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**The Modern Novelist and the Historical Sense:
The Examples of D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf**

Abstract. This paper critically examines the basic assumption that in the modern novel, there is always an interface between text and context. The text is the signifier, while the context is the signified. Thus, a text is a sign system, a signification and a symbol. That is, it relies heavily on the total environment in which it unfolds. With this framework, this paper reads two exemplars of the modern novel, the imaginative portrayal of the existential malaise of the modern world in D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. The central theoretical assumption of the paper is that both texts are signs that signify the chaos of the modern world. Hence, the analysis of the texts relies heavily on an informed eclectic combination of semiotics and socio-historical contextualization of texts. It is established in the paper that modern novelists are creators of signs, while the critics of the novels are their interpreters. Therefore, what is found in the modern novel are images, words, acts, objects, settings, characters and other semiotic properties that are signifiers/*signifiants* that represent a transition from the liberal sentiments and political optimism of the pre-war years to recognition of the ambiguities and possible irredeemable nature of modern man's moral condition. This reading of the novels as aesthetic objects and signs also reveals a world undergoing socio-political change. Also, to depict a cluster of significant thematic concerns, the tone of the two novels is a mixture of cynicism, scepticism, hedonism and the neo-picaresque tradition. The modern novel is held in this paper to express and signify the mood of its time (the modern period), especially the stress of social change marked and marred by alienation, despair, cruelty, absurdity, pain, poverty, anarchy, atheism, misogyny, misanthropy and all forms of anomy. In the two novels selected

for this study, man's life is semiotically depicted as a stream of sorrow punctuated by cataracts of momentary joy. The study also confirms the popularly-held notion that the modern novel possesses symbolic overtones and allegorical meanings, which expose the ills of the society and attack its imperfections. However, the criticism is governed more by love for the society than by disenchantment with it. Actually, most modern novelists possess a historical sense; their coherence rests on the similar preoccupations with the predicaments of man in an apparently hostile world. However, Lawrence and Woolf are discovered to have a vision of history that is capable of self-transcendence, and their novels are denunciation of the social and cultural forces that shape and thwart human progress and freedom. Therefore, in this paper, the priority of the semiotic interpretation of the modern novel is critically illustrated and confirmed.

Introduction

One of the basic assumptions of this study is that there is 'text', and there is another 'text' that accompanies it. This goes beyond what is written or said. Rather, it includes other non-verbal elements, the total environment in which the text unfolds. According to Jean-Pierre Durix, "literature is anchored in a particular moment of time and the writer is often conditioned by his environment" (1987: XI). Also, S. E. Ogude believes that "...there is a sense in which every literary work is a response to a definite historical and socio-political condition" (1991: 1). This is also the belief of Joanna Maciulewicz (2002). Therefore, we find it imperative, at this juncture, to foreground the enabling pre-texts of modern novels. This will assist us to read two selected exemplars of the modern novel through the lens of other 'texts', to wit, historical texts, and it will also enable us to view the existential malaise of the modern world through the mirror of prose literature. The modern world was conceived a hostile and anomic society, fraught with stifling gender relations and disturbing structure of power and racial relations. It is a world where

human beings are trapped by conventions, emotionally crippled, and obsessed with status and competition. The modern novelist, therefore, situates the problem of history within philosophical, psychological and social contexts.

What is found in the novel of the modern period is an endeavour which brings stylistic innovation into proximity with historical representation. The modern novel signifies a basic shift in the world order, through a semiotic revaluation of ideas in light of the changed circumstances in the modern world. According to Samuel Asein (1977), what is signified in the modern novel is “a new view of the condition of man andan attempt to reflect in literature the sum-total of these changes and their effects” (176). Therefore, the modern novel is a sign that reflects an attempt to convey the meaning of life and the essence of the human factor of civilization. Commenting on the context of the modern novel, Bhagabat Nayak (2008) opines that “the twentieth century witnessed two World Wars which brought immense change to international politics and in the perspective of English literature cropped beyond English and America” (113). Therefore, in their respective quest for meaning and appropriate form which might best represent their vision of modern realities, the modern novelists evolved techniques and forms which they cast in an unmistakable mould. For instance, the modern novel’s preoccupation with dark forces and cultural dislocations of the twentieth century is reflected in its tone of disillusionment. It mimetically signifies the post-world war philosophy of existentialism, which is marked by alienation, despair, cruelty, absurdity, urban terrorism, crime, pain, dissonance, espionage, poverty, dislocation, disintegration, famine, frustration, anarchy, atheism, misogyny, misanthropy, betrayal, nihilism and all forms of *anomie*. The modern novel depicts man’s life as a stream of sorrow punctuated by cataracts of momentary joy. Invariably, the tone of the modern novel is a mixture of cynicism, scepticism, hedonism and the neo-picaresque narration. Alan

Swingewood's (1971) definition of the anguished modern novel is quite illuminating. He describes the novel as depicting "isolated man pitted against other men, against society, sometimes engaged in a hopeless quest for his identity or in self-conscious exploration of the art of writing itself" (214). Thus, Swingewood suggests that the modern novel thematizes dissonance and pain.

We can, therefore, identify two fundamental forms of dissonance in the modern novel – class distinctions and the role of the sexes. These entail the rift among the various strata of people in society and between the feminine and masculine genders. In fact, man's modern experience signifies dissonance and pain. The current intensity of self-scrutiny indicates that the organic unity of individual and community has been lost. The modern novel is preoccupied with arguments concerning 'individual' evolution and higher states of the 'self' available through various forms of social, sexual, and existential discipline. However, in the novels examined in this paper, the characters negotiate their ways out of the sense of personal and historical entrapment, out of personal and collective despair. They are able to transcend history and contemplate the social and historical forces which condition them.

What does emerge from the outlook of the modern novelists is that they are mostly concerned with the human values and socio-historical realities of their society. This makes them qualify as 'good novelists' because they are concerned with "the possibilities of life and the treatment of this concern as a creative issue" (F.B.O. Akporobaro, 2000: 331). Also, a feature of prose fiction, particularly in the modern world, is the refusal of the practitioners to adhere to 'norms' previously held as absolute. Evidence abounds in the modern novel of thematic and stylistic innovations, which reflect and refract the shifting conceptualizations of class, gender, ideological, and generational human relationships. The modern novel represents a characteristic

modern attitude toward the perceived burden of history – a passionate engagement with the problem of history, forging a new novelistic approach that dramatizes, signifies and redefines that problem. Stephen Spender (1971) aptly captures the enabling pretexts of the modern novel thus:

The moderns are therefore those who start off by thinking that human nature has changed; or if not human nature, then the relationship of the individual to the environment, forever being metamorphosed by science, has altered so completely that there is an effective illusion of change which in fact causes human beings to behave as though they were has also to change all the relations within arrangements of words or marks on canvas which make a poem, a novel, or a painting (xiii).

In the main, the burden of this paper is to illustrate the issue of historical sense in the modern novel with two landmarks of modern fiction – Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and D.H.Lawrence's *The Rainbow*. It is an assumption of the paper that the two novels express a fluid, formless and absurd universe through the genre of the novel, which is held in this discourse to be a signifier, and the subject of modern disillusionment constitutes the signified. This is in line with M.M. Bahtin's assertion that:

The study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract 'formal' approach and an equally abstract 'ideological' approach. Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon – social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning (1981:259).

Thus, Bahtin's opinion recalls Saussure's theory of the sign, which forms the theoretical framework of this paper. According to Saussure, a sign (in this case, a text) is made up of the matched pair of signifier (form) and signified (content) (See: C. Sanders, 2004). The modern novel is, therefore, a sign reflecting and refracting the realities of the modern world. The novels selected for this discourse make an appalling comment on modernity and anticipate

contemporary acts of terrorism, including bombing, unprovoked attacks, random shootings, suicide missions and genocide.

According to D.V.Ghent (1953), in 1924, Virginia Woolf made a declaration about the dystopian nature of the modern world: “On or about December 1910, human nature changed” (68). This statement was probably made to jar her (Woolf’s) audience out of their complacency about the mood of the twentieth century, and it foreshadowed the end of an idyllic era in human existence. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a rather apocalyptic vision seemed to pervade Western culture, mainly as a result of the spread of evolutionary theory, and even more of the enunciation of the second principle of thermodynamics in 1850. Darwinian Theory challenged the theological-metaphysical conception of human existence, by replacing the reassuring myth of divine origin with the scientific hypothesis of undifferentiated magma as the only origin of life on our planet. The second law of thermodynamics projects a nihilistic vision that seriously challenged all claims to an axiological foundation of human life.

Actually, in consonance with C.C. Walker, the modern period is signified by upheaval in all areas of human activity (1990: 1292). Political, economic, religious, educational and social spheres are all affected by enormous change and uncertainty. Modernism can be connected to many factors, among which are rapid urbanization, fast-growing new towns, the effects of the telegraph and the vast railway expansion invading the most remote parts of the Western world.

Worse still, the First World War (1914-1918) brought very many excruciating ordeals to British society. According to Peacock, British casualties in the war were very heavy. About 750,000 men from the Empire were killed, and aerial and naval bombardment resulted in 1,500 civilian casualties. Apart from human losses, there were also material losses. The war led to

discontent that engendered mutiny in the army, both in Britain and in France. The Second World War (1939-1945) also unsettled the peace of Britain (Asein, 1977; H.L.Peacock, 1980: 61).

In the midst of this universal angst, life holds no continuity; no values are fixed and final. The ego's inner sanctum, once a haven for the Victorian imagination, opens to an abyss of solitariness. Thus, the climate of opinion in British fiction turns to constructive efforts to maintain and strengthen peace. There is a transition from the liberal sentiments and political optimism of the pre-war years to recognition of the ambiguities and possible irredeemable nature of man's moral condition. Militarism, disenchantment and revolution signify the modern world. The past individual fortune and social compassion are now replaced by a "theatre of organized slaughter" (John Orr, 1990: 23).

Virginia Woolf: The Writer, Her World and Her Narration of the Modern World

Virginia Woolf, the third child of Leslie Stephen's marriage to Julia Dockworth, who had already had three children from a previous marriage, was born in England in 1882. It was her father's second marriage, too, and he was fifty when she was born. As a child, Virginia was eccentric, prone to accidents, unpredictable, and highly sensitive to criticism. Her mother's death in 1895 depressed her, and she became terrified of meeting people. Her sister, Stella, died in 1987, and her father died in 1904. On March 28, 1941, sensing the beginning of another nervous breakdown and fearing the incursion of madness, Virginia Woolf drowned herself in the River Ouse.

Due to her agonizing life experiences, Woolf found the conventional novel unsatisfactory. For her, the traditional elements of the novel (plot, setting, and characterization) impose an unnatural strain on the author. She believed that the modern world was complex, untidy, and difficult to grasp; it should, therefore be artistically represented with apt methods –

modernist techniques. *To the Lighthouse* can be read as a quasi-autobiographical novel of Woolf, because it captures a few of her life experiences which were enmeshed in personal tragedies. Echoes of her childhood resonate in the novel. We have portraits of her father and mother in Mr. And Mrs. Ramsay. Her hope in humanity was shattered by ontological pangs - the deaths of loved ones, epidemics, and wars caused by mankind. In the novel, Woolf uses the characters to exemplify her own twisted feelings of the world. Through the use of the symbols of the lighthouse, Lily's painting, the Ramsays' house, the sea, the boar's skull and the fruit basket, Woolf imaginatively captures some of the issues in the modern world, including the transience of life and work, art as a means of preservation, the subjective nature of reality and the restorative effects of beauty.

Thus, *To the Lighthouse* is an archetypal modernist novel that reflects man's gloom in a manner akin to Hobbesian state of nature where man's life is short, nasty and brutish. Commenting on the existential gloom of the modern world, Fraser (1964) opines that "the world is a fallen world, man a fallen creature" (16). This is the world that Woolf actually artistically depicts in her novel. She reflects man's horror, fear, anxiety and restlessness in an unsecured atmosphere. Mrs. Ramsay harbours the fear that her eight children must suffer in future. Likewise, Mr. Ramsay is restless over his children's dissenting attitudes to his plan about the trip to the lighthouse. Augustus Carmichael, an old friend of Mr. Ramsay's, is also horror-stricken. His life is touched by the pangs of life. He is eccentric and lonely: "His self-dramatization leads to such eccentricities as reciting heroic poetry aloud or groaning extravagantly in his misery" (19). Due to his unfortunate marriage, he becomes scared of further marriage. Actually, the text is filled with irony, sadness and doubts about life. This marks it as a neo-gothic fiction, which underscores its inseparability from modernist temper. Although it is very rich in philosophical

ponderings, the text is boring and monotonous. This is an artistic reflection of the modern world – a world replete with monotonous and empty actions.

Clair Pamela (2002) attests to this claim thus: “The novel is beautiful; the language is rich and pure – our emotions are moved. And yet in a sense her novel is not interesting” (23). Actually, the novel captures a brutal world where man suffers the pangs of isolation, disillusionment and persistent failure. This attests to the veracity of B.M. Ibitokun’s postulation that, in the modern world, “man is ontologically a loner, a nothingness” (1995: 3). William Blakes, an elderly botanist in the novel, loses interest in life and remains lonely because of his childlessness. Charles Tansley, a protégé of Mr. Ramsay’s, is mocked and degraded by his children for his arrogance and self-acclaimed superiority over others. He is also not given attention at the dinner party. Augustus Carmishael’s broken marriage equally makes him alienated. He lives in the world of his own and withdraws into himself. This is a vivid expression of man’s fate in the modern world.

The modernist elements of creation and creation populate the novel. This is an artistic strategy whereby events and situations in a work of fiction are constantly in a state of flux; nothing in the fictional work is stable, rather they keep on coming and going. This is to imaginatively capture the essence of the modern world where nothing is long lasting. It is a world where human relation is not perpetually perfect. The most perfect is flawed at times. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay’s relationship initially gives them a sense of succour, fulfilment and joy. Mr. Ramsay constantly demands for financial assistance and Mrs. Ramsay courteously responds. Due to the frailty of human virtues, Mrs. Ramsay is later fed up with her husband’s persistent requests. Thus, her joy in the marital relationship declines. She begins to notice the weaknesses of her husband because of his over-dependency on her.

The domestic problems (divorce, conflict and misunderstanding) encountered by the principal characters in the text paint the marriage institution in the modern world in a gloomy image. This affirms Orr's (1990: 626) assertion that "the reality of the modern predicament is the absence of love; community, both as communion and communication breaks down." In the novel, due to Minta Doyle's sense of exuberance and irresponsibility, her marital ties with Paul Rayley break up, and the latter opts for a more 'serious' woman. The marriage of Augustus Carmichael is also not sustained. The discrepancy of attitudes of Mr. and Mrs Ramsay over the trip to the lighthouse almost nearly degenerates into a divorce when they aggressively react to each other, with both unwilling to compromise their dissonant standpoints. Marriage as an institution is not stable in the modern world. Mr. Ramsay declares: "the whole of life does not consist in going to bed with a woman" (11). Mrs Ramsay, commenting on the impossibility of lasting relationships between men and women in the modern world, asserts that "it is painful to be reminded of the inadequacy of human relationships, that the most perfect was flawed, and could not bear the examination which consisted of unworthiness" (41).

The complexity of human life in the modern world is also given an impetus in the novel. This recalls Orr's opinion that the "(post)modernist novel shows experience to be limitless" (1990: 620). The human relationships in the novel reveal that perception is pluralized, and the use of meaning is so ambiguous that the understanding of life and its worth becomes elusive. James Ramsay initially sees his father as a tyrant, because of the father's unbending principle on facts, but at last, he is confronted with his father's kindness at the lighthouse. Virtually all the main characters in the novel have their moments of harmony and joy which are subsequently interrupted by agony and boredom. The modern novelists often exhibit an ostentatiously gloomy view of their world through character and characterization. This is premised on their attempt to

signify the world as objective as possible and with utmost verisimilitude. The modern world, as depicted in the novel, is a complex of galleries of human beings whose lives can be multidimensionally interpreted.

What the modern novelists do is to create complex human beings, ordinary-extraordinary men and women who live in the particular skin of the modern period. They try to record what they see or hear and senses around them. Therefore, the modern age is seen in the modern novel as a decline from some pure origin, a lost golden age. Through the exploits and ordeals of the characters, the modern novelist suggests that the modern world is a society that does not allow sovereign individuals, an age where there are no more traditional and pre-capitalist values.

Donalds Adams captures the chaotic essence of the modern man depicted in the modern novel thus:

Modern man, whose inner world is chaotic, is constantly facing an equally chaotic outer world, where momentary impressions are rained upon him in quick succession...without connection or order of any kind (1956:234).

The novel broods on death. It examines the implications of the First World War on the modern man. Existence becomes an illusion; life is enshrouded in complexities. The world portrayed in the novel is one where there is no epistemological security. The atmosphere of the modern world is also presented in the novel as being hostile to the youths who are supposed to be the future of society. The dictum of survival of the fittest applies to the youths in the novel. The world is “temperamentally hostile to the notion of progress” (Orwell and Angus, 1968: 507) of the youths. This view is corroborated by the pain and trauma experienced by the Ramsay’s children. Their individual hopes are dashed. Andrew, though very brilliant and good at Mathematics, later loses his life in the war in France. Prue, who is very ‘beautiful, gets married

at a tender age, and suddenly tragically dies in childbirth. These harrowing experiences continue to affect the psyche of the surviving children.

The novel dwells on the issue of cultural apocalypse and disaster, which are two of the problems ravaging the modern world. Virtually all the events in the text are signifiers of the approach of the end time (Tammy Clewell, 2004). The reader comes across instances of domestic hostility and acrimony. James and Cam's attitudes towards their father over the trip to the lighthouse underscore this claim. Marriage is depicted as no longer a harbinger of comfort, but of endurance and tolerance. Woolf, in the novel, strikes a balance between socio-political commitment and art. The realities of domestic dissonance are transformed into plausible images. In the modern world, human life is thoroughly unstable.

According to DeCoste (1999), the (post)modern world is "a place where human beings are doomed to repeated suffering" (448). In the novel, this instability is symbolically portrayed through the images of time, transformation, inevitability and futility of man's struggle. The present is evanescent; it slips away, and everything, in the end, becomes a mere memory. Likewise, the future is unpredictable. Loss, failure and untimely deaths are prevalent and ubiquitous. In fact, the lives of the people of the modern world, as portrayed in the activities and experiences of the major characters in the novel, are in a continuous state of flux. Happiness turns to sadness so soon; fame turns to anonymity; success turns to failure, and life turns to death in the end. The flow of life is represented by the change of day, night, summer, winter, light and darkness. The Ramsays, for instance, had a hopeful beginning, but later, they experience the dark side of life. Woolf, in the novel, foregrounds the existential double-bind of perpetual oscillation between extreme opposites – life and the tragic fact of death, joy and despair, completeness and formlessness, permanence and impermanence.

Woolf as a quintessential modernist novelist does not believe that man is eternally doomed (Justine Dymond, 2004; Urmila Seshagiri, 2004). Despite the fact that she captures the meaninglessness and futility of human existence, she also sees man as merely encumbered by difficulties of life. Although Mrs Ramsay sees life to be totally chaotic and disharmonious, she still sees an underlying pattern in it, a unity that makes sense. In the midst of chaos, there is shape, the eternal passing and flowing of the sea. Amidst those difficulties of life, there is always a restoration that is also pathetically not permanent. Therefore, Woolf seems to be of the view that both dark and happy sides of life are ephemeral. To her, what remains after the individuals might have left the earth is their values and deeds. This is what Woolf regards as the renewal of human hope and aspiration. However, it can still be argued that time will equally overwhelm those values and deeds, thereby making everything (man and his values) futile. The novel ends on a futuristic optimistic note. It is artistically revealed that meaningful life can be achieved through the merger and union of opposites. Mrs. Ramsay's solution to life pains and conflicts is to enjoy life when it is harmonious, unified and complete. The plausibility of attaining orderliness in the modern world is symbolized by the reconciliatory nature of the voyage to the lighthouse and the simultaneous completion of the picture.

Thus, the text serves as a signifier that captures the exploits and ordeals of the people of the modern world who are symbolized by the characters in the novel. Through her artistic deployment of semiotic elements, Woolf is able to reveal her humanistic concern for her characters and the meaning of their lives.

D.H. Lawrence and the Signification of the Problem of the Modern World

In most cases, it is extremely difficult to divorce the writer from the writing, since there are always some definable characteristics of the personality involved, however muted, and whatever

style, reflected in their artistic, imaginative creation. Lawrence is one of the most important, certainly one of the most notorious, English writers of the twentieth century. To a great extent, his psychological disposition and social experience shaped his novels, *The Rainbow* inclusive. He gives his readers the narratives of disorder, not the science of order. *The Rainbow*, however, has a crucial place in Lawrence's life. It was condemned and confiscated as obscene when it was published. This damaging and discouraging criticism and the suspicion that Lawrence and his wife were German spies caused them to be prohibited from remaining in Cornwall where they were living. It is relevant to state that his penchant for obscenity was often the product of his bloodless purity, that is, his incapacity for the average man's sexual experience. His revolt against Puritanism and puritanical conventions in literature which was condemned is now recognised as a forerunner of the contemporary trend toward earthiness and sexual frankness in fiction. As a writer of descriptive nature prose, he has few equals. It is when dealing with human relationships that his style becomes clotted and turgid in the throes of his preoccupations with the love-hate theme (dialectical sexual relationship).

Lawrence was vehemently against his age, and he equally loathed it (Clarke Waldo, 1976; Eustace Palmer, 1986). If he had lived beyond his forty-fourth year, no doubt his hatred for his age would have increased. He was a very English genius, partly because he had been brought up in the tradition of religious dissent as a non-conformist. He came from the working class, and was almost inevitably, class conscious. It was due to the rancour of the class-consciousness in his novels that working men and aristocrats might be praised, but never the bourgeoisie, which was responsible for so much of the unpleasant side of his genius.

In *The Rainbow*, as in his other novels, Lawrence mounts an attack against the rigidities of Victorian morality. He interrogates the attempt of the Victorian novelists to privilege

bourgeois lives and manners. In this novel, Lawrence employs the symbol of the rainbow as a signifier of the effect of the rapid cultural changes caused by modernization on everyday human life, most especially the industrial revolution. The characters, including Anna, Ursula, Ursula's lover (Skrebensky), and the Ramsays are symbols representing the modern men who struggle to achieve fulfilling personal relationships, satisfying work, and a sense of connection to life in a period of great social upheaval. The story is set around Eastwood, the novelist's birthplace, a grim industrial mining town, and a place that holds an importance to him in a similar way Wessex does for Thomas Hardy whom Lawrence greatly admired. In the novel, man is placed in a new world, a world devoid of the intellectual ladders of humanism or Christianity, a world in which every man must descend to the inner self in order to find or redefine himself. In the text, Lawrence substitutes imagination for intellect with a view to throwing overboard many of the old styles and rhetorical devices of the Victorian novels. The obsession with stories centering on the social lives of the aristocratic and upper middle classes disappears.

Instead, there is an attempt to explore the emotional lives of people coming from the same background as Lawrence himself. In the main, the text presents a panoramic yet precisely sketched view of the life of three generations of an English family, the Brangwens who begin as farmers. In fact, the text opens with a view of the Marsh Farm of the Brangwen. With this, Lawrence is able to portray the theme of the rapid cultural change caused by the Industrial Revolution on everyday human life. The male characters are incomplete in themselves, and they, therefore, seek self-fulfilment in their relationship with women. Pitiably, this is not an achievable goal. Of the four Brangwen boys, the eldest (unnamed) runs away early to the sea and does not come back. Alfred is sent to school in Ikeston and makes some progress. However, in spite of his dogged efforts, he cannot get beyond the rudiments of anything. Also, Frank, the third son,

refuses from the outset to have anything to do with formal education. Tom Brangwen, on whose shoulders rest the perpetuity of the family heritage, is presented as a weakling right from childhood. The subsequent generations of Brangwen are no better either.

Lawrence breaks away from the materialism of his immediate predecessors, Galsworthy and Bennet, and from the intellectual probing of his contemporary, Huxley. Lawrence puts his own beliefs on the physical world – man and his world. Therefore, one major striking feature of Lawrence's fiction is that it reflects the culture and period in which it was written. Actually, the dominant tension of the age in which the novel was written was foregrounded in it. Lawrence is mostly concerned in the novel with the problems which his life and background suggest – the physical, spiritual, social and emotional relationships between men and women, the acute struggle of the free woman to survive and create for herself a meaningful life in a man's world and the role of the novelist in today's society. Like Woolf's men, the Brangwen men lean heavily on their women for their self-actualisation and survival. Although these women are initially given a seeming preference in the plot of the text, a closer reading of the story reveals that even the women need to be examined against the backdrop of other characters before they can be objectively and comprehensively appreciated. Hence, the naïve idealism of Ursula becomes insignificant in comparison with Theresa's rebellious streak and Gundrun's perpetual irresponsibility. Lawrence's characters, like their author, are consciously or unconsciously on a quest to connect the various dimensions of their lives in a period of great social upheaval. The struggle of the major characters to achieve fulfilling personal relationships, satisfying work and a sense of connection to life which is often seen as religious, whether or not connected to a formal religion, are dominant themes in the novel.

In the text Lawrence debates many sides of the major issues of the early twentieth-century. There is a radical change in the attitude of English people to education, morality, science and culture. It is, therefore, not an overstatement to claim that Lawrence, in *The Rainbow*, accepts nothing uncritically. His focus is on how well or ill his characters understand their deepest human drives, especially as these drives are affected by personal demands and society's expectations. In this sense, Lawrence shares with James Joyce and other modern writers a concern with the less conscious process of the human mind, developing techniques to reveal the "inner life" of the individual (D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, 1977). It is, thus, established that it is the quality of the mind that determines one's uniqueness and vitality, rather than appearance, habitat, or social standing.

Like *Women in Love* (1920), *The Rainbow* (1915) evolved from a single matrix called "The Sisters". It is a penetrating examination of a Midland family of farmers that dwells on the idea and interplay of passion and conflict within it. In the novel, Lawrence traces, through three generations of Brangwen, the demise of love in the modern world. To Lawrence, the death of love is an effect of certain inherent factors within, not mysteriously outside, the character, as Lawrence's predecessors would want us to believe. For example, in *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy attributes gender-conflict to a family curse. Lawrence's conceptualisation of love connotes the achievement of balance and equilibrium. Thus, in *The Rainbow*, Lawrence explores the sexual polarities which are preparations for reconciliation and bridge building. Therefore, the arch of "The Rainbow" is a moment of connection, an instance in which dualities are transcended or obliterated. Synthesis, according to a popular Marxist saying, presupposes antithesis; *The Rainbow* is constructed around a complex related series of opposition. It captures a combination of male-female principles and a consequent struggle between them. The themes of the novel are

orchestrated by means of a constantly changing, kaleidoscopic interplay between four principles, male-female and love-passion. This has been tagged the “Lawrentian battle of sexes” by some critics (Joseph Beach, 1932; Allen Walter, 1954). The most compelling theme of the novel is the inner politics of marriage, the maintenance of the ‘arch.’ The relationship between husband and wife is depicted by Lawrence as intense – ugly in its fusion of love and hate, and beautiful in its raw need for companionship and meaning.

The evils of destructive relationships and destructive society are most searchingly analysed and most powerfully dramatised. Lawrence, in the text, sees the course of European history, too, as simply a decline from the organic community. Contemporary personal relations and European civilization are considered in interrelation. The novel does not recognise sufficiently the positive gains of industrialization. Mankind is depicted as being cut off by from togetherness by his intent, basic harmony between man and woman, man and man, man and the seasons of the year, and man and the ancient festivals.

In Lawrence’s treatment of the theme of human and social relationship, it is not the situations in which the characters find themselves that primarily concern him, but the feelings they have toward one another, and not so much the feeling on one side or the other as the interplay of feelings (interpersonal and interpersonal). This is because it is not the virtues and social qualities of an individual that make another person fall in love with him, but something more elemental, less amenable to definition. The text is no doubt a humanistic writing. This is obvious in the fact that the various spiritual and emotional conflicts that are identified in the protagonists are resolved without any divine interventions but as a result of man’s adjustment of his relationship with other men. Even Ursula, who occupies a central position in the novel, eventually has her yearnings met by things outside her deep spirituality as a young girl.

Furthermore, the theme of father-mother conflict is a vital strand in the complexities of human relationships reflected in the novel. It reveals the increasing devitalisation of a society, particularly in marriage. This is inspired by Lawrence's belief in the positivity of women and the importance of their role in the regeneration of man – a world where woman will be woman in her own right and man will be man in his own place. We can, therefore, describe Lawrence as an androgynist who believes in the equality of both sexes. The general deterioration in society is reflected chiefly in marriage. The marriage of Tom Brangwen and Lydia Lensky (a Polish lady, a widow) reaches Lawrence's ideal of marriage; they are transfigured. This is to imply that true marriage is both spiritual and physical, and that man knows spiritual fulfilment mostly in marriage. However, with succeeding Brangwen representatives, the spiritual is lost in the descent to willed, self-seeking, sensual sex. The men live by it; Anna succumbs to it, and after a giddy licentious round, Ursula rejects it for something greater in life. In Willie Brangwen's quest for self-actualisation, he becomes 'alive' when he marries Anna, and he holds on tenaciously to the conjugal relationship even at difficult times when his wife seems to reject him. However, he is only able to transcend the status quo after a fleeting flirting escapade with a strange lady on a night of adventure, after which he becomes a more loving, balanced, and cheerful husband and father. Ursula thinks everybody should love her because of the kind of family she comes from; she could not imagine anything less. Ironically, boys jeer at her and try to break her spirit. Her affair with young Strebensky equally brings a kind of darkness all around her; the boy seems to have only passion for her and nothing more. At a point, even her parents antagonize her. Thus, Lawrence conveys to his readers, as in the modern industrial society, so in marriage, in the relations of between a man and a woman.

The novel can be described as a creative analysis of the inner life of a society during a period of change and disintegration, which is unmistakably the modern period. To Lawrence, only through a readjustment between men and women, and a making free of and healthy interaction of the sexes would England escape her atrophy. Lawrence has, thus, created a poetic myth, whose theme is family integration and disintegration. Each generation of Brangwen makes a real advance, but each advance in knowledge or sexual fulfilment exacts its cost. From the Brangwen whose blood beats to the pulse of the cows they milk, to Ursula who is left without a husband, lover, child, or family at the end of the novel, each generation moves inevitably farther away from the caress of the natural world to the disintegrated modern order. Therefore, the integrated, rich pre-1840 Brangwens are contrasted with the impoverished, disintegrated modern Brangwens. This is a metaphorical portrayal of the blissful pre-modern world and the modern world replete with stress, pains and tensions. Here, Lawrence has employed two kinds of truth. His presentation of previous generations is valid because it conveys a sense of how advances in wealth, education, industrialization and sexual awareness in the twentieth century have been made only at some cost to man's wholeness, his openness to other kinds of nourishment. His analysis of his society in its contemporary form is an accurate statement of man's dilemma in the most sophisticated civilization yet known.

In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence rues the social and aesthetic disaster by which old England was made ugly and dehumanised by the spread of industrialism. The theme of erosion of old order (nature and humanity) obsessed Lawrence throughout his writing career. No wonder, some critics (Joseph Beach, 1932; Philip Hobsbaum, 1981) have suggested that Lawrence's texts offer a perfect example of radically primitivistic thinking. This is mostly reflected in the novelist's laudation of the spontaneous instinctual life and his belief in a vanished condition of man's

personal and social wholeness, as well as his attacks on the disintegrative effects of the modern technological economy and culture. As such, *The Rainbow* signifies a longing to escape from the complications, fever, anxieties and alienation of modern civilization into the elemental simplicities of a lost natural world. Lawrence's penchant for depicting the ill health of European civilization may well have been sharpened by personal experiences. More importantly his disillusionment with civilization is related to the First World War, which he found extremely disturbing. It is obviously not a mere coincidence that it was around this time that he wrote *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. Although Lawrence explores the problems of sexual relations in the novel, they are only part of his concern. Lawrence was a committed writer who was concerned about the well being of the modern world. To him, the process of history has been a gradual decline from that happy stage into increasing artifices, complexity, inhibitions, prohibitions, cacophony, flood, family disintegration, among many other problems.

Lawrence's nuances of language, semiotic properties and shading of meaning in *The Rainbow* appropriately capture the historical, psychological and social realities of the modern world. In fact, the novel is a quintessential signifier that signifies/represents the potential modern woman to lash out at historically sanctioned forms of male prerogative and power. Hence, the text is a "socially symbolic act" (Jameson Fredric, 2006:1), that signifies the violence embedded in a family's evolution.

Conclusion

Worldwide inquiry into the exquisite, painful and dissonant experience of man in the modern world has gained ground in many disciplines, and literature has granted generous space to this trend. This study has confirmed the hypothesis that textual production and reception cannot be conveniently separated from the socio-historical, economic, political and cultural contexts in

which the creative artist operates. The socio-historical context of the discussed novels (modernism) rests upon a common base - an age of dystopianism, complexity, fear, anxiety and disjointedness. The characters are shown to be victims of the pervading circumstances in their individual societies. The study has been able to dwell on the analysis of the articulation of the contemporary experiences in the modern world as found in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Lawrence's *The Rainbow*. With this, we have been able to recover from the texts a secondary and deeper level of signification.

Imaginative views do not date easily; they have universal application and will continue to be relevant for a long period because of their philosophical generalizations. The study has also established that certain fundamental thematic and aesthetic strands link the modern novels irrespective of their different socio-cultural and historical backgrounds. The common thread which runs through them is the signification of the utter pangs and dissonance of life which seem devoid of hope for a better future. Their coherence rests on their similar preoccupations with the predicaments of man in an apparently hostile world. Because of their willingness to make their works socially relevant, the novelists maintain a preoccupation with the problems of their societies. Consummate storytellers, the novelists bring to life the modern world of pain and dissonance; they place the world in sharp relief - its people, its sadness and its vicissitudes. In the face of a changing, and therefore an unfamiliar world, the modern novel is unmistakably bleak and filled with images of desolation. Gloomily fatalistic, the modern novelists depict the lives of individuals who are trapped by forces beyond their control.

However, an enduring brilliance of the representations of the problems of the modern world in the selected novels of Lawrence and Woolf is their ability to jolt the modern novel out of the cul-de-sac of extreme pessimism. This is due to the belief of the novelists in the survival

of the modern man despite all odds against him. Therefore, the world they portray in their novels is not as hopelessly inconclusive as Dostoevsky's underground nor as bleak as Eliot's wasteland. In fact, the characters in the novels signify modern men, who challenge circumstances to acquire personal and communal empowerment. By personal effort, they subvert their individual and societal ordeals, and they dismantle social constraints in order to find liberation. Therefore, Lawrence and Woolf refract the history of the modern period and appropriate it in their novels. This reveals their worldview, which is tolerant, inclusive and incurably optimistic; they envision a world where contrast and conflict are mediated and resolved.

The discussion has revealed that the transition from the Victorian to the modern novel signifies an attempt to confront reality in a time of socio-political change. This shift foregrounds the disagreement among writers on the old side and those pleading for the new form of prose fiction. The modern novel is that of disillusionment, and it is generally informed by the post-world wars' philosophy of existentialism which is marked by despair, cruelty, absurdity, terrorism, crimes, espionage, dislocation, disintegration, poverty, infidelity, famine, flood, sins, dissonance, anarchy, atheism, misogyny, misanthropy, passion, nihilism and primitivism. The foregoing contextualized-cum-humanistic reading of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and Lawrence's *The Rainbow* confirms that the Modern novelist exposes the ills of his society and attacks its imperfections. However, it should be stressed that the attack is governed more by love for the society than by disenchantment with it.

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