

THE "MATERIALISTS" OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

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Received Apr. 30, 1968

In her critical writings Virginia Woolf has at times shown her impatience with some of the writers of her time and of the past, but nowhere do we find her so exacting as she is in that part of the essay, "Modern Fiction", where, before going into her famous passage on the "proper stuff of fiction", she discusses briefly her so-called "materialists", Galsworthy, Bennett, and Wells. While thanking them for a thousand gifts, she goes so far as to say that "the sooner English fiction turns its back upon them, as politely as may be, and marches, if only into the desert, the better for its soul."¹⁾ This tone of hers is very severe, considering that they are generally considered great writers representing a certain age, and that there are critics who consider *The Old Wives' Tale* the greatest English novel of this century, and critics like Mr. Daiches, who in virtue of *The Forsyte Saga*, claim for Galsworthy, the title, "the last of the great Victorian novelists."²⁾

Virginia Woolf does not attempt to analyze the reasons for her discontent with these writers. Rather, she finds it "difficult to justify her discontent by explaining what it is that she exacts."³⁾ Her professed reasons are brief, and to the effect that "they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body", that from their pages "the essential thing, life, spirit, truth or reality has moved off."⁴⁾ Whereas she refers frequently to Sterne or Jane Austen who are obviously her favorites, with the exception of another essay, "Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown", this is the only place where she refers more or less at length to these three. Other more casual references, such as the one found in her letter to Lytton Strachey in which she mimics the fact-recording habit of Galsworthy, "this might be the beginning of a novel by Mr. Galsworthy,"⁵⁾ make us feel that this feeling of hers towards these writers was a deeply ingrained one, almost akin to the feeling of dislike one harbors for things whose first impressions happen to be unfavorable. Whether she refrained

1) *The Common Reader*, First Series, London, The Hogarth Press 1951, pp. 185-6.

2) David Daiches, *The Novel and the Modern World*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press 1948, p. 44.

3) *The Common Reader*, First Series, p. 187.

4) *ibid.*, p. 185.

5) *Virginia Woolf & Lytton Strachey, Letters*, London, The Hogarth Press 1956, p.

from airing her views further out of deference for the existence in flesh of these three authors, or whether she did not think it worth her while to employ the activities of her mind further on this question cannot be known, but it is felt that had she had a mind to do so, she would certainly have come out with an original and convincing piece of work.

With respect to Galsworthy David Daiches points out that "his stock is fairly low at present" because "he speaks too distinctly with the voice of his own generation,"¹⁾ that he showed himself unaware of that disintegration of community of belief which was actually going on in his own time and which characterizes the world projected by the novelists of the generation immediately following. Mr. Daiches speaks in terms of the "principle of selection", and the "standard of values" implied by the "principle of selection", with reference to the difference between the works of Galsworthy and those of the later novelists. When in "Modern Fiction", directly after referring to the "materialists" who disappoint her, Virginia Woolf says, "Look within and life it seems, is very far from being like this", or that "we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it,"²⁾ she is articulating in her intuitive way her own awareness of the same problem.

To say that Virginia Woolf turned her back on these writers because she saw them to be blind to the spirit and temperament of their time, in short, outmoded in their outlook on life, would seem to explain away the reason for her attitude toward them once and for all. We have, on the other hand, our own impressions of these writers which demand to be given attention before we agree at all to adjust our views according to those of Virginia Woolf. We can understand, even from a limited knowledge of the works of H. G. Wells why she has so little to say of him, except that he "falls notably wide of the mark",³⁾ but our impression of the works of Galsworthy, which has been on the whole favorable, makes us wonder why she is so coolly indifferent toward him, why she almost passes him over, so to speak. As for Arnold Bennett, there is our impression that *The Old Wives' Tale* has something in common with Defoe's *Moll Flanders* for which she has shown almost unconditional praise, and also our impression that *Clayhanger*, considered by some to be a greater work than *The Old Wives' Tale*, must be judged apart.

Questions and impressions like these urge one to examine some of the works of these writers again, not by a frontal attack, as it were, but obliquely, in the light of what Virginia Woolf says about other writers of the past.

1) Daiches, *op. cit.*, p. 33

2) *The Common Reader*, First Series, p. 189.

3) *ibid.*, p. 186.

To borrow the words of G. S. Fraser, *The Old Wives' Tale* is a "novel in the French tradition, the tradition of Flaubertian realism."¹⁾ On the other hand, *Moll Flanders* is an 18th century novel, "realistic" in the broader sense of the word, so to compare these two may be to commit a confusion of kind, but for a few reasons one is tempted to dwell on the likeness between them. It should be noted in passing that Virginia Woolf herself hardly ever uses such terms as realism or naturalism in the technical sense. Defoe is classed among her "truth-tellers"²⁾ along with writers like Swift, Trollope, W. E. Norris, and Maupassant.

To her these are the writers who gratify our sense of belief, "each of them assures us that things are precisely as they say they are. What they describe happens actually before our eyes", and "we get from their novels the same sort of refreshment and delight that we get from seeing something actually happen in the street below."³⁾ She cannot agree that Defoe is, as he has been accused of being, "a mere journalist and literal recorder of facts with no conception of the nature of psychology,"⁴⁾ but she admits that in his world emphasis is laid upon "the very facts that most reassure us of stability in real life, upon money, furniture, food," until "we seem wedged among solid objects in a solid universe."⁵⁾ Of Arnold Bennett Mr. Fraser says; "Even in his best books, one is wearied after a time by a lack of any deep curiosity on (his) part about the inner workings of people. He depicted minutely and exactly the hard surface detail of life, the appearance, behaviour, and speech of his Midlanders, the streets they walked in, the rooms they lived in, without suspecting that any mysteries might lie under that surface. Yet with all its limitations the world of his best books is solid and true and living."⁶⁾ Their emphasis falls somewhat differently, but these words of Virginia Woolf and Mr. Fraser clearly point to one similarity between the two novelists, that is, the impression that they give of being literal recorders of facts, and of their world being solid and true and living.

There is one other small way in which *The Old Wives' Tale* resembles *Moll Flanders*, and that is the situation in which one of the heroines is placed. Sophia, like Moll Flanders, is "reduced to a state of unfriended misery, (her) existence must be a continued struggle, and (her) survival at all the result of luck and (her) own exertions,"⁷⁾ as Virginia Woolf says of Moll Flanders and Roxana. "(She) has the

1) D. S. Fraser, *The Modern Writer and His World*, Tokyo, Kenkyusha. 1960, p. 89.

2) *Granite and Rainbow*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1958. p. 94.

3) *ibid.*, p. 96

4) *The Common Reader*, First Series, p. 127

5) *Granite and Rainbow*, p. 96

6) Fraser, *op. cit.*, p. 90

7) *The Common Reader*, First Series, p. 124.

world to begin and the battle to fight for (herself)." Just as Moll Flanders emerges finally out of her numberless emergencies to settle down in comfort and security, so Sophia, single-handedly and with sheer diligence copes with one crisis after another, and climbs out of the original hopeless state. One wonders whether Bennett, after having constructed the story of Constance faithfully in the manner of the French realists, sought relief by bringing in some of the elements of the old-fashioned adventure story.

These points of similarity do not pertain to what is essential to these works, but they nonetheless set us wondering what there is in their art that has made Virginia Woolf offer almost unconditional praise to the one and the uncomplimentary title of materialist to the other. As mentioned before, she has not analyzed the reason for the discontent she feels with Bennett, but what little she has said seems at once to touch the heart of the question.

Mr. Bennett is perhaps the worst culprit of the three, inasmuch as he is by far the best workman. He can make a book so well constructed and solid in its craftsmanship that it is difficult for the most exacting of critics to see through what chink or crevice decay may creep in. There is not so much as a draught between the windows or a crack in the boards. And yet – if life should refuse to live there?... His characters live abundantly, even unexpectedly, but it remains to ask how do they live, and what do they live for?¹⁾

It can be seen from this that the most serious trouble with Bennett's art is for Virginia Woolf that "life refuses to live there." Wherein this trouble consists cannot be readily pointed out, she says, by the "most exacting of critics." Obviously it would involve, among other things, an inquiry into the social and spiritual background of his age, and an analysis of his "standard of values", and his "principle of selection" with reference to this background. Since this is beyond our power, and the object of this study is not the art of Bennett itself, but a reconsideration of some of his works, in the light of Virginia Woolf's judgment of what is good in fictional art, an attempt will not be made to follow this line. Having started by comparing writers as wide apart in the history of literature as Defoe and Bennett, and knowing that we cannot trace this analogy much farther, we will try to find out where in craftsmanship the one departs from the other by Virginia Woolf's standard, and also to what degree life can be found by us to "live" in Bennett's world within its limitations.

1) *The Common Reader*, First Series, p. 186.

For this, we will first listen to what Virginia Woolf has to say of the art of Defoe.

He is often dull. He can imitate the matter-of-tract precision of a scientific traveller until we wonder that his pen could trace or his brain conceive what has not even the excuse of truth to soften its dryness. He leaves out the whole of vegetable nature, and a large part of human nature. All this we may admit, though we have to admit defects as grave in many writers whom we call great. But that does not impair the peculiar merit of what remains. Having at the outset limited his scope and confined his ambitions he achieves a truth of insight which is far rarer and more enduring than the truth of fact which he professed to make his aim. *Moll Flanders* and her friends recommended themselves to him not because they were, as we should say, "picturesque," nor, as he affirmed, because they were examples of evil living by which the public might profit. It was their natural veracity, bred in them by a life of hardship, that excited his interest.¹⁾

Here two points present themselves as the basis for our argument, that Defoe "limited his scope and confined his ambitions", and that his interest was excited by the "natural veracity" of his people.

The sphere of action of *Moll Flanders* is no less limited than that of *The Old Wives' Tale*. Acting always on the spur of the moment, there is no distance that Defoe's heroine will hesitate to traverse, if only to satisfy her whims and fancies. Yet *Moll Flanders* is not an overall picture of England of those days, nor even of a certain locality. Localities like Bath, Newgate, or Virginia have their place in the novel in so far as they are directly related to the heroine and her indomitable will to improve her position as she thought best. Occasionally the heroine becomes a mouthpiece for the wisdom of the author but this does not stop the flow of his inventive power, and on the whole the impression we receive is that his people go on imperturbably as if they came there without his knowledge. Ordinarily, such an almost endless repetition of events so like one another would cause a flagging of our interest, but we are carried along to the end, spellbound, as it were. Whatever his purpose, his vision of the life of this dauntless woman who has to battle for her life against tremendous odds is held unwaveringly in his view to the end.

It was their natural veracity, Virginia Woolf says, "bred in them by a life of hardship, that excited his interest."²⁾ It was Defoe's own experience of a life of hard-

1) *The Common Reader*, First Series, pp. 129-30.

2) *ibid.*, p. 130.

ship that endowed them with their natural veracity. The pickpockets, thieves, highwaymen that people his world, we are told, were people that Defoe knew in his own life. He knew of the poverty that was at the roots of their crimes, and he knew of their almost incurable thirst for adventure. He knew also of their courage, resource, and tenacity, as well as of their passions and desires. Knowing them thoroughly, and having an unusual capacity for sympathy with his people, he could put himself into them soul and body. Moll Flander's passion for the pursuit of her goal is that of her creator's, and we are caught in the atmosphere of this passion which is infectious. When the former accomplice of Moll Flanders is arrested and then hanged and she says that was "the best news to (her) that (she) had heard a great while,"¹⁾ we are made to feel the relief as strongly as does the heroine. This power of Defoe to involve us entirely seems to make up for the lack of subtlety in the treatment of motives, and gives life to these people who are "flat" so far as character portrayal is concerned. As Virginia Woolf says, his characters have us "all in tow."

Compared to Defoe, Arnold Bennett is very ambitious. In writing *The Old Wives' Tale*, he set out, we are told, to write a novel that could well cope with *Une Vie* of Maupassant, and in order to better achieve this purpose he wrote about the lives of two women instead of one. The people he chose to write about were of one class, of the lower middle class, but he sets them against Paris in the days before and after the war with Prussia, as well as against the Five Towns of the Midlands he knew so well. He depicts with almost scientific precision the latter with their gradual development from the beloved homeland of old-fashioned modest tradesmen into a bustling center of commercial enterprise, and the former in its gay and dark moods, laden with merriment and irresponsibility and with the gloom overcast by the famous Siege. He unfolds against this background, life from youth to old age, with entanglements trivial and extraordinary, seasoned with joy and despair. With the sense of construction learned from his French masters he aims to give depth as well as breadth to this ambitious work.

In the first part of the book dealing with Constance, he seems to have achieved his purpose considerably well. The unsophisticated provincial atmosphere of the typical lower middle class people and their responses to the everyday happenings and emergencies strike us as real. There remains, of course, the dissatisfaction that the author often provides us with no more than stock responses, and therefore never heightens the critical moments of their lives into something savoring of tragedy. It seems, however, that Bennett has succeeded in conveying to us the exact

1) Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, New York, The Modern Library, 1950, p. 208.

degree of density of emotional life which is in keeping with the solid atmosphere he has created. It is true that a great deal of industry has been spent on laying the foundation for the scenes of the drama, but on the whole the world of these provincial people is self-contained, and the impression received is unified.

This impression begins to be impaired as soon as the story of Sophia is launched on its way. The bringing in of the execution scene is little more than a device in the plot to provide the heroine with just sufficient funds to start her out on her new life of adventure. If it has been brought in to bring into relief the irresponsibility and the thoughtlessness of the man with whom Sophia has eloped, it seems hardly necessary, for we have been given by this time sufficient proof of that. It has the value, however, of giving color and individuality to the scene that is France, and in itself would be excusable.

In comparison, however, with the pages allotted to this spectacular and odious scene, the expediency with which he disposes of more important things in life is astonishing.

The accent, at once ironic and listless, in which she put this question, showed that strange and vital things had happened to Sophia in the four years which had elapsed since her marriage. It did really seem to her, indeed, that the Sophia whom Gerald had espoused was dead and gone, and that another Sophia had come into her body.¹⁾

The strange and vital things that had happened to her in four years are thus disposed of in a matter of few lines. From then on, an entirely new Sophia with no trace of her former irresponsibility and improvidence, and with all the will power, forethought, and discretion of a resourceful and virtuous woman makes her way to success. This is unbelievable, and makes us feel that Bennett deals, not like Defoe, as Virginia Woolf says, with the important lasting side of things,²⁾ but with the unimportant side of things, that he spends "immense skill and immense industry making the trivial and the transitory appear the true and the enduring."³⁾ This is not the only place where we are made to feel that Bennett has gone to excessive lengths to provide a rich setting for his vision of what constitutes life and truth in a work of art, but it is more obvious here than anywhere else that he has defeated his own purpose. We are reminded of what Virginia Woolf says with respect to Robinson Crusoe: Nothing is so large that it makes another thing too

1) Arnold Bennett *The Old Wives' Tale*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, p. 326.

2) *The Common Reader*, First Series, p. 129.

3) *ibid.*, p. 187.

small ; nothing is so small that it makes another thing too large,¹⁾ or "we have only to reflect how seldom a book is carried through on the same impulse of belief, so that its perspective is harmonious throughout, to realize how great a writer Dofoe was."²⁾ If we are not carried away by the fate of this protagonist to the extent that we are by the story of *Moll Flanders*, it may be due partly to this difference in the perspective adopted by the two authors. Bennett has sacrificed his vision for his ambition to present a huge panorama of life.

As said before, there is much truth if not subtlety or pathos in Constance's side of the story. To give some examples, the feelings of a doting mother for a spiritually weaned child, fluctuating between hope and despair, or those involved in the awkward relationship between the husband and the mother-in-law, are sufficiently real. The woodenness, on the other hand, of Sophia's responses to the advances of her faithful friend, Chirac, is unbelievable in the light of her former fickleness. It seems that Bennett knew the makings of a mediocre but dutiful housewife comfortably established in life, but not the inner springs of a daring and wilful woman who had escaped the bondage of her society. He was dealing with a type of woman outside the limits of his notion of womanhood and also his standard of morality. For this reason Sophia is not sufficiently integrated with her background even in the earlier part of the novel. As a result the story of Sophia's practices of abstinence, economy, and industry as she strives toward success in Paris does not live as does the story of Constance, much less, as that of *Moll Flanders*.

In "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" Virginia Woolf has based, on *Hilda Lessways*, the second of the *Clayhanger* trilogy, her argument against Bennett's way of piling up fact upon fact to the exclusion of the essential thing - "life, truth, or reality." She has not set forth her views concerning *Clayhanger*, the first of the trilogy, which is considered by some critics to be a work greater than *The Old Wives' Tale*. Whatever the merits of this novel that may have formed the basis for such appraisal, it seems that, compared with *The Old Wives' Tale*, the vision of the author is single here, and that his usual method of accumulating facts to provide for the setting is not so conspicuous and does not get in the way of this vision. A balance seems to be maintained between the description of the facts and events that support the life of Edwin Clayhanger and that of the spiritual experiences he goes through - his faith in humanity and disillusionment, his aspiration for the refinement of his self and the final compromise, his experience of that strange and inexplicable thing, love, and his speculations about the tragedies of life. All this is wedged in a no

1) *Granite and Rainbow*, p. 96.

2) *ibid.*, p. 96.

less solid world than that of *The Old Wives' Tale*, but the author's attention does not waver far from the emotional and intellectual life of this sensitive character, and his ultimate goal in life, even if it is not a very high one. In the treatment of this inner life he has little in common with the modern psychologist. It is the method of the omniscient author simply recording thought processes, but it is often suggestive of a deeper insight and more delicate sensibility at work behind it than that of the author of *The Old Wives' Tale*. The impression received from this work is not only that the author's vision is unified but also that he knows this character more than any other character in his works. The truth of what Virginia Woolf has said as to the importance of the mastery of perspective and the dependence on it of the degree of success in overwhelming us "with the authority of a masterpiece"¹⁾ seems to be demonstrated in this one author.

At times Bennett seems to give depth to the life of Edwin Clayhanger by making him stand a little back from the immediate scene before him, which can be seen in passages like the following :-

"I hear you're getting frightfully thick with the Orgreaves," Clara observed, with a malicious accent and smile, as if to imply that he was getting frightfully above himself, and — simultaneously — that the Orgreaves were after all no better than other people.

"Who told you that?" He walked towards the doorway uneasily. The worst was that he could not successfully pretend that these sisterly attacks were lost on him.

"Never mind who told me," said Clara.

Her voice took on a sudden charming roguish quality, and he could hear again the girl of fourteen. His heart at once softened to her. The impartial and unmoved spectator that sat somewhere in Edwin, as in everybody who possesses artistic sensibility, watching his secret life as from a conning tower, thought how strange this was.¹⁾

There is subtlety in this response of Edwin to the essential nature of his sister and in his ability to detach himself to view the mystery of human relationship, which gives depth to this character, if not the effect of poetry that is achieved, in Virginia Woolf's view, by authors like Sterne. This kind of subtlety in Bennett's treatment of the feelings and speculations of this character is fairly sustained in this book. These speculations are concerned mostly with the mystery of character,

1) *The Death of the Moth*, London, The Hogarth Press 1947, p. 106.

1) Arnold Bennett, *Clayhanger*, London, 1913, p. 230.

and of human relationship, but almost never with the mystery of life, death and the fate of human beings, and for this reason, may not have had the power to make up for what he has lost in the esteem of Virginia Woolf, but to us it seems that Bennett has achieved a success here so far as singleness of vision and the truth of insight into human nature are concerned. If we have had so far a predilection for the art of Galsworthy, here we are inclined to agree with Virginia Woolf that Bennett is the better workman of the two.

Virginia Woolf disposes of Galsworthy in a few words, "nor, profoundly though we respect the integrity and humanity of Mr. Galsworthy, shall we find what we seek in his pages," but Mr. Daiches says of him :

Galsworthy's realism is not that of the simple observer and recorder, who within the scheme of values which he accepts, endeavours to present in prose narratives the products of an imagination working on an objective view of events. Galsworthy, at his best, does more—or at least does differently than this. His realism in his finest work is based on a delicate response to detail, to the small but significant symbol. ... *The Forsyte Saga* possesses... an adequacy of treatment, an effectiveness in integrating characters with their background and with each other, and a quality of sensitivity in descriptive passages, which... distinguish¹⁾ it from most novels written within that tradition in the present century.

These words of Mr. Daiches seem to define adequately the difference in quality between the art of Bennett and that of Galsworthy in spite of what we have said with reference to *Clayhanger*. The "delicate response to detail", the "adequacy of treatment," the "quality of sensitivity in descriptive passages"—these are what make us, in general, feel a stronger kinship with the author of *The Apple Tree* and *The Forsyte Saga* than with the author of *The Old Wives' Tale*. Bennett strikes us more as a survivor of the old tradition, the solidity of his world and his wit and humor being reminiscent of the art of the great Victorians, while Galsworthy with his subtle humanitarianism and intellectual clarity of approach seems to speak more as one of our age.

As is well known, Galsworthy's intention was to write in *The Forsyte Saga* of the "impingement of Beauty, and the claims of Freedom, on a possessive world."²⁾ This intention is carried through to the end of that voluminous work, but the satirical treatment of the man of property which is sensed in the early part of the novel gradually gives way to a more tolerant attitude toward the same. Due to this and to

1) Daiches, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

2) John Galsworthy, *The Forsyte Saga*, London, William Heinemann 1922, p. xii.

a neglect of motivation of the side representing the world of beauty, our sympathy shifts gradually toward the opposite side, the gradually disintegrating possessive world personified by Soames, the man of property. Galsworthy's sympathy becomes divided between the ideal he has long cherished and must defend, and the gradually dying splendor of the reality in which he himself is deeply involved. Such a split in vision which concerns the basic outlook of the artist seems to be more disastrous to the work as a whole than that lopsided vision pointed out with respect to *The Old Wives' Tale*. In Bennett's case, the intention of the author was always clear; what came into question was a hastiness in his ordering of his world. It is true that a lack of insight into the materials may have caused this slur in his hand, but we are never left in doubt as to his intention. It seems that *The Old Wives' Tale* alone is sufficient to bring out the point that Bennett, as Virginia Woolf claims, is the better workman of the two.

This split in vision of Galsworthy is one of the points most frequently brought up by critics with respect to this representative work of his. There are various other points we would like to bring up in connection with this work that come into conflict with Virginia Woolf's notion of "perspectives" that uphold a masterpiece, for example, the lack of the "androgynous" state of mind that may have caused the lifelessness of Irene, Galsworthy's symbol for his ideal of beauty, or the absence of "his concern with the private life", or "his message.. to the soul"¹⁾, which, in Virginia Woolf's view, is the saving grace of E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*, which similarly lacks the "single vision". This however, may be asking for the unobtainable, and will not be pursued further here.

The one point we would like to bring up here has to do with what has been said before concerning the impression we receive that Galsworthy seems to us to "speak more as one of our age." This impression arises, as mentioned before, from his "delicate response to detail", "adequacy of treatment", and "quality of sensitivity in descriptive passages", but also from the philosophic, at times even poetic, outlook on life that appears to be assumed by this author occasionally. We are reminded of Virginia Woolf's appraisal of this kind of outlook on life that is occasionally revealed in writers like Sterne that makes him "singularly of our own age"²⁾, the stand that is taken farther back from life to set it against the "torrents of the sunset and the eternities of night" to "invest it with a symbolical significance."³⁾ We are tempted to bring this point up because there are often moments when the characters in *The Forsyte Saga* do seem to stand back from life and assume the pose of the poet

1) *The Death of the Moth*, p. 110.

2) *The Common Reader*, Second Series, London, 1948, p. 81.

3) *The Death of the Moth*, p. 110.

philosopher. Old Jolyon and young Jolyon who are of the same grain, that is, of the same philosophical frame of mind in spite of their being themselves men of property, most often come near this attitude. This, however, is not confined to them. We find Soames who has been intended as the man of property representing the possessive instinct approach this pose.

Across the road, through the railings, Soames could see the branches of trees shining, faintly stirring in the breeze, by the gleam of the street lamps;... and over all, the sky, that wonderful London sky, dusted with the innumerable reflection of countless lamps; a dome woven over between its stars with the refraction of human needs and human fancies – immense mirror of pomp and misery that night after night stretches its kindly mocking over miles of houses and gardens, mansions and squalor, over Forsytes, policemen, and patient watchers in the streets.¹⁾

This is one of the rare passages in *The Forsyte Saga* where the character is dipped in a philosophic mood and made to view life as set against a larger background. This frame of mind is unbecoming to a man like Soames, in particular at this early part of the work where aspects of his temperament contrary to this are strongly presented. Whoever might have been allotted this part of poet-philosopher, however, it is the weakness of the effect achieved that draws our attention. Human life is set against a background only a little above the particular scene. One's eyes are drawn only for an instance to a somewhat general view of life, and directly we are borne back to the hard facts of life again. There is not that setting of life against eternity with the poetic effect that Virginia Woolf admires so much in the art of Sterne. It is to be admitted that such a treatment would look outlandish in the pages of Galsworthy, which seems to have been proved by the incredibility of the speculation of Soames. As Virginia Woolf says, "Sterne with his extraordinary elasticity could use this effect, without incongruity," and this is "only possible because his genius is rich enough to let him sacrifice some of the qualities that are native to the character of the novel without our feeling it."²⁾ Galsworthy's is definitely a more rigid art, but there are elements in his work that make us expect more of him in this respect. As mentioned before, old Jolyon and young Jolyon are both presented as men of philosophy. They are intelligent, cultured and sensitive – a reflection of the writer himself – to a degree that one is tempted to expect a greater depth in their view of life. And yet their moments of philosophy are more often

1) John Galsworthy, *The Forsyte Saga*, pp. 215~6.

2) *Granite and Rainbow* p.136

disposed of, summarily, as it were, as in the following examples.

But then against his will came one of those moments of philosophy which made old Jolyon different from other Forsytes :

After all why should the man care? He wasn't paid to care, and why expect it? In this world people couldn't look for affection unless they paid for it. It might be different in the next - he didn't know, he couldn't tell.¹⁾

But from that he began indulging in one of those strange impersonal speculations, so uncharacteristic of a Forsyte wherein lay, in part, the secret of his supremacy amongst them. What atoms men were, and what a lot of them ! And what would become of them all!²⁾

Expressions like "those moments of philosophy", "those strange impersonal speculations" do not strengthen our belief in that aspect of this old man, rather, they weaken it. This may be, not only because of the matter-of-fact way in which speculations about such things as affection and man's fate are handled, but also because we have never known this man to be truly philosophic, however different he may appear from the other Forsytes in sensitivity. We do not require here profound poetry such as that Mrs. Woolf finds in patches in Meredith where "the writer's sense of the poetry of youth, of love, of nature is heard like a song to which the characters listen passively without moving a muscle,"³⁾ for this would destroy the harmony of this solid world. But if the author insists on bringing in moments of philosophy, and if he asserts that a given character is different from others, the reader may justly look for qualities that will evoke our sense of it. Because Galsworthy stimulates us to an appetite of this kind, and does nothing further to satisfy our hunger, he leaves in us a sense of being starved, much more than in the case of Bennett, of whom we do not hold such expectations from the beginning. What the latter has given us in this direction within his limitations seems to us to have been thrown into the bargain.

Virginia Woolf does not find H. G. Wells a materialist in the same sense that she does Bennett. "It can scarcely be said of Mr. Wells that he is a materialist in the sense that he takes too much delight in the solidity of his fabric. His mind is too generous in its sympathies to allow him to spend much time in making things

1) *The Forsyte Saga*, p. 100.

2) *ibid.*, p. 33.

3) *Granite and Rainbow*, p. 137.

shipshape and substantial. He is a materialist from sheer goodness of heart, taking upon his shoulders the work that ought to have been discharged by government officials, and in the plethora of his ideas and facts scarcely having leisure to realize, or forgetting to think important, the crudity and coarseness of his human beings.¹⁾

In *Kipps* or *Tono-Bungay*, on which his serious literary reputation rests, he can be said to have achieved occasionally, in between his criticisms of the Victorian social order, artistry in the portrayal of the emotional life of his people, but its proportion is far too small, and it seems that they have well invited the comment of Virginia Woolf that he "falls notably wide of the mark." His intentions and the methods by which he achieves them must have their place in another kind of study.

Virginia Woolf says of Bennett that he is the "worst culprit of the three inasmuch as he is by far the best workman." "Worst culprit" seems to be a strong expression, but it can be taken to mean that she has reason to expect more of Bennett than of Galsworthy. The impulse behind this short study has been to find out how to dispose of the impressions we have had of these two novelists, which, if they do not exactly run counter to Virginia Woolf's appraisal, have been at least more favorable toward Galsworthy for what seemed a greater integrity and sensitivity in his treatment of the conflicts of his people. The materials chosen for this purpose have been limited, and the yardstick applied a crude one, but the effort has given us some satisfaction by enabling us to realize the significance of her brief statement concerning the art of these two novelist. We do not, however, think with her that the "soul of English fiction" would have fared better in the "desert." It is felt that Bennett has done a great deal more than making his world "shipshape and substantial," and our admiration is reserved for Galsworthy for the memory of his impressive scenes as well as for his integrity and humanity.

1) *The Common Reader*, First Series. pp. 186-7.