

Chapter 3

Alienation of the Nonconformist

Alienation is neither a modern phenomenon nor is it restricted to a particular society. It has been there since prehistoric times. But the nature and impact of alienation has changed according to the age and the society. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines alienation in the following manner:

The term “alienation” (estrangement) has many different meanings in everyday life, in science, and in philosophy: most of them can be regarded as modifications of one broad meaning which is suggested by the etymology and morphology of the word--the meaning in which alienation (or estrangement) is the act, or result of the act, through which something, or somebody, becomes (or has become) alien (or strange) to something, or somebody, else. (Edwards 1: 76)

In the beginning, alienation was to a great extent due to the feelings of helplessness that man felt in combating with the forces of nature. Modern man’s alienation, on the other hand, is the result of societal interference. As Fritz Pappenhiem argued in his article “Alienation in American society”:

Due to the tremendous advance in science and technology, especially in recent decades, man has made great strides toward overcoming alienation as far as it is engendered by the forces of nature. He is no longer at their mercy. By understanding them he has come closer to the realization of the Promethean dream – to shape his own life and to become master of his destiny. Thus, in one way he has greater possibilities than ever before of fulfilling man’s age-old yearning for self-realization. Yet, for us, this possibility cannot become

reality. The reason is that another type of alienation, that engendered by the forces of society, continues unabated and, as I have argued, has even grown stronger. (14)

The new social ideology generated by materialism has been instrumental in bringing about radical dehumanization of life. Mechanization of society has not only made machines perform functions until then done by man; it has also led to the diminishing of humanitarian qualities in man. His actions have become mechanical and automatic. He does not control his products any more and is more or less controlled by them. It is this situation that Marx termed as commodity fetishism. “Commodity fetishism, then, is the inability of human beings to see their own products for what they are, and their unwitting consent to be enslaved by human power instead of wielding it”(Kolakowski 277). Though the revolutions in transport and communication have brought men closer together, individuals have grown more estranged from one another.

In this new social scenario there has been a shift in focus from the individual to the masses and this has led to the transformation of the American society that once respected individual liberty to a “mass society” (Bell 21). The term *mass* implies that standardized material is transmitted to all groups of the population uniformly. This standardization has led to a very important behavioral change in modern man. A tendency to conform to a group or a community or a society at all costs has evolved. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries men had been forced to conform to a class or a tribe and to the authority that controlled the clan or the tribe. There the authority was overt and the individual was aware of the identity of the authority that controlled. The consequence of compliance or rebellion towards this authority was definite and known to everyone. It was easier to defy this overt authority when it stifled individual freedom. But the character of authority has changed

since the twentieth century. Fromm, while analyzing modern form of authority and the conformism resulting from it, arrived at the conclusion that industrialization and commercialization have paved the way for an “anonymous, invisible and alienated authority” (138). It is difficult to resist this modern authority when it curtails individual freedom. Though invisible, this modern authority is much more powerful and intimidating and difficult to defy. The primary stipulation of the modern authority for the masses is conformity, a new mode of conformity which expects individuals to behave uniformly. In such a society virtue consists in adjusting to the herd and vice is to be different. Compliance to the herd is of crucial importance in this new mode of conformity. The individual is trained to adapt to the group or society from an early age so that by the time the child grows into an adult he will have internalized the principle of conformity to such an extent that it is no more an external agency but an internal force. Modern childhood games and education techniques are all tools designed to encourage this process of internalization.

Unlike the authorities of the past who used physical punishment to impose their power, modern anonymous authority imposes its power through the technique of normalization. Normalization is a process whereby behaviors and ideas are made to seem “normal” through repetition, or through ideology, propaganda, etc., often to the point where they appear natural and taken for granted. In effect those who conform to the authority of society are categorized as the normal and those who do not conform are categorized as the abnormal. Michele Foucault throws light on the manipulation of power by the conforming majority. He argues that imposing discipline through precise norms is quite different from the older system of judicial punishment, which merely judges each action as allowed by the law and does not say that those judged are “normal” or “abnormal”:

Discipline is a technique of power which provides procedures for training or

for coercing bodies (individual and collective). The instruments through which disciplinary power achieves its hold are hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination.... Foucault has argued that at the heart of a disciplinary system of power there lies an 'infra-penalty' or an extra-legal penalty which is exercised over a mass of behaviors. In effect what is being punished is non-conformity which the exercise of disciplinary power seeks to correct. (Smart 85-6)

In the process of normalization, the normal is defined through the abnormal and the normal has power over the abnormal. Since the "abnormal" are stigmatized by the society, the majority tend towards normalization. This powerful, normal, majority force the abnormal minority to the periphery of society. Thus there are two factors that incite an individual in modern society to conform – the fear of isolation and the stigma of abnormality. These two powerful factors contribute to the normalization of the majority and the alienation of the minority who do not conform. The normalcy of this majority rests merely on conformity and not on any behavioral normalcy. This normal individual who forms the majority is far from normal and suffers from self-estrangement. Self-estrangement leads to psychological disorders as the need for individual identity stems from the very condition of human existence. It is so intense that man cannot remain sane unless he finds a way of satisfying it. Modern man who lacks individual identity is far from normal. But since the majority in twentieth century American society are the self-estranged their abnormality is overlooked and taken as the normal. The self-alienated individuals are not aware of their mental pathology and remain oblivious of their abnormality. Even when they are aware of their defective personality and can trace it to the social ideology they are passive. So a lack of resistance does not always imply that society plays a nurturing role in molding the

personality of the majority.

Western civilization, from the middle ages, had attempted to develop individuality by making the individual politically and economically free and teaching him to think for himself. During the Renaissance a minority achieved this new experience of individual identity. But before the majority could attain this new found experience, powerful social institutions, realizing the danger to them from thinking individuals, adopted the strategy of normalization. Thus, herd identity replaced individual identity in the twentieth century, paving the way for alienated individuals. With the replacement of individual identity by herd identity the nature of alienation itself has changed. In the modern conformist society, alienation has become an all-pervasive phenomenon with the majority suffering from self-alienation resulting in abnormality and the minority suffering from social alienation. When a few individuals in a society suffer from self-alienation the conclusion to be drawn is that it is due to personal neurosis, but when the majority suffers from it, it is to be concluded with certainty that this is a social phenomenon. Fromm, after analyzing the alienation of individuals in modern society, goes on to prove that modern society itself is sick and hence consensual validation which in the past was indicative of mental health and normalcy is not so in modern western society. The paradox of modern alienation is that since alienated individuals make up the majority they categorize themselves as the normal in spite of their self-estrangement and marginalize the non-conforming sane minority as the abnormal (23). This results in a reversal whereby the normal become the abnormal and the abnormal the normal.

The normal individual of twentieth century western society has certain characteristic features that distinguish him from his “abnormal” contemporary as well as the normal individual of the past. David Riesman in his work, *The Lonely Crowd*, analyses the

character of people in different ages, and divides people into three groups. The first is the “tradition-directed” type who is guided by the established conventions of the society in which he lives. The second is the “inner-directed” type who “has early incorporated a psychic gyroscope which is set going by his parents and can receive signals later on from other authorities who resemble his parents” (24). The inner-directed man is capable of great stability as he internalizes principles and not details of behavior. The third is the “other-directed” type whose craving for approval is so great that he has no fixed personality and varies his personality with each encounter and each situation. Riesman asserts that the majority of Americans in the twentieth century are “other-directed” and “contemporary metropolitan America” is the best illustration for a society “in which other-direction is the dominant mode of insuring conformity” (20). Since he is not aware of the actual or imaginary group he wishes to please, he wears a mask of happiness and gregariousness at all times. But this constant effort to please others takes its toll and leaves him drained and discontented. The obsession for approval from others results in a neglect of the inner self which leads to self-estrangement. As a consequence the majority in American society are self alienated individuals. The happy, healthy, normal western individual is a mere façade that masks the inner discontent and suicidal nature of these individuals. Riesman supports his theory with statistics showing that suicides have increased in the twentieth century western society in spite of material comforts. Materialism has thus failed to materialize the utopia that it prophesied to evolve in the western hemisphere.

Robinson’s poems portray both the self-alienated individual of modern society as well as the socially alienated individual. The term self-alienation suggests some or all of the following points:

- (1) The division of the self into two conflicting parts was not carried out from

the outside but is the result of an action of the self. (2) The division into conflicting parts does not annihilate the unity of the self; despite the split, the self-alienated self is nevertheless a self. (3) Self-alienation is not simply a split into two parts that are equally related to the self as a whole; the implication is that one part of the self has more right to represent the self as a whole, so that by becoming alien to it, the other part becomes alien to the self as a whole.

(Edwards 1: 79)

The split in the self leads to conflict which in turn creates tension in the individual. Thus the self-alienated individual is tortured for two reasons. Firstly his self- alienation leads to alienation from his human essence, and secondly, he is torn by an internal conflict between his two selves. This leads to frustration which may ultimately culminate in suicide.

The prototype for the conforming self-alienated individual of a materialistic society is found in the character of Richard Cory, the protagonist of Robinson's poem by the same name. The dichotomy between being and appearance, the inner self and the projected self, is brought out in a subtle manner in the poem. In just fourteen lines the poet compresses the pathos of the "other- directed" man's life, juxtaposing appearance with reality. Cory, has conformed to the standards of success laid down by society and has shaped his entire life on the materialistic philosophy. The poet portrays him as a gentleman who is accepted by Tilbury town as an epitome of success.

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,

We people on the pavement looked at him:

He was a gentleman from sole to crown,

Clean favored, and imperially slim. (1-4)

The main criterion for his gentlemanliness is his affluence and the graces that he can

buy with his wealth. The materialistic society worships wealthy people like him for two reasons--their conformity and their material prosperity. He personifies the American success myth, according to which success is synonymous with wealth and status.

And he was rich--yes, richer than a king-

And admirably schooled in every grace:

In fine, we thought that he was everything

To make us wish that we were in his place. (9-12)

In the octave Robinson builds up an atmosphere of envy towards Richard Cory, arising from his material success. But in the sestet he abruptly shifts the tone of the poem and concludes the poem with the tragic suicide of Richard Cory. The poem is thus a rebuttal of the American success myth.

And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,

Went home and put a bullet through his head. (15-16)

Tilbury townsmen are confused by the death of Richard Cory as he was the embodiment of material success. But for Robinson there is no confusion as he believed with certitude that the suicide of Cory was the result of an inner conflict arising from his self-alienation. In spite of his wealth and status, Cory was estranged from his human essence. For the conforming majority Richard Cory is the yardstick for success, but for the non-conforming minority Cory is the prototype of the alienated individual of a materialistic society. As materialism rejects spirituality the materialist is solely dependent on the self for reality and meaning. So when the self loses touch with his own inner core he is rendered totally helpless and commits suicide.

Though Robinson portrays the alienation of the conformist, in some of his poems like

‘Richard Cory’ (CP 82), he is more interested in throwing light on the alienation of the nonconformist because of three reasons: The self-alienated individuals form the majority in American society and as a result they occupy the center of the society. The nonconforming minority on the other hand are the marginalized and are pushed to the periphery of society. Power is vested in the self-alienated individuals as they are the majority in the society. The nonconforming minority on the other hand are powerless and voiceless. Self-estrangement is self inflicted and once the majority is aware of its own alienation it has the power to eradicate alienation. Social alienation on the other hand is forced on the nonconforming and results in isolation and stigma. Robinson takes up the cause of the socially alienated as they are the marginalized and voiceless. He becomes their voice and projects their suffering and loneliness through his poems.

Most of his poems are about the internal as well as external struggle undergone by nonconforming individuals in contemporary American society. Robinson exposes the two dimensional alienation to which nonconforming individuals are subjected to – their isolation as well as abnormalization. He denounces the societal alienation of the nonconformist through the portrayal of three distinct types of socially alienated characters – the Artist, the Spiritual leader and the Failed. The poet was very well aware of the societal alienation suffered by artists from his own personal experience. He was isolated by Gardiner society for his antimaterialistic as well as nonconformist ways. Gardiner society like any other materialistic town in twentieth century America demanded conformity from individuals even in the matter of a career or a vocation. Artists and Spiritual leaders were marginalized for two reasons. Firstly, they were isolated on the basis of utilitarian philosophy which considered art and spirituality as unprofitable vocations. Secondly, they were isolated for their nonconformist ways –for being different from the herd. Robinson realized very early

that conformity and art are antithetical by their very nature since an artist cannot thrive unless he has freedom for creativity. The beginning of the twentieth century was not at all conducive to art and artists. "If not quite the best of times or the worst of times, the era was nonetheless inhospitable to the artist in many ways" (Burton 1).

The American obsession with wealth was the first obstacle in the pursuit of art. Unless art degenerated into a commodity it had no value in a commercial society. Robinson strongly objected to commercialization and he expressed his ire against the commodification of art. Robinson's life as a poet is his most explicit rejection of the conformist society. Robinson grew up in Gardiner aware of the social alienation of artists in a materialistic society. Social institutions, whether family, church or school conspired to isolate art and artists. The conformity creed demanded individuals to conform to careers and vocations acceptable to society. Robinson opposed the conformity principle by opting for the life of a poet. The price that he paid for this act of nonconformity was very dear. He lost out in the race for wealth and status. But more crippling was the alienation that he suffered from society. W.R. Robinson reveals the alienating tendency of materialistic society and remarks that the artist is always an alien in a materialistic society, as there is a schism dividing art and social values (134). The schism dividing art and society is the result of the commercialization of modern society whereby everything, even art objects are viewed as commodities to be sold. Hence an artist is destined for alienation in modern western society. If he is true to art and chooses art over society he will be alienated by society. In the event of his choosing society he will still be doomed, for he will suffer from self-alienation.

Robinson exposes the alienation of an artist in a materialistic society in two of his major poems- "BJ" and "RR". In "BJ" he examines the inner conflict that tortures an artist

when he is enamored by societal values. The poem is a monologue in which Ben Jonson tells his guest, an alderman of Stratford-on-Avon, what he knows and thinks of Shakespeare. The poet looks at the character of Shakespeare from a different angle. Though Shakespeare's greatness is emphatically revealed throughout the poem, Robinson's objective in the poem is to portray Shakespeare as a materialist who conforms to the standards of success propagated by society. In spite of his unparalleled success as a dramatist, he harbored feelings of inferiority arising out of indigence in his early life. He attempts to enhance his social standing by accumulating wealth and property. He aspires to own the manor at Stratford as it symbolizes success through material prosperity. He suffers terribly because of his need to conform to society. Through his greed for the manor, Shakespeare stoops to the level of the conforming majority who worship mammon. The conflict between individuality and conformity, between art and the world is the theme of the poem. He tries to free himself from the shackles of society and remain true to his self and to his art. But he is so tempted by social success that from time to time he falls prey to conformity. This conflict between the world and art rages in every artist and each one has to choose between the two. The choice of the world entails self-alienation since it stifles art while choice of art brings in social isolation.

The opening lines of the poem bring out the contributions of Shakespeare and his artistic merit. He has proved himself a nonconformist by taking liberties with traditional rules and regulations. He violates the Aristotelian unities and through their violation proves himself a greater dramatist than his predecessors.

You are a friend then, as I make it
Of our man Shakespeare, who alone of us
Will put an ass's head in Fairyland

As he would add a shilling to more shillings;
All most harmonious, --and out of his
Miraculous inviolable increase
Fills Ilion, Rome, or any town you like
Of olden time with timeless Englishmen; (1-8)

But this creative genius, who does not conform to conventional rules in his professional capacity, becomes a victim of conformity in his personal life. Shakespeare's ambition for the manor at Stratford symbolizes his desire for material possessions which is a characteristic feature of modern conformist culture. Without too much exposition the poet brings out the conflict tormenting this great artist, the conflict between wealth and art. Shakespeare has the literary genius which makes him the unparalleled monarch of literature; but he has in him also the desire to be a prosperous citizen of his native Stratford. Robinson juxtaposes Shakespeare's literary genius which makes him unique with his greed for the manor to contrast the immortality of literature with the transience of material goods. "And there's the Stratford in him; he denies it, / And there's the Shakespeare in him. So, God help him" (33-34).

The poet expresses his shock at the inconsistency in human nature through the contradiction in the character of Shakespeare. The muses have ordained him monarch of the literary world. In spite of being a classicist, Jonson expresses his admiration for Shakespeare who violates the traditional dramatic conventions without detracting from the beauty of his plays. "I love the man this side idolatry" (354). But Shakespeare is not satisfied with his artistic kingdom since he is a victim of the herd instinct. Like the rest of the herd, this literary genius too stoops to conquer the transient material world. He is not content with his immortal fame as the king of the world of drama and wastes away his talent in search of

spurious pleasures. Shakespeare is thus portrayed as a nonconformist in his vocation but a conformist in his personal life.

He can't be King, not even King of Stratford,
Though half the world, if not the whole of it,
May crown him with a crown that fits no King (50-52)

Though Shakespeare is aware of the transience of material reality, he is haunted by the desire to become Lord of the material world. There is a three-fold conflict in Robinson's Shakespeare – the conflict between conformity and individuality, the conflict between art and material success and the conflict between the spirit and the world. Shakespeare is alienated and rendered unproductive by this three-fold inner conflict in the last lap of his dramatic career. The conflict between the longing for the manor at Stratford and his artistic aspirations has made this great dramatist a wreck so that he is rendered incapable of artistic creation.

But there's no quickening breath from anywhere
Shall make of him again the poised young faun
From Warwickshire, who'd made, it seems, already
A legend of himself before I came
To blink before the last of his first lightning. (253-57)

Conformity to a great extent is the outcome of the fear of isolation and even a great artist like Shakespeare who flouted the age old unities has become a victim of this societal evil in his personal life. "Lord! How I see him now, / Pretending, may be trying, to be like us" (182-83).

The incongruity in Shakespeare's belief in the futility of worldly glory which he expresses in many of his dramatic works and the desire for wealth and status in his personal

life is convincingly depicted in the poem. The conflict between materialism and idealism is resolved in favor of materialism in Shakespeare's mind. Since the transience of material goods is a proven fact, materialism which negates spirituality and asserts only the existence of material reality is based on false reasoning. But even a wise man like Shakespeare, who projected the temporality of material reality in his plays, succumbs to the corrupting influence of the material culture in his personal life.

It's Nature, and it's Nothing. It's all Nothing.

It's all a world where bugs and emperors

Go singularly back to the same dust,

Each in his time; and the old, ordered stars

That sang together, Ben, will sing the same

Old stave to-morrow. (300-04)

The poem exemplifies the self-alienation of the conformist in a materialistic society through the character of Shakespeare. Even a great artist like Shakespeare, who was unconventional in his art is a victim of standardization in his personal life.

If "BJ" exposes the crippling effects of materialism and the alienation of the self in an artist who tries to conform to the dictates of society, "RR" (SP 198) depicts the triumph of individuality and art over conformity and material success. Robinson portrays the life of the famous painter, Rembrandt, three years after the death of his wife, Sasika. He had just completed his painting, "The Night Watch" in which he shifts from effects of external brilliance to a world of inner vision painted in golden light and shadow. The great painter fell from public favor for not conforming to the standards set by society. Rembrandt was innovative in his poetic technique and broke the conventions of Dutch group portraits. While Shakespeare succumbed to conformity and is discontented and frustrated, Rembrandt

protests against standardization which is the hallmark of a conformist society. He rejects society as it opposes multiplicity of perspective and encourages uniformity in thought and action.

And Rembrandt knows, it matters not so much
What Holland knows or cares. If Holland wants
Its heads all in a row, and all alike,
There's Franz to do them and to do them well-- (54-57)

Rembrandt resents social interference in artistic creation and objects to the commercialization of art. He sacrifices the wealth and fame that Holland can bestow on him for the sake of individual and artistic freedom. He believed that commodification of art destroys the stability and permanence imparted to human life through art. He also denies materialism which denies immortality to art. The poem reveals both sides of the coin--the dear price that the artist who conforms to popular taste pays and the social alienation of the nonconforming artist. Peace eludes the artist who has betrayed art.

The taste of death in life – which is the food
Of art that has betrayed itself alive
And is a food of hell. (103-05)

Robinson uses biting sarcasm to voice his ire towards artists who conform to the popular taste of the day. He foretells the downfall of such worthless men of art and affirms the transience of reified art. Immortal art is forever in conflict with the mortality of the creator and his worldly ambition.

An easy fashion – or brief novelty
That ails even while it grows, and like sick fruit
Falls down anon to an indifferent earth

To break with inward rot. (146-49)

The price that Rembrandt pays for remaining true to art is alienation. For the sin of nonconformity he has to discard wealth and status, which can be had only if an artist is ready to accept society as his master. According to the narrator, Rembrandt was “Sometime a personage in Amsterdam, / But now not much” (162-63). He had enjoyed the patronage of Dutch society, when he was ready to sacrifice his individual self for the herd or the community. But the moment he asserted his identity as an artist he was ostracized by the same Dutch community. Rembrandt remains fearless in spite of his social alienation and strives for artistic fulfillment. He realizes that social alienation is much better than self-alienation and an artist who succumbs to the pressures of society can never have inner peace. Robinson contrasts the immortality of Rembrandt’s art with the transience of worldly glory, thus imploring artists to travel along the path of immortality. Every artist has to choose between immortality and material reality and the choice decides his future for him. If he chooses immortality it entails social alienation and if he chooses materialism he suffers from self-estrangement.

Your Dutchmen, who are swearing at you still

For your pernicious filching of their florins,

May likely curse you down their generation,

Not having understood there was no malice

Or grinning evil in a golden shadow

That shall outshine their slight identities

And hold their faces when their names are nothing. (246-52)

Robinson also exposes the power manipulations in a materialistic society through the poem. The conformist belongs to the majority in whom power resides while the

nonconformist is marginalized and powerless. But the conformist sacrifices his individual identity for the sake of herd identity while the nonconformist sacrifices power and position for individual identity.

You are the servant, Rembrandt, not the master –

But you are not assigned with other slaves

That in their freedom are the most in fear. (277-79)

The conformist lives in fear of the unknown authority while the nonconformist has earned his freedom by forsaking the herd identity. He asserts that it is better to be a nonconformist and suffer from social alienation rather than sacrifice freedom for the sake of herd identity.

An artist can affirm the immortality of art only if he negates materialism since materialism is a theory which asserts the accidental nature of the origin of the universe. Materialism is in opposition to the immortality of human beings as well as their creations. The permanence of art is a natural corollary of spiritualism which alone imparts immortality to men and their creations. An artist, if he has faith in the immortality of his art, cannot but have faith in the Spirit and in the ultimate meaning of human life. An artist and his art can gain immortality only if he rejects materialism and accepts the Spirit. “That’s how it is your wiser spirit speaks, / Rembrandt. If you believe him, why complain? / If not, why paint?” (302 -04).

Robinson cautions artists against an impetuous decision to make a living out of art, for he may not possess the inner strength to resist societal alienation. Only an artist who has deep faith in the Spirit and the immortality of art can have the necessary courage to face up to the alienation of society and create immortal art. It is better for a materialist to conform to the society and enjoy the transient pleasures of temporary fame and prosperity as his

philosophy rests on the mortality of human beings. Rembrandt derives the strength to resist temporal greatness from his faith in the Spirit. The indifference and scorn of his fellow men do not disturb him as he believed in the ultimate victory of spiritualism over materialism.

If at the first

Of your long turning, which may still be longer
Than even your faith has measured it, you sigh
For distant welcome that may not be seen,
Or wayside shouting that will not be heard,
You may as well accommodate your greatness
To the convenience of an easy ditch,
And anchored there with all your widowed gold,
Forget your darkness in the dark, and hear
No longer the cold wash of Holland scorn. (319-28)

The second category of nonconforming individuals making up the world of Robinson's poetry is the spiritual leader or the "empowered person" (W. Robinson 138). The empowered person is torn by inner conflict like the artist but while the conflict in the artist is between art and society, the conflict in the spiritual leader is between the Spirit and the world. According to W.R Robinson:

No where are the effects of alienation more apparent than in one of Robinson's favorite characters, the empowered person who can help others but not himself. Bearer of secret knowledge of the spirit, he can see what others are blind to and work mysterious effects on their lives, but as a bearer of that knowledge he, like Rembrandt, is outlawed from intimate human relations and the human community. His knowledge bars him from worldly position and power, for having broken through to the higher truth, he can

never take any social role seriously, and so can never do anything for himself as a social creature. (138)

If the conflict between art and society is alienating and tormenting, Robinson was certain that the struggle between the spirit and the world would be doubly alienating and painful in a materialistic society. Since materialism denies the reality of spiritual beings, consciousness and mental or psychic states or processes, the “empowered person” would always be an alien in a materialistic society. He is a social outcaste but his spiritual vision provides him with the necessary courage to resist the conformity enforced by society.

In “The Three Taverns” (CP 461) Robinson delineates this conflict between the spirit and the world through the character of St Paul. The choice of St Paul as the “empowered person” who breaks social norms to remain true to spiritual laws comes as no surprise as St Paul’s transition from Judaism to Christianity was miraculous and dramatic. Robinson employs parallelism to bring out the conflict between spiritual freedom and social materialism in contemporary society by recalling St Paul’s assertion of spiritual freedom in convention-ridden Jewish society. St Paul did not stop with his rebellion against Judaism, but served the Spirit in the face of persecution from the established Roman Empire as well. The poem introduces the conflict between the spirit and the world by stating St. Paul’s decision to enter Rome. At the very outset Robinson throws light on the transformation of power in relation to position. When St. Paul had been a prisoner of law he was socially powerful though alienated from his inner self. His freedom in the Lord has rendered him socially powerless. Robinson believes that the empowered person cannot keep away from conflict. He can serve the Spirit and achieve integration only if he meets conflict headlong and voices his protest against materialism. Hence St .Paul who represents the Spirit is ready to come into conflict with Caesar who represents the world.

In Caesarea

There was a legend of Agrippa saying
In a light way to Festus, having heard
My deposition, that I might be free,

Had I stayed free of Caesar; but the word
Of God would have it as you see it is –
And here I am. (15-21)

Robinson indirectly suggests that alienation from the spirit which leads to self alienation is more tormenting than the loss of social freedom. He interprets St. Paul's revolt against Judaism based on the self-alienation of individuals who are unable to serve the Spirit.

I fed my suffering soul
Upon the Law till I went famishing,
Not knowing that I starved. (43-45)

Though St. Paul fed on the Jewish Law, he suffered and starved because it did not provide him with peace and contentment. He was a prisoner of the Law and was deprived of freedom to nurture the Spirit within him.

The poet foregrounds St. Paul's contentment and his sense of fulfillment after his spiritual conversion. "The man that you see not- / The man within the man – is most alive; ..." (60-61). Materialism neglects "the man within the man" thus leading to his self-estrangement. The Spirit on the other hand nurtures the inner man thus leading to fulfillment. All rebellions have begun with a few and Robinson hopes that the revolt against materialism will also begin with a few empowered men who will reveal the Spirit to the multitude. "The few at first / Are fighting for the multitude at last; ..." (257-58). It is

difficult for the Spirit to directly enter the multitude and hence the empowered men are bridges of communication between the Spirit and the multitude. Robinson was fully aware that only if the spirit can enter society through the few chosen men, materialism can be checked from destroying humanity. Hence the conflict between the Spirit and the world is resolved in favor of the Spirit in St. Paul. There is always a glimpse of the Light to elevate the darkness of the spiritually sick world. “And so, through pangs and ills and desperations / There may be light for all” (250-51).

The poem exposes the fallacy in the basic doctrines of the philosophy of materialism. There are many things in the world which are beyond man’s understanding. Materialism fails to provide an explanation for these mysterious happenings of the world.

The best of life, until we see beyond
The shadows of ourselves (and they are less
That even the blindest of indignant eyes
Would have them) is in what we do not know. (277-80)

Robinson mocks at the incredulous nature of the materialist and emphasizes the inability of men to explain the mysteries of the world through mechanism.

Many with eyes
That are incredulous of the Mystery
Shall yet be driven to feel, and then to read
Where language has an end and is a veil,
Not woven of our words. (304-08)

But he does not want men to revolt against conformity and self- alienation unless they are aware of the dangers involved. He warns men of the social alienation that is a necessary corollary to their rebellion against materialism.

Home, friends, and honors, - I that have lost all else
For wisdom, and the wealth of it, say now
To you that out of wisdom has come love
That measures and is of itself the measure
Of works and hope and faith. (315-19)

Social alienation is the result of nonconformity but Robinson feels that social alienation is better than the self-alienation of the conformist. Even though the empowered man suffers a lot he attains inner peace. St. Paul emphasizes the peace which is a reward for nonconformity at the end of the poem. "Peace may attend you in all these last days-- / And me, as well as you. Yes, even in Rome" (327-328). Even when the empowered person is in the midst of a society from which he feels alienated, he enjoys peace and contentment. St. Paul will not be dissuaded from entering Rome. The faith in the Spirit gives him the strength to suffer alienation and resist the worldliness preached by materialism. The conflict between the Spirit and the world as portrayed by Robinson in "The Three Taverns" is a symbolic representation of the dichotomy between man and society in a materialistic society.

If in "The Three Taverns" Robinson portrays the spiritually empowered person through St Paul a representative of Christian orthodoxy, in "Flammonde" (CP 3) the empowered person is placed in the modern context and is devoid of any conventional Christian connotation. Robinson is distrustful of institutionalized Christianity and always believes that spirituality resides in those who are willing to help the distressed. In Flammonde Robinson finds a true Christian who in spite of his poverty is willing to help those in need. He discovers a Christ-like nonconformity in Flammonde's moral courage in keeping the company of prostitutes and helping the needy. His nonconformity elevates him to the position of the empowered person who penetrates the indifference of materialistic

society and imparts the Spirit to a minority in society. Flammonde's humanitarianism is contrasted with the narrowness of vision of the conventional Christian who has deviated from the revolutionary teachings of Christ. In his desire to conform, the traditional Christian upholds the outward manifestations of the law and disregards the essence of the law.

There was a woman in our town
On whom the fashion was to frown:
But while our talk renewed the tinge
Of a long faded scarlet fringe,
The man Flammonde saw none of that,
And what he saw was wondered at –
That none of us, in her distress
Could hide or find our littleness. (41-48)

Robinson provides us with many illustrations of Flammonde's spirituality in the poem. Since he was too poor to provide for the education of a poor boy, he sought the help of a few people and brightened the future of the boy. The Spirit within Flammonde also made him an arbiter between two citizens who had been fighting for many years so that they became friends. Flammonde, unlike the self- alienated majority who were indifferent to other people's sufferings, considered it his duty to set right what was wrong with the world. This is true spirituality be believed.

There were two citizens who fought
For years and years, and over nought;
They made life awkward for their friends,
And shortened their own dividends.
The man Flammonde said what was wrong

Should be made right; nor was it long
Before they were again in line,
And had each other in to dine. (57-64)

The spiritual awareness of Flammonde is juxtaposed with the crass materialism of Tilbury townsmen so as to provide an insight into the degenerative culture of the urban centers in America. Mechanistic societies like Tilbury needed the presence of the spiritually aware such as Flammonde to withstand the onslaught of materialism and conformity. The poet also throws light on the necessity of spirituality in times of sorrow when men have dark hills to climb. Belief in the Spirit is the only remedy for alienation and isolation. Material success brings prosperity but fails to provide contentment and happiness.

We cannot know how much we learn
From those who never will return,
Until a flash of unforeseen
Remembrance falls on what has been
We've each a darkening till to climb;
And this is why, from time to time
In Tilbury Town, we look beyond
Horizons for the man Flammonde. (89-96)

Robinson shatters the American success myth through the third type of nonconformist character in his poems the "failed". Robinson's failed is a person who has not internalized the materialistic philosophy and as a result has failed to achieve economic prosperity. Since success has become synonymous with economic prosperity in American society and the majority struggle to adhere to this norm laid by society, those who cannot conform to this standardized success are marginalized as the failed by the society. The poet

contradicts this myth which provides space only for the rich, the powerful and the famous in American society. He redefines success through his poems, and sings of the worth of many men who are unsuccessful in amassing wealth and status. Their success is often a spiritual success rather than material success. Material prosperity can be the criterion for success only in a materialistic society which believes in a mechanistic interpretation of the universe. Neither spiritualism nor idealism prioritizes material success. Both the spiritualist and the idealist recognize immortality and the transcendent. Success to them is a consciousness of the Spirit and not a physical realization. Robinson's best poems are on the failed in modern society. He casts them in the role of protagonists and imparts dignity and grandeur to them. Cestre comments on this distinguishing characteristic of Robinson's poetry and remarks that "His greatness resides in having brought into vivid light the nobleness of man's endeavor, even when the results stop short of the intentions. In fact, his best philosophical lyrics bear on what has been called 'the success of failure'" (55). Their failure is from a materialistic point of view and they are most of the time better human beings than the successes of commercialized society.

The theme of many of Robinson's poems is the alienation of the failed in a materialistic society. Through their material failure they have deviated from the norm laid by American society. This deviation is reciprocated by exclusion and accompanied by stigmatization. As Suzanne Gordon asserts in her book *Lonely in America* "In a society whose financial and social coffers are always supposed to be full, loneliness or emotional emptiness is more than emotionally distressing – it's socially stigmatic" (33). The social alienation of the failed is two dimensional in that they suffered from loneliness and are considered abnormal for being lonely.

One of the best poems that Robinson has written on the alienation of "failed" in a

materialistic society is “Mr. Flood’s Party”. Old Eben Flood through his poverty has deviated from the norm laid by American society. His poverty has categorized him as a nonconformist and the punishment that he gets for this is social alienation. His sins were not those which would deny him salvation but which estranged him from society. Robinson pictures the pathetic loneliness of Eben Flood, a typical representative of the “Failed” in the poem.

Alone as if enduring to the end
A valiant armor of scared hopes outworn,
He stood there in the middle of the road

Like Roland’s ghost winding a silent horn. (17-20)

Thomas L Brasher is of the opinion that the Roland of the poem has a better chance of being Browning’s Roland than Charlemagne’s Roland. Browning’s hero when he blows his horn is truly alone and there is no one left to mourn Childe Roland’s approaching death (45). The same is the case with Eben Flood whose old age and loneliness has segregated and alienated him.

Eben Flood has been alienated by materialistic society for the sin of being poor and unsuccessful in the poem. The social bond between Eben Flood and Tilbury townsmen has broken down and there is no communication between them. The unknown authority punishes the unsuccessful with social alienation and propagates the feeling that loneliness is an abnormality. The fear of segregation and stigmatization force the majority to conform to the norms of success propagated by society. The alienation and isolation are so debilitating that Eben Flood resorts to delusion and conjures up an imaginary friend who gives him company in his drinking spree.

“The bird is on the wing, the poet says,

And you and I have said it here before.
Drink to the bird.” He raised up to the light
The jug that he had gone so far to fill,
And answered huskily: “Well, Mr. Flood,
Since you propose it, I believe I will” (11-16).

The poem is set in the night as there is no compulsion to conform and there is no need for role play in the night. In a materialistic society the nonconformist has only the nights; the days are taken up by the conformist majority. Flood is so lonely that he sings alone in the night with only the “two moons listening.”

For soon amid the silver loneliness
Of night he lifted up his voice and sang
Secure, with only two moons listening,
Until the whole harmonious landscape rang –(45-48)

In the last stanza of the poem the poet exposes the fickleness of Tilbury society which worships the successful and excludes them the moment they are unsuccessful. Since poverty is a stigma in modern urban culture they are socially alienated.

There was not much that was ahead of him,
And there was nothing in the town below –
Where strangers would have shut the many doors
That many friends had opened long ago. (53-56)

The second poem from the large collection of Robinson’s poems on the failed analyzed to substantiate the alienation of the nonconformist in modern materialistic society

is “Miniver Cheevy”. According to Hyatt H. Waggoner “Miniver is the archetypal frustrated romantic idealist, born in the wrong time for idealism” (91). The poem is a deliberate attack on the utilitarian philosophy propagated by materialistic society. Anybody who does not conform to the majority opinion is ostracized and anything which is of no use to society is considered worthless in the twentieth century western society. Robinson’s excellent poetic craft is revealed from the ironic way in which he presents the predicament of Miniver Cheevy without resorting to sentimentalism. Miniver is a nonconformist who “loved the days of old / When swords were bright and steeds were prancing” (5-6). Miniver’s only sin lies in his inability to adjust to the standardization imposed by contemporary society. He tries to destabilize the existing social system with his fascination for the past. The unknown authority punishes him with the stigma of abnormality for his nonconformity.

The poem symbolically represents the dilemma of the artist in a utilitarian society and the dilemma derives authenticity from the fact that Robinson himself had suffered from this dilemma. The mechanistic society rejects art on the basis of utilitarian philosophy.

Miniver mourned the ripe renown
That made so many a name so fragrant
He mourned, Romance, now on the town
And Art, a vagrant. (13-16)

Conformity through compulsion has become the strategy of society to subjugate the masses. The minority who revolt against this “normalization” are alienated as the “abnormal.” Robinson objects to standardization and mediocrity that have become common place in post-industrial western society.

Miniver cursed the commonplace
And eyed a khaki suit with loathing

He missed the medieval grace

Of iron clothing. (21-24)

The abnormality of the nonconformist is magnified in the eyes of the conformist and the poet employs hyperbole to expose the discrimination of the deviant. Miniver wanted to wear “iron clothing” instead of a “khaki suit” and “loved the Medici.” “He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot, / And Priam’s neighbors” (11-12). The medieval world with its traditional values and customs fascinated him. For such acts of nonconformity he is isolated by modern western society. Unlike the artist and the spiritual leader who understand that their alienation is the result of their non conformity, the failed like Miniver Cheevy blame fate for their alienation. They are unaware that it is the struggle for power which has resulted in their isolation and blame themselves for their “abnormality”. Hence they are doubly unhappy and resort to drinking or some other method of self destruction.

Miniver Cheevy born too late,

Scratched his head and kept on thinking;

Miniver coughed, and called it fate,

And kept on drinking. (27-30)

Though the artist and the empowered man suffer from alienation their devotion to a great cause gives them the strength to adhere to their principles. Hence they derive at least a muted respect from society. In the case of the failed they are treated as worthless though their stoic endurance is cause enough for respect and admiration.

Gordon describes loneliness as a mass social problem in urban and suburban America. According to Gordon, American life styles create isolation and make it more difficult to cope with such isolation. She also throws light on the stigma attached to loneliness and states that loneliness equals failure in American society (33). Long before

Gordon's book, Robinson was aware of the stigma attached to loneliness through personal experience and the lives of others. Many of his best poems are on the intense loneliness of his contemporaries where loneliness equals failure and failure begets loneliness. One of the most poignant poems ever written by an American on loneliness is Robinson's "Aunt Imogen". In it he portrays the isolation of yet another type of nonconformist--the spinster who for some reason has forsaken marital bliss. She may have rejected the convention of marriage because of an unconventional approach to life or she may have been unable to find a husband according to the "normal" convention. For this sin of nonconformity she is discredited by society as a failure. Robinson knew very well the isolation of a spinster since he was a lifelong bachelor who had lost out in the race for love to his brother, Herman. The setbacks in the early part of his life prompted him to tread the less traveled road of a bachelor. This must have been torture for him who attached so much of importance to human relationships.

Aunt Imogen's bond with her sister's children parallels Robinson's relation with his sister-in-law and nieces. She was fated to a life of loneliness except for one month every year which she spent in her sister's house. Her sister's children loved her intensely and in their presence she enjoyed the motherhood she had forsaken. Her unique position as a well loved Aunt is brought out by the poet.

Aunt Imogen was coming, and therefore
The children-Jane, Sylvester young George-
Were eyes and ears; for there was only one
Aunt Imogen to them in the whole world, (1-4)

But in spite of her uniqueness the poet reminds his readers at the very outset that her sojourn at her sister's house is only temporary. He compares her unfavorably with her sister,

the mother of the children. She was there for only one month in a year, while the mother was always there. Robinson evokes the loneliness and monotony of a spinster's routine life in the poem. But the poet does not make her an object of sympathy but a subject of envy. She is not portrayed as ill-tempered but warm and cheerful providing love and laughter to everyone around her.

And there she sat and talked and looked and laughed

And made the mother and the children laugh

Aunt Imogen made everybody laugh. (45-47)

The most poignant lines of the poem are where Robinson reveals the paradox of the aunt's character. She is capable of giving love and happiness to others but is not fated to have joy or love in her life. The incompleteness in the life of a spinster is projected very subtly by the poet, whether the incompleteness is natural or forced upon the lonely self. The character of the aunt gains in depth by her efforts to conceal her frustration rather than reveal it. The poem reaches its climax when Young George whom she is holding tells her in his baby language that the world is a good place when she is part of it. The unsophisticated love of the baby wrenches her heart with grief. But the poem reminds the readers that a lonely self is accustomed to grief and people like Aunt Imogen accept it gracefully. It is this graceful acceptance of a painful situation that elevates her to the position of the heroine of the poem.

There was the feminine paradox-that she

Who had so little sunshine for herself

Should have so much for others. How it was

That she could make, and feel for making it,

So much of joy for them, and all along

Be covering, like a scar, and while she smiled,
That hungering incompleteness and regret-
That passionate ache for something of her own,
For something of herself-she never knew. (48-56)

The poem does not descend to sentimentalism. Rather he portrays Imogen as full of sunshine and laughter, with subtle pathos here and there in the poem. No one can remain unmoved when Robinson says “there was no love / Save borrowed love” in Imogen’s life (121-122). The redeeming factors in the pessimistic tales of Robinson’s poems lie in the wisdom that his characters attain through their suffering.

Some grief, like some delight,
Stings hard but once; to custom after that
The rapture or the pain submits itself,
And we are wiser than we were before. (102-105)

His tales of failure usually end in acceptance and reconciliation. His failed do not become skeptical because of their misery but with their stoic endurance they suffer their miserable plights.

For she was born to be Aunt Imogen.
Now she could see the truth and look at it;
Now she could make stars out where once had palled
A future’s emptiness;(131-134)

Matthias at the Door is a study in contrast between the conformist and the nonconformist. Matthias, the protagonist of the poem is the typical conformist who is complacent in his material prosperity. He is proud of the fact that he represents the “successful” and is an object of envy to others. Being the privileged member of society he

has no complaints against the scheme of society or God.

He had done well,
Wherefore he was a good and faithful servant.
God asked of him no more; and he would ask
No more of God than was already given. (31-34)

In his smugness he believes that his success is the result of his merit, and according to Garth, he behaves like the omnipotent God.

You are not God, but you are more like God,
In a few ways, than anyone else I know. (54-55)

Garth, his friend, is a contrast to Matthias in every way. He is not a success and he is far from being complacent. He realizes that if he had followed the path of conformity with Matthias, he too would have tasted success and wealth. But at the same time Garth is aware that Matthias is complacent because he is ignorant. A “cataract” impairs his vision and he is blind to truth.

Your God, if you may still believe in him,
Created you so wrapped in rectitude
That even your eyes are filmed a little with it.
Like a benignant sort of cataract,
It spares your vision many distances
That you have not explored. (237-242)

Robinson explores the mystery of human life and feels that man is not always answerable for his life. There is a controlling agency which shapes man’s life according to some purpose unknown to man. To prove this point he asks some rhetorical questions. Human beings cannot answer these questions. Many of the mysteries of human life are

known only to God.

Why does a bat

Fly in the night, Matthias? Why is a fish

Ungrateful if you catch him? Why does a bird

Wear feathers and not fur? (291-294)

Robinson moves the story forward by introducing a third character, Timberlake. Timberlake owed a great debt to Matthias, as Matthias had saved his life from a fire. Timberlake had paid his debt back a thousand times by giving up his love for Natalie so that Matthias could marry her. It was his idealism which had prompted him to repay his friend with his own life. Robinson unfolds the paradox in the situation. Matthias had saved Timberlake's life only to send him into lifelong loneliness. Timberlake had forsaken his love and life for the debt that he owed his friend. He stands distinctive from the seekers of material pleasures in his unselfish love towards his friend.

The plot involves a complex triangular relationship among Matthias, his wife Natalie and their friend Timberlake. Matthias has realized his love for Natalie through marriage but she is unable to reciprocate his love because she loves Timberlake. Timberlake had to abandon his love for Natalie as a token of gratitude. Matthias who represents material success has no sympathy for the failed and frees himself of any responsibility towards them. He is the typical self-centered materialist who shuts his eyes on the sufferings of the other. But Robinson shatters this success myth and makes Timberlake remark that the successful need not always be honorable and the failed may be honorable.

Accomplishment and honor are not the same,

Matthias; and one may live without the other. (572-573)

The poet also makes a spirited appeal to the so called successful not to judge the

failed. They do not have the knowledge to judge their brethren. No one can know what painful circumstances have brought about their failure and what we would have become in such situations. There is nothing dishonorable about failure. Natalie defends Garth's act of suicide and tells Matthias.

I doubt, if it's as easy
To write his life in saying he was a fool
As you imagine. I can find other names
For one who did much good, and did no harm.
I find a sort of bravery, if you like,
In his way out. (634-39)

The poem reaches its climax when Natalie meets Timberlake at the Gorge. They are unable to control their feeling and express their love for each other. It is here that we realize the extremity of Timberlake's sacrifice. For saving his life he repays Matthias with his love. Natalie accuses Matthias of self-centeredness and contrasts it with Timberlake's selflessness.

There was a man I would have married once,
And likely to my sorrow, but you saved him
Out of fire-and only saved yourself (1103-05)

The turning point of the action is the moment of revelation when Natalie confesses her love for Timberlake to her husband. Matthias' complacency arising out of ignorance gives way to frustration and despair. The harmony of their life is shattered and Natalie commits suicide. Matthias descends to greater depths of loneliness after her death.

Matthias, when he saw that Natalie
Was dead, saw nothing else. For a long time

His world, which once had been so properly
And admiringly filled with his ambitions,
With Natalie, with his faith, and with himself,
Was only an incredible loneliness,

The lonelier for defeat and recognition. (1585-91)

But being a conformist, he wears a mask of happiness. The modern conformist is afraid to be himself. He acts out many roles according to different situations. He hides his alienation and unhappiness beneath a mask of indifference. “Yet he was on an eminence, and would stay there / Until it fell, and carried him down with it” (1621-22). Robinson advocates the interdependence of human beings and the fact that no man is an island and all of us have to co-exist and help each other. “We are like stairs / For one another’s climbing...” (1961-62). On a silent evening, in late March, Matthias heard the door bell ring and found Timberlake at his doorstep. He was so pleased to see him that for a moment he was inarticulate. Robinson proves the necessity of communion and comradeship in human life. Wealth and status cannot fulfill a man’s craving for companionship.

You are the only friend that I have left;

And if you die, I shall be here alone.

Here in this world – alone. (1776-78)

But unfortunately Matthias was not fated to enjoy Timberlake’s camaraderie for long. His personal failure opens his eyes to the pathos in being a failed. He becomes sympathetic towards the less privileged and realizes the importance of spirituality. He is made aware of the worth of Timberlake who was opposed to the materialistic culture. Timberlake’s idealism sustained him in his disappointment in love. To him human suffering is never futile and he has optimism in the ultimate purpose of human life. The materialist is “short-

sighted” and finds no compensation for earthly suffering, until tragedy forces him to see the truth beyond material reality.

To a short-sighted and earth-hindered vision
It would seem rather a waste, but not to mine.
I have found gold, Matthias, where you found gravel,
And I can't give it to you. I feel and see it,
But you must find it somehow for yourself. (1934-38)

With Timberlake's death Matthias realizes that his friend's life was richer and more fulfilling than his own. He had only accumulated material wealth whereas his friend had cultivated friendship and love.

With all his waste,
And his uncounted losses, Timberlake
Had died the richer man, having found gold
Where there was only gravel for Matthias; (2238-41)

Robinson strongly refutes materialism and the absolute faith in science. Spiritualism answers the mysteries of life better than science. Scientific knowledge is only a tool in realizing the truth. It is not the truth and the mechanist is foolish to believe in its infallibility.

There's more of you for you to find, Matthias,
Than science has found yet, or may find soon.
Science that blinds its eyes incessantly
With a new light that fades and leaves them aching,
Whatever it sees, will be a long time showing
To you, Matthias, what you have striven so hard

To see in the dark. (2391-2397)

Robinson's most stinging attack on conformism which almost stoops to propaganda is to be found in his poem "Dionysus in Doubt". Unlike most of his other poems which are case studies of individual characters "Dionysus in Doubt" is a poem of social protest. Anderson reveals the circumstances which lead to the composition of this poem.

The enactment of the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution, Robinson took as an affront to personal liberty, the first step that might lead to further restrictions of individual freedom. He took a sharp look at the country and the people. The tendency toward conformity, with the consequent loss of individuality, the power of the big business and the machine to control the lives of people, the equating of equality and mediocrity with democracy, filled him with dismay. (97)

The poem reveals his intense frustration at the way in which modern democracy, the so called government of the people, hinders individual freedom and fosters uniformity. He propounds his theoretical stand on individual freedom and conformity without resorting to specific persons or situations. The evils of a democratic form of government, which has degenerated into totalitarianism, is projected through the eyes of the outsider, Dionysus, the God of wine and revelry, who alone can make an objective assessment. Dionysus is shocked by the tyrannical nature of modern democracy and expresses his horror and disbelief. Irony and humor are employed to expose the pitfalls of a democratic form of government. The poet believes that democracy has failed because of the proliferation of the materialistic philosophy into American society. He makes fun of the sure confidence that American people have in materialistic philosophy and their hope of a utopia born of materialism.

I mention them that are so confident

In their abrupt and arbitrary ways
Of capturing and harnessing salvations
With nets and ropes of words that never meant
Before so little as in these tiresome days
Of tireless legislation; (55-60)

Estelle Kaplan commenting on Robinson's attack on democracy in the poem says that "Freedom misdirected becomes a thing to fear rather than to desire. What most men consider freedom is beguiling convention that really limits self expression" (123-24).

Robinson exposes the role of "miscalled democracy" in enforcing conformity and curtailing individual liberty.

Freedom, familiar and at ease meanwhile
With your perennial smile
Goes on with her old guile:
Having enjoined your conscience and your diet,
She spreads again her claws,
Preparatory, one infers,
From energy like hers,
For the infliction of more liberty; (87-94)

Twentieth Century democracy prospers by sacrificing the genius of a few for the mediocrity of the millions. The democratic strategy is to "moronize a million for a few" (106). Thus democracy fosters conformity and conformity perpetuates uniformity and mediocrity. Everyone has a "niche", or a place in a democracy and standardization levels down people to uniformity.

When all are niched and ticketed and all
Are standardized and unexceptional,

To perpetrate complacency and joy

Of uniform size and strength;.... (185-88)

Democracy thus curtails vision and creativity by imposing uniformity but thrives on deception by claiming that it fosters freedom. The ultimate result is the loss of individual identity and self alienation.

For all I know

An ultimate uniformity enthroned

May trim your vision very well;

And the poor cringing self, disowned,

May call it freedom and efficiency. (199-203)

Robinson, with a crusader's zeal, calls upon modern man to open his eyes to the evils propagated by the conformity creed. But soon the poet realizes that the normal majority would rather "sleep" than understand the perils of conformity. He warns them with prophetic insight on the destructive nature of democracy when it is midirected.

If you are still too drowsy now to keep

The vigil of at least a glance

On that which reinforced intolerance

May next of yours be stealing,

From now to then you had all better sleep. (214-18)

Modern man is a prisoner of conformity in a democratic society, but since conformity is hailed as liberty by the manipulators of democracy, modern man is unaware of his lack of freedom.

You may look down again from here to see

How eagerly the prisoners will agree

In liberty's illimitable name,

All to be made the same. (228-31)

Robinson inspires his contemporaries to shape the state machinery to work for individual identity rather than herd-identity. He warns the people that they should not wait too long to act. If they act immediately they will no more be blind and they will have a clear vision of their identity. But if they delay action it will be impossible for them to extricate individual man from the conforming herd.

Better prepare the state that you possess

More to the focus of your sightlessness.

So doing, you may achieve to see,

With eyes not then afraid to look at me,

How even the blind, having resumed their senses,

May seize again their few lost evidences

Of an identity. (270-76)

Robinson's citizen in a democratic society is the actualization of Auden's "Unknown Citizen" (1940). His individual identity has been completely submerged in his herd identity so that his self alienation is absolute.

The ten poems evaluated in this chapter throw light on Robinson's views regarding alienation. He traces modern man's alienation to the existing social ideology which has been shaped by the philosophy of materialism. The materialistic culture has been instrumental in fostering conformity through the strategy of normalization. Those who conform to the herd are categorized as the normal and those oppose conformity are categorized as the abnormal. The fear of social alienation compels the majority in western society to conform. Their normalcy is characterized by their conformity to the herd and does not allude to mental

health. In effect they are victims of self-alienation which results in a divided personality and a lack of realization of the self. In the long run symptoms of mental abnormality are visible and they are incapable of meaningful relationships. The plight of the nonconforming minority is worse as they are socially alienated. Their nonconformity makes them a threat to the authority who wields power and hence they are marginalized and deprived of their voice. Robinson took up the cause of the voiceless nonconformist and exposed the power manipulations in society which resulted in the suppression of individual freedom and the nurturing of a herd identity.