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

1 "English Prose between 1918 and 1939", Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 289.
because he says, "You can't measure people up, because the yard-measure itself keeps altering its length." Woolf expresses the same view in her famous declaration that "in or about 1910, human character changed," and in her conviction that "A character may be real to Mr. Bennett and quite unreal to me." Woolf laid great emphasis on the idea of perspective in the face of the changing nature of reality and pleaded for new experiments in new and radical adjustments in the form of the novel. She tried to do away with the traditional tools and methods, and relied totally on her sensibility to express a new awareness in fiction. Forster was less radical and held that the old formula was useful provided it was informed by a "new sensitiveness."

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

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2 Ibid., p. 281.
3 "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", Collected Essays I, p. 320.
4 Ibid., p. 325.
5 Aspects of the Novel, p. 36.
6 "Anonymity: An inquiry", Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 90.
did it. And indeed he did not do it on earth.\textsuperscript{7} And so far as literary creation is concerned, \"to forget its Creator is one of the functions of Creation.\textsuperscript{8}\" For him art should effect momentary and mutual anonymity between the reader and the writer. And this mutual forgetfulness is the evidence of good art. So a writer's age, background, biography, psychology, and the influences are irrelevant or unimportant while we consider his creation. This plea for anonymity is reflected in Woolf's advice to the contemporary critics. She says:

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{7} "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{8} "Anonymity: An inquiry", p. 90.
\textsuperscript{9} "How it strikes a Contemporary", Common Reader I, p. 304.
says

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

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

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

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

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

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

10 Ibid., p. 302.
12 "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", p. 122.
13 Ibid., p. 120.
So the reader should be oriented towards this fellowship.

Forster believes that criticism does not help in this transformation or infection. He says:

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

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

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

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

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

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

15 "Raison D'être of Criticism in the Arts", p. 124.
16 "How should one read a book", Common Reader II, p. 259.
17 Ibid., p. 267.
the more severe rational analysis. Woolf does not assume the great role of critic, but the lesser role of a common reader.

We must remain readers; we shall not put on the further glory that belongs to those rare beings who are also critics. But we still have our responsibilities as readers and even our importance.\(^\text{18}\)

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

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

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 269.

\(^{19}\) Mark Goldman, p. 87.
which is essential for the appreciation of arts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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20 "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", p. 124.
22 "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", p. 125.
ought to know everything inside out and yet be surprised. 23

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

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

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

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23 Ibid., p. 126.
24 Ibid.
Think before you speak is criticism's motto; speak before you think is creation's. 25

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

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

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

25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p. 127.
There is always the contrary danger; the danger that training may sterilize the sensitiveness that is being trained; that education may lead to knowledge instead of wisdom, and criticism to nothing but criticism; that spontaneous enjoyment like the progress of Poesy in Mathew Arnold's poem, may be checked because too much care has been taken to direct it into the right channel. 28

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

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

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

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

28 "Raison D'etre of Criticism in the Arts", p. 115.
29 Ibid., p. 116.
a whiggery tendency, to decry the critical toil of the artist; to propound the thesis that the great artist is an unconscious artist, unconsciously incising on his banner the words Muddle through. 30

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

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

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

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

31  "How should one read a book", pp. 269-270.
when art intervenes to reveal them it sometimes acts in reverse, and lowers a veil instead of raising it. This deadening effect can often be dispersed by a well-chosen word. We can be awakened by a remark which need not be profound or even true, and can be sent scurrying after the beauties and wonders we were ignoring. Journalism and broadcasting have their big opportunity here. Uns suited for synthesis or analysis, they can send out the winged word that carries us off to examine the original.32

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

32 "Raison D'être of Criticism in the Arts", p. 117.
severe and exacting than the traditional standards themselves. She was not averse to the aesthetic novel of the Jamesian sort, and in her experiments in fiction one can see the effect of the post-impressionist influence on the novel. She rejects Percy Lubbock's view that the form of the novel is visual. According to her form is not a visual pattern but an emotional pattern which is the result of, and which results in, emotion.

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

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

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^34 Ibid.
^35 Ibid.
^36 Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 94.
form is organic and it contributes to the sustained effect in art. Woolf's sense of form too is comparable to Forster's in its emphasis on an emotional inner, unseen stitching of the work from within.

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

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

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

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

38 "T.S. Eliot", Abinger Harvest, p. 106.
must throw our imaginations after them if we are to accept with understanding the strange gifts they bring back to us.39

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

40 Aspects of the Novel, p. 27.
passion — ...." While Woolf advocates the claim of "Mrs. Brown" with ardent and well-argued critical defenses Forster is characteristically casual and refuses to assume the role of a defensive literary critic. But both are influenced by "the sense of a world that asks to be noticed rather than explained", which permeates their criticism and fiction.

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

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

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

41 Ibid. p. 100.
42 "The last of Abinger", Two Cheers for Democracy, p. 265.
was too involved in human affairs, too much engaged in the affairs of his time to ignore the solid fabric of the outside world. He prizes most that literature which expresses the humanistic tenets. Woolf discovers in him, above all, "the impulses of a poet", and she rightly describes Forster's problem:

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

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

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 344.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 345.
intricacy and triviality. Forster, the humanist plunged into and rolled himself in the mud that was life. Woolf did not plunge. She remained in the world of poetry, and would not let go of poetry. Forster sees her difficulty as a novelist.

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

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

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