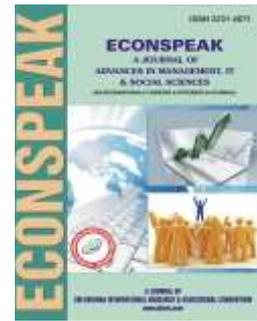




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Sillitoe's THE OPEN DOOR - Door to Immortality

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Abstract:

Alan Sillitoe, one of the most prolific English writers of the 20th Century, acquired the image of 'angry young man' through the portrayal of his characters who expressed anguish and hatred for the class conscious English society. Drawing most of his protagonists from the working class background, Sillitoe provides a canvas for them to express their passion for life and hatred for the society that had different yardsticks in its treatment to different people. The Police, the polity, the inequality in the society all get cursed by the protagonists who express their hatred and disillusionment. However, after 1985, the works of Sillitoe show their protagonists with shifting attitude. They look more docile, more accommodative and less fierce in their expression of anger and animosity. The Open Door is a novel which shows the protagonist trying for regeneration through remorse and starts revealing the human side of his personality.

Alan Sillitoe is a well known name in the 20th century literary arena. A British writer, Sillitoe was born on 4th March, 1928 in Nottingham, in a working class family. Right from childhood, he was exposed to poverty, troubles and turmoil that were offered by a merciless society that religiously observed class in all its manifestations.

Sillitoe was a prolific writer with more than 20 novels, a trilogy, poems, screen plays, a novella, short stories, essays, plays, travelogues, compilations and an autobiography. He was at his creative best till he died in the year 2010. Starting with his first novel **Saturday Night and Sunday Morning** in 1958 and immediately the next year the story "The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner", Sillitoe became an instant success and a name to

reckon with. Many awards and accolades came his way and won widespread appreciation for his creativity, his angry young man image, the portrayal of Nottingham, the frustration of the working class in his most prolific career spanning more than six decades.

As a young man Sillitoe was a school drop-out as he was forced by the poverty and squalor at home. Sillitoe joined factory as a 14 year old boy and his autobiography **Life Without Armour** (1995) is an excellent account of life at Nottingham and its class struggles.

He served the RAF during the Second World War and his life in Malaya as a wireless operator, made him a victim of TB. 16 months of retreat in the military hospital gave him the opportunity to discover himself and his art. His story “The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner”, positioned him as a writer of acclaim with the Hawthornden Prize conferred on him in 1959. His autobiography **Life Without Armour** (1995) is an extraordinary work that provides an excellent account of his life with the background of Nottingham like Thomas Hardy’s Wessex.

It is interesting to note that Sillitoe’s novels and short stories portray the anguish and frustration of Sillitoe towards the class struggle. The treatment meted out to the factory worker, to the poor and the downtrodden by the administration, police and the people in power all gets a canvas in the literary works of Sillitoe.

In his published works after 1985, Sillitoe talks about realisation, reformation, redemption, retribution and salvation as against frustration, anger, animosity and condemnation in the earlier novels. Sillitoe seems to celebrate work, womanhood and the life that is dedicated to love and sacrifice in the novels published beyond the year 1985. Sillitoe seems to come to grips with his anger and animosity towards life and the society and his protagonists seem to understand that the other finer aspects of life are also worth noticing.

It is with this premise that his novel **The Open Door** (1989) is looked at with its myriad colours and contours of literary finesse.

It is one of the remarkable novels of Sillitoe, which shares a slice of his life. It is a sequel to his earlier novel **Key to the Door** that takes up Brian Seaton’s life exactly after a gap of twenty-eight years, extending the story of Brian Seaton. **Key to the Door** revolves round the life of Brian Seaton, his early childhood, poverty, family frictions, his grandparents -the Mertons, his marriage with Pauline and finally his encounter with a Communist guerrilla in the Malayan Jungles that shatters his personality in more ways

than one. **The Open Door** begins with the return of Brian to Nottingham on a short stint of leave, as a dockside medical official withholds his 'demob' to 'cure' him of his 'spotted lung'

Sillitoe's favourite background Nottingham forms the backdrop for the early childhood and adolescence of Brain, and the verve of Nottingham seems to go into his 'making-up'. One may be reminded of his errands to scap for tips on the heaps of rubbish, his innocent thieving with his cousin Bert, and the early sexual encounters, which also bring him to marry Pauline as portrayed in the earlier novel. Brain seems to be a product of the times and the poverty that he experiences because of his father's unemployment. He is forced to join the bicycle factory at fourteen and the poverty at home drives his mother to prostitution, 'to bring something to the dining table'. Brain's belief in the physical self appears to be immense and imminent because of his job at the factory and his physical prowess more often than not, proved by his sexual exploits facilitated by his blithe body. Brain is rendered a 'physical being' prone to the prick of the flesh and blood given to fun and frolic. In his own words all that he aspires for is. "Fun and games Orgasms".¹

Sillitoe strikes the keynote with the portrayal of the dilemma in the mind of Brain about his transformation. Brain harps on the idea of the 'invisible self' (p.1) that accompanies him to England. Sillitoe deftly employs a separate register to describe the attitude of Brain after his return from Malaya. The reader may find a good lot of difference between the two novels **Key to the Door** and **The Open Door**, though both record the life of Brian Seaton as a protagonist. One may find the difference not just in the composition of the novel, but its treatment of change in the 'changing' personally of Brain and one may also notice that this change is in symmetry with the change matching with the artistry and maturity of its writer too. The style of Sillitoe is crude and unsophisticated in pages and pages that he produced in the earlier novels, whereas in **The Open Door**, Sillitoe looks at his artistic best in the composition of the latter novels. He appears to be mature and philosophic in his treatment of life and appears serious in his emphasis on individual reformation and the therapeutic effects of art, culture and love. The novel **The Open Door** shows Sillitoe as a master storyteller, spinning out tales not for mere entertainment, but with a purpose. It is composed with more sophistication and grace to suit the life of Brain after his return as a new being.

Brain harps on the idea of a sweeping change that has overtaken him, as he awaits the demob. The moment he gets down the troopship for the dockside medical, he attempts a lot to

¹ Alan Sillitoe, **The Open Door**, (London, Grafton Books, 1989) 278.

hint at the transformation of his body, mind and soul. He wonders that he “left England one person and came back another” (p.1). His two-year stint in Malaya as a radio operator seems to leave an indelible impact on him that he becomes conscious of such an invisible self. The moment sets his foot in Nottingham-such a consciousness appears to push him in to a nostalgic reverie and retrieval of the past. He assures himself that he would never feel the ‘pang of recognition (p.6) and allows himself to pride on the self that is separated by a distance of twenty thousand miles and two years. He realizes that such a long gap has distanced him from his life, his parents, his old self so much so that nothing can merge the past and the present. One may find Brain in a peculiar predicament as he realizes that he had distanced himself beyond recognition from an obscure past, a reluctant future, a wife that he had blundered into and a kid that he had never wanted. He realises that remoteness has set in terribly in every aspect of his life.

The novel is more gripping and appeals to the senses of the reader as Sillitoe takes up the human emotions and the basic traits in an individual for portrayal. Brain gets at the real change in him when he is informed of his disease and the infection in his lungs that gave ‘a leopard of an X-ray’ (p.75). he is informed that Tuberculosis has played spoilt sport with his lungs and his lungs now look like a leopard’s body. Brain is filled with the feeling of self-pity caused by the betrayal of his body that had been a source of pride and recognition for him.

The novel is remarkable for its delineation of the predicament of a man as he comes closest to mortality. Disease and the fear of death seem to eternally grip the human consciousness and throw him at the mercy of the immaculate spirit that seems to be the only source of relief. **The Open Door** records the struggle of the human will that is bogged down by hubris, selfishness, complexities, sexual promiscuity and purposeless life. It is the story of Brain’s escape from purposelessness to purpose, from ‘disease’ to ‘cure’, and from mortality to immortality.

Brain comes close with four women who seem to cause the inevitable transformation. His wife Pauline deserts him because of his infection and Rachel, a blond orderly at the hospital deserts him for obvious reasons. Brain leaves Lillian in a lurch after the ‘cure’ for which he contributes and Nora Middleton the one-eyed nurse at the Wroughton Military Hospital cures him of his disease and walks out of his life for his betrayal.

All the characters being the victims of tortured lives, and complexities, present Sillitoe, an opportunity to portray life in all its gross manifestations. All seem to be hit by the fear of 'disease; and 'death' or the victims marred or bereaved by death. Sillitoe seems to capture the predicament of the modern man who is easily prone to the ills of his own passions and dichotomy.

A thorough study of the novels of Sillitoe reveals that his characters are raw appetite-full of passion and willing victims of confusion. Sillitoe's protagonists also seem to yearn for an escape from the otherwise torrid life. They yearn to escape from oppression, anguished marriage, tortured life and mutilated consciousness. One may also find his protagonists attempting to escape from their own past. They appear to be eternal questers in search of identity and belongingness. Brain Seaton provides Sillitoe an opportunity to portray life from close quarters, as he stands at a null point and 'allows to die and take birth into a newself'. It appears to be symbolic of his transformation into a new being capable of creativity, out of a life that puts him in a precarious condition-vacillating between thought and action, confusion and realization, body and soul and between death and immortality.

A keen reader can never miss the body over mind dilemma that Brain suffers all through the novel. He suffers from the conflict as he is informed of his lungs scarred by tubercles and he is consigned to a sanatorium. The psyche of Brain becomes a battleground for the inner conflict that rips apart his personality, his pride and the myths that he had entertained of his body. Brain experiences brief relief whenever he toys with the idea of a possibility of misplaced x-rays plates, but the fear of the possible death and the agony of his disappearance from the world seem to terribly haunt him. Once being proud of his blithe and able body, Brain is filled with a feeling of guilt and blames his body for betraying his confidence.

It is interesting to note that the recollection of the past by Brain as he recollects the glory of his past where his physical self had thrived on pleasure, performance, mischief, and malice. His physical prowess as a young man, his street flights, his military service and the grand achievement of scaling the Gunong Barat besides the innumerable sexual encounters remind him of his strength and he gets himself into a dilemma whether to believe the disease or not. It is interesting to note Brain's estimation of his body on his performance scale during his sexual encounters with Rachel and Nora at the hospital. He proudly tells himself that he had "enough for more than one person"(p.113). Corporal Knotman concurs with the idea of

Brain as he too looks at a human being as a physical being and measures the achievement in life through physical performance. He opines that the Mount Gunong Barat was for him 'a pimple on a giraffe's left testicle' (p.27).

Brain's hubris receives a jolt as he returns to the hospital after the lapse of the home leave when he is put in a wheel chair, to be carried to a solitary ward. He seems to be haunted by the feeling of loneliness and looks at himself as a pariah incapable of regeneration, and his disease as a proof positive of his sin and wretched life. Once he is put in the wheel chair, his ego is punctured beyond repair and his myth about the body is shattered. His world turns topsy-turvy with his confinement in the hospital:

The world had turned upside down, the gyroscopic axis
of the universe unstuck, and he was helpless to right it²

Sillitoe artistically portrays the inner conflict of Brain Seaton through the deft employment of stream of consciousness and the third person point of view. Brain shows himself a willing victim of dichotomy and allows himself on an endless swamp of sexual promiscuity. He suffers from inferiority complex and in spite of a feeling of repentance, he will assuage himself and he indulges in a continuous justification of his deeds. He considers himself an able '*horse de combat*', but his solitary bed and the fooling of loneliness, fear of death and the pangs of betrayal of his wife Pauline, seems to shake off his pride in body.

Brain seems to feel that he is let down by the body which has pushed him towards death. He considers his predicament to that of Daniel in the Bible, and his disease pleurisy as a lion waiting to devour him. Daniel is put into the lion's den for presenting his supplications to the God against the decree, and the king next day, finds Daniel delivered by the Lord for his love and faith. Brain too intends to wait for an appropriate moment in life that will deliver him from the guilt, loneliness and the agony of living like a leper. He seems to suffer from self-pity and is gripped by paranoia. In his attempts to tell himself that he was sane, alive and kicking he starts self-talks and paces up and down the ward to tell himself that his body was still at his disposal. The reader can find Brain's preoccupation with the 'body and spirit conflict', as he indulges in much soul-searching only to realize that he had reached a cul-de-sac.

² The Open Door, 86

With a conscious struggle between a sea of gulf between his ‘knowing’ and ‘not-knowing’ between ambition and achievement, between body and spirit, between life and death, Sillitoe artistically portrays the mental ‘growing-up’ of Brain. The idea that his body has defeated him, renews again and again and Brain blames his body and soul for making him an invalid confined to a sick bed. He feels that his body “had betrayed him, and his spirit was unable to defeat the force that kept him blinded.”³ He considers himself a blind man groping in eternal darkness. The images of disease and death and the image of Aunt Lydia’s bloke who used to walk up the lane who was dying every inch and every moment from TB haunt him. His soul searching blames his body where as his ‘will’ finds the spirit responsible for the chaos. His inner psyche becomes a battle ground for the conflict between body and spirit. He finds his,

... body and mind locked in futile attrition, blaming each other for the disaster that had pole-axed him. He had fallen from an enormous height, couldn’t understand, struggled to discern cause and effect even while maneuvering the parachute of hope to land in the green comb of the Wiltshire hills.⁴

Brain faced with the pangs of guilt, suffering of the dread of the disease and death, inferiority complex and loneliness, tries his best to escape into the world of dichotomy. He finds the method of living with a split personality as a safe way to stay sane and live in hope. He feels that: “... the only way to stay sane was by being two people, a device which kept you level – headed and easy-going.”⁵

Rachel an orderly at the hospital, comes close to Brain and returns him the confidence, hope and morale. In spite of his illness, she indulges in a sexual affair with him, which seems to come in handy to avoid the boredom and feeling of loneliness. Rachel too seems to come from the world of mutilated consciousness. The reader can find Rachel as a product of the world of tension, anxiety and agony. She appears to be part and parcel of that society which had been deprived of its complete development. She too appears to be a victim of her own dichotomy. She makes many stories and creates a lot of incidents, which relieve her of her agony, and in her stories she feigns a lewd uncle with an eye on her. She is bereaved by the death of her father, as she is obsessed with the idea of her father who had

³ **The Open Door**, 98.

⁴ **The Open Door**, 63

⁵ *Ibid.* 83

died of tuberculosis. She invents many stories that are lies as much as the stories of Brian's heroic exploits in the jungles, which Brian narrates her in the hospital.

It is interesting to note that dichotomy, split and vacillation seems to be the fundamental traits of Brian's personality as he suffers from such traits till the very end. In a perplexing state of confusion, Brian tries to escape either through sexual encounters or through writing, which seems to diffuse his boredom, loneliness and fear of death. He indulges in mad sexual pursuit till he realizes that writing is a form of vent to his heart's outpourings on a paper can come in handy for him to relieve himself from his curious predicament.

Sillitoe exploits the stream of consciousness technique to bring out the inner turmoil of Brian when he looks at his loneliness as a punishment for the deeds of his physical being. As he realizes that the "division was absolute and he did not know which half he wanted, or whether he would be able to get it if he did know" (p.324), he blames himself for allowing such a severe drift from the world, from home, from his wife and son, from the country and from his own self. His mind switched in a locked of consciousness, becomes an impenetrable goal where no one could enter to rescue him. He realizes that he had achieved nothing, endeared no one, and his youth was carelessly spent without much concern for life and spirit. He seems to realize that he had lead life like an automaton with utter disregard for spirit and once the realization comes, he is full of hatred for himself:

From fourteen to twenty-one the key-to-the door had been work, eat, sleep, enjoy yourself, but there should have been more than that, because everything he hadn't learned pressed like pitted buckshot against his lungs. His attitude to the truth had been that he did not believe it, and everyone around thought the same, because it was only way to protect yourself from the world.⁶

It is interesting to note that Sillitoe is a great inventor of characters besides being a good storyteller. The plot is so well knit that the scheme of the novel makes itself clear bit by bit as one goes through page after page. Brian's loneliness drives him to soul searching, which makes him arrive at a grand emptiness of his own psyche. Once he comes face to face with the vacuity in life, he intends to go on a quest for fulfillment of which he had no clue.

⁶ The Open Door, 37

He is deprived of the key to open the door to achieve clearer consciousness and goes on an endless quest for something “without knowing that he craved.” (p. 60). Peter **Granby in Out of the Whirlpool** gets baffled once he is shown a way out of the world of Eileen as he wonders why there was emptiness in his life, even though he had everything. Peter wonders as to what holds the key to unlock the emptiness.

He had money in his pocket, clothes on his back, and
wasn't hungry. What more could you want?⁷

A majority of the protagonists of Sillitoe seems to be ‘questers’. More often than not, they go in search of their own ‘self’. They seem to make attempts to get at the core and contours of the psyche through sexual encounters. They indulge in a mad sexual pursuit, which they confess is intended at the understanding of the person with whom they place their love and in turn attempt to know or understand their own ‘self’. It is interesting to note that such attempts always end in frustration. One may analyse the whys and wherefores for such a frustration if one looks at the nature of their affairs. Unlatched from each other, the protagonist indulges in a passionate encounter with his beloved as a means to understand her, but in turn they end up with mutual distrust and frustration. The absence of love seems to separate them so much, that they go on a tour-de-force of sexual imagination and shut out the emotional side of the affair. They end up with sexual gratification and find that their attempt has proved futile to get at the ‘consciousness’ of each other.

Brain Seaton being no exception to this phenomenon, gets Pauline pregnant and the affair ends up in a marriage that is mostly ‘forceput’. He begets a child and leaves Pauline to her fate by deserting her as he goes to Malaya. In the novel, one may find a strange absence of intimacy and love between Brain and his wife Pauline. She also questions repeatedly as to why he had to leave her in lurch just after their marriage. After a hurried return of Brian and a soldier coupling, Paulien quietly disappears from the life of Brian, as she is averse to expose her infant child to the infectious environment of a sanatorium. Brain is quick to recognize her fear of the ‘infection’ as she kisses him, and disappoints her on the same pretext.

Rachel the young orderly at the hospital comes close to Brain as she too is full of passion and he is confused in her conception of life, fulfillment and her search for self – consciousness. For Brain when he comes close to Rachel, “he finds that she did not have a

⁷ Alan Sillitoe, **Out of the Whirlpool** (London, Hutchinson, 1987), 38.

face but a countenance”⁹. Though he fails to establish a long lasting love affair with her, he observes that their encounters had “produced mystifyingly good results” (p. 114), on his failing health. Rachel is a bundle of lies with a consciousness as brittle as that of Brian. She always talked about her dead father and narrated stories of her uncle who was lewd and had an eye on her. Rachel too indulges in mad sexual pursuit as part of her attempts to understand herself. When she fails to achieve such a thing through sex she intends to meet Brian’s wife: “To get to know you a bit more” (116). Such intentions of Rachel make it clear that she craves to understand Brian and her attempts to get to know him through physical union had proved futile.

Sister Middleton is a dedicated nurse and a strict disciplinarian, at the Wroughton hospital. She is looked at as a shrewd and dedicated nurse to her profession. Brian gets attracted towards the one-eyed nurse, but is checked by her many times. Rachel is shifted to a different ward as Brian suspects that Sister Middleton had a hand in the transfer, as she had become aware of their affair. With the disappearance of Rachel, Brian gets an opportunity to get at the other side of Nora, as Sister Middleton prefers to be addressed by Brian. Brian’s passion for books, his looks full of raw appetite, his recklessness and his passion for life endear him to Nora, as she exposes the other side of her personality. She treats and soothes him to provide relief and health. As Nora comes close to him his craving to understand her begins and he seems to assure himself that it was all part of his love as Pauline and Rachel come to his mind.

Was that love? It was all he had wanted, nothing else
in life, but would he be so infatuated if he got to know
everything about her? With Pauline there’d been so
little to know he hadn’t ever been jealous when she
packed him in and went off with someone else”⁸.

The reader may understand that Brian’s definition of love and infatuation border on confusion, and his conclusion that sexual gratification gives him complete knowledge of a

⁸ Alan Sillitoe. **The Open Door**, (London, Grafton Books, 1989) 153.

particular individual seems to be part of such a grand confusion. Undoubtedly one may say that Brian's craving is for love and belongingness. He seems to crave for belongingness which had been denied to him by his blinding passion and a will that was blinded by hubris.

Nora Middleton gets close to Brian as they meet outside the hospital; each busy in the enjoyment of nature in their own style. Nora once looked at as a symbol of care and love with a healing touch, allows Brian to explore the passionate side of her femininity and appears to enjoy her predicament as "being an adulteress" (167). Brian indulges in sexual encounters with Nora, which he assures himself as provoked by love and his attempts to understand her but in every encounter he ends up as an automaton.

... empty of thought, the four-stroke cycle pistoning on
and on until he was satisfied.⁹

Nora Middleton offers an impregnable personality with her seriousness and callous indifference towards Brian, but once he gets an opportunity to explore her personality, he ends up exploring her nakedness like a blind man exploring the contours of a map. He wonders if ever the real Nora exists as he attempts to understand her first and then get to know himself. In his futile attempts to relieve himself of boredom, loneliness and the fear of death and his attempts to understand his own self, he tumbles upon a method which seems to offer him solace and create mystifyingly good results. He realizes that by indulging in creative writing he could achieve a status for which he had aspired and envied. He thinks of finally writing about Nora as a means to understand her, as he realizes that "at the moment he could only write about people he didn't know". (p. 311). It is interesting to note that Brian indulges in a meaningless narrative on his pointless expedition to Gunong Barat. To escape from the ineradicable self, his commissions and omissions, the justice that he had perpetrated, he indulges in writing about an account of "progress towards a summit never reached" (p. 64), which is recorded in the sixth chapter of the novel. One may observe that such a narrative is quite out of place and has little meaning in the conditions in which he lived. Even Albert Handley in **The Flame of Life**¹⁰ resorts to painting, drawing from his own life's defeating experiences. Painting seems to become a form of vent to his suffering which otherwise will drive him to violence.

⁹ Ibid. 282

¹⁰ Alan Sillitoe, **The Flame of Life**, (London, W.H. Allen, 1979)

Brian's attempts to explore Nora result in a sexual encounter, but to his utter loss of hope, he fails to attain a merger of the two 'dichotomous' and opposing selves in him as he finds dichotomy even in Nora. Preoccupied with her abundant nakedness, he finds two identities in Nora:

...one dressed, the other naked. Clothes made her different from other people, but when she was nude, she was as raw as anyone else. The love hovered, was not and found again, between dressed and nakedness. He found love by tracing her form like a blind man mesmerizing a relief map in order to find his way to safety.¹¹

His attempts to explore her seem to end in passionate frustration as he gets preoccupied with her nakedness. He looks at the hidden femininity in her and succeeds to explore the contours of her body, but not the core and contours of her psyche. Brian looks at the French letters as 'postage stamps for letters to paradise' (p. 269) and with a condom he intends to 'have a go' at any girl that he met on the pavement.

Nora Middleton too presents herself as a victim of dichotomy and her perceptions appear too much narrowed by the environment of death. She too is bereaved by the death of her father who was a vicar busy in writing sermons than taking care of his five girls. She is confused in her attitude towards her father with half love and half hatred. Her loss of one eye and the death of her father seem to restrict her natural growth. Being elder to Brian by ten years, she exhibits more firmness of mind and alertness except in the matters of passion and gratification of sex. As Brian assures himself of his love for her, she too tells herself and repeats the question if he would marry her but she finally walks out his life. It is interesting to note that Nora attains like knowledge that "... even when they were in bed... they were in capable of a complete meeting" (p. 166) but encouraged by the mire of mutually supporting subterfuge the affair seems to continue.

During his return to Nottingham, Brian meets Lillian Verney who suffered from TB. His mother felt that the consumption seems to join them together, and she mounts pressure on him to pay a visit so her room that stank of paraffin and medicines. Lillian is again a victim of the fear of death and lives in the memories of her father who had died of TB. Lillian is a

¹¹ The Open Door, 167

perfect example of life that has not been allowed a proper development and a fuller contact with life. Her world is a confined bed, which stank of disease and paraffin. It is interesting to observe that Lillian lived in her own world completely cut off from the external world except through a few insinuations that penetrated her cardboard wall from the adjoining street. She narrates many stories, which are based on her insinuations collected from the street-side voices and noise, which Brian later realizes as falsehood.

Lillian is an imaginative girl who visualized the world by putting ‘two and two together (p. 198) and her knowledge of the world seems to be limited to the meaningless clatter from the outside world, and through the books that her mother occasionally brought for her. Brian tries to boost her morale and find some solace for her because of the common ailment. Brian finds not a patient in Lillian but a woman who aspires for the natural fulfillment in life. He gets involved in a physical encounter while he attempts to comfort her during a fit of terrible cough. Devoid of any ‘make-up’ Lillian reveals ‘more of a woman’ in her to Brian. The comfort and warmth that she derives through her acquaintance with Brian seem to ‘cure’ her of her disease and soon Brian makes her a normal human being able to come to the open and look at life in all its various multitudes.

It is ironic that Lillian too is no exception to the complexities that haunt the modern human being. She gets herself latched on to Brian when he forces his way into her life at a time when she seems to need the support most. She develops passion for life from the otherwise usual distaste of her towards life and her acceptance of death gets dwindled. In her attempts to understand Brian and in turn herself, she wonders: “Why I was born me, and not another person” (p. 210) and such words seem to tell about her growing interest in life.

It is interesting to observe the conflict in Brian as he pulls Lillian into his world to passion and mindless promiscuity. He wonders if any God would come to her rescue “if he let himself go where his body was pulling him” (p. 211). It is also interesting to observe that a marked change takes place in the attitude of Brian in his sexual encounters with Lillian when compared to his encounters with Pauline, Rachel and Nora. He is more sympathetic towards Lillian perhaps provoked by empathy, being aware of the suffering of a patient inching towards death. It is interesting to observe that Brian develops antipathy towards his passion and thinks of words like sin and atonement. He intends to escape from the scene of temptation as he realizes that it would be sin to pull Lillian into his world of passion.

... wanted to wrench himself free, because it was against every human law to be committing the awful sin of deception with someone like her, for which there could be no atonement.”¹²

But Brian completes the act that possibly seems to ‘cure’ Lillian of her disease. It is also interesting to observe the continuous outpourings of Lillian to her heart’s content, as they indulge in a passionate encounter. A torrent of words pour out of her mouth as she is pushed into a dream like state. During the passionate encounter talks about her childhood, her loving father, roundabouts at the Goose Fair, her anguish at the death of her father, which ended in a eruption of red lava from his mouth because of TB. The long purgatorial speech seems to cure her of her deep psychological malignity and she purges herself of her complexities to become one with the world.

One of the hallmark features of Sillitoe’s protagonists seems to be that they all look at themselves as physical beings. Even their creator Sillitoe himself entertained such an idea at a juncture in his life. In his autobiography **Life without Armour** he confesses that: I had always seen myself as a physical being...¹³

Brian gets preoccupied with the feeling of giving complete sexual satisfaction and attains orgasm, which he looks at as a scale to measure his physical strength, and thereby regain the pride. He is proud of his backbone, which melts into a fiery fire of storm that ‘flushes’ and ‘floods’ in the form of his orgasm and ejaculation. The animal side in him shuts out his concern for the emotional necessities of his partners and ends up in passionate frustration; than passionate combining of the consciousness for which he indulges in an encounter. As he indulges in a sexual encounter with Nora he becomes a four stroke engine pistoning mindlessly and observes that it results in an orgasm as Nora:

.... came with such intensity that even the coast of
France must have heard the sound of love pulling his
Backbone into flight.¹⁴

¹² **The Open Door**, 217

¹³ Alan Sillitoe, **Life Without Armour**, (London: Harper Collins, 1995) 237

¹⁴ Op. Cit. 175.

It is interesting to note that Brian's encounters with Nora too end in instinct, perversity, and desire. One may note that 'a blindness to her feelings or opinions led him accurately on, to wrench and squeeze and kiss and finger all respectability out of her so that she would end up being her fundamental self and for a few minutes at least belong to him (p. 174). He tells himself that Nora loved it that way when he had his 'backbone melting into liquid fire' (p. 316) which flushed and cleaned her out.

Sillitoe's protagonists indulge in a mindless thinking to prolong the sexual act as what they call 'to hold it for long (passim). Sillitoe deftly employs geographical imagery to delineate such mindless thinking, which his characters indulge in, as they come in physical contact. His protagonists' journey through the imaginary landscape is described by him through the geographical imagery, as they seek, search and attempt to belong, but end up in frustration and settle down for an intense orgasm which leaves them shuddering, sweating and groping for more. The absence of strong bond of love seems to separate them so much that no amount of effort can bring them together. Peter in **Out of the Whirlpool** indulges in a sexual encounter with Eileen but finds him very much away from her and that he was rarely responsible for the journeys on which she went on. They go on a "... trip around the world, from the Poles to Tropics... in whirlpool or Milky Way" (p.78)

Brian's encounter with Nora Middleton sends him on a tour-de-force of sexual journey:

... he was in the Land of Fire, looking at the Beautiful horizon, exploring the Holy Land, plodding through Bangkok, eating the Sandwich Islands, swimming off Madagascar... round the world... out of alliances formed by something they didn't need to understand.¹⁵

Even with Lillian during an encounter he becomes a passionate animal jabbing at her mindlessly as "knowing nothing about her made him want to be so far in her that they were one being" (p. 22) and mindlessly searches for her as "... where she was, he did not know...." (p. 282).

In the Wroughton Military Hospital Brian undergoes a process called artificial pneumo thorax which involved the chopping of one lung, which he looks at as a "soul

¹⁵ Op.cit.174

murdering procedure” (p. 182). His lung is pushed into quiescence till it was time for another refill, and Brian presents himself as a self pitying youth justifying his sexual encounters with Rachel, Lillian and Nora, and looks at them as his drafts towards self identification. As he comes to know about the suicide of Lillian through his mother’s letter, Brian seems to undergo a process of transformation. His system receives a jolt to the hilt and he becomes a victim of introspection and much repentance. It is interesting to note that as he starts to think of the spirit his preoccupation with the body recedes that seems to be provoked of its betrayal.

Lillian yearns for a satisfying love relationship with Brian, but he leaves her in lurch to reach Nora and Lillian reacts to his desertion by cutting her throat. The letter that brings the pitiful and horrifying end of Lillian becomes a wailing child beneath his pillow and he is pushed into introspection. He gets filled with guilt and repentance and realizes that his relationship with Nora would never lead him towards the open door. He intends to purge himself of sin, guilt, betrayal, purposelessness and promiscuity. He comes to know through the letter that his cousin Bert had played foul with Lillian and she was pregnant of him when she committed suicide.

Sillitoe artistically lays bare the psyche of Brian as he is pushed into a curious state of exhaustion and thoughtlessness. He becomes a vacillating object between the blame and counter blame between his will and spirit. He questions himself if he was in any way better than Bert, whom he considered a rogue, as Bert felt proud for his mindless sex with women of every nationality. Brian looks at Bert as a soulless rascal who had cheated the delicate Lillian and pushed her towards suicide. His will tells him that it is Bert who had committed the sin on Lillian, but his spiritual side argues that he was worse than Bert in his desertion of poor Lillian.

Bert, a close associate of Brian since childhood is a rogue and one may see that he is a selfish idiot who believed in the dictum “love all-forget all”. Bert looks at Brian’s disease as a blessing in disguise as he would be washed by beautiful nurses and would be blessed with good food. Brian who comes to Bert for solace gets frustrated by the idea of Bert which offered him no solace. Bert had once suggested Brian not to marry Pauline when he made her pregnant as he would be “hooked, finished, skewered and knocked” (p. 42). The reader can find that Bert is a hopeless rogue, but Brian is not beyond regeneration though he had implanted Bert in his other side of the personality. As he gets realization he struggles hard to

do away with the Bert's side of his personality and escape from the world of selfishness and callous indifference. It is interesting to observe that Brian recalls Bert, when the guilt of Lillian's death haunts him and his existence becomes impossible because of the feeling of repentance:

Bert could give him lessons in survival, but Brian didn't think you could learn from anyone else. You couldn't help yourself to their flesh, or to their spirit because their spirit didn't fit your flesh and your spirit.¹⁶

He repents his misdeeds, betrayals, selfishness and the deleterious effects of his passion and decides to do away with that side of Bert's personality in him. It is interesting to note that he soon wonders if he could live with such a mutilated consciousness: "because if you cut away part of your flesh you surely would bleed to death". (p. 107). But Brian decides to cut the animal in him and it is interesting to note that he becomes a 'leaking vessel' with the death of Lillian. He weeps because of his role in the death of Lillian and the shame makes him feel sorry for the sin, as tears roll down the cheeks "for a delectation of a heart" (p. 349) and to scorch his soul. But he warns himself not to be carried away by sentimental compunctions, and drift out of the world of "some cataclysmic storm, doomed to become an island of himself". (p. 355).

In a delicately portrayed episode, Sillitoe brings out the dichotomy in Brian, through the employment of horse as a symbol to hint at the weaknesses of Brian. Brian's passion and obsession with horse though seems to be provoked by his grandfather Merton, who shod horses, he looks at the horse as symbolic of himself. Mobility being the keyword with him he had always moved away from everything and finally his own spirit. The horse also stands a symbol for his physical prowess and the passionate side of his self. The imagery of horse is exploited to refer at the animal side of Brian. As he sneaks out of the hospital Brian finds a lonely horse which reminds him of his own predicament, his loneliness and his passions. The effect of the symbol heightens when Brian laments a lack of power at his disposal that can turn the horse into something else.

¹⁶ Op.cit.44

Sillitoe seems intent to show that there is no idea, perception or emotion that is not susceptible to art and literature. Brian's realization of his 'self' comes as a rude shock to him and he recognizes a yawning gulf between his thought and action. The dichotomy in his 'self' creates a kind of exhaustion that forces him to indulge in a kind of intellectual masturbation by translating his thoughts into writing, Sillitoe opines that:

A sure qualification for turning into a writer is to grow
up with a divided personality...¹⁷

It is interesting to note that even Brian seems to achieve such a qualification because of his dichotomous personality. The journals maintained in Malaya and RAF hospital actually seem to help him to relieve him of his loneliness and tension. His writings are aimed at self – identification seem to leave a purgatorial effect on a soul that was bogged down by sin, infatuation and cold inhumanity. He confesses that his writings would set him off “on a journey that would tell him who he was, or who anybody else might be” (p. 184). It seems to substitute for the physical passion, and lessen the frustration. Brian suffers from guilt, and the feeling of futility that had been synonymous with his purposeless life. He realizes that he was no more than an animal, given to the instinctive side of his personality being completely blind to the spiritual side. The fear of death haunts him and the futility and emptiness mock at him thus driving him towards purpose and achievement that differs completely from his earlier conception of it.

Brian realizes that his passionate errands have pushed him into deep depth of degradation and an inferno. He concludes that the key to the door remained in spending life for a purpose and a goal. He also realizes that the panacea for his ills lied neither with the sexual gratification, nor with the meaningless search for the unknown but by illuminating the dark recesses of his inner psyche through soul – searching and continuous attempts to correct his lacunae. He resorts to writing, which he looks up to as a soul saving act and looks at France as an Eldarado and decides to move immediately:

Life was too short. He wanted to write a novel. He
was nearly twenty – three, and might be dead before
he was thirty – a vast number of years, away!¹⁸

¹⁷ Alan Sillitoe, **Life Without Armour**, (London: Harper Collins, 1995) 19.

¹⁸ Alan Sillitoe, **The Open Door**, 301

One may look at the attempts of Brian as part of his intended transformation and regeneration. Sillitoe deals with the theme of transformation and individual reformation as he looks at them as the only possible means of rescue for the otherwise dread of the society which was brimming with ills, imperfect institutions, selfishness and utter vacuity. Brain's decision to move to France may be looked at as his condemnation of England because of its mindless conformity and the lying of power in the hands of selfish and mindless rulers. It also may be looked at as his attempts to move away for a change of scene that may refresh his psyche, which was haunted by the memories of Lillian.

It is interesting to observe that the major attribute of Sillitoe's novels seems to be that he treats life as a jungle among all classes of life. Jungle is a powerful and potent imagery exploited successfully and successively in a majority of his novels. Jungle is both a metaphor for the exterior and interior of his protagonists. Jungle and its changing colour, its violent manifestations, and the gripping scents and sights serve as a metaphor for life in all its gross manifestations. The world being full of changing colours, the people who live in it and suffer from tortured lives and mutilated consciousness seems to appeal to Sillitoe as a virtual jungle. Even in **Key to the Door**, the jungle is a metaphor for the ills of the society and even the jungle being the haunt of the terrorists, serves as a symbol for the psyche of Brain haunted by the weeds of passion, selfishness, carelessness and confusion. He realizes that:

The jungle was with him, his comfort and strength. No
matter what accent he spoke in, what he read or

Wrote, a life of rectitude was not for him.¹⁹

Through his conscious attempts to attain regeneration, Brain intends to weed out the jungle of his consciousness and cultivate "the garden, but of the mind" (p.114).

Sillitoe also employs the imagery of a snake and light and darkness to hint at the predicament of Brain. Brain's vision gets restricted as of a snake, as he is blinded by his own preoccupations. A street side astrologer in Ceylon tells Brain that he had snake's eyes, which Brain brushes aside, but later laughs at the idea as he realizes that he suffered from astigmatic view of life. He fails to look at his inner self and being blind to the necessity of the soul, he had lived like a blind man.

¹⁹ **The Open Door**, 325.

One may observe the attempts of Brain to break open of the cocoon of selfishness and vacuity and a world that had hemmed in from all corners. He exploits the gap between thought and action for the purpose of writing. He finds himself locked in the world of Nora, and the world of Lillian that haunt him of guilt and tries to move in to his own world of desire to achieve something. He tries out and out to break open from such a cocoon. He comes across a poem on a paper that he had scribbled that seems to reflect his inner turmoil.

I've got a key to the door
But somebody's altered the lock
The door was made of wood
And now it's turned into rock,
If I don't know where I'm going
Will the door open or not?²⁰

Brain's intention to go ahead towards the Eldorado with the pain and agony of the past intact shows his preparedness to purge himself. He tells himself that his past would be like a stone in the shoe as he allows the "growing process" and to achieve the "clearer consciousness". The loneliness at Queen's Bay comes as a god's gift to Brain that provides an opportunity to indulge in introspection and achieve clearer consciousness, which shows him the open door. Brain puts all his literary output to the consuming flames which devour his letters, stories, poems and the diary that were recorded with the aid of the afflicted old self. It appears to be symbolic of the death of his old self, which he commits to the consuming fire. He construes his writings as the outpourings and etchings of his spotted soul as he burns them to allow the death of the box of tricks on two legs, which he looks at himself. Once the illumination is provided he realizes that there "wasn't a percentage of himself" (p.353), in him as he decides to be 'on his own' (P.328)

The hundred percent pension that is bestowed on him, because of TB comes as a gift of bonanza to make a living. He decides to move out of the slumber to get 'properly awake' (p.320), on a mission to France to establish himself as a writer and make his own life. Once being blind to the Truth, he seems to get the awakening as his mind allows the realization at

²⁰ The Open Door, 128.

an appropriate time, which reminds him of Daniel and his deliverance by God. He realizes that he had “found out the truth when the mind was ready for it” (p.50).

Sillitoe’s long poem “The Rats” aptly mirrors the contemporary England, its vices and mindless conformity for which Brain intends to move away. Brain makes conscious attempts to be a non-rat, and decides to leave England to establish himself with something worthwhile. Sillitoe writes in the poem:

One cannot stay in England
Now that the Rates are there
For whoever stays in England
Gets them in their hair.²¹

The novel ends with the escape of Brain from the world of his own weaknesses, vacuity, purposelessness and sexual promiscuity. He moves towards the open door; towards immortality through creative output –highlighting the ills of the society and to ring in an upheaval of social reformation and individual transformation.

A reading of the novels of Sillitoe reveals that Sillitoe is an artist busy in portraying the contemporary man, caught in the web of a multitude of complexities and his novels seem to hint at a way out of such a status. He shows the modern man as a victim and prisoner of situations that are forced on him by the external society, by Fate and by the mindless polity.

Though he portrays his protagonists as bundle of vices, flaws and weaknesses, all the more sympathises with them as they are degenerated by the cold inhumanity of the society. His protagonists appears to be victims of ravished childhood, anguished marriage, cut-throat competition, inequality and injustice in the society besides the terrible effects of the war and ruthless fighting. He portrays the mutilated soul of the modern man, as it is aghast at the mindless destruction and the innate ability in man to wreak havoc and grand scale demolition of life. Poverty is the quality of his characters that seems to distinguish them from the otherwise unrealistic society. He portrays “People who live and suffer and make up the sum of the anything worth writing about. Though he often occupies himself with the Nottingham background, the sum total of life in his novels appears more general and universal.

²¹ Alan Sillitoe, “The Rats”, **Every day of the Week**, (London: W.H. Allen, 1987), 93

Sillitoe's views on various things too have undergone enormous change, which reflect on the portrayal of Brain in **The Open Door**. One may observe that though Brain comes from a working class background, he is not violent and vociferous in his antipathy and the criticism of the upper class. One may find a total transformation in Brain on various issues when compared to his ideas in **Key to the Door**.

Sillitoe capture the social, political and cultural aspects of England during 1948-1950 as Brain returns from Malaya against the background of the earlier times. Brain observes that the things have either changed or improved in England after his return from Malaya. Brain's father a violent man in **Key to the Door** is portrayed as a mild character, as he had enough to eat, drink and enjoy life in peace, though not without some grievance. England was still on rations and Brain's father Harold collected his doll on Thursdays. Though the Government boasted of enough supplies through rations, Brain's mother-in-law Mullinder gives an apt picture of the situation.

...never enough. We're not too bad off for money, but

I can't understand why the war's bin over three years.

I reckon this gov'ment likes keeping us on coupons.

Sillitoe seems to deftly mirror the plight of the people in England after the two World Wars. The shattered dream of the people who voted for the Labour Government in the hope of equality and eradication of poverty is hinted at many times in his novels. Ne may observe Brain heckling at the government and also making fun of Mrs. Mullinder and Nora for voting the Labour Party to power. Rationing the black market thrived so much so that the people were disheartened and had lost confidence in the political set up itself. Corporal Knotman's words are too tempting to quote as they aptly mirror the natural reaction of the people at the miserable failure of the government.

I wouldn't stay in his rundown country. Rationing, in

1949! What kind of socialism's that? You're living

under a dictatorship. The socialism of surfeit's what I

believe in. To everyman according to his wants.²²

The contemporary England is so inextricably intertwined into the plot that Sillitoe's idea becomes clear that the best art is propaganda through novel. **The Open Door**. Brain realizes on the troopship his way back home, that the war was hardly over as he goes through a newspaper. He feels sad for the airlift that was in full swing to the war fields and also about the lay-off at the Austin Car Works, which had forced the sixteen thousand factory employees to live in utter poverty. He experiences the scarcity of cigarettes and power shortage plaguing the country inspite of the grand promises made by the Atlee government. Nora expresses her concern that thing "won't get better till we throw this horrid government. Everyone's fed up to the teeth of austerity." (p.163)

The novel is very much different from its earlier predecessor **Key to the Door** and it becomes clear as one looks at Brain's attitude towards the working class, body politic, the Party and the conception of an Utopian world order. Brain is so thoroughly changed after his return from Malaya that the reader is felt to wonder at his maturity and matter – of- factness. One may recollect how Brain in **Key to the Door** expresses his desire for an utopian world order and equality. He hopes for a system where "the wealth of the world should be pooled and divided fairly among those who worked, doctors and labourers, architects and mechanics." But in **The Open Door** he does not believe in such a utopia. He aspires for a change not through a war, or a political change or a revolution, but by "sorcery" (p.191). Brain seems to have got enough worldly wise to realize that a revolution for transformation is a distant dream in a country full of people with pipe smoking complacency.

It is further interesting to note that Brain does not ascribe to the concept of working class in this novel. When two young men Percy and Chuck come to sell books pertaining to Communism and texts of Stalin's speech, he evinces no interest. Brian with enough experience of the war, knowledge of Russian history and the performance of the Labour Party, strongly felt that no party, no ideals nor and 'ism', could change the life at Radford. He seems to feel that one had to work all the life to feed oneself and no party would provide the magic key. He looks at the emptiness and meaninglessness in the writings of the books which were given by Percy and Chuck as they never talked about the worker's lives, their salaries, the machines they worked at, their houses and the quality of life that they lead, but they were full of detailed accounts of the glory of the Party and the grand system and the grand leaders

²² **The Open Door**, 125

under which it functioned. He looks at them as daft when they promise to convert the castle into a worker's rest home. He declares individual liberty and independence, equality and justice and more interestingly the humanity as the ways and means of attaining a system, which works on practical socialism. He rebuffs their tag, when they call him a member of the working class.

It's no use calling me working class, because

I'm not any class. I am only sure I am what

I'm not, and even that doesn't tell me what

I am – nowhere near it.²³ (sic)

Sillitoe strongly felt that any party or political group that does not identify a person as a distinct individual, as it talks of the people as a generalized group or mob. He also believed that a system that identifies an individual as part of any class serves no purpose. With the complete knowledge of Russia, the battles in Manchuria, Abyssinia and Spain, Sillitoe seems to believe that peace on earth for the individual soul was an impossible proposition. He seems to strongly emphasise that no system, no utopia, no government, nor any movement will improve the state of affairs except a conscious attempt by the individual for freedom of will and soul which holds the key to the door.

A through study of the novel makes one believe that Brian is a changed being unlike his working class counterparts in the earlier novels. He neither believes in fighting over class, nor aspires to achieve a berth at the elite. He attempts to find contentment with the pension and does not intend to cross the dividing line as Peter attempts in **Out of the Whirlpool**. He pretty well knew that the life on the otherside was not free from its impoverishment. He does not intend to cross the dividing line lest "he perished from spiritual want." (p. 191).

Sillitoe seems to take an opportunity to mock at the so called posh literary clubs through the Cinder Hill Group led by Tom Boak, a second hand book dealer in Nottingham. After his return from Malaya Brian tumbles his way to the club and tries to get some real encouragement and help through the club, but soon realizes that the group members were not interested in his writing, but evinced keen interest and his x-ray plates, and TB. Wendy, a member of the club calls the club as the 'den of cultural iniquity' and Brian realizes that all

²³ **The Open Door**, 227

that they did was: “Aimless talk.... Because life was too short to be washed by meaningless chatter about writers and writers.” (p. 343)

The club brings Brian face to face with another curious personality Anne Jones, who symbolizes him in his passion, promiscuity and wretched life. It is Anne Jones's episode, which further pushes Brian towards the spirit and spirituality. When she gets nude in an incident at her home and imposes herself on Brian, the blithe body of Brian does not come to his rescue to make love and Brian walks out in frustration attempting to detach himself completely from the concept that the body was supreme.

The Open Door is a remarkable novel, which is composed with much improvement in style, and technique as compared to the earlier novel. Though Sillitoe often intrudes to make extensive commentaries, which appear detrimental in the understanding of the novel, it is interesting to observe a noticeable shift in the focus of Sillitoe on various things as already discussed. Sillitoe exploits the Nottingham accent to his advantage to bring in the social, political and mental status of a character. Back on the troopships Brian gets back the taste of his 'lingo' but the posh tongue of the medical officer comes as a surprise that inspires such a tongue in him. Sillitoe employs separate registers for different characters. Nora spells the term as 'government' where as Harold, Mrs. Mullinder, Vera and a farmer at the Queen's Bay employ the term 'guv'ment' for expressing the same idea, reflecting their social, educational and cultural background.

Sillitoe's opinions on matters of class, socialism, marriage, sex and individual; all seem to undergo a curious change. He appears more matured and philosophic. He seems to be more artistic in his portrayal of characters and the composition of the plot. The rich symbols and imagery are already explicated in course of the discussion and it is interesting to note that even Nottingham becomes less diffused in the novel when compared to his earlier novels. The focus shifts from Malaya to Nottingham, from Nottingham to Berkshire and Wroughton hospital, and from Nottingham to France. Though Sillitoe was often charged of being obsessed with Nottingham and the working – class life, **The Open Door** proves his ability to deal with life that is general, universal and multitudinous, irrespective of class and colour.

The Open Door is an autobiographical novel that seems to emphasise Sillitoe's faith that everything written in fiction. A majority of experiences, incidents and persons in the actual life of Sillitoe during his stay in Nottingham, his service in Malaya, his ascent of the

Kedah Peak, his experiences in the Malayan jungles, all seem to go into the making up of the novel. Sillitoe is often charged of being auto – biographical, but the simple biographical matrix of his life in Nottingham, factory, national service, Malaya, TB and innumerable sexual encounters, seem to undergo a curious transformation and appear fit subject, worth writing about. In the hands of Sillitoe such simple autobiographical material becomes a broad and exclusive subject matter to be composed into a complex and highly sophisticated novel.

It is interesting to note that Sillitoe believed in the possible regeneration of man. He did not believe in pasting a cataclysmic end to his novels. More often that not his protagonists seize the first opportunity to correct their lives. Though Sillitoe is charged of giving surprise twists and too quick denouement that seem unnatural, one may say that his protagonist's preparedness to learn quick lessons seem to bring the too quick shifts and surprise twists. Arthur at the first opportunity learns to lead a positive life in **Saturday Night and Sunday Morning** and decides to marry Doreen. Even in **The Death of William Posters**, Frank Dawley seems to undergo a curious transformation, the moment he sets his foot in the war front on the Algerian Moroccan border. He decides to dedicate his life for the freedom struggle in Abyssinia and help the FLN. Peter Granby in **Out of the Whirlpool** holds the hand of Violet to be lead into light. Brian Seaton's transformation does not come as a shock to the reader but it is carefully built into the plot and comes and a gradual 'development'. Sillitoe truly presents himself as a master craftsman spinning tales for not mere entertainment, but to hint at the possible regeneration of man, to portray the social ills and to emphasise the need for individual transformation and social reformation.

The Open Door appears to be the story of Brian's journey from mortal fear to immortal freedom, and from mortality to immortality through his career as a writer. He moves from a grand dichotomy and spilt to grand unification of the body, mind and soul, from a being groping in darkness to an enlightened soul. It is his spectacular transformation from a man of monumental ego to mortification, from mammoth temptation to mollification. Once the door is open, and the effulgent light illuminates the path, he decides to walk unhindered. Though his unsubmitting will tries to divert him to the very end, as he feels eerie, he proceeds with courage towards the Eldarado.

Brian Morton opines that Sillitoe is a great artist in spite of his preoccupation with Nottingham, autobiographical matrix, and his obsession with the working class life. Morton considers **The Open Door** as a great achievement as it captures the shifting concerns of

Sillitoe and his flowering artistry. He praises the attempts of Sillitoe for treating the narrative instinct in man as a defence against violence and loss. He opines:

The Open Door is an extraordinary, almost symphonic development of deceptively familiar materials, and confirms his (Sillitoe's) standing as one of Britain's most powerful and sophisticated fiction writers.²⁴

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²⁴ Brian Morton, "Coming Closer to Morality", **The Times Literary Supplement**, 7 April 1989, 362.