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Contemporary
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in English

Shiv K. Kumar

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CONTEMPORARY INDIAN LITERATURE
IN ENGLISH

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**CONTEMPORARY INDIAN LITERATURE
IN ENGLISH**

SHIV K. KUMAR

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY • SHIMLA

MANOHAR PUBLICATIONS • NEW DELHI

1992

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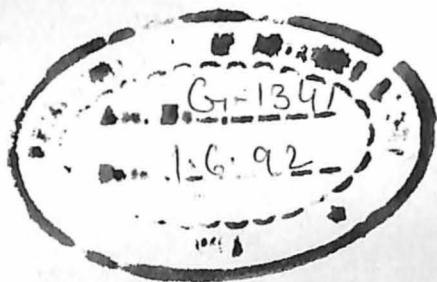
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FOR
PROFESSOR J. S. GREWAL

FOREWORD

On a request from the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Professor Shiv K. Kumar gave a silver jubilee lecture at the Himachal Pradesh University in 1991, the silver jubilee year of the Institute. At the same time, he agreed to come to the Institute as a Visiting Professor and gave three lectures. All these four lectures related to contemporary Indian literature in English: poetry, short story, novel, and literary creation and criticism. It was decided to publish them together.

Professor Kumar has brought his creative sensibility and critical acumen to bear upon a vast field of great importance to millions of his contemporaries in India and abroad. His treatment of Indian literature in English is sensitive and incisive. It is marked by a rare economy of words. Consequently this short book reads like a long poem.

I feel embarrassed to find this 'thing of beauty' dedicated to me. But Professor Shiv K. Kumar has exercised a right which cannot be denied to him.

Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla.
March 1, 1992.

J.S. GREWAL
Director



I

POETRY

I wish to say at the very outset that contemporary Indian poetry written in English has achieved international recognition, which is all the more commendable since of all the literary genres, poetry is the most complex. I can say quite confidently that our poets can compare favourably with Australian, Canadian or New Zealand poets even though the latter have the advantage of writing in their native tongue. But it is not language alone that makes a poem; it's the poet's perception, sensitivity and commitment to reality that lend beauty and power to his writing. And these are the qualities which are discernible in several of our poets whose work has appeared in such prestigious magazines as *The Sewanee Review*, *The New York Times*, *Poetry* (Chicago), *New Letters*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Ariel*, *Mearjin*, etc. The BBC has also broadcast the work of many of our poets in its overseas programmes.

But in order to spell out the significance of our attainment of this position on the international scene, it may be helpful to look at Indian poetry in English in its historical perspective, especially because the poetry written in the latter half of the nineteenth century and in the first half of this century, is conspicuously lacking in some of the qualities I have mentioned above. For instance, the work of such poets as Manmohan Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan—or for that matter even of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu—shows a marked proneness to excessive sentiment and ornate language. One may even say that their poetry is largely derivative in that it is modelled on that of romantic poets like Shelley, Keats and Byron. I may, therefore, say that we won not only our political independence in 1947, but also our cultural freedom as evidenced by a distinct change of attitude in our creative

writers—poets, novelists and dramatists. This manifests a new consciousness of their roots as also of their own cultural heritage. It is this new vision that distinguishes their work from that of their predecessors. The new poets want poetry to be authentic, intensely personal, and written in a language shorn of clichés and verbosity. A poem, for them, must be a skilfully structured artefact of both image and emotion, thought and feeling.

They have even felt uneasy about the kind of writing that has overplayed spiritualism in a language that is given more to abstract statement than to concrete metaphor and simile. No wonder, some of our post-independence poets have reacted sharply to the poetry of Aurobindo Ghose which is marked by palpable Miltonic inversions and abstruse philosophic or spiritual thought. In their introduction to *Modern Indian Poetry* (1955), which was also to serve as a sort of their 'literary manifesto' (reminiscent of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*), P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao, came down heavily on such passages in *Savitri* as the one quoted below :

Life was not there but an impassioned force,
Finer than fineness, deeper than the deeps...
Body was not there for bodies were needed not,
The soul itself was its own deathless form
And met at once a touch of other souls,
Close, blissful, concrete, wonderfully true...

Indeed, if these poets-editors held such writing to ridicule, it was to advocate their own 'principles of poetic art and craft', and to debunk any verse that seemed to be 'greasy, weak-spined and purple-adjectived "spiritual" poetry'. But it is rather paradoxical that while P. Lal chose to uphold such 'high' principles of writing, he threw to the winds all such norms while including poets in his own anthology—poets who appeared to exemplify precisely the kind of poetry that may be put down as 'spineless'.

But I wouldn't like to stay long at this historical crossroad except to say that from the fifties onwards we do see a radical change in the poetic situation. If the post-independence poet no longer invokes the moon, stars and 'oceans of bliss', and creates his metaphors and similes from everyday life, he also

handles his language with meticulous care, skill and sophistication. I shall now refer only to such poets as A.K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Nissim Ezekiel, Keki Daruwalla, Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar, Gieve Patel—and more recently Imtiaz Dharkar, Bibhu Padhi and Agha Shahid Ali. These are writers who have scrupulously avoided lapsing into easy communication. Their work is highly commendable because it is authentic, moving and free from linguistic infelicities.

What is truly distinctive about post-Independence poetry is that it allows irony to play freely around all facets of human experience—social, religious, moral or political. Let me now elaborate in some detail the use of irony in our contemporary poetry. To the modern poet reality comes filtered through a juxtaposition of paradoxes. Take, for instance, A.K. Ramanujan's poem 'Still Another View of Grace', which ingeniously brings together two distinctly polarized patterns of culture—the oriental which upholds restraint, and the western which permits unrestrained sexuality in the name of individual freedom. The speaker in this poem, an inhibited Brahmin, feels his defences crumbling when he encounters a foreign female in an American street.

Bred Brahmin among singers of shivering hymns I shudder
to the bone at hungers that roam the street beyond the
constable's beat. But there she stood. Commandments,
crumbled in my father's past. Her tumbled hair suddenly
known as silk in my angry hands. I shook a little and took
her behind the laws of my land.

It is the same irony that questions the use of veil in Imtiaz Dharkar's collection of poems titled *Purdah*; it's the veiled Muslim woman who is, inwardly, more passionate, more famished for emancipation than even the westernized Indian woman.

Arun Kolatkar's irony is woven into the very texture of his poetry. In his poem titled 'A Low Temple', he lets his pilgrim engage himself in a mild argument with the priest about an 'eight-arm goddess'. The poem opens with a startling line 'A low temple keeps its gods in the dark... You lend a match-box to the priest... But she has eighteen, you protest. All the same she is still an eight-arm goddess to the priest. You

come out in the sun and light a charminar'.

On the other hand, Nissim Ezekiel's irony is more direct, explicit, almost discursive, especially in his *Hymns in Darkness*. Here is a poster poem :

I signed the manifesto
I paid the subscription
I worked on the committee
I attended the party.
It made no difference
The common language hid my absence.

And here is one of his blessings from *Latter Day Hymns*:

May you read wisdom books
in the spirit of the comics
and the comics in the spirit of the wisdom books.

But his irony comes through more incisively in his poems written in Indian-English, which is a mix of Indian vernacular and half-baked English.

Another distinctive feature of contemporary Indian poetry is its melancholia, its poignant awareness of suffering which is an inalienable concomitant of Indian sensibility. It stems from a sense of the inexorable in Daruwalla :

Through the night we drift apart
and drift into each other.
Overhead the night roars...
In the afternoon I am alone.

Or, it may arise from a sense of non-belonging—as in most of Kamala Das's poems in which the woman emerges as a disillusioned creature, a mere plaything in the hand of her lover.

They did this to her, the men who knew her,
the man she loved, who loved her not enough,
being selfish and a coward...
They let her slide from pegs of sanity into
a bed made soft with tears...

Or, it may be due to repression as is experienced by the woman behind purdah, smarting silently and invisibly, under the indignity of negligence and indifference as in

Imtiaz Dharkar's poetry.

In the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra, it's pain, suffering—an emotion that keeps surfacing all the time. Here is an excerpt from his poem 'Pain' (from his collection titled *The False Start*).

The dark tree that stands
over the fields of my blood
has failed to leaf and bud...
Where are the inessential leaves
that commanded the heart
disturbing those clouds which only
are secrets of the sky.

Or, here is a passage from his poem 'Desire' :

And something makes me tired
Even death ashes
half-burnt logs and tombs of urns
make no sense...

Another recurring theme in most contemporary Indian poetry in English is East-West cultural encounter. This perhaps relates to the fact that several of our poets have had their education abroad—at Oxford, Cambridge, Leeds or some American University. So they often tend to write like expatriates or exiles while living in the West, and look back nostalgically on their western experience when they return home. Here is, for instance, R. Parthasarthy lamenting his lonesome existence in England, in his poem 'Exile', from his book titled *Rough Passage* :

In a basement flat, conversation
filled the night, while Ravi Shankar,
cigarette stubs, empty bottles of stout
and crisps provided the necessary pauses.
He had spent his youth whoring after
English gods.
There is something to be said for Exile.

From the tone of this passage, and his other confessions in 'Homecoming', it is, however, obvious that he seems to rather relish living abroad. Indeed, 'there is something to be said for Exile'. Adil Jussawalla also offers a variation on the

same theme in his poem 'Landing at Santa Cruz'.

What strikes one about contemporary Indian poetry is its distrust of religious orthodoxy. Our poets seem to be concerned more with phenomenal or empirical reality than anything transcendental—life beyond death or before birth. Their attitude may be termed somewhat Lawrentian since, according to them, 'it is not before or after, but now'. It is this earthiness that lends an unmistakable dimension of concreteness to their poetry. Even a casual glance through R. Parthasarthy's *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets* may reveal that there is not a single poem on any religious theme—no ode to Brahma, no hymn to Shiva or Parvati. If there's a fire-hymn by Keki Daruwalla, or a poem titled 'Philosophy' by Nissim Ezekiel, these poems may be taken only as ironical compositions. The thrust of contemporary Indian poetry is undoubtedly towards 'concrete particulars'. There is Arvind Mehrotra writing about 'The Sale', Arun Kolatkar describing a 'Boatride' or Kamala Das recreating her experience of 'A Hot Noon in Malabar'. Since Parthasarthy's anthology, which is now somewhat outdated, many recent poets have shown still greater concern with phenomenal reality.

And now a word about our women poets who have shown a remarkable boldness in portraying relationship between man and woman—a theme which still appears to inhibit several of our male poets. It seems that the past two decades or so have witnessed an unprecedented upsurge of longing for freedom in our women's outlook. They have not only claimed parity with men but have vehemently questioned certain age-old social practices and prejudices. This is the predominant theme in Kamala Das's poetry which exposes male chauvinism, its persistent endeavour to play the role of the 'stronger' sex. No wonder, the contemporary woman-writer is never tired of articulating her disgust for the insensitive, aggressive male. If there is, therefore, a recurring element of sex in her work, it is more to expose it as a form of male dominance than to glorify it. All that Kamala Das is trying to do is to salvage the Indian woman from the sexual exploitation of man, her husband or lover. In one of her early poems, titled 'The Freaks', she portrays her lover as only someone who arouses 'the skin's lazy hungers'.

He talks, turning a sunstained
cheek to me; his mouth, a dark
cavern, where stalactites of
uneven teeth gleam; his right
hand on my knee, while our minds
are willed to race towards love;
but they only wander, tripping
idly over puddles of
desire....Can this man with
nimble finger-tips unleash
nothing more than the skin's
lazy hungers?

Obviously, the answer is no, but then Kamala Das also suggests truthfully, that in this game of love and hate, the woman is as much to blame as her male partner, because she too is driven by her sexual urges. 'My body's wisdom tells me', she says in another poem ('A Relationship') that 'I shall find my rest, my sleep, my peace/and even death nowhere else but here in/my betrayer's arms....'

This new kind of love poetry, in its stark realism and pungent irony, has obviously moved far away from the romantic sentimentalism of Sarojini Naidu—in such poems as 'Hamayun to Zobaida'—or 'To Love', from which I quote the opening lines :

O Love; of all the truths that are mine,
What gift have I withheld before thy Shrine,
what ecstasy of prayer and praise,
Or lyric flower of my impassioned days?

Now to return to another contemporary woman poet, Sunita Jain, who is as candid in her portrayal of man-woman relationship as Kamala Das, though she is not as boldly uninhibited. The title of her collection of poems, *Till I Find Myself*, suggests that she too is engaged in her quest for self-realization. Her language is transparent and her emotion is surcharged with anger at man's selfishness; in brief, there is stark sincerity at the core of her poetic utterance. Take, for instance, her poem 'In My Body' which exudes only memories of anguish, of ingratitude, of man's 'unclean takings', devoid of any feeling of pure love.

In my body cloyed by ungrateful touch,
wounded by unclean taking,
I hid my best jewel
as a woman would....

But, again, like Kamala Das, even Sunita Jain presents her emancipated woman surrendering herself to her own betrayer. The man with his 'bossified frowns: is again back in my mind/when I least expect it', and she 'sleeps against his skin/without climaxes'.

II

SHORT STORY

Although the Indian short story in English is comparatively a recent phenomenon, its genesis may be traced back to the ancient fables of the sixth century A.D. Its origin lies in such ancient classics as the *Katha-Sarit-Sangara*, *Yogavashishtha*, *Brihat-Katha* or the *Panchtantra*. As stories, these fables and tales were tightly structured and ingeniously conceived, although their primary objective invariably was didactic—geared more to instruct than to entertain their readers.

The short story, written in the Indian languages, acquiring the form of a distinct literary genre, however, emerged only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It was mostly influenced by western writers, British or American. If, for instance, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee bore the influence of Sir Walter Scott, Rabindranath Tagore was susceptible to the models of his own favourite British writers. In fact, before the end of the century, most short fiction written in the Indian languages, particularly in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali or Tamil, carried the imprint of such masters as Chekhov, Tolstoy, Maupassant, O'Henry or Kipling. Therefore, the early short story, written in English or any Indian language, remained formalistic in design, with a visible emphasis on the story-line, hardly ever delving deep into its characters' psyche. The entire structure was vigorously conditioned by the author's own penchant—moral, religious, sociological or political. Consequently, the material groaned under such constraints, never allowing the characters to breathe freely. The author's preoccupation with consistency kept his characters always on the leash, never permitting them to stray into the bylanes to notice objects that didn't fall within the narrow ambit of the story-line. The result was that the story read more like an 'argument' than an 'impression'—to

use Thomas Hardy's terms to emphasize the impressionistic freedom of a genuine work of art which, incidentally, the British novelist lacked himself.

So the early short story, whether written in English or in any Indian language, grew under the western tutelage. The only difference was that while the writer in the Indian language breathed in the western influence as a part of the *zeitgeist*, the writer in English was ostensibly conscious of his indebtedness to the western masters. 'There was the impact on me of Maupassant, Frank O'Connor and Theodore Powys', observes Mulk Raj Anand, one of the pioneers of this art. Similarly, one may trace the influence of Chekhov on R.K. Narayan, or of the French masters on Raja Rao. But, one must hasten to add, that while this distinguished triumvirate—Anand, Narayan and Rao—used a foreign medium for creative expression, and often displayed western technical virtuosity in their craft, their innate genius never felt smothered. Each allowed his imagination to flower within his own emotional ambience—if Tagore remained something of a folk storyteller, never refracting the psychology of his characters to suit any western audience, Mulk Raj Anand remained firmly committed to social reality that he found lacking in the upper classes. As for Raja Rao, he pressed the English language into the mould of the Indian psyche, lending it the fluidity and suppleness that it was not used to. In his Foreword to *Kanthapura*, he brilliantly expounds his concept of what may be called Indian-English, and the Indian 'tempo'.

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien'. Yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as

the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

Raja Rao then proceeds to identify the problem of style.

The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs. We, in India, think quickly, and when we move we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on.

It should, therefore, be easy to understand the *raison-d'être* behind the fluid style in his own story 'India—a Fable', the folk-lorish run-on speech rhythms in Mulk Raj Anand's story 'The Liar', the limpid flow of sentences in R.K. Narayan's 'Green Sari'. These writers have tried to capture what may be termed the *parole interieur* of their characters, their stream of consciousness—its ebb and flow, its mobile lines and contours, its teasing ambiguities.

But if writers like Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao have stressed the Indianness of the English language used by them, it may also be remembered that there are several Indian writers, especially the younger ones, who have handled this foreign medium with the same felicity and distinction as any British writer. If they have been published by such prestigious western magazines as *The New Yorker*, *London Magazine* or *Malahat Review*, or broadcast over the BBC—it is not for their Indian-English, sometimes called a linguistic curiosity, but for their creative use of this language. But for the Indian experience that forms the matrix of their writing, it may not always be possible to distinguish such Indian writers from their British counterparts. What, of course, sometimes mars their writing is a temptation to imitate the western narrative style—its heavy leaning on irony, paradox, experimentation, and even flippancy.

That's why when one compares the contemporary short story written in an Indian language with the so-called Indo-anglian short story, one cannot often help noticing in the former a greater measure of authenticity, of native glow, of approximation to reality. Is it because the writer in English subconsciously feels that his creativity has been somewhat impoverished by his use of a foreign medium? Or, is it

because he often feels tempted to play up to his western readers to seek international recognition—or sell his literary wares in the world market? Fortunately, the native writer is not constrained by any such extra-territorial considerations. He breathes, grows and writes amidst his natural environs.

But not all short fiction in English is inhibited by such extraneous considerations. I should here like to mention some of our younger writers who have remained comparatively unknown. There is in these writers a refreshing urge to seize reality 'without the least possible shrinkage' (to borrow a phrase from Marcel Proust). While they display ample technical skill, they also impress their readers with an unprecedented aplomb and spunk in confronting experience in all its multiplicity. Their treatment of sex is bold and their comment on the contemporary human condition is both incisive and relentless. At a national conference, organized by the Sahitya Akademi in February 1986, Raja Rao, the renowned Vedantin fiction-writer, took his audience by surprise when he stressed the validity of physical relationship between man and woman. Why should we continue to feel inhibited by orthodox morality, spinning around ourselves a cocoon of hypocrisies and self-denials? It is this freedom that one now encounters in some of our new writers. Take, for instance, Anita Mehta's story 'Letters/4, 5, and 6', which presents an ingenious montage of snippets from the letters written by the protagonist's various lovers, each imprisoned within the confines of his ego, and so never touching the quick of this woman's inner being.

Images always accompanied her memories of him—she thought of ghazals, and how she'd grown to love them when she'd realized that they'd made his loneliness come alive, epitomized his bitterness at her many deviations—of his face when they made love, the violence that almost attracted her because she couldn't conceive (in the confines of her all-too-fine intellect) of something so raw and whole, the way he always made as if to strangle her after the act of love (because, as he said, he was always reminded, and reminded uncontrollably much, of those who had done and would do the same to her), the way in which she was never quite sure if this wasn't just a bit theatrical and

always thought not in the end because he was the least contrived person she had met—of the hard lonely set of his face, his stoic gait, one that unhappiness, she'd thought flippantly, always suited more than the lack of it. Life, rather than art with all that implied. The richness in knowing that all gestures, all words, were meant, weren't derived, out of a film or novel, and correspondingly the frustratingly complete unawareness in him of all the classics! You could be 5's complement, she thought dismally.

It's obvious that Anita Mehta has, like Virginia Woolf or James Joyce, tried to arrest a subtle moment of experience and then transmit it with all its multiple nuances—boldly and candidly. No compromise here with social constraints—it's all transparent authenticity. Such is the stuff that true art is made of. So haven't we travelled far beyond the regimented Aristotelian structure of the early Indian short story?

Or, take Ajoy Sen's story 'If it were not for the child', which seems to embody a tenuous emotion, transient but throbbing with a rare vitality. Here we encounter a woman ambushed by her anguish, seeking release through the touch of a cobra who awaits her, in his deep, dark hole in the garden, almost like a lover. But the climactic moment in the story is skilfully shorn of anything that may savour of melodrama—nor is there any palpable suggestion of the Lawrentian sexual symbolism. In fact, the story just trails off into an awareness of imminent death, offering the woman the promise of an easy, blissful passage into oblivion.

The soft tufts of thin blades slid smoothly beneath your pudgy palms and soon the agony was replaced by strange bliss, because your fingers had at last come on the hole. You leaned over and put your ear to it but could hear nothing because snakes do not sing. Which was a pity because somehow you felt that a beautiful snake ought to. So next you put all your fingers into the hole and shivered and recalled the odd husky tone of Joel the gardener. 'One kiss from the devil does it'. You waited, shivered with the throbs of an ultimate bliss and looked up at the starry sky. A feathery cloud drifted by, parting the milky way into two

luminous patches. They were like a pair of glazed, anxious faces that had magically come together, gasping at you, fused in an awkward huddle.

So this is how it all ends, not with a bang, but with a whimper that's almost a caress, a beckoning into the life beyond, without any fretting and fuming over what's left behind.

Our women writers seem to have lent a new dimension of sensitivity and perception to the short story in English. They find its limited canvas quite congenial to their sensibilities in confronting their brief, often muted, experiences. They prefer to say a thing or two, and then let the rest fade away into silence. There's for instance, Dina Mehta, whose story 'Absolution' eddies around a fragile, almost veiled, emotion of jealousy. Nor does Nayantara Sahgal allow her protagonist in 'Martand' to speak out her heart. She just seems to flicker between her fidelity to her husband and an irrepressible heart-ache for the other man, the doctor, who is committed to alleviating human pain. There was that untouched *innocence* about Martand, a purity without which I could no longer live. That was why I couldn't give him up, however long we had to wait for this to work out. There was so little time to talk about personal problems, and when we were alone together we did not talk'. Indeed, the spoken word is such a futile instrument of communication in a woman's world—since it's often the language of knitted eye-borws, muted sighs, deep pauses and dazed looks that does it.

That's the way most of our women writers tend to respond to reality with reticence, quietitude and endurance. Maybe there's something masochistic about such an attitude, as is manifest in Sunita Jain's story 'Heavy is Gold'. Here a young woman is married off to a widower 'twice her age' just for the sake of the yellow metal.

But there's also the new Indian woman—the bold, fearless creature who will not yield to social pressures, who will rather break than bend. Consider, for example, Raji Narasimhan's story 'A Toast to Herself' which is her little testament to freedom. She would like her women to be 'forever free' (the title of one of her novels). If Virginia Woolf could ask for a 'Room of Her Own', so would Narasimhan like

to let her women work out their own destiny. Such a woman is Priya (in 'A Toast to Herself'), who boldly resists her mother's persistent solicitations to get married and settle for a secure life. On the contrary, Priya is determined to carve out a career for herself as a writer. Raji Narasimhan has even a sly thrust at the popular notion of male superiority. She presents Priya's lover, Dr. Kesavan, as something of a dumbkopf, quite insensitive to creative writing. When he asks her to show him some of her writings, she wonders if this creature will understand anything.

The dumbkopf should never have known what to make of them. He didn't really know English even though he spoke it. She was afraid, suddenly. What if he quizzed her? What if he got out of her those little secrets about writing that formed from the duplicities of making art from life.

The Indian short story in English is, indeed, a many-splendoured-thing—its amplitude is amazing. It covers almost every aspect of Indian experience. If Manoj Das's fiction is preoccupied with the break-up of our feudal society after Independence ('The Submerged Valley'), Keki Daruwalla evokes in his story 'The Jahangir Syndrome' the pre-Independence scene of our tea-plantations, with their paradoxes—love-hate, violence-peace, etc. Chaman Nahal's story 'The Womb' represents our perpetual preoccupation with death. The protagonist, Lala Ram Prashad, vividly portrayed against his genealogical backdrop, seeks his mother's womb as he is carried from one room to another of his ancestral house. And there's Jayanta Mahapatra, one of our leading poets writing in English, whose stories seem to shimmer on the borderline of fantasy and reality. His story 'Eyes' presents a woman who is gradually losing eyesight, causing her husband deep anguish that no words can adequately articulate.

True that I didn't want to look into her face with my stupidly lyrical half-smile which merely served to frame an inner embarrassment. And I realised that my controlled expression was breaking down.

Do the weak ones like me merely move on, with their games of silence?

Mahapatra's forté, both as poet and story-teller, lies in his capability to explore those grey areas of pain which always remain intractable to verbalization. He'd rather use the language of gesture, of inner commitment, of 'quiet quiescence'.

If the short story in English remained subdued till the first quarter of this century, it has catapulted into a popular literary genre in the mid-eighties—thanks to the patronage of Doordarshan with its millions of viewers. This new medium is now treating its mammoth audience to dramatization of stories by our celebrated writers like R.K. Narayan (now known for his 'Malgudi Days') and Satyajit Ray. Such programmes as 'Ek Kahani'—and 'Katha Sagar' which has offered us ingenious adaptations of world classics—have encouraged our new writers to take to the short story as an exciting form of writing.

III

NOVEL

Of all the forms of writing in contemporary Indian literature in English, the novel has emerged as the most prolific and popular. Whereas the landscape of fiction until the sixties was dominated by three celebrities—Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan—there appeared on the scene thereafter scores of novelists, men and women, who experimented with the narrative technique to make it a supple medium of social comment or pure creative communication. If among men-novelists may be mentioned Amitav Ghose, Upamanyu Chatterji, Shashi Tharoor, Balraj Khanna and Ranga Rao, the notable women writers are legion—Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Namita Gokhle, Raji Narsimhan, Shakuntala Sriganesh, Daniels Shourie and, more recently, Shashi Deshpande. In fact, it seems that in this vast corpus of Indian fiction written during the past two decades or so, women novelists appear to have distinguished themselves for their boldness in presenting man-woman relationship, and for their sensitive manipulation of language. Only recently we have been able to have a real insight into the psyche of the Indian female. No longer is woman portrayed as a mere tool in the hands of her male partner, because she is now a full-blooded creature with a will of her own.

I have always felt rather uneasy about making any generalizations about contemporary Indian writing in English, a favourite pastime of most of our academic critics. However exciting, provocative or scintillating these may be, they often tend to fall apart when closely scrutinized. Take, for instance, Raja Rao's much-discussed observation about the 'tempo' of Indian English writing. I quote from his well-known 'Foreword' to *Kanthapura* :

We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on. And our paths are paths interminable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'als' 'ous' to bother us.

This sounds rather interesting, although it may be as true of much modern British writing. Consider, for example, Molly Bloom's famous monologue that concludes James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Also, if this is true of the folk-lorish *Kanthapura*, it may not hold good for Raja Rao's own recent novel *The Chessmaster & His Moves*, which has won him the prestigious Neustadt Literary Prize. Let us listen to the narrator talking to Jaya :

Tell me, tell me, Jaya. I started saying to myself, cannot one take away your bubo, like one would a feather from the peacock? One might, and why not? Suppose I would play the finest melodies on the flute, and... the birds would flow in to hear me, and dancing, on the banks of Brindavan, why not? O Mira, let Krishna play the trick, and take away a feather, from the bank of that thin, tallnecked peacock which seems to strut about with such total madness.

Even though the narrator (we're told) says all this in a state of delirium, the passage is neatly punctuated and ingeniously structured, both syntactically and conceptually.

Similarly, one may say that if the 'tempo' in R.K. Narayan's story 'The Talkative Man' is fluid and indeterminate, it certainly slows down in such novels as *The Financial Expert*, *The Painter of Signs* or *The Bachelor of Arts*. All that I am trying to say is that Indian fiction in English does not always subscribe to Raja Rao's concept of speed, fluency and indeterminacy. This is because each novelist regulates his 'tempo' in conformity with his particular theme, mood and form.

A salient feature of our contemporary Indian fiction, unlike our poetry in English, is its perennial preoccupation with religion, or shall I say a palpable metaphysical view of human experience? I feel here tempted to refer to Raja Rao, this time to his novel, *The Serpent and the Rope*, which

portrays Ramaswamy and Madeline as two contrapuntal characters representing two contrasted concepts of reality, the Oriental and the occidental. But I must now move on to other novelists. Invariably, our writers of fiction lapse into elaborate expositions of such Hindu concepts as karma, reincarnation, dual consciousness, etc. We feel, breathe and dream about such ideas and theories.

Even *English, August*, Upamanyu Chatterjee's sophisticated novel, is structured around Agastyasen, a young civil servant, who, at the end of his picaresque adventures in South India (with drugs, women and savants) ruminates on the spiritual compensations of renunciation and self-knowledge. His irrepressible Hindu psyche exults in brooding over stability amidst chaos. As he watches, in a field, three men ploughing their spots in a landscape of brown and green, he reflects:

Movement without purpose, an endless ebb and flow, from one world to another, journeys and passages, undertaken by cocoons for rest or solace, but for ephemerals. The flux of the sea now seemed the only pattern, within and beyond the mind-mirrored even in his encounters with the myriad faces, on some of which he had tried to impose an order by seeing them as mirror images, facets of his own self.... Perhaps it was true that first to banish all yearning, and learn to accept the drift, perhaps it was true that all was clouded by desire, as fire by smoke, as a mirror by dust, an unborn babe by its covering...

This passage, with its unmistakable overtones of Buddhist metaphysics and Hindu preoccupation with maya, also carries the rhythm and metaphorical vitality of the Upanishadic prose.

To underscore the presence of this philosophic-theosophical strain in the Indian novel, let me now summon a passage from *The Bubble* by Mulk Raj Anand, who is often categorized as a mere Marxist. This is how Parkash Pandit tries to talk Krishan into his own preoccupation with the denial of fixed dogmas as a true disciple of J. Krishnamurty:

To understand the confusions in us, we must not read the

Gita or Upanishads, or the holy books ... No formulas can take us out of our prisons ... They all make us deaf and dumb—Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Communists, all ... They all have their fixed thoughts ... One has to dissolve dogmas. Cast away the fear of being called iconoclast...

Here is an intriguing paradox implicit in the thinking of Parkash Pandit who, under the influence of his mentor, J. Krishnamurty, is advocating yet another brand of theologic sophistry that invalidates traditional dogmatism. But the mode of reasoning is the same, typically Indian, stimulated by the problems of belief and denial, affirmation and negation, yea and nay.

Another characteristic of our Indian fiction is its lack of humour. I have often wondered why we are a nation of weeping philosophers. Is it because we are constantly preoccupied with a sense of otherworldliness, as though our existence on this planet, however brief, is utterly meaningless? Every moment, we feel, should be salvaged from amusement, so as to seek redemption, attain *nirvana* or whatever.

No wonder, there have been only a couple of exceptions to this relentless concern with religion, philosophy or metaphysics. There is R.K. Narayan whose playful irony, though not fullblooded humour, has offered some relief to his readers. But true humour has come very late to our fiction with C.L. Nahal and Ranga Rao. Nahal's *English Queens* offers us an entertaining gallery of self-opinionated, hypocritical, westernized women who spout inanities and laugh over mere nothings. This is how we encounter Justice and Hemakanta Mathur, who have become millionaires overnight.

'If a chastity belt can be found, I'll be all for the wedding', said she loudly... She was the most formidable of them all, and when they found her enthusiastic, the other queens too shouted 'Yes, we are all for it'.

And as a blueprint is drawn, all started laughing over the exciting idea. Sumitra Pandey read out a poem that she'd composed.

English is my love
Midst thorns and sand
Midst hunger and want...
Midst burning heat
Midst cows on the road...
Millions of moths
Midst bugs and bees
Midst All India Radio-TV
Power cuts night and day
Water off the tap
Midst strikes and hartals
Midst total confusion

But Ranga Rao's *Fowl-Filcher* bristles with rollicking laughter; it's a narrative that offers amusement at all levels. Never a dull moment. It's not tongue-in-the-cheek brand of humour, but full-throated. There's FF's uncle Bodeyya who talks his nephew into marrying a woman who camouflages her insatiable sexuality beneath her mask of coyness and reserve. Once she discovers in her husband's clothes-box an illustrated book on sex, there's no restraining her.

By the end of the first week, FF began to worry. They had covered the book from cover to cover; he was as fatigued as a rabbit by a pack of hunting dogs, yet the woman didn't appear satisfied. Far from it. And, wonder of wonders, the moment they reached the last illustration of the book, she turned to the first page. He no longer took the lead; he just left it to her.

But humour in contemporary fiction often deepens into irony, even vitriolic satire, especially when a novelist chooses to expose the bankruptcy of our social and political systems. This is the tenor of Balraj Khanna's novel *Nation of Fools: Scenes from Indian Life*. Unsparingly, he caricatures our political leaders and their followers who can be manipulated into shouting any slogans, and incited to commit any form of violence. To Khanna it's all the same, whether it's RSS activists, the Akalis or the Congressmen. Of course, one suspects that when he exposes the shams and hypocrisies of Indians, calls this country a nation of fools, and glorifies the bygone British rule, he may be only trying to please his

British publisher, and also ensure an opulent western market. Let's now hear Dr. Diwan Chand talk to Khatri, the protagonist's father, as they watch a political procession stamp down the street :

When the Englishmen ruled there was none of this nonsense. Everybody did as they were told and everybody was happy... Gandhi and Nehru promised Ram Raj—Milk and honey Utopia after Independence. And look at this. Akalis yesterday, Brahmins today. Prices sky high and this is Independence. Ram Raj bilkul. I tell you we were better under him.

And when Omi, the young irrepressible, wants to know if this 'him' is God, there is a blunt interjection from a bystander: 'God in India doesn't work. Only fools do. Look at the marchers; they don't know what they were saying. Country of fools, ours'.

It's the same theme in Shashi Tharoor's satirical narrative, titled *The Great Indian Novel*. If James Joyce uses the Odyssean framework for his *Ulysses*, Tharoor has based his novel on the mythical pattern of the *Mahabharata*, even borrowing the names of its characters though investing them with an incisive contemporary relevance. This is what Tharoor's Ved Vyas dictates to his scribe, Ganapathi—episode number 123 of the final section, titled 'The Path of Salvation'.

Our philosophers try to make much of our great Vedic religion by pointing to its spiritualism, its pacifism, its inequalities, its obscurantism. That is quite typical ... as well as the same tendency to respect outworn dogma, worship sacred cows and offer to contemporary India where freedom and democracy are argued over, won, betrayed and lost—an India where mediocrity reigns, where the greatest cause is the making of money, where dishonesty is the most prevalent art and bribery the most vital skill, where power is an end in itself rather than a means, where the real political issues of the day involve not principles but parochialism. An India where a Priya Duryodhani can be re-elected because seven hundred million people cannot produce anyone better, and where her immortality can be guaranteed by her greatest failure—

the alienation of some of the country's most loyal citizen to the point where two of them consider it a great duty to kill her than protect her, as they were employed to do.

Tharoor may not impress us as a creative novelist, because he never lets his characters grow on their own; they are mere mouthpieces of the writer's social or political views. But he certainly succeeds in exploiting irony to its utmost limits to awaken his readers to the sordid state of affairs that now prevails in contemporary India. In a sense, he has achieved the same effect as a political cartoonist whose miniscule sketches can be more devastating than a long political tract or a loaded editorial.

Let me now turn to our feminist fiction which has grown into a significant proportion during recent years. A typical feature of our traditional fiction has been its portrayal of the Indian woman as a spineless, wooden creature, subjected to male domination. If it's not the husband, it is the mother-in-law who tries to break the young bride into total submission. It is, therefore, quite refreshing to encounter 'the new woman' in the novels of Shashi Deshpande. In her recent novel *That Long Silence*, Jaya, the protagonist, resents the image of a wife 'yoked' to her husband—a pair of bullocks yoked together'. This is the image that haunts her all the time. So, married to Mohan—a sedate, well-placed business executive—she secretly wishes to savour existential freedom through some disaster befalling him. So she feels 'relieved' when he is charged with embezzlement and they have to live in a sort of hide-out. She now feels redeemed as a woman with an identity of her own, seeing her husband rudderless and pathetically dependent upon her—this man whose 'fastidiousness, passion for neatness and order had amazed me when we got married'.

But Shashi Deshpande herself feels that most novels written by women are still somewhat restrained, not being harsh enough in exposing male aggressiveness. When, for instance, Jaya's story is rejected by several editors, it's Kamal who shakes her into realizing that there's not enough fire in her writing. 'Why didn't you use that anger in your story? There's none of it here. There isn't even a personal view, a personal vision. I'll tell you what's really wrong with

your story. It's too restrained. Spew out your anger in your writing, woman, spew out. And, referring to the angry young women he'd known, he says he 'heard them as well. Banging pots and pans. This would have been a better story if you'd banged your pots and pans in it...'

But if Deshpande is somewhat 'restrained', there are several other women novelists who have been much more candid in not only articulating their 'anger' against men, but also treating sex with an unprecedented sense of freedom. One finds such frank portrayal of man-woman relationship in Namita Gokhale's *Paro* or Raji Narsimhan's *She*. But a significant example of such writing may be Indra Mahindra's first novel *The Club* which describes an affair between Bobby, son of a coffee planter in Coorg, and Lucy, an English woman who has chosen to stay on in India even after Independence.

Bobby squatted near her and ran a finger down her back, she wiggled, every fibre stirred in her... Her fingers played with the hair on his chest; he wasn't too hairy; just right for her liking. She curled her fingers and tugged him down to kiss him. He stretched out beside her and took command. Catching her breath, she asked 'How many girls have you brought to your threshing floor?

'None. you're the first.'

'But your performance suggests long experience.'

'Not experience, inspiration. You?'

'Double liar.'

As he started kissing her, she gasped for breath. Something began to liven inside her, and rose and rose.

If the language does not measure up to the delicacy and poetic glow of D.H. Lawrence, Indra Mahindra has at least tried to show that our contemporary Indian women writers are as emancipated as some of their western counterparts.

Contemporary Indian novel, therefore, is varied in its thematic range; it represents both ends of the spectrum—the extreme cerebralism of Raja Rao, and the candid portrayal of sex in the work of Namita Gokhale, Balraj Khanna or Indra Mahindra.

IV

LITERARY CREATION AND CRITICISM

Oriental literary tradition differs from the Western tradition in that whereas our writers—novelists, poets and dramatists—have seldom offered any elaborate exposition of the creative process in the light of their own experience, the western writers have often engaged themselves with the same care and competence, in both creation and criticism. This may be seen from the fact that our novelists, like Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai or Nayantara Sahgal, have seldom enlightened their readers on the craft of fiction—nor have our poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Jayanta Mahapatra or Kamala Das written anything of significance on the poetic craft in general or as it is practised by them.

On the other hand, the Western tradition can claim several writers like Henry James, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster—and particularly T.S. Eliot—who have achieved eminence both as creative artists and critics. Of these writers, T.S. Eliot is outstanding for his recognition of both creative and critical faculties as being co-extensive in the act of creation. Taking his stand against Matthew Arnold who, according to Eliot, drives too sharp a wedge between criticism and creation, he stresses 'the capital importance of criticism in the work of creation itself. Probably, indeed, the larger part of the labour of an author in composing his work is critical labour; the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing; this frightful toil is as much critical as creative'. And he goes on to add that 'the criticism employed by a trained and skilled writer on his own work is the most vital, the highest kind of criticism and... that some creative writers are superior to others solely because their critical faculty is superior'. He then exposes the fallacy of the concept that 'the great artist is an unconscious artist'.

Let me at this stage clarify a central point implicit here—that Eliot is concerned only with the critical faculty as it operates in the creative process; he is obviously not referring to the kind of formal criticism that approaches a work of art from certain preconceived norms of valuation—classical, socio-economic, romantic, hermeneutic, symbiotic, existentialist, constructionist, deconstructionist, etc. The list is, of course, inexhaustible. I may here add that such critics not only often inhibit the enjoyment of literature but also lead the reader away from the work's inherent meaning. It is such theoretization of the creative process that arouses the anger of Joseph Conrad who is never tired of upholding the supremacy of imagination, its potency to confront reality in its multiplicity, its unpredictability; in brief, its mystery.

Liberty of Imagination should be the most precious possession of a novelist. To try voluntarily to discover the fettering dogmas of some romantic, realistic, or naturalistic creed in the free world of its own inspiration, is a trick worthy of human perverseness which, after inventing an absurdity, endeavours to find for it a pedigree of distinguished ancestors. It is a weakness of inferior minds.

Besides this application of predetermined tools of interpretation, criticism may be distinguished from creation in respect of its use of a language that is often sophisticated, syntactically involved and long-winded. Take, for instance, this concluding passage from Eliot's own essay titled 'The Function of Criticism'.

And with this test we may return to the preliminary statement of the polity of literature and of criticism. For the kind of critical work which we have admitted, there is the possibility of co-operative activity, with the further possibility of arriving at something outside of ourselves, which may provisionally be called truth. But if anyone complains that I have not defined truth, or reality, I can only say apologetically that it was no part of my purpose to do, but only to find a scheme into which whatever they are, they will fit, if they exist.

The only redeeming feature of such a critical statement is that it admits, however reservedly, that it is unclear, has

shied away from articulating its basic intention—and is, therefore, conscious of the reader's sense of mystification, of annoyance or even 'complaint'.

On the other hand, a creative artist cannot risk indulging in such involutions of thought. His language is invariably simple, direct, impassioned and dramatic. It is only a bad writer who chooses complex structures of sentences and heavy diction, obviously to hide his central meaning, if there is any. Not a distinguished writer like Albert Camus who opens his famous novel *The Stranger* with a disarmingly simple sequence of sentences. 'Mother died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure. The telegram from the Home says *Your mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Deep sympathy. Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could have been yesterday*'. Or, take this opening paragraph from Kosinsky's novel *Being There* :

It was Sunday. Chance was in the garden. He moved slowly, dragging the green hose from one path to the next carefully, watching a flow of water. Very gently he let the stream touch, every plant, every flower, every branch of the garden. Plants were like people that needed care to live, to survive their diseases, and to die peacefully.

Maybe, creation and criticism symbolize two different levels of sincerity; whereas a critic may choose to take any side, reject or fortify anything on the strength of his cultivated critical faculty, a creative artist must perforce be uncompromisingly true to his vision. He often strips himself to get his truth across to the reader. There is no middle ground here; he must, as Faiz Ahmed Faiz says in one of his famous quatrains, dip his fingers in his heart's blood to write convincingly, powerfully and movingly. In other words, whereas a critic may afford to be a little insincere, a creative writer can never forsake his inner truth. No wonder writers, according to D.H. Lawrence, often shed their sicknesses in their writings—a fact that's endorsed by Dostolovsky's *Notes From Underground* which carries the imprint of his genius on every page. A true artist never wills himself into creation; his work is always a happening—something that often surprises him as much as it does its reader or critic.

It's now time, I think, to delve a little deeper into creative

writing whether it is a poem, a novel or a play. Let me now speculate on the genesis of a work of art; in other words, what is it that triggers off a writer's imagination. If he is a poet, it may be some idea, image or event that gives birth to the first line or stanza. It may be any of these things so long as the propelling force is powerful enough to keep the writer's imagination at a feverish pitch till the work is done. But one thing is certain that the birth of a poem or story often takes place in the subliminal regions of the artist's psyche, and it is only at subsequent stages that he becomes aware of what is appearing on the blank page. In other words, the beginning is always 'unconscious' though the middle and the ending may have progressed under the control of the writer's conscious self. In this context, I am reminded of Ted Hughes's famous poem 'The Thought-Fox', which I feel tempted to quote in full, since it explains more effectively than any critical statement the mystery of the creative process, with particular reference to the composition of a poem.

I imagine this midnight's moment's forest
something else is alive
Beside the clock's loneliness
And this blank page where my fingers move.

Through the window I see no star;
Something more near
Though deeper within darkness
is entering the loneliness;

Cold, belatedly as the dark snow.
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now and now

Sets neat prints into the snow
Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come

Across clearings, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly,

Coming about its own business

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still, the clock ticks
The page is printed.

Since this poem symbolizes certain basic elements of poetic creation, it deserves a few words of comment. First, the fox, a cunning animal operating during darkness, suggests the poet's imagination that seizes on images and ideas in solitude and during moments of heightened perception when reason loses its control on reality. Time and again, Ted Hughes stresses darkness, loneliness and a sense of movement—elements which constitute the basis of any creative activity. As the fox progresses through the snow, during this dark night, the blank page in front of the poet also comes alive progressively, with the poem assuming a distinct design and meaning. As the fox disappears into the dark hole, so does the poem stand completed—"the page is printed".

Let me now single out one of the fundamental elements suggested in this poem—the mystery of creation. It is quite obvious that Ted Hughes, both as poet and commentator on the poetic craft, has always emphasized the mysterious origins of a poem. In other words, he seems to endorse inspiration, rather than 'perspiration' which only follows the act of creation when the artist engages himself in the laborious task of 'sifting, combining' and revising.

This may explain why a genuine piece of creative writing invariably generates multiple meanings, some of which may not be accessible even to the writer himself. If a poem, a story or a play surfaces from the dark, subliminal zones of the mind, it will inevitably carry a variety of meanings which will add several new dimensions to the work. In other words, while a discursive statement carries only one meaning, 'a pseudo-statement' (to borrow the term used by I.A. Richards) creation is not circumscribed by any such limitation. How shall one explain, for instance, the famous line from *Macbeth*: 'Not all the perfumes of Arabia will sweeten this little hand?' A myopic critic may feel tempted to interpret the line logically to observe that Lady Macbeth was a person of small stature.

etc. But how does one explain the 'perfumes of Arabia'—and does a perfume 'sweeten' a hand or just make it fragrant? The only answer to such nagging questions, raised by the rational mind, is to advise it to 'suspend' its disbelief. Let not reason transgress into the sacred realms of imagination and mystery. In the grey area of creation, all paradoxes, contradictions and ambiguities assume new meanings to enrich a work of art.

Criticism, on the other hand, often operates on a much lower level, using tools of analysis, in its attempt to reduce the mystery of creation to some unidimensional, simplistic interpretation. It distrusts ambiguity, feels lost in the maze of multiple meanings, and revels more in the arrogance of its judgements than in its striving for true understanding that comes from participation, not detachment, and from surrender of the will to the author's imagination.

But there is also the kind of criticism which strives to meet the artist on his own native ground as a co-explorer. Its response to a work of art is more of wonder and amazement than of rude questioning. Take, for instance, Allen Tate's essay on the technique of fiction. In the opening paragraph, he merely expresses his surprise at Tolstoy's ingenuity in synthesizing a seemingly incoherent cluster of elements into a unified scene of great beauty and power.

The best exponents, however, of creative criticism, as observed by T.S. Eliot, are the writers themselves—e.g. Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf or Saul Bellow. I have already quoted from Conrad, but let me summon him again to enlighten us on the craft of fiction as envisioned by him. It is interesting here to notice that while a critic like Wayne Booth, or even Frank Kermode, would talk about the basic ingredients of the craft of fiction only in discursive terms, Conrad, as a practising story-teller, merely says: 'My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written world, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see, that and no more, and it is everything.' Now I wonder if a professional critic could identify, in such a forthright manner, the central truth about a successful fictional narrative. How could academic criticism handle the problem of making the reader hear, feel and, above all, see. And, in any case, how could formal criticism devise any

methodology to analyse a novelist's strategy in making his narrative visually stimulating. And, as for the faculty of feeling, of making a scene or a dialogue come alive, the technique would inevitably remain inaccessible to any logical reasoning.

Let me now cite another example of a creative approach to the novelist's art, an approach which may disturb the priorities often stressed by a formal critic—plot, atmosphere, character, etc. In this context, I wish to share with you a teasing observation made by Saul Bellow in an article titled 'Where do we go from here?' After discussing how the traditional, unitary self has now come unstuck in contemporary fiction, he refers to a few celebrated novels of this century like *Ulysses*, *The Magic Mountain*, *The Making of Americans* and *Remembrance of Things Past*. And then he makes a statement which may disturb the formal academic critic. 'These novels,' he observes, 'do not absorb us in what happens next'. That, incidentally, demolishes E.M. Forster's concept of plot. But Bellow proceeds to define his own response to these novels. 'They interest us in a scene, in a dialogue, a mood, an insight, in language—but they are not narratives'. In other words, a reader is not concerned with a novel's ingenious plot-construction, but only with 'a mood, an insight', or some such intangible impression left on his mind. Such an approach clearly establishes the basic difference between a creative and a critical approach to the writing of a novel.

And, lastly, I wish to give you an example of a novelist engaged in the process of creation. This is how Henry James comments on his work in progress. Is he conscious of any design or organization as he is writing, or is he merely absorbed, entirely, in the process of creation itself? This is what he writes in his *Notebooks* :

Jan 4, 1910. I take this up again after an interruption. I, in fact, throw myself upon it this a.m. I simply invoke and appeal to all the powers and forces and divinities to whom I've ever been loyal and who haven't failed me yet—momentary side-winds—things of no real authority—break in every now and then inferior little questions to me but I am back, I come back... oh, celestial, soothing,

sanctifying process, with all the high, sane forces of the sacred time fighting through it, on my side: Let me handle it gently and patiently out—with fever laid to rest—as in all the old enchanted mounts ! It only looms, oh only shines and shimmers, too beautiful and too interesting...

