E. M. FORSTER AND VIRGINIA WOOLF : NOVELISTS AS CRITICS

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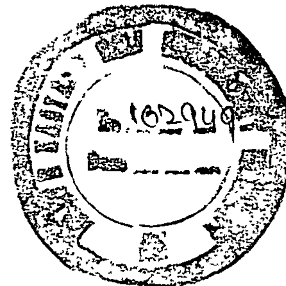

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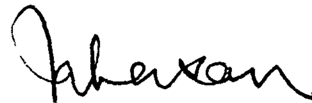

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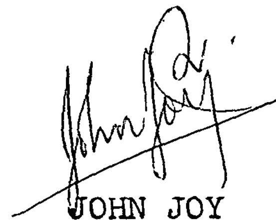

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

INTRODUCTION

This work is meant to throw light on the importance of E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf as literary critics, more particularly as fiction critics. Though much attention has been paid to their novels, and their reputation as modern novelists is firmly established, the importance of their critical views, more particularly on the novel, has not been fully established yet. Many books have been written on Virginia Woolf's novels. Joan Bennett's Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist and A.D. Moody's Virginia Woolf deserve special mention. But except for Mark Goldman's remarkable work, Virginia Woolf as Literary Critic no other significant book-length study of Woolf's criticism exists. Bennett has only a short chapter on the criticism, and the other critics of Woolf only incidentally refer to Woolf's critical views while discussing her novels. Forster's criticism too has drawn only very meagre attention from his critics. No book has yet been written on his views as a critic. Summary studies of his criticism can be found in two articles: Donald Watt's "Artist as Horseman: The Unity of Forster's Criticism" and Frederiick McDowell's "E.M. Forster's Theory of Literature." This work is much indebted to these articles for providing directions to a study of Forster as literary critic.

Both Woolf and Forster were primarily novelists. Even in their critical works their main concern was for the genre

which they practised. They are not critics in the orthodox sense of the term, in the sense in which F.R. Leavis and I.A. Richards or even Percy Lubbock are critics. They are not genuinely concerned with any general problem in art. Their views were influenced by the particular vocation they had chosen and the particular problems they faced as novelists of the modern age. Consequently there are few generalisations in their critical works. Though the critical essays of these two novelist-critics show no apparent thematic unity, though they are sometimes at odds with each other, there is one thing that is common to and characteristic of both Woolf's and Forster's criticism: a search for the conditions of poetry in the art of fiction. This element gives them a unique position in literary criticism. In this they differ radically from the critical spirit of the fin de siecle. Eliot, the artist-critic, was more on the side of pure and abstract theories in criticism. Henry James too was genuinely concerned about the novel. But his stream of consciousness theory leads to aestheticism and dehumanisation. Percy Lubbock provided techniques and methods and brought the novel down to something which can only be seen. I.A. Richard's criticism laid emphasis on the psychological condition of the authors while producing a work, and the psychic response of the reader who reads the work. There were the Marxist-critics who saw a work of art as always reflecting class conflicts. Differing from all these Woolf and Forster were uniform in their conviction that the best approach to literature

was the personal. Their common but unique concern was to assert the essential poetry of the novel and of life.

This work, which has a limited scope, is an attempt to explore the unity that underlies the impressionistic criticism and vividly personal novels of Woolf and Forster. I have tried to stress the relationship between their creative work and critical writings. For this purpose I have divided this work into four chapters. The first chapter deals with the criticism of Woolf, more particularly with her views on the novel and her quest for an adequate medium. The second chapter is an attempt to present her major novels as exemplifications of her critical quest for a new form of fiction. So no adequate and extensive survey is made as regards the thematic importance of the novels. I have only tried to show how Woolf tried to practise her own ideals on fiction in her novels, how her critical ideas helped her to evolve the new 'crystalline' form that is so evident in her novels. The third and fourth chapters deal with Forster's criticism and his novels respectively in the same way as the first and the second chapters. In the conclusion I have tried to contrast Woolf and Forster as critics and assess their role as critics in the modern age, and their contribution to the increasing modern awareness of the problematical nature of fictional ontologies.

The best criticism comes from the heart of a sensitive artist engaged in the creative act. Woolf and Forster produced just such criticism, a crictictsm which resulted from their temperaments in tension with the art they were struggling to create. The half-serious half-comic tone best suited their kind of criticism. Though they lack the seriousness and consistency of professional critics, they sometimes come out with serious, indispensably relevant critical statements which has stood the test of time. The fact that Woolf and Forster are refreshingly unconventional critics is itself an adequate incentive to study them as literary critics. Both found themselves in the centre of a duality. For Woolf it was the conflict between the Male and the Female principles. This conflict explains the dualities in her novels which are categorised by Hermion Lee as follows:

MASCULINE	FEMININE
Intellect	Intuition
Fact	Vision
Day	Night
Waking	Dreaming
Words	Silence
Society	Solitude
Clock time	Consciousness time
Realism	Impressionism
Opaqueness	Transparency
Land	Water.*

And Woolf's quest, both as novelist and critic, is to resolve

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* Hermion Lee, The Novels of Virginia Woolf (London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1977) p. 5.

this conflict, to attain the state of wholeness. According to her art should strive for such wholeness; it should strive to attain 'androgyny.' "Forsterian dialectic involves the tragic conflict between prose and poetry (passion), reason and imagination. His quest as a novelist and critic is to 'connect' the two so that harmony can be attained. Woolf and Forster share the anguish and indignation about the forms of modern institutionalized life and its exasperating grossness and vulgarity. Though temperamentally introverts, they were genuinely interested in the welfare of mankind and their ideals: 'androgyny' and 'proportion', which we shall examine in detail, are evidence enough to reveal their concern about a society that was tragically fragmented. Both envisaged a perfect integrated state of wholeness and were thus somewhat of romantic visionaries. But they were no dreamy idealist, no pale-lipped votaries of art, but sensitive, tough-minded pleaders for what is valuable in life as they saw it.

CHAPTER I

VIRGINIA WOOLF: THE IMPASSIONED CRITIC

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> Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind.[1]

It is in this spirit of freedom that Virginia Woolf begins her quest for a new aesthetic of fiction. She would not be confined to traditional forms and conventional ideas, that influenced both art and society in her time. As a social critic she was all for the freedom of women. In her writing one can notice a vein of indignant feminism at a male-dominated society. She loathed the conventions that put women in the background. She acutely felt the male-domination in creative art and fiction as well. Woolf disapproves of most fiction written in her immediate past because of this one-sidedness. They are novels of men, written in sentences which are basically men's. She was not satisfied with the voice of fiction which speaks only in a man's voice. An aspiring woman novelist, according to Woolf, would find this voice of fiction irrelevant to her purpose. Since both society and art were male-dominated and consequently one-sided, Woolf envisaged as her primary task the quest for a new aesthetic which would do away with this one-sidedness. This

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[1] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1945) p. 76.

element of male dominance was very much present in her family in the figure of her victorian father, Leslie Stephen. There is enough evidence in Woolf's diary, that she was not quite at ease under the dominating influence of her father, and with the patriarchal order he represented. On November 28, 1928 she wrote in her diary:

> Father's birthday. He would have been 96, 96, yes, today; and could have been 96, like other people one has known; but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books, - inconceivable.[2]

Leslie Stephen's world was a world of facts and it was governed by the masculine principle. This world was directly in conflict with Woolf's own world of imagination. Herbert Marder, in his study of Woolf's feminism and art, gives a convincing account of Woolf's frame of mind and the task which she set upon herself. He writes:

> Virginia Woolf saw the universe as the eternal conflict between opposites, corresponding, ... to masculine and feminine principles. Her main concern was to find ways of reconciling the warring opposites. As a practical feminist she sought equality between the sexes, a dynamic balance between two halves of mankind which would lead to social regeneration. As artist and mystic she sought inner harmony, the ideal state of androgyny, which would lead to the renewal of the individual .... One might say, for Virginia Woolf, feminism and mysticism converged in the doctrine of androgyny.[3]

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[2] Quoted by Ruth Z. Temple, "Never Say 'I': To the Lighthouse as vision and confession.", Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views, edited by Claire Spraque, (New Delhi Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, 1979) p. 94.

[3] Herbert Marder, Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf, (Chicago & London; The University of Chicago Press, 1968) p. 125.

The tragic absence of balance in society and of harmony in art seem to have impelled Woolf to undertake a quest. On the social plane, one half of mankind is dominated by the other, and so there is no healthy correpondence between the two. In the same way, in the artistic field, the masculine principle dominates the feminine principles. So Woolf concludes that art is one-sided. Her quest, therefore, is to re-establish harmony both in society and in the individual's mind. Both social and artistic degeneration of her time, according to Woolf, is due to a lack of harmony. Woolf's feminist quest for the equality of sexes parallels her artistic and mystic quest for the achievement of the androgynous mind, which alone would make the artist's work lasting, meaningful and complete. So <u>A Room of One's Own</u>, which is generally taken to be a piece of feminist propoganda, is an ideal starting point for a study of Woolf's critical doctrines. In it the feminist quest for the liberation of women merges into a mystic's quest for the state of androgyny, which in its turn parallels an artist's quest for an adequate form for his art. Perfect art springs from an androgynous mind, and artistic creation is possible only when a marriage is consummated in the mind between the warring opposites, the masculine and feminine principles. As physical creation is impossible if there is only one sex at work, so is literary creation impossible if there is only the masculine principle at work in the mind. So, as far as literary creation is concerned, according to Woolf, it is fatal

for a writer "to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly."[4] She says:

> ... there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body .... And in the man's brain, the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain, the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when the fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine.[5]

Woolf's preoccupation is artistic even in her feminism. What she pleads for is not so much social adjustments in favour of women as adjustment in the mind of the artist so that creation becomes possible as well as meaningful. So Woolf is not a feminist in the usual sense in which the term has gained currency. She is a feminist-artist-critic. A great artist, according to Woolf, is one in whose mind there is a marriage of opposites. His personality should mirror a harmony, a perfect union between the man and the woman in his mind. Woolf further illustrates this idea by a visionary picture of a girl and a young man together in a taxi-cab, in A Room of One's Own :

> Now it was bringing from one side of the street to the other diagonally a girl in patent lather boots,

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[4] A Room of One's Own, p. 97.

[5] Ibid., pp. 96-97.

> and then a young man in a maroon overcoat: it was also bringing a taxi-cab; and it brought all three together at a point directly beneath my window ... and the girl and the young man ... got into the taxi; and then the cab glided off as if it were swept on by the current elsewhere.[6]

It is only when the girl and the young man are together in the taxi-cab of human personality that the mind is "swept on by the current" of creation. This picture is symbolic of the union of the opposing powers of the mind, intellect and intuition, of the two worlds, the world of fact and the world of imagination, of the two regions of the mind, the conscious and the unconscious, and of the two levels of reality, the external and the internal. There is a beatific vision of their union in the taxi-cab which, according to Woolf, is a necessary condition for artistic creation. A writer is great if he can effect this union of the man and the woman in his mind, that is, if he can make his intellect espouse intuition. Woolf considers Shakespeare a great writer on account of this. He could establish the ideal state of androgyny both in his mind and in his work.

Woolf's idea of androgyny may be considered as a feminist reaction to an age of undisputed male chauvinism with all its contradictions and dichotomies. The separation of the different faculties of the mind gave rise to a tragic fragmentation of life which resulted in the fragmentation of

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[6] Ibid., p. 95.

art. Woolf tried to resolve this fragmentation of life and art. In her time reason was separated from imagination, thought from feeling, intellect from emotion. There was a conflict between knowledge and values, the world of facts and the world of imagination. Modern psychologists taught that the conscious and the unconscious regions of the mind the 'Id' and the 'ego', are perpetually at war. Woolf's idea of the masculine and feminine principles corresponds to this separation. The sexual analogy in A Room of One's Own expresses a hope in the ultimate reconciliation of this tragic antithesis. This reconciliation, Woolf suggests, is the only means of achieving androgyny.

Woolf's idea of the androgynous mind resembles Eliot's concept of unified sensibility which he advocates against "dissociation sensibility" or the divided mind.[7] This divided mind is the cause of imperfect writings and Eliot leads us back to John Donne and the metaphysicals and finds a unified sensibility at work in their poetry. The similarity of the two concepts is easily noticeable. While Eliot ignored the physical anology of the two sexes Woolf used it in order to arrive at the idea of androgyny. While Eliot considered the divided sensibility as the malady of the time, Woolf, the

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[7] T.S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot ed., Frank Kermode, (London, Faber and Faber, 1975) p. 64.

feminist, considered male dominance as the cause of all disharmony and imperfections. One cannot ascertain the indebtedness of the one to the other, but one can certainly notice the parallelism in the workings of these two great minds. Similar again to Woolf's idea of androgyny is W.B. Yeats' theory of 'unity of being', which is manifested in the Byzantine art. In this unity of being all the opposites are reconciled. Movement and stillness, the dancer and the dance are perfectly in harmony in this state of being. Perfect art is that which represents this unity of being, according to Yeats, while to Woolf perfect art is androgynous.

Woolf's concept of androgyny can be compared to D.H. Lawrence's idea of wholeness. Lawrence loathes the fragmented conception of man and advocates the idea of man as a whole in his novels. In his essay "Why the Novel Matters" he says:

> Now I absolutely flatly deny that I am a soul, or a body, or a mind, or an intelligence, or a brain, or a nervous system, or a bunch of glands, or any of the rest of these bits of me. The WHOLE is greater than the part. And therefore, I who am man alive, am greater than my soul, or spirit, or body, or mind, or consciousness, or anything else that is merely a part of me ....
>
> I very much like all these bits of me to be set trembling with life and the wisdom of life. But I do ask that the whole of me shall tremble in its wholeness, sometime or other.[8]

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[8] D.H. Lawrence, <u>A Selection from Phoenix</u>, ed., A.A. M. Inglis, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1971) p. 185.

In "Study of Thomas Hardy" he expatiates on this idea of wholeness by presenting the antinomy in arts between 'Law' and 'Love'. It is only when both Law and Love form a perfect "Two-in-one" that any artistic form is possible. Lawrence comes very close to Woolf when he discusses the Male and Female Principles in man.

> For every man comprises male and female in his being, the male always struggling for predominance. A woman likewise consists in male and female, with female predominant.
>
> And a man who is strongly male tends to deny, to refute the female in him. A real 'man' takes no heed for his body, which is the more female part of him. He considers himself as an instrument, to be used in the service of some idea.
>
> The true female, on the other hand, will eternally hold herself superior to any idea, will hold full life in the body to be the real happiness. The male exists in doing, the female in being.[9]

If there is a conflict between these two aspects then the situation is tragic. One has to recognise the importance of both the principles. Perfection in art can only be achieved by balancing these two elements in the artist. If one is given predominance over the other there will eventually be one-sidedness. The "Male principle, of Abstraction, of Good, of the Community, embodied in 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'" should be in perfect reconciliation with "the female principle" which says "that man lived by enjoyment,

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[9] Ibid., p.226.

through his senses, enjoyment which ended in his senses."[10] Art becomes meaningful only when this WHOLENESS, a union of these two principles can be effected.

Critics have established the direct influence of the "Bloomsbury Group" on Woolf's mind and art. The idea of androgyny can be traced back to the "Principle of Organic Unity" as advocated by G.E. Moore, who was the guiding spirit of Bloomsbury thinking. This principle of organic unity involves a subject-object relationship which operates between different aspects of self and the universe. Roger Fry and Clive Bell, both members of the same group, found its aesthetic correlate in the theory of "significant form" which alludes to the idea behind a work of art which gives it its significance. Woolf fused it into a "literary gestalt in which feeling and form, theme and content, and aspects of self, time, and reality form a reciprocal and interdependent whole",[11] which in the form of androgyny she uses as a critical tool to judge the perfection of art.

If freedom to Woolf meant transcending the barriers of one's sex, or in other words, achieving androgyny in A Room of One's Own, in Orlando she offers the phantastic vision of the achievement of such freedom. There is in it a

[10] Ibid., pp. 226-227.

[11] Hawena Richter, Virginia Woolf : The Inward Voyage Princeton, (Princeton University Press, 1970) p. 20.

confusion of the sexes which is resolved ultimately in androgyny. After the long parade of patriarchal absurdity in Orlando's career in Constantinople with all its masculine solemnities, confusions, disturbances, and amorous adventures, calm is achieved only after Orlando's sleep for seven days. It is only then the truth is revealed. He is transformed into a woman.

> He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and .... we have no choice left but to confess - he was a woman.[12]

Orlando's sexual transformation is symbolic of the liberation of the truth of androgyny from the bondage of intellect. Complete freedom is achieved and the mind is freed from the clutches of patriarchal vanities and the excesses of male egoism. Orlando, however, is androgynous from the beginning and his change into a woman is only a manifestation. Even after the change he "combined in one the strength of a man and woman's grace."[13] His change was only external and otherwise he remained as he was. The external change was but a manifestation of the inner truth which is always present. For according to Woolf, "different though the sexes are, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place, and often it is only the clothes that

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[12] Virginia Woolf, Orlando, A Biography (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1942) p. 97.

[13] Ibid.,

keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above."[14] Orlando, by becoming a woman, achieves the unity of intuition and intellect, which in turn helps him to a final perception of reality. The man and the woman in Orlando instruct each other. His/her self-realization becomes complete. Orlando, in other words, becomes an integrated personality. The most striking characteristic of an integrated personality is its androgynous nature. It is the loss of such personality that constitutes the recurrent themes of her fiction and the chief motif of her critical writings. Failure to achieve androgyny causes one-sidedness and this is the criticism Woolf flung at the Edwardian Triumvirate, Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett in her essays on fiction.

The quest for androgyny which we have just examined merges itself into a novelist's quest for an adequate aesthetic of fiction in Woolf's essays, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and "Modern Fiction". The ideal state of androgyny is indirectly used as a critical tool to judge the completeness or wholeness of the Edwardian writers. "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" marks Woolf's break from the Edwardian heritage of fiction. It is an attempt to determine the proper stuff of fiction in the face of a changed vision of reality. She agrees with Bennett's view

[14] Ibid., p. 98.

that character is the primary concern of the novelist. She says:

> I believe that all novels, that is to say, deal with character and that is to express character - not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic and alive, has been evolved.[15]

But Woolf does not readily accept Bennett's view that the reality of the characters is the test of the excellence of a novel. It is on this ground that Bennett criticised the Georgian writers and said that they did not create characters that are real. Woolf counters this charge by asserting the historical and changing nature of reality:

> But, I ask myself, what is reality? And who are the judges of reality? A character may be real to Mr. Bennett and quite unreal to me.[16]

'Mrs. Brown', the old lady in the corner with whom, according to Woolf, all novels begin "can be treated in an infinite variety of ways, according to the age, country, and temperament of the writer."[17] So the picture of Mrs. Brown, her appeal to the people, change with times. It varies from one age to another. There is no absolute standard for judging the reality of character, but there are various points of emphasis. So one may not be right when one judges the work of an age with the

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[15] Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", Collected Essays I, ed., Leonard Woolf, (London, Chatto & Windus, 1968) p. 324.

[16] Ibid., p. 325

[17] Ibid.

critical standards of another age. So it is not right to judge the work of the Georgians according to Edwardian standards, and Woolf criticizes the Edwardian stock-in-trade of fiction for its inadequacy as a model for the Georgians. The Georgians, according to Woolf, worked under different conditions, because when the Georgians began to write, that is, "in or about December, 1910, human character changed."[18] This is a very bold assertion and what Woolf has in mind is the major change that took place in the social, political, economic, intellectual and moral spheres of life at about the same period. It was a period of transition from the old intellectual order to the new socio-political and intellectual milieu. Reality, or truth, came to be looked upon in a quite different way from the earlier times. The focus shifted from the external reality to the complex inner world of the individual's consciousness. The externals became insiginificant compared with the innumerable impressions created in a moment on the human mind. Psychologists like Freud, Jung and Adler, extensively surveyed the dark areas of human mind in order to establish the nature of reality behind the appearance of the external world. Their works had greatly influenced the Bloomsbury circle of which Woolf was an active member. This revolution in the way men looked at reality influenced the artists of that time. The post-impressionist

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[18] Ibid., p. 320.

exhibition in London in 1910 boldly demonstrated the new way artists saw reality. It showed the inadequacy and incompleteness of the way people looked at reality in the past. Human figures were reduced to essences or outlines and were given multiple personality. It tries to depict the wholeness of vision, a view of the totality of appearance. In the wake of this change man was considered to be more than a submerged irrational self. He was a complex of consciousness, existing on many levels, a complex of personalities consisting of separate states of awareness. He was not the same from one moment to the next. There was a discontinuity in his personality. This revolutionary conception of man became the major point in the new view of reality. So Woolf boldly asserts that human character changed in 1910. Her main concern, therefore, is for an emotional perspective by which the reality of this new era could be viewed. It is the consciousness of this change which makes her very vehement in her criticism of the Edwardians. They failed to supply the Georgians with a satisfactory medium to express this new vision of reality. They failed to recognize the change of reality, of human character, that took place in their time. They lost sight of the inner aspect of reality and concerned themselves entirely with the externals which according to Woolf, are insignificant. Therefore, they are one-sided and their works, incomplete.

Georgian writers, on the other hand, recognised this change and went for a wholeness of vision. This desire was to

take fiction into new areas, "the darker places of psychology." They wanted to express the new vision of reality which took them to new areas of consciousness. But the Edwardians were the only models they could work from. So according to Woolf, if the Georgians failed to inform their character with truth or reality the fault lay with the Edwardians. The tools used by the Edwardians were not adequate to express the new vision of reality which the Georgians wanted to express. Lack of models or guidance was the reason for their lack of greatness and Woolf is all sympathy for them. The Edwardian form and method failed them in their endeavour to capture the elusive Mrs. Brown, human nature, life itself. The Georgians' view of Mrs. Brown was different because they had a new vision of reality. But the Edwardians looked at her in their own way. Mrs. Brown in the railway carriage is a poor and miserable creature bullied by Mr. Smith, the dominating male vanity. Woolf presents her as a picture of poverty and suffering:

> There was something pinched about her - a look of suffering of apprehensions, and, in, addition, she was extremely small. Her feet, in their clean little boots, scarcely reached the floor. I felt she had nobody to support her; that she had to make up her mind for herself.[19]

The picture of Mr. Smith settling a sinister business with this lady explains the plight of human nature, of life, of reality, at the hands of the Edwardian writers. The man bullying the woman

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[19] Ibid., p. 322.

and the woman crying out of extreme suffering is the image of what, according to Woolf, the Edwardian writers were doing with human nature, the reality. Woolf finds these writers incomplete because they supress the 'woman' in their mind and impose the male element in their works. In other words, they failed to achieve androgyny both in their mind and in their works. Therefore they were onesided, incomplete and not worthy models for aspiring Georgians. Commenting on the books written by Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy, Woolf laments:

> Yet what odd books they are! Sometimes I wonder if we are right to call them books at all. For they leave one with so strange a feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction. In order to complete them it seems necessary to do something.[20]

For Woolf, the Edwardians lacked the wholeness of vision which is the mark of a masterpiece. They were extremely onesided in their treatment of Mrs. Brown and lamentably limited in their vision of reality. But Woolf, while criticising them for this limitedness, conveniently forgets her own view that reality or human character changed only in 1910, by which date the Edwardians had written most of their novels. If reality changed in 1910, are the Edwardians to be blamed for their failure to represent the new reality?

> But the Edwardians were never interested in character in itself; or in the book in itself. They were interested in something outside.

[20] Ibid., p. 326.

> Their books, then, were incomplete as books, and required that the reader should finish them ... for himself.[21]

Woolf again forgets that this new idea of 'character in itself' which she advocates in the face of the change, was never available to the Edwardians. So they failed to concentrate on what Woolf calls 'character in itself', a product of the change of 1910. Therefore the works of Edwardians could never be a source of inspiration or a model for the Georgians. The Georgians could not learn their business from them and Woolf says:

> Now it seems to me to go to these men and ask them to teach you how to write a novel - how to create characters that are real - is precisely like going to a bootmaker and asking him to teach you how to make a watch.[22]

If the spirit of the Edwardian age demanded 'boots', the Edwardian writers had their relevance and managed to be good 'bootmakers.' So Woolf is not fair in criticising them for not satisfying the demands of the new era for a 'watch'. Mark Golman clarifies Woolf's position and says that Woolf views the Edwardian novel in historical perspective, in the face of a change in the need of the hour. He says:

> For Woolf the Edwardian novel, that utilitarian boot, had its historical place and purpose but it could not be a model for the artist who saw the novel as a self-contained, complex, and organic form, a delicate but indestructible watch.[23]

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[21] Ibid., p. 327.

[22] Ibid., p. 326.

[23] Mark Goldman, p. 43.

In the modern age, the Edwardian form has lost its relevance. To Woolf, the Edwardian novel, the utilitarian boot, had a purpose outside itself. It did not exist in and for itself like Tristram Shandy or Pride and Prejudice. The Edwardians' obsession with surface details and their lack of depth made them inferior to Sterne and Jane Austen. Woolf adds:

> The difference perhaps is that both Sterne and Jane Austen were interested in things in themselves; in character in itself. Therefore, everything was inside the book, nothing outside.[24]

One wonders why Woolf does not recommend these writers as models for the Georgians since they were masters in making this self-contained, indestructible watch which the Georgians wanted their novels to be. One can only assume that human character changed, and so Sterne and Austen would not have been of much use in the face of the new task of representing the new reality. The Edwardians evidently failed in this task because they were materialists, interested in the description of the prop, the externals, the tangible. Their vision of reality amounted to the vision of the solid, the tangible, the external. They had faith in the solid, external world of things. It was the reality for them and their novels represented this reality. But for Woolf reality lies in the inner region of the mind, in

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[24] 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown' p. 327.

the human sensibility. Environment and society become comparatively insignificant in the modern treatment of reality. This 'sensibility' has a reality of its own. The task of the modern novelist is to convey this new reality and not the external or material reality. The Edwardians conveyed only the external reality or the material reality and completely ignored the spiritual. This new view of reality is the product of the shift of emphasis from man as social reality to man as spiritual reality in the modern tradition. Woolf charges the Edwardians with materialism and depicts their materialism as she makes them travel in the railway carriage with Mrs. Brown, one by one. When he is with Mrs. Brown

> ... Mr. Wells would instantly project upon the window-pane a vision of a better, breezier, jollier, happier, more adventurous, and gallant world, where these musty railway-carriages and fusty old women do not exist; where there are public nurseries, fountains, and libraries, dining rooms, drawing rooms, and marriages; where every citizen is generous and candid, manly and magnificent, and rather like Mr. Wells himself. But nobody is in the least like Mrs. Brown.[25]

In this systematic structuring of a magnificent utopia Mrs. Brown is completely forgotten. In his splendid world of 'oughts' reality has no place. Woolf adds:

> There are no Mrs. Brown in Utopia. Indeed I do not think that Mr. Wells, in his passion to make her what she ought to be, would waste a thought upon her as she is.[26]

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[25] Ibid., p. 327.

[26] Ibid.,

Galsworthy would occupy himself in imagining whether there are women working in Doulton's factory, whether they make twenty five dozen earthenwares everyday, whether there are employers in Surrey who smoke rich cigar. He would busy himself with informations regarding the condition of the environment and its impact on lives. But in the process Mrs. Brown is forgotten.

> Burning with indignation, stuffed with information, arraigning civilization, Mr. Galsworthy would only see in Mrs. Brown a pot broken on the wheel and thrown into the corner.[27]

Mr. Bennett, according to Woolf, would spend his time in describing houses, and Mrs. Brown would not be found within the walls of Mr. Bennett's Freehold Villas and Five Towns. Commenting on Bennett's novel, Hilda Lessways, Woolf says:

> But we cannot hear her mother's voice or Hilda's voice; we can only hear Mr. Bennett's voice telling us facts about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines. What can Mr. Bennett be about? I have formed my own opinion of what Mr. Bennett is about - he is trying to make us imagine for him, he is trying to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there. With all his powers of observation, which are marvellous, with all his sympathy and humanity, which are great, Mr. Bennett never once looked at Mrs. Brown in her corner.[28]

According to Woolf, these Edwardians in their passionate obsession with the externals had no time to understand and appreciate Mrs. Brown and

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27 Ibid., pp. 327-328.

28 Ibid., p. 330.

> There she sits in the corner of the carriage - that carriage which is travelling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs. Brown is eternal, Mrs. Brown is human nature, Mrs. Brown changes only in the surface, it is the novelists who get in and out - there she sits and not one of the Edwardians has so much as looked at her. They have looked very powerfully, searchingly and sympathetically out of the window; at factories, at utopias, even at the upholstery of the carriage; but never at her, never at life, never at human nature. And so they have developed a technque of novel-writing which suits their purpose; and they have made tools and established conventions which do their business. But these tools are not our tools, and that business not ours. For those conventions are ruin and those tools are death.[29]

This, according to Woolf, is the reason why the Edwardian writers failed to represent the thing in itself. They were more interested in bricks and walls than in reality, human nature, Mrs. Brown. Such obsession with the external is what makes them onesided and incomplete. Their minds are not androgynous and they fail to effect wholeness in their works. There is a lack of harmony in the powers of their mind. Their works do not represent a marriage between opposites, between the external reality and the inner reality, between intellect and intuition, between the world of facts and the world of imagination, and between social reality and spiritual reality. In another of her essays entitled "Modern Fiction", Woolf accuses this Edwardian Triumvirate of exciting many hopes and systematically disappointing them, and she finds reason to thank them only for

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29 Ibid.

> ... having shown us what they might have done but have not done; what we certainly could not do, but as certainly perhaps, do not wish to do.[30]

Her criticism reaches its climax in the next few lines.

> No single phrase will sum up the charge or grievance which we have to bring against a mass of work so large in its volume and embodying so many qualities, both admirable and the reverse. If we tried to formulate our meaning in one word we should say that these three writers are materialists.[31]

These three Edwardians are contrasted with James Joyce who, according to Woolf, is a 'spiritualist.' He tries to come closer to life and reality and expresses what interests him with sincerity and exactness. No conventions or traditional forms seem to hinder him from doing what he wants. His predicament is likened by Woolf to that of a man who must break the windows in order to breathe. Once he has broken the windows he is at home. The obscenities in Joyce's works are overreaction to the conventions that manacled the genre. But nevertheless he is preferred to the Edwardians. She says:

> In contrast with whom we have called materialists, Mr. Joyce is spiritual: he is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its message through the brain, and in order to preserve it he disregards with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability, or coherence, or any other of these sign-posts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see.[32]

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[30] "Modern Fiction", Collected Essays II, p. 104.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., p. 107.

The solid walls of Edwardian fabric fail to contain the reality, the thing in itself, within them, so much so that life escapes from Edwardian novels. Woolf goes on:

> That is what I mean by saying that the Edwardian tools are wrong ones for us to use. They have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things. They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there.[33]

So the Edwardian form which catches "life just an inch or two on the wrong side" is no more useful to a Georgian writer, for if he uses this tool "Life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worthwhile."[34] Woolf's disapproval of the existing form of the novel is complete when she asserts: " ... at this moment the form of fiction most in vogue more often misses than secures the thing we seek."[35]

Our next problem is to ascertain what is the thing the modern writer seeks, or rather what is the thing Virginia Woolf seeks when she writes fiction. For the materialistic Edwardians 'house' was a common ground from which they proceeded to intimacy with their readers. But this convention, according to Woolf, is inadequate to express the modern notion of reality. So the problem for the Georgians was to find a tool to convey this new reality most adequately.

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33 "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", p. 332.

34 "Modern Fiction", p. 105.

35 Ibid.

> The Georgian novelist, therefore, was in an awkward predicament. There was Mrs. Brown protesting that she was different, from what people made out, and luring the novelist to her rescue by the most fascinating if fleeting glimpse of her charms; there were the Edwardians handing out tools appropriate to house-building and house-breaking.[36]

So the new reality, Mrs. Brown in the changed emotional perspective, refuses to be clothed in Edwardian garments and Woolf says:

> Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide.[37]

According to Woolf, this new reality is the proper stuff of fiction. So by dismissing the Edwardian form and method as irrelevant she opens up new areas of experimentation and new possibilities for fiction. Concentration on the moment and its values becomes her main preoccupation in fiction. This introduced new themes which resulted in daring changes of technique and structure in the novel. The main characteristic of the novel is not any more its loyalty to recorded events or facts, but a sense of the fluid, the shifting, the fragmented in life. The modern novel is to take the mould of the modern mind itself. If this is "the essential thing" for the novel, if Mrs. Brown is not be treated in the way the Edwardians

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[36] "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", p. 333.

[37] "Modern Fiction", p. 105.

treated her, if the proper aim of fiction is to capture Mrs. Brown, and if Mrs. Brown is "the spirit we live by, life itself",[38] how can a modern novelist go on writing fiction? Woolf answers: "Look within ..."[39] But it is a pity that a writer is often not able to do it. For Woolf herself gives the situation of the writer of the traditional sort.

> The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscruplous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour. The tyrant is obeyed; the novel is done to a turn.[40]

If this is how a novel is created, Woolf asks: "Is this life? Must novels be like this?"[41] Life certainly is not like this, nor are novels. It is the myriad impressions of a mind that is significant in life. The novel should be about these innumerable impressions that "shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday."[42] And if a novel is written in this way, if the novelist were to express his feelings freely, not bound by convention, then, Woolf says, "there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love-interest or catastrophe in the

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[38] "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", p. 337.

[39] "Modern Fiction", p. 106.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

accepted style."[43] So if a writer were to 'look within' she would surely find that

> Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.[44]

Thus by revolutionising the conception of life itself, Woolf goes on to determine the task of the new novel which she contemplates.

> Is not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.[45]

And so Woolf tries to discover a new aesthetic of fiction, a new form for the novel, which could adequately discharge the new task of conveying the uncircumsribed spirit, the quality of the modern mind itself. This mind is a queer conglomeration of incongruous things, full of hybrid, monstrous, unmanageable chaos of emotions. The new novel has to convey this emotional world which is tumultous and contradictory. So the problem for Woolf was to find a suitable form to order this emotional world and to express it in its totality. In "Narrow Bridge of Art" she admits that poetry is not able to keep pace with and to

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

express the emotional tumult of the modern mind. The emotions imputed to the modern mind submit more readily to prose than to poetry. So this new novel which Woolf envisages has to undertake some of the tasks hitherto performed by poetry.

The new novel as it is envisaged by Woolf will be of infinite complexity because it is made up of many kinds of emotions. So the form of the novel also will be a complex one. Woolf herself gives evidence of this complexity when she describes her conception of the new novel

> It will be written in prose, but in prose which has many characteristics of poetry. It will have something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. It will be read, not acted. By what name we are to call it is not a matter of very great importance.[46]

According to Woolf this new novel would be closer to poetry in its form and method, because its content, the emotional world, is very much that of poetry. She says:

> It will give as poetry does, the outline rather than the detail .... It will resemble poetry in this that it will give not only or mainly people's relations to each other and their activities together, as the novel has hitherto done, but it will give the relation of the mind to general ideas and its soliloquies in solitude ....
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> In these respects then the novel or the variety of the novel which will be written in time to come will take on some of the attributes of poetry. It will give the relations of man to nature, to fate; his imagination; his dreams. But it will also give the sneer, the

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[46] "Narrow Bridge of Art", Collected Essays II, p. 224.

> contrast, the question, the closeness and complexity of life. It will take the mould of the queer conglomeration of incongrous things - the modern mind. Therefore it will clasp to its breast the special prerogatives of the democratic art to prose; its freedom, its fearlessness, its flexibility.[47]

This new novel would not be much bothered about fact-recording. It will have very little to tell about houses, incomes, occupations of its characters. It will be different from the sociological novel. It will observe deeply but from a different angle. It will express a total view of man, his mind and his emotion. So the proper stuff of the novel is the real life, that is, every feeling, every thought, every quality of brain and spirit. The novelist's problem is one of rendering his private vision of the emotional world to the public, of contemplating "landscapes and emotions within" and making them visible to the world at large."[48] His task will be to enter a new subjective world, to follow a method which is "deeper and suggestive for conveying not only what people say, but what they leave unsaid; not only what they are, but what life is."[49]

Woolf's view of the new novel is not the result of her adherence to any formal positions or literary conventions. It is rather the result of her own creative experiments in her fiction. So her fiction criticism is artistic-experimental

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47 Ibid., pp. 224-226.

48 "A Letter to a Young Poet", Collective Essays II, p. 189.

49 "Jane Austen", The Common Reader, First Series, (London, Hogarth Press, 1975), p. 183.

rather than formal or dogmatic. It was her persistent aim to convey the "varying, ... unknown and uncircumscribed spirit ... with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible." For her proper stuff of fiction is not houses and towns but the complex world of the mind, the modern sensibility. The Edwardian stuff of fiction, that is, the house, is replaced by the Woolfian one, the sensibility. Novels must be true to life, and life does not merely consist in the houses in which people live. They should record the inner life of the people. They should picture not the external, parading parties, picnics, engagements and marriages, but what is going on behind this fabric which systematically mask the inner life of people. The novel for Woolf, is "a little voyage of discovery",[50] a survey of new areas of consciousness. It is a voyage 'in.'

> For the most characteristic qualities of the novel - that it registers the slow growth and development of feeling, that it follows many lives and traces their unions and fortunes over a long stretch of time - are the very qualities that are most incompatible with design and order. It is the gift of style, arrangement construction, to put us at a distance from the special life and to obliterate its features; while it is the gift of the novel to bring us into close touch with life. The two powers fight if they are brought into combination. The most complete novelist must be the novelist who can balance the two powers so that the one enhances the other.[51]

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[50] Ibid., p. 180.

[51] "Phases of Fiction", p. 101.

In her novels Woolf tried relentlessly to discover the hidden modes of her conscious and unconscious being. According to her writing is "that process of self-examination, that perpetual effort to understand one's own feeling and express it ... in language." (Night and Day, p. 38). The thematic areas which her novels probe consist largely of the personal and inner life of her characters. In each of the novels one can notice an ardent struggle of the author "to understand her multi-levelled relationship with reality."[52] In this task, that is, of registering the uncircumscribed, disorderly inner life of sensibility, Woolf finds the traditional forms of the novel inadequate. The old vehicles are not suited for her fictional voyage inwards, into the fresh and untraversed areas of the mind. Her attempts at writing novels demonstrate a struggle to find a form, an adequate medium in which she can contain the "incessant shower of innumerable atoms" which "shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday", by which she can capture the 'luminous halo' that life is, by which she can satisfactorily enact the great drama of consciousness which goes on in the mind of her characters. Her fiction presents a gradual development towards a new novel which has its culmination in The Waves. The incessant struggle to face the challenge of Mrs. Brown, who says: "Catch me if you can,"[53] reflects in her fiction her

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[52] Harvena Richter, p. 18.

[53] "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", p. 319.

struggle to arrive at an adequate aesthetic of the novel which she formulated in her essays. Her intention as a novelist is quite clearly expressed by the novelist, Terence Hewet in The Voyage Out when he tells Rachel:

> What I want to do in writing novels is very much what you want to do when you play the piano, I expect. We want to find out what's behind things, don't we? Look at the lights down there scattered about anyhow. Things I feel come to me like lights ... I want to combine them .... Have you ever seen fireworks that make figures? ... I want to make figures.[54]

Woolf's whole range of fiction is just one great attempt, sometimes successful, sometimes frustrated, at making figures with the fireworks of sensibility. This we shall be examining in the next chapter.

In her critical essays one finds an ardent enthusiasm to discover a new form for fiction, a new vehicle to undertake a fresh voyage into new thematic areas. Utterly disgusted with the Edwardian form and the models of fiction, she sympathetically considers the pathetic predicament of the Georgian writers, who with their awareness of the new reality were struggling to express it in a satisfactory medium. They failed to achieve greatness because they had no models to imitate.

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[54] The Voyage Out, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1970), p. 221.

> Such, I think, was the predicament in which the young Georgians found themselves, about the year 1910. Many of them - I am thinking of Mr. Forster and Mr. Lawrence in particular - spoilt their early work because, instead of throwing away their tools, they tried to use them. They tried to compromise. They tried to combine their own direct sense of the oddity and significance of some character with Mr. Galsworthy's knowledge of the Factory acts, Mr. Bennett's knowledge of the Five Towns. They tried it, but they had too keen, too overpowering sense of Mrs. Brown and her predicament to go on trying it much longer.[55]

It is intriguing why Woolf chose only these three Edwardians as models for the modern writer. She is very enthusiastic in her appreciation of Thomas Hardy in whose work, Far from the Madding Crowd, she finds a fusion of subject and method, form and content, which is a main point in her criticism.[56] Hardy's poetry and tragic vision, which are the main qualities of his novels, relate him to the modern sensibility. With the earnestness of a true admirer Woolf writes:

> In short, nobody can deny Hardy's power - the true novelist's power - to make us believe that his characters are fellow-beings driven by their passions and idiosyncracies, while they have - and this is the poet's gift - something symbolical about them which is common to us all.[57]

Her applause of Hardy reaches its climax when she calls him "the greatest tragic writer among the English novelists."[58]

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[55] "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", p. 333.

[56] "The novels of Thomas Hardy", The Common Reader, Second series, (London, Hogarth Press, 1965), p. 248.

[57] Ibid., p. 251.

[58] Ibid., p. 254.

If such be Hardy's greatness and his relevance as far as modern sensibility is concerned, one wonders why Woolf disregards him as a model for the moderns on the very flimsy ground that he had published no novels after 1895. In the same way she casts aside Conrad, whom she admirers for his genius in combining the outer and inner truths, in achieving the unified sensibility. Her reason for his ineligibility as a model for the moderns is that he is a Pole. All that one can assume from this is that Woolf was over-enthusiastic in criticising the Edwardians and exposing their irrelevance in the wake of a changed vision of reality. Her obsession with this new vision of reality made her unduly hasty in her indictment of the Edwardian legacy of the novel.

In Woolf's new concept of the novel "surface realism and the demands of dialogue are bypassed for that search within which is the touchstone of twentieth century art."[59] So the new novel must represent the continuum of mental events in an adequate way. What is most important in this new technique is the rendering of the moments of feeling, or what Woolf calls the 'moments of being' in language. Forster admires Woolf for this daring venture of unfolding the human mind in the printed pages of a book. He writes:

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[59] Mark Goldman, p. 55.

> It is easy for a novelist to describe what a character thinks of; look at Mrs. Humphrey Ward. But to convey the actual process of thinking is a creative feat, and I know of no one except Virginia Woolf who has accomplished it.[60]

The new form which is evolved by Woolf's experiments is the product of a personal and complex vision of life which sensitively responds to the demands of the inner reality. This new design, in the opinion of Mark Goldman, is "an electic one, a traditional and experimental fusion of prose, poetry and drama in a new three-dimensional form."[61] The search within, an inward voyage becomes the main concern of the new novel which can be called the novel of sensibility,[62] or 'poetic novel.'[63] As critic Woolf paves the way for this new novel and prepares her audience for it by posing herself as a common reader and exercising her exquisite sensitivity in the business of disinterested criticism. Her crticism consists in an ardent quest for the new reality, the 'thingness of things,' which should be the proper stuff of fiction. One can notice the strong vein of idealism in this quest. But Woolf is no dreamy idealist. Her fiction reveals a genuine struggle to find an adequate form to express the proper stuff of fiction, to make the genre meet the demands of her own vision of reality. In

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60 "The early novels of Virginia Woolf", Abinger Harvest, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1967), p. 126.

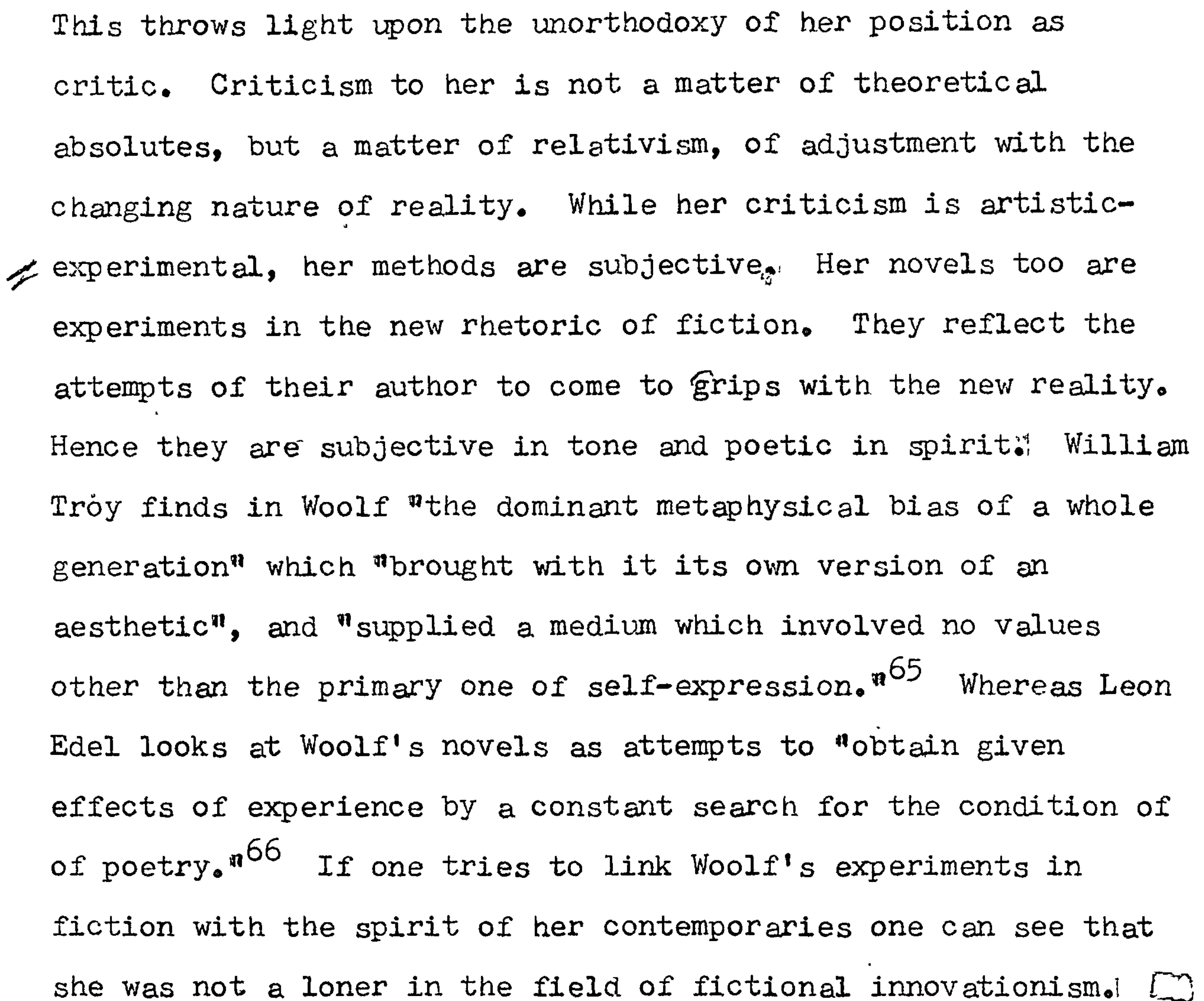
61 Mark Goldman, p. 55.

62 William Troy, "Virginia Woolf: The Novel of Sensibility" Virginia Woolf, A Collection of Critical Essays (1979),pp.26-39

63 Leon Edel, "The Novel as Poem", Virginia Woolf, pp. 63-69.

doing this she fearlessly trespasses into the realm of poetry and drama to find a method, to render the inner life of people in its totality.

> Any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express, if we are writers; that brings us closer to the novelist's intention if we are readers.[64]



This throws light upon the unorthodoxy of her position as critic. Criticism to her is not a matter of theoretical absolutes, but a matter of relativism, of adjustment with the changing nature of reality. While her criticism is artistic-experimental, her methods are subjective. Her novels too are experiments in the new rhetoric of fiction. They reflect the attempts of their author to come to grips with the new reality. Hence they are subjective in tone and poetic in spirit. William Troy finds in Woolf "the dominant metaphysical bias of a whole generation" which "brought with it its own version of an aesthetic", and "supplied a medium which involved no values other than the primary one of self-expression."[65] Whereas Leon Edel looks at Woolf's novels as attempts to "obtain given effects of experience by a constant search for the condition of of poetry."[66] If one tries to link Woolf's experiments in fiction with the spirit of her contemporaries one can see that she was not a loner in the field of fictional innovationism.

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[64] "Modern Fiction", Collected Essays, vol. 2., p. 108.

[65] "Virginia Woolf: The Novel of Sensibility", pp. 26-27.

[66] "Novel as Poem", p. 63.

Woolf's exploits are not the result of an individual attitude. In them one can notice the attempts of Bloomsbury idealism to find an 'objective correlative.' Woolf shares Lawrence's enthusiasm to make art the expression of wholeness, and Forster's concern to connect the prose with the passion in man. Woolf also "participated fully in the significant shift of emphasis, inaugurated by Henry James, from the outer social world - as explored by Balzac or the naturalists - to the sensibility with which that outer world is appreciated and felt."[67] Her memorable feat as a critic consist in her attempts to make fiction adequate to the vision of the novelist. With the fervour of a romantic idealist she disregards the curb and curtailment of tradition and conventions in the interest of what she considers as the main thing in fiction. How far she succeeds in fulfilling the promise of a new type of novel can be ascertained from a study of her major novels.

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[67] Ibid., p. 68.

CHAPTER II

VIRGINIA WOOLF: THE NOVELIST AT WORK

CHAPTER II

VIRGINIA WOOLF: THE NOVELIST AT WORK

Virginia Woolf's novels represent an artist's quest for a 'significant form', in order to represent the new view of reality, to perform new fictional tasks.[1] Woolf's career as a novelist is a protracted struggle to arrive at an adequate medium for her vision of reality. One can notice this struggle of the artist right from the <u>The Voyage Out</u> (1915) to <u>Between the Acts</u> (1941). My task in this chapter is to observe this struggle and determine the nature of its results as far as a new aesthetic of the novel is concerned. Since[2] character revelation is the main task of the novel, and, according to Woolf, human character changed in or about 1910, my first task will be to observe and study how Woolf presents character in her novels. By saying that human character changed, Woolf means that the point of view from which character is studied underwent a change, thus antiquating the traditional narrative style. The traditional tools did not express character satisfactorily. Woolf's chief medium is sensibility. Sensibility is an instrument to reveal and unravel human character. It becomes a spectrum from which human character can be observed, and closely studied. So the novels becomes a human drama played within the inner folds of sensibility which gives form and substance to character and

thus it also supplies form and design for the novel. Few of Woolf's characters are presented by means of direct description in the traditional way. The reader is not presented with a direct revelation of character. What he gets is the impressions which a particular character creates on the sensibility of others. So characters in Woolf's novels are revealed either by means of the influence they have on other characters' minds, or through their own self-reflections or inner monologues.

The Voyage Out, in which Woolf was not fully successful in her abandonment of the old form, employs this method of sensibility as via media for the gradual revelation of character. We first see Rachel through the mind of Helen Ambrose:

> Helen looked at her. Her face was weak rather than decided, saved from insipidity by the large enquiring eyes; denied beauty, now that she was sheltered indoors, by the lack of colour and definite outline. Moreover, a hesitation in speaking, or rather a tendency to use the wrong words, made her seem more than incompetent for her years. Mrs. Ambrose, who had been speaking much at random, now reflected that she certainly did not look forward to the intimacy of three or four weeks on board ship which was threatened. Women of her own age usually boring her, she supposed that girls would be worse. She glanded at Rachel again. Yes how clear it was that she would be vacillating, emotional, and when you said something to her it would make no more lasting impression than the stroke of a ship upon water. There was nothing to take hold of in girls -

nothing hard, permanent, satisfactory.[1]

Here we have a casual impression created by Rachel upon the mind of Helen. So the picture impressionistic and elusive. We have a definite feeling that there is much more to be discovered about Rachel, which stands in tension with the initial mental picture of Helen. So the process of unravelling character in Woolf's novels is gradual and fleeting, most like the nature of our impressions. The same is the process used in the other early novels like Night and Day and Jacob's Room. The character of Katherine Hilbery in Night and Day is first introduced as it impresses itself upon the mind of another character, Denham. This picture is incomplete and inadequate and so is the picture of Katherine which Mary Datchet tries to draw in her mind:

> ... Mary felt herself baffled, and put back again into the position in which she had been at the beginning of their talk. It seemed to her that Katherine possessed a curious power of drawing near and receding, which sent alternate emotions through her far more quickly than was usual, and kept her in a condition of curious alertness. Desiring to clarify her, Mary bethought her of the convenient term 'egoist.'
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> 'She's an egoist', she said to herself, and stored that word to give to Ralph one day when, as it would certainly fall out, they were discussing Miss Hilbery.[2]

This technique of unravelling character by means of partial and

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[1] The Voyage Out (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1970), p. 16.

[2] Night and Day (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 53-54.

incomplete mental pictures reflects Woolf's refusal or inability to circumscribe human beings to a fixed character. This is due to her own view of human personality as a continual flux of fleeting impressions which are tumultous and contradictory. This 'uncircumscribed spirit' or 'life' does not readily submit to any verbal fixity because it is one thing now, and another later. It is continuously changing and the attempt to arrest it and to confine it within the capsules of language is a desparate task which Woolf undertakes in her novels. In Jacob's Room Jacob's character is not immediately presented as a fixed entity. He is revealed gradually through the effect he produces on the other people in the novel. He does not reveal himself by what he says or does but by what others think of him. For instance the impression he creates upon Mrs. Norman who travels in a train to Cambridge with him helps in presenting his character to the reader.

> Nobody sees anyone as he is, let alone an elderly lady sitting opposite to a strange young man in a railway carriage. They see a whole - they see all sorts of things - they see themselves .... Mrs. Norman now read three pages of one of Mr. Morris's novels. Should she say to the young man (and after all he was the same as her own boy): 'If you want to smoke, don't mind me'? No: he seemed absolutely indifferent to her presence ... she did not wish to interrupt.
>
> But since, even at her age, she noted his indifference presumably he was in some way or other - to her at least - nice, handsome, interesting, distinguished, well built, like her own boy? One must do the best one can with her report. Anyhow,

> this was Jacob Flanders, aged nineteen. It is no use trying to sum people up. One must follow hints, not exactly what is said, nor yet entirely what is done ...[3]

The picture we get of Jacob is only sustained by the impressions of other people in the novel. We can only see him through the eyes of others, as he presents himself to the different moods and temperaments of different characters:

> 'I like Jacob Flanders?' wrote Clara Durrant in her diary. 'He is so unworldly. He gives himself no airs, and one can say what one likes to him, though he's frightening because ....' 'No, no, no,' she sighed, standing at the green-house door, 'don't break - don't spoil' - what? something infinitely wonderful.[4]

The futility of circumscribing or denominating character, of which Woolf was very sensitively aware, is reflected in Clara's anxiety in not breaking or spoiling "something infinitely wonderful," the character of Jacob Flanders. This romantic impression of Clara is offset by the series of reflections about Jacob that are going on in other peoples' minds:

> Betty Flanders was romantic about Archer and tender about John; she was unreasonably irritated by Jacob's clumsiness in the house.[5]

and again in the mind of Captain Barfoot, Jacob is presented:

> Captain Barfoot liked him best of the boys; but as for saying why .... It seems then that men and women are equally at fault. It seems that a profound,

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[3] Jacob's Room (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1965), p. 28.

[4] Ibid., p. 67.

[5] Ibid., p. 68.

> impartial, and absolute just opinion of our fellow creatures is utterly unknown, Either we are men, or we are women. Either we are cold, or we are sentimental. Either we are young, or growing old. In any case, we are but a procession of shadows, and God knows why it is that we embrace them so eagerly, and see them depart with such anguish, being shadows. And, why, if this and much more is true, why are we yet surprised in the window corner by a sudden vision that the young man in the chair of all things in the world the most real, the most solid, the best known to us - why indeed? For the moment after we know nothing about him.
>
> Such is the manner of our seeing. Such the conditions of our love.[6]

In this passage, in which one can notice the rather too predominant authorial presence, a conviction about the inadequacy and the inconsequentiality of our knowledge about one another is expressed. This is the reason why a single portrait of a particular character cannot be isolated from Woolf's novels by means of description or dramatization. Her characters lack the solidity which lends itself to description or narration. Forster's criticism of Woolf's novels, though unjustified, springs from this fact. He says:

> Now there seem to be two sorts of life in fiction, life on the page, and life eternal. Life on the page she could give; her characters never seem unreal, however, slight or fantastic their lineaments, and they can be trusted to behave appropriately. Life eternal she could seldom give; she could seldom so portray a character that it was remembered afterwards on its own account, as Emma is remembered, for instance ....[7]

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[6] Ibid.

[7] E.M. Forster, "Virginia Woolf", Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views Series, edited by Claire Sprague (New Delhi, Prentice-Hall of India Limited, 1979), p. 19.

Forster is speaking about character which corresponds to the traditional point of view which Woolf disregards in her novels because, according to her, human character changed and she is looking at it from a point of view different from that of Jane Austen or Dickens. She does not create character in consonance with traditional expectations of character in the novel. Joan Bennet points this out when she says:

> Virginia Woolf came to believe that all definition of character involved such a refusal to come near and that character in the sense in which the word is used of persons in fiction or, as often as not in biography, does not exist in real life. It is possible that the impression that she does not create clear or memorable characters is due to the fact her portraits are of a different kind from those to which the reader of fiction is accustomed.[8]

Just as the post-impressionist painters looked at and represented reality in a new way, Woolf tried to look at character in a new and different way from her predecessors. She was unwilling to circumscribe human nature, 'Mrs. Brown', within the strict and clearly definable limit of character. Her novels and her characters exemplify this. In <u>To the Lighthouse</u> Mrs. Ramsay's reflection on the nature of self slips into this characteristic withdrawal.

> ... one after another, she, Lily, Augustus Carmichael must feel, our apparions, the things you know us by, are simply childish. Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is

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[8] Joan Bennett, <u>Virginia Woolf, Her Art as a Novelist</u>, (London, Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 22.

> unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to
> the surface and that is what you see us by.[9]

It is this sharp awareness of what is beneath the surface, of something 'dark', 'all spreading', and 'unfathomably deep', that makes Woolf dissatisfied with the 'apparitions', the 'things you know us by.' In The Waves Bernard shares Woolf's complex vision of human nature and says:

> I am not one and simple, but complex and many.[10]

Woolf's method of characterization is cumulative because her understanding of human nature too is cumulative. Her characters, though they operate only on the plane of sensibility, enlist our imaginative sympathy. They are seen only through glimpses and the writer eliminates from her books the illusion of the all-seeing eye. She makes us see the complex, elusive human nature with our own imperfect vision. "It is sympathy rather than judgement that she invokes, her personages are apprehended rather than comprehended."[11] This reflects Woolf's enthusiastic surrender to the Bergsonian idea of the world of flux and individual intuition, which together with G.E. Moore's Principles of perception helped her to perceive reality in a way which became intrinsic to her subjective methods. The medium therefore, involved the primary

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[9] To the Lighthouse (London, Everyman's Library, 1967), pp.72-73.

[10] The Waves (London, Hogarth Press, 1943), p. 55.

[11] Joan Bennett, op cit., p. 27.

value of self-expression, the living spirit of the subjective novel. Her method is so adopted to express that 'diaphanous envelope' with which she surrounds her characters and with which she orders her fictional world. William Troy shows the imperativeness of the method of subjectivity to Woolf:

> The subjective mode is the only mode especially designed for temperaments immersed in their own sensibility, obsessed with its movements and vacillations, fascinated by its instability . . . it was alone capable of projecting the sensibility which because it has remained so uniform throughout her work we may be permitted to call Mrs. Woolf's own.[12]

The life of individual sensibility in a world of flux is Woolf's primary concern as a novelist. She watches the movements, vacillations and instability of this sensibility and tries to present a convincing record of this with as little mixture of the alien as possible. For this purpose she adopts the subjective or confessional method to probe into the new areas of her characters' sensibility, as she probed into her own. The novel, for Woolf, becomes a form of self-discovery, a probe into the different modes of her own being. This she does by exploiting the infinite possibilities of the genre. Her problems as a novelist are succinctly recorded by Joan Bennett:

> She was impelled by her own "vision of life" to emphasize the fluidity of human personality rather than its fixity. She perceived the variety of

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[12] William Troy, "Virginia Woolf: The Novel of Sensibility" Virginia Woolf, A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views Series, (1979), p. 27.

> impressions made by one person upon the people round him and his own ever-changing consciousness of the surrounding world. Consequently, instead of defining an identity or epitomizing it in a particular incident, she invites us to discover it by living in the minds of her characters, or in the minds of others with whom they come into contact. The discovery can only be made by a gradually acquired intimacy.[13]

A passage from The Waves which presents Bernard's self-reflection expresses just this view:

> A space was cleared in my mind. I saw through the thick leaves of habit. Leaning over the gate, I regretted so much litter, so much unaccomplishment and separation, for one cannot cross London to see a friend, life being so full of engagements; nor take ships to India to see a naked man spearing fish in blue water. I said life had been imperfect, an unfinished phrase. It has been impossible for me, taking snuff as I do from any bagman met in a train, to keep coherency, that sense of generations, of women carrying red pitchers to the Nile, of the nightingale who sings among conquests and migrations ....[14]

Bernard's reflection on the nature of life and its imperfection throws light on the busy world of engagements, and his own incapability to be consistent, to keep "that sense of generations", explains why character cannot be a clearly definable absolute to Virginia Woolf. It always remains an "unfinished phrase." Woolf stresses the elements of discontinuity in the human personality which for her consist in the undercurrents of shifting impressions. Thus by taking the mould of the modern mind itself, Woolf's novels try to represent the fleeting nature of modern sensibility. So sensibility becomes both the form and the theme of Woolf's novels.

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[13] Joan Bennett, op cit., pp. 31-32.

[14] The Waves, p. 201.

Psychological relationship among the characters is contributory to the pattern of the novel which is emotional rather than visual. This plays the greatest role in building up the thematic structure of Woolf's novels, and is directly the influence of Woolf's complex vision of human nature and reality. She tries to portray character by exploring the emotional relationship of her characters to one another. So the novel becomes a portrait of living relationships painted on the canvas of the individual's sensibility, an inner drama of emotional life expressed in prose charged with poetic overtones. Human nature cannot be clearly defined as this or that in Woolf's novels because Woolf's understanding of human nature is ceaselessly complex. In the words of Bernard in The Waves:

> I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am - Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs.[15]

What Bernard seems to be giving expression to is his basic androgeneity, his vision of himself as a whole constituted by his relationships to other people in the novel. Later in the novel, it is Bernard again who sums up the whole rhythmic movement of the novel which is made up of the rhythmic movements of six peoples' lives. So Bernard epitomizes Woolf's idea of androgyny which she uses in this novel as a device to show that

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[15] The Waves, p. 196.

character is no single thing. Different characters are bound up with one another and express one another, thus forming a perfectly coherent androgynous whole. Relationship again is the chief focus of character in Mrs. Dalloway. Relationship between Peter Walsh and Clarissa contributes to the structural solidity of the book. Peter comes in as an interrupter or a destroyer of Clarissa's domesticity, even her marriage. His dominance over her as a lover was intolerable to her. The scene between them in Clarissa's house is evocative of the kind of relationship that exists between them.

> "Well, and what's happened to you?" she said. So before a battle begins, the horses paw the ground; toss their heads; the light shines on their flanks; their necks curve. So Peter Walsh and Clarissa, sitting side by side on the blue sofa, challenged each other. His powers chafed and tossed in him. He assembled from different quarters all sorts of things; praise; his carrer at Oxford; his marriage, which she knew nothing whatever about; how he had loved; and altogether done his job.[16]

Clarissa's reassertion of her life and domesticity can be seen in her parting words when he leaves: "Remember my party tonight" which becomes a rhythm in his consciousness as he takes a morning walk. Their reflections on each other contribute in providing the reader an insight into their character.

The relationship between Clarissa and Septimus mirrors the division of the self. Septimus, though Clarissa

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[16] Mrs. Dalloway, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1964), p. 50.

never even saw him, is her 'double', a secret sharer of her suppressed life and he represents what she might have been. At the party the news of his death brings to her an awareness of her own struggle with life, her own compromise. The characters in the book live but in the relationship they have with one another. The book is not about Clarissa or Peter Walsh or Septimus. It is about human life itself, its misery and happiness and its final consummation in death. Virginia Woolf's art is not primarily applied to the drawing of individual memorable figures in her novels. What she is mainly concerned with is to present life as it is. This she does by following the workings of the individual minds. So we do not have characters systematically developed in sequence, or epitomized in definite action. Instead we have different consciousness and their movements constituting the rhythmic movement of the human spirit, which unfolds itself in the novel, not by means of continuous narrative but by the juxtaposition of different movements of the individual minds.

In To the Lighthouse, other people are revealed only in their relationship to Mrs. Ramsay and contribute to the revealation of her personality. A continual shifting from mind to mind throws light on the nature of relationship among the characters. For instance Lily's reflection on Charles Tansley at the dinner table clearly reveals the nature of the relationship that exists between them. The passage is significant

because it reveals the mutual understanding of the two in the face of a wrecked relationship.

> He was really, Lily Briscoe thought, inspite of his eyes, but then look at his nose, look at his hands, the most uncharming human being she had ever met. Then why did she mind what he said? Women can't write, women can't paint - what did it matter, coming from him, since clearly it was not true to him but for some reason helpful to him, and that was why he said it? Why did her whole being bow, like corn under a wind, and erect itself again from this abasement only with a great and rather painful effort? She must make it once more. There's the spring on the table cloth; there's my painting; I must move the tree to the middle; that matters - nothing else. Could she not hold fast to that, she asked herself, and not lose her temper, and not argue; and if she wanted a little revenge take it by laughing at him.
>
> 'Oh, Mr. Tansley,' she said, 'do take me to the Lighthouse with you. I should so love.'
>
> She was telling lies he could see. She was saying what she did not mean to annoy him, for some reason. She was laughing at him. He was in his old flannel trousers. He had no others. He felt very rough, isolated and lonely. He knew that she was trying to tease him for some reason; she didn't want to go to the Lighthouse with him; she despised him; so did Prue Ramsay; so did they all. But he was not going to be made a fool of by women, so he turned deliberately in his chair and looked out of the window and said, all in a jerk, very rudely, it would be too rough for her tomorrow. She would be sick.[17]

Since human personality is revealed by recording inner monologues of characters, stories and sequences have disappeared from Woolf's novels. What we have instead is some emotional tremulations showing the ebb and flow of lives, the condition of peoples' mind. Woolf's disappointment with

[17] To the Lighthouse, p. 100.

The traditional structure of sequence and story is well expressed by Bernard in <u>The Waves</u>:

> But what are stories? Toys I twist, bubbles I blow, one ring passes through another. And sometimes I begin to doubt if there are stories.[18]

Woolf's vision of life cannot be effectively communicated by means of "Toys I twist, bubbles I blow." Reality is too elusive to be contained within the bounds of a sequence. The ebb and flow human sensibility is not the sort of thing that one can express in a logical sequence. It exists in the mind, but not perhaps, as the universe of Newton existed. Hence it cannot be studied, defined, measured and reduced to general "laws." It can only be traced by following closely the tide of feelings in people's mind. And so the novel's pattern is emotional rather than sequential because the nature of the reality expressed in the novel is emotional and not logical. The reader's curiousity about what happened next also disappears and he is made to watch the rhythmic ebb and flow of love. In <u>To the Lighthouse</u> Mrs. Ramsay reflects:

> But what have I done with my life? thought Mrs. Ramsay taking her place at the head of the table and looking at all the plates making white circles on it .... At the far end, was her husband, sitting down, all in a heap, frowning. What at? she did not know. She did not mind. She could not understand how she ever felt any emotion or any affection for him. She had a sense of being past everything, through everything, out of everything, asshe helped the soup, as if there was an

18 <u>The Waves</u>, p. 103.

> eddy - there - and one could be in it, or one could be out of it, and she was out of it. It's all come to an end, she thought, while they came in, one after another, Charles Tansley - 'Sit there, please', she said - Augustus Carmichael - and sat down. And meanwhile she waited, passively, for someone to answer her, for something to happen. But this is not a thing she thought, ladling out soup, that one says.[19]

From this reflection on the futility of her life she switches over to a different mood, that of pity for William Bankes:

> - poor man! who had no wife and children, and dined alone in lodgings except for to-night, and in pity for him, life being now strong enough to bear her on again, she began all this business, as a sailor not without weariness sees the wind fill his sail and yet hardly wants to be off again and thinks how, had the ship sunk, he would have whirled round and found rest on the floor of the sea.[20]

The same enactment of the moment of feeling is shown again in Lily Briscoe's mind:

> Lily Briscoe watched her drifting into that strange no-man's land where to follow people is impossible and yet their going inflicts such a chill on those who watch them that they always try at least to follow them with their eyes as one follows a fading ship until the sails have sunk beneath the horizon.
>
> How old she looks, how worn she looks, Lily thought, and how remote. Then when she turned to William Bankes, smiling, it was as if the ship had turned with some amusement because she was relieved, why does she pity him? For that was the impression she gave, when she told him that his letters were in the hall. Poor William Bankes, she seemed to be saying, as if her own weariness had been partly

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[19] To the Lighthouse, pp. 96-97.

[20] Ibid., p. 97.

> pitying people, and the life in her, her resolve to live again, had been stirred by pity.[21]

Projection of the 'moments of being' as we have just seen in the passages above, is again the technique followed in <u>The Waves</u>. <u>The Waves</u> traces the patterns of feeling of six different people through different phases of their lives. These rhythmic patterns correspond to the rhythmic ebb and flow of the waves in the sea. The characters express their moments of feeling through inner monologues which are poetic and lyrical. The outside world is presented through the choric intervention of the dramatic interludes, which provide a background against which the characters reveal their 'moments of being.' The whole novel can be said to be a juxtaposition of these 'moments of being' as they are presented by different characters in their soliloquies in solitude. At the end of her school time, Susan looks forward to being at home:

> I shall throw myself on a bank by the river and watch the fish slip in and out among the reeds. The palm of my hands will be painted with pine needles. I shall there unfold and take out whatever it is that I have made here; something hard. For something has grown in me here, through the winters and summers, or staircases, in bedrooms. I do not want, as Jinny wants, to be admired. I do not want people, when I come in, to look up with admiration. I want to give, to be given, and solitude in which to unfold my possessions.[22]

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[21] Ibid., p. 98.

[22] <u>The Waves</u>, p. 39.

This longing to give, to be given, seems to be fulfilled when one hears her in her middle age;

> Now I measure, I preserve. At night I sit in the arm-chair and stretch my arm for my sewing; and hear my husband snore; and look up when the light from a passing car dazzles the windows and feel the waves of my life tossed, broken, round me who am rooted; and hear cries, and see other's lives eddying like straws round the piers of a bridge while I push my needle in and draw my thread through the calico.
>
> I think sometimes of Percival who loved me. He rode and fell in India. I think sometimes of Rhoda. Uneasy cries wake me at dead of night. But for the most part I walk content with my sons. I cut the dead petals from hollyhocks. Rather squat, grey before my time, but with clear eyes, pear-shaped eyes, I pace my fields.[23]

These two passages give a rather comprehensive picture of the process of Susan's emotional maturation without burdening the reader with the incidents which accompany it. The same is the case with Rhoda whose emotional maturation can be traced from two such passages. Here is Rhoda at school:

> 'That is my face', said Rhoda, 'in the looking glass behind Susan's shoulders - that face is my face. But I will duck behind her to hid it, for I am not here. I have no face. Other people have faces; Susan and Jinny have faces; they are here. Their world is the real world. The things they lift are heavy. They say Yes, they say No; whereas I shift and change and seen through in a second. If they meet a housemaid she looks at them without laughing. But she laughs at me. They know what to say if spoken to. They laugh really; they get angry really; while I have to look first and do what other people do when they have done it.[24]

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[23] Ibid., p. 137.

[24] Ibid., p. 30-31.

One can see the hesitation to face life and the lack of self-confidence in these lines which have been transformed into a dread of life in Rhoda, the woman:

> Oh life, how I have dreaded you ... oh, human beings how how I have hated you! How you have nudged, how you have interrupted, how hideous you have looked in Oxford street how squalid sitting opposite each other staring in the Tube! ... How you snatched from me the white faces that lie between hour and hour and rolled them into dirty pellets and tossed them into the wastepaper basket with your greasy paws.' Yet those were my life.
>
> But I yielded. Sneers and yawns were covered with hand. I did not go out into the street and break a bottle in the gutter as a sign of rage. Trembling with ardour, I pretended that I was not surprised. If Susan and Jinny pulled up their stockings like that, I pulled mine up like that also. So terrible was life that I held up shade after shade. Look at life through this, look at life through that; let there be rose leaves, let there be vine leaves - I covered the whole street, Oxford street, Piccadilly Circus, with the blaze and ripple of my mind, with vine leaves and rose leaves.[25]

In the same way all the characters are mirrored through their own reflections and we see their slow and gradual development from childhood to maturity and to old age. The novel is an enactment of the poetic and emotional drama of their relationships and their attitudes towards life, and their final consummation in death: "The waves broke on the shore."[26] The relationship among them is shown through their imaginative reactions, in what they feel about one another, and not in what they do for one another. They seem to be incapable of any

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[25] Ibid., p. 145.

[26] ~~Between the Acts (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1953)~~.
Ibid., p. 256.

significant action and the novel is devoid of any incidents. The characters live in a poetic world of imagination and their main pre-occupation is trying to express the rhythmic movements of their consciousness through an imperfect language. In this they reflect their creator's struggle to find verbal expression for the different modes of her being.

In Between the Acts too, the poetry of emotional relationship takes its source from the minds of the characters and expresses itself in their reflections. The moments between the acts are Woolf's enactment of the drama of emotional tension and resolution of the characters, of the ebb and flow of love. The intervals in the love of Isa and Giles, and their emotional tension are presented through their sensibility.

> Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night.[26(a)]

This theme of personal relationship is a part of the larger human comedy which is enacted in the whole book. The characters struggle to define their relationships and the rhythm of their feeling is what makes 'between the acts' significant. For instance Isa is trying to define her feelings for Haines, in her reflections:

[26(a)] Between the Acts (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1953).p. 152.

> Inside the glass, in her eyes, she saw what she had felt overnight for the ravaged, the silent, the romantic gentleman farmer. 'In love', was in her eyes. But outside, on the washstand, on the dressing-table, among the silver boxes and tooth-brushes, was the other love; love for her husband, the stockbroker - 'The father of my children', she added slipping into the cliche conveniently provided by fiction. Inner was in the eyes; outer love on the dressing-table. But what feeling was it that stirred in her now when above the looking glass, out of doors, she saw coming across the lawn the perambulator; two nurses, and her little boy George, lagging behind.[27]

Woolf's technique of using sensibility as form in her novels brings about a fusion of character and form. In Jacob's Room and Mrs. Dalloway the subject is one single sensibility. In To the Lighthouse Mrs. Ramsay is the central dominating force which holds the other characters together. The lives of other characters in the novel are interminably intermixed with the life of Mrs. Ramsay. They are all influenced by her even after her death. Her memory is the common factor in the minds of the other characters. Thus by laying the focus on one single sensibility and presenting other characters only in relation to this sensibility, Woolf achieves a perfect union of theme and content. Her novels represent the lack of continuity which is a central characteristic of the movement of sensibility. Sensibility is the mirror through which the reader is given a vision of character. The method of Woolf's

[27] Between the Acts, p. 14.

novels is the same as the method of following one's own impressions, the workings of one's sensibility. Character again is nothing but a sensibility seen through other sensibilities.

One can also observe the use of cumulative images and the symbolist method in her novels. In To the Lighthouse the lighthouse is used as a symbol unifying the motivations of all the characters. It is the common point towards which their desires are oriented. It directs the movement of their thought and sensibility. It marks a point of fulfillment. This symbol gives a convincing unity to the whole book. The novel is about a central action, of 'going to the Lighthouse', and so the last part involves narrative and sequential movement. Woolf slips into the narrative mode towards the end of the novel, when Mr. Ramsay and his children are nearing the Lighthouse.

> Now they could see two men on the Lighthouse, watching them and making ready to meet them.
>
> Mr. Ramsay bottoned his coat, and turned up his trousers. He took the large, badly packed, brown paper parcel which Nancy had got ready and sat with it on his knee. Thus in complete readiness to land he sat looking back at the island.[28]

Percival in The Waves unites the other six characters, and is a source of inspiration for them. After his death in India, he

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[28] To the Lighthouse, p. 240.

still remains the living force uniting the minds of the other characters. The other characters think of him in their soliloquies. He provides the common ground for their thought after death. When he is alive, he represents the model which the others want to imitate. In this he is like the lighthouse symbol in To the Lighthouse. Both Percival and the lighthouse operate as forces motivating and propelling the will of the characters. Devices of rhythm and symbolical contrasts are used in The Waves to reveal character. Characters are revealed through the rhythm of the images in their mind. Each character has an image as a motif; a chained beast stamping on the shore for Louis, the willow tree by the river for Bernard, "that wild hunting-song, Percival's music" for Neville. These are contrasted with the cumulative image of their lives taken as a whole, the movements of the sea. The Waves is the most poetic of all Woolf's novels both in conception and form, and in method and style, The characters seem to be lyrical poets making lyrical utterances. The form of the novel therefore, is that of an extended lyric. The Waves exemplifies the extent to which the novel can go in search of a form by attaining to the condition of poetry.

Joan Bennett speaks of Woolf's use of form as a vehicle for two kinds of experience, one on the plane of prose and the other on the plane of poetry.[29] In Mrs. Dalloway

[29] Joan Bennett, pp. 101-102.

there is a poetic pattern probing the eternal questions of human existence. On this plane there are only love, death and the evanscent beauty of the world. Whereas in the prose pattern we are given a picture of the modern world in all its dark aspects of class-struggle, economic insecurity, neurotic temperament and war. To the Lighthouse also operates on these two planes. On the prose plane the novel is about the Ramsays and it reveals the character of different people connected with them. In this plane the novel is about Woolf's own family. Mr. Ramsay is more or less a portrait of Leslie Stephen, and Mrs. Ramsay, that of Woolf's mother. In her diary Woolf writes of the novel:

> This is going to be fairly short; to have father's character done complete in it; and mother's and St. Ives; and child-hood; and all the usual things I try to put in - life, death, etc. But the centre is father's character, sitting in a boat, reciting we perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel. (May 14, 1925, AWD, p. 75).[30]

On the poetic plane the Lighthouse is a symbol, and its alternating light and shadow suggest the rhythms of joy and sorrow in life and the alternating radiance and darkness of human relationships. In The Waves the descriptive interludes are dramatic prose-poems delineating the participation of the objective world in the rhythmic movements of the subjective world of the characters are about to enter the different walks

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[30] Ruth Z. Temple, "Never Say 'I'", p. 93.

of life, the complex changes of their personalities are symbolized by the flight and song of the birds.

> In the garden the birds that had sung erratically and spasmodically in the dawn on that tree, on that tree, on that bush, now sang together in chorus, shrill and sharp; now together, as if conscious of companionship, now alone as if to the pale blue sky. They swerved, all in one flight, when the black cat moved among the bushes, when the cook threw cinders on the ash heap and startled them. Fear was in their song, and apprehension of pain, and joy to be snatched quickly now at this moment. Also they sang emulously in the clear morning air, swerving high over the elm tree, singing together as they chased each other, escaping, pursuing, pecking each other as they turned high in the air. And then tiring of pursuit and flight, lovely they came descending, delicately declining, dropped down and sat silent on the tree, on the wall, with their bright eyes glancing, and their heads turned this way; aware, awake; intensely conscious of one thing, one object in particular.[31]

The poetic passage is suggestive of the life of company, solitude, fear and competition which the characters are about to begin. Joan Bennett finds these interludes to be unsatisfactory because they "interrupt the mood of the narrative, they force the reader to abandon one point of view and adopt another, consequently they disturb his 'willing suspension of disbelief.'"[32] However, one gets the impression that they succeed in helping the author to express the 'luminous halo' that life is. Interruption are inevitable in a novel which does not proceed through a progressive

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[31] The Waves, p. 53.

[32] Joan Bennett, p. 107.

representation of motives because "life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged." So The Waves marks the triumph of a new form. It also marks the culmination of the poetic method.

It is in Between the Acts, however, that Woolf succeeds in achieving a fusion of form and statement. The principle of unity in the novel is to be found in the simultaneity of form and statement, because the novelist has succeeded in "making form part of the statement and statement part of the form."[33] Between the Acts is a triumph of the new form, and Woolf calls it "an interesting attempt in a new method" and a method "more quintessential than the others." (AWD (London), p. 3597.[34] This new method can be called 'novel-drama' and it enlarged the possibilities of the novel. It is informed by a sense of the really dramatic uses of prose and poetry, and of poetic uses of drama. This new method "is able to express in itself, by itself, the conflict of fragmentation and continuity, flux and stability, chaos and order."[35] The book consists of three dramas: drama of the pageant itself, the 'Acts'; drama of the relationships of the people, the 'between the acts'; and drama of the interrelationship of the two dramas themselves. It also expresses the problem of

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[33] Ann Y. Wilkinson, "A Principle of Unity in Between the Acts", Virginia Woolf, A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 146.

[34] Ibid., p. 148.

[35] Ibid.

order and chaos, art and society, stasis and flux.[36] The pageant symbolizes art which brings people together, though they are isolated. Art thus becomes a means of social integration. "So the drama becomes a part of life; and life enters into the drama. Art and society become complementary; the orderly and the chaotic, the permanent and the mutable.[37] Miss La Trobe, the artist, tries to order the society by presenting a pageant. She is like Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse who orders her life through painting. In the same way Woolf is ordering society and life by seeing them as parts of drama. She sees as a continuous dramatic conflict and uses the dramatic form to express it in the novel. "Drama, then, is form, statement and symbol in the novel."[38] It is part of the way of life. It orders both life and art, pictures the conflict of life. It consists of the conflicts between isolation and connection, permanence and mutability, stasis and flow, appearance and reality.[39] These are the different levels which show the fundamental conflict between the Masculine Principle and the Feminine Principle which Woolf observed both in life and in art. But drama reveals the identity of these opposites. The dramatic principle is dialectical and suggests that all things imply their opposites and contain them. The last act of the Pageant shows the interraction between art and

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[36] Ibid., p. 148.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., p. 153.
[39] Ibid.

life. Art, therefore, implies and contains Life. It consists in Life objectified and Life is Art lived.[40] The dramatic form in Between the Acts achieves the objectification of life, of sensibility, of emotion and feeling. In this process of unification which the new form attempts, androgeneity is achieved through a dialectical method. Art is successful in resolving the traditional conflicts between opposites. But the sense of despair is very much present in Miss La Trobe, the artist of the pageant:

> She hadn't made them see. It was a failure, another damned failure! As usual. Her vision escaped her. And turning, she strode to the actors ....[41]

Miss La Trobe wanted to show the audience themselves, and her attempts mirror Woolf's own endeavour as a novelist to create the sense of life as it is actually lived. Miss La Trobe's frustration reflects Woolf's own frustration in her attempts.

> Miss La Trobe stood there with her eye on the script. 'After Vic.', she had written, 'try ten mins. of present time: swallows, cows, etc.' She wanted to expose them, as it were, to douche them with present time reality. But something was going wrong with the experiment. 'Reality too strong', she muttered.[42]

This note of frustration is reflected in The Waves through Bernard who perceives the irrelevance and futility of words and phrases in giving a coherent shape to reality.

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40 Ibid., 154.

41 Between the Acts, p. 72.

42 Ibid., p. 125.

> 'So the sincerity of the moment passed,' Bernard cried, 'so it had become symbolical; and that I could not stand. Let us commit any blasphemy of laughter and criticism rather than exude this lily-sweet glue; and cover him over with phrases.'[43]

This may be taken as Woolf's sincere confession of the inadequacy of language in expressing human nature and her own view of reality. Her struggle to find a new form in her novels is sometimes successful and sometimes frustrated. Her problems as a novelist can be described as those of a poet trying to write novels. She had a poetic conception of human personality which she wanted to convey in her fiction. E.M. Forster finds the reason for Woolf's failure in her unwillingness to let go of poetry, which is why she is unable to grasp things which are gained by letting go of poetry. Hence the haunting, mystical quality of vision and the narrow range of characters. Forster emphasizes this obsession with poetry which characterizes Woolf's fiction.

> Belonging to the world of poetry, but fascinated by another world, she is always stretching out from her enchanted trees and snatching bits from the flux of daily life as they float past, and out of these bits she builds novels. She would not plunge.[44]

This expresses Woolf's problem as a novelist. She was a poet and she wanted to write something as near to a novel as possible.

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[43] The Waves, p. 188.

[44] E.M. Forster, "Virginia Woolf", Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views Series, p. 20.

~~This expresses Woolf's problem as a novelist. She was a poet and she wanted to write something as near to a novel as possible.~~ By not letting go of poetry she sacrifices something else vital to her art. Her preoccupation with the new form and her clinging to poetry interferred with the reality of her characters. To a reader accustomed to the traditional fiction, Woolf's characters seem shadows. But her achievement in the new type of fiction is nevertheless remarkable, and she is very relevant in the modern age because "she reminds us of the importance of sensation in an age which practises brutality and recommends ideals."[45] Untroubled by any motives which usually guide a writer, - money, reputation, or philanthrophy, - she proceeded with her experiments in fiction with a singleness of purpose, which was the most rare thing in the writers of her generation or indeed of any generation.

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[45] Ibid., p. 21.

CHAPTER III

FORSTER'S CRITICISM: A PLEA FOR IMAGINATION

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Forster is an artist turned critic. After *A Passage to India* (1924) Forster did not publish any novels. He ceased to be an artist and became a spokesman for art. His criticism, the unity of which can be systematically traced in his essays and reviews, mirrors, like his novels, the central conflict between fact and feeling, between the world of matter and the sphere of feeling. He was exposed to the conflict between the Benthamite and the Coleridgean cultures.[1] Being an implicit Coleridgean himself, Forster, both in his art and criticism, sets upon himself the task of restoring the 'nymphs' who have departed from the modern world, and preserving them amidst the heat of the industrial milieu. He feared man's separation from the "springs of imagination, from the forces providing a culture with its nymphs and symbols."[2] Forster felt the need to join poetry and prose or else, he was convinced that we shall all perish. "Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer."[3] Forster found the dialectic of his life and art in the

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[1] Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountain: A Study of E.M. Forster* (London, Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 1-4.

[2] Ibid., p. 6.

[3] E.M. Forster, *Howards End* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1973), p. 188.

traditional contention between the Benthamite and the Coleridgean cultures. Essentially it is a contrast between a mechanical and an organic view of life. Forster is a Coleridgean who pleaded for a wholeness of vision by joining poetry and materiality. In the words of Wilfred Stone, "... Forster the critic is as energetic an anti-Benthamite as Forster the artist."[4]

Forster's critical attitude is not a doctrinaire or dogmatic one. He dislikes systems. According to him criticism discloses rhythms not patterns. It should take us to the heart of the art, not to formal consideration of it. His criticism expresses a vision of artistic and humanistic values. It is a passionate plea of an artist for the values that would give a meaningful humanistic touch to his work. It is a plea for poetry and imagination which would, in the long run, make life meaningful in the world. His love for the personal, the passionate and the poetic provides a unity of vision for his criticism. "Manifestos belong to abroad",[5] Forster declares with a deep distrust for designs and abstractions in literature. He would not approve of any inflexible standards which will sap the vitality of literary art. He is only too ready to abandon any moral standard at

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[4] Wilfred Stone, op. cit., p. 5.

[5] E.M. Forster, Abinger Harvest, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books), 1967), p. 163.

a pinch. He believes that the moment of inspiration, unclouded by design, is the vital force behind any work of literature.[6] His approach to literature is personal and it is marked by an impulse to celebrate whatever brings literature alive and to denounce whatever deadens the imagination. He approaches books with the "shy crablike movement" of the mind (Aspects of the Novel). His criticism conveys a sense of the inner life.

Forster's view of art is the view of an eclectic. He draws from many sources. The essence of poetry, according to Forster, is the vision of wholeness, as was propounded by Coleridge. Poetry is a way of responding passionately to experience.[7] It is the most important quality of a literary work of art. In Aspects of the Novel he says what interests him most is "that vague and vast residue into which the subconscious enters", which he calls, "poetry, religion, passion."[8] These three words, Stone says, are the 'holy trinity of a romantic humanist.'[9] The absence or presence of poetry is the criterion of testing literature. Poetry, according to Forster, is the writer's contact with the subsurface mind. It is the vision of the inner life. In an essay entitled "Inspiration" (1912) Forster describes the art of literary creation. He says:

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6 Donald Watt, "The Artist as Horseman: The Unity of Forster's Criticism", Modern Philology, vol. 79, No.I (Aug. 1981), p. 47.

7 Wilfred Stone, op cit., p. 7.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

writers begin their work calmly. "They write a few sentences very slowly and feel constricted and used up." But soon "a queer catastrophe happens inside them. The mind, as it were, turns turtle, sometimes with rapidity, and a hidden part of it comes to the top and controls the pen."[10] Inner life takes over in the act of literary creation. In literature the flip side of the mind surfaces for a time. According to Forster there are two personalities in the human mind, on one the surface and the other deeper down, and literature should express not only the outward and the rational but the subconscious reality that lies at the centre of the creative personality. Without the deeper personality, the subconscious, Forster says, "there is no literature, because unless a man dips a bucket down into it occasionally he cannot produce first-class work."[11] So the test for good literature, for Forster, is the writer's ability to unravel the hidden mind. "Perseverence, benevolence, culture and all the other qualities that pose as good writing, are worthless if they are not rooted in the underside of the mind." (Albergo Empedocle, p. 121)[12] Forster's idea of the subsurface mind reflects the idea of the 'unconscious' which was propounded by the works of the depth psychologists, Freud and Jung. These psychologists revolutionised the conception of human personality by their new insights into the human mind.

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[10] Donald Watt, op cit., p. 46.

[11] Forster, "Anonymity: An inquiry", Two Cheers for Democracy (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1965), p. 91.

[12] Donald Watt, op cit., p. 46.

Though one cannot ascertain how far these psychologists influenced Forster's conception of human personality, it must be acknowledged that Forster was well aware of their theories of the mind.[13] Charles Lamb and R.L. Stevenson, Forster says, "never let down buckets into their underworld", and always wrote with their surface personalities. So they are not first class writers in his opinion.[14] Aesthetic activity derives from sources of integrity deep in human nature, sources that lie beyond the moral life. Art, according to him, is elemental in its reaches.

Forster was wearied at the intellectual tradition of Europe. Ennui and disgust with the modern world are his strongest feelings. But he believed in being "sensitive to what is going on." Roughly this can be taken as the manifesto of Forster, the critic: "To be sensitive to what is going on."[15] His works after 1924 show a continuing effort to preach a humanistic gospel, to advance the claim of poetry and art, to plead for the role of the "aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate, and the plucky"[16] in an impersonal world of technology and industry. The sensitive and the

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[13] In "The Art of Fiction" Forster declared: "I couldn't read Freud or Jung myself; it had to be filtered to me." p.40.

[14] "Anonymity and enquiry", p. 92.

[15] "English Prose between 1918 and 1939", Two Cheers, p. 288.

[16] "What I believe", Two Cheers, p. 82.

plucky will find consolation in Art, which for Forster is "humanistic surrogate for God or the Divine Idea."[17] Art, according to Forster, is an idea of wholeness that is greater and other than the sum of its parts. Forster has an organic view of art. He belives in art for art's sake. In his famous essay, "Art for Art's Sake", he defines a work of art as a "self-contained entity, with a life of its own, imposed on it by its creator. It has internal order. It may have external form."[18] For Forster a work of art need not necessarily have an external form. It may have an external form. In another of his essays, "The Challenge of our times" he values art for its function of ordering the society. "Art is valuable not because it is educational (though it may be), not because it is recreative (though it may be), not because everyone enjoys it (for everybody does not), not even because it has to do with beauty. It is valuable because it has to do with order, and creates little worlds of its own, possessing internal harmony, in the bosom of this disordered planet."[19] This is the consolation of art which only the aristocracy of the sensitive can notice and have reconrse to. Forster's problem was "how to maintain beauty, space and human dignity in a levelling world, how to

[17] Wilfred Stone, op cit., p. 7.

[18] Two Cheers for Democracy, op cit., p. 97

[19] Ibid., p. 68.

preserve the treasures of the privileged without sinking them in the anonymity of the insatiable mass."[20] Poetry was the only answer. The way of art, however shortlived, was the only way. But Forster is far from believing that it is only art that matters.[21] Nor is he very confident of the effect that art will produce in human hearts. In "A note on the way" he says:

> The arts are not drugs. They are not guaranteed to act when taken. Something as mysterious and as capricious as the creative impulse has to be released before they can prop our minds.[22]

Forster resembles Mathew Arnold in his struggle to order the society which was under the threat of disintegration as a result of the civilization of machine. To counter this force, Arnold proposed something that could be taken as an end in itself, and he called it 'culture'. Culture was Arnold's ideal which everyone should strive for. Whareas Art was Forster's absolute. So Forster mirrors Mathew Arnold in his humanistic concern for a benighted society.

Art, according to Forster, is a complement to society. It gives a complete expression to the human spirit. "Society", he says, "can only represent a fragment of the human

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[20] Wilfred Stone, op cit., p. 13.

[21] "Art for Art's Sake", p. 103.

[22] Abinger Harvest, p. 86.

spirit, and ... another fragment can only get expressed through art."[23] So according to Forster, life in the world of facts and information has to be connected with an 'other worldliness', that is art. Only art can transform the world, can "attempt to shape the crude clay of actuality into something divine, to transfigure the world of appearance into 'value'.[24] Art, therefore, is the creation of wholes, the harmonizing of contrarities, not the celebration of a lonely vision. It should restate the indwelling spirit in a new form because Christianity is no more a spiritual force. Fiction and other works of art are attempts at the restatement of the indwelling spirit in a more human form. Religion, thus, for Forster, is humanism.

In fiction, or in any work of literature, what Forster prizes most is the otherness which is to be found in nature and in the depths of human psyche.[25] This can be roughly called poetry, for poetry to him, is otherworldliness. His criticism, therefore, is impressionistic because he applies what in his judgement is the presence or absence of 'poetry' without being very definite about what he means by it.[26] It is poetry alone which can establish the 'connection with the

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[23] "Art for Art's Sake", p. 103.

[24] Wilfred Stone, p. 19.

[25] Ibid., p. 15.

[26] Donald Watt, op cit., p. 47.

land',[27] which is Forster's primary meeting place of responsibility and faith.[28] Forster values poetry because it makes literature out of information, transfigures fact into beauty, links the relative and the absolute, makes whole and sees whole, and has to do with the entire ethical and spiritual life of man. It is a bulwark against the onslaught of Benthamite culture. A work of art must be saturated with poetry and Forster says: "The sort of poetry I seek resides in objects man can't touch - like England's grass network of lanes a hundred years ago."[29] Forster criticizes Sinclair Lewis and H.G. Wells because both of them "share the same indifference to poetry",[30] while he commends Wilfrid Blunt because he is "partly by achievement and wholly by temperament" a poet.[31] Forster considers Sinclair Lewis a photographer and not an artist. He says:

> Neither for good nor evil is he lifted above his theme; he is neither a poet nor a preacher, but a fellow with a camera a few yards away.[32]

He considers the works of Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse and The Waves as "successful works" because they are "all suffused with poetry and enclosed in it."[33]

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27 "Our Second greatest Novel", Two Cheers, p. 229.
28 Wilfred Stone, op cit., p. 14.
29 "The Last of Abinger", Two Cheers, p. 363.
30 Abinger Harvest, p. 150.
31 Ibid., p. 304.
32 "Sinclair Lewis", Abinger Harvest, p. 147.
33 Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 254.

D.H. Lawrence is Forster's example of the novelist who communicates at a level deeper than plot-structure or aesthetic form. In Aspects of the Novel, he calls Lawrence "the only living novelist in whom the song predominates, who has the rapt bardic quality."[34] At the centre of Lawrence's work there is "poetry that broods and flashes" (1930 broadcast) sometimes striking into pages and chapters of splendour.[35] Forster rates down James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man because of the absence of the poetic sense of life. James Joyce, Forster says, "undermines the universe in too workmanlike a manner, looking round for this tool or that; inspite of all his looseness he is too tight, he is never vague except after due deliberation; it is talk, talk, never song."[36] Poetic quality for Forster the critic is the unpredictable, personal, fantastic and even chaotic play of the imagination at large. Poetry is the license granted to imagination to roam freely beyond the confines of hard facts.[37] It is the writer's ability and freedom to probe into the virgin territories, into the new zones of man's mind and personality. This sense of contact is what makes a writer great. Sir Sidney Lee, Sinclair Lewis and

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[34] Forster, Aspects of the Novel (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1974), p. 130.

[35] Wilfred Stone, op. cit., p. 59.

[36] Forster, op cit., p. 126.

[37] Donald Watt, p. 47. [illegible]

Tagore miss this sense of contact with the deeper, probing imagination on the other side of the mind. "Posturing characters, instrusive didacticism, ill-formed plots - all give way in Forster's critical sensibility if the writer can convey a poetic sense of the life within."[38] Forster is critical of the eighteenth century because it "hated mystery: it mocked a ghouls and goblins ... everything was finite and took place in the clear light of day."[39] Though he regards Fielding as the greatest novelist of the eighteenth century he has his reservations about him. Fielding, Forster wrote in 1899, in an undergraduate essay, "wrote great books - but not the greatest books; he was too easy and comfortable in his wayside parlours and stage coaches to wander out into the unknown country. 'Finished and finite clod, untroubled by a spark' - it seems a harsh judgement on the writer of our most perfect novel, but no one can deny that it is true."[40] Fielding is rated down because he failed to convey more than he says, he lacks the poetic sense of life. Forster attacks Dryden and Pope for ruining the spontaneity of poetry. In a lecture titled "Happy vs. Sad Endings", Forster considers Shelley, Dante and Keats great because they "contradict (not falsify) the

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38 Ibid., p. 59.

39 Ibid., p. 49.

40 Ibid.

facts of life."[41] A poet, in Forster's opinion, is to make the impossible seem the inevitable. Poetry is to be personal and passionate and Forster praises Wordsworth on this account; " . . . what overwhelms me is not what he thought but what he felt."[42]

Literature is not an affair of rules. Forster calls it "the most exceptional and untidy affair" that "has ever entered the heart of man to create."[43] It is a man to man business in which it is the heart that dominates. So Forster is more interested in that form of literature in which human elements have a great role to play. According to him the novel is sogged with humanity.[44] Forster's thoughts about the novel spring from his notion of literature as a spontaneous activity. In Aspects of the Novel he expresses his views on the novel very comprehensively. But one can notice the caution with which Forster approaches the subject. He thinks that the novel should be personal. It is difficult to criticise because in essence it is absolutely free from rules. Forster calls it one of the moister areas of literature.[45] Absolute norms and standards do not hold good in the case of the novel. It is a "literary form so wide in its range that generalizations about

41 Ibid., p. 47.
42 Ibid., p. 49.
43 Ibid., pp. 50-51.
44 Aspects of the Novel, p. 39.
45 Ibid., p. 25.

it are almost impossible."[46] One cannot pin down the novel to an any particular job or any particular rule. Forster says: "The novel in my view has not any rules, and so there is no such thing as the art of fiction. There's only the particular art that each novelist employs in the execution of his particular book."[47]

The novel has a personal bias. It probes the depth of human beings. It should reveal the inner life of the characters. According to Forster communication of inner vitality is the essence of the novel. This is the fundamental value behind Forster's criticism. The novelist is to create from the depths of his being. He should follow his thoughts and passions to their furthest reaches, suffuse his creations with the impress of his attitudes and mind, and he should pass the creative finger down into every sentence and every word.[48] So according to Forster, in the novel it is not fact but the novelist's sense of the fact that dominates. The artist should aim at truth and he succeeds if he raises the emotions.[49] In his mind a fusion of fact and fiction takes place because of the "junction of mind with the heart where the creative impulse sparks."[50] So Forster says: "The artist is at as passionate a

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46 "The Art of Fiction", Aspects, p. 183.

47 Ibid.

48 Frederick P.W. McDowell, "E.M. Forster's Theory of Literature", Criticism Vol. VIII, No. I (Winter 1966), p. 27.

49 Aspects, p. 174.

50 "Introduction", The Longest Journey, p. IX, quoted by Frederick P.W. McDowell, p. 26.

heat when he composes as when he is in love."[51]

For a novelist, in Forster's opinion, heightened sensibility and a sense of the inner vitality are more essential to the making of a novel than the traditional stock-in-trade. Form should never restrain the vitality and the movement of the sensibility. He is totally in sympathy with the new aesthetic experiment of Virginia Woolf and says: "A heightened sensibility thus permits Virginia Woolf to go easily and safely beyond the 'norm' of current aesthetic practice."[52] Forster admires Chekhov for his abundant vitality. Life flows on in his work, "noble, imaginative, profound, yet different only in arrangement from the life that we know."[53] Same is the reason for Forster's admiration of Proust. "Proust, though introspective, and unhappy, was full of vitality - he could not have written a million word if he was not - ..."[54]

Forster loathed the strict adherence to the traditional norms for their own sake. So does he despise innovation for its own sake. "Form is not tradition", he says in "Art for Art's Sake", "It alters from generation to generation.

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51 Aspects of the Novel, p. 72, 54.

52 Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 250.

53 "Short stories from Russia", New Statesman, V (July 24, 1915, pp. 373-374) quoted in "E.M. Forster's Theory of Literature", p. 32.

54 "Proust", Abinger Harvest, p. III.

Artists always seek new techniques and will continue to do so as long as their work excites them. But form of some kind is imperative. It is the surface crust of internal harmony, it is the outward evidence of order."[55] Forster believes that the technique in English fiction alters from generation to generation. According to him "History develops, Art stands still."[56] Art is a like a mirror in front of which the pageant of History passes. So historical changes do not necessarily influence art. The belief that feminist movement improved the position of the novel is wrong according to Forster. He says: "A mirror does not develop because a historical pageant passes in front of it. It only develops when it gets a fresh coat of quick-silver - in other words when it acquires new sensitiveness; and the novel's success lies in its own sensitiveness, not in the success of its subject matter."[57] For Forster, the novel does not rise and fall with any public causes or social problem. Its value is artistic and not political or social. According to him, a work of art" stands up by itself, and nothing else does .... It is the one orderly product which our muddling race has produced. It is the cry of a thousand sentinels, the echo from a thousand labryniths; it is the lighthouse which cannot be hidden.[58] The novel, in his view, is bounded by

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[55] Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 102.
[56] Aspects of the Novel, p. 36.
[57] Ibid., p. 36.
[58] Art for Art's Sake" pp. 99-100.

Poetry, History, and a sea. "All we can say of it (Novel) is that it is bounded by two chains of mountains neither of which rises very abruptly - the opposing ranges of Poetry and of History - and bounded on the third side by a sea - . . . ."[59]

In Aspects of the Novel Forster asks the question: 'What does a novel do?' He makes three types of people reply to this question. The first type answers in a good-tempered and vague manner that a novel tells a story. The second type gives the same answer but briskly and aggressively. The third type too gives the same answer but in a sort of drooping regretful voice. Forster prefers the third type and dreads and detects the other two types.[60] Story is an important aspect of fiction but not the whole of it. The novel does not do enough if it has only told you a story. Forster's thesis is that "the basis of a novel is a story, and a story is a narrative of events arranged in time-sequence."[61] This aspect of story appeals only to our primeval curiousity and, in Forster's opinion, if we want nothing else but the story, our literary judgements are ludicrous. Story is the lowest literary organism. But it is common to all literary types known as novels. It is universal and forms the backbone of the novel. Since story is essential in a novel and story is controlled by time sequence,

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[59] Aspects of the Novel, p. 25.

[60] Ibid., p. 40.

[61] Ibid., p. 44.

Forster stresses the role of time sense in the novel, "in a novel there is always a clock."[62] Different authors have tried to hide this clock but it is there novertheless. Emily Bronte, Sterne and Proust have tried to make this clock not too prominent in their novels. But Gertrude Stein went too far and "has smashed up and pulverized her clock and scattered its fragments over the world ...."[63] She tried to free the novel from the tyranny of time and express in it only the life by value. She fails because fiction divested of time cannot express anything. The element of time is essential to fiction and Forster asserts: "The time-sequence cannot be destroyed without carrying in its ruin all that should have taken its place; the novel that would express values only becomes unintelligible and therefore valueless."[64] Forster is aware of the presence in fiction of an organism which is higher than 'story' and he calls it 'plot'. If a novel is entirely based on time-sequence, or on a story, it cannot lead to any other conclusion but to the grave. It is an unsatisfactory conclusion and a great book should have something more to give us than this natural sequence of time that leads us to old age and ultimately to the grave. For this reason Forster says that Arnold Bennett's The Old Wives' Tale though strong,

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[62] Ibid., p. 43.

[63] Ibid., p. 52.

[64] Ibid., p. 53.

sincere, sad, falls short of greatness.[65] In contrast Tolstoy's War and Peace is a great book "because it has extended over space as well as over time, and the sense of space until it terrifies us is exhilarating, and leaves behind it an effect like music."[66] The 'great chords' which one hears in the novel do not arise from the story, nor from the characters, nor from the plots, but from "the immense area of Russia." "Space is the lord of War and Peace, not time."[67] Scott's Antiquary, on the other hand, is a celebration of life in time only and leads to "slackening of emotion and shallowness of judgement, and in particular to that idiotic use of marriage as a finale."[68]

Forster is convinced that the novel should portray convincing characters. "The novelist, unlike many of his colleagues, makes up a number of word-masses roughly describing himself .... gives them name and sex, assigns them plausible gestures, and causes them to speak by the use of inverted commas, and perhaps to behave consistently. These word-masses are his characters."[69] But these characters will not be exactly like people in real life, if so the novel becomes

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[65] Ibid,, p. 50.
[66] Ibid., pp. 50-51.
[67] Ibid., p. 51.
[68] Ibid., p. 50.
[69] Ibid., pp. 54-55.

memoir which is based on evidence. But the novel is "based on evidence + or - X, the unknown quantity being the temperament of the novelist; and the unknown quantity always modifies the effect of the evidence, and sometimes transforms it entirely."[70] In presenting a character, the novelist is not merely to speak about the actions and the other observable forms of his existence. What is more important for the novelist is "to reveal the hidden life at its source", to tell us more about a person than could be known and thus produce a character who is different from those we know in real life. The novelist is to express the "romanceful or romantic side" which includes "the pure passions, that is to say, the dreams, joys, sorrows and self-communings ...", and to express this side of human nature is one of the chief functions of the novel.[71] Character in a novel, 'Homo Fictus', is more elusive than his cousin in real life, 'Homo Sapiens'.[72] We can know more about him than we can know about our fellow creatures, because the narrator and creator are one. A character in a book, to Forster, "is real when the novelist knows everything about it."[73] Forster praises Virginia Woolf for her experiment with the new form of sensibility to reveal the inner life of her characters. In an essay, "The early novels of Virginia

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[70] Ibid., p. 55.
[71] Ibid., p. 56.
[72] Ibid., p. 63.
[73] Ibid., p. 69.

Woolf" he says: "It is easy for a novelist to describe what a character thinks of; look at Mrs. Humphrey Ward.' But to convey the actual process of thinking is creative feat, and I know of no one except Virginia Woolf who has accomplished it."[74] He is all praise for his Bloomsbury colleague because like him she believed that human beings are the permanent material of fiction, and knew that "to capture their inner life presents a different problem to each generation of novelists."[75] So her innovation in method and form can be justified but Forster observes that Woolf could give "life on the page" and not "life eternal." She could not create convincing characters who live.[76] Her characters "do live, but not continuously, whereas the characters of Tolstoy (let us say) live continuously."[77] Her problem, which would inaugurate a new literature if solved, "is to retain her own wonderful new method and form, and yet allow her readers to inhabit each character with Victorian thoroughness."[78] In Forster's opinion, Woolf lacks this Victorian thoroughness, and she comes close to aestheticism. But he has a sympathetic applause for her because she liked writing for fun. "Literature was her merry-go-round as well as her study. This makes her amusing to read, and it also

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74 Abinger Harvest, p. 126.

75 Ibid., p. 127.

76 Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 250.

77 Abinger Harvest, p. 127.

78 Ibid.

saves her from the Palace of Art."[79] Forster shares a sense of situation with Woolf. In an interview with Angus Wilson he asks: "Aren't we both working in the same tradition?" ... As to interior monologue, perhaps it would have been a help. But conscience probably ... (sic) it's surely a bit of a cheat."[80] Forster is suspicious of technical innovations which characterize many avant-garde novels of his time. It can be argued that Forster had more trust in the traditional method and style in their power to reveal the hidden life of the characters in the novel. Donald Watt's conclusion of Forster's views is at one with this argument. He says:

> It is likely that in Forster's opinion the continous narrative style of Tolstoy and the victorians brings the reader closer to the secret life than the disconcerting streams and monologues of his contemporaries.[81]

Forster classifies character into round and flat. Flat characters are "constructed round a single idea or quality."[82] Round characters have more than one factor in them. A flat character can be summed up in a sentence or phrase. This classification of character springs from Forster's belief that no human being is simple and "a novel

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79 Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 245.

80 Angus Wilson, "A Conversation with E.M. Forster", Encounter, 9 (1957), p. 56, quoted in "Artist as...", p. 58.

81 Ibid.

82 Aspects, p. 73.

that is at all complex requires flat people as well as round...."[83] Forster observes that Charles Dickens's characters are nearly all flat but the "wonderful feeling of human depth", his "immense vitality" animate and vibrate his characters "so that they borrow his life and appear to lead one of their own."[84] It is a trick which Forster sees through but admits that Dickens is "actually one of our big writers." Similarly, H.G. Wells's characters are nearly as flat as a photograph but are agitated with such vigour and vitality that the reader forgets the superficiality of their complexities. Wells does not create types, his people cannot be summed up but they "seldom pulsate by their own strength. It is the deft and powerful hands of their maker that shake them and trick the reader into a sense of depth."[85] But these "imperfect novelists" who can only transmit force and galvanize their work are quite different from the "perfect novelist", who seems to pass the creative finger down every sentence and into every word."[86] Forster lists Richardson, Defoe, and Jane Austen as perfect novelists. Jane Austen, though a miniaturist, is never two-dimensional. "All her characters are round or capable of rotundity."[87] Her characters show a freshness and give us a new kind of pleasure

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[83] Ibid., p. 75.
[84] Ibid., p. 76.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., p. 77.
[87] Ibid., p. 78.

each time they appear. This is because "she was a real artist, who never stooped to caricature, etc.," and her characters "are more highly organized." They are "ready for an extended life, for a life which the scheme of her books seldom require them to lead, and that is why they lead their actual life so satisfactorily."[88] Her characters function all round. Forster admires Jane Austen because she writes with the web of family relationship in her mind. He says: "the supreme thing in life to her was the family."[89] Family was the unit within which she excercised her liberty of choice, and similarly her characters flit and tap as much as they like but within the frame she provides for them. "The accidents of birth and relationship were more sacred to her than anything else in the world, and she introduced this faith as the ground-work of her six great novels."[90] Though quite 'imbecile' about Jane Austen, Forster observes that she is a failure as a letter-writer. "She has not enough subject matter to exercise her powers .... She takes no account of politics or religion ..."[91] Lack of direction was the defect with her letters. She did not have the sense of form and no literature can sustain itself without a form. Poverty of material, in this case, is a flaw

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88 Ibid., p. 79.
89 Abinger Harvest, p. 179.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.

but in the case of her novels, which hage a definite framework, it was an asset.

According to Forster, the novelist's relationship with the characters is important. The novel exists to depict human beings and the novelist is to reconcile human beings with non-human forces. He should establish a close affinity with his creations. He will sacrifice much to them and in turn he commands their secret lives and knows them. Jane Austen allows them to flit and tap as much as they liked within the framework she provides for them. Shakespeare's characters have consistency and they act on the law of probability. Tolstoy, on the other hand, makes his characters convincing by their inconsistency and by the violation of probablity in the interest of simplicity.[92] Marcel Proust proves that people become most real in fiction when they contradict themselves,[93] while Virginia Woolf tried to reconcile her experimental methods with the actuality of her people. Dickens "bounces" us into accepting what he says of his characters, while "Dostoevsky's characters ask us to share something deeper than their experiences."[94] Infinity attends the characters of Dostoevsky and "they expand to embrace it and summon it to embrace them.... Every sentence he writes

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92 Two Cheers for Democracy, pp. 212, 215.

93 Ibid., p. 230.

94 Aspects of the Novel, p. 123.

implies this extension, and the implication is the dominant aspect of his work. He is a great novelist in the ordinary sense - that is to say, his characters have relation to ordinary life and also live in their surroundings ...."[95] Forster finds it difficult to praise Henry James because he lays too great emphasis on pattern at the cost of human character. The result is tragic: "most of human life has to diaappear before he can do us a novel." Henry James has only "a very short list of characters", who are "constructed on very stingy lines", and are "incapable of fun, of rapid motion, of carnality and of nine-tenths of heroism." This "drastic curtailment ... of human beings and of their attributes" in the interests of a method makes his novels a place where only 'maimed creatures' can breathe. Forster's criticism of James's characters reaches its climax when he says, " ... they are gutted of the common stuff that fills characters in other books, and ourselves."[96] Forster does not approve of this heavy price which James pays in order to gain a particular aesthetic effect and agrees with H.G. Wells who "would go on to say that life should be given the preference, and must not be whittled or distended for a pattern's sake."[97] Forster is vehement in his criticism of

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95 Aspects of the Novel, p. 122.
96 Ibid., pp. 142-143.
97 Ibid., p. 145.

James Joyce, who, according to him, grossly misrepresented the secret life and gave a falsified and degraded picture of it. Ulysses portrays "all his subsconscious wishes and unrealized dreams, all the mud of his mind." Forster does not approve of Joyce's condemnation of the human race and finds him to be vindictive, soured, obscure and uncompromising. He calls Ulysses "a dogged attempt to cover the universe with mud, an inverted victorianism, an attempt to make crossness and dirt succeed where sweetness and light failed, a simplification of human character in the interest of Hell."[98] Joyce curtails his characters, not only in the interest of aestheticism but also in the interests of an unrelieved and unjustifiable pessimism. In an article entitled "The book of the Age?; James Joyce's Ulysses", Forster says:

> Of our failures and false teeth (yours and mine), he has given an excellent account, but he is too irritable and peevish to notice that we sometimes have teeth of our own. That indeed is the central mystery of human nature in this year of doubt, 1926: it is well equipped and successful, and a book that would fully express our age must take into account occasional beauty, strength and nobility. Ulysses shirks this problem.[99]

Joyce thus failed to unleash the "central mystery of human nature", the underside of the creative mind, and provide little

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[98] Ibid., p. 113.

[99] New Leader, (March 12, 1926), pp. 13-14, quoted by Watt in "Artist as Horseman: The Unity of Forster's Criticism", Modern Philology, vol. 79, No. I (Aug. 1981), p. 57.

nourishment for the reader's humanity. Forster praises D.H. Lawrence because he communicates at a level deeper than plot-structure or aesthetic form. The 'novelist's touch' falsifies life and Lawrence's characters, though not alive, are filled with the living stuff. What is valuable in D.H. Larence is "colour, gesture and outline in people and things, the usual stock-in-trade of the novelist, but evolved by such a different process that they belong to a new world."[100] Thus Forster finds some excuse for the flatness of Lawrence's characters.

Forster's criticism advocates spontaneity, eschews formulas, favours the personal touch and stands for poetry and imagination. I.A. Richards writing on Forster says:

> Mr. Forster never formulates his criticism of life in one of those principles which we can adhere to or discuss. He leaves it in the painful, concrete realm of practice, presenting it always and only in terms of actuality, and never in the abstract. In other words, he has no doctrine but only an attitude .... [101]

Canons and dogmas are things loathsome to Forster the critic. Criticism for him is a man to man business in which it is the heart that presides. The artist, according to him, is to

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[100] Aspects of the Novel, p. 131.

[101] "A Passage to Forster: Reflections on a Novelist", Forster: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views Series, ed., Malcolm Bradbury, (New Delhi, Prentice-Hall of India, 1979), p. 16.

speak directly from his heart and the test of his worth lies in his ability to communicate at a deeper level, in his ability to portray the inner self which is the fountain spring of poetry, passion and personality. For Forster, therefore, "the artist is not a bricklayer at all, but a horseman, whose business it is to catch Pegasus at once, not to practice for him by mounting tamer colts."[102] Coherency of method and consistency of form are irrelevant to Forster if an artist can catch 'Pegasus', that is, if he can capture the hidden life in his work. In this task the writer is always under a compulsion to 'reach back' to some elemental reality. Forster calls this compulsion, 'Prophecy.' In Dostoyevsky's case it reaches back to pity and love.[103] In Melville's <u>Moby Dick</u> it is the "prophetic song" which "flows athwart the action and the surface morality like an undercurrent",[104] and a 'contest', that forms its essential. In D.H. Lawrence the element of prophecy appears as something that "cannot be put into words" which transforms the usual fictional material into something extraordinary.[105] Forster considers Emily Bronte as a prophetess and <u>Wuthering Heights</u> as prophetic fiction. It is

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[102] <u>The Longest Journey</u>, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1960), p. 20.

[103] <u>Aspects of the Novel</u>, p. 125.

[104] Ibid., p. 126.

[105] Ibid., p. 131.

true that the book is symmetrically arranged and logically conceived. But she has introduced "muddle, chaos, tempest" in the book and the reason is, Forster says: "Because in our sense of the word she was a prophetess; because what is implied is more important to her than what is said; and only in confusion the figures of Heathcliff and Catherine externalize their passion till it streamed through the house and over the moors."[106] These were not 'bricklayers', but they were 'horsemen' who could catch 'Pegasus' at once, and so Forster finds it justifiable to excuse the "roughness of surface"[107] which is found in the works of these writers. In contrast to them James Joyce is a bricklayer and lets technique and pattern get in the way of his effort to unleash the underside of the creative mind.[108]

Forster's criticism is not a systematic survey in the interests of a method and form. He does not lay down strict terms which a work of art has to fulfil in order to be called a great work of art. In this he differs as a critic from Percy Lubbock. For Lubbock the test of a novel lies in the 'point of view' from which the novelist describes the the characters. Forster quotes him in Aspects of the Novel and finds it difficult to agree with him.

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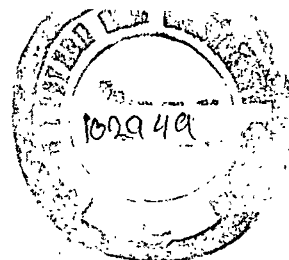
106 Ibid., p. 132.
107 Ibid., p. 124.
108 Ibid., pp. 125-126.



> The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction (says Mrs. Percy Lubbock), I take to be governed by the question of the point of view - the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story.[109]

Forster does not accept this view which makes the aesthetic of fiction formulaic. This is doctrinaire criticism which places point of view in the centre, But for Forster the main focus is not the point of view; "... for me the whole intricate question of method resolves itself not into the formulae but into the power of the writer to bounce the reader into believing what he says ...".[110] Forster puts this power right at the centre of the problem of the aesthetics of fiction. In this he is perfectly at one with Virginia Woolf who says:

> Any method is right, every method is right, that expresses what we wish to express, if we are writers; that brings us closer to the novelist's intention if we are readers.[111]

According to Forster, the power to convince the reader rather than a consistent point-of-view is the factor which determines the method of fiction. So a novelist's main intention is not to project a method but to surprise the reader in a convincing manner. "The novelist who betrays too much interest in his own method can never be more than interesting; he has given up

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[109] Ibid., p. 81.

[110] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

[111] Woolf, "Modern Fiction", Collected Essays, vol. 2, p. 108.

the creation of character and summoned us to help analyse his own mind, and a heavy drop in the emotional thermometre results."[112] The worth of the novel is to be tested by this 'emotional thermometre' and not by the author's view-point. The greatness of Tolstoy's War and Peace lies in its power to bounce us up and down Russia, in keeping the emotional thermometre high. Lubbock would have found it greater if it had a view-point. But Forster approves of the shifting view point in Tolstoy because it "comes off" and it is a symptom of the "power to expand and contract perception" which is "one of the greatest advantages of the novel-form, and it has a parallel in our perception of life."[113] So for Forster the form of the novel must be organic and not methodical. For the sake of sustained effect in fiction method has to be put aside for something more vital: imagination.[114] Unified effect in Fiction is often the result of inspiration, - not method, - uniformly sustained throughout the whole course of an imaginative effort. This is what keeps the emotional temperature high in fiction. So a novelist should not "take the reader into confidence about his characters."[115] The result is fatal to the aesthetic effect of the novel. "Intimacy is gained", Forster says, "but at the expense of illusion and nobility."[116] This is

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[112] Aspects of the Novel, p. 83.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 95.
[115] Aspects of the Novel, p. 84.
[116] Ibid.

the reason why he finds it difficult to admire Andre Gide's novel Les Faux - Mannayeurs. It is all of a piece logically but, according to Forster, it is not among the vital works.

Forster's view of fiction is iconoclastic so far as the traditional conception of plot is concerned. "As for a plot - to pot with the plot! Break it up, boil it down .... All that is prearranged is false."[117] Most novels are weak because there is a battle in them between plot and character and at the end plot takes a cowardly revenge by winding up the novel. "This is because the plot requires to be wound up." And Forster asks: "Why is this necessary? Why is there not a convention which allows a novelist to stop as soon as he feels bored? Alas, he has to round things off, and usually the character go dead while he is at work, and our final impression of them is through deadness."[118] This is vehement criticism of the traditional aesthetic of fiction which lays great stress on plot-construction. Forster loathes this idea because in traditional plot "logic takes over the command from flesh and blood",[119] and his sympathies both as a novelist and as a critic are definitely on the side of the flesh and blood. The novel is a humanistic document and "human beings have their great chance

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[117] Ibid., p. 99.
[118] Ibid., p. 94.
[119] Ibid.

in the novel."[120] But humanity is stifled by the contrived plot as Forster observes in the case of Meredith, the past master in the art of plot construction. In Forster's view, Meredith could not perceive and communicate what is really tragic in life; his vision of nature was not enduring like Hardy's. So he had to fake things up.

> And his novels: most of the social values are faked. The tailors are not tailors, the cricket matches are not cricket, the railway trains do not even seem to be trains, the county families give the air of having been only just that moment unpacked, scarcely in position before the action starts the straw still clinging to their beards.[121]

Inspite of their logicality, Meredith's plots are chilly fakes and he now lies in the trough. Speaking further about Meredith's plot Forster says:

> A Meredithian plot is not a temple to the tragic or even to the comic Muse, but rather resembles a series of Kiosks most artfully placed among wooded slopes, which his people reach by their own impetus, and from which they emerge with altered aspect.[122]

In Meredith's novel, Beauchamp's Career, Forster observes, "an attempt to elevate the plot to Aristotelian symmetry, to turn the novel into a temple wherein dwells interpretation and peace."[123] It was a failure because the book is a series of

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[120] Ibid., p. 149.

[121] Ibid., p. 90.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid., p. 91.

contrivances that spring from the characters and react upon them. What one hears is only "hammering and screwing",[124] to construct a well-ordered plot. In Hardy too the plot triumphs over character but Forster admires him because he is "essentially a poet, who conceives of his novels from an enormous height."[125] Hardy arranges events with emphasis on casuality and the characters are required to acquiesce in the requirements of the plot. There is ceaseless emphasis on fate. "The fate above us, not the fate working through us - that is what is eminent and memorable in Wessex novels."[126] But what makes Hardy admirable is that the machine that works in his novels "never catches humanity in its teeth." It is true that the characters are drained of their vitality; they are required to contribute much to the plot. Hardy's flaw lies in the fact that "he has emphasized causality more strongly than his medium permits."[127] But he is great because there is an element of mystery in his novels. In spite of the cause and effect chain which connects the characters to the plot "there is some vital problem that has not been answered or even posed...."[128] Meredith was a great plot maker and he knew where it could stand, but Forster prefers Hardy to him; "... the works of Thomas Hardy is my home and that of Meredith cannot be."[129]

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[124] Ibid., p. 94.
[125] Ibid,, p. 92.
[126] Ibid., p. 93.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid., p. 93.
[129] Ibid.

Plot is the intellectual logical aspect of the novel and it requires an element of mystery. According to Aristotle it was the sole medium for all human happiness and misery to express itself. But Forster holds the opposite view. He finds this framework inadequate to express the fullness of life and character. He says:

> In the novel, all human happiness and misery does not take the form of action, it seeks means of expression other than through the plot, it must not be rigidly canalized.[130]

In this rejection of the traditiona plot Forster is joined by Virginia Woolf, who experimented with means other than plot to express human happiness and misery, to capture the 'luminous halo.' Woolf completely discarded plot in her later novels whereas Forster pleads for a change in perspective. He is only skeptical about the plot and its centrality in the novel.

> After all, why has a novel to be planned? Why need it close, as a play closes? Cannot it open out? Instead of standing above his work and controlling it, cannot the novelist throw himself into it and be carried along to some goal that he does not foresee?[131]

For Forster the novel is not to be a well ordered, logical framework with a beginning, a middle and an end. If it is only that, it will fall short of its aim. It must grow and open out.

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[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid., p. 95.

It is not a thing to be finished and done. It must be capable of growing further in the mind of the reader. Its rhythms should produce as their effect something in the readers' mind, something that is not and cannot be in the pages. Forster asks in this regard:

> Is there any effect in novels comparable to the effect of the Fifth Symphony as/whole, where, when the orchestra stops, we hear something which has never actually been played?[132]

Forster is hopeful that fiction might achieve the final expression of this type of beauty which music offers. For this the novelist should not close himself in the plot. Forster suggests:

> Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion, Not rounding off but opeining out.[133]

This can be taken as a credal statement of Forster's aesthetic of fiction. The notion of a general and harmonious expansion is at the very heart of Forster's critical view of fiction, and it reflects Mathew Arnold's notion of culture as an aesthetic goal. According to Arnold culture implies an harmonious expansion towards the perfect state. In "Sweetness and Light" he says:

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[132] Ibid., p. 149.

[133] Ibid., p. 149.

> Culture, then is a study of perfection, and of harmonious perfection, general perfection, and perfection which consists in becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances .... The idea of perfection as an inward condition of the mind and spirit is at variance with the mechanical and material civilization in esteem with us, and nowhere, as I have said so much in esteem with us. The idea of perfection as a general expansion of the human family is at variance with our strong individualism, our hatred of all limits to the unrestrained swing of the individual's personality, our maxim of "every man for himself." Above all, the idea of perfection as a harmonious expansion of human nature is at variance with our want of flexibility, with our ineptitude for seeing more than one side of a thing, with our intense energetic absorption in the particular pursuit we happen to be following.[134]

One can notice the indebtedness of Forster to Arnold for this notion of expansion as a guiding principle for the novelists as against the notion of completion which forces a novelist to wind up his plot and so finish his novel. According to Forster, fiction can achieve the type of beauty offered by music. In War and Peace he finds such type of beauty. Its chords sound behind us as we read it and when we finished every item in it acquires an unexpected expansion.[135]

Forster is an impressionistic critic. He has no tough standards or touchstones to measure the greatness of literary

[134] Mathew Arnold, "Sweetness and Light", Culture And Anarchy in English Prose of the Victorian Era, ed., Charles Frederick Harold and William, D. Templeman (New York, Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 1138.

[135] Aspects of the Novel, p. 150.

works. He does not believe in theorising about literature. A work of literature, according to him, is valuable not because of its socio-political relevance, not because of its moral suggestiveness, not because of the sequentiality of incidents and logicality of plot, but because it communicates at a deeper level to the individual human heart. So a novel cannot be approached with any elaborate critical apparatus. There is only one approach to literature, that is, the personal because Forster says, "There is only one note in literature - the personal."[136] Principles and systems cannot be applicable in the case of the novel. Forster's approach to the novel is a ramshackly one, and according to him, in the business of novel criticism the main examiner is the "human heart" and it will be a man-to-man business."[137] This shows the impressionistic bent of Forster's criticism. According to him, "the final test of a novel will be our affection for it, as it is the test of our friends, and of anything else which we cannot define."[138] For Forster one's affection for the writer is also the test of his works. Forster takes interest in William Arnold because he is Mathew Arnold's brother. Commenting on Oakfield, Forster says, "... it has the Arnold integrity. It is the work of a man whose brother was a genius, and who was akin to that brother morally."[139]

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136 "Artist as Horseman...", p. 47.

137 Aspects of the Novel, p. 38.

138 Ibid.

139 "William Arnold", Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 204.

He criticises Virginia Woolf's works but they get a final applause from him because of his personal sympathies for Virginia Woolf. Jane Austen, Lawrence and Hardy are all forgiven for their flaws because of Forster's affection for these writers.

Criticism, for Forster, is an informal affair in which he speaks about what the novel should be like and how others have written novels. There is no pleading for the cause of some new aesthetic of fiction. It is the criticism of a practising artist. Hence it is informal, personal, artistic and impressionistic. Forster is a traditionalist who cannot totally approve of the modern assault upon the fabric of the novel. He sympathises with the modern search within. He believes that character remains constant for the novelist, and considers the novel as a traditional form of art. So the role of the novelist remains unchanged. In contrast to this is Woolf's historical conception of art and reality. According to Woolf, character changed and so the role of the novelist also changed. While Forster says: "History develops; Art stands still."[140] Both these novelist-critics saw the same problem but found different solutions. Mark Goldman gives a satisfactory assessment of both as critics.

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140 See note. 56 above.

> As a novelist of ideas, Forster's balancing, the 'proper mixture of character', as he says in Aspects of the Novel, is essential to the complexity of attitudes which is the subject and form of his novel. He works inevitably from the outside in. Mrs. Woolf's balancing is aesthetic, even when, as in The Waves, it is a rigid pattern; her points of view are discovered from the inside and 'radiate' from a subjective centre. And though Forster's intention carries any intense poetry with it, he is really opposed to Mrs. Woolf's poetic novel. He is too conscious of the human comedy, too much the novelist of ideas, too involved however, skeptically, in the liberal tradition, to commit himself to the novel of sensibility which is her major achievement.[141]

He was not an aesthete as Woolf nearly was. He believed in art but not at the expense of life as it is. His engaged humanism took him away from aesthetic considerations. His approach to fiction as a critic is best expressed by Virginia Woolf in a review of Aspects of the Novel entitled "The Art of fiction" in which she presents fiction as a lady in trouble and the critics as gallants who come to her rescue. Sir Walter Raleigh and Mr. Percy Lubbock came to her ceremoniously. They had a great knowledge of her, but not much intimacy with her. Forster comes to her without any ceremony, "disclaims knowledge but cannot deny that he knows the lady well." And Woolf goes on

> If he lacks something of the others' authority, he enjoys the privilege which are allowed the lover, He knocks at the bedroom door and is admitted when

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[141] Mark Goldman, pp. 58-59.

> the lady is in slippers and dressing gown.' Drawing up their chairs to the fire they talk easily, wittily, subtly, like old friends who have no illusions, although in fact the bedroom is a lecture-room and the place the highly austere city of Cambridge.[142]

Unpretntious and unceremonious, untroubled by any absolute dogmatic positions, Forster the critic approaches literature with an ardent desire to search for the poetic, the passionate and the personal. And his novels are an attempt to convey the poetic, the passionate side of human character, to unravel the underside of the mind from which springs everything that is valuable in life and in art.

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[142] Collected Essays II, p. 51.

CHAPTER IV

HOWARDS END AND *A PASSAGE TO INDIA*: EXPERIMENTS IN 'CONNECTION'

CHAPTER IV

HOWARDS END AND A PASSAGE TO INDIA: EXPERIMENTS IN 'CONNECTION'

Forster's critical creed centres around his passionate desire to reconcile prose and passion, to bridge the widening gap between the Benthamite and the Coleridgean views of the world. Art, according to him, should somehow connect the two so that a meaningful survival is ensured on this disordered planet. This seems to be in line with Woolf's idea of androgynous art. Art, for Woolf, should bring about a union between the female and male principles which is the only means for wholeness and integrity. In the age of anxiety and despair where T.S. Eliot could "connect nothing with nothing", Forster proposed: "Only connect ...." His criticism was a quest for reserves of spiritual and creative energies in man. But Forster was no dreamy idealist, no pedlar of Erewhonian myths. His was a tough-minded assertion of a spiritual vision of man. His humanism took him into the midst of human affairs, and human situations. His ideals as a critic came directly into conflict with values. Forster did not withdraw into the inner world of poetry and vision but as a serious artist he demonstrated a marriage between prose and passion, the inner world of vision and the outer world of action, because he felt that somehow one must attempt a connection or else we shall all perish. His novels,

particularly Howards End and A Passage to India are experiments in 'connection'.

In Howards End the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels represent the Benthamite and the Coleridgean cultures respectively. These are the two antogonistic interpretations of the world. One stresses the public aspect of action and events and the other insists on the personal aspect of life. Wilfred Stone compares this dichotomy between Wilcoxes and Schlegels to Dickinson's dichotomy between the "Red-bloods" and the "Mollycoddles".[1] He describes these two types at length.

> The Red-bloods had their originals in the wellborn bullies and roughs of the "best set," those cricket-playing conformists of the public school (and university) who were destined to rule Britain and her empire; the Mollycoddles were those, like Dickinson and Forster, almost as wellborn, who hated and envied the strong ones and consoled themselves with dreams that one day the meek and the sensitive would inherit the earth.[2]

Forster undoubtedly was on the side of the Mollycoddles and Margaret Schlegel reflects his views in the novel. He believed in the motto: Be soft even if you stand to get squashed. This Dickinsonian dichotomy can be clearly applied to the types of people in the novel. The Wilcoxes are the Red-bloods. They are in business and "belong to a world of

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[1] Wilfred Stone, The Cave and the Mountain, p. 236.
[2] Ibid., pp. 236-237.

"telegrams and anger"; they regard the world as being organized towards given ends. They are sharp towards the lower orders, deferential towards social formalities, respectful towards machinery. Predominantly practical, predatory, expansionist, their spirit is the spirit of Whiggery, their economies and social philosophy are laissez faire. Their household is masculine and has all the energy associated with the male principle."[3] Wilcoxes believe in action and their deity is efficiency. Theirs is the world dominated by committees and it is interesting to see the Wilcox committee sitting together to decide over Mrs. Wilcox's last wish. Forster presents the semi-comic scene thus:

> Considered item by item, the emotional context was minimized, and all went forward smoothly. The clock ticked, the coals blazed higher, and contended with the white radiance that poured in through the windows. Unnoticed the sun occupied his sky, and the shadows of the trees stems, extraordinarily solid, fell like trenches of purple across the frosted lawn. It was a glorious winter morning. Evie's fox terrier, who had passed for white, was only a dirty grey dog now, so intense was the purity that surrounded him. He was discredited, but the black birds that he was chasing glowed with Arabian darkness, for all the conventional colouring of life had been altered ...
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> To follow it is unnecessary. It is a rather a moment when the commentator should step forward.

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[3] Malcolm Bradbury, "Howards End" Forster: A Collection of Critical Essay, Twentieth Century Views Series, edited by Malcolm Bradbury, (New Delhi, Prentice Hall of India Ltd., 1979), p. 132.

> Ought the Wilcoxes have offered their home to Margaret? ... The practical moralist may acquit them - almost. For one hard fact remains. They did neglect a personal appeal.[4]

In the Wilcoxes' world personal relation is meaningless. It is a thing to be disposed of as just an item on the agenda. They represent the outer world of daylight experience where action and events matter, and feeling and emotions have no place at all. They are the practical pragmatic, matter-of-fact, British-to-the-backbone materialists on whom rests the Empire and her success. Margaret, a member of the opposing camp, is aware of the necessity and relevance of the Wilcox culture which is responsible for the present prosperity of England. She tells Helen :

> If Wilcoxes hadn't worked and died in England for thousands of years, you and I couldn't sit here without having our throats cut. There would be no trains, no ships to carry us literary people about in, no fields even. Just savagery .... More and more do I refuse to draw my income and sneer at those who guarantee it.[5]

Here Margaret is only asserting an historical fact. The industrial milieu which the Wilcoxes represent has changed the face of the earth. They have achieved success at the cost of imagination and personal appeal. They have bull-dozed their way to the top, and created a milieu governed by materialistic

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[4] Howards End (Hamondsworth, Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 107-108.

[5] Ibid., pp. 177-178.

and utilitarian values. But nevertheless, the reality of such outer life cannot be denied, though it has been built upon sand. Margaret herself testifies to the reality of Wilcox milieu. She tells Helen:

> The truth is that there is a greater outer life that you and I have never touched - a life in which telegrams and anger count. Personal relations that we think supreme, are not supreme there. Their love means marriage settlements, death, death duties. So far I'm clear. But here's my difficulty. This outer life, though obviously horrid, often seems the real one - there's grit in it. It does breed character. Do personal relations lead to sloppiness in the end?"[6]

Boorish industrialism untouched by personal sentiments is what the Wilcox culture stands for in the novel. For them social propriety counts more than human or personal sympathy. In contrast to them are the Schlegel sisters with their 'fetishes and intellectual heritage'. "They are thoroughly Bloomsbury; they entertain musicians, artists and even an actress; they believe in literature, art and personal relations; they are moralists and anti-utilitarians; they have a nobbish faith in the rightness of their own sensibilities."[7] Their household is predominantly female. They are emancipated, modern, humane, thoughtful and responsive to the plight of the less fortunate. Their idealism is attributable

[6] Ibid., p. 41.

[7] Wilfred Stone, op. cit., p. 239.

to their German background. Their standard of morality stresses personal sympathy rather than social propriety. Social conscience, for them, is less important than personal relations. They are the dreamy intellectual idealists representing the inner life and the forces of 'the unseen'. Their values come directly into conflict with the Wilcoxian values. They stand for the female principle of order, sympathy, harmony and understanding. They are romantic in their temperament as against the practical English heritage which the Wilcoxes stand for. This antithesis between the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels creates a dialectic "in which the national contests with the international, the seen with the unseen, the practical with the romantic, the prose with the poetry and the passion."[8] In this conflict Forster clearly shows his affiliation with the German and Coleridgean idealism with its implicit separation of utilitarian and aesthetic functions. He is on the side of the Schlegels all through the conflict. But he believes that truth can be found only by making repeated journeys into both the extremes, and finally by bringing about a union of the two. The novel thus is an attempt to test the ability of Bloomsbury liberalism to survive a marriage with the great outside world of action and events. The juxtaposition of Wilcoxes and Schlegels is meant

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8 Malcolm Bradbury, "Howards End", p. 133.

to show the conflict in which one can bring about a synthesis by the Forsterian motto which Margaret Schlegel lives out in the novel.

> Only connect. That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die.[9]

"Only connect": this is Forster's plea for meaningful survival in a world in which life is fragmented. Margaret's marriage with Henry Wilcox is a symbolic union of the two cultures they represent. It is her deliberate attempt to attain proportion, to achieve wholeness or in Woolfian terms, androgyny. Sterile idealism and romantic dreaming alone cannot improve the world, nor can inhuman industry alone better the situation. There has to be a connection between the two systems of values so that life becomes meaningful, so that art becomes meaningful. It is the only way to escape decadence and brutality which the two extremes threaten to unleash in the world. In the thematic framework there is, therefore, a "joining of power and sensibility, the heroic and the civilized, male and female".[10] Weakening of imagination the industrial world is what Forster deplores and the plea for imagination can

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9 Howards End, p. 188.

10 Wilfred Stone, op cit., p. 236.

be effective only if one can connect poetry and passion with the "civilization of luggage", which prized money first, intellect second, imagination not at all.

> It is the vice of a vulgar mind to be thrilled by bigness, to think that a thousand square miles are a thousand times more wonderful than one square mile ... That is not imagination. No, it kills it .... Oh yes, you have learned men, who ... collect facts, and facts, and empires of facts. But which of them will rekindle the light within?[11]

Margaret Schlegel tried to rekindle the light within by attempting to connect the prose with the passion. This is the only way to spread what Arnold calls "sweetness and light." She is the ideal of proportion in the book. Her search for truth differs from that of a 'yogi', or from that of a comissar. Her truth is a synthesis, an organic whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. In contrast to her sister Helen's romantic love, Margaret's love for Henry Wilcox is a means of "setting his soul in order",[12] of making him a "better man", of helping him "to the building of the rainbow bridge that could connect the prose in us with the passion."[13] Her connection is a heroic attempt to keep proportion, an effort to join the prose and the passion. Whereas Helen's connection is a kind of hysterical self-immolation verging on the suicidal.[14] She destroys Leonard

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[11] Howards End, p. 43.

[12] Ibid., p. 219.

[13] Ibid., p. 240.

[14] Wilfred Stone, op cit., p. 255.

Bast and makes him die a symbolic death even before he actually dies. She fails to achieve proportion, and thereby falls short of attaining truth as Margaret views it.

> The businessman who assumes that this life is everything, and the mystic who asserts that it is nothing, fail, on this side or that to hit the truth.
> "Yes, I see, dear: it's about halfway between," Aunt Juley had hazarded in earlier years. No, truth, being alive, was not halfway between anything. It was only to be found by continuous excursions into either realm, and through proportion is the final secret, to espouse it at the outset is to insure sterility.[15]

Margaret's love affair with Mr. Wilcox is an excursion into the other extreme in order to establish proportion and to escape from sterility. She tells Helen

> There is the widest gulf between my love-making and yours. Yours was romance; mine will be prose. I'm not running it down - a very good kind of prose, but well considered, well thought out .... I know all Mr. Wolcox's faults. He's afraid of emotion. He cares to much about success, too little about the past. His sympathy lacks poetry and so isn't sympathy really. I'd even say - she looked at the shining lagoons - "that spiritually, he's not as honest as I am. Doesn't that satisfy you?"[16]

Margaret hovers between the two worlds and realises the truth of both, accepts men as they are and continues to search for truth. She reflects:

> How wide the gulf between Henry as he was and Henry as Helen thought he ought to be. And she herself - as usual between the two, now accepting men as they

[15] Howards End, pp. 195-196.

[16] Ibid., p. 177.

> are, now yearning with her sister for truth. Love and Truth - their warfare seems eternal.[17]

The novel is a drama of this warfare between Love and Truth in which proportion is the only means of peace and harmony. This warfare takes a social dimension when the question: who shall inherit England? is raised. "Howards End" is a spiritual symbol for England and at the end of the novel we find the Schlegel sisters in posssession of "Howards End." The Mollycoddles are victorious and we find Margaret standing like an angel guarding "Howards End" and its occupants against Wilcox Red-bloods. The heir to Howards End is certainly, Helen's child, an indirect result of the Wilcox's irresponsibility and Helen's suicidal romance. Schlegelian standard of personal sympathy lives symbolically through Leonard's child, though Leonard himself is sacrificed in the process. He is disposed of through death and Henry Wilcox is defeated through moral enervation. The Schlegels triumph but by destroying everyone they come into contact with. If Henry Wilcox lives on happily with Margaret, it is not the Henry Wilcox whom we have known, but a moral ghost who was created anew as a result of Margaret's attempts to 'connect.' Leonard lives but through Helen's child who is the result of a hysterical union in the cause of moral sympathy, and who, therefore, will be a shadowy existence. If Schlegels' way is Forster's way to achieve

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[17] Ibid., p. 228.

proportion, much of human life, whether it is that of Wilcoxes or of the Basts, will be destroyed before Forster can do us a novel. One can certainly notice a curtailment of life in the interest of moral enthusiasm. Forster's mission in this novel is to defeat the devil, the Benthamite culture, represented by the Wilcoxes, which is "blinded by arithmetic, deaf to the warnings of poetry, which assumed that a man is only the sum of his qualities."[18]

Margaret's final triumph over the Wilcoxes symbolizes the triumph of the female principle over the male principle. Failure to connect is what is wrong with the Wilcoxes who are dominated by the male principle. When Henry objects to Helen's presence in Howards End on the ground of social propriety Margaret gives a long speech exposing his failure to connect.

> "Not any more of this" she cried. "You shall see the connection if it kills you, Henry. You have had a mistress - I forgave you. My sister has a lover - you drive her from the house. Do you see the connection? Stupid, hypocritical, cruel - oh, contemptible - a man who insults his wife, when she's alive and cants with her memory when she's dead. A man who ruins a woman for his pleasure, and casts her off to ruin other men. And gives bad financial advice, and then says he is not responsible. These men are you. You can't recognise them because you can't connect. I've had enough of your unweeded kindness. I've spoilt you long enough .... No one has ever told you what you are - muddled, criminally muddled. Men like you use repentence as a blind. So don't repent.

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[18] Stone, p. 7, quoted from Galsworthy Lowes Dickinson.

> Only say to yourself, 'what Helen has done, I've done.'"[19]

This reveals an essential difference between the Schlegels and the Wilcoxes. The Wilcoxes never admit being wrong whereas the Schlegels admit that they may be wrong. Henry's shirking of responsibility for Leonard's misery and Helen's romantic sympathy for Leonard are the extremes which are contrasted in the novel. Margaret keeps proportion by trying to connect in this extreme situation, and makes sure that Leonard's child becomes the heir to Howards End. The condition of the Schlegel sisters may be said to be the condition of spiritual and moral laissez-faire. They try to attune themselves to the Wilcox rhythms of "telegrams and anger." Helen heads for a headlong collision resulting in hysteria and violence while Margaret connects throughout. "She connected, though the connection might be bitter."[20]

Keeping proportion becomes the central criterion of quality in the novel. Proportion rings throughout the novel through the operation of the metaphors of wholeness, that of seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. The former is the business of a successful materialist while the latter, that of the sensitive and the plucky. Forster naturally chose the

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[19] Howards End, p. 300.

[20] Ibid., p. 207.

latter and so did Margaret in the novel. These two different ways of reacting to life are representative of the two contrasting cultures in the book. Margaret herself becomes the advocate of seeing life whole. She says:

> It is impossible to see modern life steadily and see it whole, and she had chosen to see it whole. Mr. Wilcox saw steadily.[21]

Modern life is so mechanized and fragmented that one cannot look at it and consider it item by item and at the same time comprehend it as a whole. The Wilcoxes look at life, love, marriage, death etc., in a committee room considering them item by item and so they fail to achieve a whole, complex vision of life. The Schlegels, on the other hand, prefer to see it whole. Leonard, the representative of the poor class, the culturally underveloped, also perceives the impossibility of doing both, seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. He says:

> Oh, it was no good, this continual aspiration .... To see life steadily and to see it whole was not for the likes of him.[22]

This "continual aspiration" to keep proportion seems to become a reality when Margaret indulges in a rather romantic contemplation of the eternal life of the countryside.

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[21] Ibid., p. 165.

[22] Ibid., p. 67.

> In these English farms, if anywhere, one might see life steadily and see it whole, group in one vision its transitoriness and its eternal youth, connect - connect without bitterness until all men are brothers.[23]

Proportion, Connection, Wholeness: these are the rhythms with which the novel closes. Ruth Wilcox represents the achievement of proportion. She is the living affirmation that "it is private life that holds out the mirror to infinity."[24] Her life with the Wilcoxes is indirectly pictured by Margaret

> To be humble and kind, to go straight ahead, to love people rather than pity them, to remember the submerged - well one can't do all these things at once, worse luck, because they're so contradictory. It's then that proportion comes in - to live by proportion. Don't begin with proportion. Only prigs do that. Let proportion come in as a last resource when the better things have failed.[25]

Mrs. Wilcox kept proportion when the better things have failed. This is what Margaret thinks as greatness in her.

> She was not intellectual, nor even alert, and it was odd that, all the same, she should give the idea of greatness. Margaret, zig-zagging with her friends over Thought and Art, was conscious of a personality that transcended their own and dwarfed their activities. There was no bitterness in Mrs. Wilcox; there was not even criticism; she was lovable, and no ungracious or uncharitable word had passed her lips. Yet she and daily life were out of focus; one or the other must show blurred. And at lunch she seemed more out of focus than usual, and nearer the line that divides daily life from a life that may be of greater importance.[26]

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[23] Ibid., p. 264.

[24] Ibid., p. 91.

[25] Ibid., p. 83.

[26] Ibid., pp. 86-87.

If Mrs. Wilcox is a symbol of proportion, why does she fail to change the Wilcox system? This is a moral question that can be asked in the novel. The book has no direct answer to it and shows and ethical evasiveness. One can only conclude that "the better things have failed" with Mrs. Wilcox and so she ended her life calmly by keeping proportion. But to Margaret she becomes a source of inspiration and solace. To her Ruth Wilcox is an evidence that God works in other ways. Through Ruth, Margaret finds a home amidst the civilization of luggage. She finds in Ruth Wilcox everything that she can retain as religion. She finds in Ruth's life the truth that the unseen cannot be expressed adequately in public life and "... personal intercourse, and that alone, that ever hints at a personality beyond our daily vision."[27] From Ruth she learns her mission, that is, not to contrast the seen and the unseen, poetry and prose, the outer life and the life, but to reconcile them. Margaret realises that she must "fill out both the prose and poetry in her own life, and this filling out is the principle of expansion in the novel."[28]

The rhythms of the novel close like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and we find the Schlegels escaping into the

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[27] Ibid., p. 91.
[28] Malcolm Bradbury, p. 138.

music heard after the orchestra stops, into the future perfection which "has never actually been played."[29] A world of spiritual absolutes alone is fit for the Schlegels and they drift into it. So the novel does not close, but opens out. Margaret's attempts to "fill out" the prose and the poetry are not yet over, but they provide an "expansion, not completion"[30] for the possibilities of the novel. The book as such is an eloquent plea for personal relation and Bloomsbury liberalism. Through the unsuccessful experiments at connection Forster tries to find out an alternative to decadence and brutality that seem to threaten life in the modern world. Proportion is his answer, Connection is his means. The book is a drama of conflict and an attempt to establish proportion both in social and personal life.

A Passage to India is Forster's greatest achievement as a novelist. His views on the novel are best exemplified in this book. His critical views of fiction are fully in evidence in A Passage to India. It is the greatest example of moderation which Forster advocates amidst the fury of new experiments in the genre. Forster believed that the novel should retain its traditional stock-in-trade or else it loses its values. What should be new in fiction is the new sensitiveness

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29 Aspects of the Novel. p. 149.
30 Ibid.

with which the novelist should inform his work. He is suspicious about the innovations of his contemporaries. For Forster the traditional form and methods are indispensable, but the novelist must be able to present the poetic, the passionate and the personal aspects of life. As a novelist Forster's main concern is to represent how people live life as it is. And so he distrusts any dominant pattern for the novel. According to him, in fiction "life should be given the preference and must not be whittled or distended for a pattern's sake."[31] Human beings are the permanent material of fiction and the novel is 'sogged with humanity.' For this reason "the novel is not capable of as much artistic development as the drama: its humanity or the grossness of its material ... hinder it."[32]

It will be our task to determine whether in *A Passage to India* he is successful in practising all that he preached in *Aspects of the Novel*. The answer is yes, but. Let us look at the novel in terms of the different aspects of the novel. The first aspect which Forster speaks of is the story. If one asks whether *A Passage to India* has a story, the answer which Forster himself would give is: "Yes - oh dear yes - the novel tells a story."[33] After reading the first few

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[31] *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 145.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., p. 40.

chapters the reader is curious to know what happened next. The novel reveals a "double allegiance", that is, to life in time and life by values.[34] Forster does not hide the clock in the novel nor does his allegiance to life in time lead us to its normal destination, the grave. He harmonises the two and so we hear both the ticking of the clock and the voice of values. The clock ticks on, two English ladies desirous of seeing the real India land up in Chandrapore. One of them accidently falls in with a young Indian doctor. Friendship develops and the young doctor arranges an expedition into the Marabar Caves in order to show the real India to the English ladies. He is joined by Cyril Fielding, the liberal educationist, who is in with Aziz and the Indians. Something happens in the cave into which Adela Quested enters. Dr. Aziz is accused of raping Adela and is arrested. Racial rivalry is let loose and during the ordeal Fielding is on the side of his friend Aziz against his fellow countrymen. In a packed court-room Adela breaks down and withdraws her charge against Dr. Aziz. The Indians are happy and Fielding becomes their hero. Adela is rejected by the Anglo-Indians and is left alone. Fielding comes close to her and helps her to be let off without paying damages to Aziz. The clock ticks on. Adela sails for England. Fielding too goes to England. Aziz and his friends grow suspicious and conclude that Fielding

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[34] Ibid., p. 43.

has married Adela. Meanwhile the news of Fielding's marriage reaches Aziz. He is filled with suspicion and hatred. Fielding comes back to India with his wife Stella Moore and her brother Ralph. He meets Aziz in Mau. Misunderstanding in cleared but they part forever. This is roughly the story of A Passage to India. This 'little worm' of time which we have separated from the novel appears to be so unlovely and dull. But Forster places it against the background of the Marabar Caves which frustrate and create complications in the life by time. The Marabar represents the utter negation of everything that is important in life by time. It even repudiates an attempt at its own description by Godbole, which ultimately becomes a series of negations.

> 'Are they large caves?' she asked.
> 'No, not large.'
> 'Do describe them, Professor Godbole.'
> 'It will be a great honour'. He drew up his chair and an expression of tension came over his face. Taking the cigarrette box, she offered to him and to Aziz, and lit up herself. After an impressive pause he said: 'There is an entrance in the rock which you enter, and through the entrance is the cave.'
> 'Something like the caves at Elephanta?'
> 'Oh, no, not at all; at Elephanta there are sculptures of Siva and Parvati. There are no sculptures at Marabar.'
> 'They are immensely holy, no doubt', said Aziz, to help on the narrative.
> 'Oh no, oh no.'
> 'Still they are ornamented in some way.'
> 'Oh no.'
> 'Well, they are so famous? We all talk of the famous Marabar Caves. Perhaps that is our empty brag.'
> 'No, I should not quite say that.'

> 'Describe them to this lady, then.'
> 'It will be a great pleasure.' He forewent the pleasure....[35]

The life in time which Forster presents in the novel is seen against the huge backdrop of the Marabar Caves which in the novel symbolise utter negation, valuelessness and meaninglessness. And yet it is the centre of the book which gives to it a meaning, and the readers a message. Forster is not a moralist and the Marabar Caves are not moral or holy at all. But they do represent the 'extraordinary' in the novel. Without them the little worm of time, the story of the book, is dull and ordinary. The book itself opens with an allusion to this extraordinary phenomena,

> Except the Marabar Caves and they are twenty miles off - the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary.[36]

Except the extraordinary, you will have only the little worm of time, the story. And what is this extraordinary element? Forster says:

> The caves are readily described. A tunnel eight feet long, five feet high, three feet wide, leads to circular chamber about twenty feet in diameter. This arrangement occurs again and again throughout the group of hills, and this is all, this is a Marabar Cave. Having seen one such cave, having seen two, having seen three, four, fourteen,

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[35] E.M. Forster, A Passage to India (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1936), pp. 73-74.

[36] Ibid., p. 9.

> twenty-four, the visitor returns to Chandrapore uncertain whether he has had an interesting experience or a dull one or any experience at all. He finds it difficult to discuss the caves, or to keep them apart in his mind, ... Nothing, nothing attaches to them, and their reputation - for they have one - does not depend upon human speech .... Nothing is inside them, they were sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil ....[37]

These 'caves' provide the centre of the book, and they have a terrifying echo which disintegrates all sounds into a monotonous 'ou-boum.' This echo is a challenge to all human distinctions.

> 'Pathos, piety, courage - they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value. If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same - 'ou-boum'.[38]

Forster does not romanticize the Marabar Caves. He just presents them as looming large behind the story and the plot of the book. They also influence the characters of the book. Having "robbed infinity and eternity of their vastness"[39] The Marabar Caves appear to be the vast roaring space against which Forster develops his plot and story. They are central to the aesthetic structure of the novel. What they symbolize can be deduced from Wilfred Stone's reading of the structure of the novel. Stone, though he generously assumes that the

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[37] Ibid., pp. 124-125.

[38] Ibid., p. 147.

[39] Ibid.

novel's structure is overshadowed by Forster's supposed knowledge of the structure of Hindu temples, gives a convincing account of the novel's aesthetic structure. Forster was taught to see the temple as the 'World Mountain', "on whose exterior is displayed life in all its forms, life human and superhuman and subhuman and animal, life tragic and cheerful, cruel and kind, seemly and obscene, all crowned at the mountain's summit by the sun." While in its interior there is "a tiny cavity, a central cell, where in the heart of world complexity, the individual could be alone with his god."[40] The three sections of the novel represent these two forms of life and reality, the outer and the inner. In the novel, "the Caves" is flanked by "Mosque" and "Temple", which represent the exterior of the world mountain. While the 'Caves' symbolises the inner cell, the primal darkness and chaos before creation and history. It stands for the primal mystery before all knowledge, the primal nothingness before everything was created, the primal chaos before all order and the primal darkness before the creation of light. It represents the timelessness, wordlessness, formlessness, meaninglessness and the primitive disorder, the condition of life before civilization intruded and made forms, distinctions and systems. It symbolises the inner reality, the primitive mystery out of which everything originated. It symbolises the One before the many, while

[40] Forster, "The World Mountain" The Listener XXXLII (1954), p. 978, quoted by Wilfred Stone, pp. 301-302.

"Mosque" and "Temple" stand for life in the daylight world of consciousness and experience. They represent the systems by which men try to live a meaningful life. They represent the different ways of responding to the call of the divine, the Hindu way and the Muslim way. Christianity is in the backdrop as it is the religion of the intellectual west. These three religious systems are measured against the backdrop of the Marabar Caves, the symbol of inner reality, the centre of India's appeal in the book. Forster sees how each of them responds to this appeal from the caves. This appeal is in the form of an echo which responds to everything with the same meaningless 'ou-boum', which disintegrates and dissipates all form and meaning. It offers the same response to the highest poetry and the coarsest obscenity. It repudiates all human endeavour at ratiocination and systematisation. The Marabar Caves irk the visitor with their indistinctiveness and the monotony of their echoes. They are the nucleus of the novel, the echo-producing centre. The two sections which flank it symbolise the human response to this echo in terms of the two major religions in India. The plot interest is focussed on something which happened in the caves, and an Indian gentleman, Dr. Aziz, is accused of molesting an English tourist, Adela Quested. The racial rivalry between the Indians and the English reaches a climax. Mutual hatred is in the air but one Englishman, Cyril Fielding is on the side of the Indians. He firmly believes that Aziz is innocent.

Ultimately this is established when Adela breaks down at the trial and confesses her mistake. The complication is resolved but one question is yet to be answered. What happened to Adela in the Cave? This question is never answered but instead Forster presents the different characters against the experience of the Caves. Adela is a miserable creature after the trial. Her tragedy is due to her failure to connect the outer and the inner lives, the exterior and the interior of the World Mountain. Schooled in the predominantly intellectual climate of the west, she is totally unprepared to enter the cave, to come to terms with the inner reality, to face India and to respond to her appeal. Instead she tries to interpret her experience in the cave in terms of her intellectual standards which operate by distinctions and classifications. She classifies her experience in the Cave as a rape. A rape must have been the only label she could give to that experience. The pride of intellect, of which she is a victim, cannot sustain itself in the face of the echo from the cave. She failed to connect harmoniously the outer world with the inner life. Instead she builds up intellectual defenses against the passion, the poetry in her. Just before entering the cave she is engaged in a conversation with her host, Dr. Aziz, on the subject of love and marriage. She is attracted by the charms

of Aziz but instead of admitting it she revolts against that natural impulse.

> .... What a handsome little oriental he was, and no doubt his wife and children were beautiful too, for people usually get what they already possess. She did not admire him with any personal warmth, for there was nothing of the vagrant in her blood, but she guessed he might attract women of his own race and rank, and she regretted that neither she nor Ronny had physical charm. It does make a difference in a relationship - beauty, thick hair, a fine skin.[41]

Stone offers a Jungian interpretation of what happens in the cave. What Adela faces in the cave is the "shadow, that deepest and darkest bottom of the unconscious which strikes unspeakable horror into those unequipped to encounter it."[42] Her own suppressed subconscious becomes alive and she experiences herself as "another." Failing to endure and accept this experience she tries to interpret it in terms used for describing events or experiences on the conscious level. She fails to connect her subconscious and her conscious. What she suffers from therefore, is an "undeveloped heart." The mess she creates in Chandrapore is the result of her tragic fragmentation and her incapability to respond to the vision in the cave. She tries to analyse her experience steadily and she does not and cannot see it whole.

Pitted against the 'Caves' all the characters appear

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41 A Passage to India, p. 151.

42 Stone, p. 335.

to be helpless dwarfs with the exception of Godbole and Mrs. Moore. Mrs. Moore discards her intellectual, ethical and spiritual defenses as she faces the Marabar Caves. She, to a certain extent, is capable of "seeing it whole" as a result of which she loses her hold on life. She enters the cave totally unprepared by culture and religion, but she "surrendered to the vision" and thus loses all interest in the outer life of relationships. She comes to the conclusion that though people are important, relationship is not. Religion, which was her stronghold against the anomalies of the world, now appears to be "poor little talkative christianity", and all its teachings "from 'Let there be light' to 'It is finished' only amounted to 'boum'."[43] Her intuitive adequacy, the secret understanding of the heart, enables her to endure her experience though she too is shattered by the echo. It does not disturb her afterwards as it does Adela. As a result of its influence Mrs. Moore experiences a sense of panic and emptiness. In Howards End the goblins in the Fifth Symphony infuse the same sense of panic and emptiness in Helen Schlegel. After entering one cave Mrs. Moore sits down, overcome by panic and emptiness. Panic because "she was terrified over an area larger than usual; the universe never comprehensible to her intellect, offered no

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43 A Passage to India, p. 148.

repose to her soul."[44] Emptiness because relationship and religion presented themselves to her like a vacuum. What happened in the cave presents itself to her as love -" love in a church, love in a cave, as if there is the least difference."[45] The Marabar presents itself to her as the challenge of nothingness to which she surrenders and she withdraws from life as a "saint of nothingness."[46] She is not capable of making a distinction between presence and absence of 'love.' In Marabar love is absent. It symbolizes Being without attributes. Mrs. Moore took it as final and withdrew from India, while Godbole is aware of the presence. The section entitled 'Temple' begins thus:

> Some hundreds of miles westward of the Marabar Hills, and two years later in time, Professor Narayan Godbole stands in the presence of God.[47]

Her failure to comprehend India is echoed by the coconut palms of Asirgarh as she sails away.

> 'So you thought and echo was India; you took the Marabar Caves as final?' they laughed. 'What have we in common with them, or they with Asirgarh? Good-bye!'[48]

Mrs. Moore is not capable of an extended life after the ordeal at Marabar, and she cannot like Narayan Godbole stand in the

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[44] Ibid.,

[45] Ibid., p. 197.

[46] Frank Kermode, "E.M. Forster as a Symbolist", <u>Twentieth-Century Views Series</u>, p. 95.

[47] <u>A Passage to India</u>, p. 279.

[48] Ibid., p. 205.

presnece of God and say to him: 'come, come.' Having failed to achieve completeness she is ressurrected in Godbole's mind at Mau.

> Thus Godbole, though she was not important to him, remembered an old woman he had met in Chandrapore days. Chance brought her into his mind while it was in this heated state, he did not select her, she happened to occur among the throng of soliciting images, a tiny splinter, and he impelled her by this spiritual force to that place where completeness can be found. Completeness, not reconstruction.[49]

Mrs. Moore kept 'proportion' though in an imperfect way. She, like Mrs. Wilcox, is a "redemptive character; unable to save herself she does miraculous things for others. She did them by being the sort of person she was. She continued to do them after her ordeal at the Marabar."[50]

Forster suggests that India is a mystery, a muddle, where one can come closestt to the divine in Godbole's way probably. All other attempts to penetrate the unknown, to establish connection, are destined to fail. The mud-bespattered Godbole, amidst the noisy chaos of the third section, as he waits for and celebrates Krishna's coming to save the world, is closest to the goal of attaining the divine. It is he who

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[49] Ibid., pp. 281-282.

[50] E.K. Brown, "Rhythm in E.M. Forster's A Passage to India," Twentieth-Century Views, p. 156.

presides over the ceremony which symbolises the "approaching triumph of India", which is a "muddle", "a frustration of reason and form."[51] His contemplative insight enables him to respond to the mysterious appeal of the unknown. He keeps on saying, 'come, come', to the god who neglects to come. He has an intuitive understanding of the Marabar and his view of good and evil correponds respectively to the presence and absence of 'Love', the aspects of his Lord. He tells Fielding

> 'I am informed that an evil action is performed in the Marabar Hills, and that a highly esteemed English lady is now seriously ill in consequence. My answer to that is this: that action was performed by Dr. Aziz.' He stopped and sucked in his thin cheeks. 'It was peformed by the guide.' He stopped again. 'It was performed by you.' Now he had an air of daring and coyness. 'It was performed by me.' He looked shyly down the sleeves of his own coat. 'An by my students. It was even performed by the lady herself. When evil occurs, it expresses the whole of the universe. Similarly when good occurs.'[52]

In a manner that is impossible for the others in the novel, Godbole is able to connect the inner life and the outer life. He is able to keep proportion. He knows what is special about the Marabar Hills, that is, absence of love. He understands the hundred voices of India and responds to their appeal by joining their chorus, 'come, come.' He is central to the main action of the third section, where he waits for Love to take upon itself the form of Krishna and 'come' to save the world.

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[51] A Passage to India, p. 280.

[52] Ibid., pp. 174-175.

On account of this, critics have argued that Forster is recommending Hinduism as the only answer to the problems in the novel. V.A. Shahane finds in 'Mosque' "an attemped getting together"; "Caves indicates frustration and alienation"; 'Temple' signifies reconciliation "because the festival is symbolic of love and harmony."[53] George H. Thomson correlates the three sections with the three stages of man's spiritual history: a shallow stage marked in the book by Aziz's "superficial optimism", a stage of disillusionment, embodied in Mrs. Moore's response to the caves, and a stage of qualified achievement, exemplified by Godbole in the last section.[54] These critics are too quick to find a proper denouement for the novel and they do find one in Godbole's festival. But Forster did not intend a denouement for the novel. He wanted it to grow, to open out, to expand and not to close or achieve completion. The most one can say is that by presenting the Mosque-Caves-Temple sequence in the novel Forster is recommending 'proportion' between what needs synthesis, heart, mind and soul. The book exhorts a symbol-less, soul-less age "to connect the conscious and unconscious spheres of our being."[55] Unless such

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[53] V.A. Shahane, "Symbolism in E.M. Forster's A Passage to India: 'Temple.' English Studies XLIV (December 1963) pp. 424-427.

[54] George H. Thomson, "Thematic Symbol in A Passage to India" Twentieth Century Literature VII (July 1961), p. 51.

[55] Stone, p. 339.

connection is made the traditional mistakes, - political, social, domestic, - will go on being committed. Forster's humanism does not lose sight of the separation that is the cause of all tragedy and unhappiness in the world.

> Separation between conscious and unconscious is what used to be called the separation between man and God; humanism, if it is to mean anything, must deal with this fundamental fact. Adela, so withdrawn, fastidious, desexed, urban, and intellectual, is a heart-breaking caricature of the modern condition.[56]

Forster certainly honours the Hindu way of worship because of its "inclusion of merriment",[57] which Christianity has shirked. It is the "least resistant to the unconscious and the instinctual, the least dogmatic and theological, the least appalled by the vision of the Shadow."[58] Forster admires Hinduism because it revives what the intellectual west has repressed and forgotten. Behind all these symbolic efforts to connect Forster tries to highlight that fact that for all our differences we are essentially one. It is our failure to recognize the unity behind the differences that is the cause of all disharmony and discord in the world. Godbole effects this unity for some time in "Temple." "The unity he makes is an image of art; for a moment at least all is one;

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56 Ibid.

57 A Passage to India, p. 284.

58 Stone, op. cit., p. 339.

apprehensible by love; nothing is excepted or extraordinary. The novel itself assumes a similar unity, becomes a mystery, a revelation of wholeness; and does so without disturbing the story or the parable."[59]

The other characters in the novel, in one way or other, fail to achieve completeness. Ronny Heaslop is a British-to-the-backbone administrator, a descendent of the Wilcoxes. He does not hear the echo from the cave and is not able to take hold of India. Fielding and Aziz remain outsiders as far as India is concerned. They too are incomplete and suffer from undeveloped souls. So A Passage to India does not have a hero or a heroine. There is no one in it who can be really called a hero. The main character in the novel is India herself. She fills the book with her hundred echoes and her never ending chorus is: 'come, come'. She is no one, no place, no religion. India is a mystery. India does not belong to History or Politics. Then, what is India? In the novel "India (is) something which can hardly be conceived of."[60] Forster himself gives the reason.

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[59] Frank Kermode, "E.M. Forster as a Symbolist", p. 94.

[60] D.J. Enright, The Apothecary's Shop: Essays on Literature quoted by June Perry Levine, Creation and Criticism, A Passage to India, (London. Chatto & Windus, 1971), p.116.

> India is the country, field, fields, then hills, jungle, hills, and more fields. The branch line stops, the road is only practicable for cars to a point, the bullock-carts lumber down the side-tracks, paths fray out into the cultivation, and disappear near a splash of red paint. How can the mind take hold of such a country? Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile. The important towns they build are only retreats, their quarrels the malaise of men who cannot find their home. India knows of their trouble. She knows of the whole world's trouble, to its uttermost depth. She calls 'come' through her hundred mouths, through objects ridiculous and august. But come to what? She has never defined. She is not a promise, only an appeal.[61]

Forster presents the historical setting as a means of probing a universal condition. India's appeal to people, 'come, 'come,' can be interpreted as the cry of the severed roots of man in the earth asking for re-connection. Man has severed his "connection with the land"[62] and the hundred voices of India are calling man back. A Passage to India evokes Forster's reverential view of nature. 'Nature' has been bull-dozed out of existence in the west. In 'India' Forster found nature which can symbolize what is permanent, whole and beautiful. India's appeal is a plea to all men to associate themselves with her, with nature, with what is permanent, whole and beautiful. "Destroy the old association between the land and the men who love her and you break a vital link with the instinctual life,

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[61] A Passage to India, p. 135.

[62] Forster, "Our second greatest novel?" Two Cheers, p. 231.

with that sense of an ancient and unbroken heritage from the past which creates and enriches our cultural symbols."[63] So the novel is not a novel about India alone, as Lionel Trilling has concluded. It has a wider significance, "it is about all of human life."[64] 'India' in the novel is not to be limited by potitics or geography. According to George H. Thomson, "India reflects all the world and all its people."[65] India is an unfathomable mystery. Its vastness is repugnant to any order. It is a muddle, and therefore, it is incomprehensible. If India could be fathomed all creation would be comprehensible. "India" dwarfs the plot in A Passage to India, as it dwarfs the characters. The novel, therefore, is anti-hero and anti-plot. In Aspects of the Novel Forster defines plot thus

> The plot, then, is the novel in its logical in intellectual aspect; it requires mystery, but the mysteries are solved later on; the reader may be moving about in worlds unrealized, but the novelist has no misgivings.[66]

The Plot in A Passage to India does not form the core of the novel. It is shrouded with mysteries which are not solved. Frederick C. Crews observes how 'India' makes it impossible for a plot to operate in the novel. "To understand India is

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63 Stone, op. cit., p. 14.

64 Lionel Trilling, E.M. Forster (New York, New Directions, 1943), p. 161.

65 Quoted from "Thematic Symbol in A Passage to India", by June Perry Levine, p. 117.

66 Aspects of the Novel, p. 95.

to understand the rationale of the whole creation; but the characters do not understand it, and Forster's plot makes us ask whether human faculties are capable of such understanding at all."[67] So far as India is concerned "to pot with the plot"[68] because the novelist prefers to mix (himself) up in (his) material and be rolled over and over by it." He does "not try to subdue any longer" but hopes "to be subdued, to be carried away".[69] In A Passage to India "all human happiness and misery does not take the form of action, it seeks means of expression other than through the plot ...."[70] Adela, Aziz and Fielding suffer, not as a result of any definite action. Godbole's happiness and the ignorant bliss of the Punkah-puller are not the result of any definite action. Causality does not overshadow all the incidents in the novel. Enthusiastic about a new scheme for the novel, Forster asks in Aspects of the Novel

> After all why has a novel to be planned? Cannot it grow? Why need it close, as play closes? Cannot it open out? Instead of standing above his work and controlling it, cannot the novelist throw himself into it and be carried along to some goal that he does not forsee?[71]

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[67] Quoted from The Perils of Humanism, by Levine, p. 117.
[68] Aspects, p. 99.
[69] Ibid., pp. 98-99
[70] Ibid., p. 93.
[71] Aspects of the Novel, p. 95.

The last section of the novel is an exemplification of this enthusiastic scheme for the novel. In "Temple" Forster seems to have thrown himself into the muddle and chaos of the Mau festival, quite uncertain where he is led to -

> God si love. Is this the final message of India?
> 'Tukaram, Tukaram ....[72]

Forster did not plan an ending for the novel. The plot is not wound up. Forster has followed the "convention which allows a novelist to stop as soon as he feels bored."[73] He imparts a strong prophetic vision in the novel which finds an extension in the reader's mind and so the novel keeps on growing in the minds of the readers. The feeling remains that the novelist has not rounded thing off. The last sentences of the novel justify this feeling.

> 'Why can't we be friends now?' said the other, holding him affectionately. 'It's what I want. It's what you want.'
>
> But the horses didn't want it - they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which the riders must pass single pile; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, 'No, not yet,' and the sky said, 'No, not there.'[74]

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72 A Passage to India, p. 281.

73 Aspects of the Novel, p. 94.

74 A Passage to India, p. 317.

The reader is not given a vision of completeness and fulfilment. But he is prepared for an extended life which the scheme of the book does not require the characters to represent. The Rhythms in the novel undoubtedly are 'proportion, connection, wholeness.' The novel is a drama of human struggle and failure which is presented with a curious mixture of hope and despair. The rhythm does not reach a stage of fulfilment or completion because Forster the novelist clings to the idea of "Expansion .... Not completion, Not rounding things off but opening out."[75] Thus the final effect of the novel is the same as the effect of the Fifth Symphony of Beethoven's orchestra. We hear the music that has never actually been played. In the novel we look forward to a future perfection, to a fulfilment of the rhythmic appeal of the novel, 'proportion.'

According to Forster "prophetic fiction .... demands humility and the absence of the sense of humour. It reaches back - ..."[76] In A Passage to India one notices these characteristics of prophetic fiction. It demands humility because its subject matter is above rationality. In it one can observe a compulsion to "reach back" to some elemental

75 Aspects of the Novel, p. 149.

76 A Passage to India, pp. 285-286.

reality. The novel reaches back, not to pity and love, but to a prophetic vision of a fundamental unity which alone can ensure a meaningful survival to modern man. Only a momentary glimpse of this unity is presented in the novel, and that is through Godbole

> Covered with grease and dust, Professor Godbole had once more developed the life of his spirit. He had, with increasing vividness, again seen Mrs. Moore, and round her faintly clinging forms of trouble. He was a Brahman, she Christian, but it made no difference, it made no difference whether she was at trick of his memory or a telepathic appeal. It was his duty, as it was his desire, to place himself in the position of the God and to love her, and to place himself in her position and say to the God, 'Come, come, come,.' This was all he could do. How inadequate. But each according to his capacities, and he knew that his own were small. 'One old Englishwoman and one little, little wasp,' he thought, ... 'It does not seem much, still it is more than I am myself.77

So the novel is a prophetic song urging us to "reach back" to that "connection with the land" which is Forster's means of attaining wholeness and integrity. The essential in A Passage to India "lies outside words", reaching beyond the remotest echo, the silence.

The Marabar Caves provide the element of fantasy in the novel. Forster defines fantasy as "... the introduction of a god, ghost, angel, ... into ordinary life; or the introduction of ordinary men into no-man's-land; ... the fourth

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77 A Passage to India, pp. 285-286.

dimension; ...."[78] In A Passage to India ordinary men are introduced into the "non-man's-land" represented by the Marabar Caves. Forster's description of them justifies this view.

> There is something unspeakable in these outposts. They are like nothing else in the world, and a glimpse of them makes the breath catch. They rise abruptly, insanely without the proportion that is kept by the wildest hills elsewhere, they bear no relation to anything dreamt or seen. To call them 'uncanny' suggests ghosts, and they are older than all spirit.[79]

The Marabar Caves suggest the extra-ordinary and the characters are measured against this fantastic element. They are the sphere of absolute nullity and utter negation against which human values are measured in the novel. They represent the condition which the traveller in "The other side of the Hedge" finds on the other side, and are fundamental to the contrast between inner life and outer life which the novel implies. They are the non-human forces which are basic to Forster's experiment in connection. A Passage to India, is, therefore, the finest illustration of the "rainbow"[80] with seven "aspects", Forster's scheme for the modern novel.

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[78] Aspects of the Novel, p. 106.

[79] A Passage to India, pp. 123-124.

[80] Aspects of the Novel, p. 100.

C O N C L U S I O N

CONCLUSION

While summing up it will be relevant to consider the role of Woolf and Forster as critics and their attitude towards criticism in general. As we have seen, both were practising artists and they were genuinely interested in the nature of the novel. In their critical writings one finds an attempt to explore and extend the genius of the genre. There are similarities as well as differences between the criticismsof Woolf and Forster. Both have a tendency to be belletristic and both make large allowance for impressions in their criticism. Both are skeptical of absolute standards and believe in relativity in literature. Though they believe in art for art's sake they do not believe in criticism for criticism's sake, nor do they believe in art for criticism's sake. Criticism for them is not passing final judgements on works of art according to any aesthetic theory. But it is an informal affair in which the practising artist speaks casually but intelligently about his and other works of art. Both Woolf and Forster, fired by Bloomsbury liberalism, wanted literature to release the innate joyousness of man. They were aware of the changing nature of reality and reluctant to posit any absolutes in criticism. According to Forster, "All our criticism is or ought to be tentative",[1]

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[1] "English Prose between 1918 and 1939", Two Chbers for Demogracy, p. 289.

because he says, "You can't measure people up, because the yard-measure itself keeps altering its length."[2] Woolf expresses the same view in her famous declaration that "in or about 1910, human character changed",[3] and in her conviction that "A character may be real to Mr. Bennett and quite unreal to me."[4] Woolf laid great emphasis on the idea of perspective in the face of the changing nature of reality and pleaded for new experiments in new and radical adjustments in the form of the novel. She tried to do away with the traditional tools and methods, and relied totally, on her sensibility to express a new awareness in fiction. Forster was less radical and held that the old formula was useful provided it was informed by a "new sensitiveness."[5]

Forster believed in the anonymity of the artist. The writer forgets himself when he is at work and makes us forget ourselves when we read his work. According to him "... all literature tends towards a condition of anonymity, and ... so far as words are creative, a signature merely distracts from their true significance."[6] After having completed his work the artist "will wonder how on earth he

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[2] Ibid., p. 281.
[3] "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", Collected Essays I, p. 320.
[4] Ibid., p. 325.
[5] Aspects of the Novel, p. 36.
[6] "Anonymity: An inquiry", Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 90.

did it. And indeed he did not do it on earth."[7] And so far as literary creation is concerned, "to forget its Creator is one of the functions of Creation."[8] For him art should effect momentary and mutual anonymity between the reader and the writer. And this mutual forgetfulness is the evidence of good art. So a writer's age, background, biography, psychology, and the influences are irrelevant or unimportant while we consider his creation. This plea for anonymity is reflected in Woolf's advice to the contemporary critics. She says:

> Let them take a wider, a less personal view of modern literature, and look indeed upon the writers as if they were engaged upon some vast building, which being built by common effort, the separate workmen may well remain anonymous.[9]

However, Woolf does not prescribe anonymity as a universal condition of great works of art. She is more concerned with the privacy of modern art.

Both Woolf and Forster agree with Eliot's idea of impersonality in art. Eliot maintained that literature is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality. Woolf expresses quite the same view when she

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7 "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 121.

8 "Anonymity: An inquiry", p. 90.

9 "How it strikes a Contemporary", Common Reader I, p. 304.

says

> To believe that your impressions hold good for others is to be freed from the cramp and confinement of personality.[10]

Forster too is suspicious of the demand that literature should be an expression of personality. This is at one with his idea of anonymity which is a condition of forgetfulness of one's personality. He says:

> The demand that literature should express personality is far too insistent in these days, and I look back with longing to the earlier modes of criticism where a poem was not an expression but a discovery ....[11]

And this 'longing' is actually the same as a desire for impersonality.

> There is always, even with the most realistic artist, the sense of withdrawal from his own creation, the sense of surprise.[12]

Both these novelist-critics agree as to the attitude of the reader to the writer and his work. Forster suggests that the reader should aim at a "spiritual parity",[13] and should have a sense of co-operation with the writer. In other words art is infectious and it transforms the man who encounters it towards the condition of the man who created it.[14]

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10 Ibid., p. 302.

11 "Anonymity: An inquiry", pp. 92-93.

12 "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", p. 122.

13 Ibid., p. 120.

14 "Anonymity: An inquiry", p. 92, & Raison D'etre of Grtiticism in the Arts", p. 123.

So the reader should be oriented towards this fellowship. Forster believes that criticism does not help in this transformation or infection. He says:

> Unfortunately this infection, this sense of co-operation with a creator, which is the supremely important step in our pilgrimage through the fine arts, is the one step over which criticism cannot help.[15]

Woolf too has the same view though in a different manner, when she says:

> Do not dictate to your author; try to become him. Be his fellow-worker and accomplice. If you hang back, and reserve and criticise at first, you are preventing yourself from getting the fullest possible value from what your read.[16]

Woolf however reserves a second reading in which the reader can assume the role of a judge, whereas at first he is guided only by imaginative sympathy. She says:

> Now then we can compare book with book as we compare building with building. But this act of comparison means that our attitude has changed; we are no longer the friends of the writer, but his judges; and just as we cannot be too sympathetic as friends, so as judges we cannot be too severe.[17]

This ambivalent attitude reflects the creative tension in Woolf's criticism between the impressionistic response and

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[15] "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", p. 124.

[16] "How should one read a book", Common Reader II, p. 259.

[17] Ibid., p. 267.

the more severe rational analysis. Woolf does not assume the great role of critic, but the lesser role of a common reader.

> We must remain readers; we shall not put on the further glory that belongs to those rare beings who are also critics. But we still have our responsibilities as readers and even our importance.[18]

Woolf's 'Common reader' is a responsive reader, recreated in her own image. This points to Woolf's idea of the critic as an impressionist judge. Mark Goldman contrasts this idea of the critic as impressionist judge with the positivist position of Leslie Stephen. Stephen saw criticism as a well-defined body of critical judgements ordered as literary case laws. Even Stephen made some allowance for impressions in the business of criticism.[19]

Forster does not approve of this mixed reaction to a work of art. He believes in spontaneous imaginative reaction to a work of art which springs from one's affection for it, and not from one's knowledge of it. For him the "spiritual parity" is all that matters, and criticism, in it ordinary, academic context, is irrelevant here. It is 'love'

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[18] Ibid., p. 269.

[19] Mark Goldman, p. 87.

which is essential for the appreciation of arts.

> I would not suggest that our comprehension of fine arts is or should be of a nature of a mystic union. But, as in mysticism, we enter an unusual state, and we can only enter it through love.[20]

Forster distrusts 'study' of literature because it forces into the realm of information what actually belongs to creation, to the realm of inspiration, and thus makes us forget the purpose for which creation was performed. He distinguishes between reading of literature and study of literature.

> Study is only a serious form of gossip. It teaches us everything about the book except the central thing, and between that and us it raises a circular barrier which only the wings of the spirit can cross.[21]

Instead he prefers a whole-hearted emotional response to a work of art as a whole.

> Can we combine experience and innocence? I think we can. The willing suspension of experience is possible....[22]

and that alone would make 'spiritual parity' possible. And in order that criticism is valuable

> The critic ought to combine Mephistopheles with the archangels, experience with innocence. He

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[20] "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", p. 124.

[21] Anonymity: An inquiry", p. 93.

[22] "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", p. 125.

> ought to know everything inside out and yet be surprised.[23]

This is what Virginia Woolf failed to do and so she failed to take us to the heart of art. Forster says:

> Virginia Woolf - who was both a creative artist and a critic - believed in reading a book twice. The first time she abandoned herself to the author unreservedly. The second time she treated him with severity and allowed him to get away with nothing he could not justify. After these two readings she felt qualified to discuss the book. Here is a good rule of thumb advice. But it does not take us to the heart of our problem which is super-rational. For we ought really to read the book in two ways at once.[24]

Forster is very doubtful about the value of criticism to the creative artist. He assigns sharply different and incoherent functions to both criticism and creation. According to him creation takes place when the writer is in an unusual mood, at the junction of the unconscious with the conscious where the creative impulse sparks. In that process the writer lets down a bucket into his subconscious and creates from the depth of his being. While criticism belongs to the conscious realm of information and reasoning. It does not let down a bucket into the subconscious, and it is at the surface level. The difference between the two is sharp as Forster sees it.

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[23] Ibid., p. 126.

[24] Ibid.

> Think before you speak is criticism's motto; speak before you think is creation's.[25]

Forster thus disallows the claim of criticism to take us to the central thing in art. He does not believe in criticism for art.

> ... yet I can truly say with Mr. Day Lewis that I have nearly always found criticism irrelevant.[26]

Forster takes criticism to be a conscious intellectual process of interpreting a work of art. He discovers the disparity and the irrelevance of an attempt to interpret, with the help of intellect and information, a work of art which is the result of imagination and inspiration. Woolf, the critic, is an impressionist judge, and her criticism, impressionistic judgement. But for Forster criticism can only help as a stimulation which itself is the result of imagination for "imagination is our only guide into the world created by words."[27] So for Forster, criticism is an imaginative stimulant, and the critic, not a furred and gowned authority trying to make the artist lie on his procrustean bed. Though he regards criticism as a valuable corrective to untrained inspiration, he is acutely aware of the opposite extreme and its dangers to allow any significant role to it.

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25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., p. 127.

27 "Anonymity: An inquiry", p. 95.

> There is always the contrary danger; the danger that training may sterilize the sensitiveness that is being trained; that education may lead to knowledge instead of wisdom, and criticism to nothing but criticism; that spontaneous enjoyment like the progress of Poesy in Mathew Arnold's poem, may be checked because too much care has been taken to direct it into the right channel.[28]

Forster is thoroughly skeptical of the validity of a theory of art. Art is spontaneous and manifestos of arts are irrlevant. He says:

> Except perhaps in Russia, where the deviations of Shastakovitch invite a parallel, a theory in the modern world has little power over the fine arts, for good or evil. We have no atmosphere where it can flourish, and the attempts of certain governments to generate such an atmosphere in bureaus are unlikely to succeed. The construction of aesthetic theories and their comparison are desirable cultural exercises; the theories themselves are unlikely to spread far or to hinder or help.[29]

Woolf is opposed to this view. According to her criticism has a great value for the artist and she agrees with Eliot's view that criticism is a necessary condition for artistic excellence.

> I maintain even that criticism employed by a skilled writer in his own work is the most vital, the highest kind of criticism; and (as I think I said before) that some creative writers are superior. There is a tendency, and I think it is

28 "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", p. 115.

29 Ibid., p. 116.

> a whiggery tendency, to decry the critical toil of the artist; to propound the thesis that the great artist is an unconscious artist, unconsciously incribing on his banner the words Muddle through.[30]

Woolf, too, believes that the critical judgements passed on a work of art are important and they have a great influence on the literary spirit.

> The standards we raise and the judgements we pass steal into the air and become part of the atmosphere which writers breathe as they work. An influence is created which tells upon them even if it never finds its way into print. And that influence, if it were well instructed, vigorous, individual and sincere, might be of great value now when criticism is necessarily in abeyance;....[31]

In contrast to this high-minded view of criticism Forster suggests that the value of criticism lies in its ability to stimulate the reader and to impel him to creativity. His view of criticism is impressionistic and magical for he believes that it should shock the reader into the wonderland created by a work of art. It includes journalism and broadcasting or what goes on these days in the name of the 'media'. It is in every form an eye-opener and a stimulant. He says:

> Criticism can stimulate. Few of us are sufficiently awake to the beauty and wonder of the world, and

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[30] T. S. Eliot, "Function of Criticism", Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, Ed. by Frank Kermode, p. 73.

[31] "How should one read a book", pp. 269-270.

> when art intervenes to reveal them it sometimes acts in reverse, and lowers a veil instead of raising it. This deadening effect can often be dispersed by a well-chosen word. We can be awakened by a remark which need not be profound or even true, and can be sent scurrying after the beauties and wonders we were ignoring. Journalism and broadcasting have their big opportunity here. Unsuited for synthesis or analysis, they can send out the winged word that carries us off to examine the original.[32]

Thus we find that Virginia Woolf took criticism more seriously than Forster. Though she stands for freedom and a feminine protest against the masculine academic authority, the methodology and the severe standards of her essays on the art of reading reveal her as a conscious, methodical literary critic. She revolts against tradition and the severe conventions which, according to her, impinged upon the freedom of the artist and curtailed what she called 'life.' Though she exemplifies a break from tradition, one notice that in the place of traditional conventions she substitutes something more severe and difficult to attain. Her method of sensibility in the novel is a method which can be effectively used only by an exceptionally gifted artist, which she certainly was. Not all the aspiring novelists can handle the form and method which Woolf prescribes for the modern novel. So one can say that the standards with which she tried to replace the traditional standards were more

[32] "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", p. 117.

severe and exacting than the traditional standards themselves. She was not averse to the aesthetic novel of the Jamesian sort, and in her experiments in fiction one can see the effect of the post-impressionist influence on the novel. She rejects Percy Lubbock's view that the form of the novel is visual. According to her form is not a visual pattern but an emotional pattern which is the result of, and which results in, emotion.

> ... the 'book itself' is not the form which you see, but emotion which you feel, and the more intense the writer's feeling the more exact without slip or chink its expression in words.[33]

She cannot thus accept Lubbock's idea of form which she sees as "... something ... interposed between us and the book as we know it."[34] A priestess of the modern emphasis on the emotional nature of reality, Woolf asserts: "... both in writing and in reading it is the emotion that must come first."[35] So the form of the novel consists in placing certain emotions in right relation to one another. According to Forster the excellent literature of all ages is not only to reflect life with veracity but also to reveal formal competence. Form is "the surface crust" of the harmony holding the work together from within.[36] So Forster's sense

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[33] "On Re-Reading Novel", Collected Essays II, p. 126.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 94.

of form is organic and it contributes to the sustained effect in art. Woolf's sense of form too is comparable to Forster's in its emphasis on an emotional inner, unseen stiching of the work from within.

Both Woolf and Forster agree to a certain extent with Eliot's idea of tradition and the role of the past for the writers of the present age. According to Eliot, the writer must be aware of not only the pastness of the past but also its presence.[37] And he should write with the whole of European tradition at the back of his mind. Forster hesitates to accept this readily and retorts:

> And it will be readily understood that with so much in his bones he cannot speak to the reader as man to man; indeed, while he creates he has ceased to be a man in the hand-shaking sense, he has dissociated himself for the reception of something else, something timeless.[38]

Woolf agrees with the view that the great classics of the past have an eternal, a timeless validity. She called the great masters of the novel saints.

> Whatever we may have learnt from reading the classics we need now in order to judge the work of our contemporaries, for whenever there is life in them they will be casting their net out over some unknown abyss to share new shapes, and we

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[37] "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot ed. Frank Kermode, p. 38.

[38] "T.S. Eliot", Abinger Harvest, p. 106.

> must throw our imaginations after them if we are to accept with understanding the strange gifts they bring back to us.[39]

Woolf, the critic, puts what she thinks the centrality of the novel, 'Mrs. Brown', in the corner of a railway carriage and makes the different writers travel in the same carriage with her. She draws her conclusions from how these writers respond to the appeal of "Mrs. Brown", that is, human nature, life itself. One by one Woolf makes the Edwardian writers travel with Mrs. Brown and exposes their inability to catch Mrs. Brown. Forster, the critic, seems to be engaged in a conversation with a number of great men, and visualises them "not as floating down that stream which bears all its sons away unless they are careful, but as seated together in a room, a circular room, a sort of British Museum reading-room all writing their novels simultaneously."[40] As a critic Forster is conscious that one can have only an imperfect vision and thus eschews any absolutism. But whether she calls it 'spirit' or 'life', the thing Woolf seeks, 'Mrs. Brown', seems more or less the same as what Forster prizes most in novels, that "vague and vast residue into which the subconscious enters. Poetry, religion,

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39 "Hours in a Library", Collected Essays II, p. 39.
40 Aspects of the Novel, p. 27.

passion - ...."[41] While Woolf advocates the claim of "Mrs. Brown" with ardent and well-argued critical defenses Forster is characteristically casual and refuses to assume the role of a defensive literary critic. But both are influenced by "the sense of a world that asks to be noticed rather than explained",[42] which permeates their criticism and fiction.

It may be worthwhile to consider how these two novelist-critics responded to each other's work and assessed the problems that faced them. Woolf perceives what is central in Forster's art, "the sacred fire within", a 'burning core.' She exclaims:

> It is the soul; it is reality; it is truth; it is poetry; it is love; it decks itself in many shapes, dresses itself in many disguises. But get at it he must; keep from it he cannot.[43]

Forster stuggle is to discover the elusive strangeness and mystery that lies at the depth of our being. But he does not take to aestheticism for this purpose. He does not deny the outside world in order to capture the inner reality. He proposes a balance, as a humanist should, and concludes that only proportion would help us in our search for truth. He

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[41] Ibid. p. 100.

[42] "The last of Abinger", Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 265.

[43] "The novels of E.M. Forster", Collected Essays I, p. 343.

was too involved in human affairs, too much engaged in the affairs of his time to ignore the solid fabric of the outside world. He prizes most that literature which expresses the humanistic tenets. Woolf discovers in him, above all, "the impulses of a poet", and she rightly describes Forster's problem:

> He belives that a novel must take sides in a human conflict. He sees beauty - none more keenly; but beauty imprisoned in a fortress of brick and mortar whence he must extricate her. Hence he is always constrained to build the cage - society in all its intricacy and triviality - before he can free the prisoner. The omnibus, the villa, the suburban residence, are an essential part of his design.[44]

But Woolf would have little to do with the omnibus, the villa, the suburban residence. What is central to her is the individual sensibility unfolded in private reflections. In this she finds her similarity with her Bloomsbury colleague, Forster, because the "belief that it is the private life that matters, that it is the soul that is eternal, runs through all his writings."[45] While her extreme obsession with reality as sensibility took Woolf away from the ordinary world of action on to the verge of aestheticism, Forster's concern for the soul took him right into the midst of human affairs, into society in its

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[44] Ibid., p. 344.

[45] Ibid., p. 345.

intricacy and triviality. Forster, the humanist plunged into and rolled himself in the mud that was life. Woolf did not plunge. She remained in the world of poetry, and would not let go of poetry. Forster sees her difficulty as a novelist.

> Holding on with one hand to poetry, she stretches and stretches to grasp things which are best gained by letting go of poetry. She sould not let go, and I think she was quite right, though critics who like a novel to be a novel will disagree. She was quite right to cling to her specific gift, even if this entailed sacrificing something else vital to her art. And she did not always have to sacrifice; ...[46]

In their struggle as critics and artists Woolf and Forster come close although they sometimes diverge. Belonging to no tradition in the ordinary sense, they are co-advocates of what they commonly called 'life.' Woolf's was the extreme way, characteristic of a romantic idealist. Her neurotic condition and suicide are one of the most tragic events in the history of modern literature. Forster's was the way of 'proportion', the way of the liberal humanist. Their criticism, though casual and subjective, has a stamp of sincereity and authenticity which are sadly missing from the vast body of criticism proper. Their insights into the nature of fiction need to be taken more seriously for they point to many important dimensions of the problematics of the protean novel.

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[46] "Virginia Woolf", Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 257.

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