

I. Introduction

William Stanley Merwin, the son of a Presbyterian minister, was born on 30th September 1927 in New York City. He grew up in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. He received his degree in English from Princeton University. Although he has written essays, plays, translated poetry from French, Spanish, Latin, and Portuguese and written television script, Merwin's most memorable work has been as a poet. As one of the most prolific poets of his time, Merwin has published over twenty volumes of poetry over a five –decade career and is celebrated as testing the bounds and power of language through the imagery driven by a quest for knowledge of human condition.

Merwin has a variety of subject matters such as politics, war, nature, culture, deforestation myth etc. As a poet, he always emphasizes on vacancy and absence, Silence and doubt, deprivation and disposition. So his dictionary has nouns of ill-omen (pain, grief, fear, polar, extinction) obsessive objects (gloves, hands, clocks, watches, bandages, shroud and eyes) exhausted adjectives (hollow, empty, faint, deaf, blind, blank, frozen, lost, broken, hungry, dead) ;and constellations negation (speechless, colorless, windless, unlighted, unseen, unmoved, unborn,). Merwin writes about these issues due to the political, social and cultural situation of his time. Because of the great destruction of world war second religious values, morality and human belief are destroyed there is a crisis on humanity, identity, nature and its relation to man. His poetry presents hopeless society with institutional and cultural violence. So crisis of humanity, degradation of human value to American dream, and psychic effect of war on the people are the major thematic concern of Merwin's poetry. Edward Hirsh analyses his works and writes: "Merwin's poetry have a peculiar quality of anonymity and impersonality-as if the void had inhabited them. One feels primarily the guilt and shame of being human, our complicity in destruction," (6).That shows the problem faced by the individual because of

the destruction of war. Similarly, another critic Charles Molesworth notes: "Merwin's prevalent use of a disembodied narrative agent believes that the disembodiment typically appears figuratively because the speaker sees the world as "irremediably fallen, so that to be entangled in materiality is synonymous with evil" (152).

Merwin was never satisfied with U.S. foreign policy and their dream of being rich and prosperous by destroying the nature and its resources in the name of modern scientific advancement. His poetry not only visualizes what is obvious and general but also deals with the deeper and inner parts of society and individual. He writes on the theme of anxiety, depression, frustration, alienation, violence and absurd human condition of modern world. The short poem Lark is concerned with the theme of alienation. Through the medium of "Lark", the speaker schemes to remove the body from temporal and spatial restriction in order to liberate the spirit. In "Apples", the speaker intends to go back to the natural world which is lost now. "Separation" is the best example of Merwin's composition dealing with the theme of deception. Merwin concentrates on a feeling of morality and the inherent sadness of human life in the poem "Ascent" Poems such as "For the Anniversary of My Death", "The Last One, The Burnt Child", "Finding a Teacher", "Tracing the Letters" are the examples of his poetry dealing with the themes of frustration, alienation, violence, depression and the absurd condition of human life

Merwin has done several sea changes in his poetry over the past four decades. He began in 1950's with a Poundian reading list and a graceful style reminiscent of Robert Graves, a gift for elaborate ornamentation and traditional meters. In the 60's and 70's, he radically stripped down his style, dropping punctuation and creating a compelling quasi-surrealist imagery and vocabulary of darkness and loss. The poet of urbanity and wit became a cryptic visionary of the void and anguished prophet of apocalypse. In the

later part of the 70's and through the 80's he has continued as a poet of ghostly negativities slowly embracing a dream of pastoral or ecological wholeness.

The intentions of Merwin's poetry are as broad as the biosphere. His first book, *A Mask for Janus* (1952) displays mythic themes, a highly formal, neoclassical style, and shades of the medieval poetry. It was chosen by W.H. Auden for the Yale series of younger poets Awards in the year of its publication. Regarding this book, Auden notes that: "Merwin had caught the feeling which most of us share of being witnesses to the collapse of a civilization ... And in addition the feeling that this collapse is not final but that... there will be some kind of rebirth, though we can not imagine it's nature"(15). The themes of myth and philosophical questioning regarding the self and survival continue in *The Dancing Bears* (1954), where the poems also reflect a search for identity. His mature works commences with *Green with Beasts* (1956) and *The Drunk in the Furnace* (1960) leaving the formal traditions of his first two books for more flowing blocks of language. Merwin shifts his perspectives from that of one who describes an experience from without to one that participates in the experience. *Green with Beasts* is divided into three parts: The first, a bestiary includes *leviathan* which draws on the biblical themes of Genesis, the second section involves poems that are dramatic monologues, including *The Annunciation* and several others based on Judio-Christian traditions, the third section centers on images of the sea.

The Drunk in the Furnace is related uniquely with American themes. This book followed two years residence in Boston during which he met a number of poets who were breaking with traditions of 1950's including Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, and Robert Lowell. Merwin resurrects feeling and images from his past, ignore the social plight of others and damage of the landscape. *The Drunk in the Furnace* has made a discarded furnace his home- Merwin's symbolic image of spiritual and material poverty. The

departure from his early themes and formats are intensified in *The Moving Target* (1863), where Merwin essentially abandoned punctuation, making the reader responsible for interpretation of syntax and to a degree, abdicating control of his work and inviting the reader to construct his or her own images.

The Lice (1967) is one of the most critically acclaimed volumes of poetry in the last fifty years. The book's title is taken from an ancient Greek riddle that Homer, the wisest man in Greek, could not solve. Merwin wishes to point out to us that we need to focus on the mystery of the world and our distance from it. It is also interpreted as a reaction to specific events such as Vietnam War; Merwin also emphasizes on the nature and spiritualism by signaling the coming extinction of human life. His work has always had an ecological consciousness, but these poems explicitly take up our desperate vulnerability and our plight as a species, our relentless drive to exterminate ourselves and our environment. In 1970 Merwin published *The Carrier of Ladders*, which won the Pulitzer Prize and the book of short fiction, *The Merwin's Pale children*. *The Carrier of Ladders* includes the poems devoted to westward expansion in the United States; The fifteen poems in the collection trace Merwin's thoughts on American history including autobiographical journey; his early image of Pennsylvania, the westward movement of Europeans and the misuse of land and the maltreatment of Native Americans.

In *The Compass Flower* (1977), Merwin reflects his feeling about his parents' life, death, love and the importance of all types of connections-communal, biographical, and familial. *The Rain in The Trees* (1988) is dedicated to Merwin's respect for ecology and cultural anthropology. *Merwin's Travels* (1993) presents the experience of naturalists, artist, the Amazon experience of manual Cordova, and includes a long personal account of his childhood and his minister father. In 1996 Merwin published his book-length

narrative poem, *The Folding Cliffs*, a historical piece concerning the overthrow of the Hawaiian Monarchy in 1893.

Literature review

Merwin's Poetry has been greeted with a mixture of praise and criticism. Some critics like Victor Contoski argue that the mixed reception is a result of misunderstanding of Merwin's use of unfamiliar poetic tradition rather than often cited opinion that his work is simply enigmatic and obscure. Edward Haworth argues that Merwin's poetry presents some problem for critics and reader. Neal Bowers explains this as a failure to consider Merwin's work in a postmodernist context. Most critics, however, have celebrated his work and his list of awards as testament to the critical acclaim he has enjoyed over the fifty-year career.

Poetry by W.S. Merwin has remained something of an enigma to the literary critics since its publication in 1951. There are some alleged evidences that are meant to prove the poem's meaning in terms of Merwin's biography, political ideology, contemporary situation, culture and so many others. The responses to the text and the poet by reviewers and critics were based on Merwin's personal experience of contemporary socio-political situation. Because W.S. Merwin himself was something of an enigma for the contemporary world as he was breaking away from the convention and norms. There may be no better example of the way the world has changed around W.S. Merwin than the recent critical esteem showered on his writings and his world view.

Merwin's poetry has attracted a number of responses from the literary critics not all of them in favor of it. One of the powerful critics of postwar era Jane Frazer comments:

the person whom Merwin chooses to narrate the poems of origin are not as detailed as the specific individuals one might find in a long

narrative poem; They appear in circumstances that evokes myth and their search for origin, takes on its own mythic significance. Without the self, without the body, they are free to move through the natural World and to seek out its own beginnings in a fallen modern world.
(82)

This answer proves that the poetry is written in the form of speaker's quest for natural and original world but he is failed to mention the facts that what had made them tired from the modern world and they are seeking the natural world. This is certainly due to the frustration, illusion and violence of the modern world.

Another critic, Edward Hirsch, has commented upon Merwin's poetry as manifestation of a visionary of discomfort and reproof providing him as a master of erasure and negation. He highlights the idea and directly states that:

W.S. Merwin is our strongest poet of silence and doubt, vacancy and absence, deprivation and disposition. As he put it in his poem "Teacher" what I like for I can seldom believe in/ who I love I can not go to/What I hope is always divided. "He is a master of erasure and negations, a visionary of discomfort and reproof, the Samuel Becket of Postwar American Poetry".
(136)

Edward Hirsch points the issue of silence and doubt deprivation and dispossession and vacancy and absence in Merwin's poetry. He concentrates only on silence and doubt but he is unaware of the result brought by silence and doubt. That is dislocation, frustration and alienation of the persona. That's why there is alienation.

Similarly, Sandra M Guy links Merwin's poetry to mythic consciousness and she says:

Merwin, through his poems, works to heighten society's awareness of its current intensity or historical consciousness—the reliance on laws formulas, and organized education –and to guide it toward a more natural and universal "mythic consciousness" Merwin utilizes several vehicles for conveying his message about the rigid perception of society, the most encompassing and effective being the primordial elements. (414)

In fact, Sandra tries to prove the relation between man and universe is governed by natural law. But it is not so in reality. Man struggles hard to fit in nature where he gets tension and strife that eventually result in alienation.

However, the critic Neal Bowers talks about the existential issues in Merwin's poetry. By insisting in Merwin's poetry, he says:

W.S. Merwin's poetry –stylistically, aesthetically, philosophically–in every way is engaged in the struggle for form Unlike many of his younger contemporaries who are sitting somewhere at this moment trying to gather the will to write or resist writing a sonnet, Merwin has always known that his effort to understand what it means to be human and alive in a living world are integrally bound up with a search for form. (246)

Neal Bower's assertion focuses on Merwin's poetry as rich in struggle for self existence providing stylistic, philosophic and aesthetic causes. But he is missing a great part that is social, economic and political front which determines the form.

Merwin also concentrates on the concept of freedom and happiness. Being rich and free from socio-culture bounds does not bring happiness in life rather it complicates life and brings uncertainty. David Bromwich writes that:

Perhaps the chief difficulty Mr. Merwin faces at the stages of his career is an uncertainty about motive. He writes a great deal and has too much

confidence to worry about his occasion. Self-confidence may of course gives reason enough for writing about anything but complete freedom and complete listenlessness have always looked disturbingly alike. (148)

Bromwich here talks about the uncertainty that is brought by the extreme freedom and listenlessness but he is not mentioning about the fragmentation, alienation and dislocation of modern American life caused by the same freedom.

Another critic Allan Mc Guffy analyses Merwin's poetry from his biography and his personal experience. According to him Merwin himself was born in Pennsylvania as the son of minister and he was able to reflect the realistic depiction of that society and their social, cultural and political circumstances. Regarding this issue he writes:

Merwin's Poetry reminds me of my parents, long dead who grew up in Kentucky where the land itself contributed nearly everything that sustained their lives and the lives of their people then the poems reminds me of my younger days when I was lucky enough to experience on summer morning the sound of strawberry vendors in our neighborhood these past qualities of our lives won't come again. (168)

Mc Guffy critiques Merwin's poetry as means of recalling the past where social, moral and religious values were alive and people enjoyed freely in natural surroundings. But he is unaware about the reason why Merwin reflects upon the past. Of course the reason may be dislocation, alienation, fragmentation and over competition of his contemporary time.

Similarly, Richard Howard one of the renown critics expresses inconsistency in Merwin's expressions. He seeks and finds sour satisfaction in Merwin's speaker. In his own words Richard states:

Merwin argues with himself about the possibility of time's being not a matter of sequence.... one damned thing after another-but of immediate realization. Perhaps there is no "way it all looks from afterward" but only what it means in eternal. Now, he risks inconsistency from section to section with all the bravado of Whiteman. He observed a sort of sour satisfaction none of which could be denied. (95)

In fact, Howard pays attention only on the possibility of a time being not a matter of sequence as one damned things after another. Furthermore, he seeks the immediate realization. But he is missing a great part that is the experience of loneliness and solitariness of a persona which after all results in alienation.

However, Tom Sleigh refers the technical aspect of Merwin's poetry and states his poetry as political allegory. By insisting on Merwin's style he writes:

The eccentric gallery of portraits and dramatic monologue provides the poet with subjects rich in human incidents and historical reflection. Such material could have degenerated into predictable political allegory become somnambulant run through of Browningsque winks and nudges. But his style-his reticent, self denying, coolly prophetic blend of romantic rhetoric and natural description – transports the subjects into the realm of legend and myth. (157)

Tom Sleigh assertions focus on Merwin's poetry as rich in dramatic monologue providing human incidents and historical reflection but political rigorous condition and its bad impacts on persona is not considered in his criticism. Rather he only focuses on Merwin's style transporting the subjects into the realm of legend and myth. But the issue of alienation is the strongest and unavoidable in Merwin's poetry.

Merwin gives the American literary continuum especially by breaking the tradition of the 1950. He elaborates his solipsistic view of existence like in the work of Beckett and Kafka. Because of the social ill and plight, each individual suffered and lost their identity. Daniel Hoffman criticizes his poetry from the contemporary social evils and the problems faced by the individuals. He saw pessimism in Merwin's speakers because of the great depression, frustration and hopelessness. He says:

Merwin moved to the discovery and definition of the authentic self in a world devoid of objective meaning. Neither social, historical cultural institutions have sustained the contemporary self nor they have the power of truth, the self must reconstitute itself from own experiences without precedent. Merwin henceforth abjured the ornament of an elaborate syntax and worked towards a more and more fragmented expressions. (132)

Huffman as a critique seems to support the feeling of alienation and fragmentation in Merwin's poetry pointing the social political and cultural illusions of that time. The sense of pessimism can be viewed through his break of tradition especially in poetry.

The research is focused more on existentialism and Merwin as a poet deals with absurd human condition and the human futile struggle in this absurd world. Albert Camus' concept of "absurdity" and Nietzschean concept of "Death of god" and some other existentialists' ideas are the major focused area in the research. The observations are oriented to the question: why the speaker struggle hard bearing all kinds of pains, suffering even at the risk of death and violence. The basic hypothetical solution for this problem is assumed that the poetry presents the speaker's heroic struggle bearing all kinds of pains, suffering, anxieties, frustration and horror whose root cause is for existence. Therefore the study focuses on the concept of existence or absurdity.

Poetry as a form of art is presented to the reader in the form of words. So it is opened to multiplicity of interpretation. For the raw materials of the text, the language can be twisted to focus on some particular points so that numerous interpretations toward text could be offered. Therefore, the researcher is going to interpret the poetry from the existential perspective which is also the dominant pattern of the text.

II. Existentialism

Existentialism is the philosophic movement that best-exemplified the anxiety and uncertainty of Europe in the era of world war. Like writers and artists existentialist philosophers also responded to a European civilization that seemed to be in the throes of dissolution. It is the philosophic product that flourished after the World War II by the genius critical thinkers of that terrified society. It is the modern system of belief that started from the latest movement of European thought which has achieved popular success in contemporary France after the time of 1930. At the opposite pole from logical positivism, objectivity, behaviorism, logic and science, existentialism has been a reaction in favor of individualism, subjectivity, introspection and inner desire, and feeling. It is the pure philosophy of human situation not of other objects. Existentialism is probably the most dynamic and appropriate philosophical movement to define and interpret anxiety, uncertainties of the terrified people towards individualization. Thus it is the modern belief not only of the European country but also of all over the world.

Existentialism is not totally a new belief of the modern philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth century. These type a feeling and thought can be found in Socrates, Plato and many classical thinkers. Twentieth century existentialist thinking was long before conceived by thinkers like Soren Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche of the nineteenth century but the real term "Existentialism" was earned by Jean-Paul Sartre in the twentieth century (Solomon 141-45)

The term "existence" comes from the Latin root *ex* which means out and *istere* from Sartre "to stand ". Thus existence means to stand out the universe that is against us, and existentialism means "pertaining to existentialism" (Cudden 316). According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, Existentialism is the theory that human beings

are free and responsible for their own action in a world with out meaning" regarding to the existential philosophy. M.H. Abrams writes:

....to view a human being as an isolated existent who is cast in to alien universe, to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent truth, value ,or meaning to represent human like as it moves from the nothingness whence it came to ward the nothingness where it must ends as an existence which is both anguished and absurd.(45)

The term existentialism is used to describe "a vision of the condition and existence of man his/her place and function in the world" and his relationship or lack of relationship with god (Cudden 316). It is a "very intense and philosophically specialized form of quest for self hood"(Ellmann and Feidelson 803). Encyclopedia international pronounces that existentialism is near to life and death of people. Instead of concentrating on logic or science "Existentialism is primarily concerned with human existence, especially with man's most extreme experience: the confrontation with death anguish and anxiety, despair, and, and guilt ("Existentialism" 589-90).

Existential philosophy itself represents concepts of strongest denial of any metaphysical ideas. The only task of philosophy according to existential philosophy is the description of thing as they appear in front of us. According to the leading philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre defines existentialism ". . . by existentialism we mean a doctrine which makes human setting and a human subjectivity" (Existentialism and Human Emotions 10).

Existential philosophy, term signifying a philosophy describing things as they appear, is a trend in philosophy based on ideas of Soren Kierkegaard and the German philosophers, Heidegger, Jaspers and other world war and which took different shapes in

different countries in different time. Existential philosophy experienced a revival after Second World War especially in France where almost all the younger philosophers had participated in the resistance movement subscribed to it.

Existentialism is a primary philosophy of twentieth century which is concerned with the analysis of existence and of the way man finds himself existing in the world. Although the existentialists themselves differ in the doctrine and attitude, most believe that human is totally free and responsible to himself/herself alone and that really is grounded in the experience of existence. Individual is the most important in this philosophy. So the focus of existentialism is on "being" and "subjectivity" as opposed to "logical" reasoning" and "objectivity". Individual experience rather than abstract thought and knowledge is foregrounded in these philosophies. This is not totally a new phenomenon but it is a thinking and purification of philosophical thinking. Philosophically, it now applies to a vision of the condition, experience, and existence of man.

Existentialism has been a reaction in favor of individual subjectivity, introspection and feeling. It is a philosophy not of things but of the human situation (A History of Philosophy 603). It has much in common with romanticism, pragmatism and individualism but it is far from idealism, mechanism and determinism. We find many different views about existentialism but all of them are wondering around to search the answer for the following common questions. Perry and his co-writers' remark:

What route should people taken a world where old values and certainties had dissolved, where universal truth was rejected and God existence was denied? How could people cope in society where they were menaced by technology, manipulated by impersonal bureaucracies, and overwhelmed

by feelings of anxiety? If the universe is devoid of over changing meaning what meaning could the given to one's own life. (755)

These are the relevant questions for all existentialists. They are always searching meaning of their lives by remaining inside these questions. Though the existentialists have different views about the philosophy, their major common thesis is "existence precedes essence" or "existence is prior to the essence" while in the established tradition 'essence is prior to existence". What this means for the existentialism is that human nature is determined by the course of life rather than life by human nature. Most of the existentialist thinkers believe in the following basic principles: Human nature is problematic, paradoxical and each person is like no other. Self realizations comes when one find out one's own uniqueness by himself. All the man of this universe are alone, and free and the universe is indifferent to our expectations and needs. But we have been given various chances from among different possibilities and we ourselves are responsible to our life. Abstract thinking doesn't work it must be transformed into deeds. Every individual has the potentiality to become more than s\he is.

Although existentialism got its full-fledged form in the post world war era, if we turn over the pages of philosophical history, we can find the certain elements of existentialism in Greek classical philosophy too. Protagoras held the idea of subjective truth. As Gaarder says: "man is the measure of all things said the sophist Protogoras"(62). By that he meant that the question of whether a thing or wrong, good or bad must always be considered in relation to a person's need.

Socrates laid emphasis on human existence. The concern of Socrates turned towards the human beings, individuality instead of the whole cosmos, its origin and so on. He mostly focused on the self which was prior to everything for him. To understand

the self was the primary need to know other things. So "know thyself" his motto.

Commenting on Socrates Richard Tarnas says:

In Socrates view any attempt to foster true success and excellence in human life had to take account of the innermost reality of a human being, his soul or psyche on the basis of his own highly developed sense of individual self-hood and self control, Socrates brought to the Greek mind a new awareness of the central significance of the soul, establishing for the first time as the seat of the individual waking consciousness and of the moral and intellectual character. He affirmed the Delphic motto "know thyself" for he believed that it was only through self –knowledge, through an understanding of one's own psyche and its proper condition that one could find true happiness (33).

In this way, as one existentialist Socrates supported individuality and subjectivity

In the Middle Ages, which were largely dominated by religion, also, there were some philosophers who brought with them some existential ideas. God was taken as omnipotent and omniscient and whatever people did, they had to do to please god which was the single truth. In such a time too Augustine talked about self awareness and believed that truth awareness and believed that truth should be searched from within.

Richard Tarnas also accepts that Augustine embodied existential elements when he says:

Augustine was the most modern of the ancients: he possessed an existentialist's self –awareness with his highly developed capacity for introspection and self-confrontation, his concern with memory and consciousness and time. His psychological perspicacity, his doubt and remorse, his sense of solitary alienation of human self without God, his

intensity of inner conflict, his intellectual of skepticism and sophistication(143-4).

Thus in the Middle Ages also the seeds of existentialism were growing in one way or the other. It continued in the Renaissance period too. The writer's main concern was human being not the god. Humanism flourished to a large extent during this period. It emphasized on the human potentialities where man became the centre of discussion. Every aspects of human life which was seen through divine light once again revolved around man. As Gaarder says this was a view "horse are born but human beings are not born they reformed" (197). In this way human beings exist through choice and actions not through any predetermined essence. Sartre, a predominant existential philosopher, also defines existentialism as humanism. To clarify the point he says. "By existentialism, we mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and in addition declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity (10).

Some writers and artists of the period concentrated on the issue about the self. It was really interesting matter for them because individuality was something that counted a lot for them. They tried to explore the self and talked about it frankly and openly.

Taking example of Montigne, Charles Van Doren remarks:

Montagne, at least, could speak for himself. He could say what he was, what he wanted, what he feared, what hurt him, what amused and pleased him, what struck him as vain and foolish in other men. Thus he placed himself at the center of things believing that even if the attention might seen self centered to some people nothing would prove more interesting (145).

Observing all these ideas carefully we can draw a conclusion that existentialism does not arise in the literary world dramatically and accidentally rather it has its connection with different era from the classical philosophy although the term was not coined then.

Modern existentialism has a lot to do with phenomenology, a philosophical perspective and method established by German thinker Edmund Husserl. Self or subjectivism is the primary concern for it. There is no single truth according to this philosophy but many truths there are determined by how one appears with them. So there is no objective truth. Husserl talks about phenomenology in this way: "phenomenology itself learns its proper function of transparently human "living" from an entire relationship to 'self' (. . .). Phenomenology is not less than man's whole occupation with himself in the service of the universal reason"(15).

Later on existential philosophers like Heidegger, Sartre continued the method with certain refinement. On this point Thomas Mautner comments:

Phenomenology is the attempt to describe our experience directly as it is separately from its origins and development, independently of the casual exaltations that historians, sociologists or psychologists might give. Subsequently Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty perused and continued to refine the phenomenological method, while by no means accepting conclusion. (319)

Individuality, self, subjectivism are stressed by phenomenology. It rejects the idea of objects. There is no absolute thing in the world. Things are how they appear in our consciousness. And consciousness differs from individual to individual. That's why truth is always subjective.

The existentialists are mainly influenced by the idea of subjectivism and individuality. They challenge the traditional idea about absolute being as they focus on the human beings. They believe that human beings are determined by own choices and action. In other word they are chosed to be.

Jean-Paul Sartre divides existentialist thinkers into two groups: Theistic and atheistic existentialists (existentialism 15). He divides them on the basis of believing god or not believing god or Christianity or anti-Christianity. The first group is known as atheistic existentialist, who believes in god and accept the existence of god. They believe in god's existence and say god exists first then the man exists. In this group Sartre includes Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Jasper, Martin Bobber and Gabriel Marcel. They believe in religious mysticism and argue that man can be entertained when one surrenders oneself to the will of god, without the intervention of Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical church and may not remain happy.

In the second group Sartre includes Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and the French existentialists including himself which is named as atheistic or antichristian existentialists. They do not believe in God. Nietzsche is the fore-runner and chief source of inspiration for them, who proclaimed that "god is dead." The atheistic existentialists discard the concept of God as an authentic shelter. They focus on the individuals and regard human being as optimistically forlorn, free and support less creature. In this helpless and lonely universe man has to create a system in which he is free to choose his way among the choice and he himself is responsible for his condition. According to Nietzsche and other atheistic existentialists, theists are "Old believer" and "blind supporter" of the Christian faith.

As it is not possible to include and discuss all the existentialists, the present chapter will center basically on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre and Camus, the representative figures. And it will make discussion on them separately.

Kierkegaard, Faith and Existence

Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher as well as the leader of the theistic existential movement, is a strong believer of Christian religion and god. For him, the highest truth is that human beings are God's creature so first of all god exists then only individual can exist if he submits or surrenders him in God. Man can be free from angst and uncertainty in the presence of God.

He strongly criticizes the Hegelian concepts of philosophy or reconciliation and synthesis in which man takes place of god. He supports the idea that the self-realization of a human being comes when s/he takes full responsibility for his/her life. In true sense Kierkegaard is really precursor and the fore-runner in the whole modern existentialist movement. Most of the existentialists follow Kierkegaard in emphasizing that " a moment comes for the individual when he must make an unalterable choice, and that such moments are only the real ones" (805). According to him, there are two options for the individual to choose, either he has to choose god and get redemption from the angst which is known as " ethico-religious " choice, or he has to reject god and his existence and go to perdition.

Kierkegaard does not believe in crowd. Crowd is untruth, according to him; it is a destructive force of truth existence. He says, " For a crowd untruth " (the individual 809). The existential individual has his being in relation to himself, to another or to god but never in relation to the crowd.

According to him, absurdity was the ground of Christian faith. First of all faith is absurd or paradoxical, in its form. Faith looks beyond itself and yet, like ethical choice

which is properly concerned with a man's own individual existence, Faith details as subjective reality. Thus the form of faith is paradoxical it is properly concerned with the reality of another. The Christian doctrine and its quest of objective truth have nothing to do with Kierkegaardian concept of Christianity. He only believes in Christianity and the existence of God but not in other doctrine. He argues, "Christianity is therefore not a doctrine, But the fact that God has existed" (Faith, 855).

Existence for Kierkegaard is only possible when one becomes aware of the paradoxical presence of God, Christianity and man. After feelings of sufferings, despair and absurdity we remember God and we are able to transfer our sufferings then only we exist. The only way of tolerating the anxiety of existing is to submit oneself in the realm of God.

Nietzsche and the Death of God

Nietzsche is a German philosopher, poet, and the first important forerunner of the atheistic existentialism. He is the first person who declared, "God is Dead". Man himself is supreme creature so he can do whatever he likes. According to him, philosophical systems are merely expressions of an individual's own being and do not constitute an objective representation of reality; there are no fixed rules and regulations, and source of values. Religion does not provide protection and truth because the God is dead. So this godless world is absurd and Christianity has become the shelter for weak and disabled people. He called Christianity a "slave morality". In about Christianity he writes:

Christianity is called the religion of pity. Pity stands opposed to the tonic emotions which heighten our vitality: it has a depressing effect. We are deprived of strength when we feel pity. That loss of strength which suffering as such inflicts on life is still further increased and multiplied by pity. Pity makes suffering contagious. Under certain circumstances, may

engender a total loss of life and vitality out of all proportion to the magnitude of the cause. (The Death 909)

He further writes about Christianity, "In Christianity neither morality nor religion has even a single point of contact with reality"(909). He describes Christianity as the sick religion and corrupt concept implied upon people in the name of sick God

Nietzsche also criticizes the western education system that is historically motivated. It only teaches about the heroic past and makes the people surrender before the heroism. Here the true individualism collapses. It does not serve life rather corrupts it and people become purposeless. Such education can not provide happiness to the people because they always hang themselves in the chain of history whereas for happiness one has to face with the moment. For Nietzsche education should be for the sake of human life and existence. In his essay " on the use and abuse of history" He states, "we need it for life and action , not for a comfortable turning away from life and action or merely for gossiping over the egotistical life and the cowardly bad act. We wish to use history only in so far as it serves living " (152).

In about freedom also Nietzsche has given his views differently. According to him, when we deny the theological foundations and approve the traditional morality, then only a pervasive sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness would remain .He claimed that every person's basic drive is the will to power. To clarify this point he writes, "Where I found a living creature, there I found the will to power; and even in the will of the servant I found the will to be master " (self over coming 771) .About command and its risk he further writes:

Commanding is more difficult than obeying. And not only because the commander bears the burden of all who obey and that this burden can easily crush him. In all commanding there appeared to me to be an

experiment and ask a risk: and the living creature always risk himself when he commands. (771)

Life and will are inseparable subjects; where life is there is will. The living creature values many things higher than life itself. This is the will to power, by this will to power to make man able to exist. To think God means to go against the will to power. As there is no God in the world the supermen are the Gods. The supermen are the supreme who declare war over masses of inferior men, and are free from any restrictions imposed by the society.

Nietzsche talks about subjective will and objective truth. The objective man is only the mirror which reflects others power. It has not its own power. He is not the beginning and ending, and he has no power to exist. He clarifies objective man in his own words in the following lines, " he (the objective man) is no an " end in himself ", he is only and instrument. The objective man is indeed a mirror , above all he is something that wishes to be recognized and understood; he is accustomed to subordination , devoid of any pleasure of other than the afforded by cognition , by mirroring " (Subjective will 816)

Truth is presented as an objective. To find out truth and reality one must exist by taking will to power. Nietzsche is just opposite to Christian existentialists because of his atheistic existential doctrine – " God is dead and the God is man's own creation "(816).

Heidegger, Being and Existence

He is the leading figure of atheistic existentialism in Germany and also the founder of main doctrine of existentialism –"Existence comes before essence". In his philosophical book *Being and Time* he has presented the real meaning of "Being" and "authentic life". According to him, to live authentically the individual has to face the various problems, one has to determine one's own existence and create own possibilities

and make right choice and commitments. Choosing is the most difficult task; it is not only the work of feeling but also the intellect. Everyone has his history and its impact upon him, he is bounded by conditions and outlooks inherited from the past. We all human beings are thrown inside the bounded world, without knowledge of work no one can exist. So, we must have that power for breaking the boundaries then only we are able to prove our being and existence. While talking about metaphysics he writes about "truth" and "being" in this way:

Metaphysics gives, and seems to confirm, the appearance that it asks and answers the question concerning Being. In fact, metaphysics never answers the question concerning the truth of being, for it never asks this question. Metaphysics does not ask this question because it thinks of being only by representing beings as being. (Recollection of Being 879)

Heidegger makes a distinction between being and beings. The being is an individual and here beings mean group or the society. He urges that the involvement of being in human nature is the basic philosophical question. Today people are living in being in "Oblivion of Being" because they have not got the proper answer of that philosophic question. In this condition Heidegger suggests us to get back our lost being, we have to return back into the ground of metaphysics then only we can find the roots of our existence.

He says that the world is the field of human concern not of the other objects. There is no world if there is no man. So, Heidegger focuses on man and his existence on the world. Man's being is a being-in-the world. The relationship between man and the world is the relationship of existential participation and involvement. Man makes his nature by his own efforts, and he thus, determines his own essence. The authentic human existence is unique, qualitative in past and future are always co-present. Ideality is the matter of intuitive feeling, which can not attain through intellectual knowledge. It is not possible

when one individual trains his mind that this world of objects is his own and animates himself with a feeling of love that he feels happy.

The individual is aroused from inauthentic existence in anguish and dread. Dread is always an indefinite feeling but not any specific object as fear is. Dread is the presence of a negative infinity, a loss of both personal and universal being, and an entry into positive nothingness. In about dread, he says:

Dread reveals nothing [. . .] the fact that when we are caught in the unkindness of dread we often try to break the empty silence by words spoken at random, only proves the presence of nothing. We ourselves confirm that dread reveals nothing when we have got over our dread . . . what we are afraid of was actually nothing. And indeed nothing itself, nothing as such, was there. (Dread 839)

The self is the specific way one lives in the world of dread and anxiety. Heidegger points out the unavoidable ness of anxiety, a feeling a state that makes apparent in the midst of all that one had and is that one's existence is not complete and is not absolute, in spite of the urge toward self realization.

Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism

Sartre, a French philosopher, and the leading figure among the existentialists made existentialism widely popular. He has classified existentialism into two groups and he included himself in atheistic group of existentialism. He propounded his own theory by reflecting on Christianity and God. So he focuses on existence precedes essence as the principle of existentialism. For the purpose of existence one is responsible in his position because there are no others to care for him. "Existence preceding essence" is the main doctrine of existential philosophy. To clarify the meaning of this new doctrine he writes:

First of all, man exists; turns up appears on the scene and only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust towards existence. (Existentialism 15)

Sartre says that man himself is every thing, so he himself is responsible for his every action because he is free to choose. To clarify about human will and his responsibility he further writes:

. . . There is nothing in heaven; man will be what he will have planned to be. Not what he will want to be. Because by the world. "will" we generally mean a conscious decision, which is subsequent to what we have already made of ourselves [...] Thus existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him. (16)

Sartre says that we have various choices among them we have to choose the best one. For that purpose we must have power of conscious decision which is known as "will" that enables us to choose among the choices. All the time in making the choice we must be careful not only for ourselves but also to the remaining human world. He writes "To choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose because we can never choose evil. We always choose the good and nothing can be good for us without being good for all"(27).

He has used two terms, "Being for itself" and "Being in itself" in his most important philosophical book Being and Nothingness. He makes clear distinction

between these two terms. According to him being in itself applies to things, thing exists in itself. Being is what it is "(The Pursuit 29). If this is the case, then the axiom about "existence precedes essence, so man is being for itself not being in itself.

Authenticity demands from life a free choice without excuse and without help that presupposes the full responsibility. The adaptation of responsibility, in consequence, causes certain uneasiness of which no one can save oneself. This uneasiness or the anguish is the heart of human existence. Thus existential anguish presents a reality of human life, which has to be faced historically and optimistically according to Sartre. Talking about anguish, hence the term "Forlornness" from Heidegger Sartre means, "only that good does not exist and we have to face all consequences of this" (Existentialism 21). The anguish of existential man is like the anguish of military officer on whom the life of several men depends but he has to order for attack and for this decision he feels anguish and he himself is responsible for his commitment and for lives of other men.

Camus and the Absurd

Camus, the follower of atheistic existentialism, is basically known for his views on absurdity of human life. For him the condition of man is absurd and his search for any purpose is meaningless and fruitless. The world does not possess any meaning, value or truth. According to M.H. Abrams:

Albert Camus, views a human being as an isolated existent who is cast into an alien universe to conceive the universe as possessing no inherent truth, value, or meaning and to represent human life-in its fruitless search for purpose and meaning, as it moves from nothing when it came toward the nothingness where it must end as an existence which is both anguish and absurd. (1)

Camus also believes that man makes himself his own choices. Such choices lead human being toward repetition as there is no meaning in the universe but man always aspires to achieve it. How much we try to get happiness from choosing the opportunities that much we have to choose because it is necessary to choose and bear the responsibilities. None of our choices is perfect; all of them create meaninglessness and nothingness. Though the life is inside well of obstacles we know, but we have to struggle until our death.

According to Camus, when the choice is made or the absurdity of life is recognized then existence is felt as value in itself. In this life is hopeless and meaningless, he is at once liberated and put in a position to exercise his freedom in revolt against absurdity. He says that when the absurd man becomes aware of his futile living, he is naturally filled with anxiety and helplessness but he does not surrender himself in the mouth of death. Instead, he acknowledges the consciousness of absurdity as a reliable guidance to revolt against the absurdity. In his opinion to rebel is to exist which is happier situation then before. About revolution Camus says:

The theme of permanent revolution is thus carried into individual experience. Living is keeping the absurd alive keeping it alive is above all, contemplating it. Unlike Eurydice the absurd dies only when we turn away from it. One of the only coherent philosophical position is thus revolt. It is constant contribution between man and his own obscurity.

(Absurd Freedom 845)

Absurdity does not mean for Camus, the loss of happiness rather "Happiness and absurd are two sons of same earth. They are inseparable " (69). In his essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus" he present character Sisyphus who makes choice rejecting the command of god. When he has to face the punishment to roll up a rock, he has the feeling of absurdity. But we can't say that he is unhappy. In this point Camus says:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the fidelity that negates the gods and rocks. The struggle itself toward the height is enough to feel a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (70)

Camus rejects the religion, realistic settings and logic as other existentialist do. There is always gap on between individual and society or in man and his life. So we have to try to make this gap minimum but gap cannot be avoided because the world is absurd and meaningless. In this meaningless world we are searching meaning for our existence.

Analyzing the ideas of these leading existentialists we can draw out a conclusion that alienation is one of the most burning issues on existentialism. Man feels himself alienated from the universe, as there is no body to care and guide him. One is fully responsible to oneself. Feeling of alienation comes when an individual cannot integrate in to the social system.

In Merwin's poetry we find certain qualities of existential crisis. It is because poetry explores the theme of alienation and frustration, human pain and suffering and death and destruction. The speaker in his poetry struggles hard bearing all kinds of suffering. Like Sisyphus, they are condemned to fight repeatedly though their struggle is futile.

Merwin's poetry stands as one of the most powerful books of the postwar era because of verities of criticisms and opinions, it has aroused among the literary persons. Though he has written many poems it is not possible to interpret all of them. The present research will basically center on "Elegy", "Separation", " When you go Away", "Economy" (*Elements of Literature*), "Ascent", " For the Anniversary of My Death", " Finding a Teacher" (*The Vintage Book of contemporary American poetry*), "Tracing the Letters", " The Drive Home" and "Some Last Questions"

(The Norton Anthology of Modern poetry) as the representatives of Merwin's poetry to study about the theme of alienation and fragmentation through the Merwin's speakers who struggle hard bearing pains, suffering and exhaustion.

III. Textual Analysis

William Stanley Merwin's poetry is an artistic reflection of grim human conditions deeply rooted in socio-economic and political condition. The rigorous manifestation of the socio- economic reality in the poetry exposes hardships and sufferings of people in modern America. Everything in them is written under the sign of coming extinction and anonymity as if the void has inhabited in them. Merwin probes this sort of political turmoil and social problems to influence people and make them able to struggle to regain their existence when they are displaced and estranged from it. Merwin also motivates his speaker to take struggle as precious gift and asset, though it is full of troubles and suffering. To reflect the theme of alienation and fragmentation he creates imaginative speakers having desperate vulnerability and relentless drive to exterminate themselves and their environment.

Merwin's poetry also act as serious social commentary, revolutionary in his passionate tone and is denunciation of modern day materialism and its destructive effects on the individual soul. The poem spreads the descriptive catalogue of problems and crisis of the personal and its digression. Plot of the poetry starts with a hope of survival and its rejoicement but finally ends in the acknowledgement of failure and degradation. At this stage, one feels the guilt and shame of being human which ultimately leads the speaker to the world of suffering, isolation and alienation.

Separation

"Separation" is a unique three lines modernist poem with its typically open-ended nature. As the title implies, the speaker has been separated from his partner. The speaker seems to have always given a trouble; he seems to have been unsuccessful to overcome the torturing effect of her memory and most probably a sense of guilt also:

Your absence has gone through me

Like thread through a needle

Everything I do is stitched with its color. (432)

The persona begins by addressing the one who has been separated from him. Your absence has gone through me like thread through a needle. That means her absence has penetrated his mind. The needle is something that always leads threads and thread is something that follows needle and attached to it. The metaphors of thread and needle are suggestive of husband and wife relation.

As the poem moves on, the speaker claims that she has gone away from his life and at last realized that only the memory has been left with him. The speaker is in the mood of resistance and thinking over his plight without her. The thread of her absence always haunts him and binds him. In fact, he wants to get rid of the influence of her memory but what happens in reality is that the more he wants to forget the more he remembers her.

The speaker's present is always stitched to the past; what ever he does, wherever he goes, however he tries to forget her, it seems that the sense of missing her always haunts him. It seems as if the thread of her absence binds him, not allowing him to be free.

The symbolic suggestion of thread and needle are contrasted to each other. The thread is soft, flexible and obedient whereas needle is hard, pointed and capable of hurting. It is also clear that the thread is something that should depend on needle to conform its route. That means the women are something which depends on male and are determined by male. Like thread they are also meek, mild and flexible creature who also does not have any certainties of life. But this is just the traditional idea for the 20th century modern woman. They strongly oppose the idea of male chauvinism. They have their own right and choice in the world. They think that they are as free as male. But the

speaker being a male perhaps does not accept the new idea of female. Rather he tries to suppress and repress the female partner and hurt her. That's why he is left alone in the alien universe where there is no alternation except regretting and suffering.

Thus the poem is frank exposition of social alienation created by different rights movements like feminist movement. The speaker has lost the dearest one. It has brought the pang of separation and alienation but at the same time it also implies social alienation due to reversal situation of male position in society. Because of different right movement, the speaker's psyche is fragmented.

Elegy

The short and one line monody "Elegy" is as mysterious as modern people. It is a visionary poem sums to anticipate the terrible history of coming violence and savagery. Perhaps the speaker's mind is filled with the horror and terror of coming extinction. The title of the poem elegy itself is the suggestive of mourning for death or loss. That's why the poem is the hints of mourning for the collapse of human civilization:

Who would I show it to. (433)

The poem is in the form of question which triggers our mind much. Therefore it is better to ask many questions to interpret the poem; why the speaker is uttering so? , who is he? To whom is he addressing? , and what does his concern seems to be related with? This is almost a viable idea because a poem is also considered as a kind of communication in some literary mode of expression.

The line "Who would I show it to" is really enigmatic in its nature. The speaker is in fact the true prophet who is telescoping the actual reality of modern world. He seems powerless, hopeless and fears with the coming extinction of human civilization. The poem also addresses the alienating effect upon the individual of mechanized impersonal

society and the poet describes the fragile emotional equilibrium that sets profound grief over the listener.

The mood of the poem is really pathetic and serious. The speaker seems to be helpless, forlorn and alienated. Through this prophetic line, he seems to be raising the issue of humanity during which people are suffering from dislocation, voidness and over competition. Furthermore the speaker seems to be shaped by the psyche of wholesale annihilation due to the frequent war and violence. He seems to be the victim of insecurity, confusion and disintegration. He does find even a single person to share his grief. Thus he is alienated. It also recalls loneliness of the world.

The poem exposes the grim picture of aesthetic detachment. The speaker seems to be a single sentiment being to witness the reality of loss where the rest of the world has simply washed away. The voice that is telling us the story of human existence is a testimony of how the world entangled in civil war.

The Drive Home

The poem "The Drive Home" focuses on the post modern problem of identity crisis and loss of direction in the life of the modern Americans. The particular events Merwin treats and the nature he describes are essentially the symptoms of the voidness and meaninglessness. This most famous poem on this theme, "The Drive Home" perfectly illustrates the sense of silence and failure of communication among the characters. The poem "The Drive Home" unfolds with the mixed emotion of the speaker:

I was always afraid
of the time when I would arrive home
and be met by a special car
but this was not like that
they were so nice the young couple

and I was relieved not to be driving

So I could see the autumn leaves on the farm. (73)

Here in the first two lines the speaker is oscillating in the midst of hope and despair, life and death and to be or not to be. As Sartre a renowned existentialist has stated human existence or our life is just like hurled stone without clear cut ground to stand. The speaker in the poem is also suffering from existential angst. He says "I was always afraid on the time when I would arrive at home and be met by the special car". It shows on the one hand he wants to meet a special car but doesn't know where to move and how to move. The speaker is afraid of his time when he would get home. This idea of existential questions and confusion eventually leading alienation is further strengthened in the preceding stanzas of the poem as:

I sat in the front to see better
they sat in the back
having a good time
and they laughed with their collars up
they said we could take turns driving
but when I looked
none of us was driving. (73)

As the poem turns from optimistic to pessimistic tone, Merwin here really brings the idea of anxiety and voidness of existence in this physical world. The speaker sat in front to see better. It means he seeks to search for hope and betterment of life. In that very seeds of voidness also, he witnesses the sheer and short moment of laughter. But when he observes the reality within and around himself he finds every thing leading towards nothing. There is special car but no driver, there is journey but no destination and there is life but without meaning and purpose. So he says " they said we could take turn driving".

It means the life of modern man heading towards nothing. Our efforts turn in vain as the character Sisyphus of Camus. So this stanza evidently reveals the absurdity of human existence and aftermath of anxiety:

Then we all laughed
we wondered if anyone would notice
we talked of getting an inflatable
driver
to drive us for nothing through the autumn. (73)

This third stanza finally concludes the poem with postmodern ethos of human existence. Postmodern existentialist believes that life is meaningless but we have to see the meaning in meaninglessness. Similarly they also assert that in meaninglessness and trouble, we have to seek the happiness and rejoice so the sense of celebration of survival is clearly presented in the last stanza. The speaker knows that they are without driver but yet they all laughed and all of them talk of getting an inflatable driver to drive for nothing. It means they know that there is no driver but yet hope for getting another. This very hope makes them exist which can be linked to the overall living condition of human beings.

Merwin's intention in this poem is very clear and realistic. He speaks of awareness of the danger of modern world which has gone out of control. He focuses on the sense of muddiness and opaqueness that everyman obviously feels in the lives of twenty-first century. As Nietzsche declared "god is dead", all values and beliefs connecting to god have declined. People have lost the certainties and values of existence. They have become forlorn and isolated as there is no one to guide them. The same has happened in the very poem.

All characters in the poem are troubled from the situation. As they are moving in a car, there is no driver. As they move on they do not have any particular destination. They are helpless and isolated like parentless child who are entrapped by the fear, uncertainties, insecurities and cosmic absurdity. No supreme being is there to guide them. The driver symbolically represents the almighty god and the absence of god represents the death of god. All passengers in the car are the representatives of modern people who are suffering in the world.

Finding a Teacher

"Finding a Teacher" is a poem that deals with the philosophy of life. Moreover this is also a poem related with the theme of human struggle in the modern world. The acceptance of life due to the destructive force is a major theme of the poem. The poem is also a grim picture of life of alienated modern persons living in the wood side where the dream of happiness is fled away. Amalgamating the hope and despair constructs the poem where between them characters struggle. The first stanza of the poem unfolds with the hope:

In the woods I came to an old friend fishing
and I asked him questions and he said wait.
Fish were rising in the deep stream
but his line was not stirring but I waited
It was a question about the sun. (44)

This stanza clearly states the plight and absurdity of the characters. The speaker in the poem seems to be a traveler whose movement stops with the meeting of fisherman. The speaker informs the situation of the poem in a friendly tone declaring the failure of old friend. He says "the fish were rising but his line was not stirring". This line of the poem really exposes the absurdity of old man in the alien universe. As the poem develops, we

come to know that the old man has failed to catch the fish. Rather it slips from the hand of speaker and disappears into the water. The speaker understands the cause but does not response to him. In stead of complaining and instructing, the speaker keeps silent and agrees to live with him. These facts are presented in the following stanza:

It slipped through my hands as though it were water
into the river it flowed under the trees
It sank under hulls far away and was gone without me
then where I stood night fell no longer knew what to ask
I could tell that his line had no hook
I understood that I was to stay and eat with him. (44)

This stanza invokes the theme of human struggle for survival through the realistic portraits of old man and the speaker .The old man seems very much absurd who appears as Camus Sisyphus indulged in meaningless task of carrying the rock to the top hill. Merwin presents the old man as protagonist confronting the opposing forces. Eventual blow of crisis and its acceptance are very dominant feature of this poem. Though the solitariness and suffering, he continues to lead the life of his own choice. It enables him to exist in the midst of feats and hazards. Though the protagonist has the desire to catch something it never comes at hand. Rather it tries to ruin his life.

Through this poem Merwin presents the grim reality of human life. Every individual in the world has their own choice. So they themselves are responsible for their action. People are free to choose and such choice leads people to nowhere. People do not get what they want but they always aspire to get it so how much they try to achieve happiness that much they have to bear the responsibilities. None of the choice is perfect; all of them create meaninglessness and nothingness. In the poem also, old man struggles hard but achieves nothing. His hope of getting fish ends in nothingness. On the other

hand there is speaker who seems to be a more conscious than old friend but can do nothing. He knows the old friend has failed and ruined but agrees to join with him. Despite the old man's failure, he accepts him. In fact they are the heroes of the modern world and are conscious of the time. They know that the life is struggle between feats and hazards. So they accept the eventual blow of life in heroic way. Though the poem presents the confrontation of situation, the background of the poetry provides by country scène and sights suggest the theme of alienation and fragmentations.

When You Go Away

This poem "When You Go Away" is a well presented artistically controlled composition to sum of the absurdities of the present world. The quality of rhyme and language makes this poem an out pouring of wholly personal feelings. The poet is more concerned with the social problem of the modern western world and contemporary ills where the individual suffers and engages in meaningless work. The poem begins with the immediate reaction and realization of the poet to the absurdities of the human futile struggle:

When you go away the wind clicks around to north
The painters work all day but at sundown the paint falls
showing the black walls.
The clock goes back to striking the same hour
That has no place in the years. (732)

This first stanza shows the meaninglessness and nothingness of human existence. Basically this lines talk about the human reality and the world at the face of time. According to the speaker our life is just the spec of dust at the face of time. It engulfs the whole attempts of human being leaving the world as it is.

We feel we are doing something and being engaged in some sort of creative activities. But the truth or achievement is beyond our imagination or limit. It never comes at our hand. The line "painters work all the day but at sundown paint falls showing the black walls" shows the same plight of human being. The further line "the clock goes back to striking the same hour that has no place in the year" is the hint of absurdities of human existence in the modern world. The clock is used as the symbol of time, which lets nobody to escape away from the disaster. The poem precedes highlighting the same theme of human futility as following:

And at night wrapped in the bed of ashes
In one breath I wake
It is the time when the beards of dead get their growth
I remember that I am falling.
That I am the reason
And that my words are the garment of what! shall never be
like the tucked sleeve of a one- armed boy. (732)

These lines illustrate time consciousness in modern life. In fact the time has mechanized and routinized the human life. There is rush and hurriedness of modern life but leading towards nowhere. The line "And that my words are the garment of what! Shall never be like the tucked sleeve of one-armed boy "is an ample evidence of existential crisis and the realization of meaninglessness and an anxiety of the speaker. The phrasal expression of the words such as "bed of ashes" beards of the dead "and "tucked sleeve of a one-armed boy "are suggestive of meaninglessness , purposelessness and hopelessness that creates negative effect on human life.

The great philosopher Kierkegaard says that the self realization of human being comes when he/she takes the full responsibility for his/her life. Emphasizing on

this idea he writes," a moment comes for the individual when he must make an unalterable choice and that such moments are only the real ones "(805). In the poem "When you go Away" The speaker realizes his existence when he becomes hopeless and helpless. Rejected and dejected by the universe, he comes to realize the cruelty of time at last. He faces the sequence of problem one after another but can not overcome them. He accepts the unavoidableness of anxiety and anguish from the heart of human existence.

Economy

The poem "Economy" presents the bleak and gloomy picture of human predicament in the twentieth century. In a way it presents the disillusionment of the generation. The gloom and despair of the poet are mirrored in the poem. The theme of despair and voidness is further strengthened by this poem. In fact the poem *Economy* reflects the tragic gloom and grim reality of the post war era where the speaker wants to face it squarely and has no hope to escape from reality into a world of dreams. The speaker of the poem seems to be a cripple emotionally as well as physically:

No need to break the mirror

Here is the face shattered

Good for seven years of sorrow. (731)

Here in this short poem, the first two lines show the poet's fragmented and shattered feeling of life. The speaker confesses that the face has already been shattered and so no need to break the mirror. That means the life of the twentieth century has been shattered and broken into pieces. They themselves are responsible for it so blaming others and breaking the mirror is futile and meaningless." "Good for seven years of sorrow" presents the view where individual should create the meaning within sorrow to survive and celebrate the life. This view seems to be absurd but even in between them; the speaker finds happiness and joy. As Sartre says that human being should create meaning even

from the absurdities, the speaker in the poem does the same and celebrates the life of anxiety. War, violence, death, decay and destruction have created fragmentation and dissatisfaction in the modern life. These are the reality which is grim and horrible and at the same time difficult to over come. That's why the speaker says "no need to break the mirror. Here is the face already shattered "It shows that as W.B. Yeats has said" Things fall apart center can not hold, mere anarchy is loosened in this world. In fact modern world is wasteland where only anarchy and nothingness dwells. Modern life is full of anxiety, voidness and without purpose. This reality of modern life is clearly depicted in the poem "Economy".

The most outstanding and fabulous feature of this poem is the sense of hope even within the hopelessness. The speaker has clear realization that life after all lands at nothing and purpose of life has lost its way in dreary desert but yet the speaker enjoys the meaninglessness and fragmentation. Even long sorrow brings the moment of joy and happiness at the heart of speaker. In this way the poem is the perfect and vivid presentation of modern life and its celebration. In order to continue the life as there is no escape from the grim reality the only thing modern man can do is acceptance and celebration of grim, fragmented and unavoidable reality as Sisyphus in Camus' writing.

Ascent

Merwin pursuit of the silence and darkness further found in the poem "Ascent". The speaker travels into the darkness and dissolution in stead of unity and light. Despite the implicit authority of science and religions behind him Merwin persistently seeks that mothering emptiness. In this particular poem he describes the ugly picture of beautiful meadow comparing and contrasting it with the grimfullness and meaninglessness of modern life though it looks beautiful and attractive:

I have climbed a long way

There are my shoes minute larvae
The dark parents I know
they will wait there looking up
until some one leads them away. (94)

Here in the poem it is found that the speaker has climbed a long way with the hope of obtaining something in the meadow. But the meadow itself is full of larvae and its dark parents. The meadow is already shocked and exploited by larvae. So the actual beauty and potentiality of meadow is lost. Here the meadow is symbolic representation for this beautiful world which has turned to be barren. This world is like an Edenic garden but consists of apple of sorrow, unhappiness, dissatisfaction and disaster. This is the frank revelation about modern world. That's way the horridness and ambition of modern man has lost its way in sandy desert of this beautiful world which is clearly stated in the following stanza:

I may have reached the first
of the bare meadow
recognized in the air
the eyes by their blankness
turned knowing myself seen by the lost
silent Bare choir. (94)

The speaker in this stanza conveys that "I may have reached the first of the bare meadows recognized in the air the eyes by their blankness turned knowing my self seen by the lost " In these lines the tone of melancholy is very dominant because it insists on the bare meadows and its lost silent bare foot choir. Merwin concentrates a felling of morality, humanity, hopefulness and afterall dissatisfaction and alienation of life.

This poem presents the vision of dissolution and spiritual draught. The journey of speaker beyond the quotidian life of shoes and parents and is moving towards the bare meadows and the lost in silent with bare foot choir presents the felling of morality and the inherent sadness of human life. Dark, blankness, shades, bare, silent barefoot used in the poem themselves are suggestive of meaninglessness, nothingness, voidness and hopelessness.

Tracing the letters

The poem presents the contrast between hope and despair. In the beginning of the poem "Tracing the letters" the speaker is capable of expressing his own sense of hope which ultimately leads to nowhere except to the dark and silence. The theme of loss and hopelessness and human futile struggle to search the meaning within them is the dominant feature of this text. The first stanza highlights the speaker intension of tracing the letter:

When I learn to read I will know green is spelled
When it is not green already for all
the green of the years there is only one word
even when the green is not there
and now the word is written down
and not only spoken. (1271)

Here in this stanza the speaker intends to find the lost words. He wants to animate vocabulary. Like a child who has been tracing the letters, Merwin longs for the full power of language. He wants to receive the essence of green as it was at the moment of its creation, when the word was in the beginning. But the reality is that what the speaker searches is always missing. The essence that the speaker wants has lost from the

pages and he is trying to trace it. The further lines tell about the acceptance of meaninglessness and nothingness:

So it can be closed in the dark
against an unknown page until another time
and still the green comes without a word
but I see it a word tells me it is green
and I believe it even in the dark. (1271)

This stanza tells about the absurdity of the speaker. The speaker knows that the meaning (green) of word has lost but he tries to get it even in the dark. Rather the speaker becomes happy within the absurdity of the world. Albert has presented the absurdity of human existence by presenting his character Sisyphus in toil of fruitlessness. He repeats and repeats the same task of rolling the rock up to the hill which after all heralds (bring) no results. This very theme of absurdity is exposed in Merwin's poem 'Tracing the letter'. Merwin's speaker in this poem does not have serious intent to find the lost words and to trace the letters. The speaker intends to animate vocabulary which is filled with words to represent the things. In fact, the speaker engages in absurd work or futile task of animating the words. In fact words can never depict the theme in itself and letter can never trace the reality. The speaker knows these facts but yet engaged in this futile activity because it's the act of own choice. He intends to trace the green when it is spelled. When he says "when I learned to read I'll know how green is spelled when it is not green".

The poem by drawing the arbitrariness of language to the reality exposes the arbitrariness of human activities and its result. As there is no physical proximity and real connections between green and greenness, the human activities and results are also arbitrary and not interconnected. Thus, it creates the sense of absurdity eventually heralding the pang of anxiety. The second line of the last stanza justifies this idea and the

speaker says "still the green comes with out a word tells but when I see it a word tells me it is green and I believe it even in the dark". It means the green can only be symbolized and realized in the word grass but greenness can never be realized through language. This fact is crystal clear for the speaker but yet sticks over it because this is the grim reality of physical word and human existence.

For the Anniversary of My Death

This poem "For the Anniversary of My Death "deals with the immoral, disordered, chaotic, sterile and hopeless society. In this poem the speaker draws the attention of the listener towards those facts of 20th century world:

Every year without knowing it I have passed the day.

When the last time will wave to me.

And the silence will set out.

Tireless traveler

Like the beam of a lightless star

Then I will no longer

Find myself in life as in Strange garment. (147)

The subject matter of this poem is pain. The poet describes the fragile emotional equilibrium that settles heavily over a survivor of recent trauma or profound grief. The very first line of the poem shows the acceptance of reality of life. The speaker says that the days have been passed without knowing it. This is the speaker's withdrawal from this world. The speaker is trying to locate the truth of life. He sees death as something we know as a part of our life. As the death comes in one life the whole suffering and pain will escape from life. The poem moves as follows:

Surprised at the earth

And the love of one woman

And the shamelessness of man
As today writing after three days of rain
Hearing the sing and the falling cease
And bowing not knowing to what. (147)

The second stanza describes the experience about what happens after death. The speaker says that his body and soul will not remain in the earth. It will be strange for himself. Love, passion, shame and the beauty what we have today will fade away along with our death. The last two lines of the poem are very much suggestive of the absurdity of modern people. People of twentieth century are well informed about the death. Yet they try to resist it. They pray to god at the time of crisis without knowing the existence of the god. They pretend to be innocent and kind before god. "This is the absurdity and shamefulness of modern man. So the speaker says," Hearing the wren sing and the falling cease and bowing not knowing to what." This is really a powerful satire for the showiness of modern people. In fact the poet is very much indifferent to the modern people and their futile job of worshipping the god.

As one feels oneself helpless and alienated, the sense of anxiety and despair enter the mind. A person cannot see the ray of hope in life. The speaker in the poem "For the anniversary of my death" feels helpless. He regards himself a failure and nothing else. He is not satisfied with his ongoing life. So the sense of anxiety and despair enter in his mind. The first stanza in fact describes the speaker's sensation when he died. The three lines of the second stanza describes about the experience after death. The last four lines provide the transition from personal to the social level which reflects the vainness and gain less activity of man.

Some Last Questions

"Some Last Questions" deals with the bitter experiences of the twenty first

century world and its effects upon individuals. The poem amply illustrates the pain, anxiety and despair of the modern people. The feeling of absurdity and nothingness are projected very tactfully in this poem:

What is the head

A. ash

What are the eyes

A. The wells have fallen in and have inhabitants

What are the feet

A. under them the impossible road is moving

Down which the broken necked mice push

Balls of blood with their noses. (67)

This poem is in the form of questions and answers. The speaker makes many questions and at the same time provides the answers beyond the listener's thought. The answers given in the poem are really absurd and meaningless. The head what we generally think as a store house of intellect is considered ash. That means the world of twenty first century is ruled by anxiety, absurdity and uncertainty and the reason can not drive away the sense of darkness, ignorance and injustice. The intellectuals feel that they are living in the broken world which is beyond the recovery. The head symbolically represents the intellect so the eyes have been full of grief. The wells in the eyes mean pain and sufferings in life. Further more the feet which we are used to walking around are considered the representatives of imperialist who invites many wars and kills many people destroying the property. The "balls of blood" is the metaphor which reminds us the bloodshed of the civil war. The absurdities further as the poem moves on:

What is the tongue

A. The black coat that fell of the wall

With sleeves trying to say something

What are the hands

A. Paid

What is silence

A. As though it had a right to move

Who are the compatriots

A. They make the stars of bone. (67)

The poet has made many questions regarding with tongue, hands, silence and compatriots in this stanza. The tongue is for taste but the speaker has said that it is like a fell off coat with sleeves trying to say something. That means the tongue has never got the taste. The hands which we used to earn are thought as paid. That means the hands of oneself is not using for own purpose. It is using for others. According to the speaker, the silence is all and great. It is the part of life. And the compatriots are nothing. Their efforts are purposeless and gainless.

The poem is most about the expression of frustration and anxiety. Everything describes in the poem are considered beyond our imagination. The things which are important for life are presented as valueless, meaningless and purposeless. The feeling of negativity towards life is the product of first and Second World War. As the belief in stability and security of life ends in the twentieth century, People start thinking the human civilization as illusive. The intellectuals also begin to feel that they are living in the broken world. The poet is the eyewitness of that reality whose anxiety and despair are mirrored in this poem carefully.

IV. Conclusion

The poetry by W.S. Merwin dramatizes the meaninglessness of life. It also deals with the human futile existential struggle which gave nothing except suffering, anxiety, despair and feeling of absurdity. In the poetry regarding with this text present the abundant ideas of hunger for survival and personal failure with the felling of absurdity. The poetry has occupied glorious position not only in America but also throughout the world with enormous renowned prizes.

The poetry galvanizes the idea that art can be a tool for survival in the hands of virtuous writer. Merwin has done this by creating imaginative speakers who are embroiled in the turmoil of violence, absurdity and scarcity of life but they rejoice and continue their struggle in life. The poetry opines the idea that meaninglessness of life and fragmentation of personality are common. That's why we have to celebrate the survival and critical mode of life as common phenomena by collecting vigor and stamina. The textuality of the poem has widely reflected the socio – political and economical issues rampantly affecting and influencing life of common people.

Merwin not only shows strength and stamina in an individual continuously inspiring and instigating to continue, free floating and independence life ,he also reflects the site of rigorous social, economical, political and other opposing forces that ruin individual life. By showing the speaker entangling within the life long struggle for form, they are victimized by fragmentation, restriction, suppression, domination exploitation and oppressions. Merwin has successfully demonstrated the sweet passion and strong desire for self identity and survival even within the pang and plight of humanity.

For instance, acceptance of existential crisis, urge for survival, and rejoicement of fragmented life are some of the characteristics that highlight the idea of alienation and isolation. Merwin's speaker's acceptance of existential crisis paves way for the vision of

struggle for survival. Despite the speaker struggle for freedom and happiness they suffer from the scarcity, anxiety and absurdity.

Merwin's speakers are physically feeble mentally retired, economically bankrupt and socially abnormal. They regain their existence within the fragmentation and lamentation. They celebrate the loss and isolation because they are hardly beaten and looted by environment and sociopolitical situation so the characters are submerged in the life of alienation, domination and scarcity living in the wood side, separating from the life partner, riding without driver, doing the meaningless job and worrying about the future are some of the moments of existential crisis.

Merwin's characters surrender at last any sort of opposing forces that try to ruin their life though they have hope and energy at first. They give up their desire to attain survival when they converge metamorphosis of experience during the struggle. Their life is full of fragmentation, isolation, displacement and exploitation. They are fragmented mentally, physically and socially due to the rigorous political social and cultural condition. Merwin's assertion "No need to break the mirror, Here is the face already shattered good for seven years of sorrows" exposes the hard ship of life during his time.

The characters in a poem are almost homeless, familyless and penniless figure. They have no kiths and kins. They are absolutely solitary figure. Homelessness and joblessness are the burning problem that characters face. Such situation of course brings the moment of solitariness and fragmentation. Despite the individual's struggle, there are restriction confinements and exploitation that brings alienation and fragmentation in life. This is the true portraits of 20 the century world.

The 20th century world was full of chaos and confusion. People embroiled in the turmoil of war and competition which fragmented them. The crisis of life inspired them to live in the world of meaninglessness and purposelessness. They gave up hope,

optimism and positivity from life. They lived within the scarcity, exploitation and fragmentation as the characters in the Merwin's poetry. That's why these poems very artistically reflect the alienated and fragmented life of his contemporary time.

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This thesis titled "**Alienation in Merwin's Poetry**", submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Tika Raj Ghising has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research committee.

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Abstract

William Stately Merwin's poetry exposes the grim futile human existential struggle which heralds nothing except suffering, anxiety, despair and feeling of absurdity. The speakers heroically accept and continue their struggle throughout his life in order to maintain the glory of his survival but at the same time they embroil in the turmoil of violence, absurdity and the scarcity of life. Merwin's poetry also reflects the grim picture of human life during and after the war when people were victimized by restriction, suppression, domination, exploitation and over competition. Because of which characters demonstrate the sweet passion and strong desire for survival and self identity even within the pang and plight of life. Despite the characters' struggle for freedom and happiness they suffer from scarcity, absurdity and nothingness which showers pain and suffering that ultimately lead them into the realm of fragmentation, displacement and alienation.

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