

S.A. Aboudaif

**ANTHONY BURGESS AND VIKRAM SETH
AS TWENTIETH CENTURY VERSE NOVELISTS:
A CRITICAL SURVEY**

To come to an answer of the question, what is a verse novel? A verse novel is a fiction written in verse lines either in a simple form or a complex one. This new form of narrative has roots in history. The verse novel of the late 20th century is inspired by the legendary long poems of the past. Verse novels differ greatly from the epic poems of the ancient heroes of Homer and Virgil. The verse novels have different technique in writing away from the conventional style of the 19th century novels. This paper gives examples of Anthony Burgess's *Byrne* 1995. It is a verse novel about a defeated person who has high inspirations. Burgess is taking the chance to speak about the cultural background of the twentieth century. The second example is Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* 1986. It describes the experiences of a group of friends living in California. It is a masterpiece verse novel written in sonnets. In short, verse novelists prove that the new genre is very effective literary media at the early twentieth century. Eventually the study will try to answer some questions about the late twentieth century verse novels as a new sub-genre. What is the historical background of the verse novel? What are the main features of the verse novels? What is the role played by early verse novelists in establishing the new genre?

verse novels, Burgess's Byrne, Seth's the Golden Gate, Twentieth Century criticism.

At early twentieth century critics think that Realism is a critical school which aims at 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. 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 sequence of realism. It is followed by modernism which was appropriate to the natural restrictions of narration; in turn it gave way to postmodernism. Twentieth-century narrative is too diverse, multiform, and cannot be treated in a simple research paper in a chronological order. The development from realism to modernism then postmodernism simply does not correctly describe literature in this century. However, the accurate schools of criticism shows five distinctive and significant narrative critical movements; realism, modernism, postmodernism, high modernism, and expressionism. These five critical models change all the time. They always come and go, encounter against each other, and sometimes interrelate with each other. Narrative fiction continues its success within the twentieth century to an extent that it needs more flexibility and open-mindedness to be described by the postmodern critics. Brain McHale mentions a description of Beckett's transition to

postmodernism¹. 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). McHale² 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, he³ continues to describe «the successive phases in the development of the poetics of the novel» as «realist, modernist, (perhaps) postmodernist». The present study tries to trace the development of narrative fiction during the last phase of the twentieth century. It will try to identify and recognize the dramatic change that happened to the narrative technique and the form of the novels within the second half of the twentieth century. The study will give examples of some novelists of that period like Sonya Sones, Virginia Euwer Wolff, Antony Burges, and Vikram Seth. Eventually the study will try to answer some questions about the late Twentieth Century verse novels. What is the historical background of the verse novel? What are the main features of the verse novels? What is the role played by early verse novelists in establishing the new genre?

Narrative fiction witnesses a continuous change and development from 'humanism' to 'formalism' and structuralism which was known as 'New criticism'. Humanism represents the novels of the nineteenth century. Formalism, on the other hand, is the real invention of modernism within the twentieth century to explain its aims, aesthetics, and activities. Then postmodernism appeared to describe the literature of the second half of the 20th century. The new coined term 'postmodernism' is more exciting, more mysterious and different from the previous literary terms. Ihab Hassan⁴ 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 narrative texts that foreground their own nature by disregarding the conventional methods of traditional prose fiction. Virginia Woolf⁵ 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. Woolf⁶ observed that «there is no word, such as romance or realism, to cover even roughly the works of Miss Dorothy Richardson». Brian Richardson⁷ acknowledged, «Of the four main poetics that persistently inform twentieth-century British fiction, realism and high modernism are the best known and least contested,

¹ McHale B. *The Obligation toward the Difficult Whole: Postmodernist Long Poems*. Tuscaloosa : University of Alabama, 2004. P. 12–13.

² Ibid. P. 12.

³ Ibid. P. 188.

⁴ Hassan I. *Toward a Concept of Postmodernism // Postmodernism: a Reader* / ed. by Th. Dohererty. N.Y. : Columbia UP, 1993. P. 148.

⁵ Woolf, V. *Virginia Woolf, Women and Writing* / ed. by M. Barrett. N.Y. : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980. P. 190.

⁶ Ibid. P. 191.

⁷ Richardson B. *Postmodern Narratives // Poetics Today*. 1997. N 4. P. 401.

though the period during which each is allowed to have flourished varies wildly from critic to critic, usually for fairly obvious reasons».

So, postmodern narratives acknowledge the foregrounding for the sake of change and development to new forms and ideas. The modernist novelists sometimes use verse narrative in their prose novels for the sake of change. Catherine Addison⁸ states in her article *The Verse Novel as Genre: Contradiction or Hybrid?* «In other Modernist texts, the interchangeability of prose and free verse is evident without rearrangement. Prose poems have, of course, been experimented with, though this form has never been very common in English. And then there are anomalies such as Virginia Woolf's extraordinary tour de force, *The Waves*». The modern novelists use different standards and methods to reach their goals. David Ashley⁹ describes this change saying: Modern, overloaded individuals, desperately trying to maintain rootedness and integrity...ultimately are pushed to the point where there is little reason not to believe that all value-orientations are equally well-founded. Therefore, increasingly, choice becomes meaningless. According to Baudrillard, we must now come to terms with the second revolution, «that of the Twentieth Century, of postmodernity, which is the immense process of the destruction of meaning equal to the earlier destruction of appearances. Whoever lives by meaning dies by meaning».

That is to say, postmodernism added new types of novels; «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. So, Ryan Bishop¹⁰ says «Postmodernists are suspicious of authoritative definitions and singular narratives of any trajectory of events».

To come to an answer of the question, what is a verse novel? A verse novel is a fiction written in verse lines either in a simple form or a complex one, «but there will usually be a large cast, multiple voices, dialogue, narration, description, and action in a novelistic manner»¹¹. This new form of novels does not mean any violation to the traditional definition of a novel because it is an addition to the narrative technique. David Lodge defines a novel as «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 cannot 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»¹². This new form of narrative has roots in history. In fact the histori-

⁸ Addison C. *The Verse Novel as Genre: Contradiction or Hybrid?* Northern Illinois UP, 2009.

⁹ Ashley D. *Habermas and the Project of Modernity // Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity* / ed. by B.S. Turner. L. : Sage Publications, 1990.

¹⁰ Bishop R. *Postmodernism // Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* / ed. by D. Levinson, M. Ember. N.Y. : Henry Holt, 1996. P. 993.

¹¹ Verse Novel // Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. Web. 04 Feb. 2011. URL : <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verse_novel>.

¹² Lodge D. *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature*. L. : Longman, 1977. P. 9.

cal epics are no more than fiction written in verse and its main theme is heroism and courage. Verse novel goes back to the story of Gilgamesh, the Iliad, and the Odyssey. However, epic poetry is different from the verse novels which is originated to make a direct effect on its readers and to make the discourse in a new creative method. Joy Alexander¹³ in his article about verse novel says: Definitions of the verse-novel are necessarily elastic, since as a genre it is still evolving. There is the vexed question of distinguishing between a novel told in verse and a series of poems linked in a narrative sequence. Both poets and novelists have been drawn to the genre from their respective directions. The entire story is told in the form of non-rhyming free verse.

Epic long poems were at ancient times about the battles of their heroes for the sake of goodness, but what about 20th century literature? The twentieth century literature has witnessed the appearance of long poems like the *Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot, W.H. Auden: Collected longer poems and the Long poems of Robert Kroetsch. Margaret Dickie¹⁴ in her commented on these long poems; «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.» These modern long poems have a narrative nature. Dickie acknowledges that the «long public poem has traditionally thrived on narrative or on argumentation for development»¹⁵ 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’¹⁶. It has ‘no principle of generation, no limits to reach or transgress, no narrative to tell, no hero to tell it’¹⁷. So, the long poems of the 20th century inspired other writers, mainly American poets to try an experimental new form of narrative. The modern new form of narrative is called ‘Verse Novel’. Lars Ole Sauerberg¹⁸ announces this new type of fiction: 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.

Historically, the twentieth century verse novels can be traced to an important British prose novelist, Virginia Euwer Wolff, who published a novel in 1993 called *Make Lemonade* which appeared as a novel written in verse lines. Wolff herself was surprised to introduce this new form of fiction. In an interview with Roger Sutton 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.» In 1996 Mel Glenn another

¹³ Alexander J. The Verse-novel: A New Genre // *Children's Literature in Education* 36.3. 2005, Sept. P. 270.

¹⁴ Dickie M. *On the Modernist Long Poem*. Iowa City : University of Iowa, 1986. P. 153.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* P.11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* P.15.

¹⁸ Sauerberg L.O. *Repositioning Narrative: The Late-Twentieth-Century Verse Novels of Vikram Seth, Derek Walcott, Craig Raine, Anthony Burgess, and Bernadine Evaristo* // *Orbis Litterarum*. 2004. N 59/6. P. 445.

prose novelist wrote a verse novel, *Who Killed Mr. Chippendale?* This is followed by other brave novelists writing more verse novels like Sonya Sones who continues writing complete novels in verse. Hence, the verse novel gained a wide critical acceptance and permission to be considered a sub-literary genre at the twentieth century. However, the critical scene did not accept this dramatic change easily. Some critics like Peter Sieruta¹⁹, in his article *Ten things that tick me Off!*, explained his refusal of the verse novel in a comic poetic form. He says

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

Another critic who explains why young people are attracted to the verse novels. Amy O'Neal showed her explanation in a long article called «*Calling It Verse Doesn't Make It Poetry*». Amy O'Neal²⁰ explains the admiration of young people to the short rhymed fiction; «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, and their pages have lots of white space».

O'Neal criticized verse novelists because they fascinate young teens but Sonya Sones an important Young American novelist wrote about the crazy life of the teens in marvelous verse novels. In fact, the wild world of the teens, their chaos, their violence and their wild imagination have attracted the young daring novelist to write novels in a new modern form. Sonya wrote some very important verse novels about her personal life when she was a teen. Her novel, *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy*, was published 1999 where she told about her sister's breakdown. Each page of poetry in the novel tells about her sister's sadness, confusion and loneliness. In an interview²¹ Sones speaks about her novel, «Writing these poems gave me a sorely needed feeling of power over those horrific times». In the same interview, she says about her autobiographical novel and best seller *What My Mother Doesn't Know* which was published 2001; «...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». In 2007 Sones continued the story in another verse novel *What My Girlfriend Doesn't Know*; she started right where the

¹⁹ Sieruta P.D. The Other Stuff, Ten Things That Tick Me Off! // Horn Book Magazine. 2005. 1st ser. N16. P. 1.

²⁰ O'Neal A. Calling It Verse Doesn't Make It Poetry // YALS. 2004. N 39. P. 39.

²¹ Lesesne T. Sonya Sones & «One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies» // Great Stories CLUB @ Roosevelt High School. 2002. Web. 04 Jan. 2011. URL : <http://bookclubrhs.blogspot.com/2010/03/sonya-sones-one-of-those-hideous-books.html>. P. 51.

first novel ended. At the annual Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, Sones has participated in panel discussions. She was the moderator on the panel «Young Adult Fiction: Teens and Turmoil» with Gayle Forman, Jandy Nelson and Cynthia Kadohata during the 2010 event. That is not all but some critics like Amy O'Neal did not like the works of Sones. O'Neal ²² 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.

Hence, the new sub-genre attracted the attention of some novelists during the late twentieth century and some critics as well. Those critics consider the new verse novel an important development to go with the rapid changes of the new millennium. They compared the conventional novel with its known elements of plot, theme and characters to the modern unconventional verse novel to find out the differences. But in general, the main features of verse novels as mentioned by Patty Campbell ²³ 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» which 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 arranged on the bases of a conflict which rises to reach a climax, and then readers are allowed a conclusion. The verse novel is often round- like full of emotional events and the narration is referring to these events. The next section will present a critical survey to highlight the importance of some post-modern verse novelists who adapted this new genre in writing their novels.

Anthony Burgess (1917–1993) is an American novelist who is known as a critic, a music composer, essayist and a verse novelist. His well known novel is *A Clockwork Orange*. Burgess's characters are anti-heroes who look for peace in the modern disordered world. He is a modernist who represents the current theme of modern people's dilemma during the Twentieth century. Burgess himself is a defeated person, a drunk and a loser. Roger Lewis ²⁴ in his book *Anthony Burgess* talked about the literary value of Burgess, he says; «In America only *A Clockwork Orange* is still read in England he is still a force, but more, I suspect, as a remember 'character' ready and eager to outrageous on screen or newsprint than for his novels». Lewis added a very important comment about Burgess' personality. He says that his «true love was reserved not for humanity but for its speech and languages,

²² O'Neal A. Calling It Verse Doesn't Make It Poetry. P. 39.

²³ Campbell P. The Sand in the Oyster: Vetting the Verse Novel // The Horn Book Magazine. 2004, Oct. P. 614.

²⁴ Lewis R. Anthony Burgess. N.Y. : Thomas Dunne, 2004. P. 24.

words were things to him, objects, jewels. They are what he gets emotional and meaningful about». But as a literary figure, Burgess is a successful writer and a critic of the late twentieth century. His friend Andrew Biswell ²⁵ the contemporary historian said about his literary talent: 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*)... 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.

Burgess tried the new form of verse novels. He wrote novels in poetic lines, so he used stanzas, meters and rhyme to make the dialogue among his characters and to delineate his protagonists. His first verse novel is *Byrne* ²⁶. Carter Kaplan says, «A special of Burgessean dystopia is the book-length poem *Byrne*. *Byrne* explores the relationship between art and the political climate of Twentieth-century Europe». The novelist firstly introduces his narrator, Tomlinson who is a pressman. The journalist is an anti-hero who looks for scandals. His new job is to write about the life of Michael Byrne the man who hired him for the job. Kaplan adds «Michael Byrne is a ranging Anglo-Irish painter and composer who spent the 1930s living off women, exhibiting his pornographic paintings, and writing music for the cinema... Burgess demonstrates the relationship of rampant modernism to fascism» ²⁷ Burgess says that his protagonist is a detective dreamer in a wild city who thinks that he is Lord Byron:

He thought he was a kind of living myth
And hence deserving of *ottava 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 ²⁸.

Byrne is a painter and a music composer but his talent does not serve his ambition because he is a loser. He worked as a servant to Hitler in Germany at 1930s. Then, he disappeared and thought that he fled to Africa. Later, his twin sons received a letter from Byrne inviting them to London to give away their inheritance.

A heavy task, but there was light relief
In the Germanic ambience, boisterous, brash,
Torch lit parades and pogroms, guttural grief
In emigration queues, the smash and crash
Of pawnshop windows by insentient beef

²⁵ Biswell A. *The Real Life of Anthony Burgess*. L. : Picador, 2005. P. 50.

²⁶ Burgess A. *Byrne: a Novel*. N.Y. : Carroll & Graf, 1995.

²⁷ Kaplan C. *Critical Synoptics: Menippean Satire and the Analysis of Intellectual Mythology*. USA : Associated UP, 2000. P. 157.

²⁸ Burgess A. *Byrne*. P. 5.

In uniform, the gush of beer, the splash
Of schnapps, the joy of being drunk and Aryan,
Though Hitler was a tee totalitarian²⁹.

Burgess chooses a narrator who fits the description of the Twentieth century American characters, like Eliot's Prufrock but Dana Gioia³⁰ describes the opening of the novel as «The novel's opening section recounts Byrne's public and private careers. «Failed artist but successful bigamist,» he moves opportunistically from country to country and from bed to bed, «leaving a small tribe of children across the globe». Eventually Byrne vanishes, presumably dying of old age in Africa.» The narrator is commenting on the literary background and the change of the cultural inheritance to the American poets who fly high away from the reality of the life and neglect the dilemma of modern Man:

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 artifice³¹.

The narrator has a big mission to write the biography of a man who thought that he is a myth but he is, as Burgess thinks, no more than a «good garbage for my garbage bin»³². The narrator chooses to write in verse, because he is ordered to do so. He uses the «Ottava Rima» (abababcc), which was used by Lord Byron in his Mock-heroic *Don Juan*. He continues the novel using this metre and rhyme but he sometimes gets tired and unable to continue. So, he shifts to another metre.

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 hexameters³³.

Burgess decides to be very satiric and observant to the events of the age. He speaks about other writers and poets seriously and ironically:

There are always intellectuals around
Who praise the incompetent as the profound³⁴.
<...>
And white men go to pieces, as we've seen
In over lauded trash by Graham Greene³⁵.

²⁹ Ibid. P. 40.

³⁰ Gioia D. A Book Review of Byrne // The New York Times Book Review. 1997. 20 Nov.

³¹ Burgess A. Byrne. P. 40.

³² Ibid.

³³ Burgess A. Byrne. P. 105.

³⁴ Ibid. P. 20.

In addition, Burgess comments in versified novelistic technique on the Gulf War and Music to find a match between them or to find an answer to the suffering of modern man in this life. This is clearly stated in Catherine Addison's ³⁶ article about the verse novel as genre. She says, «The vast majority of the new narrative poems deal with everyday life in contemporary settings, eschew magic, the uncanny and even coincidence and strive towards a characterization that may be psychologically complex but is both plausible and familiar to a reasonably well-educated twenty-first-century reader.»

But little in the Gulf War's visual grammar,
Big feast of death to feed the cinecamera ³⁷.

The question is: Can music really speak?
Music is merely notes, all self-referring;
The articulative faculty is weak;
Music means rather less than a cat's purring.

The novel ends when Byrne goes back to London to face his illegal sons and we discover that there are five lyrical sonnets written by Michael Byrne himself. He is playing the role of a poet himself but in fact he is speaking on behalf of Burgess the author who as Gioia ³⁸ says that he divides his novel into layers and one of them is the autobiography one, «If *Byrne* is a novel built in layers, no one familiar with Burgess's life and career can fail to recognize that one layer is autobiographical. The two main characters – Byrne and his son Tim – are both unflattering versions of the author».

These sonnets sum up all our annals,
In five disjunctive but connective panels ³⁹.

Burgess introduces his novel in a form full of irony and he intends to be very satirical concerning his unsuccessful life as writer and as a human being. He decided to write a verse novel and to allow his characters to be poets so to accomplish his ultimate dream.

Wretches like Byrne are far from indispensable,
A single puff will blow their dust away.
Paronomasia is a needless joke:
He needs no fire to turn him into smoke ⁴⁰.

Thus, Burgess succeeded at last through his last novel, *Byrne* to be remembered as a pioneer in his field of literature. He is one of the most important American novelists of the second half of the twentieth century who tried the new form of verse novel

³⁵ Ibid. P. 39.

³⁶ Addison C. The Verse Novel as Genre: Contradiction or Hybrid?

³⁷ Burgess A. Byrne. P. 54.

³⁸ Gioia D. A Book Review of Byrne.

³⁹ Burgess A. Byrne. P. 140.

⁴⁰ Burgess A. Byrne. P. 140.

and wrote an amazing novel discussing the problems of the age in a refined versified prose.

The other important modern novelist of the twentieth century who wrote verse novels is Vikram Seth. He was born in 1952 in Calcutta, India. He was educated at Oxford and Stanford Universities. He travelled widely and lived in Britain, California, India and China. He wrote very important English novels and critics consider him to be a great novelist as Tolstoy and Dickens. Seth is also a poet and a traveler who wrote books about his travels. His ability as a poet makes him competent of trying the new verse novels because of his ability to manage the poetic tools in ease and in excellence.

Vikram Seth wrote an important novel about the Indian Life in 1993. His novel is the longest novel in English literature. His novel, *A Suitable Boy*, is situated on an Indian background and culture. It is about an Indian girl, Lara, and her search for a husband. The novel discusses the forbidden relationship between a Muslim boy and a Hindu girl to discover the post-independence conflict in India between the Muslims and Hindus. What is amazing here is that Seth wrote his novel in Prose and verse. The novel has six volumes of poetry. It is a very satiric work of art of the Indian life in 1950s. Critics consider it the English Epic of the twentieth century.

However, Seth tried the verse novel. His novel, *The Golden Gate*⁴¹ is written in verse lines about some friends who live in San Francisco. The novel discusses in a poetic form the themes of loneliness and alienation which distinguish the twentieth century literature. The main character is John who is very sad and lonely, and his friend Ed who is suffering because of his denial to his homosexuality. The poetic lines in the novel make it very interesting with a fast rhythm which attracts the reader and in particular the young men. The novel contains thirteen chapters; each chapter is forty poetic stanzas and each stanza is fourteen lines in iambic tetrameter, rhymed a-b-a-b-c-c-d-d-e-f-f-e-g-g. The whole novel is written in sonnets. Seth decides to use the Shakespearean sonnet to express his poetic romance. Ben Downing⁴² 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.

The novel is full of descriptions and witty suggestive words. The novelist uses the sonnet form. So the chapters are divided into stanzas with numbers. The novel 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

⁴¹ Seth V. *The Golden Gate: a Novel in Verse*. N.Y. : Random House, 1986.

⁴² Downing B. Big city, long poem // Parnassus : Poetry in Review. 1993. N 17-18/1-2.

Labs. The plot of the novel is full of love and pain. It moves from the guilt to the religious believe. The novel describes social issues of homosexuality. It tells in detail how the life in California is at that time of chaos. Seth explains the struggle and the conflict of love relationship in his novel. He is not using the traditional triangle of love where a woman is loved by two lovers, 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. In chapter 6, the first stanza Seth ⁴³ (1989) says:

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.

The novel of Seth does not only discuss love themes but also the themes of the crisis of modern Twentieth Century. It indicates these problems in a satiric way to highlight them in a smooth poetic style. He comments on Materialism that most people of this age are aspiring at and its effect on them. Seth ⁴⁴ (1989) says:

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...

⁴³ Seth V. *The Golden Gate: a Novel in Verse*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

In addition, we can easily see how Seth uses his verse in making very powerful speeches like the one by the priest against nuclear power:

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 ⁴⁵.

Thus, Seth tackles his themes in a very brave tone. He uses his poetry in a narrative style to talk about the ideas of the young people of the modern age. This kind of objection and foregrounded form did not gain him fame as a verse novelist. Karly Miller ⁴⁶ explains this meaning:

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.

The novel of Seth is full of description written in a rhythm style to show his ability in telling stories using verse lines and untraditional metre (four feet instead of the traditional five feet). The novelist uses the four feet metre to delineate the details of his characters and to discuss their problems. So, in chapter five Seth ⁴⁷ explains:

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
Demean 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.

⁴⁵ Seth V. *The Golden Gate: a Novel in Verse*.

⁴⁶ Miller K. *Books without Borders: An Equal Music by Vikram Seth* // *The New Republic*. 1999. 12 July. P. 44.

⁴⁷ Seth V. *The Golden Gate: a Novel in Verse*. P. 102.

This stanza is an explanation and an invitation to the reader to know more about these poetic qualities. Sauerberg⁴⁸ clarifies Seth's choice of this metre, «Such a description is one that we expect in a perspective of literary history, and one on which the discussion of the choice of the four-foot rather than the traditional five-foot metre is discussed in the fourth stanza of chapter five». Sauerberg⁴⁹ adds more information about Seth's choice of this kind of metre and rhythm. «In the two stanzas surrounding the invocation of Hudibras (5.3 and 5. 5) we learn about the provenance of the narrative from quite another source»:

How do I justify this stanza?
 These feminine rhymes? My wrinkled muse?
 This whole passe´ extravaganza?
 How can I (careless of time) use
 The dusty bread molds of Onegin
 In the brave bakery of Reagan?
 The loaves will surely fail to rise
 Or else go stale before my eyes.
 The truth is, I can't justify it.
 But as no shroud of critical terms
 Can save my corpse from boring worms,
 I may as well have fun and try it.
 If it works, good; and if not, well,
 A theory won't postpone its knell⁵⁰.

<...>

Reader, enough of this apology;
 But spare me if I think it best,
 Before I tether my monology,
 To take a stanza to suggest
 You spend some unfilled day of leisure
 By that original spring of pleasure:
 Sweet-watered, fluent, clear, light, blithe
 (This homage merely pays a tithe
 Of what joy and inspiration
 It gave me once and does not cease
 To give me) – Pushkin's masterpiece
 In Johnston's luminous translation:
 Eugen Onegin – like champagne
 Its effervescence stirs my brain⁵¹.

To come to a conclusion about Vikram Seth's trail version of a verse novel, one has to admit that this novel was not easily accepted and it was not considered a good example of verse novels. Some critics considered Seth's novel a game of a good poet

⁴⁸ Sauerberg L.O. *Repositioning Narrative: The Late-Twentieth-Century Verse Novels of Vikram Seth, Derek Walcott, Craig Raine, Anthony Burgess, and Bernadine Evaristo* // *Orbis Litterarum*. 2004. N 59/6. P. 447.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* P. 447–448.

⁵⁰ Seth V. *The Golden Gate: a Novel in Verse*. P. 101.

⁵¹ Seth V. *The Golden Gate: a Novel in Verse*. P. 102.

who uses a simple plot in form of sonnets. They think that the development of the plot is not complete because the novelist deliberately violated the narrative technique for the sake of the rhyme and the rhythm of poetry. Downing⁵² explains: 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.

However, readers call attention to the great ability of the novelist to create an interesting story full of events about the life of the young people at the Twentieth Century. Readers, in particular young teens, find the novel amazing because it tells their stories and it discusses their problems. Vikram Seth is a good poet with a great narrative ability who is considered an important pioneer in the field of Literature because of his use of this new genre of literature.

This short critical survey of the Late Twentieth Century verse novels intended to present a historical review of the early beginnings of this literary genre. How does it start and how does it come to be acknowledged by many critics as a literary sub-genre of the novel. In addition, this study presented some important writers who tried this new form. The early writers were considered as experiments used poetry to write their novels. They changed the traditional technique to create their characters, settings, and plots. Anthony Burgess used this form to express the lonely feelings of his age. In his novel *Byrne* he introduced a defeated hero of the late Twentieth Century. Readers can not miss the satirical, enjoyable and intellectual mode of his verse novels. The second example of verse novels is Vikram Seth's «*The Golden Gate*». This social novel is written in a sonnet form. He tried his excellence as a poet and a narrative writer to present a very fine and delicate social story of young lovers in San Francisco.

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⁵² Downing B. *Big city, long poem*. P. 222.

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