

CHAPTER XV

Recentering of the Poet: The Postmodern Perspective

Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again. (Shelley, "The Cloud" 83-4)

From Descartes to Derrida there has been a gradual death of the creative self in Western philosophy. Under cultural pluralism and the dislocation of the logocentric system, the lone voice of the hieratic poet suffers a serious marginality giving way to the poetic of 'plurality' and ceaseless interpretability of textuality. The poem as we normally recognise disappears into a network of signs, a 'jouissant affirmation of indeterminacy, a dance of the pen, a Dionysian threshing floor'. (Burke 1992:24) At the hands of the constructivist anti-humanist theorists the poet is desacralised and all forms of theocentric auteurism is deemed outlandish. Refusing to ascribe a 'secret' to the text, we encounter a 'counter theological' and 'revolutionary activity' 'for to refuse to halt meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law' (Barthes 1986:54)

So truth cannot return in her traditional logocentric forms. Truth cannot unveil herself and display her naked charms to the rapacious gaze of man or present herself as a clear and distinct idea to the mind's eye. She cannot be laid out in philosophical propositions or adequately represented in language or in sensuous form. *Savoir* (knowledge) can longer be identified with *sa-voir* – literally, his seeing; homonymically (*ca-voir*), seeing it. (Bannet 1993 :51)

So however much we desubstantialise our thinking, and leave aside the textual monism with a foundationalist rationale where the author is the *auctor vitae* or 'transcendental signified', the artist pushes the horizon of the artefact to lurk subjunctively in the critic who is engrossed in a near demented text-digging to stamp his *significance*. The poem may exist as a sea of signs with multiple referents; as an open ended system sponsored by *écriture*. But can we decimate the objectivity of the text in the first place? Does not the subjective reality of the text with its bounds and boundlessness trigger a multivocality of significance? If the critic vibrates the text with an overplus of signification, was it not an inspiration from the 'inaugural' text? How could we obfuscate the man who blew, as it were, the 'linguistic structure' out in the initial instance? One remembers that Brihaspati, the poet-philosopher in Rig Veda blows out the birth of the gods. This act of blowing brings out the dialectic between *what is* from *what was not*. Postmodernist tendencies where 'anything goes' would have unabashed militancy against such a concept which however, cannot outpace what is in the teeth of what could be. Beyond the thralldom of univocity of significance where textual reading has unimpeded significative possibilities, the metaphysics of 'presence' acknowledges the 'arranger' of signs whose arrangement comes to be subverted and also a voice that could possibly *order* meaning(s) out. Astoundingly, Stanley Fish denies the existence of textual meaning or any text independent of the reader's constitution of it. Felperin rightly argues that 'if Fish's tail-chasing theory avoids the pitfalls of that large body of contemporary theorizing that seeks to prescribe practice, it does so at the high cost of withholding any *practical guidance* whatever in doing what we would do anyway, since the reader's operations are quite literally beyond 'his' control. Who needs or wants a theory that is, in this strict sense, inconsequential?'(1985:211). This 'inconsequentiality' could render serious body blows to the edifice of critical practice which without Culler's 'literary competence' and Holland's 'reason' in critique would patently encourage an absurd travesty of interpretation. This amusing obligation to be 'interesting' with acentred nomadological and schizoid interpretation could lead to critical 'caprice'. Barret points out the shockingly hyperbolic symbolic matrix of Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" where the deconstructionist would never take the "woods" as woods but 'could be anything dark and inviting – perhaps the

female genitalia, to whose seductiveness the poet would, but for various reasons cannot, yield, etc., etc....' (Barret 1987:129). However much we accept the amorphous semantic space and the rhizomatic textual existence and eschew a seeming polarisation on auteurist criticism, criticism needs to imbibe what the Sanskrit aesthetics would attribute as *auchitya* ('justness'). (This is with due regard to Eliot's perception over a dubiety about the future of interpretation). Here side stepping the pitfalls of autodeconstructionism, the poem can exist as a linguistic construct – without an overzealous burial of the constructor – awaiting revelatory utterances from the 'interpreter'. (This is no 'interpretive fallacy' as the reader and the writer maintain the sanctity of their domain and 'secondary interpretive texts' cannot be 'semantically equivalent to the literary text', Bagwell 1986: 43-4) In Iserian synthesis 'ideation' (*Vorstellung*) as opposed to 'perception' (*Wahrnehmung*) would lead the interpreter to the 'blanks' (*Leerstellen*), the 'suspended connectibility' in the text on the syntagmatic axis that forges a text-ure in the Text. Surface signs of the authorial reification could be Iser's negativity that braces up to the 'hidden cause' for a readerly sally at the unformulated constellations.

In a revisionary impetus, the poet's determinate or unilinearity of design are ^{is} transcended much in the same way in which Derrida discusses counter-metaphysical writers like Nietzsche, Heidegger or Levinas. The referentiality of the text that leads to the remonumentalisation is born from the inherent signification. 'True, text can no longer be thought to carry a "message" from author to reader nor to have any autonomous identity, since they are always already each reader's self-replication and have no function other than to reinforce and prolong reader (and author) identity.' (Ray 1984:68) The recognition of authorialism, euphemistically the textual givens, lends to the decomposition-recomposition dialectic its much needed propriety. Ellis is very close to the truth when he points out that 'to postulate a sign that simply played indefinitely and infinitely against other signs is to imagine one with no distinct character at all, i.e., one not recognizable as having any shape or function of its own. That produces not more and richer meaning, as advocates of this position like to think, but no meaning at all'. (1989:118) For us the inceptive text has the signs with distinctive

shape and function that 'recognizably sets it apart from other signs.' (ibid) Countering the preposterous resonance of Frost's poem, as given by Barret, we can choose the inceptive text with its own distinctive signs to formulate an analysis that construes 'intention' and interpretation'. This is not just what the writer meant, but *how* he may have meant us to take that text. It is the 'woods' that infuse the moment of reflection – the 'lovely, dark and deep' phase of life – which leads to a resolution to keep 'promises'. In fact the realisation that 'miles' remain to be travelled is the supreme discovery. This realisation etches out a 'design' before man where 'sleep' comes to mean a meditative pause, a restive inertia, that doles out peace, harmony and rest. The text, in a striking layer of meaning, can *reveal* that the man riding the horse, is riding his material self for long. This initiates the horse's failure to understand the meaning of the halt for the malaise of a conflict between the spiritual and the material selves of existence is brought to the fore. The man stops in the wood, lovely and dark, to focus deep down within him for the real wealth that has been accumulating ever since man rode the 'horse'. This self-introspection is necessary in the run up to 'sleep', which could be death or final consummation. (Ghosh 2000: 48-50)

Indisputably, the success is in exceeding the poet's conscious purpose – the intention of the poet is never the final creator. The poet, as Eliot has argued, may hardly be aware of what he is communicating. Hirsch's statement that all uses of language are ethically governed by the intention of the author (1976: 91), is unacceptable for, the author cannot live as the sole determiner of his work but can obviously survive the critical outrage of the anti-intentionalists by remaining as a block, if not the most essential, in the textual architecture. So the 'understanding' and 'intention' without being at loggerheads or entirely sponsorial on levels of mutuality could foster an interpretation that reverberates the textual 'voids' without disambiguating the authorial 'point of view'. Even though it may be admitted that 'not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond the author' (Gadamer 1989: 296) yet the 'linguistic arrangement' that spawned the whole saga of hitherto untracked tracks of meaning is the 'unrealised' or 'blindness' of the creative self. This incubates on the corridor of the 'unfounded' and 'unthought' with startling ramifications – the Derridian dissemination. The critic, the sign-seeker, can situate him/herself in a 'prestructural activity' and

fitting the 'diverse perspectives into a gradually evolving pattern' (Iser1978:35) augments the 'meaning' with his text (*écriture*) – 'he has not shown infinite meaning but instead additional, *specifically stated* meaning that has been ignored in an inadequate account of the text. The critic has shown something *particular*; he deludes himself if he thinks he has shown something indeterminate and indiscriminate.(Ellis1989:118) Ellis contends with a strange 'curiousness' in Fish's logic that 'if there are two opposing views of the text, one cannot appeal to the text, because that is simply the locus of the dispute. Given Fish's logic, no knowledge of any kind is possible, for if two people make opposing statements about anything, the mere fact that they are different prevents any further investigation into the adequacy of the either by looking at what it was that the two purported to be talking about'. (123) So the text cannot be the basis for deciding on the weakness, blemish and misdirection for that would prevent a feisty leap into the infinite space of untamed subjectivity. That the argument revolves around the impossibility to assign 'weight' in the event of a conflict of view sounds apocryphal. Every opinion cannot be equally valid. As conflated with my interpretation, the explanation to the Frost's poem that Barret quotes, could only have grown riding on the monstrously reckless wings of critical discourse. It is an instance of writing about the text without reading it. The validity of the authorial intention may be largely ambushed with credible accretion of significance generated from the fluid sign-system; but a total freedom that heralds the mark of the writer as being 'reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence' (Lodge 1988: 198) is an impossible notion. To thwart such critical vandalism would require an implicit authorial resuscitation. When Hirsch writes – 'it may be asserted as a general rule that whenever a reader confronts two interpretations which impose different emphases on similar meaning components, at least one of the interpretations must be wrong' (1967: 230) – he strictly antagonises Fish in a mislaboured argument. The critic can exist with his hemispheric dominance without terrorising the text. Here one may pause to note in *Of Grammatology*:

The writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses

them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system. And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. (Spivak 1994: 158)

So authorial meaning has its place with the differing spectrum of readerly introspection to evolve a conflict that contributes to the enhancement of knowledge. In a 'bi-active' process, it is critically precarious to believe that a poem really means whatever any reader seriously believes it to mean. Falck vents a consternation over the evolution of language in post-structuralism where 'language simply evolves as it does, and no question can usually be asked about the spiritual – or even the physical – situation of the experiencing human beings who are the means by which such evolution occurs. It is at this point that post-structuralism falls into incoherence, since the pre-experiential human awareness, or Man as a source of experienceable meaning, cannot in fact disappear unless he reverts entirely to nature and loses altogether the conceptual and world-referential mode of comprehension which comes to him through his possession of language'. (1989: 101-2) Holland points out the inconsistency in the argument that since one needs a linguist to tell what it is that one knows, the status and nature of the 'I' which knows, is cast under a cloud. He argues, 'If, for example, I do not understand the working of my hip, if I have to ask an orthopedist to find out what it is I am walking on, does it follow that I am called into question?'(1992:168) Substantiating Falck further one can say that unacknowledgement of the self need not mean its dismissal. Wittgenstein has a logical thesis founded on a metaphor namely that just as the eye is not the part of the visible field, the philosophical I does not exist. This can be interpreted in more than one way in a very crucial passage in *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant has remarked that the phrase 'I think' accompanies judgement and knowledge claim. Self for Kant, is transcendently apperceived; the cogniser, the knower, the philosophical I are transcendent to the domains of knowledge. Frost's poem is a unique text; it is not Yeats' "Among School Children". Pluralism in signification is critically decorous to the point that its borders of singularity of existence

are not perilously attenuated. Perambulatory interpretations egged on by whatever the mind chooses to say could mean that Frost's poem blots out the divide with Yeats' composition in an appalling medley. The authorial intention constructs the first premise of meaning that sustains itself in its transcendence. With the declarative and descriptive textual stratification, the inner dynamics seizes on the programmatic and the operative intention. The poet, in a way, lives in the 'unintended' - the hiatus between gesture and statement. In the revisionist perspective, the readerly forays identify the locale of an authorial voice and prepares to 'slay the father' at the crossing. This 'marking' of the place for an introjection and 'overturning' is knowing in belief of a 'presence' or a 'voice'. Deconstruction is justified in attributing creativity to critics. But what disqualifies it from coherence and cogency is the *carte blanche* that revels in debunking the author. If imagination is the creative afflatus in the critic's tool so also it is of the author. What can be sufficiently argued is that no anarchic critical maelstrom, *anauchitya*, devoid of the rethinking of one's thinking, can differentiate Shakespeare's and Sidney's sonnets without attributing one to the other. An attitude- what the critic has done he has done - would exonerate the imputation of 'consequence' that responsible animadversion brings in its trail. The virtues of 'discrimination', *de rigueur* to the 'sanity of criticism', would be mashed at our own peril and dissolution of the essential divide between the two voices would tantamount to critical perversion. So poststructuralism, limited by its conceptual framework, cannot recognise a text's artistic success or failure; the demarcation between great writer and poor writer/ great criticism and poor criticism is debunked. The dismal desuetude of 'literary competence' leaves normal (intonating 'proper' but not 'right') criticism with a ring of primitive discordance which is unfortunate for mere insistence on one's individual response precludes any room for critical improvement beyond the initial stage of thought. It may be tepidly admitted that autho-centric truth of prevalent reality can spark off a 'direction' that subsidises to critical calls. This understanding of literature, in a way, justifies the implied author's peripheralisation of the empirical author as Paul de Man expatiates in the essay 'Impersonality in the Criticism of Maurice Blanchot'. That in the askesis of depersonalisation, Blanchot, endeavours to conceptualise the literary work as an autonomous entity, a 'consciousness without a subject', involves a negativism

bordering on an extreme purification that wrenches out elements from everyday experience and human interaction 'all reifying tendencies that tend to equate work with natural objects'. (de Man 1983:78) In the reversal of tendencies is inherent a rooting towards a 'subject'. Blanchot stresses meaningfully the process of mediation in the act of reading. In his exegesis on Mallarmé he makes allowance for the poet's voice in this essential reading process. 'He has been abolished and has vanished as the dramatic centre of his work, but this very annihilation has put him into contact with the reappearing and disappearing essence of the Book, with the ceaseless oscillation which is the main statement of the work.' (77) So absolute impersonality is deconstructed and substantiating further Booth consigns the 'untransmuted biases' to oblivion in a restructuring that involves empirical moulting. When the author writes, 'he creates not simply an ideal, impersonal man in general but an implied version of himself'. (1973: 70) Even when Barthes admits the authorial ingress by the backdoor, an inscription of himself in the text 'as one of his characters, as another figure sewn into the rug' (1979: 78), the implied authorship is irrefutable.

A constative statement - A candle burns limply near the window - when rendered to a poetic form, can branch out into several strata of meaning. A modest rendition would appear like this:

A burning candle, limp and low,
It burns to burn near the window.

To obviate the lines of 'identity' between poetry and non-poetry under the facetious assumption that all discourse are hooded under the blanket of *écriture* is sheer naivety. Admitting Holland's statement - 'meaning whether we are talking simply of putting black marks together to form words or much more complex process of putting words together to form theme do not inhere in the words-on-the-page but like beauty, in the eye of the beholder' (1975: 98) - to our advantage we can assert that the poetic construct has a kind of rhythmic or gestural quality that reveals 'the before unapprehended relations of things'. (Jones 1919:123) The personal idiosyncratic quality - the transcoding ability - is brought to bear on the text when the poetic structure

encourages a pursuit of signs. The tyrannical graphocentricism of the text needs a conscious denial with obvious reference to the ego, or *cogito*, and the text can be likened to ‘a violet by a mossy stone / half hidden from the eye. (Wordsworth, “She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways” 5-6); This is the *expressiveness* or the *revelatory* interests of the text. Here runs a ‘possible’ interpretation:

The burning candle is the decadent existential circuit of mortal man beleaguered by his broiling milieu. It holds the fire to burn but not to spread light; it burns to perish in its infructuous burning. The conventions of symbolic extrapolations bring the window to stand for the hope that would ‘carry’ the burning mortal existence to the outer space of ‘expansive’ composure, linking the exhaustible with the inexhaustible being. The flame in its depressing glow awaits the gusts from the window either to douse itself or lend a shiver to the burning – an added degree to the brightness. The window is a beckoning to an ‘ambiguity’ – the equivocationality between a burning for the second wind from the external self and ‘burning out’ for the surging assistance across the conflagrating texture of life to a cosmic transcendence.

Here the text with a certain arrangement of ‘signs’, rhythmic ‘angles’ and metaphorical ‘curves’, elicits the reader’s ‘play’ with significance; rather, activating the imagination, it coaxes a manifold transcription of experiences. Recent intentionalists, obviating the genetic relation between meaning and authorial intention, choose to consider it as an ‘ontological relation’ that is grounded in the assumption that ‘every meaning presupposes a meaner’ (Tatar 1998: 35) who exists like a cause in the effect (not the *causa sine qua non* but *causa causans*). There is no gainsaying that any text in literature draws us for its revelatory attributes. One can agree with Culler that to read a text one need not make his mind a *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconception. Reading requires the internalisation of the grammar of literature where a ‘preconception’ locks horn with an ‘existent’ idea to evolve a new-found textuality. Krieger, professing his stubbornly humanistic stance, sees not only the poet’s verbal power for humanistic

affirmation, faced as it is with the blankness of our common language but also the poet's product existing as an out-of-the-ordinary stimulus for our response. (Seturaman 1989: 533) A mere flim flam conversationalist utterance solicits the skill of a 'mind' to restructure it with a rhythmic form and thematic viability, cutting open the 'corridors' for readerly intervention. In the conflict is the 'revelation'.

Foucault, emphasising the presence of the author as a 'functional principle', seconds the Eliotian thesis of an organic relationship among the various texts of the author. He raises the issue of transdiscursivity in 'What is an author?' emphasising the authorship beyond the sanctum sanctorum of the text. It is a phenomenon which legislates against textual protectionism. It is an existence that defies the strict identifiable borders of textual status to qualify as something more than the creator of one's own text. It is a deterritorialisation that establishes an endless possibility of discourse. However, such discursivities cannot, as Burke argues, transcend the inceptive text in the sense of a paradigm-replacement in science for 'revisions' legitimise within the primal corpus and cannot outdo the centripetal reflexes to the founder. (1992:92) The return cannot be qualified as a historical supplement or an ornament; rather it develops into an endeavour that transforms the discursive practice itself. A reassessment of Galileo's text can contribute to the augmentation of knowledge of the history of mechanics but it cannot alter mechanics itself. Modifications have in them the authorial subjectivity – a meta-authorial figure with remarkable discursivity. So the author can be said to exist as a 'convenient explanatory device', an a priori principle with which we are able to domesticate a text for our specific purposes'. (Racevskis 1983: 39)

Truly in the face of cannibalistic critical appetite for the displacement of the author and the replacement of the readerly author-ity and against the anachronistic status of refrigerated univocality and timelessness of text, the subjective reality does not suffer entire etiolation. The poet cannot be reduced merely to a manipulator of conventions; a person who thrashes out a programme of reader harassment. Also the reader, "occupied in 'making texts' rather than reading them, has mislaid one of the greatest of human qualities: intellectual curiosity, the desire to enlarge his being by learning about

something other than himself". (Gardner 1982: 25) 'Mastery of meaning' which Barthes underscores in *S/Z* is a miasma beyond the reader and the writer. Significant questions of ideology and social power arise in all discussions of art. This underscores the necessity of the writer and the reader to comprehend the ideological dimensions and develop an understanding into their literary imagination itself. How much blood can the deconstructive leech suck? How far can the deconstructive angel fly? The poet and his poetry remain as the most reliable access to reality. Without a centre language – a phenomenon that outdistances the Buddhist *anantmavada* – is cut off from its human base with art and ethics becoming the two foremost casualties. Giving intransigently a wide berth to the 'self', without trying to map out the living structures of truth, poststructuralism has hit the deep end where precarious critical practices have overshadowed the aesthetic standpoint. Literature can never be wholly lacking in truth value for as Todorov observes 'if we continue to read Shakespeare today, it is because we have the feeling (even though we cannot explain it) that he offers us a better understanding of "human nature" or something of the sort'.(1987:185) Accepting Scholes' prescription to evade extremism that rankles the text with an inveterate predisposition to 'overpower', we can acquiesce to the text-induced empowerment that facilitates the reader to cultivate a serious sense of questioning which puts the values proffered by the text we study under scrutiny. Accepting a textual voice in the first place, the reader can safely question: Is it true?/ Is it proper? Todorov writes, 'In this way, we could transcend the sterile opposition between specialist-critics who know, but do not think, and the moralist-critics who speak without knowing anything about the literary works they discuss. In this way, the critic could finally assume fully the role that is incumbent on him, that of participant in a double dialogue: as reader, with his author: as author, with his own readers...' (191) The reinstatement of the poet's voice need not be perceived as a vitriolic polemic against the regnant modes of reading. Deconstructive textualism can also survive with demethodological reflexes without neutering the original progenitor. The process of demystification that bludgeons through the aporia(s) would not do itself a disservice in the event of a rehabilitation of the poet's voice which without being vociferous could yet be perceptual. The true self is a free whole; it is ever more than its parts. Tagore believes that even amongst the

dramatic characters of Shakespeare about whom Keats proposed the idea of negative capability, the bodiless presence of the poet can be felt. His 'timbre is inexplicable any more than the quality of a beautiful speaking voice can be.'(Barthes 1990:vi) The creative self is so expansive that it eludes the language-net and maintains its restless existence in the Wittgensteinian silence. The poet's text, existing as a potent point of reference, could stymie subversive propensities that disallow distinction between the essential and the inessential, encouraging the wanton defocussing of the mind that is deleterious to the sanity of critical/creative practice. The dehumanisation and desubstantiation of literature could never attest a high intelligibility without the gnawing uncanniness of a missing 'core'. Deleuze and Guattari see in the logic of AND an ontological subversion and a nullification of 'foundation'.(1987:25) 'The processes of intention, influence and revision, the infertility of life and work, autobiography and the autobiographical, author-functions, signature effects, the proper name in general, the author-ity and creativity of the critic, all these are points at which the question of the author exerts its pressure on the textual enclosure.'(Burke 1992:191) The authorial reinscription, says Burke, would strike out 'not as a question within theory but as the question *of* theory, of its domains and their limits, of its adequacy to the study of texts themselves, to the genealogy and modes of their existence'.(ibid) Meaning, admittedly, is not the bourgeoisie monopoly of the poet or the critic. Literary text is an endless event which the poet instantiates but which in its subsequent polyvocality foregrounds a multiplex where the reader-ly and the writer-ly voice get locked in a polysemia with the former 'empowered' and the latter partially 'overpowered'. In fitness of things the birth of the Reader and importantly the rebirth of the Author stand to 'right' the wrong in 'writing' with a future invested with a new authority and monumentality.