



NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN LITERATURE WITH REFERENCE TO E M FORSTER'S WORKS

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ABSTRACT

The importance of any topic lies in its narration. The art of story narration has many techniques. A story is defined as events narrated in the time- sequence. The structure of a story revolves around a character or a theme. Apparently it is all about what the character is, what he does under what circumstances and what the result is. The theme of the story has to be convincible to the audience.

Edward Morgan Forster who belonged to the fag end of the Victorian era and a liberal humanist was also a successful novelist. Three of his novels, 'A Room with a View', 'Howards End', and 'A Passage to India' have been made into films. In his Aspects of the Novel', he gives a detailed manuals on the craft of storytelling. His insights, his observations are a primer in the essentials of storytelling. He emphasizes the relationship between character and incident and makes a clear distinction between story and plot. The most common method of narrating a story adopted by the novelist are – the direct or epic method of narration in which the novelist employs the third person narration, the autobiographical or the first person narration in which the narrator becomes one of the characters of the novel and the epistolary method which presents the story through a number of consecutive letters.

Forster relevance felt through his writings that are built on a strong conviction and belief that 'each aspect of the novel demands a different quality in the reader'. According to him, a novelist explores the value of human experiences by developing the characters of the story. And these characters are connected with the plots. In his novels, protagonists ability to find a room of their own or the failure to do so, the significance of the caves', the movement within and travel inside, even the echoes in the caves appear to be voicing some kind of relations. His novels are substantial explanations of mockery and seriousness, combinations of ancient and modern reappearing in the contemporary world.

Key words: narration, technique, character, human experiences, audience, story, plot

INTRODUCTION

E. M. Forster is one of the major novelists of the first half of the twentieth century. He was born in 1879 and educated at King's College, Cambridge, where he was for a time a Fellow. His first novel, Where Angels Fear to Tread, was published in 1905 and was quickly followed by The Longest Journey (1907), A Room with a View (1908) and Howards End (1910) which received



wide attention. In 1924, the highly acclaimed *A Passage to India*, based on Forster's observations of Indian life. His other works include collections of short stories and essays, a volume of criticism, the libretto for Benjamin Britten's opera *Billy Budd*, a film script and a study of Virginia Woolf. In 1953, Forster was awarded membership in the Order of Companions of Honour by Queen Elizabeth II. On his Ninetieth birthday, in 1969, he received the Order of Merit, the highest distinction outside of political rank that a British sovereign can bestow. He died in Coventry, England, on June 7, 1970.

Forster with the founding of 'The Independent Review' (1902) and beginning his career as a writer in the same year took his first step in the literary life. This was possible for him because of his coming under the influence of Wedd and Goldsworthy Lowes Dickenson, thought a new age had begun. Soon Forster took to full-time writing and started contributing to many journals and periodicals. He defined the limits of his approach to his novels with great modesty and restraint; 'Only Connect', he said in his 'Howards End'. All that he was interested in was personal relations between and among human beings. Besides this, he was deeply concerned with the psychological atmosphere of the society in which he grew up and which limited the scope of his inquiry. Primarily he is an English novelist of the Edwardian and Georgian era, firmly rooted in the tradition of Jane Austen and George Meredith, though he extended that tradition to take in something of the detachment of Flaubert.

Matthew Arnold the poet declared in his famous debate with Thomas Henry Huxley, even man's remote ancestor, "the hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits....carried hidden in his nature something destined to develop into a necessity for humane letters". (Huxley 1963, p.2).

According to Misia Landau in her 'Human Evolution as Narrative' says that many scientific theories are essentially narratives. The growth of a plant, the progress of a disease, the formation of a beach, the evolution of an organism- any set of events that can be arranged in a sequence and related can also be narrated. A typical event has an organized sequence of events with a beginning, middle and an end.

Any set of events that can be arranged in a sequence and are related can also be narrated. Each deep structure comes in many versions and in several different modes. For e.g. Fables are embedded not just in fairy tales but in novels, films, operas, ballets and television shows. Some narratologists, stressing the central role of narrative in human experience, argue that we have not only different versions of stories but different versions of reality which are shaped by the basic stories.

As Frank Kermode tells us that Forster thinks it essential to understand the ways in which fiction can give the interior life of characters, calls it 'rotundity' of their presentation and it is important that in turning into plot the story acquires a complexity favorable to the creation of what he calls 'value'.



“Something which is measured not by minutes or hours, but by intensity”.

Forster also says that story narrates ‘the life in time’ but the novel as a whole, if it is a good novel’, includes the life by ‘values’ as well where life experiences certain moments of ecstasy or vision in plenitude or its opposite. These moments cannot be expressed in plain narrative, hence rises from the whole complex structure and is partly dependent on rhythm.

Forster was inspired by G.E.Moore’s philosophy of aesthetic beauty.

He chooses the title ‘Aspects’ because he says it is unscientific and vague, it leaves maximum freedom both to a novel as well as to the different aspects selected for discussion in his ‘Aspects of the Novel’ : The Story, People, The Plot, Fantasy, Prophecy, Pattern and Rhythm.

To begin with, he says the fundamental aspect of the novel is its story- telling aspect. For him, the novel tells a story, without which it could not exist. The more we analyse a story, the more we are disentangled from its basis which the reader may find less to admire the work. The beginning and end seem to be based on no reason or plan. He traces its origin – the origin of story –telling to Paleolithic times by judging the shape of the skull where Neanderthal man listened to stories. It all began with a “primitive audience was an audience of shock heads, gaping round the camp-fire, fatigued with contending against the mammoth or the woolly rhinoceros and only kept awake by suspense. What would happen next?” (Forster 1954, p.26)

A novelist would go on and on with his story keeping the audience in curiosity until they fell asleep or get enraged

Forster exemplifies his statement by mentioning a character from One thousand and one nights mostly known as Arabian Nights. Scheherazade – a legendary queen and the storyteller who avoided her fate as she knew the art of keeping her husband in suspense with her stories. Stories told by her to her husband is a perfect example for Forster’s art of story-telling. The husband wants to kill her as all his previous wives after the first wedding night but decides to postpone the execution because she would stop at the middle of a sentence each time when she saw sun rising and left him gaping. He wanted to know how story ends as she always starts the next before he notices the first one is finished.

Forster says that it is universal truth that the backbone of a novel has to be a story. Audience wants curiosity and nothing else.

Later he defines, the story as “a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence”

He calls story as the lowest and simplest of literary organisms and the highest factor in the complicated organism called novels where the novelist tells what happens next by not telling what happens next keeping his audience in suspense.



He says a novelist can never deny time, he has to keep that in account while he threads his story however lightly otherwise he becomes unintelligible and his work a blunder whether he likes or dislikes it. Stating examples for time- sequence, he tells that Emily Bronte in Wuthering Heights tried hiding it, while Tristram Shandy turned it upside down. Even though he ridicules Sir Walter Scott, as not so a great novelist, he appreciates his power of keeping his audience in suspense and playing on their curiosity.

He takes another example of Arnold Bennett's 'The Old Wives Tale' in which he says time is the real hero but with an unsatisfactory conclusion. It is not a great book as it ends with 'of course' giving the author a great disappointment.

The undermining of the third person narrative voice lies at the heart of all Forster's novels and the majority of his shorter fiction.

Forster argues that Daily life is practically composed of two lives- the life in time and the life by values" (36) for which reason "our conduct reveals a double allegiance"(36). What the "story does is to narrate the life in time"(36) whereas "what the entire novel does.... Is to include the life by values as well"(36) by means of "devices hereafter to be examined"(36).

An autonomous object with a characteristic internal dynamic that treats literary features such as plot, character and theme as a means of description and classification is defined as structuralism. Forster insists that a novel must have a story which is not same as its plot

The plot is narrative's joy. Plot is where character is drawn, plot is effect and cause, plot has room for themes and issues and digressions and set pieces and re-building of structure into original shape; it is in the plot that the writer struggles and experiments and is surprised, as if ambushed, by elements that the novels origins had still concealed.

The plot then is the novel in its logical intellectual aspect; it requires mystery, but the mysteries are solved later on. the reader may be moving about in worlds unrealized, but the novelist has no misgivings.....He plans his book beforehand; or anyhow he stands above it, his interest in cause and effect give him an air of pre determination (Forster 1954:96)

Time is our enemy, suggests Forster, chronology is a demon (1955; 9-23). He conjures up an image of all novelists writing their novels in a circular room, simultaneously, outside of time. Look, he says at these pairs of passages of writing. We see at first how alike they are. But they are from very different writers, very different times.

Comparing two passages from Samuel Richardson and Henry James, Forster says that

"Surface differences are indeed no differences at all, but additional points of contact (Forster 1954:16)

Comparing passages from Wells and from Dickens



.....their medium is similar; the same odd effects are obtained by it (16-20)

Realize then, that

The novel's success lies in its own sensitiveness, not in the success of its subject-matter.(20)

However, if compared with other writers one can argue that novelists art, its effects, have changed, giving importance to its subject matter. But can conclude that all exists finally in a comparable form that is of the novel.

As Umberto Eco says;

We are continually tempted to give shape to life through narrative schemes.....

Fiction makes us feel more metaphysically comfortable than reality. There is a golden rule that cryptanalysts and code breakers rely on- namely, that every secret message can be deciphered, provided one knows that it is a message. The problem with the actual world is that, since the dawn of time, humans have been wondering whether there is a message and if so, whether this message makes sense. With fictional universe, we know without a doubt that they do have a message and that an authorial entity stands behind them as creator as well as within them as a set of reading instructions (Eco 1994: 99,116)

CONCLUSION:

Even though, in modern novel- writing narrative is analysed through structuralism, deconstruction, feminine, psychoanalysis, identity, politics and post- modernism, understanding of setting, character structure is more refined paying more attention to context and culture in which writing takes place. Yet Forsters' 'Aspects of the Novel' is studied for developing theorizing of narratology providing foundation to many.

Forster says that the final test of a novel will be our affection for it, as it is the test of our friends and of anything else which we cannot define.

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