

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In ten minutes how can I sum up
This life, this voyage on uncharted
Sea, this flight over radarless ports
This endless worship at plundered shrines
This love transformed into mere pain and
This emptiness that hangs from brackets
Of withered arms, the strangers who have
Come to wipe my tears, the oyster's ache
For the pearl it has lost, the scent of talc on
Baby-skin tended three decades ago
Still lingering on. Change the world with
Rhetoric? Never; cynicism
Takes the driver's seat for time perhaps
Personified as stillness, all its
Fury gelled, tanned. Life spreads its moulting
Wings to sicken me but do not judge
Me harshly, I am your kith and kin
I gathered your laments into a song.

(Das: "Summing Up")

Kamala Das who soared to eminence in the sixties and took the literary world by storm remains a major literary personality even today. S. Iyenger rightly called her “a new phenomenon in Indo-Anglian poetry” and called her poem “An Introduction” “a minor classic”. A measure of her popularity is that she figures in almost all the important anthologies of Indo-English poetry and critical surveys of Indian writing in English. She is on the curricula of a considerable number of colleges and universities in India and abroad. Her global recognition is attested by her nomination for the Nobel prize for literature in 1984. She is also the first Indian recipient of the Asan World Prize for Literature in the same year. By virtue of her lyrical grace and lucid diction, coupled with a unique poetic personality, she has been able to establish an unflinching bond with her readers. She displays a profound capacity “to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday”, to echo Coleridge.

She transcends the barrier of sex. Her creative consciousness reveals its essentially androgynous and even trans-sexual character despite her sexually charged idiom. She talks more about women because they are more oppressed and exploited than men. Thus, there is a great deal more in Das’s work than just sex and physical love—an aspect overemphasized by some of her critics. Overexposure of sex is only a literary strategy with her. It is for generating in the reader the desired sense of disgust for the reprehensible aspects of human behaviour that she uses overemphasis.

Her poetry represents an incessant quest for love and identity—perhaps an identity that is misplaced. Marriage is seen by the poet only as an intrusion in her creative life. A sense of loss comes out when she says: “I am positive if I had been unmarried, I would have been a better writer.” (1990). Contrary to the general opinion, she has found as an artist sex debilitating. She explains her attitude to it in a characteristically candid manner: “Sex saps you, which is why I took celibacy some 15 years back. Because that is the only way I can write, by keeping my vitality intact.” At another place she says: “Love is certainly not sex”. All the statements taken together, along with many others, constitute Das’s “private voice”. But then how do we relate it to her multiple “public voices”? If this is her attitude to sex, marriage and love then why did she write the way she did? We are heading for a multi-voice theory of her poetry. One may consider her own answer to the question: “I began writing the way I did because I wanted to write away my disgust for sex....A woman-writer, whatever she leaves incomplete in her life she feels compelled to complete in her writings, all that we never wanted to face in our real life.”

Writing to her is, therefore, a psychic necessity, an antidote to loneliness and betrayal. She cannot imagine a life without creativity and wonders what she would have done if she had not learnt to write in one of her Anamalai poems:

If I had not learnt to write how would
I have written away my loneliness

or grief? Garnering them within my heart
would have grown heavy as a vault, one that
only death might open, a release then
I would not be able to feel or sense.

(No. III)

About those who do not write she says: "Those who do not write, retain nothing of life, ultimately. Life runs through their fingers like fine sand". As Rehman observes, like a seismograph she records every tremor of experience. She writes with a sense of double commitment: commitment to her inner self and commitment to the outside world. This is what Satchidanandan calls Das's "aesthetics of complementarity." The former is the source of her introspective and reflective poetry, her poetry of self-discovery, self-scrutiny and even self-flagellation. It can for the sake of convenience be called the poetry of her "private voice". The latter has two dimensions: the first reveals the poet as a "chronicler of events" who holds a mirror up to the world of violence and corruption; the second reflects the dissolving identity of the poet into numerous selves and the autobiographical "I" completely merges with the archetypal "I". This second dimension of her commitment to the external world reveals her public voice. She can be strident, admonitory and prophetic, sparing none.. No experience can be embarrassing to the creative self for creation takes place in a state of void which in Buddhist philosophy implies pure thought, pure consciousness, a tabooless vacuum.

The versatile creativity of Das manifests itself very interestingly in her poetic praxis. There are a number of poems which have as their subject the all-devouring nature of her sensibility. In these poems her creative process finds a thematic exposure. One such poem is "Forest Fire". Fire is a powerful metaphor for the devouring nature of the poetic sensibility. Just as the forest fire consumes everything that comes its way so does the sensibility in question:

But in me

The sights and smells and sounds shall thrive and go
on
And on and on. In me shall sleep the baby
That sat in prams, and, sleep and wake and smile its
Toothless smile. In me shall walk the lovers, hand
In hand, and in me, where else, the old shall sit
And feel the touch of sun in me, the street-lamps
Shall glimmer, the cabaret girls cavort, the
Wedding drums resound, the eunuchs swirl coloured
Skirts and sing sad songs of love, the wounded moan,
And in me the dying mother with hopeful
Eyes shall gaze around, seeking her child, now grown
And gone away to other towns, other arms.

("Forest Fire")

To most of Das's critics "Forest Fire" is only one of her many love poems and the poem is interpreted along this line. As is obvious

from the excerpt, the poem is also an essay on literary composition and the poetic process. The poem lists all the themes that one finds in Das's poetry, right from the baby in a pram to the old mother and the dying. Harrex makes similar points in his discussion of the poem:

Before external reality can be rendered, she argues, its objects—baby, pram, lovers, old man, street-lamps, cabaret girls, wedding drums, eunuchs, the wounded and dying—must be possessed and devoured by the poet's sensibility, must be personalized, so that images of their reality live on, objectified, in the world of poetic imagination. (168).

In other words, poetic composition presupposes internalization of external reality. These objects of reality await their poetic transmutation and nourish the poet's sensibility.

As discussed in the introduction, the ceaseless activities of the poet's mind make him different from the rest of human beings. Das implies that poetry is a creative reaction to the "pressures and torrents" which the ever-active mind of the poet brings to her. Even when the body sleeps her mind is immersed in creation. It keeps leaping up like a "grey hound", making poetic creation largely a nocturnal activity:

Mind,
Lean grey hound,
Awaking
And leaping up
When I lie
A dead heap upon my bed
Down
Doggie, down,
Merciless
Your claim
That nights fed on the moon
Are yours
While days
Fed on the sun
Are the body's
To play out
Its dreary wearying chores.

(“Grey Hound”)

The poem revolves around a single image that takes it closer to the Imagist Movement of Ezra Pound. The far-fetched nature of the comparison, the poet's mind being imaged as a hound, makes it a Metaphysical conceit. “Mind” obviously means creative mind and the “moon” is a symbol of creative inspiration, the poetic imagination in the manner of nineteenth century Romanticism. The creative mind is “merciless” because poetic creation is a strenuous and demanding exercise and it cannot be affected by the constraints

of the "body". It is significant in this context that Das does most of her writing during night. Thus, creation to her is an unending and continuous process. To quote her own words:

For the creation that is literary there is no beginning or end. It precedes the writing and also follows it. It takes place in the mind nearly all the time during the waking hours. At times I suspect that even in sleep the mind is obsessed with its need to create. When you ripen for a poem and a poem ripens for its debut it gets born. There is no easy way to get it out, no miracle remedy for its delayed gestation. There is something primeval and magical in creation—be it that of a living creature or a perfect poem. (Answer to Questionnaire, 3 Feb 1988).

Unable to find comfort in her real life the poetic mind escapes into fantasy and myth. What is denied to the poet in the real world becomes attainable in the "shadowy" world. The two worlds, as is clear from earlier discussions, complement each other. Thus a major aspect of Das's creativity can be seen as wish-fulfilment. What imagination was to Coleridge, fantasy is to Das. It is a need of the creative psyche and the flight is unconscious and automatic: "We all fantasize. About God for instance. We imagine that something exists. Like that I imagined that there would be a friend who'd understand me, comfort me. But then, in real life nobody turned up," as she writes in *Sunday Observer*. If the literary form

suited to fantasy is romance in traditional literature then in Das this is romance of the liberated self. Thus in her poems and autobiography the descriptions of and references to extra-marital love-affairs are nothing but fantastic adventures of the searching self during its sojourn in that "shadowy world". Autobiography as a literary form is an imaginative representation of certain selected facts of life, and in so doing, the imagination at work in "*My Story*" and in a number of her earlier poems "distorts" and dissipates" (facts) in order to "recreate". The demolition of the empirical self needs to be seen as the necessary precondition for creative reconstruction. In this creative void she recreates herself:

"We weave the fabric
Of our art, settling and unsettling an ancient
Design...."

(Feline)

The notion of parallel existence of two worlds is reminiscent of Plato's theory of Ideas. This grants the poet an interesting posture of Feminist-Platonist—an idea that can best be illustrated by examining her treatment of the two worlds of lovers and two types of love experience. One is of myth, the other of imaginatively transmuted reality; one is archetypal, the other an imperfect imitation, a distorted reflection. The former is represented by Radha and Krishna, luxuriating in a serene state of fulfilment. The divine adultery is echoed and imaginatively re-enacted in *My Story*. The imperfect reflection of the ideal lovers can be seen in the more

mundane pseudo-lovers and the husband-figures, imprisoned in, and therefore, yet to be able to rise from the obscurantist “Stone Age” of domestic male tyranny.

Das’s journey from Bombay to Kerala in 1980 came to mean a journey away from English to Malayalam and then from poetry to prose/fiction. She did write a number of poems in Malayalam but as an Indo-Anglian poet she found herself to be a total misfit, an alien in her own native land. This added to her loneliness and yielded her a new realization:

Now when I went to Kerala as a writer who wrote in English, I realised I became lonely. I didn’t belong there. There was no audience for my English poetry. Then I realised, for the first time, without an audience I would not be able to function at all as a writer (*IL* 139, 1990, 156).

Again after three years Das articulates this anguished perception generated by her experience of alienation and marginalization due to language:

I have written poems during the past few months, but I find them to be of a lower standard. They are less spontaneous, and this is probably because I live here in Trivandrum where society has powerful inhibitions.... It is very difficult here for one to feel the

taste of freedom. The poetry that I write here is a kind of inhibited poetry which I do not appreciate fully. ...There is no audience here for English poetry. (*IL* 155, 1993, 146).

The two extracts taken together emphasize two basic facts. The first concerns the poet's linguistic alienation experienced at various stages of her poetic development. Away from the English language she cannot have "the taste of freedom"; to her English is the uninhibited and uninhibiting medium of poetic communication. The language with all its socio-cultural components, enables the poet to shake off all her inhibitions and remain just Kamala, precluding the need for a mask or disguise provided by a pseudonym. But in her Malayalam circle with its "powerful inhibitions" she must assume a different identity and be called Madhavikutti.

The second fact relates to the audience as an integral part of Das's poetic process. She writes for an audience with stateable objectives. Hers is the poetry of address with an I-you/I-s/he addresser-addressee structure. The speaker is in most cases represented as being actively and often intimately engaged in a dialogue with an addressee who is almost always male. Her indictment is directed against this male addressee while the implied reader is taken into confidence. In the "love poems" we find the male addressee is projected as an offender or an exploiter taken to task in the presence of a vast community of implied readers treated as her confidants:

Writing is very strenuous. And without having somebody in mind, I don't think that one can begin to write. Like for example, mad people talk to themselves. They always imagine a listener so it was easy for me to imagine a listener. This is not an unusual activity. (*The Sunday Observer*, 8 Nov 1987, 12).

An example of such a representative addressee is to be found in one of the most referred to poems of Das, "The Old Playhouse":

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her
In the long summer of your love so that she would
forget
Not the raw seasons alone, and the house left behind,
but
Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless
Pathways of the sky. It was not to gather knowledge
Of yet another man that I came to you to learn
What I was, and by learning, to learn to grow, but
every
Lesson you gave was about yourself.

The addressee could either be the speaker's husband or her lover. In creating a prison-like condition for the addresser the second person addressee is remarkably close to the addressee in the first section of "The Stone Age." The tone of intimacy between the addresser and

the addressee/reader is greatly enhanced by the quality of the speech that characterizes Das's poetry in general. One may particularly consider the suprasegmental features of her verse like the rapid shifts in tone and pitch, varying intonation patterns elliptical syntax, the vividness of a speaking voice and the overall informal conversational idiom.

In Kerala she has found her sensibility at odds with the prevailing Malayalam poetic conventions. This discovery has considerably curbed but not altogether stopped her poetic flow. Fired by a zeal "to adorn the Malayalam language" she has turned to prose fiction and painting. It has been more a matter of shifting emphasis from one literary form to another. She has not abandoned poetry. She cannot do so for poetry is in her blood. The reason for the relative marginalization of poetry is also economic for she is a writer by profession. Poetry can be a source of supreme joy to her but it cannot be a source of her livelihood in Kerala. This is a peculiar irony of fate, both for her as well as for poetry. Her resentment about her native poetic scene also stems from her distinct ideological position that she holds with respect to the very function of poetry as is obvious from one of her more recent observations:

The Malayalam poets usually tend to use beautiful words and in their search for musical words what they wish to say gets forgotten—like throwing the baby with the bath-water. My mother is a noteworthy

exception. I believe in original thinking. (IL, "Reminiscences From Indian English", 113).

Implied in the commentary is the age-old debate about the function of poetry and the vocation of the poet and also about content versus form, message versus entertainment, thought versus feeling. What she resents about the "Malayalam poets" is their rather excessive stress on sonority; their apparent blurring of the distinction between music and poetry, the sacrifice of thought-content to musicality. A considerable quantity of contemporary Malayalam poetry still conforms to a very strong oral tradition of singing poetry. Indeed, a song privileges the sound over the sense. By contrast, Das's is the poetry of powerful thought, rising from the chainless mind of a chained individual. It is consistent with Rousseau's famous remark that man is born free but he is everywhere in chains. Poetry to Das is a primal necessity. She cannot allow its communicative power to be weakened or eclipsed by "choice of beautiful words".

After her return to her home state, the existential pressure begins to weigh even heavier upon her mind and her poetic sensibility shows some significant changes. In a large number of her more recent poems just as the thematic focus gives place to violence and corruption in various fields. Such poems are, however, far outnumbered by those that reveal a sustained note of melancholy and pessimism that takes them closer to some of her earlier poems like "The Descendants", "The Substitute", "Luminol" and several others. The difference lies in that the earlier ones, in one way or the

other, expose and critique sexual exploitation; the later poems like the Anamalai poems, "Home Is A Concept", "Smudged Mirror", "A Widow's Lament", "A Feminist's Lament", "Larger Than Life Was He" and "Stock Taking" are more introspective and can be seen as a climactic expression of the poets loneliness.

Anamalai Poems are a sequence of poems which the poet wrote (or rather spoke) during her sojourn in the Anamalai hills of Tamil Nadu following her crushing defeat in the Parliamentary election of 1984. She spoke these poems into a tape recorder while recuperating from the shock (a detailed account of the origins of these poems is given in *IL* 155). These poems stand in a sharp contrast to the earlier ones. They totally abandon the external world. They cultivate interiority and celebrate the self in the manner of the Tamil *akam* (interior) poems of the Classical times, as P.P. Raveendran rightly points out. What they unveil is the interior landscape of the poetic psyche. They show a kind of self-exploration and self-scrutiny she never attempted before. For lack of space only two poems may be sampled in addition to the ones discussed earlier:

The longest route home is perhaps
the most tortuous, the inward
path you take that carries you step
by weary step beyond the blood's
illogical arrogance, yes,
beyond the bone and the marrow

into that invisible abode of pain,
yes, that deathless
creation tethered to your self
and constantly struggling to wrest
itself free, tethered to your soul
as your shadow is to your form,
your Siamese twin no surgeon
can cut away from you. Other
journeys are all so easy but
not the inward one, the longest
route home and the steepest
descent.

(No. VIII)

Home becomes in the poem the arena of the soul. It is also “the invisible abode of pain” and a site of deathless creation. A work of art is conceived “in that invisible abode of pain” implying that only in a condition of pain and turbulence poetic creation is possible. The “deathless creation” though tethered to the self, is paradoxically in a perpetual struggle to free itself from the creator-self. This kind of creation can only be located in the region of the soul to which it is “tethered” eternally like shadow and substance—as inseparable as the Siamese twins. The process of introspection and self-scrutiny is the most difficult one. This is also a journey from the realm of the body to the arena of the soul.

Many of these poems betray an undeniable element of self-pity that often makes the depicted experience appear morbid. The poems are nevertheless saved by some vivid images, as for example:

This has always been
Someone else's world not mine.
My man, my sons, forming the axis
While I, wife and mother,
Insignificant as a fly,
Climb the glasspane of their eyes...

("A Widow's Lament")

On its own "insignificant as a fly" is a stock simile but in the last line with its transformation into an image of a lonely and neglected individual the conceit acquires authenticity. In fact very rarely one finds hackneyed similes in Das's poetry. In "Larger Than Life Was He" loneliness is combined with a sense of betrayal and guilt:

In twenty weeks
My grief gave way to faint stirrings of guilt.
In the gauzy sleep of dawn
I had not lain with him
For fifteen years or more
I had tried as satiated wives did
To wean him of desire
My celibacy flowed like a river in spate
Between the twin beds in our room....

The poems of this phase also show a growing preoccupation with marginalization due to age. It is the anguish of being disowned and rejected by the loved ones:

There were nights when I heard
my own voice call me out
of dreams, gifting me such rude
awakenings and then
expelling me from warm
human love, unaccustomed
fare for one such as I,
a misfit when awake.

(Anamalai Poems: II)

The urge for communion and reintegration finds a moving and sombre articulation in poems like "At Chiangi Airport" and "Home is a Concept". The old are referred to as "a displaced generation" who are in most cases seen by the poet as victims of their children's ingratitude and unconcern. As a Third World Feminist Das exposes the agony of alienation of the aged:

...The unwanted carry heavy bags
And overcoats but the heaviest luggage
They tote is pain. If home is a concept
They shall not know it, if home is a group
Prepared to love, the traveller has not known that

Group and never shall....

(“Home is a Concept”)

The theme of old age and the generation gap is treated in a number of her recent Malayalam poems. One of them is entitled “The River Named Time”. Das translated into English impromptu on my request. It is more of a paraphrase than a finished poem and so unfit for a formal or structural analysis. Time is compared to a river and the past becomes “the great moody sea” of memories into which this river must flow and merge. The poet’s mother “Amma” becomes a representative of the “displaced generation” embracing nothing but memories:

Not once but several times

Amma must have felt that she was swimming

With her children along that river

Named time, struggling to keep their heads afloat

But that was only a delusion. Her children

Stand on the other shore and Amma on this shore;

Forever and ever she shall be on this shore.

She fears that for a moment her eyes may shut
themselves

Out of fatigue and those beautiful forms shall

Disappear. Amma, a tired one, the one who

Only embraces memories now....

The translation reveals the pathos of isolation concomitant with old age. "Amma" clings to memories, unaware of the vast chasm that separates her from her children. The metaphor of the two banks of the river graphically presents the generation gap. The banks are the two points in time at which the poet's mother "Amma" and her children stand. The impossibility of their reconciliation is brought out so effectively by this metaphor of the two shores on which the poet finds them standing.

As has been pointed out, in most cases the technique, the literary strategy adopted in her poetry and short stories, is one of satiric exposure, supplemented by often truculent and unequivocal statements in her columns and interviews. Exposure of lust alternates with exposure and indictment of violence of every kind with all its ugliness and ignominy. By rejecting patriotic violence she sets humanity above nationalism which are too often held in antithesis. Mounting belligerence and barbarity enjoin upon the literary artist the indispensable task of promoting national and international integration and peace. As Das says: "The ultimate aim of literature and art must be to establish peace on this earth". Mutual hatred and animosity, born of religious fundamentalism and ethnic strife, portend the extinction of the human race. To the poet all-pervasive hatred is the only enduring inheritance of mankind:

We ate
Our forefathers to gather vigour for living, Later

Our descendants shall perhaps eat us when their turn
arrives, No,
We shall not be surprised, we are ordinary, no God
seems
Too keen to preserve us. We mated like Gods, but
begot
Only our slayers. Each mother suckles her own enemy
And hate is first nurtured at her gentle breast and each
man's seed
Is pregnant with his death....

(“White Man with Whiter Legs”)

Or, as she bemoans the “incarnadined glory” of the riot-torn city,
she brings to life the orgy of religious violence in “Inheritance”:

Slay them who do not
Believe, or better still, disembowel their young ones
And scatter on the streets meagre innards. Oh God,
Blessed be your fair name, blessed be the religion
Purified in the unbeliever's blood, blessed be
Our sacred city, blessed be its incarnadined glory.

In this tirade once again lies her commitment to humanity that is for
her far above nationality, race and religion. This urge to embrace
humanity at all costs gives Das a special topical relevance today.

Das's concerns broaden considerably with the passage of time. She gradually disentangles herself from her gender identity. She extends her sympathies to all sections of society: the poor and the down-trodden, women and children, victims of war and ethnic strife, religious intolerance; victims of corruption, the minorities, fighters for justice and sanity, abandoned youths and even plants and animals. This widening of vision grants Das a comprehensiveness denied to a dogmatic feminist. Typical of this sensibility is her poem "Smoke in Colombo" which Das wrote while in Sri Lanka:

On that last ride home we had the smoke
Following us, along the silenced
Streets: lingering on, though the fire
Was dead then in the rubble and the ruins,
Lingering on as milk lingers on
In udders after the calves are buried,
Lingering on as grief lingers on
Within women rocking emptied cradles
They stopped us, a somnambulistic
Daze was in their eyes, there was no space
Between us and their guns, but we were
Too fatigued to feel fear, or resist
The abrupt moves
Of an imbecilic will....

This is life distilled into poetry. The poem is remarkably rich in subtexts and can suggest more than a voluminous account of homicide and arson can state. The poem positions Das in a broader historical context. The maternal similes represent a fervent appeal to preserve life and shun violence of every kind. It is an unobtruded poet-reader lyrical communication, transparent but profound. It is fine artistry aiding a melioristic vision of life.

With life taking precedence over art with the passage of time, poetry gets relegated to a secondary position and loses some of the robust qualities which her earlier poetry possessed. Speaking of the visible differences between the poetry of the earlier phase and the one written after 1980 she says:

The recent ones have been actually controlled by reason and logic. So certainly they suffered. They are just poetry written by a lady, and there is no flutter of the wings there. It is a caged bird singing its songs. If you cage a bird its music will not be as good as it was when it was free. (*IL* 155, 146-47).

This detached self-analysis cannot be taken at its face value. The “caged bird” metaphor implies the mounting socio-cultural pressure on the poet’s mind leading to the weakening, if not loss, of her unfettered imagination and spontaneity. Conversely, her ability to find such vivid metaphors even in a casual conversation testifies to her robust poetic impulse and her descriptive skills. It is evident

from the poems and prose extracts that Das excels in the art of description—description of facts, imaginary description and creative description—to use Robert Andrew’s classification. Objects and ideas are transformed for a stunningly vivid apprehension so that with desolation setting in “the house was crouching/On its elbows then”. The poet thought the windows were closing like the great grandmother’s eyes; she heard “the pillars groan/And the dark rooms heave a sigh”. Guilt-ridden she says: “I plucked your soul/Like a pip from a fruit” (“Blood”). In “Annette” beauty is seen “falling as chaff in old mirrors” while the skin of a poet “is yellowed/Like antique paper”. The eunuchs were “thin in limbs and dry like half-burnt logs from/Funeral pyres” (“The Dance of the Eunuchs”). By contrast, the “drink” offered to the speaker in “*Summer in Calcutta*” is “but/The April sun,/Squeezed/Like an orange in/My glass” and “Wee bubbles ring/My glass, like a bride’s nervous smile”. In “The Lunatic Asylum” “An unshaded/Bulb shaped like a tear-drop/Hanging from the dead-white ceiling of the hall” and “The feeble rain throbs on the city’s brow like migraine.” (“The Blind Walk”).

In her entire poetic career what stands out more than anything else is this unique capacity to put to poetic use the vast resources of the English language. It always remains her forte. This is also perhaps the most uncontroversial aspect of her poetic practice. As for her style, it is least artificial and most natural. Words virtually grow on her like leaves on a tree. As she says in her poem, “words”:

All round me are words, and words and words,
They grow on me like leaves, they never
Seem to stop their slow growing
From within.

.....
They grow on me like leaves on a tree,
They never seem to stop their coming
From a silence, somewhere deep within.

Past and ancestry, alienation and survival, love and death, innocence and experience, in their highly diversified forms are woven into the very fabric of the poetry of Kamala Das. Her strength lies in her ability to speak in many voices. She exposes herself to the diverse facets of life and her poetic pilgrimage is the story of a searching soul humanized by pain and turbulence. Her essentially tragic vision of the worldly life lends her poetry an elegiac character because, after all, as she says: "I gathered your laments into a song". Though for her "life spreads its moulting wings", her thirst remains unquenched and cries out: "...Rob me, destiny, if you must,/rob me of my sustenance, but do not, I beg/Of you, do not take away my thirst".