CHAPTER V

CRITICISM OF THE NOVEL
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Eliot’s criticism of novels needs a separate section for a detailed discussion. It has not been systematically explored, partly for the reason that Eliot himself speaks embarrasedly of his ability to write criticism of novels and further informs us that he is not a novel-reader. Except for one or two essays (“Wilkie Collins and Dickens” in Selected Essays and two essays on Henry James included in The Question of Henry James, edited by F.W. Dupee, and some pages on D. H. Lawrence and Thomas Hardy in After Strange Gods), almost all the Criticism of different novels and novelists remains uncollected and is buried in journals and periodicals like The Athenaeum, The Dial, Horizon and The Hudson Review. It is to be noted further that Eliot’s criticism of novels is mostly in the form of reviews. But this fact does not diminish the importance of these reviews as criticism and we know that some of the brilliant critical essays in Selected Essays, the Sacred Wood and on Poetry and Poets were originally reviews.

Eliot has reviewed major novelists—English, French, American and Russian. He has dwelt upon Henry James, Hawthorne, Mark Twain, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Collins and Dickens, Beyle and Balzac, Dostoevsky and Turgenev, Virginia Woolf, Lawrence and Hardy. In addition, Eliot has incidentally commented on Joseph Conrad and Flaubert too. From Eliot’s likes and dislikes, praise and
appreciation, some unifying principles about the requisites of
the novel do emerge. Dr. Leavis's charge that "Eliot has never
shown any intelligence about prose fiction" does not seem
quite fair.

What Eliot finds in the analysis of various novels is of
permanent importance and of general interest to us. In his
estss on Henry James, he insists on the pattern in the novel as
well as on the integrity of the artist and the presentation of his
vision. In Hawthorne, he finds firmness, the true coldness, the
hard coldness of the genuine artist. He regards *Ulysses* as the
most important expression which the present age has found.
This book is, he seriously believes, a step towards making the
modern world possible for art. Eliot finds in *Ulysses* the
mythical method instead of the narrative method which is useful
and suggestive for Eliot's own poetry and for the artist of the
twentieth century in general. In Balzac, Eliot says, the fantastic
element is of another sort; it is not an extension of reality; it is
an atmosphere thrown upon reality direct from the personality
of the writer. And Stendhal and Dostoevsky are superior to
Balzac in the sense that they "strip the world". Stendhal's
scenes and some of his phrases have the sharpness of a razor's
edge, like cutting one's own throat. The atmosphere of Balzac is
the highest possible development of the atmosphere of Mrs.
Radcliff. Eliot says that Mark Twain, at least in *Huckleberry
Funn*, has discovered a new way of writing, valid not for only
himself but for others. He places him, in this respect, with
Dryden and Swift, as one of those writers who have brought
their language up-to-date and have "purified the dialect of the tribe". In the work of Mr. Lewis, he finds the though of the modern and the energy of the cave man. Besides eccentricity of thought and feeling, sexual morbidity, lack of social and religious training. Eliot finds in D.H. Lawrence an insensibility to ordinary social morality. Thomas Hardy, to Eliot, is a case of extreme emotionalism, symptom of decadence, and an interesting example of a personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment. Turgenev used Russian material naturally, with the simplicity of a genius turning to what his feelings knew best. In the obituary on Virginia Woolf, Eliot points out "the imaginative genius and the sense of style", her qualities of personal charm and distinction, of kindliness and wit, and of curiosity about human beings.

Eliot's points of praise regarding Henry James are of central significance for serious readers of the novel. Eliot points out that great novelists and poets have a pattern in their art. He has obviously been influenced by James, as the word "pattern" given currency by James himself recurs in Eliot's critical work. "Pattern" in a novel stands for beauty, unity, point of view, consistency, and a developing, maturing personality in the novelist. Eliot writes:

*The other part of the pattern is to be found in the work of ...... some of the greatest novelists, certainly of George Eliot, and of Henry James....*

While introducing *The Wheel of Fire*, Eliot says that the greatest prose like the greatest poetry has a double ness, and
considers Henry James "on less genuine a pattern marks than Dante." Eliot's reviews of novels and novelists are usually general interpretation rather than detailed, proper criticism. Alan Holder writes in an article that readers are struck by the frequency with which the name of Henry James gets into Eliot's criticism. In "Letter d' Angleterre" (1923) in La Nouvelle Revue Française, Eliot names F.H. Bradley, Henry James "the most intelligent man of his generation".

To insist on the pattern in a novel is to insist on the structural and textural design of it. In other words, it emphasizes the fact that a novel is a tissue or a living organism, in which characters, dialogue, story, rhythm or action are simply constituents of or contributory to the pattern or the unity of impression. The ideal of pattern in a novel points to the aesthetic beauty, the artistic perfection, the wholeness, completeness and roundness of art. E.M. Forster dwells upon pattern:

*We can say only (so far) that pattern is an aesthetic aspect on the novel....it draws most of its nourishment from the plot....It springs mainly from the plot, accompanies it like a light in the clouds. Beauty is sometimes the shape of the book as a whole, the unity and our examination would be easier if it was always this.......

And later

*The longer James worked the more convinced he grew that a novel should be a whole - not necessarily geometric like The Ambassadors, but it should accrete round a single
topic, situation, gesture, which should occupy the characters and provide a plot, and should also fasten upon the novel on the outside, catch its scattered statements in a net, make them cohere.....A pattern must emerge and anything that emerges not from the pattern must be pruned off as wanton distraction.....

Eliot says that the general scheme in the work of Henry James is not of one character or a group of characters in a plot or merely in a crowd. The focus is situation, a relation, an atmosphere, to which the characters pay tribute, but being allowed to give only what the writer wants. Eliot adds that, which character, in the sense in which the portrayal of character is usually expected in the English novel James had no concern. Had James been a better hand at character, he would have been a coarser hand altogether and would have missed the sensibility to create the peculiar data of impression. Eliot notes that the books of Henry James form a complete whole. One must read all of them, for one must grasp, if anything, both the unity and the progression, the gradual development and the identity of spirit. Professor L.C. Knights too in his preface to Explorations writes about “the figure in the carper” of James’s work. A critic’s concern with the character of a novel is a more limited concern than that with the pattern. To stress, in a conventional way, character or plot or any of the other abstractions that can be made, is to deny and neglect the total response.
L.C. Knights in his essay "How Many Children had Lady Macbeth" says⁸ that the assumption that it is the main business of a writer other than the lyric poet to create characters is not, of course, confined to criticism of Shakespeare: it long ago invaded criticism of the novel. He continues in the same essay that the mass of Shakespeare criticism does not give a hint that character—like plot, rhythm, construction and all our other critical counters—is merely an abstraction from, the total response in the mind of the reader or spectator brought into being by written or spoken words. And his applies equally to the novel or any form of art that uses language as its medium Dr. C.H. Rickwood in "A Note on Fiction", writes admirably regarding the novel:

*The form of novel only exists as a balance of response on the part of the reader. Hence, schematic plot is a construction of the reader's that corresponds to an aspect of the response and stand in merely diagrammatic relation to the source. Only as precipitated from the memory are plot or character tangible.....⁹*

Walter Allen in his introduction to *The English Novel*¹⁰ says that a novel is a totality and of this totality characterization is only a part; yet it is plainly an essential one and the first in order of importance. Without it the most profound apprehensions of man's fate count for nothing. Only through character, Allen adds, can the novelist's apprehension of man's fate be uttered at all.
We have the impression from Eliot's essays on Henry James that a novel is great not only by the beauty and perfection of its style but by the possession and communication of an ideal, a point of view or a vision. Eliot finds behind the greatness of Henry James's novels the imperative insistence of an ideal, a vision of an ideal society. He repudiates those who accord every praise to James's technique only:

*James has suffered the usual fate of those who, in England, have outspokenly insisted on the importance of technique. He has received the kind of praise usually accorded to some useless, ugly and ingenious piece of carving which has taken a very long time to make.*

*The example which Henry James offered us was not that of a style to imitate, but of an integrity so great, a vision so exacting that it was forced to the extreme of care and punctiliousness for exact expressions.*

That James's view of England, says Eliot, was romantic, is a small matter. James's romanticism implied on defect in observation of the things that he wanted to observe. It was not the romanticism of those who dream because they are too lazy or too fearful to face the facts; it issues rather from the imperative insistence of an ideal which tormented him. And yet, as Eliot says, no one in the end, has been more aware of the disparity between a possibility and a fact. James's last unfinished novels (*The Sense of the Post and The Ivory Tower*), at least, can hardly fail to prove this.
Some of Eliot's points of praise for Henry James are equally true of great art in genera. A mastery over and an escape from "Ideas", Eliot says, are "perhaps the last test of a superior intelligence". Eliot finds this quality in Henry James. James was a critic who "preyed not upon Ideas", but upon living beings. James did not provide us with "Ideas", but with another world of thought and feeling. The sharper intelligence or the finer sensibility of a great artist like the Shakespeare of Lear has no prepossessions: it simply explores the utmost extent of human possibility, the region of "nothingness", the no man's-land. It fears nothing, it blinkers nothing; it brings to us the fact, however terrible it is.

Eliot praises Henry James for this escape from "Ideas"; by this Eliot seems to have meant that the novelist's mind did not permit any prior formulation about experience to blind it to experience itself, that it did not attempt to arrive at any final generalization but remained alert to life's dialectical possibilities. In his essay "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Senecia", Eliot is skeptical of "thinking", though", "Ideas" or "philosophy" in art. As he says, the poet who thinks is merely the poet who can express the emotional equivalent of thought, but the poet is not necessarily interested in thought itself. In the same vein he writes later in the same essay:

*I would suggest that none of the plays of Shakespeare has a meaning, although it would be equally false to say that a play of Shakespeare is meaningless. All great poetry gives the illusion of a view of life.*

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A great novel like any great piece of art does not present to us “Ideas”; it rather communicates a vision, a life and a world to us. “Ideas” in great art cannot exist in crude form; they can justify themselves in art only after being pulsated with sensation or feeling or the passionate capacity or what Eliot calls “sensuous apprehension” of the artist. Here we mark the clear-cut impact and imprint of F.H. Bradley. The “immediate experience” of F.H. Bradley points to the ideal state of equilibrium when thought and feeling or intellect and sensation interpenetrate or remain unified or closest to each other. Ideas in their raw form in art are like the dead lumber over it, blunting its sharper edge. They need to be in immediate contact with the senses, as we find in the “Immediate Experience”. This is manifest from what Eliot writes on Henry James:

In England ideas run wild and pasture on the emotions instead of thinking with feeling (a very different thing) we corrupt our feeling with ideas; we produce the political, the emotional idea, evading sensation and thought. George Meredith (the disciple of Carlyle) was fertile in “idea”; his epigrams are a facile substitute for observation and inference. Mr. Chesterton’s brain swarms with ideas.....James in his novels is like the best French critics in maintaining a viewpoint, a viewpoint untouched by the parasitic idea.15

James is a profound believer in the novel as a work of art and is, therefore, a confirmed opponent of any didacticism in
fiction. James, nevertheless, infused into his work an important body of belief: the need for individual freedom and a moral vision, to be achieved through insight and awareness. "The conception of a certain young lady affronting her destiny"—that is how Henry James described the subject of The Portrait of a Lady.

Eliot regards novels, as he himself says, from the viewpoint of a poet. In other words, he examines them in the light of the perceptions gained in the composition of his own poetry. Eliot's earliest published reference to James occurs in a review he wrote while an undergraduate at Harvard. Speaking of Huneker's Egoists Eliot said that Huneker possessed a style which "shares with that of Mr. Henry James.....what I should call a conversational quality; not conversational in admitting the slip-shod and madadroit or a meager vocabulary, but by a certain informality, abandoning all the ordinary rhetorical hoaxes for securing attention."  

Eliot again connects James with the conversational style saying:

The spoken and the written language must not be too near together as they must not be too far apart. Henry James's later style, for instance, is not exactly a conventional style.....There is, however, an essential connection between the written and the spoken word, though it is not to be produced by aiming at a conversational style in writing or a periodic style in speech: I have found this intimate, though indefinable connection between the speech and
writing of every writer whom I have known personally who
was a great writer....

How highly Eliot regards Henry James is suggested by his
having once placed that novelist's name along with those of
Dante and Shakespeare. Eliot compares James with
Dostoevsky:

*I am inclined to think that the spirit of James's so much
less violent, with so much more reasonableness and so
much more resignation than that of the Russian, is no less
profound, and is more useful, more applicable, for our
future.*

Eliot extends his praise to Hawthorne and Henry James
almost in an equal degree. He writes in "The Hawthorne
Aspect" that Hawthorne was deeply sensitive to the
situation; that he grasped character though the relation of two
or more persons to each other, and this is what no one less,
except James, has done. He finds Hawthorne a finer stylist and
a greater explorer of the soul than Mark Twain. He agrees
with Henry James's opinion about Hawthorne: "The fine thing
in Hawthorne is that he cared for the deeper psychology...."

This definition, Eliot says, separated the two novelists
(Henry James and Hawthorne) at once from their English
contemporaries; Neither Dickens not Thackeray had the
smallest notion of the deeper psychology. George Eliot had a
kind of heavy intellect for it.

Deeper psychology in the sense of inner, spiritual
exploration, mental and emotional ramifications of the kind
found in James and Hawthorne, is of course missing in most British novelists. It has no trace in Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells, Galsworthy or Kipling. These novelists are, as Virginia Woolf terms them, "materialists".

Eliot says that Hawthorne and James have a kind of sense, a receptive medium, which is not of sight. It is not that they fail to make us see, so far as necessary, but sight is not the essential sense. They perceive by antennae; and a deeper psychology is present in them.

Eliot in his review called "American Literature" finds in Hawthorne both qualities — moral vision and the firmness, the true coldness, the hard coldness of the genuine artist. He seems to insist that in Hawthorne the degree of realism does not diminish owing to his observation of the moral life. The moral life in Hawthorne is to understood in a wider sense, in terms of a deeper significance of human consciousness. He agrees with Professor Erskine's view that Hawthorne is no mystic and his method has no room for optimism and for prepossession of any kind. Eliot says that Hawthorne is really the questioner the detached observer. He points not further that the observation of the moral life in The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables and even in some of the tales and sketches has solidity, and permanence, the permanence of art. The work of Hawthorne is truly a criticism—true because of the fidelity of the artist and not merely because of the transcendental morality and of the world which Hawthorne Knew. It is a criticism as Henry Janies's work is criticism if
the America of his times, and as the work of Turgenev and Flaubert is a criticism of the Russia and the France of theirs. Thus, Eliot finds in Hawthorne capacity for enquiry, detached observation, and artistic integrity backed by a moral vision and the deeper psychology. Henry James and Hawthorne are almost the ideal novelists for Eliot.

In his essay “American Literature and the American Language” Eliot praises Mark Twain for discovering a new way of writing, valid not only for himself but for others. He places him, with Dryden and swift, as one of those writers who brought their language up-to-date and thus, purified the dialect of the tribe. He appreciates *Huckberry Finn* form the viewpoint of language only, though this novel deserves to be praised form other angles too. Mr. Henry Nash Smith in his introduction to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*22 says that *Huckberry Finn* is, for all its imperfections, a great book, not only because of worked a revolution in American literary prose but because of what it is says against stupid conformity and slavery of the individual.

In his introduction to Nightwood by Djuna Barbes, Eliot says that it is a book of creative order which it is an impertinence to introduce. What is important in this novel is not one or two characters, one scene or one event, but the total, complete meaning, the pattern that emerges from the whole of the book. Nightwood is not just a collection of individual portraits, its character are all knotted together by what we call Chance or Destiny. It is the whole pattern formed
by the characters, rather than any individual constituent, that
draws our interest. We come to know those characters through
their effect on one another, and by what they say to one
another about the others. Eliot adds:

*A prose that is altogether alive demands something of the
reader that the ordinary novel-reader is not prepared to
give. To say that Nightwood will appeal primarily to
readers of poetry does not mean that it is not a novel: but
that it is so good a novel that only sensibilities trained on
poetry can wholly appreciate it. Miss Barnes’s prose has
prose rhythm that is prose style, and the musical pattern
which is not that of verse. This prose rhythm may be more
or less complex or less complex or elaborate according to
the purposes of the writers; but whether simple or complex,
it is what raises the matter to be communicated to first
intensity.*

Nightwood is a work of true creative imagination and
not a philosophical treatise. Eliot finds, in the novel, a great
achievement of style, beauty of phrasing, brilliance of wit and
characterization, and a quality of horror and doom very nearly
related to Elizabethan tragedy. He says that the book is not a
psychopathic study. The miseries that people suffer through
their particular abnormalities are visible on the surface, but the
deeper design in abnormalities are visible on the surface, but
the deeper design in the book is that of human misery and
bondage which is universal.
Dr. F. R. Leavis writes critically of Eliot's enthusiastic review of Djuna Barnes's Nightwood:

*I have in mind writers in whom Eliot has expressed an interest in strongly favorable terms: Djuna Barnes of Nightwood, Henry Miller, Lawrence Durrell of The Black Book. In these writers – at any rate in the last two (and the first seems to me insignificant) – the spirit of what we are offered affects me as being essentially a desire, in Laurentian phrases, to "do dirt". In this review entitled “Beyle and Balzac” Eliot says that the great novelists make a patient analysis of human motives and emotions and dispense with atmosphere. This quality is to be found in Beyle, Flaubert and Dostoievsky rather than in Balzac. Apparently Beyle and Balzac both have imagination but the imagination in Balzac is much inferior to the formers. Imagination is Balzac coats and glosses over reality rather than brings light on it or peels off its appearances. The aura of Balzac has not a “clear, bright centre”, it may rightly be called “mystical” but more truly “occult”. In the greatest artist, says Eliot, imagination is a very different faculty form Balzac’s: it becomes a fine, delicate tool for operation on the sensible world. Stendhal’s scenes, and some of his phrases, read like cutting one’s own throat; they are a terrible humiliation to read, in the understanding of human feelings and human illusions of feeling that they force upon the reader.*
This exposure explains a great part of the superiority of Beyle and Flaubert over Balzac. Balzac, relying upon atmosphere, is capable of evading an issue, of satisfying himself with a movement or a word. Beyle and Flaubert, Eliot says, “strip the world” and they are men of far more than common intensity of feeling, of passion.

“Stendhal and Flaubert”, says Eliot, “suggest unmistakably the awful separation between potential passion and any actualization possible in life. They indicate also the indestructible barriers between one human being and another”.

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*It was this intensity, precisely and consequent discontent with the inevitable inadequacy of actual living to the passionate capacity, which drove them to art and analysis. This surface of existence coagulate into lumps, which look like important simple feelings, which are identified by names as feelings which the patient analyst disintegrates into more complex or trifling, but ultimately, if he goes far enough, into various cancellations of something again simple, terrible and unknown.*

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The aura of Balzac “sputters and goes out” when we compare Balzac’s imagination with that of Dostoevsky. The imagination in Dostoevsky, as Eliot rightly points out, is utterly different, and put to utterly different uses. If we examine, some of Dostoevsky’s most – successful, most imaginative flights, we find them to be projection,
continuations of the actual, the observed. In the final scene of The Idiot, and in the interview of Ivan Karamazov with the devil, Dostoevsky’s point of departure is always a human brain in a human environment, and the aura is simply the continuation of the quotidian experience of the brain into seldom explored extremities of torture. But as most people are too unconscious of their own sufferings to suffer much, this continuation appears fantastic. Dostoevsky begins with the real world, as Beyle does; he pursues reality farther only in a certain direction. Balzac’s imagination is not actually like a sharp-edged instrument to sink through the surface to the farthest and deepest reality of human life and the world. It is a phantasm that brings the forefront of reality more in shadow and darkness, cloak or cover. In Balzac, the fantastic element is of another sort. It is not an extension of reality, it is an atmosphere thrown upon reality direct from the personality of the writer. We cannot look at it, as we can look at anything in Dostoevsky. We ask ourselves in relation to what real, solid object the atmosphere of Balzac has meaning, the incantation is exposed to be powerless. The atmosphere of Balzac is the highest possible development of the atmosphere of Mrs. Radcliff. In Dostoevsky Eliot finds “doubleness” and the “under-pattern” less manifest than the theatrical:

*We sometimes feel, in following the words and behaviours of some of the characters of Dostoevsky, that they are living at once on the plane that we know and on some, other plane of reality from which we are*
shut out; their behaviour does not seem crazy, but rather in conformity with laws of some world that we cannot perceive. 27

Eliot comments on Turgenev 28 while reviewing Edward Garnett’s book on Turgenev. Turgenev, he says, is much more cosmopolitan than Goethe and is the least exploited of the Russian novelists. The novels of Turgenev compose a single work and one should study the whole of it. This insistence on the reading of the total work is typical of Eliot. He praises Edward Garnett’s book on Turgenev for the simple reason that it helps us to see his novels in relation to one another. Eliot says that the novels of Turgenev are one work in the sense that they are not a “series of scattered inspirations”.

Eliot says that Turgenev’s is not a position of popular appeal. He finds him essentially the artist and not the showman. Turgenev to him is one who used Russian material naturally, with the simplicity of genius turning to what its feelings know best; he recognized in practice, at least, that a writer’s art must be racial – which means, in plain words, that it must be based on the accumulated sensations of the first twenty-one years. Eliot praises Turgenev for his “insight into the universal sameness of men and women”, his grasp on the uniformity of human nature, and more for the perfect proportion, the vigilant but not the theoretic intelligence and the “austere art of omission”:
They (Turgenev’s personages) are never unreal or abstract, but simply the essential. I am not sure that the method of Turgenev, this perfect proportion, this vigilant but never theoretic intelligence, this austere art of omission – is not that which in the end proves most satisfying to the civilized mind. 29

Lord David Cecil also believes that it is the economical certainty of touch which gives Turgenev’s pictures the continuous significance of art. Eliot notes in Turgenev’s work not only this economy and proportion but also another important quality – an element of spirituality and a sense of the mystery of life. Eliot quotes approvingly Henry James’s words on Turgenev:

He carried about with him the air of feeling all the variety of life, of knowing strange and far-off things, of having a horizon in which the Parisian horizon easily lost itself....He was not all there, as the phrase is; he had something behind, in reserve. 30

Eliot makes some general points about fiction. He says in his essay “Collins and Dickens” that a good novel should possess both dramatic as well as melodramatic elements, for melodrama is perennial and the craving or it is perennial. In Modern times, terms like “high-brow fiction”, “thrillers” and “detective fiction” are used to distinguish melodrama from drama, but in the Golden Age of melodramatic fiction, says Eliot, there was no such distinction. The best novels were thrilling:
We cannot afford to forget that the first and not one of the least difficult – requirements of either prose or verse is that it should be interesting.\textsuperscript{31}

Eliot says the work of Wilkie Collins does not have the permanence of the greatest novels but one can learn something from it is “the art of interesting and exciting the reader”. In the realm of novels, the possibilities of melodrama must, from time to time, be re-explored. The conventional method of thrilling has become stereotyped. The resources of Collins are, in comparison, inexhaustible. Great art is essentially the refinement of popular art:

\textit{Collin’s novels suggest questions which no student of the art of fiction can afford to neglect...Henry James...in his own practice could be not only interesting, but had a very cunning mastery of the finer melodrama.}\textsuperscript{32}

Mr. Walter Allen has written similarly, almost as if inspired by Eliot:

The distinction between the entertainer and the novelist is sophistication. There have been greater entertainers in fiction who have not been great novelists, but there has never been a great novelist who was not first of all a great entertainer, for the end of the novel, like that of poetry, is delight, and total significance, however, profoundly serious, will go for nothing, will not indeed exist, unless the novel has primary and overriding value as entertainment. That it would
delight, whether at the most naïve and unreflecting level or as a "superior amusement", is the first ask of any novel. 33

A comparative study of the novels of Wilkie Collins and Dickens can do much to illuminate the question of the difference between the dramatic and the melodramatic in fiction. Eliot seems to feel that Dickens is more melodramatic than Collins and Collins more dramatic than Dickens. Dickens in Bleak House tends towards Collins, as Collins in The Woman in White does towards Dickens.

Eliot praises Dickens for characterization. He says that Dickens excelled in characters, in the creation of characters of greater intensity than even human being. Collins was not usually strong in the creation of characters; but he was a master of plot and situation. The characters of Collins miss the typical quality of Dickensian characters. They are painstakingly coherent and life-like. Compared to Dickens's they lack the kind of reality which is almost supernatural, which hardly seems to belong to the character by natural right, but seems rather to descend upon him by a kind of inspiration of grace. Eliot writes:

Dickens's figures belong to poetry, like figures of Dante or Shakespeare, in that a single phrase, either by them or about them, may be enough to set them wholly before us. 34

It is one of the important functions of a critic to revalue and rehabilitate the less know or the neglected writers in
literature, and Eliot has partly performed this function by reviewing some novels of Wyndham Lewis.

That Eliot is favourably disposed to writing on Wyndham Lewis shows the similarity of temperament and the attitude of mind: Eliot is a classicist, an eschewer of sentimentality and he can hardly adjust himself with the biological mysticism of D.H. Lawrence. Wyndham Lewis belongs to the robust ethos of the nineteen-twenties and is, like Eliot, tough, masculine, virile. Despite the long neglect by the conventional critics, the genius of Wyndham Lewis was hailed by such masters as Eliot, Joyce and Pound.

Eliot reviewed Tarr in 1918, saying that is a commonplace to compare Lewis to Dostoevsky. The method of Lewis, Eliot says, is, in fact, no more like that of Dostoevsky, taking Tarr as a whole, than it is like that of Flaubert. To compare Lewis’s mind is different and his aims are different.

In contrast to Dostoevsky, Lewis is impressively deliberate, even frigid. There is a peculiar intellectuality not akin to that of Flaubert. Intelligence, however, as Eliot says, is only a part of Lewis’s quality; it is united with a vigorous physical organism which interests itself directly in sensation for its own sake. The direct contact with the senses, the perfection of the world of immediate experience with its own scale of values, is like Dostoevsky, but there is always the suggestion of a purely intellectual curiosity in the senses. And there is another important quality – humour.
There can be no question of the importance of Tarr. But is only in part a novel: for the rest, Mr. Lewis is a magician who compels our interest in himself: he is the most fascinating personality of our time rather than a novelist. The artist, I believe, is more primitive, as well as more civilized, than his contemporaries, his experience is deeper than civilization, and he only uses the phenomena of civilization in expressing it. Primitive instincts and the acquired habits of ages are confounded in the ordinary man. In the work of Mr. Lewis, we recognize the thought of the modern and the energy of the caveman. 35

Eliot wrote a note on Monstre Gai by Wyndham Lewis, in The Hudson Review 36 in 1955. In his review of Tarr, he finds some similarity between Wyndham Lewis and Dostoevsky and, in his note on Mostre Gai, he says that Wyndham Lewis has something common with Henry James in the novelty of style. He regards him as a "distinguished living English novelist" and as the "great prose master of style" who can set "one's sluggish brain in motion".

Eliot points out that Monstre Gai is a sequel or continuation of The Childermass, and Monstre Gai also is to have a sequel. He adds that Monstre Gai is much better than its forerunner The Childermass, not only in construction but also in the story elements, the characterization, in the measure of reality and its maturity. The characterization, in the measure of reality and its readers as a brilliant, interminably
long opening chapter. The reader's attention is held by the power of the style, the vividness of the pictures, and the brilliance of the debate. Monstre Gai on the other hand, tells a story, and is filled with what it is an understatement to call exciting episodes.

Beyond the structural improvement, the much greater skill at plain story-telling, Eliot finds here a more important difference. There is, it seems to Eliot, a gain in maturity in Monstre Gai. The difference in maturity says Eliot, between The Childermass and Monstre Gai is not merely that the philosophy in the latter is riper or more explicit or more coherent; there is, he believes, also a development in humanity. In the first part of The Childermass one is too often reminded that Pulley and Scatters belong to Mr. Lewis's puppet gallery. It is not that their creator failed to make them real—it is that he denied them more than a measure of reality. In Monstre Gai, the puppets, says Eliot, begin to get the better of the puppet-master, and become human beings.

Lewis was a painter, a draughtsman, and a writer, but such a range of powers is easily dismissed as virtuosity—implying that a man who does several things must do all of them badly. Eliot says one cannot teat Lewis like that, any more than one can Goethe or Leonardo. In his pictures and in his prose, Lewis sought all his life to explore the possibilities of a number of different forms of expression.

*As for the novel it is well known that I am not a novel reader, that there are notable novelists with whose*
work I have only a partial acquaintance, and others with whose work I have no expectation of acquainting myself at all: so that I can only suspect" that Mr. Lewis is the most distinguished living English novelist... There are some writers who please me because they seem to hold the same views as myself, others who annoy me by maintaining opinions that seem to me manifestly silly; but very few who can set my sluggish brain in motion, and for that I am always grateful. The opinion to which I do not hesitate to commit myself is that Mr. Lewis is the greatest prose-master of style of my generation—perhaps the only one to have invented a generation—perhaps the only one to have invented a new style. And by style I do not mean "craftsmanship" nor do I impute "impeccability"... I have observed that Mr. Lewis has this in common with Henry James...  

E.R. Leavis is critical of Eliot’s appraisal of Wyndham Lewis. He writes:

Yet I cannot believe that he (Eliot) could have committed himself to such extravagant appraisals of this last (Lewis) as a creative writer and a thinker if he had not known him personally (one tries to give Eliot credit for a kind of loyalty that is not at all a virtue in a critic as such)...  

Eliot is almost lyrical in his praise of Ulysses. He says that Joyce’s parallel use of the Odyssey in this book has a great importance. The method has the importance of a
“scientific discovery”. No one else built a novel on such a
foundation before: it had never been necessary. Eliot finds in
Ulysses a new method for the adequate rendering of the
“immense panorama which is contemporary history” with
precision and compression. Eliot takes Ulysses as a novel and
more than a novel. To call a novel, says Eliot, simply because
the novel is a form which will no longer serve, and because
the novel, instead of being a form, was simply the expression
of an age.

Mr. Joyce has written one novel — The Portrait; and Mr.
Wyndham Lewis has written one novel — Tarr. I do not
suppose that either of them will ever write another
novel. The novel ended with Flaubert and with James. It
is, I think, because Mr. Joyce and Mr. Lewis, being in
advance of their time, felt a conscious or probably
unconscious dissatisfaction with the form, that their
novels are more formless than those of a dozen clever
writers who are unaware of its obsolescence. 39

In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel
between “contemporaneity and antiquity”, Eliot says James
Joyce is simply devising a way of controlling, of ordering, of
giving a shape and significance to the “immense panorama of
futility and anarchy which is contemporary history”. Joyce is
pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They
will not be imitators any more than the scientist who uses the
discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent,
further investigation. The method in Ulysses is one for which
the horoscope is auspicious. Instead of the narrative method, says Eliot, one may now use the mythical method. It is, as he seriously believes, a step towards making the modern world possible for art.

Eliot does not examine Ulysses as a whole. He concentrates on its method and commends it as a discovery and formula for compressing the multifarious and multitudinous experiences that confront and envelop the modern man. Dr. F.R. Leavis does not see Ulysses in as favourable a light as Eliot:

*But it seems plain to me that there is no organic principle determining, informing and controlling into a vital whole, the elaborate and analogical structure, the extraordinary variety of technical devices, the attempts at an exhaustive rendering of consciousness for which Ulysses is remarkable, and which got it accepted by a cosmopolitan literary world as anew start. It is rather, I think, a dead end or at least a pointer to disintegration— a view strengthened by Joyce's own development...*\(^{40}\)

Eliot rites in his essay on Swinburne that the prose of James Joyce or the earlier Conrad is important as it is struggling to digest and express new objects, new feelings, new aspects. In a Commentary in the Criterion,\(^ {41}\) he says that Joseph Conrad is unquestionably a great novelist, endowed with the modesty as well as the conviction of a great writer. Conrad's reputation is as secure as that of any writer of his
time: critical analysis, says Eliot, may adjust but it will not diminish his importance.

Eliot wrote an obituary on Virginia Woolf, in which he spoke highly of her. Virginia Woolf’s imaginative genius and her sense of style, Eliot says, cannot be contested. Eliot dwells upon the qualities of personal charm and distinction, of kindliness and wit, of curiosity about human beings as well as the particular advantage of a kind of hereditary position (with the incidental benefits which the position bestowed) of Virginia Woolf. But one will be led to a false impression if one makes much of the “accidental advantage” of Virginia Woolf, for “her fame itself is solidly enough built upon the writings”.

He points out that Virginia Woolf was the centre not merely of an esoteric group, but of the literary life of London. “Her position was due to a concurrence of qualities and circumstances which never happened before... It maintained the dignified and admirable tradition of Victorian upper middleclass culture – a situation in which the artist was neither the servant of the exalted patron, nor the parasite of the plutocrat, nor the entertainer of the mob – a situation in which the producer and the consumer of art were on equal footing, and neither the highest nor the lowest. With the death of Virginia Woolf, a whole pattern of culture is broken. She may be, from one point of view, only the symbol, of it; but she would not be the symbol, if she had not been more than any one in her time, the maintainer of it”. 43
F.R. Leavis is critical of Eliot for praising James Joyce and Virginia Woolf and under-valuing D.H. Lawrence he writes "His (Eliot's) performance as a judge of his contemporaries has been consistently disastrous. It is represented at its most respectable by his backing Joyce – the significance of which election, all the same, is given in his dismissal of Lawrence".\textsuperscript{44} And later:

What I myself was slow, I confess, to realize was that Eliot was as completely of that Bloomsbury world in acceptance and loyalty or docility.

Eliot in After Strange Gods is critical of Hardy's and Lawrence's novels. It is quite expected of Eliot that he should not be favourably disposed to the emotional intensity of Hardy's work. It appears that Eliot has not done due justice to Hardy. Eliot finds in Hardy only extreme emotionalism, writing only for "self-expression", "exploitation of personality", self-absorption, and symptoms of decadence. Eliot further points out that the work of Thomas Hardy represents and interesting example of a powerful personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment or by submission to any objective beliefs, Hardy essentially and finally stands for forthright sincerity, integrity, devotion, utmost sacrifice, and genuine love. His work points to idealism, paganism and liberalism, and to these, the classicist, the formalist and the orthodox in T.S. Eliot cannot give approving response. Hardy's vision, Hardy's belief – that happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain, or "As flies
to wanton boys, are we to the Gods; they kill us for their sport"- cannot be called mere fancy or phantasm and is not without the objectivity of proper observation. A man in moments of solitude may feel drawn to pondering over the mystery of the universe and the littleness and nothingness of man against the force of Fate or the tremendous powers of God. It seems unfair on the part of Eliot to say that Hardy represents “emotional paroxysms” or “passion for its own sake”.

He seems to me to have written as nearly for the sake of self-expression, as a man well can; and the self which he had to express does not strike me as a particularly wholesome or edifying matter of communication...At times his style touches sublimity. Landscape, too, is filled for the purposes of an author who is interested not at all in men’s minds, but only in their emotion and perhaps only in men as vehicles for emotion. This extreme emotionalism seems to me a symptom of decadence; it is a cardinal point of faith in a Romantic age, to believe that there is something admirable in violent emotion for its own sake, whatever the emotion or whatever. Its emotion or whatever its object...People imagine passion to be the surest evidence of vitality. This in itself may go towards according for Hardy’s popularity. 46

But Eliot is right in pointing out a flaw in the work of Hardy. What introduces a note of falsity into Hardy’s novels
is that he leaves nothing to nature, but always gives one last turn of the screw himself, and Eliot has the gravest suspicion, of his motives for so dong. In the Mayor of Caster bridge — which has always seemed to Eliot his finest novel as a whole — he comes nearest to producing an air of inevitability, and of making crises seem the consequences of the character of Henchard; the arrangement by which the hero, leaning over abridge, finds himself staring at his effigy in the stream below is masterly tour de force. This scene is however as much by arrangement as less successful ones in which the motives intrude themselves more visibly; as for instance, the scene in Far from the Madding Crowd in which Bathsheba unscrew Fanny Robin’s coffin — which seems to him deliberately fake.

The structure of Eliot regarding D.H. Lawrence is well-known. Eliot confesses his prejudice regarding Lawrence but he cannot help it. His attitude to Lawrence in After Strange Gods and elsewhere in his reviews or introductions is almost the same, Eliot in After Strange Gods regards D.H. Lawrence “a very much greater genius, if not a greater artiest than Hardy”, yet he finds in him the lack of a sense of humour, a lack not so much of information as of the critical facilities which education should give and an incapacity for what we ordinarily call, “thinking”. Of this side of Lawrence, Eliot says, there is the brilliant exposure by Wyndham Lewis in Paleface. Eliot finds in the work of D.H. Lawrence a “distinct sexual morbidity” and an, insensibility to ordinary social morality”- and he calls this a ‘monstrosity’. He argues that
Lawrence started life wholly free from a restriction of tradition, that he had no guidance except the untrustworthy and deceitful guide called he Inner Light. The deplorable religious upbringing gave Lawrence a lust for intellectual independence. Lawrence had keen sensibility and capacity for profound intuition, but from this intuition, says Eliot, he drew the wrong conclusions. Lawrence with his acute sensibility, violent prejudices and passions and lack of intellectual and social training is admirably fitted to be an instrument for the forces of good or evil. Eliot calls D.H. Lawrence "an untrained mind" and a soul "destitute of humanity" and filled with self-righteousness, "a blind servant" and "a fatal leader". He says that Lawrence was right in speaking again and again against the living death of modern material civilization. And as a criticism of the modern world Fantasia of the Unconscious is a book to keep at hand for re-reading.

Eliot does not find any development in Lady Chatterley’s Lover; the game-keeper is representative of "social obsession", which makes well-born or almost well-born ladies offer themselves to plebeians, and this springs, says Eliot, from the same morbidity which makes other female characters of Lawrence bestow their favours upon savages. He finds the author of Lady Chatterley’s Lover "a very sick man indeed".

There is, Eliot believes, a very great deal to be learnt from Lawrence but he fears that Lawrence’s work may appeal, not to those who are well and able to discriminate, but to the
sick and debile and confused; and not to what remains of health in them but to their sickness. Concerning Lawrence, Eliot has even used words like “rotten and rotting others”. Though at one time Eliot called Lawrence “a serious and an improving writer”, it is a fact that he never adjusted with him. Lawrence has never drawn a fully favourable response from Eliot.

One may remark that it is not fair on the apart of Eliot to slight a novelist of such tremendous creative gifts. Lawrence has indeed a great range of powers; he has delicacy, subtlety, intuition, forthright language, superb imagination and much human tenderness. Lawrence says in his essay “Morality and Novel”: “The novel can help us to live, as nothing else can”.

In praise of Lawrence, Aidous Huxley has written a brilliant introduction to the letters of Lawrence selected by Richard Aldington. He says that Lawrence was in a real sense possessed by his creative genius. He emphasizes the significant statement of Lawrence himself that “one has to be terribly religious to be an artist”. He is right in pointing out that Lawrence’s special and characteristic gift was an extra ordinary sensitiveness to what Wordsworth called “unknown modes of being”. Lawrence could never forget, as most of us almost continuously forget, the dark presence of the otherness that lies beyond the boundaries of man’s conscious mind. And this special sensibility was accompanied by an immense
power of rendering and registering the immediately experienced otherness in terms of literary art.

E.M. Forster in Aspects of the Novel is lyrical in his praise of Lawrence. He finds Lawrence the only living novelist in whom "the song predominates", who has the "rapt bardic quality", and whom "it is idle to criticize".

F. R. Leavis has brilliantly criticized Eliot's arguments and statements on Lawrence in his essays "The Wild Untutored Phoenix" and "Eliot, Wyndham Lewis and Lawrence", included in The Common Pursuit. He points out the pertinent fact that Lawrence knew four languages besides his own and had an extremely wide and close acquaintance with painting, too. Lawrence did not exactly suffer from lack of social, intellectual and did not exactly suffer from lack of social, intellectual and educational training; at twenty-one he was no less an intellectual than Eliot at the same age. Dr. Leavis finds in him not only what we "ordinarily call thinking" but an extraordinarily penetrating, persistent and vital kind of thinking.

I have already intimated that the acuteness of Lawrence's sensibility seems to me (whatever Bloomsbury may have decided) inseparable from the play of a supremely fine and penetrating intelligence...but few readers of the memoir of Lawrence, by E.T. will I imagine, however expensive their own education, claim with any confidence that they had a better one than Lawrence had.
And later:

Eliot's stress in this book (After Strange Gods) falls explicitly upon the religious needs of the age... When, for instance, he says that he is applying 'moral principles to literature', we cannot accept those principles as alternative to the criteria we know......

This equivocalness, this curious sleight by which Eliot surreptitiously takes away while giving, is what I mean by the revealingly uncritical in his attitude towards Lawrence.

And for attributing to him "spiritual sickness" Mr. Eliot can make out a strong case. But it is characteristic of the world as it is, that health cannot anywhere be found whole; and the sense in which Lawrence stands for health is an important one. He stands at any rate for something, without which the preoccupation (necessary as it is) with order, forms, and deliberate construction, cannot produce health. 48

However, one feels that Mathew Arnold would hardly have included D.H. Lawrence in his list of classics. Lawrence has perhaps genuineness but not greatness, and Eliot is right in saying that the greatness of literature is to be judged not by literary standards alone. Eliot is not wholly wrong about Lawrence when he finds in him "the tragic waste of powers". In spite of the utmost lyrical sensibility, the imaginative apprehension and gift of language, one has a feeling of vacuity and one desire that Lawrence's genius should have worked upon some different, intenser stuff and experience of life.
The attitude to the novel held by Eliot in the essay “Religion and Literature” may be questioned and criticized. The ethics and the morals that Eliot here talks of are narrow, purely Christian; and not always unacceptable. Eliot writes: “I am not concerned here with religious literature but with the application of our religion to the criticism of any literature”.

Eliot says that it is quite irrational to separate literary judgments from our religious ones, but one can add that it is equally irrational to impose a purely Christian judgment on literature. Eliot feels sad to note the “gradual secularization” of the novel. Bunyan and to some extent Defoe, says Eliot, bad moral purposes. But since Defoe, Eliot adds, the “secularization” of the novel has been continuous.

*There have been three chief phases. In the first, the novel took the Faith, in its contemporary version, for granted and omitted it from its picture of life. Fielding, Dickens and Thackeray belong to this phase. In the second, it doubted, worried about, or contested the Faith. To this phase belong George Eliot, George Meredith and Thomas Hardy. To the third phase, in which we are living, belong nearly all contemporary novelists except Mr. James Joyce. It is the phase of those who have never heard the Christian Faith spoken of as anything but an anachronism.*

The critical approach here is not that of scientific, dispassionate enquiry. If Eliot takes the “secularization” of the novel as an unhappy feature, the baptism of fiction is still
more disastrous and unwelcome in literature. Any good literature should of course be ‘moral’ but in the sense suggested by Henry James. In his preface to The Portrait of a Lady, Henry James remarks that the moral sense of a work of art depends on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it. He says that the “developing air of the artist’s humanity” gives the last touch to a work of art.

F.R. Leavis also deals with the association of literature and morality and examines certain novelists in this light. But the moral intensity of Dr. Leavis is unlike Eliot’s attitude in “Religion and Literature”. It is the result of, and distinguished by, a vital capacity for experience and a kind of reverent openness before life.

Regarding Eliot’s criticism of the novel and novelists, it is worth nothing that:

(i) Eliot’s criticism of the novel is not criticism proper. It is review, interpretation or, in Eliot’s own phrase, “literary journalism”; yet it is significant.

(ii) It has not been written systematically according to a plan or a major point of view, as F.R. Leavis has done in The Great Tradition.

(iii) It is often of a far too general kind. Eliot does not examine the novels in detail.

(iv) Eliot’s opinions on novelists are, in one sense, incidental; Eliot wrote about novels only when he had to write reviews.
(v) As he himself says, Eliot examines novels from the viewpoint of a verse-maker. In other words, he searches the novels for a method, for a language, for some clue or suggestion that may be helpful to a poet in the composition of poetry. For example, Eliot appreciates the method of compression and controlling in Ulysses which could be a stimulus to the making of a poem like The Waste Land. He also says that the language of Joyce and Conrad is important as it is struggling to digest new groups of feeling or new groups of objects or experiences.

(vi) Eliot likes novels that have a pattern formed not by one or two characters but by the whole book. The total meaning emerging from the novel is more important to him than any of its constituents.
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