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TREATMENT OF PAST AND PRESENT IN JOHN FOWLES'S NOVELS

ABSTRACT

John Fowles, a great contributor to Twentieth Century literary scenario, takes past and present as two different entities and intermix in his fiction so as to acknowledge the vitality of both. His novels dealt with past eras and characters with the shadows of the present time. The selection of narrative form and setting add to the tune of intermixing process. He does not merely intermix instead at points he separates both so as to bring the difference of the periods. The Twentieth century period was of vast and series of wars and exploitations. Like the other writers Fowles too felt disintegrated with the current life incidents and that might be the reason he moved to past era. He draws the picture of characters from previous era which in turn adds to his aim to recreate one. Likewise, he tries to bring out the consequences of past that resulted in the present era of wars. Fowles, in this aspect, tunes the moral undertone in his writings. Far more than a historian he presents history as a fictional truth and at the same time recreate it to bring out the moral and social undertone. In bringing out the past life events and to sketch a bygone era he seems to employ post modern techniques. It made him sound when compared to other writers of his age for only he employed a new technique to create a bygone era. In bringing out a new technique to bring past era to life considered to be a great rare deal among the writers.

Keywords: Twentieth Century, Post modernism, Historical metafiction

INTRODUCTION

Novels of Twentieth century held different ideologies when compared to its predecessor, the Victorian era. Literature, in other terms, arts has taken a whole new dimension in turn of a new century. It can be called as a period devoid of Victorian conventions and traditions. It was a century that witnessed a sudden rise in search of new values and systems as twentieth century was an era that shook the entire world with its demonizing scientific inventions and creations. The system that twentieth century followed oozes out from the vengeful dilemma of writers against Victorianism. It cannot be properly said to be taken from a reaction against Victorianism but the conditions forced them to look up for a new system. The result was a modernist movement replacing the Victorian writings. Modernism characterized a new way of exploring past experiences.

Literature has always stood in the first strand to explore past experiences and always acted as a mirror to the past events. But Modernism had a different approach towards expressing past events. It has gained a tradition of its own and failed to follow earlier traditions. It can be considered as a part of an ethos that gave importance to practices of past and the conventions created in the past. This recently invented tradition has radicalized the literature and increased the creative level of writers. Post Modernism, a higher form of modernism seems to creep in when the Modernist writings swelled itself with proper medium to expand their ideas. Post Modernism had similar ideology to Modernism, can be said a revision of ideology resulted from the atrocities the writer faced during the era. It employed a new style of creative writing. Fragmentation, intersexuality, alterative writing ceased the writings of post war writings. All these attribute are visible in the works of great Twentieth Century writer John Fowles.

Fowles novels dribble with past events in a new life. Similar to other writers of his era, Fowles try to warn about the century's nemesis by exploring past life and try to subsume the present events as a revelation. The paper takes up two novels *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *A Maggot* to analyze the treatment of past and present. Both novels explore a historical time period and try to analyse what leads to a new world like this. He tries to question the work done by our ancestors to open new platform to express his ideas. Another specialty with these two novels carry can be well brought out through the manner it is written. Though his novels occupy a position among post war novels he took the Victorian novel strategy to explore his idea.

In the novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, he explores the motives and primary characteristics of past and act as a narrator of the whole past event. Moreover, the novel can be considered as historical metafiction. The novel finds to combine the literary devices of metafiction and historical fiction. It is a self-reflexive novel or something which contradicts with fictional quality of the writing. But another dimension to the same novel arises from re-introduction of historical context and makes an awful distinction between functionality and the historical knowledge. Fowles's metafiction envisages the wonder and fascination for history or rather past events. The above quoted line of famous critic Malcolm Bradbury can be evidently taken for consideration as a support to this idea: "His text announces a return to the Victorian novel and therefore 'to the site of that realism from which much modern fiction has been struggling to diverge.' (Bradbury2001:386) (Studies in John Fowles's *French Lieutenant's Woman* 29)". His realistic way of presenting narrative is arresting to any reader who fell for past ideas.

The narrative structure of the novel adds to the picturing of the past. The whole novel is divided into small chapters similar to episodes in TV series. Each chapter commences with epigraph mostly providing the general idea of the coming chapter. It can be said it carries a double purpose in providing an epigraph which is Victorian in style. The lines in epigraph are taken from Victorian contemporaries and again by adopting a style for previous era re-examines the past in the present scenario. This re-examination if taken to modern critical level can be view Post modernism. He had gruesome interest in past events and historical incidents. He uses history and takes it up to reader to decide the fate of characters. History has always been a fascinating point to Fowles.

The incidents and events Fowles bring up in the novels suggest the era's makeup. The Nineteenth century and the Victorian dilemma exquisitely showered in the novel through various scenes and characters. He paints Victorian people, architecture, character types and expectations. In the below lines it is evident about Victorian culture and its expectation of young man:

Yet he was not, adrift in the slow entire of Victorian time, essentially a frivolous young man. A chance meeting with someone who knew of his grandfather's mania made him realize that it was only in his family that the old man's endless days of supervising bewildered gangs of digging rustics were regarded as a joke. Others remembered Sir Charles Smithson as a pioneer of the archeology of pre-Roman Britain; objects from his

banished collection had been gratefully housed by the British Museum. (*French Lieutenant's Woman* 16)

The introduction of the hero as per Victorian expectation clearly pictured. In order to bring out that the novel is set in Victorian times he used incidents as if happening parallel to the story line. The publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* and steam inventions painted parallel to the story's timeline. He writes about everything Victorian – lady, man, young or old, building, church, invention, discovery and much more unknown facts about Victorian England.

A Maggot is similar to this one but not concerned with Victorian era rather had touch with an earlier era. The title is made out of the sense as obsession, quirk. Its historical setting takes place at precise time period from May 1736 to February 1737 in England. It has mystery, science fiction and historical evidences to support. Like his other novel he uses metafictional devices. It can be on a critical level considered as postmodern novel as it carries all the literary devices. The novel fills with supernatural elements pointing to the Christian faith. It has religious undertone. Past is brought out through the historical time period and the present through the religious undermining supporting the present reader generation.

Religion and science stood in a position of compromise during Victorian era. With the publication of Darwin's theory of evolution the Christian belief was under scanner. It got depleted after that. When the twentieth century advanced religious beliefs was again became a point of expression. It maintained throughout the century belief in God is the only way to move away from evils created by man. Inventions and nuclear tests left people into barren lands and the sound belief for a hope rose. As a result of it religious themes and writings started emerging from the chaos. At this stage, Fowles too tired to paint the same religious themes to his writing thereby bringing past and present in the same novel. In the end of the novel Rebecca gives birth to Ann Lee the future founder of American Quakerism. Rebecca also gets visions about fate of human race. She sees suffering of humans and cruelty on them. Her version of story reveals this mythical vision that present generation lacks religious ultimately moving to disaster. Many interpreters may take it as extraterrestrials. It was beyond that it has a religious undertone. After her vision she loses consciousness and wakes. She tells Jones her vision was malicious. It was a satanic version of human suffering. While Rebecca was inside the cave, Jones saw Dick leave the cave in frightened state and he hung himself. These two incidents variably show lack of faith in God. It foretells the impending disaster world has to face because of the lack in growth of faith. The hope for a better

future shackles in the hands of non-religious tempts and the move towards betterment is shown in the climax with the birth of Ann Lee. The novel ends with a ray of hope that Ann Lee, whose mother had a vision of human suffering, changed the world by embracing a new belief against the then existed one. These lines from the novel is example for pure faith in Christian ideals:

Now I hate modern evangelism, with its spurious Madison Avenue techniques and general loathsome conservatism in politics. It seems almost always unerringly based on the worst, most backward side of Christianity, an insidious supporter of whatever is retrograde in contemporary thought and politics; and thereby denies the very essence of Jesus himself. Nor I do think any better of this same trait in many other religions, such as Islam. (*A Maggot* 457)

These words show the condition of faith in the present generation. Fowles uses past to bring out the present state.

CONCLUSION

Fowles is an extraordinary writer of twentieth century who brought past and present in his writings to talk about the condition of twentieth century Britain. He breaks traditional barriers and uses modern narrative style to bring home the idea. It can be said it is because of his treatment of themes he is able to create a memorable picture in mind of readers. He takes away the modern decaying society and use past historical evidences to rekindle humanity among the public.

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