

## CRITICISM AS MANIFESTO VERSUS CRITICISM AS SCIENCE: A NEW “BATTLE OF THE BOOKS” IN BRITISH MODERNIST LITERATURE

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### Öz

#### *Manifesto Olarak Eleştiri Bilim Olarak Eleştiriye Karşı: Modernizm Çağında Yeni Bir “Eserler Savaşı”*

Percy Lubbock, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot ve diğerleri, çalışmaları değerli sayılan ve hala çağdaş edebiyat kuramı ve eleştirisinde geçerliliğini sürdüren eleştirmenler arasında kabul edilirler. Bu eleştirmenlerden bazıları yazar-eleştirmen, diğerleri ise akademik ya da profesyonel eleştirmenlerdir. Hayal ürünü türünde yazan yazarların kimisi gelenekselliği benimseyip gerçekçi olarak yazmaya devam etmiş, kimisi ise buna karşı çıkarak yenilikçi olmuştur. Aynı şekilde, edebi eleştirmenlerden bazıları geleneksel sübjektif ve mücadeleciler eleştirilerine devam etmiş, diğerleri de eleştiride yenilikçi olmaya ve daha tarafsız, bilimsel ve metodolojik yaklaşımlar geliştirmeye çalışmışlardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Virginia Woolf'un *Modern Fiction* ve Percy Lubbock'un *The Craft of Fiction* eserlerine odaklanarak yirminci yüzyılın ilk yarısındaki bu eleştirel yaklaşımları açığa kavuşturmak. Bir yazar-eleştirmen olan Woolf, çağdaş gerçekçileri reddeder ve kendisinin de önemli bir savunucusu olduğu deneysel kurguyu metheder, fakat bir eleştirmen olarak geleneksel sübjektif, savunucu ve kuralcı kalmaya devam eder. Aksine, kendisi de bir eleştirmen olan Lubbock, roman türünü estetik olarak uyumlu hale getiren on dokuzuncu yüzyıl gerçekçi yazarlarının başarılarını destekler. Fakat Lubbock eleştirel çalışmalarında Henry James'in kurgu türünü yapı ve anlatım tekniği bakımından değerlendiren fikirlerini kullanır ve geliştirir. Dolayısıyla, bu makale, İngiliz modernist edebiyatı yazar-eleştirmenleri arasındaki olası iletişimi inceleyerek, bu çalışmada bahsi geçen yazar-eleştirmenlerin farklı edebi eğilimler göstermesine karşın onları aynı şemsiye altında ele almanın, İngiliz edebiyatının modernist döneminde yaygın olan edebi eleştiri üzerindeki zıt görüşleri ortaya çıkarma konusunda bir çözüm yolu sunabileceğini tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Edebiyat Kuramı ve Eleştirisi, Yazar-Eleştirmen, Modernizm.

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### **Abstract**

*Percy Lubbock, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot are among those critical voices whose works are valuable and still constitute a viable presence in contemporary literary theory and criticism. Some of these critics are writer-critics; others are academic or professional critics. As authors of imaginative writing, some of them follow tradition and remain realists; others defy it and become modernists. Likewise, as literary critics, some of them continue the traditional subjective and combative critical argument; others attempt to be innovative in criticism and develop a more objective, scientific and methodological approach. The aim of the study is to disclose these critical perspectives in the first half of the twentieth century by focusing on Virginia Woolf's *Modern Fiction* and Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction*. The writer-critic Woolf condemns her contemporary realists, and praises the experimental fiction of which she is a major exponent, but as a critic she remains in the traditional way subjective, defensive and prescriptive. On the contrary, the critic Lubbock praises the achievement of the nineteenth century realists who made the novel an aesthetically coherent genre, whereas his critical work extends the systemic Jamesian attempt to discuss fiction scientifically in matters of its form and narrative techniques. Thus, this article aims to seek a possible dialogue between the writer-critics of the British modernist literature, and argue that although the writer-critics explored in this work show discrepant literary attitudes, examining these writer-critics under the same umbrella might offer one way to unveil and enunciate the conflicting views on literary criticism prevalent in the modernist period in British literature.*

**Keywords:** *Literary Theory and Criticism, Writer-Critic, Modernism.*

### **I. Introduction: British Criticism before the Twentieth Century**

In his celebrated *The Novelist at the Crossroads and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (1971), David Lodge distinguishes three types of critic, namely "academic", "freelance" and "writer-critic". The first type is almost non-existing before the twentieth century but dominates the contemporary field of literary theory and criticism from the height of universities and similar institutions. The second emerges at the end of the seventeenth century with the rise of journalism and produces criticism written in the form of reviews and magazine articles. David Lodge belongs to the third kind which is represented by the producers of two types of writing, creative and critical, the latter, in their view, itself being a form of literature. In Lodge's words, the writer-critic is

the creative writer whose criticism is mainly a by-product of his creative work. He is less disinterested than the academic, more concerned to work out in the practice of criticism the aesthetic principles of his own art, and to create a climate of taste and opinion favourable to the reception of that art. He writes in the first place for fellow-artists, but as there are never very

many of these he has to draw on a wider audience,  
 either the academic one, or the “general reader”.  
 (Lodge, 1971: 247)

The most important critics before the twentieth century were writer-critics such as Philip Sidney, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, Henry Fielding, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, Henry James, and others. With a few exceptions in Victorian Age, literary history considers them authors of imaginative literature rather than critics, excelling in different periods and different genres, or even as founders of new genres and as promoters of various literary trends and movements. But their critical status in British literary history should not be neglected. For instance, Fielding in his critical work (Preface to *Joseph Andrews*) defended the literary value of the novel as a new genre in English literature, in general, and of the comic novel, in particular. Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s critical endeavour facilitated the implementation in contemporary neoclassicism-saturated cultural mentality of a whole new literary tradition, that is Romanticism, and defended its literary validity. Likewise, Pater developed and promoted the theoretical complexity of the late Victorian avant-garde thinking.

For these and many other writer-critics in the history of English literary theory and criticism until the twentieth century, criticism would often deviate from its main aim to focus, in order to evaluate, on particular literary works, and would start with some purposes which were then alien to the nature of critical act. Sidney, for instance, defended poetry against Puritan accusations; Dryden prescribed ways of writing drama after Puritans had thwarted the course of literary development in Britain; Fielding introduced a new genre and Wordsworth rejected the neoclassical ornamented and normative type of poetry and introduced a new one, one that laid emphasis on subjective experience and imaginative flight. During the periods before the twentieth century, criticism was moral, humanistic, descriptive and biographical. But above all it was dependent on the cultural background to which it belonged, expressing the ideas and principles of a movement or cultural doctrine which was prevalent in that specific period prior to the twentieth century. Criticism was also prescriptive by explaining, giving rules and showing the direction for literary production. Hence, criticism was also highly subjective, because the critics were also writers who would over-evaluate and defend their own work, exaggerate or diminish the value of the work because of the critic’s personal responses to the text, or some historical context, and because criticism on the whole was lacking the scientific, methodological, and objective rigour. Finally, until the twentieth century, criticism was also defensive, and the defensive assessment of literature implied the concern to vindicate imagination and the freedom of artistic

expression – where the most common way “of achieving this vindication was to differentiate sharply between imaginative literature (or poetry, in Sidney’s sense) and all other forms of discourse” (Daiches, 1981: 6) – or to show the superiority of imaginative literature above all other forms of writing, or to prove the literary validity of the type of literature to which the writer-critic belongs against another type of literature or any accusation or attack on his literature. Criticism was thus conceived as part of the literary world with the function to defend, prescribe, correct and serve literature. Criticism was “a part of the creative process”, but this “cooperative vision will eventually vanish as criticism develops into a discipline in its own right” (Day, 2008: 134).

The separation of criticism from literature in British culture takes place in the Victorian period which marks the transition from the subjective, prescriptive, defensive and dependent criticism to the twentieth century modern, independent, objective, scientific, and methodological critical theory with its own trends and schools having specific objects, aims, principles, and methods of literary research. The transition is made possible, first, by criticism developing its own typology based on the contemporary developments in art, philosophy and social theories, and, second, by assuming new purposes – such as to find in literature what is the best, the most valuable and moral, and help reader with apprehending all that, as for Matthew Arnold – and thus becoming didactic and reader-oriented. Meanwhile, in M. H. Abrams’s terms (from *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, 1953), the Victorians develop the “objective theory” on art and literature, adding it to the expressive theory of authorship produced earlier by the romantics.

## II. British Criticism in the Modernist Period

Criticism develops into a discipline in its own right at the beginning of the twentieth century paralleling the rise in arts and literature of various experimental and innovative themes and techniques of Modernism.

The first in the line of the modern scientific critical perspectives is the formal approach to literature which includes three major schools of literary criticism: Russian Formalism, Anglo-American New Criticism, and later French Structuralism. A more accurate consideration of the types of the formal approach names Formalism, Structuralism, New Criticism, and, independently from New Criticism (which is viewed as primarily American) but intimately related to it, the British formalist school of T. S. Eliot and the “practical criticism” and the “close readings” of I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, and William Empson, the last three academics being referred to as the “Cambridge English School” of the 1920s.

The British and American types of formalism (i.e. Cambridge School and New Criticism), like French Structuralism, represent “another way of

suppressing history and politics in literary criticism” by “sealing the text off from the social or historical context of its production and reception” (MacSiniuc, 2002: 185), and attempt to make criticism scientific, precise and systematic by replacing the humanist and moral views with “much less prescriptive versions of literary studies which have sought to analyse and explain how writing is written, read, distributed and exchanged” (Milner, 2005: 14). The new critics focus on the form, technique, the structural level of the text, and the individual meanings of particular works while regarding the study of literature as a science, containing general principles and rules.

This new orientation in criticism can be attributed to the result of various stands: the rejection of earlier humanist and moral criticism, the continuation of some earlier more scientific and methodological attempts to discuss literature in terms of its form and technique, the awareness of the creative potential of the new modernist writing, and also the growing awareness of the importance of science and technology in the modern world. But above all, Richards, Leavis, Empson and other critics “have shown a greater knowledge of the relevant scientific theories, and responded to them in a far more intelligent, less sweeping and doctrinaire fashion” (Norris, 2001: 412), applying them to literary analysis.

The guiding spirits of the new Anglo-American approach to literature that focuses on literature in itself and regard the study of literature as a systematic science are F. R. Leavis and T. S. Eliot. Many producers of the new critical theories, like F. R. Leavis, are academics, faculty members at different universities, or just professional critics, like Percy Lubbock. Others, such as T. S. Eliot, are writer-critics, critics who also produce imaginative writing, fiction as well as poetry, the creators of both literary and critical discourse. Among them – apart from T. S. Eliot – Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, H. G. Wells and others are the most important twentieth century writer-critics who contributed to the rise and development of the idea of literature in its entire theoretical and critical complexity in British cultural background.

In their hypostasis as writer, some of them embarked on literary innovation and experimentation, and came to be considered under the auspicious of Modernism, like Woolf, Eliot, or Joyce. Others, such as Wells or Forster, followed the traditional patterns of writing, remaining socially concerned realists.

Yet, the adherence of a writer to a modernist trend in literature does not automatically make him/her original and innovatory in criticism as well. To be a modernist in creative writing does not necessarily imply that one should be scientific in critical thinking, and there are many writer-critics who are subjective, defensive or prescriptive in criticism as either traditionalist or experimental authors of literary works.

A remarkable exception is T. S. Eliot who is indeed both an experimental poet and a more scientific, formalist critic. Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, is a great modernist and experimental novelist, yet her criticism is in traditional way subjective, defensive, and expressive of the type of literature to which she belongs as a writer, a literary tendency that is reminiscent of Pope or Wordsworth, or Woolf's contemporary writer D. H. Lawrence. H. G. Wells and, to a certain extent, E. M. Forster are traditional and realistic writers and traditional critics. Henry James discusses fiction in matters of narrative technique and narrative elements, in particular the point of view, and on the whole his own novels and ideas on novel writing "were representative of the transition between the classical realist novel, with its emphasis on story, setting and character, and the modernist novel with its stress on writing and composition" (Onega and Landa, 1996: 21). In contrast to the writer-critics discussed above, Percy Lubbock, I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis are considered more original, formalist, and text-oriented critics.

In this respect, a comparative assessment of Lubbock's critical ideas (representing the scientific approach) and Woolf's critical opinions (keeping alive the subjective and defensive approach) would be useful to reveal the condition of literary criticism at the beginning of the twentieth century, a period which is marked by an intensive fight between innovative and traditional nature of both literary practice and critical thinking.

### **III. Scientific Criticism versus Traditional Criticism, or Objectivity and Subjectivity in Lubbock and Woolf**

In more recent metacriticism, Percy Lubbock has unjustly been neglected, whereas in his own period, that is the first half of the twentieth century, with scientific criticism in its infancy, Lubbock was acclaimed, cited and often regarded, as Allan Tate stated in *Techniques of Fiction* (1943), as the best critic of the novel genre.

With his book *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), Lubbock appears as the next literary critic after Henry James to embark on a scientific, methodological and objective discussion of the novel and the narrative techniques. The main focus is on the form or the structural level of the fictional text, including such elements as point of view, impersonal narrator, omniscient narrator, first-person narrative, third-person narrative, and the modes of organization of the sequence of events. With such a goal, it can be said that Lubbock follows a formalist or rather a structural approach, since, in his own words, "the whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction", and as he further states, "I take to be governed by the question of the point of view – the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story" (Lubbock, 2007: 211).

The “point of view” is Lubbock’s main critical concern, where he distinguishes between two different points of view constructing two different modes of representation of events in novels, or methods of writing. One is the “dramatic” viewpoint, reminiscent of the classical *mimesis*, that is “showing”, characterized by the absence of the author, the discourse and its events being directly presented to the reader. The other is called “panoramic” or “pictorial”, a contrasting method or point of view following the ancient *diegesis*, that is “telling”, where an omniscient author controls the events and mediates their comprehension by the reader. The first, “dramatic” technique, concentrates on the importance of the discourse as text and its relation to the receiver, and characterises that type of fiction in which “the recording, registering mind of the author is eliminated” (Lubbock, 2007: 96). Lubbock appears to favour this method of writing, contrary to E. M. Forster and later W. C. Booth who appreciate the second method that revives the importance of the author and represents the way in which “the reader faces towards the story-teller and listens to him” (Lubbock, 2007: 96).

Lubbock’s distinction between “dramatic” and “pictorial”, or “showing” and “telling”, as two opposite methods of narration is universally accepted. Lubbock sides with the narrative method by which the controlling voice of the author is so disguised that the reader has the impression that he is “shown” the events rather than “told” about them. In this case, the narrator of the story “tells it as he sees it, in the first place” and the story “may be told so vivaciously” that the presence of the author is forgotten, and “the scene becomes visible, peopled with the characters of the tale” (Lubbock, 2007: 211). Lubbock tends to value this “dramatic” or “scenic” presentation of events (which takes place through the character’s immediate impressions and the dialogues) more than the “pictorial” or “panoramic” method (description, summary and evaluation of events). However, neither of the two is firmly recommended by Lubbock, and thus he concludes the book by offering a Jamesian technique of narration, one that embodies a hybrid combination of the best parts from both dramatic and pictorial points of view so as to form a “method by which the picture of a mind is fully dramatized, the method which is to be seen consistently applied in *The Ambassadors* and the other later novels by Henry James” (Lubbock, 2007: 133). Lubbock’s advice is to balance the methods, since

there is no single superior technique to be preferred at all times, but a variety of techniques that should be deployed in accordance with the fictional materials to be treated, the only golden rule being that the transitions and inconsistencies among them should be so disguised as to maintain an artistically coherent impression. (Baldick, 2005: 158)

In *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), E. M. Forster, another important writer-critic of the period, considers Lubbock as a writer-critic who examined the various points of view in the novel “with genius and insight”, and who provided “a sure foundation” for the aesthetics of fiction. Furthermore, Forster gives a remarkable summary of Lubbock’s typology:

The novelist, he [Lubbock] says, can either describe the characters from outside, as an impartial or partial onlooker; or he can assume omniscience and describe them from within; or he can place himself in the position of one of them and affect to be in the dark as to the motives of the rest; or there are certain intermediate attitudes. (Forster, 1956: 78)

Many chapters in Lubbock’s *The Craft of Fiction* mix literary theory in terms of formal techniques with passages of literary criticism that contain discussions of William Makepeace Thackeray, Gustave Flaubert, Leo Tolstoy, and Henry James. Hence, it is interesting to note that in his study “The Art of Fiction” (1884) as well as in a number of critical prefaces, Henry James pre-empted Percy Lubbock as to the critical focus on the form of the novel or the novel as a form. Lubbock was James’s friend and editor, and, like James, he attempted to provide fiction with a theoretical substratum in order to show it as a notable art form, as high as drama and poetry.

As a critic and theoretician of novel, Henry James stimulated important though conflicting discussions on fiction. On the one hand, he was acclaimed as a “Master” by those critics, including Percy Lubbock, who favoured formal perfectionism and technique. On the other, James was condemned by E. M. Forster for considering the point of view as more central to the art of novel than the character, and by H. G. Wells for thwarting “the freedom of the novelist to exhibit his own personality and opinions, to comment openly upon his fiction, to indulge in parody and burlesque, and to discuss contemporary ideas” (Baldick, 2005: 159).

Likewise, many of Percy Lubbock’s ideas were found useless by contemporary critics and novelists, including Virginia Woolf who condemned his theories in her *Diary* (October 15, 1923), and in particular his argument which emphasized that the completed aesthetic form of the novel can be achieved consciously by the novelist as an ingenious maker of the work. However, in her critical writings for the public, such as in her *On Re-reading Novels* (1922), Woolf praises Lubbock’s ideas, and even further develops some of them. Indeed, Woolf and Lubbock share the critical perspective laying emphasis on the mind of the character rather than that of the author. For Woolf, the mind of the character, which consists of innumerable fleeting impressions, should be the object of attention of the receiver of the literary work. For Lubbock, however, not only the mind of



the character but also the reading process is a temporally fleeting experience in that "as quickly as we read, it melts and shifts in the memory; even at the moment when the last page is turned, a great part of the book, its finer detail, is already vague and doubtful" (Lubbock, 2007: 5).

On the whole, contrary to Percy Lubbock's and Henry James's scientific consideration of the literary work, Virginia Woolf in her self-assumed fight not with Lubbock or James but with the realists, namely Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett, emphasises sensibility and personal response in critical writing.

In her essays, particularly in "Modern Fiction" (1919) and "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1924), and in her articles, Woolf defends the modernist and experimental fiction against the works of the socially concerned realists. In "Modern Fiction", Woolf argues that Wells, Galsworthy and Bennett betray the "soul", the insight into character, and she accuses them of being "concerned not with the spirit but the body" (Woolf, 1979: 197). For this reason, as Woolf suggests, it might be appropriate to define these writers as "materialists", sacrificing the character in the novel as individual for the sake of its presentation as social and/or moral type. According to Woolf, the characters of the traditional novel

live abundantly, even unexpectedly, but it remains to ask how do they live, and what do they live for? More and more they seem to us, deserting even the well-built villa in the Five Towns, to spend their time in some softly padded first-class railway carriage, pressing bells and buttons innumerable; and the destiny to which they travel so luxuriously becomes more and more unquestionably an eternity of bliss spent in the very best hotel in Brighton. (Woolf, 1979: 197)

Against this kind of fiction, Woolf emphasises the dynamism of human personality by favouring the inner world as the novel's subject-matter, or rather the mind's reaction to and reception of various stimuli, that is "a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel" (Woolf, 1979: 199).

Woolf protests against the fiction of Galsworthy and Wells, and defends those writers who, like James Joyce and implicitly herself, "attempt to come closer to life, and to preserve more sincerely and exactly what interests and moves them" (Woolf, 1979: 199). Such an author, in contrast with the realists whom she considers materialists, is innovative and original, a true exponent of the modernist experimental fiction, because such a writer, in her words,

is spiritual; [...] is concerned at all costs to reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its

messages through the brain, and in order to preserve it he disregards with complete courage whatever seems to him adventitious, whether it be probability, or coherence, or any other of these signposts which for generations have served to support the imagination of a reader when called upon to imagine what he can neither touch nor see. (Woolf, 1979: 200)

Finally, as another argument to support her view of what fiction should really be, Woolf speaks of the Russian influence and praises the Russian writers such as Chekov for having disclosed the most profound levels of the human "soul and heart". Apart from the Russian writers, Woolf was an admirer of Dryden, Keats, and especially Coleridge.

Virginia Woolf contributed greatly to the development of feminist criticism, and thus being next in the line to such great authors as Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot. But Woolf did not aspire for a place "among the select company of writer-critics she admired", and as in DiBattista's words, she "does not rate highly as a pure critic of literature. Her criticism, as she openly confessed, was of the grosser sort, adulterated by personal likings or aversions, alloyed by doubts and perplexities" (DiBattista, 2000: 122).

In her critical writings, Woolf appears as a subjective critic, "uncharacteristically decisive and polemical", contributing "to the critical relegation of "Edwardian" fiction in favour of modernist experimental novels" (Baldick, 2005: 257). Woolf insists that the novel be recognized as art rather than a realistic reflection of the actual life. Given this, as Sanders suggests, "what Woolf seeks to defend in her essays is not necessarily a new range of subjects for the novel, but new ways of rendering and designing the novel" (Sanders, 1994: 515).

In "Modern Fiction", in the tradition of the subjective, defensive and combative criticism, Woolf defines and values her own work, as well as that of Joyce and Lawrence, against that of the Edwardian traditional and realistic novelists. She quarrels with the materialists such as Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy, and considers them slaves of a tyrant who prescribes rules and a tradition of writing, as if the writer does not possess individual psychological or spiritual initiatives, as Woolf writes:

The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to the last button of their coats in the

fashion of the hour. The tyrant is obeyed; the novel is done to a turn. (Woolf, 1979: 198)

Woolf believes that "sometimes, more and more often as time goes by, we suspect a momentary doubt, a spasm of rebellion, as the pages fill themselves in the customary way. Is life like this? Must novels be like this?" (Woolf, 1979: 198) Such questions and the answer that life "is very far from being "like this"" represent the hope for the writer's liberation from the constraints of tradition. Woolf argues that life is not static, and that the human "mind" receiving a "myriad" of personal impressions and ideas is the best working material for the novelist who – "if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention" – would go beyond "the accepted style" (Woolf, 1979: 199) and reach a new aesthetic of novel, one without traditional plot, intrigue, or catastrophe.

Thus, Woolf expresses the prescriptive feature of literary criticism by urging future novelists to take up the character's psychological experience as their most important literary concern. She prescribes novelists the task of conveying the impression of "this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit", which is the "luminous halo" of life, "a semitransparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end", with as little as possible "alien and external" element (Woolf, 1979: 199), stating:

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it. (Woolf, 1979: 199)

Instead of realism and materialism, Woolf advocates original artistic energy, and continues the tradition of the subjective and literature-dependent criticism, as well as the defensive tradition, given her attempts to validate the new literary expression of Modernism, a tendency that is reminiscent of some of the romantic critics such as Wordsworth and Shelley. A similar route is followed by her contemporary writer-critic Lawrence, and, in both literary practice and criticism, both Woolf and Lawrence "signal an important sceptical departure from habit and convention, a spasm of rebellion that is felt in the experimental construction not just of their own novels in the 1920s but of many other attempts to escape the imaginary tyrant of novelistic custom" (Baldick, 2005: 160).

By means of her critical ideas, Virginia Woolf rejects the socially concerned realistic fiction of her period and acclaims originality and experimentation in literature, being herself one of the most important representatives of British modernist fiction and stream of consciousness technique. Together with Joyce and Lawrence, Woolf attempts to break through the strong material of the realistic fiction, which is an endeavour difficult to accomplish within a traditional and normative cultural background. David Lodge explains this trend as follows:

the English literary mind is peculiarly committed to realism, and resistant to non-realistic literary modes to an extent that might be described as prejudice. It is something of a commonplace of recent literary history, for instance, that the “modern” experimental novel (...) was repudiated by two subsequent generations of English novelists. (Lodge, 1971: 7)

Virginia Woolf’s critical ideas and literary practice would have served the purpose to proclaim the authority of literary innovation, but, following the period of the modernist experimental novel, English literature arguably turns again to tradition rather than innovation during the war and post-war periods, leading to the co-existence of experimental and innovative novels with the traditional and realistic ones during the postmodern period.

#### **IV. Other Participants in the “Battle of the Books”**

In the age of Modernism, another writer quarrelling with Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells is David Herbert Lawrence. Concerning literary practice, like Woolf, Lawrence advocates in fiction the focus on individual – psychological and emotional – experience rather than social existence, and, like Woolf’s, his low esteem for the Edwardians and the traditional fiction in general emerges from considering that the realistic writers have failed to create vital and vivid human characters, attributing this failure to the change of the perspective from the psychology of the free human individual into the psychology of the social being. Concerning critical act, like Woolf, Lawrence refuses to see criticism as a “science” and pleads for the subjective response in criticism. In his essay “John Galsworthy” (1927), D. H. Lawrence asserts that

literary criticism can be no more than a reasoned account of the feeling produced upon the critic by the book he is criticising. Criticism can never be a science: it is, in the first place, much too personal, and in the second, it is concerned with values that science ignores. The touch-stone is emotion, not reason. We judge a work of art by its effect on our sincere and vital emotion, and nothing else. (Lawrence, 1985: 209)

In contrast to D. H. Lawrence, Herbert George Wells, as a traditional and realistic writer-critic of the period, sides with the realists against the modernists. In his most famous critical text "The Contemporary Novel" (1914), Wells's credo is clearly that of a realistic novelist: for him the novel is "a story of human beings, absolutely credible and conceivable"; the novel is "a story that demands, or professes to demand, no make-believe"; and the novelist "undertakes to present you people and things as real as any that you can meet in a omnibus" (Wells, 1979: 165). Wells's traditional and realistic view of the novel tends to echo the Victorian moral sense. The novel, as Wells states,

has inseparable moral consequences. It leaves impressions, not simply of things seen, but of acts judged and made attractive or unattractive. They may prove very slight moral consequences, and very shallow moral impressions in the long run, but there they are, none the less, its inevitable accompaniments. (Wells, 1979: 165)

As a critic, Wells is remembered for his dispute with James, which supplements the fight of Lawrence and Woolf with the Edwardians. Wells's quarrel with James represents the conflict between the social concern, and thematic level in general, emphasised by Wells, and, as promoted by James, the psychologisation of the thematic material and, concerning the narrative level, a normative and rigid art of fiction. In "The Contemporary Novel", although Wells emphasizes the value of realism, he does not quarrel so much with his contemporary modernists (whereas Woolf would openly identify the realist writers Bennett, Wells or Galsworthy as the antagonist) as he focuses his Protestant rhetoric on the strict formal requirements and, without mentioning Henry James, identifies the extensive concern with the form and technical issues as the main obstacle to the freedom of expression of the novelist. Wells and James were friends but their creative and critical personalities were totally opposite: "Wells was extroverted, versatile, bumptious, high-spirited, assertive and credulous; James was introverted, dedicated, urbane, sombre, tortuous and sceptical. They shared a deep concern about human condition", but their views on the practice of prose fiction differed, in that "James's material was the human psyche – its elusiveness, rapacity and vulnerability"; whilst "Wells's interest in human nature was far more physical and environmental" (Gillie, 1975: 2-3). Against James's insistence on enunciating novel as art, and novelist as artist, Wells in a 1915 letter to James declares that he "had rather be called a journalist than an artist", thus revealing his preference for the realistic objective observation and documentation and the expression of facts in the novel.

Likewise, the writer-critic Edward Morgan Forster in his *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) charges Henry James "with sacrificing the common stuff of

humanity, with gutting and castrating his characters for the sake of rigid aesthetic patterns” (Baldick, 2005: 159). Like Aldous Huxley, Forster is difficult to be categorised as a writer, traditional realistic or experimental modernist. As a critic, praising Tolstoy and Dickens, Forster values the main task of novel-writing as not the consistency of the narrative point of view but the depiction of people, meaning the creation of “a proper mixture of characters” (Forster, 1979: 194). However, Forster’s own famous distinction of character types as “flat” and “round” reveals at least an interest if not a genuine concern with general and universal aesthetic categories, a tendency which can be also seen in his focus on “plot”, “story”, “rhythm”, and “pattern”. Actually, E. M. Forster advocates the idea of “universalist truths” in fiction, thus extracting novel from the concrete historical context, and making literary criticism assume the “notion that the novel expressed a universal language and spoke of and to the human condition” (O’Gorman, 2002: 19).

Arnold Bennett is another writer-critic of the period who condemns the modernists for their interest in the form of the novel, their exaggerated attention to the narrative level, which in his opinion, is a curtain that hides the true inspiration and the interest in real life. In his essay “James Joyce’s *Ulysses*” (1922), Bennett blames Joyce, among other things, for the pervading difficult dullness of his novel and for being “more indecent, obscene, scatological and licentious than the majority of the professedly pornographical books” (Bennet, 1979: 209). Likewise, Richard Aldington in his essay “The Influence of Mr. James Joyce” (1921) considers the experimental novelist as a writer who has used his creative gifts to disgust mankind, and therein blames Joyce for doing something which is false, and libel on humanity. Against such attacks, the imposing voices of the modernist writer-critics such as Thomas Stearns Eliot and Virginia Woolf emerge. Eliot, in his essay “‘Ulysses’, Order and Myth” (1923), like Woolf in her work “Modern Fiction” and other essays, defends experimental literary discourse, and clearly takes the side of modernists against the realists.

Like Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot is another major twentieth century writer-critic, but, unlike Woolf, who appears to follow the subjective, prescriptive and literature dependent criticism of the earlier periods, Eliot is interested in technique and form of the literary works, namely poems, and above all a poem’s meaning. In general, Eliot’s “thought is the sum of three kinds of writing: his literary criticism, his social and political criticism, and his poetry”, which complement “but do not repeat each other”, and among which literary criticism, “though it engages intermittently in theoretical inquiry, is largely practical, chiefly concerned with what a poet needs to know and think about the literature of the past” (Menand, 2000: 43). There

are critics of criticism who have seen T. S. Eliot as "Dryden's successor in the sense that his critical work serves the purpose of introducing and justifying his own practice as a poet", as well as "Arnold's successor in so far as he assumed the role of guardian of cultural elitism" (Blamires, 1991: 324).

It could be stated that just as Matthew Arnold was the most influential voice in Victorian literary criticism, so was T. S. Eliot in the first half of the twentieth century. Like the critical work of his Victorian predecessor, Eliot's criticism might be considered in some of its aspects to be defensive and prescriptive, and it certainly rejects subjectivity. In "The Function of Criticism" (1932), Eliot insists that criticism must avoid the "Inner Voice", which is the subjective responses of the critic, and must become "the common pursuit of true judgement". The function of criticism would be "the elucidation [interpretation] of works of art and the correction of taste" (Eliot, 1999: 24). In "The Perfect Critic" (1920), Eliot states that the only critical method "is to be very intelligent, but of intelligence itself swiftly operating the analysis of sensation to the point of principle and definition" (Eliot, 1950: 10), a statement to which many of later critics, including the writer-critic Al Alvarez, subscribe. T. S. Eliot's scientific, not subjective, attitude from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), "Hamlet and His Problems" (1919), and "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921) rendered criticism the task "to interpret" poems, after which to "pass judgement on them; that is, establish how well they succeed in creating and conveying the complexity of meaning that we expect from them" (Bertens, 2005: 14).

Among the writer-critics of modernism, it is primarily T. S. Eliot's emphasis on text itself that has become the so-called "practical criticism" (with the contribution of I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis), and on the technique of "close readings", representing "a critical practice which dwelt with fierce alternativeness on the verbal details of canonical works of "great literature"" (Collini, 1992: 5). "Practical criticism" and "close reading" occupy the centre of the new type of criticism in the first half of the twentieth century, both in Britain and the United States, of both British "Cambridge English School" and the American "New Criticism". However, unlike in Richards and Leavis, who are known mainly as great critics, there is a vital connection between Eliot's creative work and his critical attitudes expressed in essays and articles. Eliot the critic is also a great poet of modernist and experimental attitude, and in this hypostasis he consciously places poetry "in opposition to the modern world" and "seeks in poetry the sort of profound experience that the modern world, in which materialistic values and a cheap moralism have come to dominate, cannot offer" (Bertens, 2005: 14).

Contrary to H. G. Wells and E. M. Forster along with John Galsworthy and Somerset Maugham who represent “tradition” in the first half of the twentieth century, James Joyce represents “innovation” together with T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf. However, unlike Eliot and Woolf, Joyce is not regarded as a writer-critic, but he produced a number of theoretical discussions, which are as original and out of the ordinary as his own literary practice. As Woolf or Lawrence, Joyce expressed his critical views in a number of essays, as well as through the voice of his protagonist Stephen Dedalus, the archetypal image of the twentieth century artist, and the emblematic character from *Stephen Hero*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses*. Such fictional characters are described by Peter van Inwagen as a “theoretical entity of literary criticism”. Thus, Joyce’s character fits the recurrent modernist theme of the portrayed artist, as in Marcel Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*, which, like Joyce’s work, is “both a portrait of the artist and a discovery of the aesthetic by which the portrait is painted; clearly, a modernist aesthetic” (Fletcher and Bradbury, 1991: 404). Joyce’s most interesting ideas in his personal theory of art are about genres, epiphany, the role of the artist, the form of the work of art, and the reception of art, or rather the reaction of the audience to the work of art.

### Conclusion

The era of “old criticism” ends at the beginning of the twentieth century when criticism develops into a discipline in its own right with all its traditional, scholarly, humanistic and moral principles being challenged by a new generation of academic critics who superseded the views of the former writer-critics by the focus on text in itself and poetic language, and through “close reading” and “practical criticism”. In literary and artistic practice, the first decades of the last century were the period of Modernism, of innovation and experimentation, of artistic self-consciousness and rejection of rules and commonplace. In this period of modern experiment, literary criticism itself underwent a revolution, and even the most conservative critical approaches, such as traditional biography, underwent certain changes. Yet, at the beginning of the twentieth century in Great Britain, as well on the Continent, the scientific nature of criticism, nurtured by the rising professional critics as Percy Lubbock, T. S. Eliot and the Cambridge academics as I. A. Richards, William Empson, and F. R. Leavis faced the moral, humanistic, historical and subjective inheritance from the critical writing of the previous century, still cultivated by many scholars as well as by some newly emerging writers. F. R. Leavis versus D. H. Lawrence, Percy Lubbock versus Virginia Woolf, or rather Henry James, and Percy Lubbock versus H. G. Wells, are opposites representing the scientific, formalist view against the subjective response in literary criticism, and, in terms of literary history, the conflict between “innovation” and “tradition”.



Indeed, the condition of British literary criticism at the beginning of the last century in the age of Modernism reveals another "battle of the books", another confrontation in the war between originality and conventionality, the eternal conflict between the element of innovation and that of tradition in the literary process. Modernists were with regard to "innovation" just as the symbolists and the entire nineteenth century avant-garde before them, that were preceded by romantics, and much earlier by the metaphysical poets, whereas after Modernism the task of keeping literary originality alive has been assumed by postmodernism. In the history of literature, the ancient classical period, the revival of ancient classical tradition in the Renaissance, the seventeenth and eighteenth century neoclassicism, the nineteenth century realism, and the twentieth century and contemporary realistic and socially-concerned literature are arguably on the side of "tradition".

The "battle of the books" as the fight between "innovation" and "tradition" is largely the confrontation of some critical theories on art and literature which keep the engine of literary development running, stimulating both the movement of literature and the enhancement of critical thinking. Thus, this battle started so in Antiquity, continued throughout different centuries under different forms as to put on in the first decades of the twentieth century the forms of realism and modernism in literary practice and those of tradition and science in critical discourse.

Some critics, like James and Lubbock, attempted to provide criticism with a methodological and scientific dimension, and others, like Eliot, followed this aim also in their effort to prove the superiority of their own, modernist and experimental type of literature over that of those writers who used traditional themes and techniques. Woolf was also determined to show the superiority of the modernist and experimental fiction over that of the socially concerned realists, but, unlike Eliot, in doing so she continued the traditional manner of a subjective, defensive and combative critical discourse against the traditional and realistic manner of creative writing.

Virginia Woolf's literary criticism differs from that of Percy Lubbock not in matters of their concern, which is fiction, but in the modalities chosen to deliver such a concern. Woolf is passionate, subjective, combative and defensive, whereas Lubbock tended to be impartial, objective, scientific and methodological.

Also, Woolf emphasizes primarily the thematic level of the fictional text, and discusses its content, character representation strategies, and the status of the author while defending her own, modernist type of the novel against the realists whom she regards as materialists. Lubbock focuses primarily on the narrative level of the fictional text, and, apart from the author's relation to the character and the narrated material, he also discusses

the reader and the reception of the form of the novel which should occur from a detached non-temporal perspective.

Although Lubbock's critical work is not on modernist writers, it is modernist in that it rejects the earlier subjective, prescriptive, moral and humanistic critical tradition and advocates new aesthetic goals of formal coherence and formal techniques that would confer to novels the status of ideal works of art produced by novelists who are, above all, craftsmen.

With Woolf, Lubbock, Eliot and others, the condition of criticism at the beginning of the last century reveals not only a turbulent period in its history, but also great energy and flourishing reified by the diversity of many and often contradictory matters of concern and method, critical trends and attitudes. Among the reasons in the first half of the twentieth century for this intellectual diversity and collision are: the demand for critical texts and critical studies, the great number of periodicals, the establishment of literature as a university discipline, and especially the fact that at the beginning of the last century literary criticism gained independence from literary trends and movements and shook off the previous critical tradition. The development of literary criticism was possible in spite of the heavy nineteenth century heritage, conservative critics and "emotional" writers and writer-critics who were in the act of still providing such "obstacles" as dependence on creative practice, subjectivity and prescriptiveness. But having Formalism in Russia, T. S. Eliot and Cambridge English School in Britain, New Criticism in America, and later structuralism in France as its avant-garde, the twentieth century criticism established a scientific, methodical and methodological basis, developed theory, increased typology, attempting to approach creative writing theoretically and critically from a number of perspectives which to the present have emerged as various critical trends and schools.

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