Chapter One

Introduction

Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) has been perhaps one of the most prolific and versatile among Victorian novelists. He has to his credit 47 novels, an autobiography, numerous short stories, essays and plays. Throughout his career, his reputation went through ups and downs. Trollope’s literary career began with the Irish novel, *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* in 1847.

Yet it was not until 1855, with the appearance of his fourth novel, *The Warden* that Trollope established the material and style for which he became known. With the arrival of Henry James on English literary scene, Trollope’s reputation took a downward curve. As Elise B. Michie observes, one can hardly imagine two more antithetical figures. She calls Trollope and James an Odd Couple: one apparently careless about his art, the other fastidious, one perceived as vulgar, and the other as morbidly sensitive to vulgarity.¹
The achievement of Joseph Conrad, the seminal essay “The Modern Fiction” by Virginia Woolf and the subsequent rise of the stream-of-consciousness novel— all swearing by Jamesian artistic self-consciousness – did have a negative impact on Trollope’s reputation as a novelist. His reluctance to “theorize” about his craft, his nonchalance about the artistic principles governing his art gave rise to a view that clubbed him with Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett whom Virginia Woolf had denounced as “Materialist”. With the stream-of-consciousness novel reaching its cul-de-sac with Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, English fiction returned to the traditional ways of writing a novel, albeit having learnt a lesson or two from the psychological experiment.

What was realized was that mere artistic self consciousness was not enough for a novelist; what he basically needs is to tell his story well. This is precisely what E.M. Forster in his *Aspects of the Novel* had hinted at. To the question what does a novel do his rueful answer was_ a novel tells you a story, dear. The sadness in the tone is there for Forster would not want the novel to be seen as mere entertainment but then, as he realizes, the form of novel is such that whatever else he may do, the novelist must tell a good story.
The importance of the story as an indispensable aspect of the novel being reinstated, it was but natural that Trollope’s stock should go up for he has always being seen as a fascinating weaver of tales.

Now his work is seen as among the best produced in the nineteenth century, and his fiction is frequently compared to that of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, William Makepiece Thackeray and George Eliot.

The present study in part a result of this reawakened interest in Trollope’s work in particular and the Victorian Age in general. As stated at the outset, his novelistic output is tremendous.

No study of Trollope can undertake to examine all of his 47 novels, if it wants to be feasible. In other words, any study of Trollope’s novelistic art has to be selective in the very nature of things. For any researcher, the usual options of chronological or thematic study are open. One may for instance divide the works as early, middle and late novels are one may group these novels under different thematic rubrics. Indeed, many late 20th century critics focus their attention on the quality of Trollope’s early Irish novels, others concentrate on his political novels known as Palliser series. Recently, his lengthy novel The Way We Live Now (1874-75) has caught the attention of critics, similarly Trollope’s treatment of women and gender issue in his fiction has become a favorite subject of study.
The present study, however, is about the most popular set of his novel known as **Barseshire Chronicles**. The group comprises six novels;

1- *The Warden* 2- *Barchester Towers* 3- *Dr Thorne* 4- *Framley Parsonage* 5- *The Small House at Allington* 6- *The Last Chronicle of Barset*. The primary aim of the study to examine Trollope’s novelistic art as reflected in **Barsetshire Chronicle**.

The study expects to show that Henry James may be said to have misunderstood the literary situation and the British view of fiction of his time. Because of his undoubted theoretical sophistication his view influenced modernist novelists like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. And hence the equation of artistic fiction with Jamesian aesthetics. On hindsight this seems to be unfortunate because all those novelists who were writing in a different vein from that of James were dismissed as ‘materialists’ as Virginia Woolf called Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett. All these were seen as having no art at all and as being casual vendors of fiction which unfortunately was the fate of Anthony Trollope.

It would be in the fitness of things to bring out Jamesian view of fiction and its limitations which become obvious when seen against the British view of fiction ideally expressed in E.M Foster’s *Aspects of the Novel*. 
Perhaps after the Epic Theory of the novel by Henry Fielding in the 18th century, the art of fiction has not been discussed with that degree of artistic self-consciousness as we find in the late Victorian era and the early decades of 20th century. The credit for making this popular form so discutable must go to the American, Henry James. Alongside his theoretical formulations, we get Conrad’s credo as an artist in his celebrated ‘preface’ to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), Virginia Woolf’s seminal essay ‘The Modern Fiction’(1916), D. H. Lawrence’s famous essays like ‘Why the Novel matters’ and ‘Morality and the Novel’ and E. M. Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel.* (1925).

This is only a random selection and does not take into account Trollope and H. G. Wells’s protracted correspondence and exchange of views with James on the subject of the art of the novel. But even such a selection will serve to highlight how in those days the major practitioners of the form — for all the names mentioned were that — were preoccupied with making their theoretical considerations explicit.

This is rather unusual in the history of the English Novel. After Fielding we hardly find Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and Hardy waxing eloquent on their theory of the form. It is not that they had no ‘theory’ but they chose not to be explicit
about it and went about their job of writing novels quietly. And as history is our witness, what a fine job they made! Their artistic success and, at the same time, their lack of theoretical explicitness puzzled James who had come to England to carve a niche for himself in the world of letters. The pronouncements of novelists like Trollope who assured his readers that he could give his tale any turn they wanted simply horrified James, the stickler for artistic integrity of a work and stung him into polemics.

The very earnestness of the Americans’ essays forced the contemporaries like Wells to spell out their assumptions about novel writing and inspired the new generation of English novelists to take a look at the theoretical reticence which was beginning to be seen almost as a national characteristic. Perhaps that may explain the spate of essays dealing with the art and form of the novel. Henry James’s essay ‘The Art of Fiction’ was published in Longman’s Magazine (September 1884) and reprinted in his Partial Portraits (1888).

The essay was James’s reaction to Walter Besant’s lecture-pamphlet published under the same title a year before. Its nature, therefore, is, quite expectedly, highly polemical, and the tone equally pontifical. Taking up the organic unity of a novel or, for that matter, any work of art as his point of attack, James snipes at the theoretical naiveté of English novelists and critics and at their cavalier attitude to their art.
The theoretical naiveté is something that passes under the name of British solid common-sense. James questions those very commonsensical assumptions underlying their views on the art of fiction. For instance, he fails to understand what he calls the ‘apologetic’ attitude of British novelists. On the one hand they claim their writing to be ‘realistic’ and on the other they do not tire of reminding their readers that after all what they are writing is ‘fiction’.

Such an apologetic attitude is not found on the Continent. If the novel is a realistic mode of writing, it is, in James’s eyes, hardly distinguishable from history. As he says in *Partial Portraits*,

“*It is impossible to imagine what a novelist takes himself to be unless he regards himself as an historian and his narrative as history. It is only as an historian that he has the smallest *locus standi*. As a narrator of fictitious events he is nowhere…”*3

He wonders whether Gibbon and Macaulay would have been ever apologetic about their writing! James finds the British attitude to the art of fiction not merely apologetic but at times even cavalier. And here Anthony Trollope with his frequent authorial intrusions is his *bete noir*. He cites an example from Trollope’s best known novel.
Had she given way and sobbed aloud, as in such cases a woman should do, he would have melted at once, implored her pardon, perhaps knelt at her feet and declared his love. Everything would have been explained, and Eleanor would have gone back to Barchester with a contented mind-- But then where would have been my novel? She did not cry and Mr. Arabian did not melt.\(^4\)

James regards this as an implicit admission by Trollope that he can give his narrative any turn the reader may like best. He is greatly annoyed by ‘these little slaps at credulity’\(^5\) for they not only destroy the whole artistic illusion but blow up the very concept of integrity of a work of art. Similarly, Besant’s remarks on the ‘story’ bring forth James’s ire. Understandably so taking umbrage at Besant’s comments, James points to the integrity of a work of art.

“I cannot see what is meant by talking as if there were a part of a novel which is the story and part of it which for mystical reason is not….the story…. represents the subject, the idea, the data of the novel,…”\(^6\)

With such a highly abstract notion of story, James takes up cudgels with ‘the writer in the Pall Mall’, who asserted that “the story is the thing.” He also takes up issue with Besant about what constitutes a story. According to James, even the states of consciousness of a ‘Bostonian nymph who
rejects an English duke for psychological reasons’ can be a matter of adventure and hence of story.

In 1925 E. M. Forster was invited to give a series of talks on the art of fiction in the Clark Lectures in Cambridge, which later on were turned into a book *Aspects of the Novel* which in its turn has now become a classic in the study of fiction. The informal tone may be due to the original form of lectures being retained. But despite the chattiness, Forster’s comments are by no means superficial and they show the much-maligned British common sense at its best.

His perceptive and subtle yet clear distinction between story and plot, between flat and round characters, between the autobiographical and omniscient point-of-view — a term he borrows ironically from Percy Lubbock an admirer of Henry James — have now become common currency in any discussion of the novel from. Now if anything stands out from these theoretical formulations by these three practitioners of the form, it is that it is one thing to theorize about the novel but quite another to write one.

This appears to be the case especially with Henry James in spite of — or is it because of? — his greater theoretical sophistication. When one
looks at their fictional achievements, James’s performance does not compare at all well with that of Lawrence and Forster. The reasons — and there are many — are not far to seek.

Firstly, the difference between the theoretical musings of Lawrence and Forster on the one hand and the theorization of James on the other is that the English novelists spoke explicitly about theory at the end of their novelistic career whereas the American theorized while he wrote, if not before. Lawrence’s essay was published posthumously in 1936 and by 1925 Forster had written his last novel *A Passage to India*. Consequently, with Lawrence and Forster theory emerges out of their practice while with James the picture is exactly the opposite. F. R. Leavis pointed out the deleterious effect James’s obsession with theory had on his novels, which show a remarkable atrophy of sensibility and divorce from the roots of life.\(^8\)

Even an admirer of James like Dorothea Krook begins her study by citing a none too flattering, almost a left-handed compliment by T. S. Eliot according to whom Henry James is a difficult writer for English readers because he is an American, for Americans because he deals with European subjects and for Europeans because he writes in English!\(^9\) The reference to Eliot is helpful for several reasons. In the first place, it tells the reasons for
James’s universal obscurity and secondly and far more importantly it serves to bring out the difference between the literary careers of these two Americans. T. S. Eliot came to England following the footsteps of his senior fellow countryman to make his name in the literary world. Both rebelled against the literary practice of their time. But whereas Eliot located his rebellion within the framework of the English poetic tradition, James did not ally himself to any English novelistic predecessor. The result was that James always remained an alienated American whereas Eliot became the denizen of both the literary hemispheres one by birth and the other by ‘naturalization’.

Further, his reformist earnestness seems to have misguided James in coping with the bantering tone of the British novelists whenever they chose to talk about their craft. For instance, what James took to be their ‘apologetic’ attitude was actually a sound sense of what they were doing when they wrote novels. To say that after all what they were writing was but a fiction and not history was not being ‘apologetic’ but merely asserting the true nature of their work despite the pretence of realism. And that art can never be ‘true’ in the sense history was conclusively shown by Laurence Sterne in his hilarious *Tristram Shandy*. Surprisingly James seldom speaks about that 18th century predecessor. In narrating his myriad
problems in beginning the account of his life according to Aristotle’s concept of the ‘beginning’ and the Horatian injunction of starting the work *ab ovo*, Sterne had brilliantly underscored the essential fictionality of all fiction. What the contemporaries of James like Trollope were doing was merely to elaborate on that in their own way. To draw attention to this essential fictionality, to break the illusion of reality later on became the credo of the Brechtian Epic Theatre and also a salient feature of the self-reflexive postmodernist fiction.

The frequent reminder that they were writing fiction might have saved the British novelists from confusing fiction with history. From the earlier quotation it will be clear that James’s theory of fiction contains precisely this confusion.

Long back in time Aristotle in the ninth chapter of his *Poetics* had clearly distinguished between ‘poetry’ and history. The latter narrates events as they have *actually* occurred and the former as they may occur in accordance with the laws of necessity (*ananke*) and probability (*eikos*). The identification of the novel with history by James, who carried a notebook in his pocket to record material for his novels, shows the closing of the American’s mind to the Classical wisdom and sanity.
James seems to misread completely Trollope’s novelistic strategy in the latter’s authorial intrusions. It is possible to argue that far from destroying the pretence of realism and the aesthetic integrity, they display Trollope’s confidence in himself as an author. Indeed Wayne Booth in his comments on the earlier quoted passage from *Barchester Towers* implies this much when he talks of the inviolability of Eleanor’s character and the relationship that Trollope has managed to establish with his readers.¹⁰ That James completely missed the complexities in Trollope’s creation of illusion due to his view of the novel as history is brought out by Kincaid, when he says,

“The venerable analogy that James here ignores and tries to dismiss to the realm of irresponsibility is provided by the image of artist as maker.”¹¹

If authorial intrusions in Trollope are a sign of his casual attitude, what is one to make of James’s own in his novels? For instance, in *The Portrait of a Lady*,

‘Smile not; however, I venture to repeat, at this simple, young woman from Albany who debated whether she should accept an English peer before he had offered himself …’¹²
In what way is James’s intrusion different from that of Trollope unless the latter one’s were more candid in acknowledging the fact of fictionality?

It is in James’s pontification with Besant over the nature of the story that he appears most vulnerable both as a theorist of fiction and as a novelist despite his comparative relativism in attitude seen in ‘Art of Fiction’. Stung by Besant’s derisive comments on the ‘romance’ of a Bostonian nymph who rejects an English duke — an obvious reference to *The Portrait of a Lady* — James harangues him over the story aspect of the novel and querulously asks as to what constitutes a story, and what exactly is meant by ‘adventure’. Even the stages of psychological development can form a story and the way in which a girl looks at you across the table can be an ‘adventure’. Both these terms are thus relative, according to James.

Indeed these terms are relative. But thanks to the enlightened critical opinion and the popular taste of generations of readers, the conceptual contours of ‘story’ are not as fuzzy as James tries to make them. Forster defines story as a chain of events arranged in sequence of time and plot as events arranged in terms of causality.
The ‘events’ mentioned by James can become story depending upon the skill of the novelist who can take this apparent inaction to the level of action. For as once again Aristotle points out, ‘men in action’ are the objects of artistic imitation. And action with Aristotle is a technical term implying not physical activity but a process of change in fortune; the protagonist goes from happiness to misery and *vice versa*. The story and the plot are the embodiment of that action. Now James or for that matter any novelist is free to show how a narrative of the mental stages a Bostonian nymph passes through reflects that process of change or how the way a girl look at you across the table brings out a change in your fortune one way or the other.

Any novel becomes ‘interesting’ or, shall we say, ‘readable’ by the way its story describes that process of change from one state to another. Forster regrets that the story is totally and only concerned with ‘life by clock-time’ for the novel can do and often does many other ‘valuable’ things. But unfortunately those valuable things cannot go to make a novel by themselves. And hence Forster’s rather rueful reply to the question what does a novel do: the novel tells you a story, dear!
A look at the history of the stream of consciousness novel — largely a product of the Jamesian aesthetic — will bring out the inevitability of the story aspect. Even these novels while rejecting a well-made plot had to have a story no matter how threadbare of a family visit to the lighthouse, or the hosting of a garden party or the meeting of spiritual father and son in their metropolitan peregrinations. It will explain why the experiment was a short-lived affair and also why writers like Virginia Woolf and Faulkner did not write all their novels in that mode. No doubt, the experiment did give a new dimension to the art writing novels but it did not replace the traditional mode of plot and story. In fact, a contemporary novelist like Muriel Spark wishes she would like to write novels like H. G. Wells!  

The lesson to be learnt here by any theorist of fiction is not to discount story from his considerations. It may be an evil but it is a necessary one. And the novelist in his turn has to be a good story-teller. If he tells his story well, everything else he crams into it will be forgiven to him. Unfortunately, James both as theorist and practitioner of fiction forgot that. H. G. Wells’ comments to him after reading the bulky *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of Dove* are appropriately chastening. He says that the impression he got of James after wading through those tomes was that of a mighty hippo trapped in a small cave and trying to pick up a small pea on the floor!  

On the other hand, the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, bulkier than James’s, which he dismissed as ‘loose baggy monsters’ continue to be masterpieces of world-fiction precisely, because they do their primary job of story-telling so well. In his interview with the *Time* magazine, Alexandre Solzhenitsyn, who regarded himself as the inheritor of the 19th century tradition of Russian fiction, as opposed to the Soviet fiction of the Bolshevik Era, was asked as to what he thought of Henry James’s comment on the novels of the Russian masters. His was a slap of a riposte when he said that in Russia novel writing is taken seriously, that novelists are often looked upon as interpreters of life, indeed as prophets and, hence, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky talk responsibly about life and do not indulge in mere verbal games!\(^\text{15}\)

It is only when the importance of good story telling is realized that one begins to realize that Anthony Trollope the supreme story teller has an art of his own and that too of a most viable kind. It will be the concern of the subsequent chapters to bring out this art as reflected in his most popular group of novels *The Barsetshire Chronicles*. 
Notes & References


5. Henry James, *Partial Portraits* 116-17

6. Ibid, 120


9. Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge; 1962) 1


13. As reported by David Lodge, in The Art of Fiction, (London, Seckur & Warbug, 1992), 65

14. Nicholas Delbanco, *Group Portrait* (London; Faber and Faber, 1982) 145