character and emphasis".

The Puritans, on the other hand, had developed a plain style in literature as well as in architecture, dress and worship. This plainness spoke of a deeply ambivalent suspicion of art as false, deceptive and seductive. Art was regarded as an appeal to the carnal and the irrational, a portrayal of fiction as truth. In fact, Puritans contrasted two modes of perceiving, imaging or expressing. " "Types," a term derived from a method of interpreting Scripture and extended into reading the "book" of nature, reveal the spiritual truths inherent and made manifest in the phenomenal world by divine constitution. "Tropes" are mere figures of speech, similitudes and allusions gestated by the fertile fancy". Almost in a similar vein, the great Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards asserted that the things of this world are designed to shadow forth spiritual things. This was so because Edwards believed that God makes the inferior in imitation of the superior, the material in

imitation of the spiritual, on purpose so as to have a resemblance or shadow of them. In the Puritan scheme, typological resemblance, thus, presents the God-made symbolism of objective reality which is beyond the verbal skill or interpretive powers of the artist. Topological resemblance, on the other hand, represents or recomposes reality in poet-made metaphors. Types, therefore, present directly extrinsic truths whereas tropes represent indirectly imaginative inventions. Puritans did use tropes but rather warily. In Bradstreet and Taylor, however, typological conviction not only liberated but also became an impetus to their verbal inventiveness.

The Puritan aesthetic set the agenda for American poetry into the nineteenth century and even down to the present. "The hermeneutical and epistemological assumptions behind the literary distinction between type and trope, the different implications of how things come to mean and how imagination and language function and participate in that process, established the poles for an ongoing dialectic that later poets would resume and resolve on their own terms".

While scanning the inflow and development of the Nineteenth-Century Romanticism in American poetry, it is undeniable that William Cullen Bryant brought the first stirrings of romanticism to American poetry. "The transition from his grandfather's Federalist Calvinism to his father's Unitarianism to his own career as a nature poet and a liberal reformer sums up the declension of New England intellectual and religious life". Bryant wrote a poem entitled 'Thanatopsis' — a stoic meditation on human mortality in the round of nature — at the age of 17. Despite his intense involvement in the worlds of journalism and public activism, he continued to publish poetry. It is noteworthy that Bryant became known as the 'American Wordsworth'. For him, however, the various aspects of nature were not exactly the manifestation of the Power that rolls through all things as a soothing, healing haven from the stresses of secular, urban living. Seen more objectively, Bryant was more of an eighteenth-century meditative precursor to the American Romantics than being a visionary poet in his own right.

Ralph Waldo Emerson marks the real watershed of American poetry and went on to become the prophet of Transcendentalism. After resigning from his Unitarian pulpit

in Boston, Emerson immersed himself in English and German Romanticism and brought forth his manifesto *Nature* in 1836. "The 'Sage of Concord' assimilated Neoplatonism, German idealism, and Oriental mysticism into a Yankee conviction that individuals who trusted their powers of intuitive insight (which he called transcendental Reason) would discover in their own experience, rather than in doctrines or institutions, their harmony with nature and with the Oversoul immanent in nature".

In just one phrase — philosopher as poet, poet as seer and seer as sayer — Emerson enunciated such a powerful American poetics that both contemporaries and succeeding generations have had to contend with it either by affirmation, qualification or denial. The axioms which Emerson laid down in *Nature* postulated an intrinsic correspondence among words, things and absolute truth. As per these axioms, words are the signs of natural facts. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts and nature is symbol of Spirit. Indeed, there is a clear line of continuity from the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards' declaration that the material and natural world is typical of the moral and spiritual world on to Emerson's axioms.

For Emerson, a poet is the receptive and expressive medium of the Spirit in nature who has the power to receive and impart his typological experience. "But Emerson's unchurched experience of types rested not on the certitude of Scripture and doctrine but on the instabilities of subjective experience". In Emerson's view, the individual is his/her world. It is significant to note, in this context, that Emerson did not keep any strict distinction between types and tropes; in fact, he used the two terms almost interchangeably. Thus, "that individualizing and psychologizing of experience, which is the essence of romanticism, and which was itself a result of the general decline of theological and philosophical assurance in the West and of Puritanism in the U.S., served to undermine the distinction between types and tropes".

In fact, what got Emerson the maximum response from the public was his call to believe in the infinitude of the private man and his affirmation of the power of imagination to realize its perceptions. He also had immense faith in America's

natural sublimity as the source of a new poetry capable of idealizing American materialism and building a new society. At the same time, Emerson laid a great deal of emphasis on an aesthetic of organicism. He believed that form did not proceed from the technique of following conventional rules and patterns but rather flowed from the impulse of the insight. Thus, in Emerson's view, "the shape of the poem ought to be the extension of the generative experience into words".

Emerson placed forth his Transcendentalism in a large number of poems. He himself acknowledged that his poems did not sufficiently illustrate the ideals he had proposed and admitted that his best poetry was *in* his prose. Nevertheless, his verbal directness, rhythmic roughness, irregularity (even in metred verse) and freshness anticipate the revolution in form and expression which Whitman, Dickinson and other poets propelled and fueled later.

Not surprisingly, Emerson drew many disciples. Foremost among them was his Concord neighbour, Henry David Thoreau, a naturalist, thinker and a student of literature. Thoreau took Emerson's teaching to heart and lived by it. He is known for his fresh, vigorous prose. He gave an account of his two-year sojourn at Walden Pond in his masterpiece entitled *Walden or Life in the Woods*, published in 1854. Thoreau also converted Emersonian self-reliance into a workable formula for opposing the power of government in his well-known essay 'Civil Disobedience'.

A contemporary of Emerson's but fiercely opposed to his Transcendentalism was Edgar Allan Poe. A Southerner by defiant choice and a poet by aspiration, Poe struggled to support himself through journalism, writing short stories and the voluminous reviews which have made him the first American critic of stature. "A Southern strain of Calvinism not only disposed Poe to the Gothic but disabused him of the 'Transcendentalists' claims". In his 'The Philosophy of Composition' Poe explicated his own poem 'The Raven' as a rational construction from an irrational narrative. In fact, 'The Philosophy of Composition' mounted a withering attack on the presupposition of ecstatic inspiration in the poetry of the Transcendentalists. Through another essay called 'The Poetic Principle' Poe dismissed didacticism and its heretical beliefs and defined poetry as the rhythmical creation of beauty. He

concluded this essay by claiming that a poem is a poem and nothing more and it is written solely for the poem's sake.

Herman Melville also exhibited a tormented dissent from Transcendentalism after an initial fascination with it. He associated with the Young America Group of literary nationalists in New York in the late 1840s and wrote fictional romances, to begin with. He drew inspiration from his adventures as a sailor and his fiction increasingly dealt with psychological and philosophical themes. However, Melville continued to experience disillusionment with his audience. As a result, he gave up fiction and turned to poetry.

Among the stalwarts of nineteenth-century American Romanticism, Walt Whitman was undoubtedly at the forefront. Whitman brought forth an immensely far-reaching revolution in American poetry, both in content and form. As a poet, he sublimated his anxieties into an ideal of a joyous soul in a robust body. He acknowledged to a friend that he had steeped himself in Emerson. He reminisced that he had been simmering for a long while and finally Emerson brought him to the boil. Expectedly, the poems that surged up were radical in technique and content.

"Out of Emerson's call for organic form, Whitman distilled, from translations of the Old Testament and Homer and operatic arias and recitativo, a revolution in verse technique that came to be called free verse: lines irregular in length and stresses, patterned not by metre or rhyme but by repetition of phrase and rhythm". Partly inspired by Emerson's call for an American seer-prophet. Whitman devised the persona whose colloquial, expansive and often exclamatory voice struck a different relative attitude towards God and the objective universe. The persona, by virtue of reflection, confession and assumption, exhibited a changed attitude of the ego towards himself and his fellow human beings. It is often rightly claimed about Whitman that he was 'large' and sought to contain multitudes — the city, countryside, the people and places of America — in himself The very opening lines of 'Song of Myself — Whitman's epic of a democratic individual's consciousness — strike this expansive note right from its beginning.

Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* appeared in a large book designed and printed by the poet in 1855. It contained 12 untitled poems wherein the first and the longest poem, of 43 pages occupying half the book, was 'Song of Myself. The 'Preface' to this work identified the author as the American bard that Emerson had anticipated. Expectedly enough, Emerson responded immediately with rhapsodic praise and, with this, Whitman's vocation as a poet got confirmed. In the very next year, Whitman brought out the second edition *oi Leaves of Grass* containing 56 poems including the famous 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry'.

Whitman continued to emphasize the body as much as the soul and identified the life-force with sexual urge. Maintaining his self-reliance and independence, he devoted his life to the organic expansion of *Leaves of Grass* through a succession of editions. He revised the old poems as he added the new ones, simultaneously reordering the sequence and groupings. By 1867 or so, the best poetry of Whitman's had already been written. However, he wrote voluminously in verse and prose with frequent flashes of his old power and compassion. Despite his admirers and disciples. Whitman failed to gain the wide audience and recognition that he had hoped for as the American bard. Nevertheless, the final Preface entitled 'A Backward Glance O'er Traveled Roads' to the 1888 edition reaffirmed the goals and achievements that he knew had already transformed American poetry.

Although Emily Dickinson hardly ever commented on the poetry of Whitman — her worthy contemporary •— yet the two represent complementary aspects of the American poet emerging from Emerson. While Whitman stood for the democratic projection of the self into nature and the city, Dickinson admirably exemplified the hermetic absorption of the world into the private self. The religion of the Connecticut River Valley where Dickinson grew up was neither Unitarian nor Transcendentalist but still Congregational. She was, however, the only member of the family who did not join the local church. Instead, she committed herself, partly inspired by Emerson, to a different vocation — that of "recording with unwavering attention the interior drama of consciousness" (28).

"Adapting the quatrain of the hymnal to her own purposes, Dickinson lines out, not sentence by sentence but word by

word, single moments of perception and emotion". Each taut, spare poem brings out, with unblinking fidelity, the truth of its moment. The accumulation of her poems charts out the extremes of her experience, namely, love as fulfilment or renunciation, God as present or absent and nature as harmonious or alien etc.

One of her poems beginning with the line 'The loss of something ever felt I' puts forth the first act of consciousness as an experience of radical bereavement. Later, many other poems capture how the individual consciousness seeks completion through its relation to the other — nature, lover, God. Or else, the consciousness focusses on its own integration. It is noteworthy that Dickinson found relation to nature, God or lover rather contingent and less assuredly typological than Emerson. Most often, the contrasting stanzas in her poems present the alternatives in typically Dickinsonian style — marked by compactness, gnomic phrasing, uncommon rhythms, highly unusual capitalization and punctuation. The "He" in her love poems seems to be Jesus or a human lover (although the biographical evidence is not conclusive) or the masculine aspect of herself. At times, this "He" subsumes all of these. Dickinson's word "for the ecstatic fulfilment of consciousness in triumphant selfhood was Immortality, sometimes expressed as a marriage, often one deferred to the next life...". Despite renunciations and reclusive lifestyle, Dickinson experienced momentary intimations of Immortality in the upstairs bedroom which often nourished her with images of her secluded consciousness. The publication of her collected *Poems*, numbering above 1800, in an unbowdlerized version, in 1955 and her *Letters* in 1958 assured Dickinson an extremely important place as the stellar woman poet among the great American Romantic poets.

Among the Massachusetts poets was another recluse, Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, whose poetry dissented from Emersonian optimism through a melancholy regret. The bulk of Tuckerman's work consists of five series of sonnets wherein he had experimented with that tight form. He was also known for focusing feelings in sharply observed images. Another remarkable sonneteer of the nineteenth-century America was Jones Very — once again a Massachusetts recluse

— whose Puritan spirit exuded Transcendentalist exaltation. These Massachusetts poets, including Emerson, were also popularly referred to as the Household Poets.

Notable among the Massachusetts poets was a small group of Harvard professors known as the Boston Brahmins. Extremely popular among the Boston Brahmins was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow whose popularity rivalled that of Tennyson's on both sides of the Atlantic. As a Harvard professor, he introduced German literature to American students and translated Dante. His most famous narrative poems are *Evangeline* and *The Song of Hiawatha* — an epic rendering of American Indian legends in tetrameters. Another well-known poem 'The Psalm of Life' seeks to tackle human mortality through work ethics. Longfellow's chief poetic interest now lies in lyrics such as 'The Jewish Cemetery at Newport' and 'The Cross of Snow'.

James Russell Lowell, an equally famous Boston Brahmin, was Longfellow's successor at Harvard. He was the first editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and became a very powerful liberal voice in American journalism. In 1848, Lowell published *A Fable for Critics*—"a spoof of contemporary American writers in Popean couplets and outrageous rhymes". 1848 also saw the first series of Lowell's *The Biglow Papers*, "written in a rollicking version of Yankee dialect for a down-home satire on such political issues as slavery and the Mexican War". 'The Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration' for those who laid down their lives in the American Civil War is indeed the noblest poem of Lowell's.

The only exception to the Boston Brahmins, among the Household Poets, was John Greenleaf Whittier — who turned his Quaker piety and Abolitionist opposition to slavery into poetry. His *Snow-Bound*, published in 1866, remains a movingly nostalgic idyll of rural New England life.

Undeniably, the reputation of the Household Poets, including that of the Boston Brahmins, has diminished with time. Some of them are now regarded as more Victorian than Romantic, prone to moralizing sentiment and preferring conventional forms to experimentation.

"The contrast between Sidney Lanier and Stephen Crane illustrates the exhaustion of romanticism in American poetry". The extreme musicality of Lanier's language and the metaphorical straining for a diffuse effect indicate his admiration for Poe. Lanier used his knowledge of music theory and his experience as a

symphony flautist to codify Poe's correlation of music and poetry into strict rules. He based these rules "on the assumption that the metrical foot, like the musical bar, was governed not just by pattern of stress but by syllabic duration". His poems entitled 'The Marshes of Glynn' and 'Sunrise' express the last gasp of romantic typology — celebrating the dying of the individual back into the sublimity of nature and nature's God. In contradistinction to Lanier's poetry. Crane's terse, irregular verse extends the anti-romantic naturalism of his fiction. Besides, Crane wrote his poems in response to the angularity of Dickinson's newly-published poems at that time.

To round off the description of nineteenth-century Romanticism in America, a few poets from the end of the century deserve to be mentioned. Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Bayard Taylor were the genteel New York bohemians who were in search of the Ideal. The Harvard Aesthetes included George Santayana, Trumbull Stickney and William Vaughn Moody. James Whitcomb Riley was the Hoosier Poet of sentimental dialect poems. Paul Laurence Dunbar, son of Kentucky slaves, wrote conventional lyrics as well as dialect poems of plantation life. Lizette Woodworth Reese — the Baltimore schoolteacher — wrote poems on nature and death in clean, direct lines that marked quite a departure from the overly sentimental poetry of Lydia Sigoumey and her sisters. Joaquin Miller's *Songs of the Sierras* published in 1871 earned him the epithet of being the swaggering bard of the Far West.

The above-mentioned poets are, however, decidedly minor figures. "The romantic ideology which had made for the energy and experimentation of the middle years of the century had played itself out. American culture needed the jolt of a new ideology — modernism — to galvanize a generation of poets whose achievement rivals that of the English Renaissance".

The Modernist period in American poetry rightly begins with three major pre-modernists — Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost and John Crowe Ransom. Like their modernist contemporaries, they felt the increasing gravity and precariousness of the human predicament. The human vulnerability was caused and further compounded by a number of factors — the decline of religious belief and metaphysical certitude, the subversion of Enlightenment rationalism and the

disappearance of romantic intuition. All of this left the unprotected individual at risk in an indifferent universe and an increasingly violent social world. "But the strongly regional conservatism of these three poets made them resist breaking the old forms and reject the formal experimentation that impelled modernism internationally".

Robinson grew up in Gardiner, Maine which became the model for his Tilbury Town. His poetry appeared in long Arthurian narratives in strong blank verse. His most widely read poems, however, are the tragic vignettes of the residents of Tilbury Town, for instance, 'Miniver Cheevey', 'Eros Turannos' and 'Mr. Flood's Party' etc. Besides, he wrote excellently-crafted, melancholy sonnets such as 'Maya' and 'New England'. In his tribute to Robinson, Frost observed that his theme was unhappiness but his skill was happy as well as playful. His life was a revel in the felicities of language. Interestingly enough, this tribute to Robinson was equally applicable to Frost himself

Frost's career spanned many decades, beginning with *North of Boston*, published in 1914 to *In the Clearing* in 1962. As a young man, Frost lived in England and was highly influenced by the pastoral, regional verse of Thomas Hardy and his friend Edward Thomas. When he received the Emerson-Thoreau medal in 1958, Frost acknowledged that he had learnt to write, from Emerson, such sentences as were crafted so close to the flesh and bone that they bled if they were cut. Philosophically, Frost disagreed with Emerson on account of latter's blindness to evil. He insisted that an unresolved dualism was at the heart of the dialectic of nature and man.

Through his New England pastorals, for instance, 'Home Burial', 'For Once, Then, Something', 'Design', 'West-Running Brook' and 'Directive', Frost tested the premises of Puritanism and Transcendentalism and left the answer open. In Frost's view, an aesthetic form made it possible to draw certain provisional conclusions that permit human beings to pit their wits and will against ultimate defeat. Thus, an aesthetic form provided just a momentary stay against the prevailing confusion.

Frost looked down upon free verse. He argued that poetic skill lay in making the dramatic tones and inflections of the speaking voice break through the strict pattern of metre and verse. Frost, just as Ransom did, believed that a sense of form is a necessary control for the poetic voice's ironic modulations. The stature of Frost's poetic talent and achievements can be gauged from the fact that he was revered both in the U.S. and England.

Ransom's poems delineated a fallen world in which death is an omnipresent fact and transcendence remains a nostalgic idea. The conflict of head and heart often ends in an impasse that paralyzes love. After *Chills and Fever* and *Two Gentlemen in Bonds*, collections of poems published in 1924 and 1927 respectively. Ransom devoted himself completely to teaching and promotion of New Criticism.

The pre-modernists' skepticism "unsettled the typological sense of Edwards and Emerson and allowed only the double terms of trope: in Frost's words, "play's the thing. All virtue in 'as if' ". The modernists, however, refused to reside in ironic paradox. Their manifestoes vehemently rejected romantic idealism and optimism. They pressed on to find the terms and means, "by which the imagination, even without the epistemological and metaphysical claims of romanticism, might still function as the supreme faculty of human cognition, potent enough to meet the psychological, moral, and political crises of the twentieth century". The modernists, in fact, brought to the point of rupture and release the irony and uncertainties which increasingly threatened to subvert romantic holism in the course of the nineteenth century. In this way, they reconstituted the key issue of romanticism — revalidation of imagination (with many riders and qualifiers attached) as the agency of individual coherence, outside systems and structures, in a secular and highly relativized world.

In contrast to romanticism, modernism assumed a disjunction between art and life. Meaning was not revealed but made. Construction was itself the cognitive act. Form was not thought to be organic to the operations of nature but to the internal relations of its structure. "Yet the dialectic between symbolism and imagism—the two most widely influential and persistent strains within modernist poetry—represent differing inclinations that resume in more complex formulations the distinction

between tropes and types which had become cloudier and more problematic during the nineteenth century". As the romantic synthesis of subject and object through the agency of Spirit became harder to sustain, the destabilized focus of perception veered back and forth.

In American poetry, symbolism developed out of Poe through Baudelaire and Rimbaud to Mallarme and Valery. It exemplified the tendency to turn inward on subjective consciousness and absorb impressions of the external world into expressions of moods and feelings of increasing subtlety. Imagism, initiated by Pound in 1912 as an alternative to symbolism, manifested the counter-tendency to fix consciousness in its encounter with the phenomenal world. Clearly, both symbolism and imagism are modernist and not romantic since "modernism validates subject (symbolism) and object (imagism) in the authority of the artwork rather than of Spirit". Symbolism seeks the multivalent suggestiveness of metaphor and the rich imprecision of music. Imagism, on the other hand, seeks a clean-edged delineation of image and a painterly disposition of elements.

Ezra Pound, the great modernist poet, defined image as the presentation of an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. He also drew up the imagist axioms, exhorting poets to directly treat the 'thing' whether subjective or objective. He cautioned the practitioners of imagism against the use of any word whatsoever which did not contribute to the direct presentation of the thing. In Pound's view, direct presentation opposed romantic reflection and didacticism. It rather mandated a rendering of experience so that the poem rendered itself as an experience. In the direct presentation of the thing, strict verbal economy was observed which militated against emotional diffuseness.

Pound's early poetry showed the impact of the fin de siècle decadence. But just before and after the World War I, he enthusiastically apprenticed himself to modern art. Thus, he wrote, partly imitating Greek, Latin, Provencal, Old English and Chinese poetry which was collected under the title *Personae*. But the real turning-point in Pound's poetry took place through 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' in which he expressed his outrage at the war and a dying English culture. This poem also helped Pound exorcise-the remnants of a decadent romanticism. Soon enough, he departed

for Paris and thereafter for Italy where he took up his life-long epic entitled *The Cantos*.

In 1914, Pound wrote an essay on 'Vorticism' in which image conceived as vortex was charged with energetic movement and power drawn from the analogues of machine and the whirlpool. So far as *The Cantos* is concerned, the big conceptual breakthrough, for Pound, came from the ideas of American philosopher and Orientalist, Ernest Fenollosa. Pound wrote *Cathay*, a brilliant rendering of Fenollosa's literal transcription of Chinese and Japanese poems. In fact, Fenollosa reconnected Pound with his romantic roots by presenting ideogrammic language as pictographs grounded in the divinely ordained operations of nature. Such a language communicated directly without the logical and discursive machinery of parts of speech and syntax. In its juxtaposition of phrases and images, *The Cantos* aimed to be an English equivalent of the ideogrammic presentation of ideas as actions.

The Cantos came out in segments throughout Pound's life and the posthumous collection of 1972 ended with Canto 120. "The ideogrammic method, historical scope, mythological references and erudite sources of *The Cantos* are demanding". The poem, however, is a remarkable effort at resolving polarities through a modernist collage technique. On the psychological plane, it combines reason with instinct, Apollonian control with Dionysian energy, archetypal masculine with feminine and sexuality with mysticism. Philosophically, it places on the same anvil Greek Neoplatonism and Confucianism. Economically, it juxtaposes individual freedom with governmental regulation of money. In addition to all this, on an immediate historical level, *The Cantos* is the record of war and violence with the possibility of building a paradisiacal society on earth. In a nutshell, Pound was an ace experimenter, poet, editor, a tremendous polemicist and promoter of modernist art and poetry.

William Carlos Williams enjoyed a lifelong, although somewhat contentious, friendship with Ezra Pound. He steered clear of myths and metaphysics and remained determinedly the naturalist. He observed that there is no ideas but in things. In fact, he claimed, rather good-naturedly, that where Pound's word was caviar his was bread. Williams was the literary nationalist who, as poet and doctor.

committed himself to the poor, grimy, industrial Rutherford, close to Paterson in New Jersey. As a result, he was critical of Pound's and Eliot's expatriation to Europe. For Williams, art-work was not disjunctive from nature but rather apposite to it. His interest in painting and friendship with precisionist painters "taught him to make his imagism into a kind of verbal cubism". Arrangements of lines were used as an analytical device to cut into the syntactic groupings of words. Familiar verbal relationships were spliced and rearranged so as to focus maximum attention on the words themselves and the complexities of their relationships.

Williams is credited with many books of shorter lyrics, some of which became very popular. By 1930s, he began experimenting with a longer, more complex project published as *Paterson* in five books between 1946 and 1958. It came out in a single volume in 1963. The poem's fragmented vignettes present the city's history and human lifespan in a self-generating, self-completing open form which finally turns back on itself. In later years, however, Williams became obsessed with defining a poetic measure that was more appropriate to the American idiom. He did come up with the concept of 'variable foot' according to which poetic lines were comparable to musical bars having roughly the same duration but containing varying numbers of syllables and stresses like notes within the bar. Williams tried various possibilities of the variable foot in poems which were longer, more personal and meditative than his early work.

Hilda Doolittle is best known for her association with the key early twentieth-century avant-garde Imagist group of poets. In fact, Ezra Pound coined the term imagist to describe an early and very well-known poem of hers entitled 'Oread'. Her later writing, however, represents a move away from the Imagist model and towards a distinctly feminist version of modernist poetry and prose. Doolittle met Ezra Pound in Philadelphia. Later, she became a part of his London literary circle. Indeed, H.D. — her pen name — was given by none other than Pound. In the beginning of her literary career, H.D. was greatly drawn to Dickinson's poems as they were published in 1920s. The two women poets did not have the same external circumstances but they were alike in their extraordinary sensitivity and their unshakeable commitment to recording the life of consciousness.

H.D. saw her own destiny played out within the violent sexual and international politics of her time. She regarded the crucial events of her life as moments of cosmic consciousness in which she participated in life's mystery. Throughout her somewhat traumatic life, she drew relief from her ability to find the archetypes, for her own experiences, in Greek and Egyptian myths and mystery cults. In fact, her truly wonderful achievement lay in projecting her life into myth, through poems of collections entitled *Sea Garden*, *Hymen* and *Heliadora* in 1916, 1921 and 1924 respectively.

After a considerable period of writing impressionistic fiction, H.D. returned to poetry in the last phase of her career. By this time, she had mastered the art of grouping together images in a larger temporal/narrative framework. She produced *Trilogy*, *Helen in Egypt* and *Hermetic Definition*. *Helen in Egypt* is an anti-epic narrated in lyrics interspersed with prose bridges. It takes up, from a woman's perspective, the matter of Troy and the themes of love and war. It remains one of the most ambitious works written by a woman poet in English and suitably fulfils its ambition.

Marianne Moore's first selection of poems was jointly edited by H.D. and her British novelist friend Bryher. Moore's chaste modesty and reserve, amply evident in her poems, put her at the opposite temperamental pole, in sharp contrast to H.D.'s. Moore wrote in the imagist mode and did not approve of any metaphorical obfuscation. Her Presbyterian faith gave her imagism a clear typological purpose. With a keen eye for the minutest of details coupled with the perceptions of a highly refined mind, Moore wrote elaborate and elegant poems. She observed and interpreted flora and fauna as quirky, witty emblems of human virtue and weakness in poems such as 'The Fish', 'To a Snail', 'The Wood Weasel' and 'In the Days of Prismatic Color' etc.

In 1928, T.S. Eliot — already a British subject — made his famous declaration that he was a classicist in literature, royalist in politics and Anglo-Catholic in religion. This statement of Eliot's is often kept in mind to sum up his distance from his native American scene. However, the fact of the matter is that he combined a "Catholic cast of mind with a Calvinist heritage and a Puritanical temperament"

(Brogan ed., 1996: 33). Eliot himself recognized that his American roots and his growing up in St. Louis and New England were the deepest sources of his personality and poetry. Nevertheless, in poetic practice as well as criticism, Eliot cultivated and promoted a distinctly non-autobiographical strain. His early essays set the norms for a modernist 'classicism' and the need for a 'historical sense' in an 'impersonal' poet.

Eliot dated his poetic maturation from reading Arthur Symons' *The Symbolist Tradition in Literature* in 1908. Poems such as 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', 'Preludes' and 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' from the collection *Prufrock And Other Observations* manifested the influence of Laforgue and Baudelaire. Symbolism thus provided Eliot the perspective and techniques for locating the tropes in urban life which, in turn, helped to objectify the twists and turns of the poet's acute self-consciousness. In *Poems*, published in 1920, Eliot used extreme verbal compression in tight quatrains to lay bare the conflict between sexual body and paralyzed spirit in modern society. In a way, Eliot dramatized his disillusionment and yearning for redemption in his well-known poem *The Waste Land*. In fact, Ezra Pound played a significant role in editing this poem into a brilliant collage of episodes in different voices and styles.

After Eliot's conversion to Christianity, a more personal note found its way into the 'Ariel' poems of late 1920s and in *Ash Wednesday*. The personal voice echoed Scripture, Dante and the Book of Common Prayer to meditate on opening the strongly desirous heart to redemptive grace. In his essay 'From Poe to Valery', Eliot sought to remove the oft-repeated bias that symbolism harbors a self-enclosing, self-defeating narcissism. Another essay entitled 'The Music of Poetry' spelt out Eliot's movement from prosodic experimentation to traditional forms and musical structure of his magnum opus *Four Quartets* brought out in 1943. Each quartet, in fact, uses a five-part structure similar to *The Waste Land* so as to concentrate on a place of autobiographical importance. For instance, the third quartet entitled 'The Dry Salvages' uses the Mississippi River and the Massachusetts coastline to invoke the Incarnation whereas 'Little Gidding' "moves from the flames of the London Blitz to a vision of Pentecostal fire and the Dantesque rose of the Paradiso" (33).

Where Eliot got inspired from the symbolism of Laforgue and Baudelaire, Wallace Stevens took his inspiration from the symbolism of Mallarme and Valery. The symbolist thrust, in fact, deepened in Stevens' poetic career. A poem such as 'Sunday Morning' (1915) "expressed in gorgeously textured blank verse a sad affirmation that the death of God obligated the mortal imagination to invest nature with the aura of paradise" (33). Other poems in the collection *Harmonium* (1923) aimed at a symbolist pure poetry whose agile wit and exotic effects of sound and colour are remarkable. In later poems from collections entitled *Collected Poems* (1954) and *Opus Posthumous* (1957), the early ironic mode had given way "to a sinuous, incantatory harmonizing of abstract language and recurrent archetypal figures in slow, stately pentameters" (34).

Through the publication of his collection *White Buildings* in 1926, Hart Crane voiced his hope of achieving the romantic rapture through symbolist means such as synesthesia, dense accumulations of connotative and metaphorical suggestiveness and oracular apostrophe etc. Crane was closely associated with Waldo Frank's circle of literary nationalists in Manhattan. Under the impact of this association, he started on an epic with the Brooklyn Bridge as its central symbol. This bridge was indeed a wonderful feat of engineering, linking not only the opposite shores, but metaphorically speaking, psychological and moral contradictions also. Besides, it manifested a technological sublime to parallel the sublimity of the wilderness. In Crane's consciousness, the bridge became a means to synthesize a myth or mystique. Consequently, *The Bridge*, published in 1930, presented a vision by projecting Whitman's prophecy into an industrialized, urban America so as to offset the impotent disillusionment of *The Waste Land*.

The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 30s was the first big movement in the arts for the American Blacks and signified their growing political and cultural consciousness. Key figures of The Harlem Renaissance were Claude McKay, Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes who remained the most important of them all. For many poets of African-American origin also, Whitman was the touchstone. Hughes, in fact, claimed to be Whitman's 'darker brother' in singing his America through spirituals, jazz and the blues. The American Midwest also had its own share

of popular Whitmanesque bards in Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay and Edgar Lee Masters.

Many minor poets of the first three decades of the twentieth century exhibited a lingering romantic tenor beneath the modernist manner. Prominent among them were Archibald MacLeish, e.e. cummings and Conrad Aiken. Similarly, the lyrics of Elinor Wylie and Edna St. Vincent Millay are traditional in form and echo the English and American romantics.

Another group of poets called Objectivists reformulated modernism in the 30s. Objectivism sought to extend the imagist sense of the poem. From constructing an encounter with things, it endeavored to turn the poem itself into a new thing. It is noteworthy that all these objectivists were proletarian in politics like William Carlos Williams and not elitist like Ezra Pound. Chief among them were Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, George Oppen, Carl Rakoski, Lorine Niedecker and Kenneth Rexroth. Zukofsky was the co-founder and primary theorist of the Objectivist movement. In later years, his work became deeply influential to poets in the Black Mountain and Language movements. Despite his Judaism and Marxism, Zukofsky remained indebted to Pound as evidenced in his long autobiographical poem entitled "A" published posthumously in 1979. Oppen, on the other hand, intensified Williams' jagged, angular minimalism.

At the more conservative end of the spectrum, the New Criticism translated modernist assumptions into an explicitly literary method of textual explication delinked from biography, psychoanalysis and history. The New Criticism studied the technical and structural properties of the poem per se to show how the interplay of paradox, irony, tension and sound create the totality or the unity of effect in an autotelic framework. The phrase 'New Criticism' was coined by John Crowe Ransom to describe the critical inclinations of I.A. Richards, William Empson, T.S. Eliot and Yvor Winters. Through Ransom's teaching and editing and that of his students and followers, the New Criticism dominated the academic study and criticism of poetry well into the 60s.

Allen Tate and Robert Peim Warren were both members of Ransom's Fugitives—a group of poets and economic agrarians at Vanderbilt—who professed to defend Western humanism against secular materialism and socialist collectivism. Tate was deeply influenced by Poe, French symbolists and T.S. Eliot. His metrical and rhyme patterns virtually served as a vice to contain the explosive compression of language, metaphor and sound effects. In later poems, however, Tate postulated love — both human and divine — as the release from solipsistic sterility. Warren's early poetry had a certain 'metaphysical' manner marked by New Critical tightness and paradox. Later, this tightness gave way to a diffuse emotiveness bemoaning the mortal self and the chasm between ideals and experience.

Two important figures, Yvor Winters and Robinson Jeffers cast themselves as anti-modernists. Winters started off by experimenting with both symbolism and imagism. By 1920s, he had reached the conclusion that both these strains of modernist poetry portended a morally dangerous romanticism for which Emerson and Whitman were the American prophets. Consequently, he took to writing formalist verse, modelled after English Renaissance, as a rationally controlled exercise on morally significant issues. Jeffers, on the other hand, prophesied an apocalyptic romanticism to a doomed age, ignoring all the modernist experimenters. The long, loose lines of his free verse identified him as a shadow-bard to Whitman. His shorter lyrics and meditations, however, urged the extinction of consciousness in the savage beauty of things, which for Jeffers, was the beauty of God.

Both Winters and Jeffers rejected modernist aestheticism and insisted on value and truth extraneous to art. Winters had recourse to theistic humanism and Jeffers in pantheistic non-humanism. Their contradictory stands, however, served to illustrate "in reverse perspective the dialectic through which imagism and symbolism resumed the old Puritan distinction between type and trope which lay at the heart of romanticism" (Brogan ed., 1996: 35).

In the Post-War period, the poets who came of age in the times immediately following World War II found themselves in a difficult relation to their modernist predecessors. Although the work of Eliot, Pound, Stevens, Frost, H.D., Moore and Crane had provided the younger poets with an extraordinary range of formal and

thematic resources, yet the very diversity of this achievement became a hurdle for further experimentation. It is indeed some such sentiment that made Randall Jarrell observe that the most successful and influential body of twentieth-century modernist poetry had died already. Such an elegiac assessment of the post-war era concealed a widespread desire, on the part of many poets, to have a clean slate. Indeed, modernist poetry had challenged the structure of the traditional verse. The post-war generation of poets, thus, felt the need for a thorough stock-taking. They seized upon the liberating advantages of the French *vers libre* and the derived Anglo-American free verse but tried, at the same time, to curb their excesses.

Poets born in the first two decades of the twentieth century, for instance, Theodore Roethke, Elizabeth Bishop, John Berryman, Randall Jarrell, Robert Lowell, Howard Nemerov and Richard Wilbur, turned away from free verse. They developed a technically complex and rhetorically difficult poetry, modelled on the metaphysical poetry of Donne and Herbert as well as the late modernists such as Ransom, Tate and Warren. While "poets of the first generation capped their careers by writing long epic or dramatic poems, postwar poets perfected a kind of reflective, ironic lyric that would become the formal model for the two decades following World War II" (35).

T.S. Eliot's literary criticism provided a major impetus for many of these tendencies. His cultural criticism, meanwhile, introduced a religio-ethical framework within which poetry could be assessed. His well-known essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' became a locus classicus for the postwar era. Moreover, "Eliot's theories of impersonality were extended by the New Critics into prohibitions against intentionalism and affectivity, qualities that would turn the poem into a vehicle of personal expression rather than the site of distanced meditation" (36). Hence, the characteristic voice in poems, written during this period, is arch and ironic, wary of making bardic pronouncements yet assured in its mastery of complexity and contradictions. At this juncture, irony did not just imply saying one thing while meaning another. In fact, what irony stood for was that the artist was in control, able to moderate feeling by transforming it into rhetoric.

Indeed, it was an age of criticism in which "the techniques of close reading and scientific analysis were perfected in ways that ultimately affected how poems were written" (36). The postwar years witnessed colleges and universities expanding their enrolments and, as a result, the curricula needed practical critical methodologies to accommodate this influx. Thus, for the first time in history, poets in increasing numbers became teachers and creative writing, also for the first time, became part of the literary curriculum. In a nutshell, poetry, for the first generation of modernists, was produced within bohemian enclaves and expatriate communities. In the postwar years, however, poetry became a province of the English Department classroom and the university quarterly.

2. American Poetry and Postwar Poets

The three poets who most typify—while simultaneously challenging—the conservative trend of the times were Robert Lowell, John Berryman and Elizabeth Bishop. Lowell's first two collections of poems exhibited his close association with his New Critical mentors, Ransom and Tate, as well as the metaphysical poets. In these poems, he used a highly convoluted syntax and alliterative language to put forth issues of existential doubt. In *Life Studies* (1959), he suddenly dropped his metaphysical style and spoke in a far more personal voice about the ambiguous relationship with his family, marriages, mental breakdowns and theological anxieties. "Lowell's rather archaic diction and heavy alliterations temper his Confessionalism with a need to contain feeling within definite formal boundaries" (36). In later volumes such as *History, For Lizzie and Harriet* and *The Dolphin*, he resumed a more traditional style, working consistently in unrhymed, blank-verse sonnets.

John Berryman started writing in the style of Auden and Yeats. With the publication of a poem entitled 'Homage to Mistress Bradstreet' in 1956 and more so with the collection *77 Dream Songs* brought out in 1964, Berryman developed a highly idiosyncratic persona. This persona permitted him a wide range of voices so as to dramatize various sides of his volatile personality. In the poem addressed to Anne

Bradstreet, Berryman collapses his own voice into that of America's first poet. He speaks of his own existential malaise through Bradstreet's confessions of spiritual doubt. In his major work entitled *The Dream Songs* (1969), Berryman confronts his own biography in a long sequence of lyrics. Despite its strongly autobiographical content, the poems in this collection make *use* of a complex series of characters in which the tone ranges from mocking accusation to ironic self-deprecation.

From the point of view of rhetoricalness, Elizabeth Bishop was much less explosive than either Berryman or Lowell. She combined microscopically sharp observations with irregular syllables to accomplish a tense lyricism that was reminiscent of Marianne Moore. In Bishop's verse, images we've isolated and refined until they lost their conventional associations and became rather exotic. For Bishop, as for her two poetic peers, formal mastery implied the creation of "a charged linguistic and rhetorical field in which cognitive acts may be tested" (37). It is noteworthy that "Lowell's and Berryman's harsh, crabbed language and Bishop's enjambed, condensed lines represent a formalism impatient with its own limits, dramatizing by sheer verbal energy areas of psychological intensity that cannot yet be expressed" (37).

Lowell's poetry, especially after *Life Studies*, made an indelible mark on a number of poets including Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, W.D. Snodgrass and John Berryman too. For instance, Sexton's verse explored biological and psychological traumas and Snodgrass wrote several middle-age-crisis poems. Berryman's characteristic tone resided in his brooding, self-mocking lyrics whereas Plath's poems dealt with the agonized zones of suicide and patricide. Frequently, these voices are referred to as the Confessional Poets. But despite their emphasis on autobiographical materials, these poets, in fact, reflected a much more carefully modulated response to their personal content. Plath's very famous poem 'Daddy', for instance, does not draw its power from its specific address to the poet's father — Otto Plath — who died when she was a child. Rather, the poem's real strength comes from its conscious and careful manipulation of conflicting, discursive modes such as childhood rhymes, Holocaust imagery and obsessive repetitions. All these together form a sort of an objective correlative to the poet's psychological condition.

In fact, in his inaugural essay on Confessionalism, M.L. Rosenthal rightly pointed out that this movement should not be considered as a prescriptive formula held by any one group of poets. Rather, Confessionalism may be understood as a general permission, felt by most poets of the period, to treat personal experience, even in its most intimate and painful aspects.

Although Eliot, Auden and Frost exerted the most pervasive influence on the dominant tradition of the 1950s, Pound and Williams left a deep impact on an emerging avant-gardist strain in American poetry. Pound's *The Cantos* had generated a lot of interest in historical, open poetry. On the other hand, Williams' hard, objectivist lyrics inspired a poetics of visual clarity and metrical experimentation.

Charles Olson's essay entitled "Projective Verse" (1950) extended Pound's and Williams' ideas. He laid special emphasis on poetic line as a register of physiological and emotional contours. He wanted to rejuvenate poetic language by generating a "composition by field" by means of which poetic form extended directly from the subject matter. In Olson's view, the New Critical, autotelic poem left the poet no room for developing a historical or critical stance towards reality beyond the poem. Olson wanted to regain this stance which, he believed, Pound had in ample measure. In his long poem called *Maximus Poems*, he explored this aspect by dwelling on the separation of individual from locale owing to the ill effects of entrepreneurial capitalism. Admittedly, Olson's essay had very few takers when it appeared but the fact of the matter is that it was a harbinger of things to come. This was so because poets, at this time, did seek a loosening of poetic forms and an alternative to the New Critical strictures.

The most notable public announcement of a change came from Allen Ginsberg — one of the most respected Beat Generation poets. His work has often been compared with that of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman and is said to contain that old gnostic tradition. He was greatly influenced by Jack Kerouac's spontaneous and carefree style and often worked in a 'stream of consciousness' manner until he completed a work. Like many writers of his period, Ginsberg had a desire to attain the mystical. In his best-known epic poem "Howl" (1956), he "revived romanticism in its most

vatic form" (Brogan ed., 1996: 37) and, with Whitmanesque enthusiasm, made his specific, personal voice the center of concern. In fact, the reading of *Howl* resulted in the arrest of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the owner of City Lights Books, on obscenity charges. The authorities objected to Ginsberg's openness concerning his homosexuality as well as the graphic sexual language. However, the courtroom episode added new meaning to the poem's socio-cultural indictment and brought a mass readership to the works of Ginsberg and other Beat Generation poets.

Thus, through his many other works such as *America*, *In the Baggage Room at Greyhound*, *Sunflower Sutra* and *In Back of the Real* etc., Ginsberg lodged a strong protest against institutional mind-control and McCarthy-era paranoia. In his own words, he did this in 'Hebraic-Melvillian bardic breath' and in a language that was marked by directness and explicitness.

Beat Generation Group also included writers like Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, John Clellon Holmes, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso and Michael McClure. These poets provided their own critique of the era. All of them, including Ginsberg, revived "a demotic, populist poetics inspired by Whitman and Williams, as well as the romantic, visionary work of Blake and Shelley" (37). The Beat poets performed their poetry in jazz clubs, occasionally accompanied by jazz, or in coffee houses. They, in fact, made poetry-reading a primary fact of postwar literary life.

The Beat movement is the most public face of a general romantic revival during the late 1950s and 60s. Apart from Olson's ideas of composition by field, some other orientations also left a deep impact on the American poetic scene. Robert Bly's ideas of the psychological 'deep image' and Frank O'Hara's manifesto called 'Personism' influenced their contemporaries and future poets, to a large extent. As a result of all this, poets began to regard a poem not as a mimesis of experience but as an experience itself. It was thought of as a map of moment-to-moment perceptions whose value needs to be measured in terms of immediacy and sincerity rather than in terms of artistic unity. Poets, therefore, relinquished order so as to discover the order immanent within experience. Thus, the older, romantic idea of a synthetic, creative imagination gave way to a poetics of open forms in which the poem

becomes a spontaneous register of phenomenological moments. "As with abstract expressionist painting during the same period, the poetics of open form stresses gestural and expressive response over reflective or meditational experience" (38).

In the late 50s and early 60s, the above-mentioned general tendencies in poetry could be seen in many small-scale magazines such as *Origin*, *The Black Mountain Review*, *Yugen*, *The Fifties* and *Evergreen Review* etc. Donald Allen's anthology called *The New American Poetry* published in 1960 divided the experimental tendencies of American poetry into five groups. The first group called the Black Mountain Poets comprised the poets associated with Black Mountain College in North Carolina. This group included Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov and Edward Dom. Another group, including Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch and James Schuyler, was associated with the New York art world. The 'San Francisco Renaissance' included poets such as Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, Brother Antoninus (William Everson) and Philip Lamantia. A fourth category included other West Coast poets such as Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and David Meltzer. Along with the Beat Poets, these groups shared less a common aesthetic than a spirit of avant-garde, bohemian exuberance and anti-establishment camaraderie.

In a similar vein but issuing from different sources, Robert Bly, James Wright, W.S. Merwin, Galway Kinnell, Mark Strand and others developed a poetics of psychological 'deep image'. Bly was the leading proponent of deep imagism—a school of poetry distinguished by its preoccupation with Spanish and French (to a lesser extent) surrealism, Jungian archetypes, elemental description of the natural world and the visionary emotional states. Using surrealism as a source, these poets experimented with associative techniques that could overcome discursive thought and tap into the unconscious realms. Reacting against the intellectualized academic verse of the 1950s, the 'deep image' poets sought to infuse contemporary American poetry with emotionalism and spontaneity achieved through free association and non-rational subjectivity. Bly, for instance, cultivated his practice of writing 'leaping poetry'.

Among Deep Image poets, a distinction may be drawn "between those who create discontinuous "leaps" within a minimal, denuded landscape and those for whom the "leap" implies access to a world of numinous presence" (38). Merwin and Strand are poets of the first type, creating poems in which language has been reduced to a bare minimum. In Ely's and Wright's poetry, on the other hand, the deep image serves to join quotidian, unreflected experience with realms of spiritual and natural value. Taking a walk, mailing a letter and wasting time etc, become initiatory rites of passage into archetypal experiences. "Unlike their imagist precursors, Deep Image poets strive for clarity without relying on the criterion of verisimilitude" (38).

Surrealism imparted the common ground for another group which was initially associated with Wright and Ely's deep image school but, eventually, it moved in a very different direction. This group included David Antin, Jackson MacLow, Jerome Rothenberg and Armand Schwemer. These poets had a strong interest in European avant-garde movements like Surrealism and Dadaism. The surrealist mode was merged with the poetics of Gertrude Stein, the aesthetic theories of Marcel Duchamp and John Cage and the theatrical 'happenings' movement. In order to find aesthetic models from outside the Western tradition, many of these poets turned to oral and non-literate cultures. Consequently, they created a sort of an 'ethnopoetics' that continues to emphasize the socio-cultural sources of poetry.

Undoubtedly, these group labels such as 'Beat', 'Black Mountain' or 'Deep Image' fail to account for many local variations and individual styles. For instance, O'Hara's desultory chronicles of New York life and Snyder's descriptions of the natural landscape share common elements in quotidian movement and surface detail. And yet these two poets are seldom mentioned in the same context. Similarly, Galway Kinnell and William Stafford share many 'immanentist' or transcendentalist values with Duncan and Levertov of the Black Mountain group but they do not appear in the same anthologies. The varying nomenclature, however, generated keen discussions in the poetic scene. As a result, 1960s were lively and contestatory years.

Notwithstanding their vital differences in tendencies, practices and names thereof, most poets of the period were united in their strong opposition to the American

foreign policy and its ill-advised interventions abroad, especially the Vietnam War. Moreover, many younger poets "identified a poetics of openness and innovation with the social goals of the New Left in which social action, alternate lifestyle, and cultural production were intertwined" (39).

The emergence of political activism among poets along with the development of inexpensive, offset printing technologies brought new constituencies into the world of American poetry. "Increased activity in Black poetry, Asian poetry, Native-American poetry and Chicano poetry coincided with the increased social consciousness among minorities during the 60s" (39). The Black poet and playwright LeRoi Jones, for instance, threw off his previous Black Mountain and Beat affiliations and adopted the name Imamu Amiri Baraka to signal his alliance with the Black Nationalist movement. Many other Black poets such as David Henderson, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Alice Walker and Michael Harper etc. set about, equally committedly, foregrounding Black cultural experience and language in their work. Black poetry made use of a number of sources such as jazz rhythms of Black writing, oral chants of Native-American poetry and bilingualism of Chicano poetry. Nevertheless, it derived its basic formal imperatives from the more populist, oral styles of the Beat poets and other new poetry movements.

A very important development that took place in American poetry, along with the growth of literary communities in ethnic minorities, was the emergence of women poets who started writing out of the social and political context of the feminist movement. Undoubtedly, women poets, in the American scene, had been writing for many centuries and the first American poet too had been a woman. But the 60s provided an all-too-new dimension to the women poets. The biggest inspiration and impetus was a new-found awareness of being a woman, first and foremost. To reflect, write and interact as a woman were the bywords for this era. Besides, printing presses, reading spaces, distribution services and anthologies provided a range of new resources for women poets like never before.

Many of these women poets, including Adrienne Rich, began their careers within the predominantly male literary community and, slowly but surely, they came into their own. Women's poetry is thus both a matter of new emphasis, new direction

and a new-found confidence in self as well as an incontrovertible historical fact. Most women poets, in the 60s and even now, were/are in full agreement with Rich and others that there was the dire necessity for revision. Rich understood revision as an act of looking back, an attempt to see with fresh eyes and a consciously-undertaken exercise of entering an old text from a critical, feminist perspective. Rich herself as well as others took up many revisions of previous texts to locate such times and mind-sets as marginalized women or ignored them outrightly. "Although she began by writing poems very much in the formalist mode of the 1950s, Rich's style gradually loosened to admit her own changing awareness of women's oppression and to express her anger at patriarchal authority" (39).

"The proliferation of poetic styles during the 1970s and 80s has, to some extent, repeated many of the tendencies of the whole modern period, though with obvious refinements" (39). By this time, poets had rejected the more bardic and expressive gestures of the 1960s in favour of a certain discursiveness, even chattiness. As a result of this, poems were written in the distinctly personal realms through an adroit execution of tone and diction. Thus, the dominant mode of 1970s and 80s was a reflective lyricism in which technical skill was evident all through but never obtrusive. Consequently, the overtly romantic stance of 1960s poetry with its emphasis on participation, orality and energy gave way to quiet speculation.

In the poetry of 1970s and 80s, three general areas of practice can be identified, all of which display a common concern with voice and diction. The first group includes A.R. Ammons, John Ashbery, Robert Pinsky, Louise Gluck, Sandra McPherson and Robert Hass. These poets have sought to merge the philosophical scepticism of Wallace Stevens with the ethico-cultural concerns of Yvor Winters and Robert Penn Warren. Ashbery's poetry remains the most complex and sophisticated of the group, manifesting what he calls the 'swarm effect' of language. His long, desultory lyrics such as 'The Skaters', 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror' and others capture the fluctuating patterns of a consciousness that believes neither in a supreme fiction nor in a self-sufficient ego. Ammons' poetry builds upon Frost's naturalism and his concern for the morality of 'place'. He has, in fact, conducted a quiet campaign for the restorative effects of weather, seasonal change, animal life and horticulture as

these aspects come in contact with the speculative intellect. Hass's poetry continues Amnions' naturalist concerns but builds upon subtle shifts of voice and tone.

The second group extends more directly out of the 'deep image' aesthetic of Bly and Merwin, although it is associated with the above-mentioned first group also. It includes C.K. Williams, Marvin Bell, Philip Levine, Tess Gallagher, Charles Wright, Stanley Plumly and Carolyn Forché. These poets combine the surrealist mode with a spare, minimalist style so as to reveal unconscious or atavistic resonances in everyday events. In contradistinction to the ecstatic leaps associated with Bly and Wright, these poets prefer a more narrative progression and a considerably restrained diction. They use long lines and prosaic speech, thereby creating a leisurely effect which is in direct contrast to the much darker subject matter of their verse.

The third category, loosely referred to as 'The Cosmopolitan Style', is represented by John Hollander, Richard Howard, James Merrill and Anthony Hecht. However, this category also includes a number of younger poets grouped under the label 'New Formalism'. For poets included in this category, "discursiveness becomes a foil for strategies of self-preservation and effacement. At the same time, a tendency toward conversation conflicts with the use of formal metres and complex internal and terminal rhymes". This tension is generally felt in the verse of Merrill whose work often uses its own aesthetic virtuosity to mock aesthetic solutions. His poems are intentionally bookish and his tone remains arch and urbane. His reticence and detachment are calculated stances for comprehending a conflicted personal history.

Merrill is generally considered to be a major influence on a more recent movement called 'New Formalism'. Interestingly, the New Formalists include comparatively younger poets such as Alfred Com, Marilyn Hacker, Brad Leithhauser, Katha Pollitt and Gertrude Schnackenberg. All of them share a renewed interest in traditional forms and have explored various possibilities of narrative poetry. In fact, they have tried to recover the liberating potential of traditional forms.

The New Formalists believe that writing in traditional forms aims to redress the balance that had veered too strongly towards free verse since the 1960s. This,

according to them, had resulted in a rather amorphous autobiographical lyricism in which the open form became simply an excuse for sloppy practice. In such a scenario, the New Formalists promoted the use of patterns which do not straight jacket language, rather they carry a distinctly liberatory effect. "The challenge for New Formalists has been to hide or at least diminish pattern through the use of slant rhyme, nonce forms, syllables and expressive variants on repeated metres". At the same time, they also combine regular metres and rhyme with diction drawn from contemporary life, using the idiom of urban experience, technology and advertising. This is done to specifically blur the usual association of traditional forms with high or standard diction.

Many of these above-mentioned poetry-groups of 1970s, 80s and 90s share a common feature in their combined resistance "to the more autobiographical and vatic modes of the 1960s". Thus, the dominant tradition of American poetry, in recent times, has witnessed a return to the subtleties of voice and diction that characterized the work of 1940s and 50s. Nevertheless, "a more complex critique of expressivist poetics has come from writers gathered under the rubric 'language poetry". In developing their poetics, members of the Language School emphasised method evident in the modernist tradition, particularly in the work of Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky. Language poetry is, in fact, an example of poetic postmodernism. Its immediate postmodern precursors were the New American Poets, a rubric which includes the New York School, the Black Mountain School, the Beat poets and the San Francisco Renaissance. Language poets emphasise metonymy, synecdoche and extreme instances of paratactical structures in their compositions. Although they employ everyday speech, yet the result is a differently-textured verse which is often found to be alien and difficult to understand at first glance. This is exactly what is intended by this school — these poets want readers to participate in creating the meaning of poems. Prominent among the Language Poets are Lyn Hejinian, Bruce Andrews, Carla Harryman, Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman, Susan Howe, Clark Coolidge, Barrett Watten and Michael Palmer.

The Language School poets try to foreground language as a signifying system within larger social structures. Their strategies of fracturing and fragmentation open up new realms of play and semantic complexity. Their interest in prose poems and other new forms of prose challenges the generic boundaries of lined verse. Commenting on Language (L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E) school's basic tenets, Barrett Watten observes that this poetry deprivileges self-expression and sees the poem as a construction in and of language itself. Thus, these poets explore the degree to which self and experience are constructs, enmeshed in social discourse.

A significant number of women poets, magazines and anthologies of innovative women's poetry have been associated with Language poetry on both sides of the Atlantic. Obviously, these women poets represent an often distinct set of concerns. Among these women poets are Leslie Scalapino, Madeline Gins, Susan Howe, Lyn Hejinian, Carla Harryman, Rae Armantrout, Johanna Drucker and Abigail Child.

In a nutshell, in American poetry as elsewhere also, modernists foregrounded the materiality of language by removing it from conventional and contrived usage, thereby making it new by making it strange. "Late modernists from Ransom to Hecht sought to curb the excesses of linguistic and metrical 'defamiliarization' by making formal control of tension and ambiguity the corner-stone of a continuing humanist enterprise". Poets of the 1960s rebelled against the limitations of this enterprise insofar as it removed language from voice and personal expression. If, at times, "the poetry of this era became grandiose and inflated in its testamentary role, it also re-established a dialogue with the reader". The post-1960s poets took it upon themselves to interrogate thoroughly the depth of words, especially when they lack the epistemological and ontological supports which they carried in the previous eras. "Lacking either Whitman's all-encompassing Self or the authority of Eliot's detached personae, poets have renegotiated the territory of subjectivity as an intersubjective and historical phenomenon". Thus, with a heightened awareness and recognition of language and its mediations, the post-1960s poets seek to achieve, on the one hand, ever more subtle subjective states. On the other hand, they are also simultaneously engaged in deconstructing the notion of subjectivity altogether.