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A STUDY OF JOHN FOWLES AS TIME TRAVELLER OF TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITAIN

ABSTRACT

The Twentieth century Britain was a time to exalt to disillusionment age and the writers of the age are found to be commenting more on the contemporary issues. John Fowles, a British Fiction writer, finds the contemporary world to be devoid of any value to attribute and the belief in the idea of re-examining past for the present existence. He seems to develop extreme curiosity in past events and life style of British people when one reads through his narrative. . The curiosity that raised from past episodes points to an urge for going back to an era or even more than just an era. This time travelling mentality is general to his writings. Assume that novels are time machines it means that the writer is transported to a different time than the present era. The writer seems to be in a place where there is no real identity just like a regular novel. If the genre altogether is going to be taken for the consideration the authors of these novels have no real identity and trapped in the time. This paper attempts to read Fowles novels as a time travelling

entity and takes two novels in providing possible explanations to reach the conclusion. Through the depiction in each of these novels it can be seen as some part of it besides being a Postmodern novel carries certain amount of time travel as if in science fiction stories.

Keywords: The Twentieth Century writings, time travel, Post modern

INTROUDUCTION

John Fowles is one among the great writers of the twentieth century literary and cultural scene. The Twentieth century is packed with great enthusiasm for a new world, one that is devoid of all the residue of previous century. It has opened a new era of hope as well as despair. It is an era witnessed the growth and progress and at the same times - a world plunging into transgression. The hope that sprouted during the first decade was vanished between the two world wars. The century's apprehension, for a new world marked inception of a world without rules, values and everything that was believed to sustain human life as well as culture. All disillusionment that creeps into the intellectual, political, economic and social strata has been distinctly delineated in Fowles novels. Fowles world is wholly depended on the past. He seems to develop extreme curiosity in past events and life style of British people when one reads through his narrative. The greatest part of Fowles writings unfold the historiographical dimensions that a novelist can reach. The curiosity that raised form past episodes points to an urge for going back to an era or even more than just an era. This time travelling mentality is general to his writings.

According to oxford dictionary, Time travelling is: "Hypothetical or fictional travel at will to the past or the future, typically by means of a machine (a time machine) or a wormhole" (English wikidictionary."Time travel." *Yourdictionary*.14Aug 2017. Web. 14 Aug.2017). To take the definition "fictional travel at will to past" (English wikidictionary." Time travel.") Fowles travels to past at his will through his novels and machine employed here is not a wormhole instead the techniques through which he succeeds in doing it. Assume that novels are time machines it means that the writer is transported to a different time than the present era. The writer seems to be in a place where there is no real identity just like a regular novel. If the genre altogether is going to be taken for the consideration the authors of these novels have no real identity and trapped in the time. Here to Fowles seem to be trapped in the narrative along with characters and then lost access to the time machine. He is no longer the omnipotent narrator of a story he is an

observer of past just like a person caught between two worlds. He can sense the characters, their activities, and their life but can only be a watcher of it. So he is lost in the sense of being unable to find way back to twentieth century, and lost because no identity, no friends, no family and a stream of characters who acted upon a diverse variety out of the dimension. Fowles novels like *French Lieutenant's Woman*, *The Collector*, *A Maggot* can be taken into analysis to comprehend this idea. It is needed to be analysed based on the novels.

The novel, *The French Lieutenants Woman*, is written in the first person narrative form; although it attempts to make us believe that it is written in the third person omniscient form of narrative. He acts as a minor character like one travelled in different dimensions.

“Throughout the first fifty chapters or so, the narrator makes himself a part of the story - the dramatic narratorial of Chapter 13 is an example of this, when he admits that "this story [he is] telling is all imagination" (80). Our author admits to being the narrator, and continually reminds us that he is not only narrating the story, he is also imagining it: he definitely doesn't try to hide the fact that, as he says, "I am a novelist" (81). The narrator playfully inserts himself into the text in other ways, as when testifies that he has bought the same jug that Sarah purchases in Exeter, "a year or two ago for a good deal more than the three pennies Sarah was charged" (220). In Chapter 55 and Chapter 61, the narrator appears as a physical character in Charles' and Sarah's world - he is a minor character who plays the important role of winding back his pocket watch by 15 minutes, to allow the second ending to occur.” (Gradesaver Editorial Team. “The French lieutenant’s woman”. *Study Guide*. 13 Aug 2017.Web.13 Aug 2017.)

At times, the narrator interrupts and speaks about the present situation which showcases his attribute to an entirely different strand of time. He seems to be aware of his time when he says: “But the chief argument for fight – fixing is to show one’s readers what one thinks of the world around one –whether one is a pessimist, an optimist, what you will. I have pretended to slip back into 1867; but of course, that year is in reality a century past. It is futile to show optimism or pessimism, or anything else about it, because we know what has happened since” (*The French Lieutenant's Woman* 409).

The time travel novels focus on the consequences of traveling into the past or the future. In this case the narrator is transported to Victorian past and seems to give a snap shot on the characters who seemed to be lived during that time. The general theme of time travel novels or stories can be summarized in these words: “The central premise for time travel stories oftentimes involves changing history, either intentionally or by accident, and how altering the past changes the future and creates an altered present or future for the time traveler when they return home” (Wikipedia contributors. "Time travel in fiction." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia* .11 Aug. 2017. Web. 11 Aug. 2017). But this general criterion finds to not to be fully appreciated in the novel *French lieutenant's Woman*. The narrator seems to travel to Victorian England and depicts the life of the people and also showcases the improvements and developments of the age, and how it alters the life of common people both in beliefs and attitudes, he doesn't seem to be present in full authority and returns too home. The novel freezes at three alternative endings and the climax is half way through the novel. The climax finds to be fit into an entirely new way of approaching the past. The way Fowles embraces past and the points out the time travelling method through narrative. He doesn't simply reorganize and recreated a Victorian era nor he mocks at it. His approach turns out to be out his curiosity to reach out a past world where the current noises of lost and despair could not be heard.

A Maggot, unlike *French Lieutenant's Woman*, deals with mystical elements and unsolved mysteries. When the latter can be viewed as a historical journey to Victorian era and lives the former embarks on a journey to a mystical place and the mystical happenings added with historical touch. In his prologue to *A Maggot* Fowles pushes him altogether and reaches a land of mystery through his experience. It goes like this:

“For some years before its writing a small group of travellers, faceless, without apparent motive, went in my mind towards an event. Evidently in some past; since they rode horses, and in a deserted landscape; but beyond this very primitive image, nothing. I do not know where it came from, or why it kept obstinately rising from my unconscious. The riders never progressed to any destination. They simply rode along a skyline, like a sequence of looped film in a movie projector; or like a single line of verse, the last remnant of a lost myth.” (*A Maggot* 5)

Fowles received his inspiration from this idea and travelled to the world through his exquisite narrative. The novel takes the time period during a precise historical timeframe ranging from May 1736 to February 1737 in England. It opens with the picture of five people travelling through Exmoor in rural England. They reach at a small inn in the village and the characters are unfolded. Each seems to carry a kind of enchantment and mysterious in the manner they behave. In later part of the story it comes to know that these characters are not the people they seem to be. The entire story roams around the life of Mr. Bartholomew and it ends with the unsolved mystery of Mr. Bartholomew's disappearance. Fowles tells us that the story began as a vision he had of five travellers riding with mysterious purpose through remote countryside. The whole novel reflects the series of images and the supporting various events projecting a mystical and magical world. All these images give way to another and finally - a hanging corpse with violets stuffed in its mouth - which take the readers into a maze of beguiling paths and wrong and dead end turnings, disappearances, persecution and revelations, unaccountable motives and cryptic deeds and evil wretch, as this unbounded mystery serves towards a startling vision at its centre.

Unlike the previous novel which itself finds to be set in Victorian times and the narrator seems to interfere in the between, *A Maggot* embraces a mystical travel to past England and its glorified gorged characters. It doesn't find to be a whole new way of arranging the past events instead just like a travel to a mystical world the characters emerge themselves into the themes for cultural and religious one. At times, it dwells on the historical facts that surrounded the time though historical evidence can be identified in few places other than a handful one. Fowles himself has rejected his novel from being called a historical novel as he stated in his Prologue. But the novel oozes out the past evidences and events that encamped the England. But the time traveling is brought not through the narrator but through the characters. The character of Rebecca and others travelling to cave can be identified as a time travelling adventure. The mystery behind the cave and the appearance of characters after a mystic event in cave points to time traveling activity. The present era readers may interpret Rebecca's visions as films and her experience in the cave as a contact with time travellers or extraterrestrial beings. Rebecca loses consciousness; she wakes, finds Jones outside the cave, and they leave together. The exact content behind the mysterious cave and consequent deaths after that remains a mystery. But it can be said that the entire novel and the cave scenes can be attributed with a time travelling scenes where the readers are unaware of the journey made by the characters. Rebecca, after the incident in the cave, find

herself pregnant. She returns to her parents but then converts to Shakerism, marries a man and then gave birth to Ann Lee, the future leader of the American Shakers. The mystery of Bartholomew's disappearance is never solved in the novel, and Ayscough's death contents that he committed suicide out of guilt from his disobedience to his father in the matter of an arranged marriage but the fact is never clearly outspoken. Unlike the other novels the readers can find the cave as "wormhole" through which the characters pass through a different dimensional. But the purpose and the flight to the other dimension is not depicted by the author. Instead the end result of the journey is shown evidently in the novel.

In a scrutiny presence of past occurrences in these novels finds to intersperse with Modernistic and Post Modernistic caliber. In a more elaborated manner, Post Modernism has acted out as a means of expressing the past event and far more beyond a technique. As a novelist Fowles has employed techniques to bring out the happenings but it makes the novel devoid of a structure that is apparent in precedent novels. Certain extended versioned travel fiction focus solely on the paradoxes and alternate timelines, rather than time traveling itself. It is utmost scintillating effect that these stories often provide some sort of commentary on the society as time travel provides a distant view of it that helped many science fiction and historical fiction too to make a commentary on the cultural and economic scenario.

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