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Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com

criterionejournal@gmail.com

Bucolic Imaginings and Urban Reality: Nissim Ezekiel's Poetry Suspended in Mid-Space

Rinkoo Wadhwa

The opinions that are held with passion are always those for which no good ground exists; indeed the passion is the measure of the holders lack of rational conviction. Opinions in politics and religion are almost always held passionately.

— Bertrand Russell, *Sceptical Essays*

Introduction

Faith and reason are both sources of authority upon which beliefs can rest. Reason is generally understood as the principles for a methodical inquiry, whether intellectual, moral, aesthetic, or religious. Thus, it is not simply the rules of logic or the wisdom of a tradition. Faith, on the other hand, involves a stance toward some claim that is not, at least presently, verifiable by reason. Thus faith is a kind of attitude of trust. As such, it is understood to involve an act of will or a commitment on the part of the believer.

“Religious faith involves a belief that makes some kind of either an implicit or explicit reference to a transcendent source” (Swindal 59). In Ezekiel, one is faced with a such a poet persona who is on a shifting territory between faith and skepticism, Pastoral dreams in an urban space. He evolves continuously—changing his style ever so often and yet , keeping in focus, a subject from which he seldom wavers. The subject is his lack of place in the scheme of things. Life to him is the trap of sundew from which he does not wish to escape, but taste its wonders and arrive at a mean—that of the corporeal and the spiritual. The outstanding characteristics of his poetry are an ironic attitude and the desire to commit to a single point of view. These vacillations point to a dichotomy at the nucleus of his work. The most appropriate illustration of Ezekiel's trenchant attitude is found in “The Egoist's Prayers III” (CP 212) where he wrangles with the philosophy of the *Bhagwad Gita* with the irreverence of a Baudelarian :

No, Lord
Or the fruit of action
Is my motive
But do you really mind
Half a bite of it?
It tastes so sweet,
And I'm so hungry. (1-7)

Ezekiel's being –in –the –world posits a problem. Confronting the fact of his existence, he faces his loneliness, his uncertainty, his lack of perspective in a scheme of things as a quandary to be resolved. Life to him is a maze from which he has to emerge - not into death or an ideal state, but a state of resolution. Ezekiel has always striven for a human balance—“a structure of withdrawal from the world and contemplation” (King 38).

The Unfinished Man (1960) - undoubtedly a significant landmark in Ezekiel's career is such a saga of his struggles repeated to himself. He embarks on an “Enterprise” (CP 117-18), not with the aim of evolving into a haze of divine oblivion but into the idealized state:

It started as a pilgrimage,
Exalting minds and making all

The burdens light. The second stage
Explored but did not test the call
The sun beat down to match our rage. (1-5)

He adds in the fifth stanza:

We noticed nothing as we went,
A straggling crowd of little hope
Ignoring what the thunder meant,
Deprived of common needs like, soap
Some were broken, some merely bent.
When, finally, we reached the place,
We hardly knew why we were there. (21-27)

The outcome of the pilgrimage remains abstract; it is presented as an eventual understanding and an explanation of his existence. As the poet ends the poem with the trenchant homily: "Home is where we have to earn our grace" (30). This understanding points to various lessons that he possibly derived from the pilgrimage. One may be that it is within the context of poetry that this goal is to be realized.

The struggle of the artist centers on the revival of his vision-the poetic logos. In this collection, the impersonal approach in the poems is enhanced by the use of a persona referred to in phrases like-"you look down" "you search for", your own "divided face", "you seem to move", etc. This works as an effective device to detach the modern pilgrim from the state of a heightened religious sensibility defined in "Enterprise". The modern sensibility of the protagonist is one that is blunted by forces of rationalism and skepticism with the result that there is incapacity to see roots of traditional culture. The poem begs comparison with Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri* where the journey is a pilgrimage but experiences of the poet are trivialized. The persona of *Jejuri*, after getting down from the bus, to his entire time spent at the temple can recount worldly and sensual experiences only.

In Ezekiel's poetry, although the search 'frightens' the poetic persona, he is never tired of the observation and self-analysis. As the poet's oeuvre progresses, he becomes more and more introspective. *The Third* demonstrates a deep and solemn spirit of introspection and reflection. There are several poems in the confessional mode and some of these are suggestive of the poet's dissatisfaction, both with his domestic life and with his creative work. In the poem "Song of Desolation" (CP 103), the poet urges:

Come, religion, comfort me.
Your lifeless moralists prescribe your laws,
And make me see
My secret flaws.(9-12)

The poet is certainly aware of his secret flaws and looks towards religion for absolving him.

Ezekiel's Urban Consciousness

From "Urban" whose "landscape has no depth or height" (CP 117) to where the "A Morning Walk"(CP 119) the persona in a sort of confused-dream and is:

Driven from his bed by troubled sleep
In which he dreamt of being lost
Upon a hill too high for him

(A modest hill whose sides grew steep),
He stood where several highways crossed
And saw the city cold and dim, (1-6)

He can identify himself not with the world of myth and vision but with the barbaric city, and the poet's accent is on the nature of the human will:

The pain of his fragmented view.
Too late and small his insights came,
And now his memories oppress.
His will is like the morning dew.(32-35)

Mahan says, "Ezekiel wants to point out that living in a modern city, leads to loss of vigor and corruption of the essential self. It reduces man to the level of economic man, one whose psychological motivations are thought of largely in terms of self – interest" (53). The mechanical existence of the modern individual is stressed in the following lines of the poem "Encounter" (CP 35):

The city pressed upon me; shops, cinemas and business houses
Spoke in unambiguous accents. Only the people said
Nothing. They
bought the evening papers, hurried to a tube
Station,
Ceasing to exist.(8-13)

She speaks about the impersonality of a big city where each individual is alone each has to struggle to survive. She says:

The modern city has its dehumanizing effect. The place is not necessarily Bombay, but any place where man loses identity. The bleak picture of the city deprived of human sensitivity, seething with poverty, dirt, squalor and noise comes vividly before our eyes by the use of concrete imagery. The images – 'slums', 'seasons', 'rains', 'hawkers', 'beggars', 'processions', 'drums', 'purgatorial lanes' are seen allied to the image of city. The use of 'purgatorial lanes' takes us to the great Italian poet Dante. The notions of suffering, doom, punishment signified by 'purgatorial' adds to the horror of the city. The city emerges as an image of inferno where the modern city dweller is placed to suffer and carve his way out (55).

Speaking of urban consciousness, it is a common pre-occupation of most modern poets. Like Eliot and Auden, Ezekiel deals with the life in a city. Like them, Ezekiel too highlights the rootless-ness of urban life and the psychological stresses and challenges inflicted by modern urban living. However, Ezekiel's approach to the city is different from these poets. He is more exclusively concerned with the Indian milieu. His ambivalent relationship with the city with mixed reactions of allure and repugnance generate tautness in his writing . Although Ezekiel is a 'Bombay poet', at times this poetic persona seeks release from this city which 'like a passion burns' as in (CP153):

Do I belong, I wonder,

To the common plain? A bitter thought.

I know that I would rather
 Suffer somewhere else
 Than be at home
 Among the accepted style. (13-18)

Urban versus Pastoral The morning walk is supposed to be an awakening to the world of unity, but what the persona painfully discovers is the ironic difference between the imagined world and nature as well as his own incapacity to perceive these two worlds in unity. The strong imagination will associate itself with a higher world, but the weak imagination, which is "like the morning dew/ is incapable of making such a forward thrust. His insights come "Too late and small,"(33) and "His past is like a muddy pool / From which he cannot hope for words"(39-40).But, as is evident from "Morning Prayer," (CP 122) there is a loftier and more ambitious goal behind these pilgrimages. "Morning Prayer" expresses a sincere and legitimate concern of the artist for perfection of his vision and art:

Restore my waking time
 To vital present tense,
 And dreams of love or crime
 To primal quiescence. (5-8)

Affirmation of Faith in Art This time, there is no skeptical irony, frustration or doubt resulting from the collapse of vision; instead there is a frank, positive and definitive statement of the artist's personal faith in his art, and of his sincerity, integrity and commitment. Throughout the course of "Morning Prayer", he seeks protection of the soul, because the world of imagination and art demands a personal and subjective realization of the self. He asks for the restoration of his "waking time / To vital present tense,"(6-7) because it is only by existing in the present tense that the imagination experiences perpetuity and individuality. He aspires to the condition of "primal quiescence," because the imagination can reconcile the so-called dualism between good and evil and experience original unity and harmony of consciousness. But the crucial part of the prayer appears in the last stanza of the poem, where Ezekiel boldly defines the moral function of art: he asks for the gift of metaphor which will transmute the "passion of the blood," (14) man's untamed energy, into "human good"(15).

Whereas "Morning Prayer" suggests a certain specific direction and discipline for the pilgrimage of the artist, "Jamini Roy" (CP125-26) outlines the stages in the process of maturity, and the joyous fulfillment achieved by the urban artist. The last two stanzas of the poem especially focus on the nature of fulfillment:

He started with a different style,
 He travelled, so he found his roots.
 His rage became a quiet smile
 Prolific in its proper fruits,
 A people painted what it saw
 With eyes of supple innocence.
 An urban artist found the law
 To make its spirit sing and dance.(9-16)

The three stages of travel referred to in the poem are childhood, adulthood and maturity. In childhood, Jamini Roy's "purple elephants," cats "with almond eyes"(2) and blue aristocratic birds are symbolic of childlike simplicity and directness,. Moving to that of adulthood, "His all-assenting art"(8) successfully copes with the hostile adult world "of sex and power-ridden lives."(6) Upon maturity, however, his more energetic and direct concern with man and city becomes "a quiet smile / Prolific in its proper fruits" (11-12). And now, having discovered the "law," he can aspire to the world of myth and realize an identity with his art and the barbaric city. "The law" refers to rigorous discipline which transforms energy into a vision of primal innocence and unity. Thus, by reintegrating his wholeness, and by creating a comprehensive myth of concern, the artist attains his freedom. The juxtapositions of city and passion; will and morning dew—concrete and abstract are Rilkean devices, employed to startle the readers as much as the poet himself.

It is important to point out at this juncture that Ezekiel is always true to his own self as he is to his art. Bharvani points out that:

it is clear there is trauma and the writing is a cathartic experience for the poet. The poet is aware that he is responsible for his own actions and hence an element of guilt is also apparent in some of the poems. This is particularly pronounced in the poems "Wisdom", "Insight" and most especially in "Song of Desolation" (27-8).

The following lines from "What Frightens Me" (CP 106) will emphasise the point:

Myself examined frightens me.
It is no accident I am what I am.
I saw the image being formed,
I saw it carnal in the arms of love
(Crushed, compromised and consummated).
I saw it making vows
With hidden weakness in the bone, (1-7)

With a self-abrasive lashing and confession, the poet ruthlessly tears open the façade of carnality-in-the-guise-of-truth. He adds further in the same vein:

I have long watched myself
Remotely doing what I had to do,
At times ashamed but always rationalizing all I do. (9-12)

The poet is an unabashed defender of truth and these lines as spoken by a very agonized poetic self reflect his objective self-analysis. The fact remains that Ezekiel not only seeks the self through his poetry but his entire involvement with the act of writing poetry, editing anthologies of poetry, motivating and introducing new poets, playing mentor to minor poets, and playing a proactive role in the literary circles make him a person who uses poetry as a tool to come to terms with him- self.

Imagery and Devices The discussion of the image of the city and the metaphor of pilgrimage explicates Ezekiel's focus on commitment, sincerity and integrity as essential conditions for complete fulfillment in life and art, "Commitment"(CP 121), "Event"(CP122-23) "Marriage"(CP 123-24) and "Case Study"(CP 124) contain a more extended treatment of this theme: using commonplace but intimate and personal situations. Using devices such as self-parody and self-censure, Ezekiel dramatizes the too-human problem of pathetic failures and frustrations, primarily resulting from his lack of commitment, and the image of life turned into hell. In "Commitment,"

Truly I am betrayed, consorting with

The world contracts my love, vast organized
Futilities suck the marrow from my bones
And put a fever there for cash and fame.(1-4)

Vacillation between Skepticism and Faith

The poet is seen torn between baser appetites and lofty visions of truth. He goes on to elucidate how his appetites become voyeuristic and his instincts, animal. The poem portrays the poet's dehumanization at various levels due to contact with urban life, where survival is a challenge in itself. But he rejuvenates his vigour with self-motivation in "Transmutation" (CP 56):

Leave no more the flesh of deed unfondled.
Attempt the enterprise. Apprehend
The carnival of things created: water, wind
And season's breath. Demand
The dissolution of the word, the aspiration,
And all the equipage of doubt and dissipation.(1-6)

The poet commits himself to enterprise once again and more importantly, to faith. To commit oneself is to perceive the world of things and to establish a relational identity; therefore, commitment becomes a total act of will for him. Thus, with true commitment which is the ethical act of the Kiekegaardian aesthetic self, true meaning in the immediate and ordinary world can be found. But without commitment, the poet persona's foggy perception makes him wander from one illusion to another. Of course; the ironic conclusion suggested in the poem is that if one cannot understand matters of ordinary existence or the lower world, then the truth of a higher realm too will be equally perplexing.

Without commitment, the poet feels life and cosmos have no meaning and his actions are merely glorified, ritualistic responses. Much of the problem concerning the loss of individual identity, as has been seen, arises from the consumerist character of the modern urban society. In "Case Study," (CP 124-25 an investigative poem with a profound moral tone, all the actions of the persona, "a foolish love affair"(7), "useless knowledge"(11), involvement in politics, marriage and vocation, are a part of the rigorously conformative and highly programmed social ritual that most people feel expected and compelled to perform. The poet tells in the first line of the poem that "Whatever he had done was not quite right"; and following a succession of paradoxical sketches, we encounter his decisive voice:

He came to me and this is what I said:
The pattern will remain, unless you break
It with a sudden jerk; but use your head.
Not all returned as heroes who had fled
In wanting both to have and eat the cake.
Not all who fail are counted with the fake.(24-30)

Man-Woman Relationship

Ezekiel tells his hero to make a choice and break the pattern "with a sudden jerk" (26). Love and marriage, as Ezekiel implies in "Event"(CP 122-23) and "Marriage"(CP 123-24) are sacred commitments. But when the "ironic gift"("Event" 4) of time destroys "the will to act or pray"("Event" 8), love degenerates into possessive sensuality and flippant indulgence. The woman in "Event" plays this game of false love:

She lay and waited, watching me,
Like a child in her nakedness,
Uncertain if it ought to be,
Awe-inspired and motionless.(9-12)

The tone of the poem suggests innocence and purity in love. However the tenor changes in subsequent lines when it is revealed that the love being talked about is studied and superficial.

Irreverently, then, she said,
'I bought a book some years ago
Entitled greatly *Wine and Bread* ,
It's true I never read it though. (13-16)

She is unsure of herself, especially her role in the affair. She merely carried the book - *Wine and Bread* but does not know the significance. Her interest in art and the superficial dialogue and wit explain her attitude and the ritualistic process. Ironically, this gross and empty ritual of our world stands in sharp contrast to the sacred and artistic ritual of the pastoral-romance, in which love, bread and wine are considered sacred. Thus, the woman in an urban society plays the stereotyped roles: she, like her male counterpart, exists purely as an instrument and does not have personal identity.

In his ennui, he surrenders to an emptiness of the spirit in the absence of true love which is reflected in "Nothingness" (CP 50):

At last I have been reconciled
To simple nothingness, and catch
Myself, hour after hour,
Free from any need to live at all—
The impulse and the fear of love ,
Small ambition sick at the roots,
Shabby cures for dissolution,
Twenty thousand abysses
Encountered on an aimless day,
Humiliated by the truth
of Nothingness, mortality.(1-11)

The poem shows that Ezekiel is overwhelmed by the day to day mendacity of living and falsities in loving.

The image of women as portrayed in many of Ezekiel's poems is negative; and the same terse irony and concern are echoed in "Marriage". We are, of course, reminded in "Case Study" that "A man is damned in that domestic game" of marriage. In the ironic sense, marriage as a social custom is a bondage, a state in which man and woman, though intended united eternally, lose freedom and identity. While Ezekiel parodies the traditional view of marriage, he raises serious issues of sin and guilt in "Marriage" (CP 123-24):

I went through this, believing all,
Our love denied the Primal Fall.
Wordless, we walked among the trees,
And felt immortal as the breeze.
However many times we came
Apart, we came together. The same
Thing over and over again.
Then suddenly the mark of Cain

Began to show on her and me.(9-17)

Does Ezekiel consider the carnal, sinful? The answer is rather ambiguously cloaked in the biting accent on the absurdity and tedium of "The same / Thing over and over again" (14-15).

Enlarging Sympathies

For Ezekiel, being is believing. Life lived to the fullest means life amid a clash of extremes. It is here that any dialectical synthesis may take place (which the poet seeks). To adopt safe position, to accept a system of beliefs rather than engage oneself fully in the pursuit of truth, is to forego the truth. Faith, however, is not a substitute yet for whole hearted investigation for the poet. From this point, the quest for a way to negotiate the non-tangible begins. Inspired by the artistic and spiritual achievement of Jamini Roy, he wishes to look for the right idiom to represent reality-his own. It is this achievement that guides him on the path of discovery of "The Exact Name" by creating myths, all of his own.

In "Philosophy" (CP 129), Ezekiel asserts the superiority of the poetic myth over cold logic and declares:

A million stars are blotted out. I think
Of each historic passion as I blink
That happened to the sad eye of Time.

But residues of meaning still remain,
As darker myths meander through pain
Towards a final formula of light.

I too reject that clarity of sight:

What cannot be explained, do not explain(8-15).

He metamorphoses this perception in "Platonic" (CP 145):

Simplicity, I know, you have achieved
Beyond the reach of all but praise or love.
You stand composed, related, absolute,
And in your presence I am simple too:

The devious word dissolved, the mirror true.(1-5)

The poem goes on to unfold how the woman has the "tone of voice for true or false" (6) and whose calm disposition remains unruffled by unpleasant encounters. This is high praise coming from a poet who has written trenchant verse about duplicities practiced by the "female animal". He can reconcile with evil and good alike. He is now open to newer emotions because of his new found confidence sprouting from a new spirituality that gives him the strength to peep out of his "dark tunnel"-his ego as pictured in "Two Images" (CP 143):

From the long dark tunnel
Of that afternoon, crouching, humped,
Waiting for the promised land,
I peeped out like a startled animal
And saw a friend flapping his angelic wings.
I welcomed him.(1-6)

In "In Retrospect" (CP 144), the poet now realizes that "there is a point / in being obscure"(23-24) because words are not enough to define the "invisible landscape". Once the interplay of dream and reality of the world is accepted and ingrained, the perceptions of the poet

undergo change. Sex is now perceived as a myth and a dream and it becomes a mutual nurturance. These lines from “Platonic” (CP 145) emphasize the point:

You know the monologue of rage,
The drab exchange of tongues, with faith
Repeating parables of hell.
But still defying time and place,
Perennial dawn is on your face.(11-15)

The woman beast of sex of earlier volumes turns into a lover “in the invisible landscape of love” (18) in “In Retrospect”(CP144). She is now a fellow traveler in the quest for harmony in life. Such a *volte face* in poetic perspective, now committed to sincerity and purity takes the poet to a plane where empathy paves the way for transition from understanding to profundity.

This empathy is evident in “Virginal” (CP 138-39) where the poet rues that the ageing virgin’s “longing for a lover and a child” (14) is too large to be contained in the (small) universe. He says:

Remote from the prospect of the wedding kiss
You say you do not care, and change your dress
To read a book or write a letter, then
You wait. Perhaps you sigh. The day is done.
Your sorrow as it sleeps denies its loss.(4-8)

These concerns portray the involvement of the poet in the common-place and their relation and consequences upon the development of his self. Ezekiel at this juncture has come a long way from the simple desires for “a bit of land, woman and a child or two” to “the ordinariness of most events” (“The Visitor” CP137-38, 60), and “The devious word dissolved, the mirror true (“Platonic” CP 145, 5) something he had not been able to foresee. The same humility of his attitude is visible in “Night of the Scorpion”(CP 130-31) where while taking a dig at the superstitions of villagers and his own father alike, Ezekiel does not deny dignity to the characters—the mark of a true literary man.

“Poet, Lover Birdwatcher” (CP 135) is perhaps a response to Jamini Roy’s achievement. ‘Waiting’, ‘praying’ and ‘surrendering’ are the poet’s potion for understanding things.

The hunt is not an exercise of will
But patient love relaxing on a hill
To note the movement of a timid wing;
Until the one who knows that she is loved
No longer waits but risks surrendering—
In this the poet finds his moral proved,
Who never spoke before his spirit moved.(4-10)

The strategy of waiting rather than pursuit seems to be midway between the Keatsian position that poetry should come naturally and the Yeatsian stance of active labour for attainment of beauty. “Testament” (CP 159) feels that writing poetry demands reduction to essentials. It is the art:

Of bringing up- to- date
The essential truth of old performances,
abandoning the costumes, make-up,
setting, stage directions.

Yet this is the calling

Not of poets only
But of men and nations,
The spaceship earth itself
In revolutions recollected
For Time's unimagined
Apostolic continents.(18-30)

The power of poetry, hence, is of such magnitude that it can recapitulate life in the blink of an eye. It can imagine earth as a mere spaceship in time and the role of the hero poet in forging new inventions of idioms.

The grappling with "The monstrous truth of moral law"(10) is voiced in "Poetry Reading" (CP 136). It is here that the poet persona comes to terms with the dichotomies of evil and good; sin and song; right and wrong. He exhorts:

Against those demons, who can win?
He drank, he drugged himself, he went
With wives and whores galores. In sin
And song he spelt out what they meant.(13-16)

In the words of IndernathKher:

The poet's sin constitutes action which brings him close to the awareness of his being and song constitutes poetry which brings in the reverberating "message from another shore". This shore is the abyss of the human heart, which contains the aesthetic vision of Nissim Ezekiel (JSAL 164).

Philosophy and God—Contentious Concerns

There has always been a striving for a philosophical dimension in his work, an untiring effort at developing an aesthetic strategy. This brings up the question of beliefs as expressed in his poetry. From "A Time to Change" to "The Exact Name", there has been a steady shift in emphasis from "seen" to "seer" and thence to "vision" as has been observed by Kurup .(76)

Though Ezekiel has not written overtly religious verse, God has never been far from his conversations and comparisons. At times it is seen as the Judeo-Christian "Lord" of "A Time to Change" and at others, he is just "God". Not omnipotent but always at the beck and call of the poet for conversations or confrontations. Even in "An Atheist Speaks"(CP 287), His existence is not denied:

He
Made Hitler and Stalin
He
made the Inquisition
He
made the holocaust(11-16)

Seen comprehensively, Ezekiel's perception of God reflects a coming of age, a maturity and clarity in his own poetic beliefs. In fact Ezekiel had thought about taking up the vocation of the rabbi but these views were radically challenged under a strong influence of M.K Roy. He joined the Rationalist association of India and even wrote a paper on atheism. "I believed that there was no God, no future life, that morality was man made."(qtd.ByRajangan5).

A course in philosophy undertaken at London resulted in a certain dilution of these views and he shifted base from atheism to agnosticism. During the LSD trip in 1967, Ezekiel had

visions of Christ, Krishna and various prophets that resulted in his acceptance of a mystical, metaphysical and cosmic reality. This experience however was never to find direct expression in poetic utterances. It would be unfair to say, however, that Ezekiel's poetry lacks the spiritual element.

In an interview, when asked about his philosophy of life, Ezekiel answered: "I don't make claims about a whole philosophy of life expressed in the plays. There are perceptions, views, and ideas, reasonably integrated. The same can be said about his poetry too which is ablaze with a broad and deep sympathy towards the human race, especially the underdog. As Walter Tonetto and Enrique Martinez have commented, "within the economy of Ezekiel's language there spins a commitment to humanity that keeps the reading alive, nurturing it from deep sources" (*The Commonwealth Review* 266).

In "A Small Summit" (CP 152-53) where he just cannot see things as he ought and rues:

I cannot bear the view,
Although it seems important
Somehow either to endure it
As a fact of self-created history,
Or to work upon its nearest
Particulars in the light of love. (19-24)

The poet is seen mired in the conundrum of life. A similar lack of understanding of the issue of existence is palpable in poems like "Happening" (CP 163), where the poet acknowledges a lack of clarity in ideas and laments that:

As a rule, the room is in semi-darkness
Though I cannot see clearly
I take decisions and the consequences.
There is a knock on the door,
Or a voice on the telephone
suggests a project that will
come to nothing. (10-15)

The semi-dark room suggests a lack of ideas and the poet is ready to bear the consequences of this inanity. "Island" (CP 182) and "In the Theatre" (CP 151), echo similar confusion. The poet persona is often heard bewailing the presence of a voiceless void, a phenomenon beyond his powers of assimilation. These concerns have always been a part of Ezekiel's poetry but never voiced with an attitude of fatigue and resignation. "Theological" (CP 156) seems to be the turning point in Ezekiel's quest where, poetry, his *summum bonum* till now seems unable to contain the anguished cries of his own soul, much less provide solace to it. He cries out:

Lord, I am tired
Of being wrong
I've taken a stand
but to what end?
Your truth
Is too momentous for man
And not always useful. (1-7)

This is the self of poet that has come face to face with his own limitations and the earlier stance of self-satisfaction and complacency seems to be buckling at the knees. The rationalist analyses with which he tried to arrive at a sort of equilibrium is a shifting territory which does

not lead to any conclusion. As an artist when it comes to handling the concrete and the abstract, Ezekiel fumbles while handling the non-tangible. But it is to his credit that he has always arisen, phoenix-like after every failure to question his own actions and pursue his intended goal. In the words of King, the quandary that faces the poet is :

how to avoid the bleakness of a purely scientific materialist view of the world with its lack of values, spirit, purpose, poetry, and to avoid the confining, repressive orthodoxies of most religions and their otherworldliness at the expense of this, probably the only life we have. This confrontation is seen regularly in the poetry of Ezekiel. How to seize the day without being a vulture? How to give up your ego without losing interest in the world and in such basic pleasures as sex, love, success(55)?

Conclusion

The modern literature lends itself to analysis as two main strains in: one that stresses the experience itself as an unavoidable effect of the impersonal, nature of modern life, entailing the loss of ability to use that experience to attain some deeper, more genuine truth about the world—since with the death of God and traditional structures of authority, most of these truths were considered definitively lost. The other, drawing on older theological traditions, saw alienation as the key to the true, hidden nature of the modern (i.e., capitalist, industrial) order itself, showing it to be an intolerable situation that could be resolved only by overthrowing that order and replacing it with something profoundly different.

This latter tradition can be traced to George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Søren Kierkegaard who drew heavily on theological sources. For Hegel, "alienation" was a technical term, a necessary moment in the process whereby Spirit (which for Hegel was simultaneously God, Mind, Spirit, and Human Self-Consciousness) would achieve true self-knowledge. Human history involved the same story: Mind would project itself out into the world, creating, say, Law, or Art, or Science, or Government; it would then confront its creations as something alien to it and strange; then, finally, coming to understand that these alienated forms are really aspects of itself, would reincorporate them and come to a richer self-conception as a result. Ezekiel seems to be stiving for such an inclusive perspective, a glimpse of which is found in "Testament" (*CP* 157-58):

Unredeemed
we never learn the art
of bringing up-to-date
the essential truth of old performances ,
abandoning the costumes, make up,
settings, stage directions.(16-21)

Contrary to popular understanding, social relations and institutions do not necessarily constitute barriers to individual development and freedom. On the contrary, individuality and freedom involve the exercise of powers and capacities which can be acquired only in and through community with others. Alienation can be overcome and individuality developed and realised only through participation in a social world: by fulfilling, in Bradley's phrase, 'my station and duties' (Bradley 149).

Luntley has pointed out "The modern self is a holder or possessor of religious, political and cultural properties, but it is not constituted by them"(152). It follows that the true modern self is not a self that occupies any particular historical, social or cultural milieu or identified with any particular religious, political or moral background.

The poet gives a clarion call to all those who wish to bring a change in the world, as he says in "Testament" (CP 157-58):

Yet this is the calling
not of poets only
but of men and nations,
the spaceship earth itself
In revolutions collected
for Time's unimagined
apostolic continents. (22-28)

These are the concerns that the poet has been handling since "A Time to Change" to "The Exact Name". The concern with voicing his beliefs as a poet and his beliefs as a religious man. The modern day to materialism stands at a tangent to his concept of a unified understanding; of an attempt to see the inner spiritual and the outer aesthetic world in resonance. The desperate attempts towards leaps of faith as exemplified by his LSD trips are clear indicators of a persona in the quagmire of doubts. But instead of being quelled by these forces, he adopts the stance of a warrior at a moment of truth with God, demanding participation.

Just when you give up
the whole process
begins again

and you are as pure
as if you had confessed
and received absolution.

sufficient reason surely
for faith in process
that can perform miracles.

without assistance from you.
Imagine what it would do
With a little assistance from you.(1-18)

He demands faith from God to sustain his fervor in the journey towards a reconciliation of these dilemmas. Ezekiel stands at such a crossroads.

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