Narrative Verse in the Late-Twentieth-Century Novels
(A Critical Survey)

By
Dr. Said A. Aboudaif
Lecturer of English Criticism

1. Introduction:

Realism means faithfulness in representing the actual life of people in literature. As a literary movement of the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, realists believed that literature should depict life with complete honesty. So, the realists say that the purpose of literature is to represent reality as it is. Realism appeared mainly in novels and it was centered in France, England and America. The history of twentieth-century fiction is seen as a mere succession of realism, the ultimate achievement of nineteenth-century narrative, was displaced by modernism, its expected descendant, which was appropriate to its own natural restrictions, in turn gave way to postmodernism. Twentieth-century narrative is too diverse, multiform, and over determined to be reduced to a simple research paper within a chronological order. The progression from realism to modernism then postmodernism simply does not correctly describe literature in this century. A more accurate model shows five distinct and significant narrative poetics; realism, postmodernism, high modernism, expressionism, and romance. These five critical models change all the time. They always come and go, encounter against each other, and sometimes interrelate with each other. Why then would we ever think that equivalent narrative structures are able to hold modern literature or critical theory?
The successful works of narrative fiction of this century demands a more spacious, flexible, and open-minded description from critics. I would like to mention Brian McHale’s (1987:12-13) description of Beckett’s transition to postmodernism. McHale has selected the phases in Beckett's trilogy that define the transition from modernism to postmodernism. He does not attempt to describe Beckett's subsequent return to modernism in *Company* (1980). McHale (1987:12) recognizes Christine Brooke-Rose's irregular use of modernist and postmodern poetics. This makes us see the two as "equally 'innovative' or 'advanced' alternatives which our historical situation makes available to contemporary writers". Nevertheless, he (1987:188) continues to describe "the successive phases in the development of the poetics of the novel" as "realist, modernist, (perhaps) postmodernist". Throughout the following research paper, I will focus my investigation on narrative fiction, though my critical study is intended to be applicable on a much wider scale. It might also be pointed out that the target of this research is to introduce a critical analysis of the verse novels of the late twentieth century.

2. Postmodern Narratives:

The narratives of modern literature represent a clear evidence of the progress in the modern critical theory of the twentieth century. The permanent progression from ‘humanism’ to ‘formalism’ to ‘poststructuralism’ has become so established as to be almost unquestionable, and this establishment probably seems so unavoidable in part because of the associations between each literary theory and a related type of narrative form. Humanism represents the texts of the realists. Formalism, on the other hand, is the real invention of modernism to explain its aims, aesthetics, and typical activities. Postmodernism has in turn made a cheerful merger with poststructuralism. Since the Second
World War the critics prefer to use the new term ‘postmodernism’ to discuss the new literature of that time. The new coined term is more exciting, more mysterious and different from the old fashioned literary terms. Ihab Hassan (1992:148) describes this saying, "there is a will to power in nomenclature, as well as in people or texts. A new term opens for its proponents a new space in language". Postmodern narratives are modern, unifying structured narratives that foreground their own composition by disregarding the conventional methods of traditional prose fiction. Virginia Woolf (1980:190) was disappointed by the insufficient "unity, significance, or design" of The Tunnel. Katherine Mansfield, in a review of The Tunnel, objected to the novels' refusal of foregrounding. Woolf (1980:191) observed that "there is no word, such as romance or realism, to cover even roughly the works of Miss Dorothy Richardson. Their chief characteristic ... is one for which we still seek a name". Brian Richardson (1997: 401) acknowledged:

Of the four main poetics that persistently inform twentieth-century British fiction, realism and high modernism are the best known and least contested, though the period during which each is allowed to have flourished varies wildly from critic to critic, usually for fairly obvious reasons. I suggest instead that realism runs uninterruptedly from Arnold Bennett to Evelyn Waugh to Barbara Pym to Margaret Drabble to Helen Simpson. Similarly, high modernism should not be limited to the works of a handful of writers working between 1914 and 1939; instead, it stretches continuously from the last phase of Henry James to fiction of Elizabeth Bowen, Anthony Powell, and Elizabeth Howard to the latest novels of Graham Swift, Kazuo Ishiguro, and (if we are generous geographically) Nadine Gordimer.

That is to say that a main feature of the post modern narratives is the use of the basic compositional standards and methods of high modernism. This means modern, complexly structured narratives that foreground their own composition by changing or disregarding the old
methods of traditional prose fiction. John Hawkes (1965:149) comments: "I began to write fiction on the assumption that the true enemies of the novel were plot, setting, character, and theme, and ... totality of vision or structure was really all that remained". Postmodern fiction has shown a clear change from the conventional fiction. One feature that showed itself clearly is what is called the "ontological" type in which different orders of reality are distorted and a "hermeneutical" type that explains the edges of simplicity. Postmodernism in fiction is the same as that in architecture or music at that time. A new era of critical studies succeeded in introducing these terms of postmodern narratives and what is known as neo-modernism in fiction at the early twentieth century.

3. The Modernist verse novels:

Long poems are introduced in literature from earlier ages but what makes this an important phenomenon is that these long poems are the real inspiration of the modernist verse novels. The modern scene has witnessed the appearance of such anthologies like W.H. Auden: Collected longer poems (1969) and the Long poems of Robert Kroetsch (1989). That is not all but the scene has also witnessed critical studies that acknowledged the length of these poems, for instance, *The Long Poems of Wallace Stevens: An Interpretive Study* (Patke: 1985) and *On the Modernist Long Poem* (Margaret Dickie: 1986). Margaret argues that:

The commodiousness of these Modernist poetic experiments, which allowed both varied forms and varied materials, appeared at first to be a new conception of form, open and responsive to the new conditions of modernity. But as it developed, the poem became more settled in its attitude. The burden of the long poem, pressing against its subjects, developed into satire, but satire without much laughter or mockery and written by poets more anxious to instruct and judge than to humor or cajole. And in this mode, the movement from The Waste Land to The Cantos is
toward an increasingly self-conscious, despairing, and conservative end. (p. 153)

The late-twentieth-century verse novel is related to the ‘longer poems’. Whereas the "long public poem has traditionally thrived on narrative or on argumentation for development" (p.11) the modernist long poem begins with an ‘image, a symbol, a fragmented translation, a mood of ecstatic affirmation … as if it were to be an extended lyric’ (p.11). It has ‘no principle of generation, no limits to reach or transgress, no narrative to tell, no hero to tell it’ (p.15). In fact the verse novel of the late twentieth century is not just a reflection of the long poems of the past but it is inspired by its length. Lars Ole Sauerberg (1989:445) acknowledges this fact saying:

The late-twentieth-century verse novel shares with the prose novel its reliance on a strong narrative drive, mimesis of the world-as-we-know-it, and a foregrounding of the subject (human agent) as part of the cast and/or in a narrative stance. To this it adds the formal element of verse, which works its effects by the visual impact of the graphic units of verse and stanza, realized as pauses when read aloud, the prosodic emphasis of rhythm, and the semantic configurations arising from rhyme, whether internal or end rhyme.

The central idea here is that the verse novel is a long story told in verse. This idea of storytelling faded away with the appearance of the prose novel in the eighteenth century. Its return in literature is because there is a big change in understanding the nature of literature in the twentieth century. The first verse novel to be recognized as such is Make Lemonade by Virginia Euwer Wolff, published in 1993. In the late eighties Glenn wrote three books of poems in the voices of his high school students, and in 1991 he assembled those voices around a central theme and place--a guidance counselor's office--in My Friend's Got This Problem. Then in 1996 he wrote a verse novel, Who Killed Mr.
Chippendale? Virginia Euwer Wolff, who had written successful prose novels previously, also seemed surprised by this new form. In an interview with Roger Sutton (Horn Book, May/June 2001), she said, "The form just came to me.... I did try changing part of a draft into paragraphs, and I just got all blocked and stifled and couldn't do it." Some new writers, however, tried this new form of writing with awareness and eagerness, and some, like Sonya Sones, have continued to be completely committed to it. The verse novel gained critical acceptance and permission to be considered a sub-literary genre.

However, there are some critics who do not think that the verse novels are successful genres of the late twentieth century. The famous reviewer of the Horn Book magazine, Peter Sieruta (2005: P.1), in his article Ten things that tick me Off! is ridiculing the verse novel in a comic poetic form.

Enough with the verse novels!
Arranging words
Prettily
On a page
Does not necessarily
Turn prose
Into
Poetry.

Amy O’Neal (2004) in her article "Calling It Verse Doesn’t Make It Poetry" explains that the verse novels of the new age are not appealing to the teens who are accustomed to the fast songs and to the lyrical easy readings. O'Neal (2004:39) admits these facts when she says:

In verse novels, emotions rather than imagination get free rein; the target reader is aged twelve to eighteen, and rhyme is left behind. Contemporary verse novels as a genre share the following traits:
Their bright, shiny covers stand out on the bookshelf.
Their titles are intriguing.
Their pages have lots of white space.
The books are long enough to meet book report requirements.
The books are short enough to be worth a try.
The typical volume is lightweight and easy to hold.
The story rings true, frequently packing an emotional punch.
Like movies, they usually contain many characters.
The rhythm of the language addicts the reader on the first page.

In addition, some of the verse novelists are writing about the wild world of the teens and their chaos of violence and wild imagination in a way to make their novels more attractive to those young teenagers. One of these verse novelists is Sonya Sones. Her verse novels are full of chaos of teens' lives. In her autobiographical novel (2001), Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy, she begins with her sister’s breakdown, and each part of the story informs about the sister's sadness, confusion, segregation, loneliness, and devastation. In an interview (Lesesne: 2002:p.51), Sones says about her novel, "Writing these poems gave me a sorely needed feeling of power over those horrific times”. In the same interview (p.52) she adds saying, “…I’m pleased to say that every single woman who’s read What My Mother Doesn’t Know has told me that it really snapped them right back into exactly how they felt when they were fourteen. And the teens . . . say it seems totally real. Which, to me, is the highest of compliments.” O' Neal is criticizing the novel of Sones and the poetic style she is adapting to write her story. She (2004:39) says:

Flipping through Sones' book is like looking at a volume of poetry. Each entry is usually a page long with a bold heading and lines of staggered length. The poetry-shy can relax after just one page, however, because there are no rhyming couplets. The lines read like sentences, and the sentences are straightforward.

While some critics did not like the new phenomenon about the verse novel as a genre in literature others consider it a very important
development that helped to express the changes of the new millennium. There are several other features that most verse novels share. They are all written in the present tense and narrated in the first person by a young person. The text is formed in a chain of one- or two-page poems, usually titled, that end with a beat line. This offers a brief end for the reader, a necessary rest of the narration. It also gives a way to change characters. Some of the best verse novels are told by one voice, but there can be two, three, or multiple voices. A change in the character is usually pointed out in each poem's title or at the beginning of a section as a guide to the change. No matter how many characters there are, they are all expressed through their feelings. This means that the action of the novel is centered on an emotional event, and the rest of the novel deals with the characters' feelings before and after. Then the structure of the verse novel is different from the traditional novel, which is built with rising conflict toward a climax, followed by a denouement. The verse novel is often round-like full of emotional events and the narration is referring to these events. In this research paper, a critical survey will be introduced to highlight the importance of some post-modern verse novelists who adapted this new genre in writing their novels.

4-A Critical Survey of the Late Twentieth Century Verse novelists:

**Anthony Burgess:**

Anthony Burgess (1917-93) the novelist, who is best known for writing *A Clockwork Orange*. He is also a critic, composer, essayist, and translator. He is the most contradicting literary figure of the late twentieth century. His characters are all defeated persons who are looking for their place in the real world. The author himself was a defeated writer, a drunk who was trying to earn any money for booze. Andrew Biswell the
historian who best wrote about Burgess said about his literary talent in his article "The Real Life of Anthony Burgess" (2005:p.50)

It is a measure of Burgess’s eclecticism that the heroes he hoped to emulate were James Joyce and Somerset Maugham: Joyce for his explosive originality (aspired to by Burgess in *Earthly Powers*), Maugham for his cosmopolitanism (*The Malayan trilogy*). In the event, with the exception of *A Clockwork Orange*, the most lasting things he did were the most naturalistic: the Malayan books and his splendidly unreliable memoir *Little Wilson* and *Big God* (his best novel, it has been said). His fictional themes (murder, violence, deviant sex) could be excessively exotic and overwrought, and the agglutinated wordplay of his prose sometimes heavy-going. But when they shot out sharp and clear, the fireworks were spectacular.

However, Burgess is an important novelist of the late twentieth century who wrote verse novels. His novels are narrative written in poetic format. Instead of prose, he used meter, stanza, rhythm, and rhyme to convey his ideas and to create his characters. In fact, the idea of the epic poem is away from the new genre which is created to make a direct effect on the readers and to make its discourse in new creative method. The verse novel of the late twentieth century is a real deviation from the normal conventional prose narratives. Throughout the following pages I will start tackling Burgess's verse novel *Byrne* which he wrote in 1995. Burgess uses the poetic format to express his ideas. He starts introducing his narrator Tomlinson who is an inferior pressman. His main job is to search for scandals in the city. Tomlinson has a mission to write the biography of Michael Byrne who was born 1990.

He thought he was a kind of living myth
And hence deserving of ottave rima
The scheme that Ariosto juggled with,
Apt for a lecherous defective dreamer.
He'd have preferred a stronger-muscled smith,
Anvilling rhymes amid poetic steam,
A sort of Lord Byron.
Byron was long dead.
This poetaster had to do instead. (Burgess: 1995:p.5)

This quotation from Burgess's verse novel is introducing the narrator of the story which reminds us of T.S. Eliot's anti-hero in his poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. He is an inferior man just like him and he is a dreamer of things much bigger than him. Burgess is also reminding us of the eighteenth century Mock- heroic *Don Juan* by Lord Byron². In addition the novelist is insisting on the idea of the American inheritance of Literature, this is clear through the American spelling and even the ideas of the new century. He means the American poets when he says "Poets, high flying" (Burgess: p.40). Burgess's narrator is aware of these changes as well as of the traditions related to Aristotle. The narrator is describing Michael Byrne, the man who he is writing his biography, that he is "good garbage for my garbage bin" (Burgess: p.40). This clarifies the main style Burgess uses in his novel which is the anti-climax, humorous and sarcastic. The narrator is taking the advantage to comment on the cultural background of the late twentieth century through the eyes of Anthony Burgess using the verse.

Why choose this agony of versifying
Instead of tapping journalistic prose?
Call it a tribute to a craft that'd dying,
Call it a harmless hobby. Art, god knows,
Doesn't come into it. Poets, high flying,
Don't need these plodding feet with blistered toes,
Old-fashioned rhymes, prosodic artifice essential to an effect such as this.
Remember how I told you at the start
That Byrne himself commissioned me to fashion (Burgess: p.40-41)

The attention which the narrator is creating to Lord Byron Mock- heroic is clear in his adapting of Byron's meter and style. The narrator continues
describing his mission and how he should do it. He continues borrowing from Lord Byron:

The technique should be much more novelistic,
Occasionally even microscopic,
Hairs and moles noted, if my masochistic
Adherence to this from allows- myopic
Close peering, close listening to linguistic
Tropes in the thrall of an ephemeral topic-
What Booker fiction gives you every time,
Though never iron-corseted in rhyme. (Burgess: p. 47)

Throughout the novel Burgess finds the chance to speak about different things critically sometimes and ironically other times. As a musician and a composer of music, he speaks about music of the late twentieth century. He uses the narrator as a mouthpiece to comment critically on music:

Music is merely notes, all self-referring;
The articulative faculty is weak;
Music means rather less than a cat's purring.
The fact that E flat clarinet can squeak
Will hardly make them murine. So, in stirring
The listener's blood with crash and upper partial,
Is not a march a march, abstractly martial? (Burgess: p.34)

However, Burgess comments on the literary background at the early twentieth century. Sometimes his comments are positive points and other times his opinions are aggressive ironies.

There are always intellectuals around
Who praise the incompetent as the profound (Burgess: p.20)

While he says about one of his contemporary novelists, Graham Greene:

And white men go tom pieces, as we've seen
In over lauded trash by Graham Greene (Burgess: p. 39)

Throughout the novel Burgess depends mainly on Lord Byron's verse, but sometimes he shifts to another verse, like when his narrator speaks
about the beauty of the winter in Venice, he adapts another meter of Edmond Spenser. He uses the Spenserian hexameter. Nevertheless, he is unable to continue using this meter. So, he goes back to Lord Byron:

   Curious, rather, wouldn't you agree?
   - The way mild Spenser holds one in his clutch.
   I quit his rhyme-scheme with a certain glee
   But find it hard to disengage his touch,
   Though I'm no longer drawn to his hexameters. (Burgess: p. 105)

To conclude this discussion of Burgess's novel Byrne, the final part has to be highlighted. Byrne at last goes back to London to face his illegal sons and we discover that there are five lyrical sonnets written by Michael Byrne.

   These sonnets sum up all our annals,
   In five disjunctive but connective panels (Burgess: p.140)

Finally, we come to the revelation in the final line in the novel. It concludes the narrator's point of view and it clarifies Burgess's own philosophy of the new millennium:

   Blessing the filthy world, someone had to. (Burgess: p.150)

   The narrative text of Anthony Burgess is not a well designed novel but it is an interrelated text full of many satirical situations and ironic comments of both the narrator or even of the author himself. What is astonishing in this text is the new medium used by the novelist to express his ideas and to sketch his main characters. He uses the poetic form to write down his plot and to manipulate his characters. Burgess did this wonderful foregrounding for one reason which is to change the old traditional way of dealing with novels since the eighteenth century and to introduce a new format that suits the changes happening in the late
twentieth century. The next section will deal with Vikram Seth who preferred this new form of expression to present his novels.

Vikram Seth:

Vikram Seth was born in 1952 in Calcutta, India. He was educated at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Stanford University and Nanjing University. He has travelled widely and lived in Britain, California, India and China. His first verse novel, *The Golden Gate* (1986), describes the experiences of a group of friends living in California. This novel consists of thirteen chapters. Seth uses the poetic form to write his novel, so each chapter consists of forty stanzas. Each stanza consists of fourteen lines with iambic tetrameter rhymed a-b-a-b-c-c-d-d-e-f-f-e-g-g. Can 690 sonnets, rhyming a-b-a-b-c-c-d-d-e-f-f-e-g-g, be a novel? The novelist chooses the sonnet form to write his novel. He chooses to write his novel in a Shakespearean sonnet format. Ben Downing (1993:219) says:

Vikram Seth is mad about sonnets. *The Golden Gate* consists of a staggering five hundred and ninety of them stung together to form a verse novel. Even the bio page, acknowledgments, dedication, and table of contents are written in sonnet form. Seth's sonnets depart, however, from the traditional English line laid down by Wyatt and Surrey in that they rarely aspire to be, in Rossetti's phrase, a "moment's monument". Rather, they trace their ancestry back to Pushkin, placing high value on wit and effervescence. To achieve these effects, Seth favors quick, playful tetrameter over the more ponderous pentameter.

His celebrated epic of Indian life, *A Suitable Boy* (1993), won the WH Smith Literary Award and the Commonwealth Writers Prize. The novel happens in India in the early 1950s, it is the story of a young girl, Lata, and her search for a husband. *An Equal Music* (1999) is the story of a violinist haunted by the memory of a former lover. Seth is also a poet and a traveler who wrote books about his travels. His ability as a poet
makes him competent of writing verse novels and managing the poetic tools in ease and in excellence.

*A Suitable Boy* is called the longest English novel. Seth wrote it both in poetry and prose. It has six volumes of poetry. It is very satiric and romantic to a great extent to become the most popular English epics of the late twentieth century. This great prose-verse novel has earned Seth greatness like Tolstoy, Charles dickens and other great English novelists. It is a modern classic set in Calcutta, Delhi and Brahmpur after the Indian Independence. *A Suitable Boy* uses the taboo relationship between a boy and a girl as a key through which to explore the post-Independence conflict in India between Hindus and Muslims. The novel centers on four families: the Kapoors, Mehras and Chatterjis (Hindus) and the Khans (Muslim). Mrs. Rupa Mehra is looking for a ‘suitable boy’ for her strong-willed daughter, Lata. ‘Suitable’ here means Hindu, but Lata seems has her eyes set on a Muslim boy. The consequences of this relationship are written in one thousand three hundred and forty nine pages. It's like a 19th-century English novel in its structure and resolution, yet its details are all Indian. Robert Worth (1993:11) criticizes the novel. He says, "Seth treats his characters with a gentle concern, and is unwilling to sacrifice them (or their futures) to blazing language or dramatic conclusions. *A Suitable Boy* makes no effort to shock its readers or even to dazzle them". However, in the following pages I will examine *The Golden Gate* which is the story of a group of friends living in San Francisco. Among them are John, a successful but sad lonely man, and Ed who is burdened with the need to deny his homosexuality. This is a novel in verse and Seth’s brilliant use of the form, and the fast beat of the narrative, pulls the reader to the story.
The Golden Gate is full of wit, wordplay, successful suggestions, and some marvelous animals. It leads less to the traditional comic ending and marriage rather than to surprising sadness. Seth uses the sonnet form throughout his novel, and he varies his language from lyrical elegance to appropriate dialect. Seth's story is about four California friends. In this witty, poetic and compressed style, he gives fully delineated characters: John, a Silicon Valley executive seeking comfort in a meaningful love relationship; his friend and ex-lover Janet, an artist and musician in a harsh rock band; Liz, a cheerful Stanford law grad whose parents produce superior California wine; her brother Ed, struggling between sin and religion; and John's friend Phil, deserted by his wife and left with his son, his moral vision and his scientific career at Labs. It is an attractive story of the pain and passions of love, connected to the serious issue of homosexuality and religion and the future of the earth in the atomic age. It explains a complete picture of the modern lifestyle of California in this age. The lyricist does not hesitate to interrupt his story from time to time, to explain a change in the course of events or to comment on the structure of his narration. He (Seth: 1986: 5.4) says:

Why, asks a friend, attempt tetrameter?
Because it once was noble, yet
Capers before the proud pentameter,
Tyrant of English. I regret
To see this marvelous swift meter
Deamean its heritage, and peter
Into mere Hudibrastic tricks,
Unapostolic knacks and knicks.
But why take all this quite so badly?
I would not, had I world and time
To wait for reason, rhythm, rhyme,
To reassert themselves, but sadly,
The time is not remote when I
Will not be here to wait. That's why.
By doing this Seth defends himself against critics who would accuse him of foolishness in writing an entire novel in the sonnet form. The comment of Seth reminds the readers of the famous poem of Andrew Marvell; *To His Coy Mistress*:

Had we but world enough, and time,  
This coyness, Lady, were no crime.

Seth explains the struggle and the conflict of love relationship in his novel. He is not using the traditional triangle of love, but he is inventing his own love complex struggle. John misses out on love because his emotions are straitened by weapons work; Jewish Phil drops out of Silicon Valley and finds love, but his male partner, tormented by Catholic guilt, leaves him; Phil and his ex-lover's sister (John's alienated woman friend) marry. The novel is full of powerful descriptive pieces; of love and of pain:

How beautiful it is, when waking,  
To find one's lover at one's side,  
The delicate slow light is breaking  
Irresolutely through the wide  
Bay windows of their bedroom, falling  
On Liz's hair, and John's recalling  
How last night she untied it, how  
It flowed between his hands, but now  
She lies asleep, unswiftly breathing;  
Her thoughts are not with him, her dreams  
Traverse the solitary streams  
Of inward lands, yet her hair, wreathing  
The pillow in a mesh of light,  
Returns to him the fugitive night. (Seth: 1986:6.1)

Seth's novel is introducing powerful sonnets about different subjects. Here is his comment on the contemporary materialism that most people of this age are aspiring at. These sonnets are effective in highlighting
these important themes seven years after the publication of the novel. Downing (1993:220) confirms these facts,

*The Golden gate* already seems like a mildly amusing artifact of that excessive time when (in its own words) "the syndrome of possession" reached epidemic proportion, when AIDS had yet the darkest portion of its shadow over San Francisco. Seth's sonnets are best suited to light subjects and mock-heroic catalogues, as in this blithe romp through contemporary materialism.

So, here is the sarcastic sonnet of Seth describing the materialism of modern people in the late twentieth century San Francisco:

John looks about him with enjoyment.  
What a man needs, he thinks, is health;  
Well-paid, congenial employment;  
A house; a modicum of wealth;  
Some sunlight; coffee and the papers;  
Artichoke hearts adorned with capers;  
A Burberry trench coat; a Peugeot;  
And in the evening, some Rameau  
Or Couperin; a home-cooked dinner,  
A Stilton, and a little port;  
And so to duvet . . . (Seth: 1986: )

While Seth is discussing the American life ridiculously and comically, other times he discusses this life seriously and harshly. In his condemnation of nuclear weapons he introduces these tough comments on the political life around him at that time.

It takes a great deal of moral clarity  
To see that it is right to blitz  
Each Russian family to bits  
Because their leader's muscularity  
--Quite like our own--on foreign soil  
Threatens our vanity, or 'our' oil.
However, Seth did not appeal to his senior writers and critics. He is considered the boldest of his age. His themes also develop the ideas of the young people of his modern time. Karly Miller (1999:44) explains this meaning. He says:

_The Golden gate_ appeared in 1986, five years after _Midnight's Children_. It is an emulation of Pushkin and Byron, and could be called a romantic but not a confessional work. A regency of gaiety and mockery were applied to a sexual-revolutionary singles' San Francisco, where his teacher of the time, Donald Davie, at Stanford, is frowned on the result…but _The Golden Gate_ is designed to be disapproved of by the seniors, and it has given great pleasure. Seth is a festive writer, with an unexpired boyish innocence and lots of allegros in what he gets up to.

In addition, some critics did not like the novel at all. They considered it a mere trail version of writing new genera. They attacked Seth fiercely on the grounds that he is trying to prove his ability as a poet more than writing a true novel. They considered his story as a simple immature plot and that he violated the tragic development of the novel for the sake of writing sonnets full of rhyme and rhythm. One of them, Downing (1993:222) says attacking this novel:

Yet despite Seth's ambition, _The Golden Gate_ is neither good poetry nor good fiction. In attempting to bridge two genres, it falls between them. Instead of buttressing and enabling each other, the verse tends to hobble the narrative, the narrative to compromise the verse. The genres, in Seth's hands are least, are like an arranged marriage: not deeply compatible. One is nearly always conscious of the story straining against its poetic leash. …Like the game of Scrabble played in Chapter 8, _The Golden Gate_ is limited by rules of its own devising. It moves deftly enough about its board; unfortunately, that board is a small one.

In short, Seth is a novelist with a great narrative ability and a poet with an extreme talent. He is a master of using narrative poetry to write about the
American society at the postmodern age. He is relying on the literary history to depict the social life in America in a comic, interesting way.

**Derek Walcott:**

Derek Alton Walcott was born on January 23, 1930. He worked as a teacher from 1953 to 1957. From 1959 to 1971 he founded the Little Carib Theatre (later called the Trinidad Theatre Workshop) which produced many of his early plays. In 1998, Walcott focused his attention to homeland theme with a collection of essays about West Indian culture entitled *What the Twilight Says*. Walcott studied the long way from slavery to independence and his personal role as a nomad between two cultures. Walcott has been a constant traveler to other countries. He felt himself deeply-rooted in Caribbean society with its cultural mixture of African, Asiatic and European elements. Walcott’s widespread recognition as a poet came with *In a Green Night* (1964). His other books such as *Castaway* (1965) and *The Gulf* (1969) referred to his feelings of artistic alienation, caught between his European cultural orientation and the black folk cultures of his native Caribbean. Among the subjects Walcott always paid attention to is the multicultural mixture of identities. In his books, *Sea Grapes* (1976) and *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979) he uses a profound, rational style to examine the deep cultural divisions of language and race in the Caribbean. In *The Fortunate Traveller* (1981) and *Midsummer* (1984) he examined his own situation as a black writer in America who has become alienated from his Caribbean homeland.

The final narrative verse example in this paper is Derek Walcott. He wrote his epic masterpiece *Omeros* (1990) using the poetic format. It is considered one of the greatest epic novels. Yet it is one of the most
difficult conceptualized novels of the post modern literature. The concept of difficulty is derived from the fact that he used Homeric plot, he adapted the name of his characters from Greek's mythology, and he referred to Virgil's Aeneid. Derek also talked of the colonial and postcolonial history in his epic novel. Even with its difficulty for the novel reader who is supposed to be interested more in the events and the ideas of the novel rather than recalling literary and historic information, Derek used a consistent meter and rhyme that makes his novel a very interesting verse novel.

All the thunderous myths of that ocean were blown
Up with the spray that dragged from the lacy bulwarks
Of Cap’s bracing headland. The sea had never known
Any of the them, nor had the illiterate rocks,
Nor the circling frigates, nor even the white mesh
That knitted the Golden Fleece. The ocean had
No memory of the wanderings of Gilgamesh,
Or whose sword severed whose head in the Iliad.
It was an epic where every line was erased
Yet freshly written in the sheets of exploding surf
In that blind violence with which one crest replaced
Another with a trench that heart-heaving sough
Begun in Guinea to fountain exhaustion here,
However one read it, not as our defeat or
Our victory; it drenched every survivor
With blessing. It never altered its metre
To suit the age, a wide page without metaphors.
Our last resort as much as yours, Omeros. (pp. 295–6)

As we read more of the novel, we come to the narrator who is enlightening his readers with the facts that they should realized while reading this novel. The narrator says:

You were never in Troy, and,
between two Helens,
yours is here and alive;’ (p. 313)
From the critical point of view, *Omeros* is a verse novel which uses the epic form as a symbolic recalling of the ancient culture of Greece and the heroism of their legends. Derek Walcott wants to lead his readers to make comparisons between the past and the present. The writer's intention is to come closer to his implied reader and to enlighten him about his culture and his heritage. Walcott’s greatest strengths as a poet has always been his ability to bring the two aspects of his life together – an absorption in the European poetry that he learnt at school (its vocabularies, its poetic forms, the lives of its poets), and to write about the sea and the way in which the rhythms of the sea affect the islanders, both in the way they speak and the way they work. Walcott’s works commemorate the elemental rhythms of the sea. In *Omeros* his depiction of the fisherman’s battles with its stubborn vastness reminds readers that fishing itself has its own legendary.

**Conclusion:**

This research paper considers the verse novel from a historical perspective and then considers the various features of these verse novels. David Lodge explains that the novel as a genre can include a variety of ideas and techniques. He said that the novel is:

An open category in the sense that you can, in theory, put any kind of discourse into it – but only on condition that such discourse has something in common with the discourse that can not take out of it: the something being a structure which either indicates the fictionality of a text or enables it to be as if it were fictional. (1977:p.9)

The modernist poets have their own poetic experiments when writing long poems as a reaction against the poetic conventions of the 19th century. These long poems directed the modernist movement to
writing novels in verse using all the lyrical abilities of poetry in producing a narrative verse full of characters, symbols, images and ideas. The modern novelists of the twentieth centuries try to deviate from the present-day norms in fiction. They depend on some sort of fictional, lyrical discourse of their characters which is different from the realists' fictional characters. Sauerberg (1998: p.461) says "The distinction between prose as the medium of narrative fiction and verse- rhyme and rhythm – as the medium of poetry is a distinction valid only in a traditional genre context." When we think of one of the most important long poems *The Waste Land* (1922) which was published the same year James Joyce's *Ulysses* was published, we realize that Eliot proved that the long poem can be an effective literary media as the narrative works. He used this long poem to criticize the desperate situation of the early twentieth century. Downing (1993:219) says, "Eliot proved that, given ample breathing room, a single poem could modulate rapidly enough to catch the modern city's jagged rhythms, to shore up its scattered fragments against a future civic ruin"

This research paper introduced three important verse novelists of the late twentieth century. Those experimentalists, who used a poetic format to introduce their narratives, had varied reasons for deviating from the traditional novel form. They created their characters, their settings and their plots in rhythmical lines. Anthony Burgess used this form to express his lonely desperate feelings. In his masterpiece *Byrne* he introduced a defeated hero (an antihero) of the later twentieth century. Burgess insisted on presenting the idea of the American inheritance of literature. Readers can not miss the satirical, enjoyable and intellectual mode of his verse novels. The second
example of verse novels is Vikram Seth's *A suitable Boy* which is considered a great English romantic novel, just as great as Tolstoy and Dickens masterpieces. His second verse novel which gained him more greatness is "The Golden Gate". This social love story was written in a sonnet form. He proved his excellence as a poet and a narrative writer to present a very fine and delicate story of young lovers in San Francisco. The last example I have chosen is Derek Walcott, who was an educator and a man of theater. He produced most of his plays. He was trapped between two cultures and he tried to present them equally in his verse novels.

1 ‘Preminger et al (1993:P.361, 362) define the epic; "An epic is a long narrative poem that treats a single heroic figure or a group of such figures and concerns an historical event, such as war or conquest, or an heroic quest or some other significant mythic or legendary achievement that is central to the traditions and belief of its culture...[It is] typically long and elaborate in its narrative design, episodic in sequence, and elevated in language".

2 English Romantic Literature introduces such narrative verse, like Lord Byron's *Don Juan* (1899) but it was not successful as a narrative but it was taken as poetry.

3 A line of verse with six metrical feet, used by the ancient Greek and Latin poets but not often used in English.

4 A line of verse with four iambs feet.

5 *The Golden Gate* was published in 1986. It is composed of no less than 690 rhyming tetrameter sonnets (more than 7000 lines). It is a satirical romance happens in San Francisco.

Vikram Seth is also the author of a travel book, *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983), a description of a journey through Tibet, China and Nepal. He won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award.

**Works cited**


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