Aspects of the Novel Study Guide

Aspects of the Novel by E. M. Forster

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Introduction

Aspects of the Novel is the publication of a series of lectures on the English language novel, delivered by E. M. Forster at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1927. Using examples of classic works by many of the world's greatest writers, he discusses seven aspects he deems universal to the novel: story, characters, plot, fantasy, prophecy, pattern, and rhythm.

Forster dismisses the method of examining the novel as a historical development, in preference to an image of all novelists throughout history writing simultaneously, side by side. He first establishes that, if nothing else, a novel is a story that takes place over a period of time. He stresses the importance of character, maintaining that both "flat" and "round" characters may be included in the successful novel. He regards the necessity of plot, which creates the effect of suspense, as a problem by which character is frequently sacrificed in the service of providing an ending to the novel. Fantasy and prophecy, which provide a sense of the "universal," or spiritual, Forster regards as central aspects of the great novel. Finally, he dismisses the value of "pattern," by which a narrative may be structured, as another aspect that frequently sacrifices the vitality of character. Drawing on the metaphor of music, Forster concludes that rhythm, which he defines as "repetition plus variation," allows for an aesthetically pleasing structure to emerge from the novel, while maintaining the integrity of character and the open-ended quality that gives novels a feeling of expansiveness.

Author Biography

Edward Morgan Forster was born in London on January 1, 1879, the only surviving son of Edward Morgan Llewellyn Forster, an architect, and Alice Clara Forster. Forster's father died of tuberculosis in 1880, and he was subsequently raised by several female family members, in addition to his mother, all of whom made a strong impression on his youth, and some of whom eventually turned up as characters in his novels. Marianne Thornton, his great-aunt on his father's side, died in 1886, leaving him an inheritance, which paid for his secondary and college education, as well as his subsequent world travels, and bought him the leisure to pursue the craft of writing. Forster recalled bitter memories of his time spent as a day attendant at Tonbridge School in Kent, from 1893 to 1897. In 1897, he enrolled in King's College, Cambridge, where he was grateful to be exposed to the liberal atmosphere and ideas lacking in his education up to that point.

Upon graduating with a bachelor of arts degree in classics and history, Forster went abroad and devoted himself to a writing career. He lived in Greece and Italy from 1901 to 1907, during which his first novel, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) was published. Upon returning to England, he lectured at Working Men's College. His second and third novels, *The Longest Journey* (1907), and *A Room With a View* (1908) appeared during this time. *Howard's End* (1910), his first major literary success, was a critique of the British upper class. In 1912, he made one of several trips to India. During a period including World War I, Forster worked as a Red Cross volunteer in Alexandria from 1915 to 1919. When the war ended, he returned to England, serving as literary editor of the Labor Party's *Daily Herald,* and contributing to journals such as *Nation* and *New Statesman.*

From 1921, Forster held various prestigious lectureships in England, and gave a lecture tour in the United States in 1941. He became associated with the London intellectual and literary salon known as the Bloomsbury Group, which included such celebrated modernist writers as Virginia Woolf. His second masterpiece, *A Passage to India,* was published in 1924, after which he published no more novels during his lifetime, devoting himself to non-fiction writing, such as essays, literary criticism, and biography. In addition to *Aspects of the Novel,* two important essay collections were *Abinger Harvest* (1936) and *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951). After his death on June 7, 1970, in Coventry, England, his novel *Maurice* (1971) was published for the first time, apparently suppressed by the author because of its autobiographical content concerning a young homosexual man.

Plot Summary

Introduction

In an introductory chapter, Forster establishes the ground rules for his discussion of the English novel. He defines the novel simply - according to M. Abel Chevalley in *Le Roman Anglais de notre temps,* as "a fiction in prose of a certain extent." He goes on to define English literature as literature written in the English language, regardless of the geographic location or origin of the author. Most importantly, Forster makes clear that this discussion will not be concerned with historical matters, such as chronology, periodization, or development of the novel. He makes clear that "time, all the way through, is to be our enemy." Rather, he wishes to imagine the world's great novelists from throughout history sitting side by side in a circle, in "a sort of British Museum reading room - all writing their novels simultaneously." Finally, he acknowledges the intended ambiguity of the phrase "aspects of the novel" to indicate an open-ended discussion in which he will cover seven of these "aspects": story, characters, plot, fantasy, prophecy, pattern, and rhythm.

The Story

In a chapter on "The Story," Forster begins with the assertion that the novel, in its most basic definition, tells a story. He goes on to say that a story must be built around suspense - the question of "what happens next?" He thus defines the story as "a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence." Forster adds that a good novel must include a sense of value in the story. He then discusses *The Antiquary,* by Sir Walter Scott, as an example of a novel that is built on a series of events that narrate "what happens next." However, he criticizes *The Antiquary* as a novel that adheres to a sequence of events but has no sense of value in the story. Forster refers to Russian novelist Tolstoy's *War and Peace* as an example that includes value in a narrative of events that unfold over time. He brings up the American writer Gertrude Stein as an example of a novelist who has attempted to abolish time from the novel, leaving only value. However, he declares this a failure that results in nonsense.

Characters

In two chapters entitled "People," Forster discusses characterization in the novel. He describes five "main facts of human life," which include "birth, food, sleep, love, and death," and then compares these five activities as experienced by real people *(homo sapiens)* to these activities as enacted by characters in novels *(homofictus)*. He goes on to discuss the character of *Moll Flanders,* in the novel by Defoe of the same title. Forster focuses on Moll Flanders as a novel in which the form is derived from the development of the main character. In a second lecture on characters, Forster distinguishes between flat characters, whose characterization is relatively simple and straightforward, and round characters, whose characterization is more complex and developed. Forster finds advantages in the use of both flat and round characters in the novel. He points to Charles Dickens as an example of a novelist nearly all of whose characters are flat but who nonetheless creates "a vision of humanity that is not shallow." He spends less time discussing round characters but provides the examples of Russian novelists Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoyevski, most of whose characters are round. Forster moves on to a brief mention of point of view, concluding that novels with a shifting or inconsistent point of view are not problematic if the author possesses the skill to integrate these shifts into the narrative whole.

Plot

In a chapter on plot, Forster defines plot as a narrative of events over time, with an emphasis on causality. He claims that the understanding of plot requires two traits in the reader: intelligence and memory. He discusses George Meredith who, he claims, though not a great novelist, is one of England's greatest masters of the plot. He then turns to Thomas Hardy as an example of a novelist whose plots are heavily structured at the expense of the characters; in other words, the characters are drawn to fit the measure of the plot and therefore lack a life of their own. He asserts that "nearly all novels are feeble at the end," because the dictates of plot require a resolution, which the novelists write at the expense of the characters. He adds that "death and marriage" are the most convenient recourse of the novelist in formulating an ending. He provides the example of Andre Gide' s *Les Fauxmonnayeurs* as a novel in which the author attempted to do away with plot completely, concluding that, though plot often threatens to suffocate the life out of characters, it is nonetheless an essential aspect of the novel.

Fantasy

In a chapter on fantasy, Forster asserts that two important aspects of the novel are fantasy and prophecy, both of which include an element of mythology. Using the novel *Tristram Shandy,* by Sterne, as an example, Forster claims even novels that do not include literal elements of the supernatural may include an implication that supernatural forces are at work. He lists some of the common devices of fantasy used by novelists, "such as the introduction of a god, ghost, angel, or monkey, monster, midget, witch into ordinary life." He adds to this list "the introduction of ordinary men into no-man's land, the future, the past, the interior of the earth, the fourth dimension; or divings into and dividings of personality. He goes on to discuss the devices of parody and adaptation as elements of fantasy, which, he says, are especially useful to talented authors who are not good at creating their own characters. He points to *Joseph Andrews,* by Henry Fielding, which began as a parody of *Pamela,* by Richardson. He goes on to the example of *Ulysses,* by James Joyce, which is an adaptation from the ancient text the *Odyssey,* based on Greek myth.

Prophecy

Forster describes the aspect of prophecy in a novel as "a tone of voice" of the author, a "song" by which "his theme is the universe," although his subject matter may be anything but universal. He notes that the aspect of prophecy demands of the reader both "humility" and "the suspension of a sense of humor." He then compares Dostoevsky to George Eliot, concluding that, though both express a vision of the universal in their novels, Eliot ends up being preachy, whereas Dostoevsky successfully expresses a "prophetic song" without preaching. Forster confesses that there are only four writers who succeed in creating prophetic novels: Dostoevsky, Melville, D. H. Lawrence, and Emily Bronte. He discusses passages from *Moby Dick* and the short story "Billy Budd" in order to illustrate Melville's prophetic voice and from *Wuthering Heights* for a discussion of Bronte as "a prophetess." He points to D. H. Lawrence as the only living novelist whose work is successfully prophetic.

Pattern and Rhythm

In a chapter on pattern and rhythm, Forster describes the aspect of pattern in the novel in terms of visual art. He describes the narrative pattern of *Thais,* by Anatole France, as that of an hourglass and the novel *Roman Pictures,* by Percy Lubbock, as that of a chain. He determines that pattern adds an aesthetic quality of beauty to a novel. Forster then discusses the novel *The Ambassadors,* by Henry James, which, he claims, sacrifices the liveliness of the characters to the rigid structure of an hourglass pattern. Forster concludes that the problem of pattern in novels is that it "shuts the door on life." He then turns to the aspect of rhythm, which he describes as "repetition plus variation," as better suited to the novel than is pattern. He describes the multi-volume novel *Remembrance of Things Past,* by Marcel Proust, as an example of the successful use of rhythm. Forster concludes that rhythm in the novel provides a more open-ended narrative structure without sacrificing character.

Conclusion

In a brief conclusion, Forster speculates as to the future of the novel, asserting that it will in fact not change at all because human nature does not change. He concludes that "the development of the novel" is no more than "the development of humanity."

Section 1

Section 1 Summary and Analysis

Written by one of the most well respected British novelists and essayists of the early 20th Century, this book is a critical analysis of the novel and its various elements. The book's content was originally presented in 1927 as a series of lectures at Trinity College at Cambridge University in England, and is published here as a series of essays. The technical components of the novel (story, plot, character, and pattern) receive the majority of Forster's attention but, in that context, he also explores the novel's more emotional and spiritual elements. His core theme relates to the creative tension between freedom and form, between structure and passion.

"Introductory" Forster begins his first lecture with a tribute to William George Clark, a writer and scholar whose legacy to his alma mater, Trinity College (Cambridge, England) established and defined the series of lectures Forster is about to give. He discusses Clark's life and achievements in the fields of scholarship, writing, and traveling, refers to Clark's lifelong relationship with Trinity College, and discusses the details of the Clark Lectures, which Clark's will dictated were "to be delivered annually 'on some period or periods of English Literature not earlier than Chaucer.'" Forster states, however, that he cannot and will not adhere strictly to these official guidelines, offering several reasons.

Firstly, Forster suggests that the lecture guidelines are too narrow—they do not allow for inclusion of great non-English writers like Tolstoy or Proust, and they fail to recognize the key failing of English fiction writing: its provincialism. This provincialism Forster defines as a narrowness or smallness of perspective and style. Provincialism is fine for critics, he writes, but has no place in the world and work of the creative artist (see "Quotes," p. 19-20). The second reason Forster is rejecting the guidelines, he says, is that the novelist's work is too personally important and too boundless to be confined to a particular period. "The fact that their pens are in their hands," he writes, "is far more vivid to them ...their sorrows and joys are pouring out through the ink." He suggests that considering literature on such terms as nationality and period is the act of the pseudo-scholar (concerned with superficialities and facts) as opposed to the genuine scholar (concerned with truth, meaning, and experience), and proposes an alternative perspective on the topic at hand. He suggests that for the purpose of his lectures, his audience imagine that all English novelists of whatever period are in a room writing together (see "Quotes," p. 21), his implication being that novelists all have essentially common interests. He offers a series of selected excerpts from the work of various pairs of writers of different periods as an illustration of his point.

Forster's first excerpts are from the works of Samuel Richardson and Henry James, novelists writing a hundred and fifty years apart and from the perspectives of a shopkeeper and an artistically temperamental recluse—but with, Forster says, similar sensitivities to suffering, appreciations of self-sacrifice, and "a sort of tremulous nobility."

His second excerpts are from two different descriptions of funerals, one written by Charles Dickens and the other by H.G. Wells. The two writers are separated, according to Forster, by sixty years, advances in technology and education, and improvements in society, but are unified by a certain satirical sensibility, an insensitivity to beauty, and rough edges to their prose. Their basic art, Forster maintains, is essentially similar. Forster's third set of excerpts is from the writings of Virginia Woolf and Laurence Sterne, suggesting that although Sterne is a sentimentalist (focused on feeling and sensation) and Woolf is more objective and observational, both are anchored by "a humorous appreciation of the muddle of life with a keen sense of its beauty." Forster suggests that by offering these examples of parallels between writers of different periods he has proven that considering the novel on the basis of when it was written is invalid, stating again that the truest way to examine the novel is by digging into meaning—the author's meaning (see "Quotes," p. 38).

Forster then suggests that his theory might be summed up in the statement that "History develops, Art stands still." In other words, while the facts of the world change, while its activities and the society in which they take place evolve, the novelist's perspectives on them and the art created out of those perspectives remain essentially the same. He writes that literary tradition—habits, ways of working and thinking that are how they are because they have always been that way—must be considered in terms of what those traditions mean, as opposed to when or how they developed and how long they have been maintained. He writes that the ultimate judge of the value of the novel must be the reaction of the human heart (see "Quotes," p. 42), suggesting that he will do his best to avoid sentimentality but if humanity is removed from the novel, "little is left but a bunch of words." He concludes this first essay by explaining that he chose to title his lectures *Aspects of the Novel* because the term was abstract and vague enough to accommodate the various ways the novelist looks at his work, and suggests that there are seven key aspects—The Story, People, The Plot, Fantasy, Prophecy, Pattern and Rhythm.

For any book that is itself an analysis (as this book is), any commentary upon it must itself be analytical—an analysis of the analysis, as it were. In the particular case of *Aspects of the Novel*, the analysis must focus on Forster's two main theories, one presented more directly and the second developed more sub-textually, or thematically. The first theory is his analysis of the way a novel works, his examination of its various technical components and how they combine to create a whole. In metaphoric terms, Forster's work in this area might be likened to the stripping down of an automobile into its component parts to examine how they individually function—the engine system, the braking system, the transmission system, or the steering system, for example. For the most part, this aspect of Forster's analysis seems sound. He presents the technical aspects of the novel in a straightforward, deeply perceptive way, going into the core of why the respective elements ("aspects") function in the way they do and expressing his understandings clearly and engagingly. He gives the very clear impression (principally through the examples he cites and the way he cites them) that he not only knows what he is talking about, but that he has invested a lot of thought in his theory. There are exceptions, but these are relatively minor and will be discussed as they arise.

The second, more thematic focus of Forster's work is his analysis of what a novel means, why it exists, and what it comes into existence to do. The automobile metaphor can also be developed here, in that the novelist can be seen as the driver of the car, responsible for the care and maintenance of its component parts as well as for the journey the car takes. If the driver (novelist) is in any way incompetent in either of those areas, the passenger in the car (the reader of the novel) feels uneasy, uncomfortable, and ultimately unsatisfied. However, if all the various systems in an automobile are functioning at optimum efficiency, and if it seems clear the driver/novelist knows what he is doing, where he is going, and is proceeding on his journey thoughtfully, the passenger/reader feels safe, perhaps even excited. There may be surprises along that journey—sudden detours, sudden changes in direction, alterations in plan—but in a successful situation the car/novel, its driver/novelist and its systems/aspects are equipped not only to handle them, but to capitalize upon them. In fact, and in Forster's perspective, many of the best novels do contain surprises, in story, character and theme. If the various aspects, like those of the well-maintained automobile, are all in good, functioning order, and the driver/novelist is in control, the reader/passenger is taken on a safe, secure journey. In Forster's opinion, that journey will take the reader to a place where he has never been before and which may actually bring something new into his life—beauty, perspective or understanding.

This last is Forster's key thematic point, developed throughout his book. The purpose of the novel is to bring the reader, and perhaps the novelist, into a broader, deeper understanding of himself, of humanity, and of the spiritual and physical world around him. This aspect of the novel is essentially summed up in the term "value," the fuller meaning of which is explored in detail in the following section.

Section 2

Section 2 Summary and Analysis

"The Story" Forster begins this lecture by stating that Story is the backbone of the novel, indicating that he makes the statement reluctantly (see "Quotes," p. 45) but recognizing that wanting to know "what happens next" is a fundamental human experience. This means, he asserts, that a novel succeeds when the audience is brought to a point of high suspense (to the desperation of wanting to know what happens next) and fails when it does not create that suspense—when an audience does not want to know, and does not care. He explains that this is so important because life itself is dependent, for the most part, on things happening one after the other, on a chain of events hung on the coat-rack of the measurable time sense. He adds, however, there is also an immeasurable quality that seems to most human beings to be of equal importance. This Forster defines as value, "something which is measured not by minutes or hours, but by intensity." He then suggests the most successful novels combine both aspects of daily life, the narration of life events in time and the values associated with those events.

Forster then focuses specifically on Story as a series of events and the necessity for a strongly anchoring time sense. He cites examples of novelists (Emily Bronte, Proust, Sterne) who attempt to manipulate time but nonetheless find themselves inevitably drawn back to the necessity of grounding their stories in it. He then writes at detailed length of how the famous Scottish writer, Sir Walter Scott, became a renowned and respected novelist in spite of having "a trivial mind and a heavy style"—he was, Forster maintains, a master Story-teller, a fact Forster illustrates with a detailed synopsis of Scott's novel *The Antiquary*. At the conclusion of his synopsis, Forster contrasts *The Antiquary* with *The Old Wives' Club*, in which the potential transcendence of the story falls victim to the rigidities and narrowness of time, and *War and Peace*, which, in Forster's view, manages to transcend those rigidities by employing space and music to evoke emotional and spiritual values.

In the final third of this essay, Forster turns to another aspect of Story. This is its status, in the novel, as a manifestation of a voice—the soothing, engaging inescapable voice of the Story-teller, "the voice of the tribal narrator, squatting in the middle of the cave, and saying one thing after another until the audience falls asleep." Both Story and the voice of the Story-teller, Forster writes, are primitive—just the same as the desire in each human being to be told a story, to be made to wonder what happens next. Forster questions whether it is possible for a novelist to successfully banish the time sense from his work, and install only an exploration and celebration of values, and then answers his own question by evoking the work of Gertrude Stein. Forster writes with evident admiration of both her attempt to transcend time and the failure of those attempts, saying that abolishing the sequential element of Story cannot be accomplished without also abolishing the sequencing of sentences and words and letters, without which there can be no communication (see "Quotes," p. 68). Forster concludes this essay by urging his audience to yes, admit that there can be no novel without Story—but to do so with a little sadness.

The first question that arises in relation to this section is why Forster, at its beginning, is reluctant to admit that the primary component of a novel is its story. The core reason for this is indicated in this section and reiterated throughout the book—Forster, it seems, cares more for the value of experiences rather than for the experiences themselves, for the meaning of its story rather than its events. This ties in with his main theme, that for a novel to be good—as opposed to merely successful, or telling a good story—its values and experience must transcend the everyday.

In a sense, these first four sections (Story, the two parts on People, Plot) are all leading up to Sections 6 and 7, the sections on Fantasy and Prophecy, which contain his core thematic statements, his statements of belief in transcendence. Those statements are quite well disguised, in that they are presented with the same sort of faintly ironic, at times passionate, but mostly dryly academic way as the other, more technically oriented sections. However, his repeated, albeit quite varied, references to events having more value than is inherent in their existence, and people reacting to those experiences having more sides tot their selves than initially apparent, support his essential belief that the novel's purpose is to somehow enlighten. This belief, then, defines his reluctant emphasis on the importance of Story and his admiration (in this section's latter paragraphs) for Gertrude Stein, who attempted to banish story in favor of meaning.

All that said, his analysis of how Story functions is well reasoned and thoughtful, albeit tinged with his evident personal prejudice in favor of value.

Section 3

Section 3 Summary and Analysis

"People, Part 1" Forster begins this lecture with a point related to the two different experiences of life: the order of events and the value of those events. He suggests that the characters in a novel embody, represent and dramatize the value of the story the novelist is telling. After making witty comments about how novelists write about people rather than animals, about how there is an automatic affinity between the novelist and his characters because the novelist too is a human being, and about how characters are in literal fact nothing more than carefully chosen clusters of words, Forster introduces the main focus of this lecture. This is his contention that people in books are markedly different from people in life.

Forster supports this contention in several ways. Firstly, he says the difference between history/memoir and fiction, or the study of life and the illumination of life, is that history is concerned essentially with facts, while fiction is concerned with the values of facts (see "Quotes," p. 71-72). In other words, as Forster states, "the historian records where the novelist must create." This leads him to consider the second key difference between people in life and people in books—people in life rarely understand each other thoroughly, where people in books can almost always been entirely understood by those reading about them. "We," he says, "have been told all about them that can be told; even if they are imperfect or unreal they do not contain any secrets, whereas our friends do and must, mutual secrecy being one of the conditions of life upon this globe."

The third way in which Forster supports his contention that people in fiction are different from people in life is by examining five key experiences of being human—birth, food, sleep, love, and death. He suggests there are other key experiences, but for the purposes of his lecture and his point, he is limiting his focus to five. He begins by examining what he calls "the strangest," birth and death, both of which no one can ever actually know—birth because the human being is not conscious enough at the moment of experience to recall, death because the human simply is not alive (see "Quotes," p. 76). Forster then essentially dismisses food and sleep as being essentially uninteresting to the novelist, being rarely associated with anything of "value". He spends, however, a great deal of time analyzing the importance of love in both humanity at large and in humanity in books, beginning his analysis with an academic consideration of sex, which he says is a universal human experience linked with several other emotions—and then leaves the subject alone (see "Quotes," p. 79). He also writes that love between persons is a complex blend of the desire to give and the desire to receive, both of which are expressed in an infinite number of ways and for an equally infinite number of reasons.

Forster then specifically examines the way these five manifestations of life are dealt with in books—he describes birth is being mostly dismissed, since novelists are unable to understand the psychology of babies (although the psychology of parents is often delved into). Death, he suggests, is mined much more often for value—on a human level, it is often observed, and on a Story level it is an easy a way to provide ending, shock and meaning. Food and sleep he again dismisses as being relatively useless to a novelist, and then turns the bulk of his attention to love, which he says has received so much novelistic emphasis for two reasons. First, he suggests that novelists, sometimes without actually meaning to, allow their characters to become extraordinarily sensitive to love, letting them become obsessed with it in all its manifestations in ways that people in life do not. Second, he suggests "love, like death, is congenial to a novelist because it ends a book conveniently." This, Forster suggests, is because the novelist draws upon the human tendency to attach permanency to strong feeling—an attachment that, in essence, is fatally flawed because nothing, he says, is permanent (see "Quotes," p. 86).

At this point, Forster examines the book *The Amorous Adventures of Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe, suggesting that Moll is an excellent example of a character who can be seen fully, thoroughly, and humanely no matter what she does or who she does it to (and, according to Forster's summary, she does some awful things to some awful people). Moll, Forster writes, completely embodies his point about the difference between novelistic people and real people—the former can be completely understood, but the latter cannot be. "They are real not because they are like ourselves, (though they may be like us) but because they are convincing." They also, he concludes, "suggest a more comprehensible ... manageable human race, they give us the illusion of [insightfulness] and power."

Forster's essential theme, that the purpose of the novel is to bring a deeper, broader understanding of life, is more subtly evoked here than it is elsewhere—specifically, in his implication that the reader will come to know more about life because she knows everything about a character in a book. It is ironic, however, that even while he is making this suggestion, he also makes statements about the necessity of friends keeping secrets, the implication of which is that while it is important for human beings to know more about themselves, each other, and their life on this planet, "more" has some very specific boundaries.

At this point, it might be useful to consider the personal character and perspective of the author of these essays. As discussed in the section on "Important People," Forster was an intensely complicated man, one who desperately sought more in his life but one for whom "more" could not mean "all". On the one hand, he knew his upper-middle class life was limited in perspective, so limited he felt his calling as a novelist was compromised. So, he traveled extensively—to Italy, to India, to America, all more than once. Upon his return from each trip, he felt he had an additional degree of understanding, but never enough. In short, he constantly sought "more," and believed not only that such a condition was an essential aspect of his humanity, but that it was an aspect of all humanity in general. He struggled for years to cultivate a broader, deeper perspective. On the other hand, Forster was a homosexual, filled with the self-loathing, desperation for secrecy and hidden-ness ("less") pervasive among those of homosexual inclination at the time (the late 1800's, early-to-mid 1900's). Later in life, he experienced the beginnings of sexual and emotional freedom, but for most of his life he was too frightened of repercussion to tell anyone but a few very close, discreet, intimate friends.

This, combined with the traditional British reticence that reached its peak during the years of the emotionally damaged Queen Victoria, years which saw Forster's birth and maturity into young adulthood, became the source of Forster's belief in boundaries, that friends must have secrets. Indeed, it was his belief that the entire world and society must also have secrets, secrets that, in his dream of dreams, would no longer be necessary. One need only read his novel *Maurice* to discover how much longing there was for transcendence—a longing evident in these essays, often disguised in academic language and perspective, but on vivid occasions, such as the lectures on Fantasy and Rhythm, all too apparent.

Section 4

Section 4 Summary and Analysis

Note: The division between the two examinations of the subject of "People" is the author's.

"People," continued. Forster begins this lecture with a brief explanation of its content, a consideration of how the characters in a novel relate "to other aspects ... to a plot, a moral, their fellow characters, atmosphere, etc." He speaks of how characters (like those in the novels of Jane Austen, for example) function in exactly that way, as part of a sum of the novel's parts. He also speaks wittily of how characters in novels often develop lives of their own and therefore, because those lives parallel those of human beings, can occasionally derail the novelist's narrative intent. This situation, Forster contends, can be managed by the employment of two methods of working: using different kinds of characters, and defining different points of view for them.

In analyzing the first method, using different kinds of characters, Forster focuses initially, and in some detail, on flat characters—characters with one single, clearly defined characteristic or motivation that remains consistent throughout the novel and all the action it contains. Such characters, he maintains, can be useful touchstones for the reader, who is, after all, endowed with the human desire for consistency. They are best utilized as manifestations of comedy. He asserts that such characters can generally be defined by a simple formula or statement of philosophy, and for that reason can at times be felt by the reader to be distilled manifestations of humanity. Characters in Dickens, Forster contends, are almost always flat, are almost always powerfully vivid, and are almost always regarded as potent manifestations, albeit of single aspects, of the human spirit. Round characters, by contrast, are more difficult to understand and more difficult to remember, but are ultimately truer expressions of "value". He does not define "round" per se, but offers examples from the writings of Jane Austen of how characters are almost always portrayed as rounded—with more than one social, moral, emotional or spiritual experience or perspective. He writes admiringly of her skill at developing such characters, and juxtaposes this strength with what he considers to be her weakness (her inability to write about physical experience, whether violent or intimate). He concludes by suggesting she may start by defining her characters with a degree of flatness, but ends by inflating them with feeling and soul to the point where they are some of the roundest characters in fiction (see "Quotes," p. 118).

Forster then considers the second way in which characters in novels can be shaped to realize the novelist's intent—through the utilization of differing points of view. This, Forster writes, is essentially the way in which the novelist "bounce[s] the reader into accepting what he says," a concern Forster puts squarely at the center of the question of whether a novel works. He cites *Bleak House*, by Charles Dickens, as an example of how a shifting point of view works, suggesting that such a method can be messy but functions well to bring the reader into the world of the story. He suggests that such an approach works because it "has a parallel in our perception of life. We are stupider at some times than others; we can enter into people's minds occasionally but not always ... and this intermittence lends in the long run variety and color to the experiences we receive." At the same time, however, he suggests it is dangerous for a novelist to break his established conventions about point of view and draw attention to what he is trying to do with his characters. In other words, Forster is saying let the characters tell the story and let the reader determine why and how they are doing what they are doing (see "Quotes," p. 122).

More so here than in any other section, Forster's analysis seems to be grounded in a huge generalization, that being the distinction between round characters and flat characters. This is not to suggest that the generalization is inaccurate—on the contrary, what he says makes eminent sense ... to a point. There are characters in Dickens, for example, which display more roundedness than Forster gives them credit for—characters such as Fagin and Nancy in *Oliver Twist*. By the same token, there are characters in Austen—mostly supporting characters, like Mrs. Jennings in *Sense and Sensibility* or Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*—who are essentially flat. The question here is why does Forster make such a sweeping generalization—to make his point vividly, or because of a certain academic didacticism?

Here again examination of the author's character might come into play. Forster was known among his circles of friends and professional colleagues for a certain narrowness in his perspective—ironic, of course, given his belief that members of the human race must know more, feel more, and be more, and also that all of them on some level wanted to. In other words, he had very clear, almost obstinate ideas about what fiction should be, life should be, and even how friendships and relationships should be. At times, he was able to relax those ideas, but at other times—perhaps while composing and delivering these lectures—he was unable to relax them as much as he ought. In other words, he was not always able to practice what he preached.

Meanwhile, Forster's point about how varied points of view reflect life parallels his points about character, made in the previous essay. Point of view, he seems to be saying, is ultimately an evocation of life, a similarity to it, as opposed to a strict portrayal of it, an ignoring of it, or a complete breakdown of its conventions and belief systems. This ties in with his perspective throughout the novel—pure, undiluted realism is of less value than an interpretation of realism, an interpretation designed to bring deeper understanding to the reader's mind, heart and soul. Meanwhile, Forster's point about allowing the reader to form her own opinions and conclusions about characters and the meaning of their actions relates strongly to his points in the following section, on Plot. There is, again, irony here—throughout the book he is, of course, suggesting how readers of the novels he is examining ought to react to them.

Section 5

Section 5 Summary and Analysis

"The Plot" In this lecture, Forster begins by suggesting the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who maintained that "all human happiness and misery takes the form of action," is wrong. Aristotle, Forster says, knew nothing about novels and based his theory on the nature and function of drama, in which everything unseen, unknown and unknowable about human beings must be understood from action. The novelist, Forster writes, has access to the unknowable, and can therefore devote time and energy to its unexpressed, inner existence, communicating it without recourse to action. This, he suggests, is the core of the difference between story and plot. Story, he maintains, is simply a series of events narrated in time-sequence, while plot adds the element of causality, of why—and what defines the why, he says, is the unknowable. "If it is a story," he writes, "[the audience] say[s] 'And then?' If it is a plot, [the audience] ask[s] 'Why?'" After a brief discourse on how curiosity (the wanting to know why) is one of the basest and most degrading of human faculties, Forster maintains that a plot can be grasped and understood by adding to curiosity the faculties of intelligence and memory. The first, he says, places an incident in a novel in context—instead of considering it on its own, which is what curiosity does. The second deepens the sense of context by giving it meaning. A well-constructed plot, Forster writes, is a thing of beauty, but adds that beauty in all its value will be discussed in another lecture. He then turns his attention to a writer who, in his opinion, is an admirable plotter—George Meredith.

Forster contends that Meredith, as a novelist, has considerable flaws—stridency when discussing moral issues, a true sense of tragedy and suffering, superficiality of research and characterization. Yet, Forster contends that Meredith was masterful at integrating character and action, making action spring, often surprisingly, always effectively, from character. Meredith also successfully used the mystery of human unknowability to define the mystery of why. Forster contrasts Meredith's plotting ability with that of Thomas Hardy, who in shaping his story demands his characters fulfill his vision, rather than allowing them to define it and bring it to life. "[Hardy's] characters," Forster says, "have been required to contribute too much to the plot ... their vitality has been impoverished, they have gone dry and thin ... he has emphasized causality more strongly than his medium permits." This contention leads Forster to another about plot—that most novels go flat at the end. He suggests this is the result of the novelist deciding he has to define the ending, rather than letting the characters define it themselves. He cites several instances of this, suggesting novelists need to come up with better ways (than death and marriage) of allowing their stories to end.

After summing up the points he has made so far in this lecture, Forster addresses the question of "whether the framework thus produced is the best possible for a novel." He asks whether it is possible for a novel to simply grow, to evolve into itself, as opposed to being something shaped and manipulated by a writer. He cites an example of an attempt to do exactly that. This is a novel by French novelist Andre Gide, in which one of the characters is in fact a novelist, writing a book of the same title as the novel itself, and is attempting to meld both sorts of truth—the truth of life as lived, and the truth of a novel as interpreted by its author and characters. Forster quotes from the book at length, citing a sequence in which the novelist-character describes what the novelist-author is striving to do and is mocked by other characters. Forster paints Gide's attempt as not quite successful, but nonetheless commends Gide, in the same way as he commended Gertrude Stein in Section 2, for making the attempt. Forster concludes this essay with the suggestion there is a great deal that is subconscious, or at least colored by the subconscious, about the art and craft of novel writing. He says that in the following lecture, he will discuss this subconscious element, which he defines as fantasy.

From the vantage point of nearly a hundred years beyond the time at which these lectures were written, and therefore a hundred years beyond their literary context, it can be difficult to appreciate Forster's examples, particularly when he quotes from them in such a detailed way as he does on several occasions throughout the book. It is a credit to Forster, however, that for the most part his points would be clear without the examples—in particular, his points about People and Story. His points about Plot are, at times, somewhat more elusive. His somewhat obliquely stated point about the relationship of intelligence and memory to Story, for example, might become more clear if summed up in this way—for Forster, intelligence regards an incident in a story as a piece of a puzzle, while memory functions to put those pieces together to ultimately create a whole picture.

In terms of Forster's central point, that Plot is at its core a deepening of Story, there are those who might argue there is little relative difference between the two elements, just as there are those who would argue his discussions of Fantasy and Prophecy are ultimately immaterial. A novel's purpose, such people might say, is simply to entertain—Plot and Story therefore serve the same purpose, to bring the reader along for a ride, while Fantasy and Prophecy are sidelines at best, irrelevant at worst. For Forster, however, whose writing in this section and indeed throughout the book clearly indicates his belief that the novel has a greater, more humanistic purpose, his core point about Plot is inextricably tied to his points about Fantasy and Prophecy. Plot is, for him, defined by the journey of transformation undertaken by the central characters, a journey that artistically echoes the journey that should be undertaken by every human being in life, a journey from ignorance to awareness.

Once again Forster expresses his admiration for a novelist who attempts to "break the mold." In the same way he praised Gertrude Stein in Section 2 for attempting to break the barriers of Story, he praises Andre Gide here for attempting to break the barriers of both Story and Plot. This is a manifestation of one of Forster's secondary themes—freedom is more conducive to creating art, and that transcendent understanding Forster so desperately seeks, than rules or form.

Section 6

Section 6 Summary and Analysis

"Fantasy" Forster begins this lecture with a discussion of criticism and analysis, developing an extended metaphor about a bird and its shadow. Criticism, he suggests, is like a bird flying from the ground. Both bird and shadow remain intact, but as the bird flies higher the distance between it and its shadow (criticism and its subject) becomes greater and greater, until eventually the shadow (the subject) disappears and the bird (criticism) continues on its own way—a way that has little or nothing to do with the shadow at all. Forster suggests that Gide, in the experimental novel referenced in the previous lecture, attempts to bring the bird and the shadow (criticism and its subject) back together. In the attempt, Forster suggests, Gide identifies for readers, critics and fellow novelists, a key element of the novel that cuts across the concrete factors of time sense, people, logic or plot. That element, Forster suggests, manifests in two ways—fantasy and prophecy.

Some readers, Forster suggests, are more able to accept these elements than others, and adds that neither sort of reader is any greater or lesser, any wiser or more foolish, than the other. That said, he goes on to distinguish between the two. Fantasy, he suggests, evokes the presence of gods and mythology, while prophecy evokes the existence of a spiritual presence that transcends even the godlike (see "Quotes," p. 162). Fantasy, Forster says, "implies the supernatural, but need not express it ..." employing the fantastic events of two books to illustrate and define his point. As he has with other books in this series of lectures, Forster both summarizes and quotes from these books at length. The first is *Flecker's Magic* by Norman Matson, the story of a beggar given the opportunity to wish for whatever he wants, but paralyzed with fear when he realizes the possible repercussions of each wish. The second is *Zuleika Dobson* by Max Beerbohm, in which the title character is an attractive and vivacious young woman in whom several young men are passionately interested, and for whom they all die in various suicidal ways. He uses the quotes from these books to illustrate his point that ultimately, acceptance and effectiveness of fantasy depends on how it is employed, and suggests that the reason *Dobson* in particular is so effective is that the subject is treated with "a mixture of realism, wittiness, charm and mythology, and the mythology is most important."

Forster then turns to the subjects of adaptation and parody, which he suggests are manifestations of the fantastical in the creative— such works, he claims, are fantastical explorations and expansions of an entity that already exists. He cites *Ulysses*, by James Joyce, which uses the Classical Greek story of *The Odyssey* as the foundation for its story, people, plot and values. Forster first points out *Ulysses* is much more than simply a fantasy—it is, he suggests, a means to perceive and understand life in a unique way—but maintains it has fantastical perspective. He then summarizes the book, suggesting that ultimately it does not work particularly well because its fantastical perspective lacks a key component that, he says, he'll discuss "soon." That component is, in fact, the element of Prophecy, discussed in the following section.

Forster's metaphor of the bird and its shadow is an interesting one, and narrated in writing that, in its simple and beautiful form and content, is quite unlike anything else in the book. It might, in fact, be seen as an extension of his central theme. Is it possible to see the bird as an embodiment and symbol of the greater value to life, of the emotional knowledge and spiritual transcendence of which Forster speaks so frequently throughout this section, and in the section on Prophecy that follows?

Meanwhile, Forster's differentiation between Fantasy and Prophecy seems, at first glance, to be straddling a very fine line—transcendence, whether delineated as connected to Fantasy or Prophecy, is simply transcendence. It might be useful, in this context, to suggest that there is a key difference, that possibly Fantasy is a wondering whether transcendence is possible, while Prophecy comes from the perspective that transcendence exists. In any case, Forster's exploration of these two aspects are at the core of his philosophy of the novel and therefore of the book itself. He believes, as he suggests throughout the book, that the novel's purpose is to express and explore transcendence, and ultimately he does not care what form that exploration takes. In traditional analytical terms, then, these two sections qualify as the book's climax, the point of its highest emotional, spiritual and intellectual intensity.

It is interesting that Forster considers literary forms like adaptation and parody to be manifestations of Fantasy. While such forms are clearly expansions and illuminations of what has gone before, and thus echo another aspect of fantasy, which takes what is known and reshapes it in order to perceive it in a different way, there is often something personal about these literary techniques. There is frequently the sense that the novelist writing in the form of adaptation or parody is motivated by the belief such expansion is necessary—that the novelist who created what has gone before is too limited in perspective and scope. While this may be seen as a negative value, it might also relate back to Forster's point at the beginning of Section 3, in which he suggests novelists have an automatic affinity for humanity because they themselves are human. In that context, it is possible he means to imply that novelists, even if they are striving for an understanding of transcendence, are limited by being human. It is therefore reasonable to suggest the transcendence striven for by one novelist be expanded through adaptation, parody or satire by another.

Section 7

Section 7 Summary and Analysis

"Prophecy" Forster states at the beginning of this lecture that for him, Prophecy does not mean foretelling or foreseeing the future. Rather, Prophecy as an aspect of the novel refers to "an accent in the novelist's voice ... [the presence of] the universe, or something universal ... [the novelist] proposes to sing, and the strangeness of song arising in the halls of fiction is bound to give [the reader] a shock." The quality of Prophecy, he writes, transcends the various traditional faiths, simply offering the implication of a meaning and depth to existence beyond ... not heaven, not hell, not nirvana, simply beyond. He suggests considerations of style, the novelist's state of mind, attitude and word choice, come into play here, adding that the novelist is not seeing the nuts and bolts ("the tables and chairs," as Forster puts it) of the world and the Story, but is rather focused on and connected to that which is beyond. Forster then distinguishes between two different sorts of novelists—the preacher (like George Eliot, who seems to have a moral agenda in her spiritual writing) and the prophet (like Dostoyevsky, whose characters all seem to be experiencing some kind of connection to the infinite). It is this latter sensibility, Forster writes, with which he is primarily concerned.

Forster suggests that an appreciation of, and connection to, that sensibility is possible only if a reader has a greater degree of humility, a genuine sense of relative smallness in the presence of something transcendent, and a lesser sense of humor, a genuine sense of respect for that transcendence, and for those aware of it. He also suggests that the spirit of the prophetic in literature is, at least occasionally, grounded in the details of reality, that it is experienced by the reader as a sensation of song or sound, and that unlike fantasy, which gives the sense of randomness, prophecy gives the sense of harmony and unity. He lists several writers (Poe, Hawthorne, Hardy, Conrad, Joyce) who are more fantasists than prophets, and then lists the few novelists he can think of who might be described as prophets (Dostoyevsky, Melville, D.H. Lawrence, Emily Bronte). He examines two of Melville's works (*Moby Dick* and the short story *Billy Budd*), and makes general observations about Lawrence, suggesting that in spite of his occasional bullying detours into preacher mode, he is prophetically transcendent. Finally, he comments that Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is read wrongly by most people, who see it as a novel of earthly passion. Forster suggests the intense feelings experienced by Bronte's lovers, Heathcliffe and Catherine, are larger than those in any other fiction—more storm-like, and transcendent in their power. "Great as the novel is," he says, "one cannot afterwards remember anything in it but Heathcliffe and ... Catherine ... their love and hate transcended them." Theirs, Forster maintains, is a personal mythology, but a powerful, universal mythology nevertheless.

Forster concludes this lecture with the suggestion that some may find what his statements difficult to accept and understand, but urges those who care about literature to consider what he has to say carefully. Finally, he states that in the final lectures he intends to examine once again the tools of the novelist's trade, rather than that which is evoked by the finished novel.

References to God are few and far between in Forster's examination of Prophecy. As he himself indicates in the lecture's opening words, he is not speaking of something tied to a particular religion or belief system, but of something with connections to the sweep, movement and power of the universe itself. The example of Catherine and Heathcliffe in *Wuthering Heights* makes this point quite powerfully, wherein Forster suggests that human feeling can perform this function—that intensities of human feeling can lead to transcendence. Further, Forster defines not only love as such a feeling, but also hate. Intense feelings, passions of any sort, are for him ways into transcendence. One wonders whether, if pressed, Forster would suggest that a passion for writing and connecting with transcendence is itself a way to achieve it. One also might wonder where Forster would draw the line between intensity and obsession—when does passion cross the line from being a key to the higher transcendence of life and become a destroyer of it? What is the line between life enlightening and life ending? Forster's answer might very well be a suggestion to read *Wuthering Heights* and find out.

A second important point to note here is the careful but clear distinction Forster draws between preaching and Prophecy. Here again, consideration of Forster's life is important. As a homosexual, a liberal, and as a Briton concerned with the treatment of Indians by the imperial British, he has a profound awareness of what it feels like to be subjected to preachy, moralistic impositions, of the pain such impositions cause, and how crushing they are to the human soul. His plea here is for those making such impositions to consider the human beings whose heads are pinned beneath their moralistic, rhetorical boots, and that the souls of those human beings have equal right to awareness of, and connection to, full humanity. Again, there is the irony apparent throughout the book—that Forster, in stating his opinions so strongly and so baldly, also runs the risk of stepping on some heads. Forster displays his own firmness of conviction, and no particular degree of care.

Meanwhile, this lecture reaches an even higher point of emotional, spiritual, and intellectual climax than the previous one. There is almost a sense of pleading and despair in the language Forster uses here, as though he is desperate not only to be understood but also for his audience to agree and transform their way of thinking, being and writing. The reason for this sense of intensity might very well be his own passion, his own obsession—his own depth of belief in the power and necessity for transcendence. Here again Forster treads forcefully, but the sense of pleading in his writing, almost of apology, softens his step, inviting his readers to walk with him along the path pursuing transcendence.

Section 8

Section 8 Summary and Analysis

"Pattern and Rhythm" This lecture begins with Forster expressing his intention to leave the world of the fantastical and return to consideration of the novelist's tools—in particular, an aspect of the novel "which springs mainly out of the plot, and to which the characters and any other element present also contribute." He describes this aspect in visual terms as Pattern, and in musical terms as Rhythm. Before examining literary definitions of these two terms in detail, he offers two examples of novels with very clear patterns. *Thais* by Anatole France he describes as having the pattern of an hourglass (characters begin the novel separated, converge, and then separate again). *Roman Pictures* by Percy Lubbock has, Forster says, the pattern of a chain (characters meet at the beginning, separate, one of the characters has several encounters and experiences, and at the novel's conclusion reunites with the character met at the beginning). Forster claims that Pattern, in light of these two examples, can be seen as a quality of plot—a formal, unified shape that lends the prospect of beauty to the novelist's construction. He then goes into extensive detail, with summary of plot and inclusion of excerpts, about the pattern in *The Ambassadors* by Henry James, which Forster demonstrates has a similar, hourglass shaped plot to that of *Thais*. At the conclusion of his analysis of the book Forster, somewhat indulgently, detours into extensive criticism of James' skills as a novelist, suggesting that while James is good at detail and at evoking Pattern, he has a limited stable of character types that he uses, little sense of deep humanity, and little narrative flexibility. It seems that for Forster, Pattern was one of the few real values in James' writing, and he uses his analysis of James' work to express his own disaffection for the technique. Forster indicates quite clearly that he prefers the random and the surprising in literature, and Pattern's position as an attribute and fosterer of beauty is of less value than it seems. "To most readers of fiction," Forster writes, "the sensation from a Pattern is not intense enough to justify the sacrifices [of spontaneity, freedom, intensity, randomness] that made it, and their verdict is 'Beautifully done, but not worth doing.'"

Forster then turns his attention to Rhythm, indicating he is seeking beauty in a less rigidly defined form. Rhythm, he suggests, is difficult to define, but he makes two attempts. The first comes through his examination of repeated imagery or motifs, using the repetition of a particular phrase of music in *Remembrance of Things Past* by Marcel Proust as an example. In this context, Forster says, Rhythm can be described as "repetition plus variation," and should not "...be there all the time like a Pattern, but by its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope." In his second attempt to define Rhythm, Forster laments he can find no examples in literature to express what he means, but defines the quality he is seeking as being comparable to the playing of a symphony and, "when the orchestra stops, we hear something that has never actually been played? ... [the symphony's various movements] all enter the mind at once, and extend one another into a common entity," an entity born of the relationship between the blocks of sound defined by the orchestra and the composer (see "Quotes," p. 241-242).

There are a number of interesting elements to consider in this lecture. The first is how Forster defines Pattern quite successfully and clearly, but almost fails to explain what he means by Rhythm. It seems they are essentially the same thing, a repetition of a motif, an image, an expression of emotion or theme or circumstance—but Pattern is regular while Rhythm is less so. In that context, it is possible to see why Pattern, for Forster, falls within the realm of the more formal, structural, somewhat rigid aspects of the novel, while Rhythm is somehow connected to the more humanist, feeling-oriented aspects that for him enable transcendence.

The second key element here is related to the first, and has to do with Forster's extended criticism of Henry James. This is the sole occasion in the book when Forster criticizes a fellow novelist with such vigor and at such length, a situation explained by James being, in Forster's opinion, so dependent upon Pattern and Story, two aspects of the novel which Forster holds in quite low regard. Forster, in fact, considered James something of a personal and professional rival, and their approaches to their work were almost diametrically opposed.

The third key element here is Forster's suggestion that beautiful, patterned, carefully constructed art can be appreciated but not felt, and is not conducive to transcendence. He maintains that such shaped-ness is, in fact, a negative value. While there is certainly something to be said for his position—the less patterned art has a definite rawness about its energy—there is ultimately something to be said for balance. Just as Forster advocates for balance in a novel between flat and round characters, he might here plead for balance between the structured and the free. A comparison to a Shakespearean sonnet might be appropriate—a sonnet has an extremely rigid, patterned form, but within that form the poet is free to write whatever she wants and explore whatever imagery, feeling and passion comes to mind. Shakespeare himself wrote amazingly evocative sonnets on a wide array of subjects, all within the rigid, patterned confines of his rhyme scheme. Forster does not actually make this point— it is, however, a potential solution to what seems to be his problem, his need for beauty not defined solely by regular form, shape and structure.

Section 9

Section 9 Summary and Analysis

"Conclusion" Forster's brief conclusion offers the observation that it is "tempting" to speculate on the future of the novel—"will it become more or less realistic, will it be killed by the cinema, and so on." He suggests that such questionings, while entertaining, are ultimately fruitless—since these lectures, he says, have been based on the premise that all the English writers throughout history have been writing in the same room, it must be assumed that English writers in the future will also be writing in the same room. He suggests, however, that the real question is not whether the novel will change, but whether those writing novels will—in other words, will human nature change?

Forster offers the opinion that there are generally two schools of thought, both existing simultaneously. One suggests that human nature will never, ever change, the other suggests that, mysteriously, human beings can. With irony, Forster points out that both observations are based on the same facts, and then suggests that if human nature does change, it will be because "a few individuals manage to look at themselves in a new way." He goes on to say that there are a few novelists undergoing this process, that every organization in society (the church, the state, the traditional) resists such a process, that there will always be individuals making the attempt, and that the attempt may very well result in alterations of how the novel is written, functions, and is read. He suggests that the process of human change over the course of all history has indeed taken place, but that the process has been so slow as to be almost immeasurable. Finally, however, he adds that if all history could be observed, that movement might itself be observable, with the result that "the phrase 'the development of the novel' might come to be seen as a manifestation of "the development of humanity."

Forster's points here can be taken as yet another manifestation of his awareness of the tension between structure and freedom, between passion and control, between tradition and transcendence. He clearly sees the enlightened novelist, and by extension the enlightened novel, as being in the forefront of societal transformation, meeting the resistance presented by rules and order with deep feeling and belief, open expression of that feeling and belief, and persistence of allowing that expression. It is important to note that, throughout the book, he rarely acknowledges the value of any kind of experience other than the subjective, the emotional or the freeing. Only when he considers Story (Section 2) and flat characters (Section 3) does he acknowledge, albeit grudgingly, that anything other than the unfettered expression of human feeling and spirit has value.

The key aspect of the novel, for Forster—in this book, in his novels and in his life—is the human capacity to escape what has been imposed and embrace what must undeniably be lived. The key aspect of the novelist is to accept the challenges not of writing such a novel, but of living such a life. For E.M. Forster, the first came relatively easy. The second proved practically impossible.

Characters

Jane Austen

Jane Austen (1775-1817) was an English novelist whose works depicting the British middle class are a landmark in the development of the modern novel. She is best known for the novels *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), and *Persuasion* (1817). Drawing examples from both *Emma* and *Persuasion,* Forster notes that all of the characters in Austen's novels are "round."

Sir Max Beerbohm

Sir Max Beerbohm (1872-1956) was a British journalist celebrated for his witty caricatures of the fashionable elite of his time. His publications include *The Works of Max Beerbohm; Caricatures of Twenty-Five Gentlemen* (both in 1896); *The Happy Hypocrite* (1897), a light-hearted fable; and *Seven Men* (1919), a short story collection. Forster discusses Beerbohm's only novel, *Zuleika Dobson,* a parody of Oxford University student life, as an example of the complex use of fantasy.

Arnold Bennett

Arnold Bennett (1867-1931) was a British novelist, critic, essayist, and playwright whose major works include a series of novels set in his native region of the "five towns," then called the Potteries (now united into the single city of Stoke-on-Trent). The "Five Towns" novels include *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902), *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), *Clayhanger* (1910), *Hilda Lessways* (1911), *These Twain* (1916), and *The Clayhanger Family* (1925). Forster discusses *The Old Wives' Tale* as an example of a novel in which time is "celebrated" as the "real hero." He concludes that, while *The Old Wives' Tale* is "very strong and sad," the conclusion is "unsatisfactory," and it therefore "misses greatness."

Charlotte Bronte

Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855), the sister of Emily Bronte, was a British novelist of the Victorian era, celebrated for her masterpiece *Jane Eyre* (1847). Her other works include *Shirley* (1849) and *Villette* (1853). Forster uses *Villette* as an example of a novel in which the plot suffers due to an inconsistency in the narrative voice.

Emily Bronte

Emily Bronte (1818-1848), the sister of Charlotte Bronte, was a British writer whose only novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), is generally considered to be a greater achievement than any of her sister's novels. Forster asserts that Emily Bronte "was a prophetess," in his literary sense of the word. He explains that, while *Wuthering Heights* makes no reference to mythology, and "no book is more cut off from the Universals of Heaven and Hell," the prophetic voice of her novel gains its power from "what is implied," rather than from what is explicitly stated.

Daniel Defoe

Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) was an English novelist and journalist, and author of the novels *Robinson Crusoe* (1719-1722) and *Moll Flanders* (1722). Forster discusses *Moll Flanders* as an example of a novel in which the plot and story are subordinate to the main character. Forster states that "what interested Defoe was the heroine, and the form of his book proceeds naturally out of her character."

Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is often considered the greatest English novelist of the Victorian era. His works, many of which remain popular classics, include *A Christmas Carol, Oliver Twist* (1837-1839), *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), *Bleak House* (1852-1853), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-1861), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865). (His novels were originally published in serial form, often spread out over a period of years.) Forster makes the point that most of the characters in Dickens novels are "fiat" and can be summed up in one sentence. However, he asserts that these characters evoke "a wonderful feeling of human depth," by which Dickens expresses "a vision of humanity that is not shallow." In a discussion of narrative point-of-view, Forster uses the example of *Bleak House,* in which the narrative perspective shifts around inconsistently, yet does not alienate the reader, due to Dickens' stylistic skill.

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1882; also spelled Dostoevski) was a nineteenth-century Russian writer who remains one of the greatest novelists of all time. His most celebrated works include the novels *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868-1869), *The Possessed* (1872), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-1880), and the novella *Notes from the Underground* (1864). In a discussion of prophesy, Forster compares a passage from *The Brothers Karamazov* with a passage from a novel by George Eliot, concluding that in Dostoevsky's work can be heard the prophetic voice of the novelist.

Norman Douglas

Norman Douglas (1868-1952) was an Austrian writer of Scottish-German descent who traveled widely in India, Italy, and North Africa, and most of his works are set on the Island of Capri in southern Italy. Master of a conversational style of prose, he is best known for the novels *Siren Land* (1911), *South Wind* (1917), and *Old Calabria* (1915) and for the autobiography *Looking Back* (1933). Forster mentions Norman Douglas in a discussion of character.

He quotes an open letter written by Douglas to D. H. Lawrence, in which he criticizes the novelist for his undeveloped characters.

George Eliot

George Eliot (pseudonym of Mary Ann, or Marian, Evans; 1819-1880) was an English novelist celebrated for the realism of her novels. Her best known works include *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), and *Middlemarch* (1871-1872), her masterpiece. In a discussion of prophesy, Forster compares a passage from *Adam Bede* with a passage from *The Brothers Karamazov,* by Dostoevsky, concluding that, while both express a Christian vision, Dostoevsky's vision is that of a prophet, whereas Eliot's is merely preachy.

Henry Fielding

Henry Fielding (1701-1754) was a British writer, considered to be one of the inventors of the English novel. His best known works include the novels *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and *Tom Jones* (1749). Forster mentions Fielding as a novelist who successfully creates "round" characters. In a discussion of point of view, Forster criticizes Fielding for his intrusive narrative voice, which is no better than "bar-room chattiness" that deflates the narrative tension. In a discussion of fantasy, Forster mentions *Joseph Andrews* as an example of an "abortive" attempt at parody. He explains that Fielding started out with the intention of parodying the novel *Pamela,* by Samuel Richards, but, through the invention of his own "round" characters, ended up writing a completely original work.

Anatole France

Anatole France (1884-1924) was a French novelist and critic who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1921. In a discussion of pattern, Forster describes France's novel *Thais* (1890) as having a narrative structure in the shape of an hourglass.

David Garnett

David Garnett (1892-1981) was a British novelist best known for his satiric tales, such as *Lady into Fox* (1922) and *A Man in the Zoo* (1924). He also wrote several books based on his association with the Bloomsbury Group, including *The Golden Echo* (1953), *The Flowers of the Forest* (1955), *The Familiar Faces* (1962), and *Great Friends: Portraits of Seventeen Writers* (1980). In addition, he edited a 1938 edition of *The Letters of T. E. Lawrence* (1938). Forster discusses *Lady into Fox,* in which a woman is transformed into a fox, as an example of the fantastic in the novel.

Andre Gide

Andre Gide (1869-1951) was a French writer awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1947 and is best known today for his novel *L'Immoraliste* (1902; The Immoralist). In a discussion of plot, Forster discusses Gide's *Les Faux Monnayeurs* as an example of a novel in which the story is entirely determined by the main character and contains almost no plot whatsoever.

Oliver Goldsmith

Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1774) was an English novelist, essayist, and playwright whose major works include the novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), the essay collection *The Citizen of the World, or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher* (1762), *the poem The Deserted Village* (1770), and *the play She Stoops to Conquer* (1773). In a discussion of plot, Forster describes *The Vicar of Wakefield* as a novel in which the formulation of the ending comes at the expense of the story and characters. Referring to Goldsmith as "a lightweight," Forster notes that in *The Vicar of Wakefield,* as in many novels, the plot is "clever and fresh" at the beginning, yet "wooden and imbecile" by the ending.

Thomas Hardy

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was an English novelist and poet whose major works include the novels *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). In a discussion of plot, Forster describes Hardy as a novelist whose plots are so overly structured that the characters are lifeless.

Henry James

Henry James (1843-1916) was an American-born novelist who lived much of his adult life in England, creating characters who represent conflicts between American spirit and European tradition. His major works include the novels *Daisy Miller* (1879), *The Portrait of a Lady, Washington Square* (both 1881), *The Bostonians* (1886), *The Wings of a Dove* (1902), and *The Ambassadors* (1903). In a discussion of pattern, Forster describes *The Ambassadors* as a novel in which the narrative is structured in the pattern of an hourglass, stressing symmetry at the expense of character.

James Joyce

James Joyce (1882-1941) was an Irish novelist whose major works include the novels *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922), and *Finnegan's Wake* (1939), and the short story collection, *Dubliners* (1914). In a discussion of the fantastic, Forster describes the experimental novel *Ulysses* as an adaptation of the classic Greek mythology of the *Odyssey.* Although he refers to *Ulysses* as "perhaps the most remarkable literary experiment of our time," Forster concludes that it is not entirely successful as a novel, as it lacks the element of prophecy.

D. H. Lawrence

D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) was an English novelist whose major works include *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *Women in Love* (1920), and the highly controversial *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (first published in 1928, though not readily available to the reading public until 1959). Drawing an example from *Women in Love,* Forster asserts that Lawrence is, to his knowledge "the only prophetic novelist writing today," (in 1927).

Percy Lubbock

Percy Lubbock was an author and critic whose book *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) contributed to the development of the theoretical study of the novel. In a discussion of character, Forster cites Lubbock as claiming that point of view is central to characterization. In a discussion of narrative pattern, Forster discusses Lubbock's *Roman Pictures,* a comedy of manners, as a narrative structured in the pattern of a chain. Forster asserts that this novel is successful, not simply because of this pattern, but because of the appropriateness of the pattern to the mood of the story.

Herman Melville

Herman Melville (1819-1891) was an American novelist whose masterpiece, *Moby Dick* (1851) is considered one of the greatest novels ever written. In a discussion of prophecy, Forster describes Melville as a profoundly prophetic writer, citing passages from both *Moby Dick* and the short story "Billy Budd."

George Meredith

George Meredith (1828-1929) was an English novelist and poet, known for his concern for women's equality and his mastery of the internal monologue. Meredith was highly influential among many of the great modern novelists of the early twentieth century. His major works include *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859), *Evan Harrington* (1860), *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* (1871), *Beauchamp's Career* (1876), *The Egoist* (1879), and *Diana of the Crossways* (1885). In a discussion of plot, Forster, drawing from the examples of *Harry Richmond* and *Beauchamp's Career,* explains that, while Meredith is no longer the towering figure of literary accomplishment he once was, he is, if nothing else, a master of plot in the novel.

Marcel Proust

Marcel Proust (1881-1922) was a French novelist whose masterpiece is the seven-volume, semi-autobiographical novel, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27; Remembrance of Things Past). At the time of Forster's lectures, the final volume of *Remembrance of Things Past* had not yet been published. In a discussion of character, Forster refers to Proust as an example of a writer whose "flat" characters function to accent the "round" characters. In a discussion of rhythm in the novel, Forster praises the work of Proust as an example of a novel that, while chaotic in structure, is held together by rhythm, the literary equivalent of a musical motif.

Samuel Richardson

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) was an English novelist credited with inventing the epistolary novel, in which the story is narrated through a series of letters between the characters. His major works are *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747-1748). In a discussion of parody and adaptation, Forster mentions *Pamela* as the work that Henry Fielding set out to parody in his novel *Joseph Andrews.*

Sir Walter Scott

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) was a Scottish novelist credited with the invention of the historical novel. *Ivanhoe* (1819) is the best known of his many novels and novel cycles. In a discussion of storytelling in the novel, Forster uses the examples of *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) and of *The Antiquary* (1816; the last of a trilogy, set in Scotland from 1740-1800, known as the "Waverly" novels). Forster, although admitting that he does not consider Scott a good novelist, does concede that he is a good storyteller, to the extent that he is able to narrate a sequence of events that occur over time. Forster concludes, however, that the result of Scott's perfunctory storytelling is a shallow and unemotional work, lacking the qualities which lend value to a novel.

Gertrude Stein

Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) was an American writer of experimental novels, stories, and essays, whose major works include *Three Lives* (1909), *Tender Buttons* (1914), *The Making of Americans* (1925), and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933). In a discussion of story, Forster describes Stein as an example of a novelist who attempted to write stories without the element of time.

Laurence Sterne

Laurence Sterne (1713-1768) was an Irish-English writer whose masterpiece is the novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767), in which narrative digression dominates the story line. In a discussion of fantasy and prophecy, Forster mentions Sterne among a number of novelists in whose works both fantasy and prophecy are essential.

Leo Tolstoy

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) was a Russian novelist whose major works, *War and Peace* (1865-1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1875-1877), are considered among the greatest novels ever written. In a discussion of character, Forster describes *War and Peace* as a novel in which the narrative point of view, while scattershot and inconsistent, is successfully rendered by the skill of the novelist. In a discussion of rhythm, Forster celebrates *War and Peace* as a novel in which the author not only succeeds in creating rhythm but comes close to the equivalent of a musical symphony on a par with Beethoven's Fifth.

H. G. Wells

H. G. Wells (1866-1946) was an English novelist best known for his now-classic science fiction novels *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), and *The War of the Worlds* (1898), as well as the comedic novels *Tono-Bungay* (1909) and *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910). In a discussion of character, Forster notes that Wells's characters, like those of Dickens, are almost all completely "flat" yet succeed in the context of his novels due to his great narrative skill.

Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was a British novelist and critic whose major works include the novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and *Orlando* (1928), as well as the early work of feminist criticism, *A Room of One's Own* (1929). In his introduction, Forster cites a passage written by Woolf in comparison with a passage by Sterne.

E.M. Forster

William George Clark

The Genuine Scholar/the Pseudo-Scholar

Homo Sapiens / Homo Fictus

Fictional Characters (Round/Flat)

Sir Walter Scott/Gertrude Stein

George Eliot/Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Herman Melville, D.H. Lawrence, Emily Bronte

Jane Austen, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, Leo Tolstoy, H.G.Wells, James Joyce, Walter Scott, Daniel Defoe, Andre Gide

George Meredith, Laurence Sterne, Norman Matson

Objects/Places

Trinity College

Trinity is one of several colleges that function within the umbrella organization of Cambridge University. It was the alma mater of William George Clark, the sponsor of the lectures contained in *Aspects of the Novel*. Another college, King's, is the alma mater of E.M. Forster, who delivers these lectures.

The British Museum Library

This place is evoked by Forster in Section 1 of the book ("Introductory") as the setting for a hypothetical gathering of all the British writers who have created novels over the course of history. The British Museum is one of the largest and most expansively furnished museums in the world, and its library has one of the most extensive collections of historically significant documents from all over the planet. The library is therefore the perfect setting for Forster's imaginary gathering of writers.

The Novel

Novels are the subject of detailed examination and commentary in these lectures, which consider them in both theoretical and actual terms. After discussing a particular theory about novel writing, E.M. Forster often cites examples from actual published works.

Time

Time is the first of several aspects of the novel considered by Forster, and is inextricably linked with the second, story, because the second is a function of the first. In other words, story cannot exist without time.

Story

Story is defined by Forster as a series of events placed along a timeline.

Character

Character is defined by Forster as a collection of individuals (flat or round, narrowly or broadly defined) playing out the novel's story.

Value

Forster defines "value" as the emotional or spiritual experience of the characters in reaction to the events of the story, the "meaning" of those events.

Plot

Plot is defined by Forster as the sum of story, character and value, or the way the novel answers the question of why events happen as opposed to simply recounting what those events are.

Pattern and Rhythm

These two aspects of the novel are explored less extensively than the others, and as such come across as being less important in Forster's perspective. They are defined as a formalization of shape, a careful control of structure that can bring and/or inspire beauty.

Fantasy and Prophecy

These two aspects of the novel are dealt with separately from the others because they both deal with non-technical aspects— spiritual elements related to meaning, as opposed to the more structurally oriented aspects relating to composition.

The Antiquary (Walter Scott), Moll Flanders (Daniel Defoe), Les Faux Monnayeurs (Andre Gide), Flecker's Magic (Norman Matson), Ulysses (James Joyce), The Ambassadors (Henry James)

These books are all referenced at length by Forster—each is summarized, quoted extensively, and held by him to be a vivid and defining example of at least one of his key aspects of the novel.

Themes

The Literary Critic

Throughout his lecture series, Forster includes commentary on the role he plays as a literary critic in relation to literature. He makes observations about his methodology as a critic, occasionally refers to the assertions of other critics, and sometimes questions the validity of the critic in the world of literature. In his introduction, Forster dismisses, for the purposes of his discussion, standard methods in literary criticism based in the tracing of historical development and the influence of earlier writers on those who come after them. Likewise, Forster mentions the notion of tradition put forth by T. S. Eliot, who asserted that it is the task of the critic to preserve the best of literary tradition. Forster immediately dismisses this as an impossible task. He does, however, agree with Eliot that the critic is required to see literature in its entirety and not as it may be determined by the constraints of a historical timeline. Throughout the book, Forster occasionally cites other literary critics, often in order to present a counterargument. He also continues to question the relationship of the critic to literature when he observes that perhaps his lectures have moved away from literature itself, in the pursuit of abstract theorizing about literature. Ultimately, however, Forster asserts that the most important measure by which literature ought to be judged is that of the "human heart," concluding that the most important "test" of a novel is "our affection for it."

Reading

Forster's series of lectures on the novel are concerned not just with analysis of the novel itself but with what he deems the requirements the novel demands of the reader. He asserts that the appreciation of plot requires of the reader both intelligence and memory. He explains that, while curiosity may be what leads the reader to take an interest in the story, it is, in itself, a rather basic and uninteresting trait in a reader. In order to grasp the plot, however, the reader must first possess intelligence. He observes that, though curiosity is the quality that allows the reader to take an interest in individual pieces of information, intelligence makes it possible for the reader to appreciate the aura of mystery embedded in plot, allowing her or him to contemplate the relationships between pieces of information. He further notes that the reader requires memory in order to recall the relationship of information provided earlier in a novel to that which comes later; it is therefore the responsibility of the writer to satisfy the reader's memory by making sure each piece of information contributes to the whole. Forster further claims that the element of prophecy requires both humility and the "suspension of a sense of humor." He explains that humility is required of the reader in order to hear the voice of the prophetic in the novel and that "suspension of a sense of humor " is required in order to avoid the temptation to ridicule the universal, or spiritual, element that makes it great. In describing his requirements for the great novel, Forster thus makes clear his definition of the appropriate reader of great literature.

The Universal

In his discussion of prophecy, Forster touches upon the element of the universal as the most profound aspect of the novel. The universal, as Forster uses it, could also be thought of as the spiritual, in the broadest sense of the term, although not necessarily in relation to a specific creed or religion. Forster explains that the universal in a novel may refer to specific religions or spiritual practices, or it may refer to profound human emotions such as love and hate. He notes that the element of the universal in a novel may be indicated directly, or it may be implied through subtle, indirect means. In order to illustrate what he means by the prophetic, Forster compares passages from George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brother's Karamazov.* He observes that, though both authors are from a Christian background and both wish to express the idea of salvation as inspired in the sinner by love and pity, Eliot's direct reference to Christianity comes off as a heavy-handed sermon, whereas Dostoevsky's subtle and indirect reference to Christian spirituality succeeds in being prophetic. Forster goes on to observe that, though Eliot is sincere in her invocation of the spiritual, her references to Christianity remain in the realm of realism and fail to inspire in the reader a sensation of the spiritual. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, though also a master of realism, imbues his characters with the spirit of the infinite, or universal, so that, "one can apply to them the saying of St. Catherine of Siena that God is in the soul and the soul is in God as the sea is in the fish and the fish is in the sea."

Form vs. Freedom

This is perhaps Forster's dominant theme. Several times throughout the novel, he makes the statement that form, while often an ally of beauty, is just as often an enemy to art, and that freedom from rigidities defined by time, tradition, culture and the personal limitations of the novelist is the only true source of true art. He develops this theme directly and indirectly. Directly, he compliments literary experimentalists like Gertrude Stein and Andre Gide, both of whom attempted to redefine the way a novel works and both of whom, in Forster's perspective, failed. However, Forster maintains passionately, both are to be commended for the effort. Indirectly, this theme is found in his commentary on round vs. flat characters. Flat characters are, in Forster's view, rigidly defined by what the novelist needs or wants them to do and how the reader wants or needs to perceive them. This, according to Forster, makes them limited, and less able to achieve what he maintains throughout the book is the true goal of art—to make a reader aware of values transcendent of the earthly. Round characters, however, are seen by Forster as examples of the way art can explore and expand the boundaries of experience and understanding— round characters are full of surprise, free to act and react in ways that the reader, and perhaps even the world, might not expect.

The book's definitive exploration of this theme is embedded in Sections 5 and 6, on "Fantasy" and "Prophecy" respectively. These two aspects of the novel function outside the boundaries supplied by aspects more directly involved in construction (story, plot, character, for example). Fantasy and prophecy take both the novelist and the reader beyond the world of form, of what is on the page, and into the realm of spirit, of perspective, of possibility, of the unknown, of freedom. Both the reader and the novelist must be free if the novel is to achieve its true, and most valued, goals.

Other themes explored by the book are sub-themes of this main theme.

The Novel as an Expression of "Value"

Value is defined by Forster in Section 2 ("The Story") as that in human experience which gives events their meaning. Without value, events are simply events, occurrences strung along a timeline in an apparently random order. Value, or the emotional and spiritual response to those events, is what gives them meaning, and consequently, to a novel as a whole. In other words, while structurally a novel is the sum of its parts its meaning is the sum of its values—in the same way events, in Forster's description, are strung along the time sense like pearls on a string, values are strung along the spiritual sense. Events and values contribute to the whole. Well-strung events make a narrative whole, well-strung values make a spiritual entirety.

There is a potential pitfall in this perspective, defined by Forster in Section 6 ("Fantasy"). Therein preaching is defined by strict moral values, while prophecy is defined simply by a larger awareness of the spiritual, of the universal, perhaps simply of the unknown. If a work's essential value is morally preachy, it functions in opposition to the novel's essential purpose, to expand human understanding rather than define it in narrow boundaries. If, however, a work's essential value is prophetic, if it refers either directly or indirectly to something larger than human understanding without defining that "something," then the novel is serving the essential purpose. It is, in fact, serving the essential purpose of human existence—to know more, to feel more, to be more. This, then, is the reason why this sub-theme can be seen as a manifestation of the larger theme relating to form and freedom. Preachy values, for Forster, fall into the category of "form," while prophetic values fall squarely into the category of "freedom." This is ironic, considering the ultimate goal of pure freedom, novelistic as well as actual, is to have no categories whatsoever.

The Novel as an Expression of the Spiritual

For Forster the novel must be a gateway into something transcendent, for both the writer who creates it and the person who reads it,. Forster never makes this statement explicitly, but it does seem to be a clear thematic underpinning of almost the entire series of lectures. The time-defined path of Story must lead the way, the People must travel the journey, the Plot must take the reader and the People along the spiritual manifestation of that journey, and Pattern and Rhythm (with their sense of order, beauty and purpose) can play a part in the journey's goal. The glimpses of spiritual light provided by the elements of Fantasy and Prophecy illuminate both path and goal, for both novelist and reader. In other words, the creation and the reading of the novel must be on some level a spiritual event— not religious, but spiritual. It is not that the novel must be preachy—on the contrary, in the section on Fantasy (Section 6) Forster makes exactly the opposite point, that preachiness renders the novel a lesser work, a story with a moral rather than an open minded, open hearted guide into a wider experience of humanity. Preachiness and morality, Forster suggests, are as restrictive and shallow in their evocations as a story without value. There is, he seems to be saying, absolutely no point to such writing as it does not lead to the expansion of humanity, only its restriction.

Style

Tone and Structure

The narrative tone, or voice, of *Aspects of the Novel* is first and foremost determined by the fact that it is a printed version of a series of lectures, originally written and presented in verbal form by the author before an audience of college and university students and professors in the halls of Trinity College, Cambridge, Forster's alma mater, in the name of the distinguished Clark lecture series. An editor's note that opens the reprinted lectures observes that their tone is "informal, indeed talkative." Because of this informal, chatty tone, Forster's voice throughout this collection of lectures is relatively intimate and, on a surface level, appears to make unexpected digressions or include various asides, which one might not find in a work originally intended solely for the printed page. The overall structure of Forster's discussion, however, is not the least haphazard or off-the-cuff. Each chapter/lecture progresses through a clearly planned series of points to present a specific position on each of the seven aspects of the novel with which Forster is concerned. Thus, though informal in narrative tone, the underlying structure of *Aspects of the Novel* progresses through a well-developed argument, illustrated by carefully chosen examples.

Analogy

An analogy is a use of figurative language in which the writer draws a parallel between a concrete, familiar, or easily understandable object or concept and a more abstract, original, and complex idea for purposes of explanation and clarity. The central analogy with which Forster opens and concludes is an image of all of the novelists from world literature throughout history writing simultaneously, side by side, in a great circular room, such as that of the library of the British Museum. Forster utilizes this analogy in order to make the point that the novel and the novelist are oblivious to variation in culture and history and that all novelists write in accordance with the same basic principals of creativity.

Forster employs this overarching analogy in order to make clear that, in his discussion of the novel, he is not interested in historical development or regional difference but in the universal qualities. The analogy of writers working side-by-side allows Forster to discuss the work of novelists who lived and worked in disparate centuries and continents, in order to demonstrate their commonalities as well as differences. He thus devotes a significant portion of the introduction to placing side-by-side passages from such far-flung origins as Samuel Richardson of the eighteenth century and Henry James of the early twentieth century or a Dickens novel from 1860 with an H. G. Wells novel from 1920. Forster thus utilizes the analogy of novelists writing side-by-side in order to illustrate his premise that "history develops, art stands still." In his concluding chapter, Forster comes back to this analogy in order to speculate about the direction of the novel in the future. He proposes that "we must visualize the novelists of the next two hundred years as also writing in the same room," asserting that the "mechanism of the human mind" remains essentially the same throughout history.

Perspective

As discussed in the "Important People" section, E.M. Forster was a well-respected and popular novelist. Therefore, his perspective is a valuable one, as he was able to practice as well as preach. However, he makes few, if any, references to his own books during his lectures, or even to his own writing process. There are occasional indications that he does not consider himself capable of writing the kind of novel he advocates here - full of rich, round characters, capable of surprise, expressing transcendent values. Does this mean he considers himself not up to his own ideals? He obviously believes passionately in his subject - his faith in the ultimate value and importance of the novel, and in what the novel should evoke in the reader, seems absolute. Ultimately, Forster's perspective is that he believes in transcendence, that the meaning of a novel should transcend human experience, and that it should awaken a sense of transcendence in the reader. The novel in Forster's mind and teaching must be about more - more than the day to day, more than rigid spiritual or philosophical belief, more than narrow belief systems of any kind.

These lectures were prepared for a particular audience - students and faculty at Cambridge University. At the time the lectures were presented, Forster's fame was close to its peak, since his most accomplished novel, *A Passage to India*, had been published and received very well a mere three years before. Forster chose to expand his intended audience beyond the confines of Cambridge by publishing the lectures. Forster's desire to connect with a broader audience reflects the key point of his lectures - that boundaries and limitations ought to, and must, be transcended.

Tone

There are three key aspects to the tone of the book, which is ultimately an engaging blend of the academically objective and the passionately subjective. The first is essentially its intellectual dimension - Forster presents his various theses in ways that have obviously been carefully thought out and researched, developing his themes and ideas in a well organized, carefully crafted, though occasionally repetitive, fashion. The second aspect of tone is its more emotional dimension. Even in the midst of developing a series of well-crafted logical arguments, Forster's passion for his subject is clear. He cares deeply and transcendentally about the novel, about its spiritual and emotional resonances, and how those resonances can be brought to bear on the experience of humanity. The third aspect of the book's tone is what makes it a pleasure to read - Forster's sense of humor, irreverent at times, a little sad at others, often self-deprecating. He sees human foibles and frailties in both novelists and their work, and while at times he can become almost aggressive (particularly in his comments on Henry James, whom he saw as a rival), generally he is compassionate and all too aware that he too is as human as those whose work and ideals he is examining so thoroughly. In this sense, the book's tone can be seen as embodying one of its key themes - the transcendent power of humanity. Forster's humanity, seen in his passion and humor, transcends the book's general academic tone and transforms the work into a call from one creative spirit to another.

Structure

The novel's structure is quite straightforward. The lectures are presented in a logical progression, one following the other in an order (the Introductory and the Conclusion notwithstanding) that suggests their priority within Forster's perspective. Given Forster's apparent belief in the transcendence of the novel, and his contention that transcendence is best served by the elements of Fantasy and Prophecy, it may seem odd that the lecture on those two elements occurs so far into the sequence. However, Forster contends throughout that the values of Fantasy and Prophecy are only achievable through the appropriate application and development of the other elements. In other words, without well-shaped and skillfully crafted Story, People, and Plot, there can be no appreciation of the spiritual. The road must be prepared so the destination can be reached. Therefore Story, People and Plot must be considered first. Meanwhile, the placement of the relatively brief chapter on Pattern and Rhythm at the conclusion of the sequence suggests that these two aspects of the novel are low on Forster's list of priorities, and this is reiterated by the almost dismissive way he writes about them. Pattern and Rhythm, for Forster, are either afterthoughts or by-products - if the novelist enters into his project with these two aspects in the forefront of his mind and creative spirit, his efforts are doomed to shallowness and deemed dismissible.

Thus the structure of *Aspects of the Novel* can be seen as a manifestation of its theme and perspective. In giving his work the structure he has, does Forster contradict himself? He argues extensively that a dominant goal for the novel and its creator must be freedom from restrictions imposed by time and experience, and yet that argument is placed within the context of what comes close to being a formal, restrictive structure of the sort he argues so pleadingly against. In fact, he proves the point he makes, albeit reluctantly, at the end of Section 2 - that there can be no novel without story and/or structure?

Historical Context

English History and Literature

Forster's discussion covers three centuries of the novel; his own life and work spanned the late nineteenth through the late twentieth centuries. His life was affected by such major events as World War I, in which he participated, and his novels bridge the historical transition from Victorian to Edwardian England, as well as the literary transition from romanticism to modernism.

Victorian and Edwardian England

The Victorian era is the name given to the period of English history during the long reign of Queen Victoria, from 1837 to 1901. While commonly associated with a culture of conventionality and prudishness, Victorian England witnessed major upheavals in economic, political, and technological structure. In the nineteenth century, England lead the way in the Industrial Revolution, ultimately followed by other European and non-European nations. Significant advances in wages and a significant population expansion were integral to a series of political reforms that gradually increased the rights of average citizens and decreased the power of the regency in the political realm. The Reform Act of 1832 began a trend that lead to the Reform Bill of 1867 and a series of economic and social reforms introduced in the 1870s. The requirements for voting rights were altered to vastly increase the proportion of the male population eligible to participate in elections to Parliament and local government offices. While the era of Queen Victoria was in part characterized by the conservative values associated with traditional family structure and social propriety, a strong strain of liberal thought characterized significant elements of nineteenth-century intellectual life. A major and controversial landmark was the biological theory of evolution put forth in Charles Darwin's 1859 *Origin of the Species*. The Victorian era ended upon the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, when her son ascended the throne as King Edward VII, thus initiating the much shorter era of Edwardian England. King Edward, unlike his mother, brought with him a freer, looser atmosphere that had its effect on the mood of the nation. Edward, who was already fifty-nine years of age when he became king, died in 1910 and was succeeded by King George V, whose reign lasted until his death in 1936.

World War I and the Post-War Era

The period of World War I, from 1914 to 1918, had a profound effect on Forster, who served as a Red Cross volunteer throughout the War, and many of the writers of his generation. A landmark in British politics of the post-War era was the People Act of 1918, which extended the right to vote to women over the age of thirty and to all men over the age of twenty-one, regardless of property holdings. In 1928, the right to vote was extended to women ages twenty-one to thirty. Forster was an active supporter of the Labour Party, which won its first major victory in 1924 when James Ramsay MacDonald was the first Labour Party leader elected to the position of prime minister of England. MacDonald, however, held this office only nine months before he was replaced by Stanley Baldwin, who remained prime minister until 1929, taking the office again in 1935, where he remained until 1937.The 1920s and 1930s in England came to be known as the Baldwin Era, which encompassed the period in which Forster first wrote *Aspects of the Novel* in 1927. Although Forster was politically engaged, his lectures make little reference to political or historical events. His only direct reference to British politics is the mention of Prime Minister Asquith, who remained in power from 1908 until 1916.

English Literature

Though Forster explicitly avoids any discussion of historical development in the novel, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of the standard chronological periodization of English literature during the time periods in which the works discussed by Forster were produced.

In the course of his discussion, Forster mentions the four great novelists of the eighteenth century: Daniel Defoe, whose major works appeared in the 1720s; Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, both of whose major works appeared in the 1740s and 1750s; and Laurence Sterne, whose major works were published in the 1750s and 1760s. Major poets of the eighteenth century include Alexander Pope, Robert Burns, Oliver Goldsmith, and Samuel Johnson.

The literary era known as the romantic period spanned the 1780s to 1820s. Focusing on the imagination of the individual, the early romantic poets include William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth; the late romantic poets include Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and Lord Byron. The major English novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries include the popular Gothic works of Ann Radcliffe and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (author of *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus,* 1818), the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott, and the masterpieces of Jane Austen.

The end of the romantic era in literature and the beginning of the Victorian era is generally dated around the mid-1840s, from which point numerous masterpieces of the English novel were produced. Charles Dickens, publishing from the 1830s through 1860s, was an early master of the Victorian age novel, contemporary with William Makepeace Thackeray whose masterpiece, *Vanity Fair,* was published in the 1840s, and Elizabeth Gaskell, publishing in the 1840s and 1950s. Among the greatest novelists of the age were the Brontë sisters, Emily and Charlotte, whose works, combining elements of Gothicism and realism, were published in the 1840s and 1950s. Later Victorian novelists working in the 1850s through 1890s include George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, George Meredith, and Thomas Hardy.

The literary period of the first decade of the twentieth century, associated with Edwardian England, was characterized by the novels of H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, Galsworthy, and Forster. The modernist movement in literature, with which Forster is also associated, began in the pre-World War I era and continued into the 1930s. Early modernism included the poets of the Georgian movement, who represented a transition from Victorian to modern literature, as well as the more forward-looking poetry of the imagist movement, made prominent by Anglo-American poet and critic Ezra Pound. The great modernist novelists wrote during and after World War I and included D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Ford Madox Ford, as well as Forster. Modernist poets include T. S. Eliot and William Butler Yeats. Forster was a member of the informal group of modernist writers and intellectuals known as the Bloomsbury Group, which met regularly between 1907 and 1930 in private homes located in the Bloomsbury district of London to discuss literature and ideas and included such great modernist writers as Virginia Woolf. Most of the men belonging to the Bloomsbury Group, such as Forster himself, were graduates of King's College or Trinity College of Cambridge.

Critical Overview

Forster is best remembered as a master of the English novel. He published five novels between 1905 and 1924, including *Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905), The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room with a View* (1908), *Howard's End* (1910), *A Passage to India* (1924), the last two being his undisputed masterpieces. He was to publish no more novels in his lifetime, although *Maurice,* originally written in 1914, was published posthumously in 1971. Norman Page, in *E. M. Forster* (1987), observing that Forster produced only six novels in his lifetime, notes, "Forster's impact on the twentieth century has gone far beyond what his modest output might lead one to expect." Of Forster's lifelong literary career, Claude J. Summers, in *E. M. Forster* (1983), notes that, at least since the 1950s, "he was regularly ... described as England's greatest living novelist." By the time of his death, "he had earned an international reputation as an incisive interpreter of the human heart and a champion of the liberal imagination."

Forster spent the last forty-five years of his life writing various forms of nonfiction, as well as a few short stories. While most agree that Forster cannot be considered a great literary critic, critics vary in their overall assessment of *Aspects of the Novel*. Lionel Trilling, in *E. M. Forster* (1943), an early and influential essay, claims that Forster is "not a great critic, not a great 'thinker.'" Trilling qualifies this statement, conceding that *Aspects of the Novel* "is full of the finest perceptions." He nonetheless observes, "Even if we grant Forster every possible virtue of his method - and it has virtues - he is never wholly satisfactory in criticism and frequently he is frustrating." However, Trilling suggests that "the laxness of the critical manner in which Forster sets forth his literary insights" is in fact a conscious protest against the Western over-valuation of rational thinking. Harry T. Moore, on the other hand, in *E. M. Forster* (1965), asserts that *Aspects of the Novel* "is valuable not only for what it tells of Forster's ways and means of writing, but it is also an important study of the art of fiction." Wilfred Stone, in *The Cave and the Mountain* (1966), claims that *Aspects of the Novel* is "Forster's most ambitious aesthetic statement." Moore, in *E. M. Forster* (1967), observes of both *Aspects of the Novel* and Forster's other works of literary criticism: "surprise and delight with unexpected insights, practical and impractical, casting light on Forster and his own fiction, obscuring both in order to illuminate some corner hitherto deprived of adequate light." Page assesses the significance and impact of *Aspects on the Novel* on literary criticism, as well as on Forster's career, in observing, "though informal in tone, [these lectures] were to have a wide influence in a period when the theory and criticism of fiction was relatively unsophisticated, and they increased Forster's reputation as a man of letters." Summers observes of *Aspects of the Novel* that it is "Forster's most sustained critical statement," in which the casual, conversational style of the writing masks an ambitious "ideological work" of criticism. Summers concludes, "*Aspects of the Novel* is extraordinarily well-written, amusing and lively as well as rueful in tone. Throughout, the book is enlivened by sharp judgments and original insights on particular works and individual authors." Finally, Summers asserts that "Forster's essays, criticism, and biographies are a significant fraction of an important literary career."

Philip Gardner, in Dictionary of Literary Biography, points to Forster's humanism as the overriding theme throughout his essays:

Through all his essays ... one registers Forster as a man with an alert eye for the telling detail, who responds to what he sees, reads, and hears with emotions ranging from delight to indignation, but always with intelligence and personal concern. His voice is never that of a detached academic observer, but that of a human being reaching out to other human beings, on the one hand his readers, on the other the individuals, dead as well as living, about whom he writes.

Summers likewise assesses the corpus of Forster's eight books of nonfiction, *Aspects of the Novel* being among the "most completely successful" of these, in essentially glowing terms. He claims that these works "collectively chart a career remarkable for its breadth of interest and depth of commitment." He goes on to note, "In these books, Forster emerges as a sensitive and thoughtful critic, a charming yet unsentimental popular historian, a skillful biographer, and an essayist of rare power."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
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- Critical Essay #7

Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture, specializing in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses Forster's use of figurative language in Aspects of the Novel.

As explained in the above entry, an analogy is a use of figurative language in which the writer draws a parallel between a concrete, familiar, or easily understandable object or concept and a more abstract, original, and complex idea for purposes of explanation and clarity. Both metaphor and simile are types of analogies. In a metaphor, the subject under discussion is described in terms of the characteristics it shares with a more concrete image. In a simile, the writer states that his subject is similar to another object or concept. Throughout his series of lectures on seven aspects of the novel, Forster employs the figurative language of analogy, using both metaphor and simile, drawn from such disparate sources as nature, architecture, science, and music.

He often utilizes analogies drawn from nature in order to express his ideas about literature. In the introduction, he describes literature, "a formidable mass," as an "amorphous" body of water, "irrigated by a hundred rills and occasionally degenerating into a swamp," which he contrasts with the sturdy, solid, imposing image of a mountain. Forster is here explaining that the study of literature is made complicated by the fact that its exact definition and boundary lines are unclear, sometimes so much so that it resembles the murky water of a swamp. Claiming that, to his mind, there is no absolute definition of what does or does not constitute literature, Forster ventures, "All we can say of it is that it is bounded by two chains of mountains ... Poetry and History" and, on a third side, by the sea. In other words, although it may not be possible to accurately define what literature is, one can at least say that it is not history and that it is not poetry. The sea, of course, is an image that continues the description of literature in terms of water. Forster uses water imagery in a different sense when employing the commonly used metaphor "the stream of time" in order to explain that his discussion of the novel will not be concerned with chronological development and thus will avoid viewing authors or works of literature as objects floating through the "stream of time" but will instead imagine them to have been writing simultaneously. Thus, in his use of metaphors drawn from nature, Forster distinguishes between his vision of literature as an amorphous body of water, whether it be a swamp or the sea, and an image of a stream of water, which implies a clearly-defined direction and flow of events.

Forster additionally employs metaphors drawn from nature when he discusses the use of adaptation in the novel. He describes the relationship between the twentieth-century novel *Ulysses,* by James Joyce, to the ancient Greek mythology of the *Odyssey* as that of "a bat hanging to a cornice" - the novel, like the bat, has a life of its own yet clings to the original mythological text as an essential means of support. In a further metaphor drawn from the animal world, Forster, speaking again of *Ulysses,* adds that it is overrun with references to a variety of mythologies, to the extent that "smaller mythologies swarm and pullulate, like vermin between the scales of a poisonous snake." He further makes use of a simile drawn from images of nature in describing the relationship between the literary critic and the subject matter of criticism. Forster questions whether or not he may have gotten too far away from literature itself, in the course of his discussion of the novel, likening the flight of ideas generated by the critic to a bird in flight and the subject matter itself to the shadow of that bird:

> Perhaps our subject, namely the books we have read, has stolen away from us while we theorize, like a shadow from an ascending bird. The bird is all right - it climbs, it is consistent and eminent. The shadow is all right - it has flickered across roads and gardens. But the two things resemble one another less and less, they do not touch as they did when the bird rested its toes on the ground.

Forster extends this metaphor in suggesting that the literary critic, pursuing the route of theory, may find himself taking flights of thought into regions of ideas far removed from the works of literature with which he began.

In his discussion of story in the novel, Forster utilizes a curious set of metaphors drawn from biology. He interchangeably describes the function of the story in a novel as either a "backbone" or a "tape worm." He uses the image of a backbone to explain the role of the story as the internal structure that supports all other elements of the novel. However, he suggests the alternative image of a tapeworm in order to express the idea that the beginning and ending of the story in a novel is arbitrary, just as a tapeworm has no specified length and no discernible head or tail. Yet, despite the arbitrary nature of the beginning and end of a story, Forster asserts that it must nonetheless be narrated over a span of time; thus, he states that the author must always "touch the interminable tapeworm." In other words, the novelist must, regardless of where he begins or ends, touch upon a series of events that unfold over a span of time. Forster continues to use metaphors drawn from biology in stating that the story "is the lowest and simplest of literary organisms, yet it is the highest factor common to all the very complicated organisms known as novels." He goes on to imagine the element of story as a "worm," held up for examination on the "forceps" of the literary critic. Through the image of the story and the novel as organisms, Forster puts forth the opinion that the element of story, fundamental to all novels, is, in itself, not especially interesting in comparison to the "very complicated" novel as a whole. He later notes that the plot is, however, a "higher" organism than the story, meaning that it is a more complex and interesting aspect of the novel. Forster observes that the story is a "lower," "simpler" organism also in the sense that it is primitive, a timeless human activity that originated in our primitive cultures.

Later in the introduction, Forster employs metaphors drawn from architecture in order to describe the magnitude of specific novels. He asserts that a number of English novels are "little mansions," meaning they are certainly impressive literary accomplishments but that they are by no means "mighty edifices," of grander significance. Forster compares these English novels to the "colonnades" and "vaults" of the great works of Russian novelists Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky, thus implying that these authors have created majestic, imposing works of immense magnitude and enduring importance, well beyond that of many "great" English novels. Forster later employs a metaphor drawn from architecture when he describes Thomas Hardy's novels as stories in which the plot is the "ground plan," meaning that all other elements of the story are built upon the foundation of a highly structured plot.

In a discussion of the relationship between plot and character, Forster uses the metaphor of war. Critical of the overly schematic plot that deadens the life of the characters in a novel, he describes this tension as a "losing battle" at the end of which the novel is "feeble," due to the "cowardly revenge" of the plot upon the characters, as carried out by the inadequacy of most endings. He later uses the metaphor of war and battle in describing the attempts of some modernist writers to abolish the plot from their novels as a "violent onslaught." Compared to the more benign metaphors drawn from nature and science, Forster employs imagery drawn from war in order to express the potentially destructive force of an overly structured plot on the very life of a novel's characters.

Another curious metaphor employed by Forster is that of the circus sideshow to describe the place of the "fantastic" in the novel. He explains that readers who enjoy the element of the fantastic are like the spectators who do not mind paying both the general price of admission to the circus and the additional "sixpence" to see the side show. Readers who do not care for the element of the fantastic in literature - and Forster does not fault these people - are not willing or able to pay the additional fee for the sideshow. Via this analogy, Forster suggests that some readers, while willing to use their imaginations in order to enter the story of a novel, do not possess the imaginative faculty for appreciating the element of the fantastic. Others, however, having entered into the relatively realistic world of the novel (the circus), are eager to make the extra imaginative leap (pay the extra fee) in order to enjoy the elements of the fantastic, which may stretch the boundaries of credibility.

In a very different type of metaphor, Forster describes the elements of fantasy and prophesy in the novel as a "bar of light" that "illumines" other aspects of the novel. In contrast to the more concrete analogies drawn from nature, architecture, and war, the analogy of a bar of light is appropriate to Forster's concern with fantasy and prophesy as more abstract, conceptual, universal, or spiritual elements of the novel. However, light is not in fact an abstract substance, and Forster later suggests that, as there are only a limited number of devices by which the novelist may express the fantastic, this "beam of light can only be manipulated in certain ways." Forster thus implies that these literary devices, like light, have properties and laws of their own, according to which the author is limited in his ability to manipulate them to his will.

In his discussion of prophecy and rhythm in the novel, perhaps the elements that he most values in a great work, Forster makes use of analogies drawn from music. The element of prophecy he describes as a quality of the author's voice akin to that of a song - a song accompanied by "the flutes and saxophones of fantasy." In contrast to the universal, or spiritual (in the broadly defined sense of the term), elements of the novel, as expressed through fantasy and prophecy, Forster describes the element of realism, which he deems as essential to the novel as the interior structure and furnishings are to a house. Forster suggests that there is a degree of conflict between the abstract "music" of fantasy and "song" of prophecy and the concrete realism of dust and furniture in the rooms and hallways of a house; he observes the following regarding the prophetic novelist:

[The prophetic novelist] proposes to sing, and the strangeness of song arising in the halls of fiction is bound to give us a shock. How will song combine with the furniture of common sense? We shall ask ourselves, and shall have to answer "not too well": the singer does not always have room for his gestures, the tables and chairs get broken, and the novel through which bardic influence has passed often has a wrecked air, like a drawing-room after an earthquake or a children's party.

Forster asserts, however, that the value of the chaotic and potentially disruptive nature of the prophetic voice in fiction is worth the risk of wrecking the furniture of realism. He then picks up the metaphor of the fantastic as a beam of light that cuts across the narrative, suggesting that the prophetic song of the novelist may also serve to light up a room, rather than, or in addition to, wrecking it a bit:

Perhaps he will smash or distort, but perhaps he will illumine.... He manipulates a beam of light which occasionally touches the objects so sedulously dusted by the hand of common sense, and renders them more vivid than they can ever be in domesticity.

Having utilized the metaphor of song to illustrate the effect of the prophetic voice, Forster continues to describe another key aspect of the novel in terms of music. His final chapter, "Pattern and Rhythm," dismisses the value of structuring a novel in accordance with the visual metaphor of pattern, such as in a woven fabric. Rather, he argues for the value of an open-ended structure akin to the musical motif in a symphony, or, in a novelistic masterpiece, a symphony in its entirety. Forster states that music is the best analogy for the novel. He uses the example of *Remembrance of Things Past,* by Marcel Proust, as a novel in which a recurring "musical phrase" provides internal unity throughout an otherwise structurally "messy" story. Unlike the pattern, which Forster deems ultimately too rigid and all encompassing to accommodate the best elements of the novel, the rhythm of a musical motif, which comes and goes throughout the story, can "fill us with surprise and freshness and hope." Forster observes that the musical analogy of rhythm provides the novelist with a narrative form that is expansive and open-ended. Finally, Forster suggests that only one novel, Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* has successfully achieved the musical brilliance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, in which "great chords of sound" can be heard to emerge from the narrative form.

Throughout his lectures, Forster makes use of a variety of analogies in order to illustrate his central concerns with the novel. He draws imagery from the natural landscape, the animal kingdom, biology, architecture, interior design, war, properties of light, circus entertainments, and music. His use of analogy not only serves the practical purpose of clarifying his meaning but imbues his discussion with a playful, whimsical quality that captures his sense of joy in the creative act of reading and discussing, as well as writing, great literature.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Henley examines the debate over novel writing in general, and Aspects of the Novel *in particular, between E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf.*

In his "Introductory" to *Aspects of the Novel,* E. M. Forster invites his audience to imagine the glorious company of English novelists "seated together in a room, a circular room, a sort of British Museum reading-room - all writing their novels simultaneously." And so I invite you to adopt a similar stratagem and picture the two novelists who are the subject of this study - Forster and Virginia Woolf - seated, as they often were in fact, on either side of a smaller table in a more intimate room, a room in Forster's Cambridge lodgings, or at tea in a Bloomsbury townhouse or at Monk's House, the Woolfs' weekend residence in Sussex.

Woolf describes one such session in a letter to Vanessa Bell dated 19 May 1926: "Morgan came to tea yesterday," she says, "but we argued about novel writing, which I will not fret your ears with." This argument spills far beyond the edges of the 1926 tea table and permeates the novels and critical writings of both Woolf and Forster. One might say that chronologically the argument began in 1908 - when, as a novice reviewer of books, Virginia Stephen applauded "the cleverness, the sheer fun, and the occasional beauty" of E. M. Forster's latest novel, *A Room with a View* - and ended in 1941 with Forster's Rede Lecture on Woolf at Cambridge just a few months before her death. In a larger sense, however, the dialogue continues today: not only does it mark off the fields of difference between the two most prominent literary figures in the Bloomsbury coterie and thus illuminate their novels as we read them, but it also isolates the aesthetic issues at stake in the first decades of the twentieth century. Many of the principles of modernism were forged, according to Michael H. Levenson, in the heat of active debate between certain of its fabricators - T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Ford Madox Ford, and T. S. Eliot. Woolf and Forster's sparring was the same kind of formative dialogue: each forced the other to clarify his or her conception of the novel, to articulate the essential principles that, in their differing views, made fiction an art. In Forster's responses to Woolf's comments, we find a defence of the novel as a perpetuator of traditional values and a transmitter of belief; while Woolf, in her reactions to Forster's criticism, becomes increasingly the champion of an objective, self-sufficient, endlessly experimental art form.

The verbal dueling increases in interest when we see it in the context of the two novelists' longstanding but problematical friendship. Forster was one of the Cambridge graduates who gravitated to the Stephen siblings' Bloomsbury flat, but his somewhat sporadic association with the "Bloomsberries" was due primarily to his profound admiration for Leonard Woolf. Of Virginia herself Forster was wary: "One waited for her to snap," he said. He confided to Quentin Bell that "she was always very sweet to me, but I don't think she was particularly fond of me, if that's the word." If she was "sweet" to the skittish Forster publicly, privately she was often scathing: the letter to Vanessa Bell quoted earlier, for example, describes Forster as "limp and damp and milder than the breath of a cow." Nonetheless, throughout her twenty-five-year career as a novelist, Woolf's desire for Forster's critical approbation was ardent and undiminished. When he wrote in 1919 that he liked *Night and Day* far less than *The Voyage Out,* Woolf had to struggle to take the criticism philosophically: "This rubbed out all the pleasure of the rest," she says in her diary. The next week, however, she was able to comment, "I see it is not a criticism to discourage. . .. Morgan has the artist's mind; he says the simple things that clever people don't say; I find him the best of critics for that reason." And in 1940, when her fame as a novelist was undisputed, she all but held her breath as she waited for Forster's reaction to the Roger Fry biography: "And I fear Morgan will say - just enough to show he doesn't like, but is kind." For his part Forster admired Woolf both as a novelist whose visionary quality corresponded to his wishes for his own fiction and as an authority on British literature. It was, in fact, in this latter capacity that he sought her advice at the contention-riddled tea table. Having been asked to deliver the Clark Lectures at Cambridge, the series subsequently published as *Aspects of the Novel,* Forster came to Woolf to find out how to lecture on novels and what novels he ought to include. She was to his mind the one member of an extraordinarily learned literary circle best equipped to give sound advice in both areas.

The teapot's lid was blown, in effect, by Woolf s two responses to *Aspects of the Novel* - a review, later entitled "The Art of Fiction," in October 1927; and an essay in *Atlantic Monthly,* "The Novels of E. M. Forster," the next month. These three works - plus Forster's "The Early Novels of Virginia Woolf," his Rede Lecture, and Woolf s "Modern Fiction" and "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" - comprise the ongoing debate. Taken together they abstract the two aspects of novel writing - character and artistic vision - which separate most emphatically the two teacups on the Bloomsbury table.

Having followed Forster's lead and dispensed altogether with chronology, we are free to begin tracing the Woolf-Forster disagreement at its conclusion, the 1941 Rede Lecture, for this is the document that divides the debate most neatly into two spheres. After discussing at some length Woolf s strengths as a novelist, Forster comes to what he calls "her problem's center," that is, "can she create character?" Woolf had, Forster recognizes, some skill in creating characters who were not "unreal ... who lived well enough on the page"; her great flaw as a novelist was her inability to imbue her characters with "life eternal":

She could seldom so portray a character that it was remembered afterward on its own account... Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay do remain with the reader afterwards and so perhaps do Rachel from The Voyage Out and Clarissa Dalloway. For the rest - it is impossible to maintain that here is an immortal portrait gallery ...

Woolf s difficulty with character absorbs Forster here as it had sixteen years before in his essay "The Early Novels of Virginia Woolf." Her first four novels had convinced Forster that here was a writer whose technical virtuosity clearly forecast anew era in the history of the novel. "But," he objects, "what of the subject that she regards as of the highest importance: human beings as a whole and as wholes?" He continues: "The problem that she has set herself and that certainly 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." Forster invites his readers to consider how difficult "this problem" is (and here he is speaking specifically of *Mrs. Dalloway):*

If you work in a storm of atoms and seconds, if your highest joy is "life; London; this moment in June" and your deepest mystery "here is one room; there another," then how can you construct your human beings so that each shall be not a movable monument but an abiding home, how can you build between them any permanent roads of love and hate?

The image of the novelist as architect or civil engineer is apposite when one considers the two chapters Forster devotes to character in *Aspects of the Novel,* for in this work he makes it clear that characters in a novel, whatever the depth and complexity of their inner lives, function to satisfy the demands of other aspects of the novel. "We are concerned," he says, "with the characters in their relation ... to a plot, a moral, their fellow characters, atmosphere, etc. They will have to adapt themselves to other requirements of their creator." Again and again the utility of character is stressed. A novelist, Forster tells us, has two "devices" to help him cope with the trials which beset him: one device is point of view, and the other is the "use" of different kinds of characters.

Indeed, Forster's characters failed to convince Woolf precisely because they are so tightly hitched to their creator's intentions. Her review of A *Room with a View* expresses her disappointment with Forster's treatment of his characters, their "belittlement," his "cramping of their souls." And while her discussion of *Howards End* in "The Novels of E. M. Forster" praises the reality with which the characters are presented, it also notes the distressing disjunction between the characters "as themselves" and the characters as they are forced to serve the ends of their maker. The reader, Woolf complains, must abandon "the enchanted world of imagination" where all the faculties operate in concert and enter "the twilight world of theory, where only our intellect functions dutifully." Occasionally Forster forgets his obligation to deliver his "message" and allows certain comic characters - Tibby and Mrs. Munt, for example - to range freely in the imaginary world unshepherded by the author. Such characters are, however, the exception in Forster's fiction; far more usual are characters pent by purpose. "Margaret, Helen, Leonard Bast, are closely tethered and vigilantly overlooked lest they may take matters into their own hands and upset the theory."

In her own treatise on character, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf had already alluded to the damage done Forster's fiction by his subordination of character to theory. Forster's early work, like D. H. Lawrence's, Woolf says here, is "spoilt" because, instead of throwing away the tools of the Edwardians and their "enormous stress upon the fabric of things," he attempted to compromise with them. He "tried to combine [his] own direct sense of the oddity and significance of some character with Mr. Galsworthy's knowledge of the Factory Act, and Mr. Bennett's knowledge of the Five Towns." And though Woolf suggests that Forster has engaged to some extent in the general Georgian smashing and breaking of convention, she nonetheless finds him cementing his characters too firmly to their surroundings and to his own morals, struggles, and protests.

Nothing could contrast more sharply with Woolf s vision of character in the novel. Her comments on British and Continental novelists and her notes on her own novels attest to the fact that for her, character depends on no force outside the novel; rather it is the novel's moment of genesis, the vital centre from which the novel and all its various aspects radiate. All novelists write, she says in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," because "they are lured on to create some character which has ... imposed itself upon them." The realists fail to capture the will-o'-the-wisp of character because, in their fervour to express it in terms of surroundings or in terms of some doctrine, they are blind to "character in itself." Laurence Sterne and Jane Austen, who alone among English writers receive unequivocal praise from Woolf, succeeded where her contemporaries fail because they "were interested in things in themselves; in character in itself; in the book in itself. Therefore everything was inside the book, nothing outside." Russian novelists, however, provided Woolf even sounder models of the proper relationship of character to the novel. Turgenev, for example, "did not see his books as a succession of events; he saw them as a succession of emotions radiating from some character at the centre." And it is thus that many of her own novels were conceived. About *To the Lighthouse* she says, "The centre is father's character, sitting in a boat, reciting We perished, each alone, while he crushes a dying mackerel." Writing a novel then requires dedication to the task of rendering that vision of character as accurately and suggestively as possible: "to try this sentence and that, referring each word to my vision, matching it as exactly as possible."

Thus the argument goes. Woolf s characters fail to live, says Forster, because they are too far removed from the flux of daily life; Forster's characters fail, says Woolf, because messages and material surroundings hamper their movement. Character, says Forster, is a device a novelist uses in the service of other aspects of the novel. Character, says Woolf, is the vital principle that calls the rest of the novel into being.

The second sphere of critical difference between Woolf and Forster is not so much an aspect of the novel as it is an aspect of the novelist - artistic vision, the faculty with which the writer selects and shapes the substance of his work. In describing Woolf in the opening paragraphs of the Rede Lecture, Forster mentions two qualities which apparently he feels were peculiarly hers: the first is her receptivity to sensual stimuli; the second is her singleness of vision. Most writers, he remarks,

write with half an eye on their royalties, half an eye on their critics, and a third half-eye on improving the world, which leaves them with only half an eye for the task on which [Woolf] concentrated her entire vision. She would not look elsewhere ...

But Forster is at best a grudging admirer of this singleness of purpose, for this fixed vision of Woolf s leads her toward that "dreadful hole" of aestheticism. "She has all the aesthete's characteristics," he complains: she "selects and manipulates her impressions ... ; enforces patterns on her books; has no great cause at heart." Indeed Forster trips repeatedly over the fact that Woolf had no great cause at heart, that she felt no responsibility for improving the world. Her art suffered, in his estimation, because her feminism and her detachment from the working classes made her attitude to society "aloof and angular."

To take lack of sympathy with humankind as a basis for a literary judgment appears to be mistaking ethics for aesthetics, but or Forster the two amounted to very nearly the same thing. In Aspects of the Novel he insists that

the intensely, stifling human quality of the novel is not to be avoided; the novel is sogged with humanity; there is no escaping the uplift or the downpour... We may hate humanity, but if it is exorcised or purified the novel wilts; little is left but a bunch of words.

The most valuable fiction, Forster feels, is produced not by the writer whose eye is single, trained exclusively upon what Woolf calls "the work itself," but by one whose eye is catholic, eclectic, capable of focusing at the same time upon the work and upon the human issues which surround it.

The conflict between the novel's intensely human quality and its aesthetic exigencies is the subject of the chapter of Aspects of the Novel entitled "Pattern," in which Forster recounts the debate between Henry James and H. G. Wells. The exchange figures importantly in our study because it mirrors the Woolf-Forster debate exactly and because Woolf responded to it so pointedly. Forster's objection to James's fiction is that "most of human life has to disappear before he can do us a novel." "There is," he protests,

no philosophy in the novels, no religion... no prophecy, no benefit for the superhuman at all. It is for the sake of a particular aesthetic effect which is certainly gained, but at this heavy price.

Here in part is Woolf s rejoinder:

For Henry James brought into the novel something besides human beings. He created patterns which, though beautiful in themselves, are hostile to humanity. And for his neglect of life, says Mr. Forster, he will perish.But at this point the pertinacious pupil may demand: "What is this 'Life' that keeps cropping up so mysteriously and so complacently in books about fiction? Why is it absent in a pattern and present in a tea party?"

Forster, of course, finds in favour of Wells, who asserts that life " 'must hot be whittled or distended for a pattern's sake.'" And this same finding - that a novel must be imbued with its creator's eclectic double vision or it is finally "not worth doing" - is at the heart of Forster's criticism of Woolf.

Perhaps Forster denounced Woolf s singleness of vision in the Rede Lecture because years before in "The Novels of E. M. Forster" she had rather harshly attacked his doubleness. There is, she insists in this essay, "one gift more essential to a novelist than [any other], the power of combination - the single vision." But at the heart of Forster's novels she finds ambiguity supplanting this essential gift: "instead of seeing ... one single whole we see two separate parts." She finds in *Howards End* all the elements necessary to a masterpiece but finds them in solution. "Elaboration, skill, wisdom, penetration, beauty - they are all there, but they lack fusion, they lack cohesion." *A Passage to India* too fails to live up to its readers' expectations, but it is at least beginning to approach "saturation": in this novel, Woolf says, "the double vision which troubled us in the earlier books was in process of becoming single."

The words "saturation," "fusion," "cohesion " are important critical terms for Woolf; a diary entry penned just a few months after her public responses to *Aspects of the Novel* explains them:

The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole ... Why admit anything to literature that is not poetry - by which I mean saturated? Is that not my grudge against novelists? that they select nothing?

And her entire career was a series of daring attempts to reproduce luminous moments of human consciousness no matter what conventional paraphernalia she had to eliminate in the process. Forster, like other novelists, fell far short of Woolf s exacting criteria because his double vision muddled his attempts to see and render the moment whole. Indeed the entire Woolf-Forster argument, about character as well as about the artist's vision, is largely an argument about whether a novel is the sum of various quantifiable parts dictated by material circumstances outside the novel - certainly Forster saw it thus - or whether it is what Woolf, influenced as she was by Coleridge and by G. E. Moore, felt it to be: an organic unit whose parts evolve spontaneously from an original conception of the whole.

As sincerely as Forster admired Woolf s technical achievement in the art of fiction, he nonetheless objected strongly to her apparent preference for the formal over the human elements of the novel. He was, as Mark Goldman points out, "too much the novelist of ideas; too involved, however skeptically, in the liberal tradition" to be completely receptive to Woolf's "novel of sensibility." Forster's comments on Woolf sound, in fact, remarkably like the importunate speaker's in Robert Frost's poem:

O Star (the fairest one in sight), We grant your loftiness the right To some obscurity of cloud ... But to be wholly taciturn In your reserve is not allowed. Say something to us we can learn By heart and when alone repeat. Say something! And it says, "I burn."

To Forster, observing the cultural confusion about him, the situation demanded literary communication of something which resembled, at any rate, the old verities and values. If, as David Daiches was to insist in 1938, the "community of belief" had vanished, if human relationships were forever altered, then the writer was obligated, these two critics felt, to offer something to stand in the place of those beliefs and relationships. Forster most clearly articulates his frustration with Woolf s refusal to "say something we can learn by heart" in his essay on her early novels: one novel is "not explanatory of the universe"; the style of another is so elusive that "it cannot say much or be sure of saying anything"; and another has no "message" save " 'here is one room, there another.'" Woolf, he remarked after her death, had no great cause at heart; specifically, she declined to transport inherited beliefs and conventions through the post-World War I desert to whatever Promised Land lay on the other side.

But Woolf was no less sensitive to the seismic shocks of her time than Forster and Daiches. Observing in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" that "on or about December, 1910, human nature changed," she goes on to acknowledge that such changes are always accompanied by radical changes in "religion, conduct, politics, and literature." She too, she says, cries out "for the old decorums, and envy the indolence of my ancestors who, instead of spinning madly through mid-air, dreamt quietly in the shade with a book." However, though she, like all novelists before and since, was preoccupied with the meaning of being human, she did not see that meaning threatened or obscured by the crashings going on about her. As a woman she had been at best a peripheral participant in the cultural and literary tradition which had preceded the war; thus she saw in the splintering of convention freedom to fashion from "orts, scraps, and fragments" a fuller, more luminous, and finally more accurate rendering of the human condition than had previously been possible. Though convinced that Forster was "the best of critics," she nonetheless clung resolutely to her own evolving methods of reproducing vital experience. "We know," she says in "Modern Fiction," "that certain paths seem to lead to fertile land, others to the dust and the desert."

Forster was deeply stung by Woolf's reactions to Aspects of the Novel; her objection, to his dismissal of the claims of art in favour of the claims of "life" annoyed him especially, as this vexed letter to Woolf makes clear:

Your article inspires me to the happiest repartee. This vague truth about life. Exactly. But what of the talk about art? Each sentence leads to an exquisitely fashioned casket of which the key has unfortunately been mislaid & until you can find your bunch I shall cease to hunt very anxiously for my own.

Woolf responded in an impersonal typewritten note that one ought to hunt more diligently than Forster had for the proper relationship of art to life before relegating art to an inferior realm. But then she added in her own hand a note apologizing for hurting or annoying him: "The article was cut down to fit The Nation, and the weight all fell in the same place. But I'm awfully sorry if I was annoying."

Thus ended the tempest in the 1927 teapot. However, despite admiration and conciliation, the debate between Woolf and Forster was inevitable. Because their verbal duel forced each to articulate critical theories and because it reflects two significant positions in the modernist dilemma, Woolf and Forster continue, in their essays as they once did across their tea tables, to argue about novel writing.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Schwarz analyzes Aspects of the Novel *within the context of Forster's own novel writing and that of his peers.*

E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) remains a cornerstone of Anglo-American novel criticism. Forster's study helped define the values and questions with which we have approached novels for the past several decades. Moreover, today it still addresses the crucial questions that concern us about form, point of view, and the relationship between art and life. While acknowledging the importance of Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1921) in extending the James aesthetic, the brilliance of Virginia Woolf's insights in her essays in *The Common Reader* (1925) and elsewhere, and the usefulness of Edwin Muir' s *The Structure of the Novel* (1928), I believe that Forster's book is the one of those 1920's books on the novel to which we most frequently return to learn about *how* novels mean and *why* they matter to us. *Aspects of the Novel* is informed not merely by the living experience of Forster's having written novels throughout his adult life but more importantly by judgment, perspicacity, and erudition. To be sure, he does not articulate what we now think of as a theory, and he lacks the dialectical and polemical edge of recent criticism. Thus he disarmingly explains that he has chosen the term "aspects," "because it means both the different ways we can look at a novel and the different ways a novelist can look at his work." In the early chapters, Forster begins with such traditional aspects as story, people, and plot before turning in the later ones to less conventional ones such as fantasy, prophecy, pattern, and rhythm.

In the editor's introduction to the Abinger edition of E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel,* Oliver Stallybrass rather patronizingly writes that Aspects *is* "a set of observations, somewhat arbitrarily arranged ... of a man who is a novelist first, a slightly uncommon reader second, a friend third, and an analytical or theorizing critic fourth." Moreover, Stallybrass contends, "What most readers will cherish are the numerous particular judgments, instinctive rather than intellectual..." For Stallybrass, *Aspects* is merely "a useful adjunct to other, more sustained and consistent works of criticism" - although we are not told where we are to find these. That the editor of Forster's collected works makes such modest claims for such an historically significant study shows how far scholarship and theory have drifted apart. Because Forster defines aesthetic goals in terms of the values by which he wrote his own novels, it has been flippantly observed that *Aspects of the Novel* is Forster's *apologia.* Thus, Stallybrass quotes the narrator in Somerset Maugham's *Cakes and Ales:* "I read *The Craft of Fiction* by Mr. Percy Lubbock, from which I learned that the only way to write novels was like Henry James; after that I read *Aspects of the Novelby* E. M. Forster, from which I learned that the only way to write novels was like Mr. E. M. Forster." Taking issue with this condescension, I shall argue that *Aspects of the Novel* is a seminal text in the criticism of fiction.

The key to understanding Forster is to realize that he writes in two traditions: the humanistic tradition, with its components of positivism, nominalism, and utilitarianism, and its admiration of realism; and the prophetic tradition, with Platonic and biblical origins, which sees art either as an alternative to, or an intensification of, this world. In this first tradition, we find Aristotle, Horace, Arnold, and usually James; in the second, we find Blake, Shelley, Pater, Wilde, Yeats, Lawrence, and Stevens. The first tradition strives to see life steadily and to see it whole. The second wants art to be superior in quality to life. Forster and, indeed, Woolf were drawn to both these traditions. In *Aspects,* we might imagine that Forster speaks in two voices, as he tries to do justice to the appeals of both these traditions. In the chapters "Story," "People," and "Plot," the voice of the first tradition dominates. But in the later chapters, beginning with "Fantasy" and becoming more pronounced in "Prophecy" and "Pattern and Rhythm," the voice of the second tradition becomes gradually more prominent. At times we feel, as in the chapter on fantasy, that he knows that he cannot resolve the contending claims of these two traditions.

Aspects of the Novel is not only a rough codification of the Bloomsbury aesthetic but also a specific response to Woolf's "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." Writing in 1924, Virginia Woolf insisted that the Georgian writers needed to abandon the "tools" and "conventions" of their Edwardian predecessors because the latter "have laid an enormous stress on the fabric of things":

At the present moment we are suffering, not from decay, but from having no code of manners which writers and readers accept as a prelude to the more exciting intercourse of friendship ... Grammar is violated; syntax disintegrated; ... We must reflect that where so much strength is spent on finding a way of telling the truth, the truth itself is bound to reach us in rather an exhausted and chaotic condition.

In 1928, except for Conrad, the great modern British novelists - Lawrence, Joyce, Woolf - were at their peak even if their achievement and significance were far from clear. But while Lawrence, Joyce, Woolf, and Conrad sought new forms and syntax, Forster had shown in his novels - *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905). *The Longest Journey* (1907), *A Room With a View* (1908), *Howards End* (1910), and *A Passage to India* (1924) - that the English language and the novel genre already had the resources to examine human life, including its instincts and passions; in *Aspects of the Novel* he sought to articulate that view.

Forster's own career as a novelist helps us to understand *Aspects.* His iconoclasm in part derives from his homosexuality and in part from his sense that he is an anachronism who belongs to a social and moral era that has been all but overwhelmed by modernism, progress, and utilitarianism. Forster wrote in "The Challenge of Our Time":

I belong to the fag-end of Victorian liberalism, and can look back to an age whose challenges were moderate in their tone, and the cloud on whose horizons was no bigger than a man's hand. In many ways, it was an admirable age. It practised benevolence and philanthropy, was humane and intellectually curious, upheld free speech, had little colour-prejudice, believed that individuals are and should be different, and entertained a sincere faith in the progress of society.

In the guise of writing objective novels, he wrote personal, subjective ones. For Forster's novels, like those of the other great modern British novelists - Conrad, Lawrence, Joyce, and Woolf - are the history of his soul. His novels dramatize not only his characters' search for values but also his own - a quest that reflects his own doubt and uncertainty. As Wilfred Stones writes:

His novels are not only chapters in a new gospel, they are dramatic installments in the story of his own struggle for self-hood - and for a myth to support it. They tell of a man coming out in the world, painfully emerging from an encysted state of loneliness, fear, and insecurity. Forster's evangelism springs as much from self-defense as from self-confidence, as much from weakness as from strength; but the style of his sermon always reflects those qualities about which there can be no compromise: tolerance and balance, sensitivity and common sense, and a loathing for everything dogmatic.

Put another way: what Stephen Dedalus says of Shakespeare in *Ulysses* - "He found in the world without as actual what was in his world within as possible" - is also true of Forster's novels and, as we shall see, of *Aspects.*

Like Forster's novels, particularly the later ones, *Aspects of the Novel* challenges the artistic and thematic conventions of the novel of manners. Indeed, the early chapters on story, people, and plot roughly correspond to the early period when he wrote *Where Angels Fear to Tread, The Longest Journey,* and *A Room With a View,* while the later sections discuss aspects that he tried to make more substantive use of in *Howards End* and, in particular, A Passage to India - the aspects of fantasy, prophecy, pattern, and rhythm. Not unlike his novels, *Aspects* enacts his quest for the inner life as well as his attempt to rescue himself from the curse of modernism. For *Aspects of the Novel* sometimes strikes an elegiac and nostalgic note when confronting contemporary avant-garde works, such as those of Gertrude Stein and James Joyce.

Forster's book originated as the 1927 Clark lectures given at Cambridge University. His conversational approach and lightness of touch, rather than dating the lectures, recreate the spontaneity of clear-headed, sensible, unpretentious talk. Forster is speaking in a tradition of manners that eschewed sharp conflicts and hyperbole on those occasions when a lowered voice and a tactful gesture would do. Although Forster's style is somewhat more informal in *Aspects,* it is marked by the same features as in his novels: leisurely pace, self-confidence, lucid diction, and poised syntax. As Lionel Trilling puts it, "The very relaxation of his style, its colloquial unpretentiousness, is a mark of his acceptance of the human fact as we know it now.... This, it seems to me, might well be called worldliness, this acceptance of man in the world without the sentimentality of cynicism and without the sentimentality of rationalism." As in his novels, Forster's style becomes his argument for the proportion, balance, and spontaneity that are essential to Forster's humanism.

Aspects enacts Forster's values. Like his novels, its tone and style are objective correlatives for the keen sensibility, the personal relationships, and the delicate discriminations of feeling that he sought. With its elegant phrasing, tact, balance, and sensibility, it is a protest against what he calls "the language of hurry on the mouths of

London's inhabitants - clipped words, formless sentences, potted expressions of approval or disgust." Forster never forgets what he calls "the inner life" and the "unseen" - those aspects of life which resist language. By the "inner life," he means the passions and feelings that enable man to experience poetry and romance. For Forster, the "unseen" means not the traditional Christian God but a world beyond things that can be reached by passion, imagination, intelligence, and affection.

Aspects enacts Forster's values. Like his novels, its tone and style are objective correlatives for the keen sensibility, the personal relationships, including relatively abstract terms like "beauty," "curiosity," and "intelligence," refers to a shared cultural heritage and therefore conveys meaning.Thus he can write: "Our easiest approach to a definition of any aspect of fiction is always by considering the sort of demand it makes on the reader. Curiosity for the story, human feelings and a sense of value for the characters, intelligence and memory for the plot." These are the "demands" that motivated Forster to write novels and the *values* that he felt must be central to a criticism of the novel. He is never afraid of being naive and expresses the full range of emotions from wonder and awe to impatience, chagrin, and dismay. He is, above all, a humanist. As Stone writes, "His art, and his belief in it, are his religion. . . . The religion is a coming together, of the seen and the unseen, public affairs and private decencies. Another name for this religion is humanism." With its carefully constructed patterns and symbolic scenes, the artificial order of the novel was for Forster an alternative to disbelief.

Forster's aesthetic values cannot be separated from his moral values. In an important 1925 essay, "Anonymity: An Enquiry," he wrote that "[a work of literature, such as *The Ancient Mariner]* only answers to its own laws, supports itself, internally coheres, and has a new standard of truth. Information is true if it is accurate. A poem is true if it hangs together.... The world created by words exists neither in space nor time though it has semblances of both, it is eternal and indestructible." For Forster, as for his Bloomsbury colleagues Roger Fry, Clive Bell, G. E. Moore, and, often, Virginia Woolf, art is a surrogate for religion. For those who, like himself, do not believe in the harmony of a divine plan or that a God directs human destiny, it provides "order" and "harmony" that the world lacks. At its best, art enables us to see life steadily and see it whole. Aesthetic order can provide a substitute for and an alternative to the frustrations and anxieties of life. in "Art for Art's Sake" (1949), he argued that what distinguished art from life is form, and that view, articulated by Bell and Fry well before *Aspects,* is implicit in much of Forster's book: "A work of art ... is unique not because it is clever or noble or useful or beautiful or enlightened or original or sincere or idealistic or educational - it may embody any of those qualities - but because it is the only material object in the universe which may possess internal harmony." While life in action is fundamentally disorganized ("the past is really a series of *dis* orders"), creating and responding to art are ways of putting that disorder behind.

"Form" (which he does not discuss in its own chapter) is another name for the internal harmony achieved by the creative synthesis of other *aspects:* "[The artist] legislates through creating. And he creates through his sensitiveness and his power to impose form. . . . Form of some kind is imperative. It is the surface crust of the internal harmony, it is the outward evidence of order." But form is not merely the *significant* form of Bell and Fry; it includes - much more than for such a pure art as music - awareness of the complexity of life. Unlike music, the novel inevitably addresses how and for what human beings live. Responding to Lubbock, Forster eschews "principles and systems" as inappropriate to the novel. He insists on "the intensely, stifling human quality" as a critical focus, because the novel's subject is humanity: "Since the novelist is himself a human being, there is an affinity between him and his subject-matter which is absent in many other forms of art." By beginning with the chapters "Story" and "People," *Aspects of the Novel* shows that novels first and foremost depend on human life. Moreover, Forster does not use the formal term "character" in the title of the "People " chapters. And the centrality of people derives in part from Bloomsbury's stress on emotional and moral ties. Virginia Woolf asserted in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown": "I believe that all novels... deal with character, and that it is to express character... that the form of the novels, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive, has been evolved."

Underlying *Aspects of the Novel* is a stress on the quality and intensity of novels' moral visions. Forster implies that a novel's ability to show us something we don't know about the people and the universe is important. Not only does penetrating the secret lives of characters help us as readers to become more perspicacious in life, but our aesthetic experience will enable us for a time to achieve internal harmony. As Forster wrote in "Anonymity: An Enquiry": "What is so wonderful about great literature is that it transforms the man who reads it towards the condition of the man who wrote, and brings to birth in us also the creative impulse. Lost in the beauty where he was lost, we find more than we ever threw away, we reach what seems to be our spiritual home, and remember that it was not the speaker who was in the beginning but the Word." On the one hand, Forster is speaking urgently in his prophetic voice, urging the religion of art that enables us to see beyond the real world, and we feel his kinship with Blake and Lawrence. On the other hand, despite his epiphanic language, Forster stresses the use of art in terms of the effects of art, and this stress is typical of Anglo-American criticism, which is influenced by a blend of Horatian *utile* and English utilitarianism.

Critical Essay #4

Despite Forster's lack of theoretical sophistication, his lucid, unpretentious discussion as the aesthetics of the novel challenges us to consider the necessary dialogue within fiction between art and life, between the imagined world created by the author and the real one in which we, like the author, live. Forster defines the novel in terms of a dialectical relationship between fiction and reality: "there are in the novel two forces: human beings and a bundle of various things not human beings, and . . . it is the novelist's business to adjust these two forces and conciliate their claims." Forster taught us that interest in the novel as an art form is not incongruous with attention to content and that, paradoxically, the novels with the highest artistic values are the richest in insights about life. But Forster knew that *"homo fictus"* is not the same as *"homo sapiens."* What differentiates art from life is not only that the novel is a work of art, but that "the novelist knows everything about [a character in a book] ... [I]n the novel we can know people perfectly, and, apart from the general pleasure of reading, we can find here a compensation for their dimness in life." Forster's assertion that we know the characters in a novel completely and that they contain, unlike characters in life, "no secrets" is belied by our experience that characters have secrets that even their creator or his own omniscient narrator does not recognize. (This is the point not only of Kermode's The Genesis of Secrecy [1979], but one implication of his own chapters on prophecy, pattern, and rhythm.

Forster's introductory chapter insists on a non-chronological approach which conceives of English novelists "writing their novels simultaneously" and turns away from questions of influence: "Literary tradition is the borderland between literature and history." Imagining a reader who encounters the total experience of the English novel enables him to take a quite different perspective from those who speak of influences and origins. His ahistorical approach—what we now call synchronic—appealed to the formalists of the next generation and probably, along with James and Lubbock, deterred thinking about the novel in terms of traditional literary history.

Forster's book was a response to James's critical legacy and Lubbock's codification and simplification of that legacy in *The Craft of Fiction,* which argued, following James, for the importance of point of view. Forster believes that critics have overstressed point of view. By speaking in compelling terms of the elements that he thinks are crucial, he rescued the novel from the dogmatism of James and Lubbock. Point of view is not the most important "aspect" but merely one of many secondary ones that do not deserve a separate chapter. The absence of a chapter on "point of view" probably affected the direction of novel criticism. With Lubbock (whom he has mentioned a few lines previously) in mind, he remarks that critics feel that the novel "ought to have its own technical troubles before it can be accepted as an independent art." For Forster, a novelist's "method" resolves "into the power of the writer to bounce the reader into accepting what he says." By discussing point of view in a few pages in the second chapter entitled "people," he is emphasizing that point of view, whether in the form of a persona or omniscient narrator, is significant only insofar as it expresses a human voice.

Parting company with James and Lubbock, he writes, "the creator and narrator are one."

Forster's warning about self-conscious art is a deliberate attempt to separate himself from the James aesthetic: "The novelist who betrays too much interest in his own method can never be more than interesting; he has given up the creation of character and summoned us to help analyse his own mind, and a heavy drop in the emotional thermometer results." Unlike Lubbock, who questions Tolstoy's shifting point of view, he feels, "this power to expand and contract perception, . . . this right to intermittent knowledge" is not only "one of the great advantages of novel-form," but also "has a parallel in our perception of life." Finally, he holds, what is important is not the technique but the result. Unlike Lubbock, Forster never loses sight of the role of the reader and, like James on occasion, thinks of himself as the reader's surrogate. Stressing that novels must be convincing to readers, he writes: "All that matters to the reader is whether the shifting of attitude and the secret life are convincing ..." Yet despite his avowed catholicity, he has his preferences and prejudices. While he believes that it is fine for an author "to draw back from his characters, as Hardy and Conrad do, and to generalize about the conditions under which he thinks life is carried on," he does not like the intimacy of Fielding and Thackeray, who take readers into confidence about their characters. Perhaps influenced by James on this point, he implies that the artist should use his artistry to shape the reader's response rather than simply tell him what to think. *Aspects of the Novel* shows that Forster had a complicated oedipal love-hate attitude□an anxiety of influence□towards James, whose novels and criticism influenced him more than he acknowledged.

Forster's most important contribution to the aesthetic of the novel is the distinction between flat and round characters. While flat characters can be summarized in a single phrase and hence are often caricatures, round characters are as complex and multifaceted as real people: "The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way ... It has the incalculability of life about it□life within the pages of a book." Forster demonstrates that characterization includes different kinds of mimesis in fiction, each with its own function, and that flat and round characters can coexist in the same novel. Although "It is only round people who are fit to perform tragically for any length of time and can move us to any feelings except humour and appropriateness," the "proper mixture of [flat and round] characters is crucial." The advantage of flat characters is that they are convenient for authors and easily recognized: moreover, they are easily controlled, "provide their own atmosphere," and "are easily remembered by the reader afterwards." Although they exaggerate one major factor at the expense of all others, they have a place in fiction.

The 1910-1912 Post-impressionist exhibits in London taught Forster and his contemporaries that different kinds of mimesis were possible in the same works; Forster is extending that principle to fiction and showing that the equation of "lifelike" and good is simplistic. Post-impressionists intentionally neglect some details, while they distort and exaggerate others. Their abrupt cutting of figures, elimination of traditional perspective, and foreshortening of figures and images influenced the quest of Lawrence, Joyce, Woolf, and Forster to move beyond realism. The concept of volume to describe character may derive from Charles Mauron, to whom *Aspects of the Novel* is dedicated. But it is also likely that Forster himself had learned from modern painting that objects occupying different places in space could be resolved on the same pictorial plane. It may even be that he has in mind the three-dimensionality of sculpture, particularly modern sculpture, which defines objects in relation to the space the work occupies in comparison to the inevitable two-dimensionality of painting.

With its focus on character in the novel in contrast to form, Muir's *The Structure of the Novel* was probably the most important of Forster's immediate offspring. Very much influenced by Forster, Muir has criticized him for depreciating and oversimplifying flat characters. Muir prefers to differentiate between "pure" characters, whom he generally equates with "flat" characters, and "dramatic developing" characters, whom he equates with "round" ones. His case for flat characters depends upon extending the concept to include all characters who remain relatively static: "All pure characters, formally, are in a sense artificial. They continue to repeat things *as if* they were true.... It is this accumulation of habits, dictated by their natures or imposed by convention, that makes every human being the potential object of humour." Thus, he concludes, "The co-existensive truth and congruity of its attributes, indeed, makes the flat character no less remarkable as an imaginative creation than the round; it is not less true, it is only different. It shows us the real just underneath the habitual." But Forster had in mind the differing function of characters, not simply their status within the imagined world. His distinction between flat and round characters is still influential because it showed us that the formal world of art functioned on different principles than the world of life. Subsequent critics, including Wayne Booth, Sheldon Sacks, and Northrop Frye, have focused on the rhetorical function of characterization.

Like the other major British modernists, Forster understood that human character is a continually changing flux of experience rather than, as depicted in the traditional realistic novel of manners, relatively fixed and static; consequently, in his novels he sought to dramatize states of mind at crucial moments. His emphasis on character helped to establish the respectability of the view that character (people) in fiction takes precedence over plot. By stressing the primacy of character over plot while rejecting their emphasis on point of view, Forster continued the movement of James and Lubbock away from the traditional stress on plot. The nineteenth century increasingly became more interested in character than plot; climaxing this trend was the interest in obsessions, compulsions, and dimly acknowledged needs and motives in the works of Browning and Hardy, and, indeed, in A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904).

Forster emphasized that novels depend on a complicated and, at times, messy dialogue between "life in time" and "life by values." It may appear that life by values is part of content or story, but it is clear that its presence in the novel depends upon what Forster calls the author's "devices" and what subsequent critics call his artistry or technique or discourse. While subsequent critics use different terms, Forster demonstrates that discussion of fiction must deal with the two variables□whether we call them life in time and life by values, life and pattern, content, and form, or story and discourse. (In his *Introduction to the English Novel,* Arnold Kettle borrows Forster's term "pattern" to define "the quality in a book which gives it wholeness and meaning," but his definition is much closer to what Forster means by "life by values" than to what he means by "pattern".)

Forster's distinction between story and plot is similar to the distinction in recent studies of narrative between story and discourse: "[Story] is a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence ... [I]t can only have one merit: that of making the audience want to know what happens next. And conversely it can only have one fault: that of making the audience not want to know what happens next." By contrast plot is an aesthetic matter, the basic unit of form. Plot organizes story; it is "a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality.... The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it." Unlike drama, Forster contends, plots in novels rarely comply with Aristotle's "triple process of complication, crises, and solution." He sees plot as a series of circumstances, often arbitrarily selected and arranged, which enables the author to explore the major characters' personal lives and values: "In the novel, all human happiness and misery does not take the form of action, it seeks means of expression other than through plot, it must not be rigidly canalized." While Forster accepted the classical notion of an efficient plot, we should note that the terms "economical" and "organic" derive from the James influence: "[In the plot] every action or word ought to count; it ought to be economical and spare; even when complicated it should be organic and free from dead matter." But the meaning of plot depends on the active participation of a responsive reader: "[Over the plot] will hover the memory of the reader (that dull glow of the mind of which intelligence is the bright advancing edge) and will constantly rearrange and reconsider, seeing new clues, new chains of cause and effect, and the final sense (if the plot has been a fine one) will not be of clues or chains, but of something aesthetically compact, something which might have been shown by the novelist straight away, only if he had shown it straight away it would never have become beautiful." This is the very kind of active reader that R. S. Crane had in mind in his famous 1952 essay "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of *Tom Jones"* and upon whom recent theorists depend. Forster conceived of the structure of the novel as a continuous process by which values are presented, tested, preserved, or discarded, rather than the conclusion of a series which clarifies and reorders everything that precedes. He understood that the importance of a linear pattern within the imagined world relates to the temporal experience of reading the novel. He knew that, even if the greatest novels expand infinitely as if they were atemporal, "It is never possible for a novelist to deny time inside the fabric of his novel." For when one "emancipate[s] fiction from the tyranny of time ... it cannot express anything at all" because "the sequence between the sentences" is abolished, and then "the order of the words," until there is no sense. Thus he pointed novel criticism away from James's spatial conception of form, a concept derived more from James's understanding of painting, sculpture, and architecture than from Coleridge's organic form. Forster helped keep alive temporality as a critical concept in the years when discussion of novel form in spatial terms predominated because of the influence of James and later Joseph Frank.

Forster's insights about endings influenced the work of Alan Friedman's *The Turn of the Novel* (1966) and anticipated Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967). Endings, Forster avows in the chapter on plot, are inherently defective: "Nearly all novels are feeble at the end. This is because the plot requires to be wound up." According to

Forster, death and love are ordering principles that end novels neatly but not in accordance with our own experience of life. The ending should be a part of a process, the last section chronologically in the narrative, but not a completion or a summary because, until death, life is a continuing process. We let authors urge us into thinking love is permanent, even though in reality we know the future would disconfirm this. Because, in his view, life is always open, problematic, and unresolved, Forster's own novels end on a deliberately inconclusive and ambiguous note. Characteristically, his ending does not resolve the social and moral problems dramatized by the plot. Rather it is another in a series of episodes in which man's limitations are exposed, rather than an apocalyptic climactic episode which resolves prior problems. As we shall see, in the following section on "rhythm," he speaks of the possibility of novels, like symphony music, expanding and opening out for their audience; but he is speaking of the resonance of a work upon its audience after its reading is completed.

Critical Essay #5

As *Aspects* progresses, Forster moves further away from the doctrine of nineteenth-century realism that novels must be imitations of life and begins to introduce categories that his classically trained lecture audience would have found innovative and exciting, if at times provocatively idiosyncratic, whimsical, and even bizarre. By introducing these categories and by refusing to restrict himself to what can be seen and analyzed within a novel, Forster reintroduced an imaginative and creative strain to criticism that Lubbock' s more positivistic approach had denied. Such a strain was a dominant force in Pater, Wilde, and, at times, James.

Following the chapter on plot, Forster turns to fantasy. Forster's "fantasy" includes the kinds of extraordinary events that James called "romance," but it also includes very different kinds of speculative, tonal, and stylistic departures from realism. Fantasy asks the reader to "accept certain things" that are unnatural. Fantasy "implies the supernatural, but need not express it;" like prophecy, it has a "sense of mythology." According to Forster, the devices of a writer of fantasy include "the introduction of a god, ghost, angel, monkey, monster, midget, witch into ordinary life; or the introduction of ordinary men into no man's land, the future, the past, the interior of the earth, the fourth dimension; or divings into and dividings of personality; or finally the device of parody or adaptation." As a parody of *Pamela,* Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* is an example of the last kind. Inspired by both "an already existing book" and a "literary tradition." *Ulysses* is also a fantasy that depends on parody and adaptation.

If fantasy takes us to a linear world of diversity, difference, and idiosyncrasy, prophecy takes us to a vertical dimension where this world is a shadow of a more intense world. The truth of prophecy is the truth of vision. Thus in the subsequent chapter entitled "Prophecy," Forster asks us to put aside our logic and reason and look elsewhere for insight and knowledge of the human plight. He wants the novel to move beyond local nominalistic insights toward unity and toward truth beyond itself. Stone aptly describes Forster's concept of prophecy as "the seeing of the visible world as the living garment of God, the miracle of natural supernaturalism." When novels expand temporally and spatially, they displace the reader's awareness of the world in which he lives and give him a spiritual experience. Such experience is cognate to the moment when all will be one, except here the signified is not Christ but a sense of wholeness that derives from awareness of man's common plight and common psychological past.

Thus the theme of the chapter "Prophecy" is "the universe, or something universal." Prophecy "is a tone of voice"; "What matters is the accent of [the prophet's] voice, his song." Forster's examples are Lawrence, Dostoevsky, Melville, and Emily Bronte. The prophetic impulse demands from the reader "humility and the suspension of the sense of humour." While George Eliot is a preacher, Dostoevsky is a prophet:

[Mitya] is the prophetic vision, and the novelist's creation also.... The extension, the melting, the unity though love and pity occur in a region which can only be implied and to which fiction is perhaps the wrong approach.... Mitya is a round character, but he is capable of extension. He does not conceal anything (mysticism), he does not mean anything (symbolism), he is merely Dmitri Karamazov, but to be merely a person in Dostoevsky is to join up with all the other people far back.

The prophetic dimension cannot be pinned down in particular sentences or patterns of language: "The essential in *Moby Dick,* its prophetic song, flows athwart the action and the surface morality like an undercurrent. It lies outside words." But how, one might ask, can we agree on the presence of prophecy? Forster might respond that it is the truth that passes understanding, our epiphanic realization that transcends any single moment of narrative.

Chapter 8 is entitled "Pattern and Rhythm," terms which are borrowed respectively from painting and from music. First, Forster discusses pattern: "Whereas the story appeals to our curiosity and the plot to our intelligence, the pattern appeals to our aesthetic sense. It causes us to see the book as a whole." He dismisses as jargon the notion that we see a book as a physical shape: "Pattern is an aesthetic aspect of the novel, and ... though it may be nourished by anything in the novel - any character, scene, word - it draws most of its nourishment from the plot." Although Stallybrass thinks Forster is merely paying homage to a friend when he mentions Lubbock's novels, Forster is making a critical point by using a novel by Lubbock to illustrate pattern and by praising it for qualities quite remote from point of view. Pattern is whatever in plot is beautiful: "Beauty is sometimes the shape of the book, the book as a whole, the unity." Not only is James discussed in the section on pattern rather than in the brief section on point of view within the second "People" chapter, but Strether's role as an observer, as "a rather too first-rate oculist" is facetiously noted. Forster indicts James for giving preference to pattern over life: "[Rigid pattern] may externalize the atmosphere, spring naturally from the plot, but it shuts the doors on life and leaves the novelist doing exercises, generally in the drawing-room. ... To most readers of fiction the sensation from a pattern is not intense enough to justify the sacrifices that made it." Writing of Forster's concern with pattern and rhythm, Edwin Muir, his contemporary and admirer, made a trenchant remark that accurately establishes Forster's link to the James tradition, notwithstanding Forster's effort to separate himself from James's aesthetic: "We do not really believe that a novel has a pattern like a carpet or a rhythm like a tune.... James is the father of most of those question-begging terms; he was an incurable impressionist; and he has infected criticism with his vocabulary of hints and nods."

Rhythm is the relation between "movements." Rhythm is a linear version of organic form, for it provides the concept of internal harmony for the temporal process of reading, whereas pattern seems to define internal harmony in more traditional formal and somewhat spatial terms borrowed from painting and sculpture. According to Forster, the function of rhythm in fiction is "not to be there all the time like a pattern, but by its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope.... It has to depend on a local impulse when the right interval is reached. But the effect can be exquisite, it can be obtained without mutilating the characters, and it lessens our need of an external form. Of course, rhythm forms a pattern too, but a temporal one, not a spatial one. Perhaps Forster should have differentiated between "spatial pattern " and "rhythmic pattern" - recurrence within a temporal framework which is both ineffable and ever-changing; the latter is a dynamic concept that adjusts continually to the experience of reading and probably owes something to the substantial influence in the 1920s of Gestalt psychology, which sees human events as dynamic patterns that constantly move and shift into new fields of perception. He finds rhythm in "the easy sense" in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past:* "The book is chaotic, ill-constructed, it has and will have no external shape; and yet it hangs together because it is stitched internally, because it contains rhythms." E. K. Brown's influential *Rhythm in the Novel* (1950) derives directly from this discussion, but it also anticipates the kind of order that Hillis Miller discusses in his recent *Fiction and Repetition* and that Gerard Genette speaks of in *Narrative Discourse* (1980), a book whose focus is *Remembrance of Things Past* and which cites Forster with approval.

He then turns to a more sophisticated and elusive kind of rhythm, which he finds only in *War and Peace:*

Music, though it does not employ human beings, though it is governed by intricate laws, nevertheless does offer in its final expression a type of beauty which fiction might achieve in its own way. Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out. When the symphony is over we feel that the notes and tunes composing it have been liberated, they have found in the rhythm of the whole their individual freedom.... As we read *[War and Peace]* do not great chords begin to sound behind us, and when we have finished does not every item - even the catalogue of strategies - lead a larger existence than was possible at the time?

In his novels and in *Aspects of the Novel,* Forster is trying to create this "expansion" for his audience, in part by trying to reach back to the sources of man's humanity. But isn't this passage extremely impressionistic? Do we know from this why *War and Peace* achieves its greatness? Aren't we being simply asked to endorse Forster's responses? Indeed as *Aspects* progresses, the argument becomes weaker and weaker and depends, beginning with the chapter "Fantasy," more on assertion and apt turns of phrase. It is as if he wishes the book to conclude with a prolonged lyric about the novel's potential to move its readers. Yet in the passage, does he not seek to join with those - Pater, Wilde, and usually Woolf - who see art as greater and more important than life and to participate in Yeats's urgent wish in "Sailing to Byzantium," to be a golden bird "to sing / To lords and ladies of Byzantium / Of what is past, or passing, or to come?"

The discussion of prophecy and rhythm (and, to a lesser extent, fantasy and pattern) is part of an effort to define something inexplicable, something spiritual and unseen, which might be an antidote to his own discovery and dramatization of evil in the Marabar caves in *A Passage to India.* Forster yearned for something beyond the pedestrian, disorganized, and sometimes banal stuff of novels. When he speaks of reaching back and "expansion," we must not forget the influence of Freud, Frazer, and Jung. *The Golden Bough* (1890) had extended the range of the past beyond biblical time and even beyond historical time; later, Jung's emphasis on archetypes stressed that all cultures share common anthropological experience and psychological traits. And Forster believed that, despite differences in breeding, customs, and values, a common heritage united mankind. *Aspects,* like *A passage to India,* written only a few years before, is a quest for something beyond the diurnal life. But his tragedy was finally that he could not believe, with Stevens in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," that "the words of the world are the life of the world." At times Forster regretfully concedes that creating and perceiving art cannot compensate for the frustrations and anxieties of daily life, and that concession may be why he stopped writing novels.

Critical Essay #6

Before closing we should acknowledge what now seem as shortcomings of *Aspects of the Novel.* The book does not discuss precisely the means by which life is transformed into art and would benefit from separate chapters on form and narrative technique and more detailed discussion of style, the reader's role, and setting. Sometimes Forster provides us with little more than an impressionistic, gustatory statement of like and dislike. But lyricism is not the same as argument, and his credo that "the final test of a novel will be our affection for it" is a bit tautological. At times, his generalizations need more precise evidence and tauter supporting argument. Clearly, he is ambivalent about the critical enterprise and worried that it is too scientific, even mechanistic. For this reason, he speaks of holding up "story" with a "forceps" (as if it were a part of Tristram Shandy's anatomy.) Even if we attribute the lack of sustained analyses to the limitations of length imposed by the original lecture format, we have to admit that his own ratings of prior English novelists are at times quirky and reductive. For example, Scott, who has "a trivial mind and a heavy style," is a writer for a time when our brains "decay"; but "he could tell a story. He had the primitive power of keeping the reader in suspense and playing on his curiosity."

In the face of the bold and experimental, Forster's fastidious and conservative temper, which prefers order, proportion, clarity, and precision, sometimes leads him astray. Although he praises Lawrence for his "rapt bardic quality," he completely misunderstands *Ulysses,* of which he writes, "the aim ... is to degrade all things and more particularly civilization and art, by turning them inside out and upside down." At times, he suppresses his prophetic strain and sees himself as a custodian of humanistic (some might facetiously say bourgeoise) principles in the face of challenges from the avant-garde.

Yet, while a contemporary reader, accustomed to either the critical nominalism of the New Criticism of the theorizing of recent European criticism, might find it at times lacking in rigor, *Aspects of the Novel* remains one of our seminal texts of novel criticism. We value it because Forster speaks to us not only as a major novelist and an incisive critic, but also as a reader who is concerned with how aspects of the novel relate to aspects of our lives.

Source: Daniel R. Schwarz, "The Importance of E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel,*" in *South Atlantic Quarterly,* Vol. 82, No. 2, Spring 1983, pp. 189-205.

Critical Essay #7

In the following essay excerpt, Colmer gives an overview of Aspects of the Novel, *saying it is still popular because it "is alive on every page" and "communicates the author's own enthusiasms."*

The invitation to give the Clark Lectures at Cambridge in 1927 was a tribute to Forster's distinction as a novelist and his perception as a critic; moreover, it re-established his connection with Cambridge that was to remain close until his death in 1970. After he lost his house on his mother's death in 1945, King's College elected him an Honorary Fellow and later provided him with rooms in College. For the Clark Lectures in 1927, he chose as his topic the Novel; and when the lectures were published he gave them the title, *Aspects of the Novel,* a modest title totally in keeping with the personality of the lecturer and his general tone and approach. In view of Forster's frequent disclaimers to scholarship (he 'was not a scholar and refused to be a pseudo-scholar', said Virginia Woolf), it is worth considering what qualifications he did actually possess. He had knowledge of the novel from the inside, having written five novels, the last□*A Passage to India*□recognized as a masterpiece as soon as it appeared in 1924. He had an extensive knowledge of English, American, and European fiction. As a frequent book-reviewer, he had learnt to seize on essentials in any work, to be sensitive to nuances of meaning and style, to summarize imaginatively, to select quotations aptly, and to develop an attractive and flexible prose style for communicating his acute insights to a wide public. Moreover, he was already an accomplished lecturer and reader of scholarly papers, although not a professional academic. He had lectured on a variety of literary topics to the Weybridge Literary Society, including 'Literature and the War'; he had addressed the Working Men's College 'On Pessimism in Modern Literature' and other subjects; he had given talks on literary topics to students in India. As the result of this very mixed experience, he had developed his own informal method of speaking about literature and saw no particular reason to change it for his Cambridge audience. This included A. E. Housman, who, much to Forster's disappointment, came to only two lectures, put off perhaps by the lecturer's informality and self-confessedly 'ramshackly course' of lectures. 'Housman came to two & I called on him on the strength of this, but he took no notice.'

Forster's approach to the novel was deliberately anti-historical, in marked contrast to his essay on the 'Novelists of the Eighteenth Century and their Influence on Those of the Nineteenth', submitted for an undergraduate prize in October 1899. When he came to give the Clark Lectures he knew that he lacked the range of knowledge and the 'rare gifts' necessary for 'genuine scholarship'. Despising the cataloguing and classifying absurdities of 'pseudo-scholarship', he therefore decided to abandon the historical approach altogether and to imagine all the great novelists of the world writing their masterpieces under the dome of the central reading room of the British Museum. A charming and whimsical fancy that does enable Forster to 'exorcise' the 'demon of chronology' and to concentrate on the novelist's common task of finding in art a mirror for reality□a common task because, unlike History which develops, 'Art stands still.'

Forster begins by presenting his audience with two passages of introspection, two funeral scenes, and two passages of fantasy about the muddle of life: the first pair are by Richardson and James; the second pair by Wells and Dickens; and the third by Virginia Woolf and Sterne. Forster deliberately withholds the names of the authors to bring out the idea that similarity of vision transcends chronology, yet any well-trained undergraduate today would have little difficulty in showing how deeply the language and sensibility of each passage is rooted in its historic period, and could indeed have been written at no other time. Any connection that the use of unseen passages, the withholding of authorship and the anti-historicism, suggests with the new Cambridge school of 'practical criticism' of the 1920s is utterly misleading. Indeed, Forster's neglect of close linguistic texture ('almost nothing is said about words', complained Virginia Woolf) and his neglect of social context, seriously limit his critical perspire. Of this, Forster was partly aware, regretting that his chosen method ruled out the discussion of literary tradition, especially as this affects a novelist's technique. Reference to tradition, he believed, could show that Virginia Woolf 'belonged to the same tradition' as Sterne, 'but to a later phase of it'. This is indeed a rather special conception of literary tradition. What Forster does not sufficiently appreciate is that the actual material of fiction and the consciousness of the artist are at least in part historically conditioned. It is illuminating to compare his remarks on Richardson with those of Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* or with those of any other modern critic sensitive to the fact that the moral and social values embodied in a novel reflect the unique interaction of individual sensibility and the temper of an age.

Having□as it were□set his scene in the British Museum and having adopted a French critic's convenient definition of a novel as 'a fiction in prose of a certain extent', Forster focuses on seven formal properties of the novel. These he calls 'Aspects'. They are: 'The Story', 'People', 'The Plot', 'Fantasy', 'Prophecy', 'Pattern', and 'hythm'. This chatty updated Aristotelian approach gives the discussion an air of completeness while allowing Forster to speak about what happens to interest him most. The chosen framework might suggest an exclusive concern with form and technique, a concern shared by such novelists as James, Conrad, and Ford Madox Ford, exemplified also in Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction*. But, in fact, Forster avoids a strictly formalist approach; he maintains a pleasant balance between questions relating to technique and questions relating to truth and reality. At the beginning of the lecture on 'Fantasy', he indicates the principle that determines this balance; in the novel itself and in his own approach.

The idea running through these lectures is by now plain enough: that there are in the novel two forces: human beings and a bundle of various things not human beings, and that it is the novelist's business to adjust these two forces and conciliate their claims.

Ultimately, however, Forster's supreme test is truth to life, an old-fashioned test certainly, but one that is susceptible of considerable refinement in application. But it did not satisfy Virginia Woolf, a close friend and admirer, who asked 'What is this "Life" that keeps on cropping up so mysteriously and so complacently in books about fiction?'. Here she was not only continuing the battle against the Edwardian realists, begun in *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, and originally provoked by Bennett's claim that she had failed to create character or reality in *Jacob's Room*, but also remembering Forster's remarks about characters and life in his 1925 essay on her early fiction. 'Why', she asks pertinently of Forster, is reality 'absent in a pattern and present in a tea party?' From this it may be seen that, in spite of the chapter headings drawing attention to the formal properties of the novel, Virginia Woolf regarded *Aspects of the Novel* as typical of the 'unaesthetical' attitude that prevailed in English fiction and which would 'be thought strange in any of the other arts'. To understand her responses here we need to remember her admiration for the contribution made by Henry James and Turgenev to the 'art of the novel' and also her inordinate pride in Bloomsbury aesthetics. Bloomsbury, she believed, was a society 'alive as Cambridge had never been to the importance of the arts'. By contrast, Forster was altogether more sceptical towards Bloomsbury aesthetics and the art of the novel. 'This vague truth about life. Exactly. But what of the talk about art?', he asked Virginia Woolf in a letter. 'Each section leads to an exquisitely fashioned casket of which the key has unfortunately been mislaid and until you can find your bunch I shall cease to hunt very anxiously for my own'. Many years later he summed up his own sceptical pragmatic approach:

The novel, in my view, has not any rules, and there is no such thing as the art of fiction. There is only the particular art that each novelist employs in the execution of his particular book.

The chief interest of the first chapter of *Aspects* is that it brings out Forster's comparative lack of interest in narrative: 'Yes□oh dear yes□the novel tells a story.' And yet, of course, Forster is himself a brilliant story-teller. But depreciation of this element leads him to reduce Scott's stature to that of a mere entertainer. 'He could tell a story. He had the primitive power of keeping the reader in suspense and playing on his curiosity.' If that summed up the whole of Scott he would certainly not enjoy the acclaim he enjoys today. That Forster allots two chapters to 'People' is an accurate indication of the importance he attributes to character in fiction. In the first chapter on People he breaks new ground by drawing attention to how little of our lives actually gets into fiction. The five main facts of life (birth, food, sleep, love, and death) appear selectively or hardly at all. The brief impressionistic notes on this topic prove that Forster's view of life was not the simple one ascribed to him by Virginia Woolf; they are products of a mind that has brooded long over the contrast between 'Art' and 'Life', that has seen that the novelist's function is 'to reveal the hidden life at its source'. Indeed Forster had recognized as clearly as Virginia Woolf or James Joyce that, by modifications of convention and technique, much more might be achieved to render our experience vivid as we 'move between two darknesses', birth and death. Forster returns to the same 'unavoidable termini', at the end of the essay, 'What I Believe': 'The memory of birth and the expectation of death always lurk within the human being, making him separate from his fellows and consequently capable of intercourse with them.'

In the second of the chapters on 'People', Forster draws a distinction between 'flat' and 'round' characters. By the first he means Jonsonian, 'humours' characters, 'constructed round a single idea or quality', like Mrs Micawber, for example, with her repeated 'I never will desert Mr Micawber.' These have the advantages that they are easily recognized and easily remembered. By the second, 'round' characters, he means characters that are so fully developed that we can imagine how they would behave in circumstances not actually presented in the novel (this is not quite the Bradley, 'How Many Children had Lady Macbeth?' approach applied to the novel). 'Round' characters also have the 'capacity of surprising us in a convincing way'. This distinction has caught on and become part of the language of twentieth-century criticism. But it lacks precision, is less illuminating than the distinction between 'life on the page' and 'life eternal' made in the Rede lecture on Virginia Woolf, and can at best be regarded as a convenient piece of critical shorthand. In *Aspects*, 'flat' and 'round' are sometimes used as neutral terms to describe differences in technique and sometimes as evaluative terms to award praise or blame. In the first case it is Forster the fellow-novelist speaking, in the second it is Forster the critic. Here is one place where the two do not quite coincide.

It is true that in literary criticism, as opposed to science, definitions can never be more than a rough and ready convenience to facilitate communication. Most readers of *Aspects* probably respond gratefully to the simplicity of Forster's definition of 'Plot' as distinct from 'Story'. 'The king died and then the queen died' is a story; but 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief' is a plot. The time sequence is preserved, Forster remarks, but 'the sense of causality overshadows it.' Beautifully simple. Yet the distinction leads ultimately to curious results. It leads, for example, to a further definition of the plot as 'the novel in its logical intellectual aspect'. But what about the aesthetic patterning function of plot? Forster has little to say about this under the heading of 'Plot'. The reason is that he wants later to make a clear distinction between 'Pattern' (something mechanical and external that determines the shape of AnatoleFrance's *Thaïs* and James's *The Ambassadors*), and 'Rhythm' (something organic and internal, as in Proust, a process of 'repetition plus variation', and 'internal stitching'). Again, the definition of 'Fantasy' as a form of fiction that 'asks us to pay something extra', is too fanciful itself to take us very far, and the choice of Norman Matson's *Flecker's Magic* as a major exhibit marks a disastrous victory of fashion over sound judgment. It is in the sections on 'Prophecy' and 'Rhythm' that Forster rises to the height of his powers as a critic, combining lucid definitions with beautifully chosen examples. Here his sympathies were fully engaged and he was writing with half an eye on his own work, especially in developing his ideas on 'Rhythm'. The result is criticism of the very highest order. Three examples must suffice. The first comes from his account of Proust's use of rhythm

... what we must admire is his use of rhythm in literature, and his use of something which is akin by nature to the effect it has to produce□namely a musical phrase. Heard by various people□first by Swann, then by the hero□the phrase of Vinteuil is not tethered: it is not a banner suck as we find George Meredith using□a double-blossomed cherry tree to accompany Clara Middleton, a yacht in smooth waters for Cecilia Halkett. A banner can only reappear, rhythm can develop, and the little phrase has a life of its own, unconnected with the lives of its auditors, as with the life of the man who composed it. It is almost an actor, but not quite, and that 'not quite' means that its power has gone towards stitching Proust's book together from the inside, and towards the establishment of beauty and the ravishing of the reader's memory. There are times when the little phrase-from its gloomy inception, through the sonata, into the sextet-means everything to the reader. There are times when it means nothing and is forgotten, and this seems to me the function of rhythm in fiction; not to be there all the time like a pattern, but by its lovely waxing and waning to fill us with surprise and freshness and hope.

The second comes from his discussion of the 'prophetic' in Dostoevsky.

Dostoevsky's characters ask us to share something deeper than their experiences. They convey to us a sensation that is partly physical—the sensation of sinking into a translucent globe and seeing our experience floating far above us on its surface, tiny, remote, yet ours. We have not ceased to be people, we have given nothing up, but 'the sea is in the fish and the fish is in the sea.'

The third example comes from his discussion of Melville. Here he points out the importance of evil in Melville's moral vision and its relative absence in English fiction, a theme brilliantly developed by Angus Wilson many years later in a series of unscripted radio talks.

It is to his conception of evil that Melville's work owes much of its strength. As a rule evil has been feebly envisaged in fiction, which seldom soars above misconduct or avoids the clouds of mysteriousness. Evil to most novelists is either sexual and social, or something very vague for which a special style with implications of poetry is thought suitable.

Aspects of the Novel has survived remarkably well and continues to be read when more scholarly discourses on the novel gather dust on the shelves. The reasons are not difficult to discover. It is alive on every page; it communicates the author's own enthusiasms; it whets the reader's appetite through apt quotations and skilful commentary, while never doing the reader's work for him, the usual fault of popular literary handbooks. It is genuinely popular without being vulgar. In the simplest possible manner it throws new light on old problems, and it contains original insights into the art of many major novelists, especially Emily Brontë, Melville, Dostoevsky, and D. H. Lawrence. His discriminating praise of two novelists as unlike each other as Jane Austen and Herman Melville illustrates the range of his imaginative sympathies; it also reminds us of his own extraordinary feat in assimilating characteristic features of both into his own art. The pages on Melville repay the closest attention. Here was a writer, Forster realized, who had 'not got that tiresome little receptacle, a conscience', who was therefore able—unlike Hawthorne, or say, Mark Rutherford—to reach 'straight back into the universal, to a blackness and sadness so transcending our own that they are indistinguishable from glory'. Is this not what Forster achieves in *A Passage to India* and in flashes in *The Longest Journey?* His continued admiration for Melville appears in his adaptation with Eric Crozier of Melville's short story *Billy Budd*, 'a remote unearthly episode', as a libretto for an opera by his friend and admirer Benjamin Britten. All three lived in the same house for a month; Forster and Crozier worked from a 'kind of skeleton synopsis', trying all the time to make the words flower into lyricism. 'I felt quite differently to what I have felt while writing other things,' remarked Forster, 'completely different. I was on a kind of voyage.' The idea of 'song' and a voyage into the unknown are the essential features of Forster's conception of Prophecy.

Aspects of the Novel is not without its faults. Forster brought to his task a mixed bag of likes and dislikes, of discriminating preferences and odd blind spots. His judgment of some major writers is consequently somewhat erratic. He is unfair to Scott, sees only the preacher in George Eliot, finds it difficult to be just to Meredith, his youthful idol, and he uses Henry James almost exclusively as an example of the sacrifice of 'Life' to 'Art', quoting Wells's brilliant but malicious account of the high altar of James's art ('and on the altar, very reverently placed, intensely there, is a dead kitten, an egg shell, a piece of string'), declaring that 'most of human life has to disappear' before James can do us a novel. Yet, notes for the lecture series in his Commonplace Book reveal a sympathetic insight into James's difficulties as a novelist□were they not his own? In these rough notes he considers evil in the English novel and claimants to 'Satanic intimacy', glances briefly at the 'Pan School', petering out in Hichens and E. F. Benson, and remarks perceptively that in *The Turn of the Screw,* Henry James 'is merely declining to think about homosex, and the knowledge that he is declining throws him into the necessary fluster.' It was a pity Forster's personal censor intervened before he actually gave the lectures, since this insight into James's creative psychology was startlingly original at the time.

There are two further weaknesses in *Aspects of the Novel*. Few of the definitions or distinctions, although they have passed into the language of criticism, will stand up to rigorous scrutiny. And ultimately the whole book throws as much light on Forster's own fiction as it does on the Art of the Novel, a point amply demonstrated by James McConkey in his application of the seven different 'Aspects' to Forster's own novels. Yet, with all its obvious limitations and weaknesses, it is a book one finds oneself returning to again and again and always with a sense of new discovery and fresh insight into some major novelist. This capacity to surprise and delight is the combined product of individual taste, personal integrity, and the inveterate habit of looking at life and art from unexpected angles. It is also the product of the crisp sensitive prose style. At a time when extravagant claims were being made in Cambridge for systematic and scientific criticism, *Aspects of the Novel* struck a minor blow for the more personal, informal approach.

Forster's earliest writings reveal his gift for recreating the lives of neglected characters from the past. He is obviously attracted to minor figures caught up in major events, to genuine seekers after truth however muddled, to interesting failures rather than to dull successes, to those who have left behind them at least one work that still lives or can be brought to life again. The two essays, 'Gemistus Pletho' and 'Cardan', both published in the *Independent Review* in 1905, illustrate Forster's youthful skill in combining history and biography in a highly entertaining fashion; they also foreshadow his later success in raising the biography of the obscure into a fine art, as in *Marianne Thornton* (1956), and, to a lesser extent, in *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* (1934), although perhaps Dickinson could not be labelled 'obscure' in 1934, since, by then, he had become well known through his work for the League of Nations and through broadcasting.

The essay on Georgius Gemistus recounts the story of this little-known philosopher who was born at Constantinople in 1355 and who spent his life in Greece, but for one important visit to Italy when he helped to found the Neo-Platonic Academy in Florence.

What attracts Forster to Gemistus and Cardan, an obscure scientist, is the strange but very human gap between their dreams of truth and the absurd form these dreams often take. Thus, writing of Gemistus' ideal of reviving the religion of Greece by invoking the names of the Greek gods, Forster writes:

These names had for him a mysterious virtue: he attached them like labels to his uninspiring scheme, while he rejected all that makes the gods immortal their radiant visible beauty, their wonderful adventures, their capacity for happiness and laughter. That was as much as his dim, troubled surrounding allowed to him. If he is absurd, it is in a very touching way; his dream of antiquity is grotesque and incongruous, but it has a dream's intensity, and something of a dream's imperishable value.

This was written when Forster himself was seeking to recapture the 'radiant visible beauty' of classical mythology, in his short stories and early novels. Throughout these two biographical vignettes, 'Gemistus Pletho' and 'Cardan', there is a delicate balance between sympathy and ironic detachment; a compassionate recognition, too, of the extent to which human beings are limited by their historical environment, by their 'troubled surroundings'. It is the quality of Forster's imaginative sympathy for human weakness and oddity and his refusal to extract easy laughter from the absurdities of the past that chiefly distinguish his biographical essays from those of Strachey. In this he is at one with Virginia Woolf in her biographical essays in *The Common Reader*. The ending of his account of the eccentric sixteenth-century Italian scientist, Cardan, brings out the essential difference between Forster's and Strachey's approach to biography.

To raise up a skeleton, and make it dance, brings indeed little credit either to the skeleton or to us. But those ghosts who are still clothed with passion or thought are profitable companions. If we are to remember Cardan today let us not remember him as an oddity.

It is as an oddity that Dr Arnold appears, with his too short legs, in Strachey's brief biography, it is as an obsequious oddity that the poet Clough appears in his life of Florence Nightingale. What Forster looked for in biography and the study of the past were 'profitable companions' and not objects of ridicule or ironic contempt. In later years he certainly recognized that Strachey was 'much more than a debunker', that he did 'what no biographer had done before him: he managed to get inside his subject'. By comparison Forster's is a smaller achievement. He was not strongly drawn to biography as a literary form, and he made no startling innovations in technique; but he did write two fine biographies that reveal as much of their author as of their subject.

Source: John Colmer, "Life and Times," in *E. M. Forster: The Personal Voice,* Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, pp. 174-83.

Quotes

"A critic has no right to the narrowness which is the frequent prerogative of the creative artist. He has to have a wide outlook or he has not anything at all," (pp. 19-20).

"We are to visualize the English novelists not as floating down the stream [of time] ... but as seated together in a room, a circular room, a sort of British museum reading room, all writing their novels simultaneously," (p. 21).

"... those people writing in the circular room ... may decide to write a novel upon the French or the Russian Revolution, but memories, associations, passions, rise up and cloud their objectivity, so that at the close, when they re-read, someone else seems to have been holding their pen ... their self, no doubt, but not the self that is so active in time ..." (p. 38).

"The final test of a novel will be our affection for it, as it is the test of our friends, of anything else which we cannot define," (p. 42).

"[Story] is the fundamental aspect [of the novel] without which it could not exist. That is the highest factor common to all novels, and I wish ... that it could be something different—melody, or perception of the truth, not this low atavistic form," (p. 45).

"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," (p. 68).

"A memoir is history, it is based on evidence. A novel is based on evidence plus or minus *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," (p. 71-2).

"...let us think of people as starting life with an experience they forget and ending it with one which they anticipate but cannot understand. These are the creatures whom the novelist proposes to introduce as characters into books; these, or creatures plausibly like them," (p. 76).

"...as soon as we try to determine the relation between sex and these other emotions we shall of course begin to quarrel ..." (p. 79).

"All history, all our experience, teaches us that no human relationship is constant, it is as unstable as the living beings who compose it, and they must balance like jugglers if it is to remain; if it is constant it is no longer a human relationship but a social habit, the emphasis in it has passed from love to marriage," (p. 86).

"Any strong emotion brings with it the illusion of permanence, and the novelists have seized upon this. They usually end their books with marriage, and we do not object because we lend them our dreams," (pp. 86-7).

"[Characters] are real not because they are like ourselves (though they may be like us) but because they are convincing," (p. 97).

"The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is a flat pretending to be round. It has the incalculability of life about it—life within the pages of a book," (p. 118).

"The novelist who betrays too much interest in his own method can never be more than interesting; he has given up the creation of character and summoned us to help analyze his own mind, and a heavy drop in the emotional thermometer results," (p. 122).

"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 [channeled]," (p. 142).

"... the novelist ... is competent, posed above his work, throwing abeam of light here, popping on a cap of invisibility there, and ... continually negotiating with himself ... as to the best effect to be produced ... his interest in cause and effect give him an air of predetermination," (pp. 144-5).

"Why place an angel on a different basis from a stockbroker? Once in the realm of the fictious, what difference is there between an apparition and a mortgage?" (p. 160).

"The stuff of daily life will be tugged and strained in various directions, the earth will be given little tilts mischievous or pensive, spot lights will fall on objects that have no reason to anticipate or welcome them, and tragedy herself, though not excluded, will have a fortuitous air as if a word would disarm her," (p. 162).

"Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off but opening out. When the symphony is over we feel that the notes and tunes composing it have been liberated, they have found in the rhythm of the whole their individual freedom. Cannot the novel be like that? Is there not something of it [that can bring us to] a larger existence than was possible at the time?" (pp. 241-2).

Adaptations

Forster's best known novels were adapted to film during the 1980s and 1990s. *A Passage to India* (1984), directed by David Lean, stars Judy Davis, Victor Bannerjee, and Alec Guinness. Merchant-Ivory productions adapted several of his novels, under the direction of James Ivory: *A Room With a View* (1986) stars Helena Bonham Carter, Daniel Day-Lewis, Judi Dench, Julian Sands, and Maggie Smith; *Maurice* (1987) stars James Wilby and Hugh Grant; *Howard's End* (1992) stars Helena Bonham Carter, Anthony Hopkins, Vanessa Redgrave, and Emma Thompson. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1991), directed by Charles Sturridge, stars Helena Bonham Carter, Judy Davis, and Rupert Graves.

Topics for Further Study

Forster discusses many of the major novelists of the English language, as well as several French and Russian writers. Pick one author from the list of Key Figures in this entry and learn more about that author and her or his major works.

Forster discusses seven aspects he deems essential to the novel: story, plot, character, fantasy, prophesy, pattern, and rhythm . Pick a work of fiction not specifically mentioned by Forster and analyze it in terms of these seven elements. How well does it measure up to Forster's standards? Do you agree with this assessment?

Although Forster discusses elements specific to the novel, they may also be applied to the short story. Try writing a short story which takes into account each of the seven aspects discussed by Forster.

Two years after Forster's lecture series on *Aspects of the Novel,* Virginia Woolf, his contemporary and a fellow member of the Bloomsbury Group, wrote a very different critical work on literature and literary history, a book-length essay entitled *A Room of One's Own*. Read *A Room of One's Own*. What are the central points of Woolf s discussion of literature in this essay? To what extent do you agree or disagree with her arguments and conclusions?

Compare and Contrast

1837-1901: The reign of Queen Victoria lends its name to the Victorian era, a term that first comes into use in the 1850s.

1901-1910: The reign of King Edward VII, referred to as the Edwardian age, marks a contrast with the national atmosphere of his austere mother.

1914-1918: The horror and disillusionment experienced by the World War I era has a profound effect on English literature and the modernist movement.

1924-1937: James Ramsay MacDonald is the first candidate of the Labour Party, with which Forster sympathized, to be elected prime minister. MacDonald, however, holds office for only nine months. MacDonald again holds the office from 1929-1935. However, during the 1920s and 1930s, English politics are dominated by Prime Minister Baldwin, who holds office from 1924 to 1929 and from 1935 to 1937, as a result of which the 1920s and 1930s come to be known as the Baldwin Era.

1979-1997: British politics are dominated by the Conservative government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, whose term of office is followed by that of the Conservative John Major.

1997: The Labour Party, with which Forster had been associated during his lifetime, wins a landslide victory in the election of Tony Blair as prime minister.

1780s-1840s: Romanticism, focusing on the imagination of the individual, is the predominant literary movement in England.

1840s-1890s: Romanticism gives way to the Gothicism and realism of the Victorian era novelists.

1901-1910: Novelists of the Edwardian era express a critical perspective on British society.

1910s-1930s: The modernist movement in literature expresses a desire for doing away with older literary forms in extending the boundaries of the novel.

1939-1945: During the World War II era, various factors cause poetry and the short story to gain prominence over the novel in English literature. A brief movement in poetry known as the New Apocalypse develops during the war years.

1940s: The New Apocalypse gives way to a development known simply as the Movement in poetry.

1950s: A group of novelists known as the Angry Young Men are known for their realistic, autobiographical works.

Today: New developments in the novel are characterized by what is known as post-colonial and post-modern fiction, alongside the enduring form of the realist novel.

What Do I Read Next?

Wuthering Heights (1847), by Charlotte Bronte, is an early Gothic novel by one of the four writers Forster deems truly prophetic. It concerns themes of inheritance and legitimacy among the upper classes of the English countryside and includes elements of the supernatural.

Moby Dick (1851), by Herman Melville, is considered one of the greatest novels ever written. It narrates one man's obsession with the pursuit of Moby Dick, a great white whale that he is determined to kill. Forster deems this one of the truly prophetic novels ever written.

The novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-1880) is a masterpiece by the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky, whom Forster deemed one of four truly prophetic novelists. It concerns a man accused of the murder of his own father.

Howard's End (1910), a novel by Forster and his first major literary success, is concerned with divisions among upper and lower classes in Edwardian England, as expressed by the encounter between members of two different families.

The novel *Women in Love* (1920) is one of the major works by D. H. Lawrence, whom Forster considered the only truly prophetic writer alive at the time of his lecture series in 1927. It concerns the romantic relationship of two sisters, both modern, independent, free-spirited women, in the post-World War I era of England. It is a continuation of the earlier novel *The Rainbow,* which chronicles three generations of a family from the 1960s up to the years preceding World War I.

The novel *A Passage to India* (1924) is Forster's masterpiece, in which a young girl experiences the clash of cultures between the British and Indians in colonial India.

Abinger Harvest (1936) is a collection of about fifty essays by Forster that originally appeared between 1919 and 1935. As in the later collection *Two Cheers for Democracy,* it includes biographical sketches of other writers, critical discussion of literature, and articulations of his political views as a liberal humanist. This collection includes "Notes on the English Character," one of his best known essays.

Two Cheers for Democracy (1951) is a collection of essays by Forster that, like the collection *Abinger Harvest,* includes biographical sketches of other writers, critical discussion of literature, reviews, and articulations of his liberal humanist political stance. It includes "What I Believe," one of his best known essays.

Maurice (1971), a novel finished by Forster in 1914, was published for the first time after Forster's death. It concerns a young man discovering his homosexuality and is generally believed to be autobiographical.

E. M. Forster: A Biography (1994), by Nicola Beauman, is one of several recent biographies of Forster.

Further Study

Bakshi, Parminder Kaur, *Distant Desire: Homoerotic Codes and the Subversion of the English Novel in E. M. Forster's Fiction,* P. Lang, 1995.

This is a critical discussion of the homoerotic elements of Forster's novels.

Clarke, Peter, *Hope and Glory: Britain, 1900-1990,* Penguin, 1996.

Clarke's book is a history of England in the twentieth century.

Ferguson, Niall, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I,* Basic Books, 1999.

This social-historical history of World War I, in which Forster served, had a profound affect on the post-War literature of his generation.

Lago, Mary, *E. M. Forster: A Literary Life,* St. Martin's Press, 1995.

This biography of Forster focuses on the development of his literary career.

Lago, Mary, and P. N. Furbank, eds., *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster,* 2 Vols., Harvard University Press, 1983,1985.

This two-volume selection of Forster's correspondence includes the years 1879-1920 in Volume 1, and the years 1921 to the time of his death in 1970 in Volume 2.

Moynahan, Brian, Annabel Merullo, and Sarah Jackson, *The British Century: A Photographic History of the Last Hundred Years,* Random House, 1997.

This work presents a history of Forster's native Britain in the twentieth century through documentary photographs and text.

Naylor, Gillian, ed., *Bloomsbury: Its Artists, Authors, and Designers,* Little Brown, 1990.

This history of the Bloomsbury literary and intellectual salon in London, in which Forster was a participant, discusses key figures in the Bloomsbury Group.

Paterson, John, *Edwardians: London Life and Letters,1901-1914,* I. R. Dee, 1996.

This is a history of life, society, and culture during the reign of King Edward, during which era Forster was an active participant in the literary culture of London and in which many of his novels take place.

Pugh, Martin, *Britain Since 1789: A Concise History,* St.Martin's Press, 1999.

This work is a broad-view history of Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, during which Forster lived and wrote.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NCfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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