

RECLAIMING PAST: SYNCHRONIZING HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION WITH POSTMODERN ETHOS

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Abstract

Reclamation of the past is an apt required need of postmodern literature, the bulk of literature produced during what we call 'postmodernism' was itself 'self-reflexive', interlinked and has drawn its roots in history. The postmodern perception seems to have been influenced by the thoughts which had once been produced long back. History has always been modified over the years and always requires different dimensions for its interpretation, understanding and comprehension. This is something which can be understood by considering the present about the possible happenings in the past. Many postmodern practitioners have extensively focused on claiming roots of postmodern thoughts that had already existed in the past, often seeming dominant in postmodern ethos. The primary aim of the present paper is to focus on how Linda Hutcheon's concept of Historiographic Metafiction influenced the record of late alternative literature in a postmodern ambience.

Keywords: *Historiographic Metafiction, Linda Hutcheon, Postmodernism, Postmodern Literature, Self-Reflexivity, Reclamation of the past.*

An alternative version of a literary piece of art has always been first and foremost over the generations right from the mediaeval era to the postmodern period. This has continuously echoed throughout literary history. Every literary period has its own set of understanding of things, beholding capacity and certainly a distinct way of interpretation. To decode all those literary nuances which are brought out by the writers, here, an already existing history of the literary text becomes the core of its objective.

Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher, proposed the method of reading against the grain: not accepting the established meaning of a text, as the Derridian theory espouses that a text can have many implications, and trying to find out the contradiction in the text- changing the relation the centre and the margin. The same historicity of the text has been consolidated, imitated and carried forward by the writers of that time. By doing this, it is believed and asserted to this conclusion that every text is supposed to be studied by going deep into its literary uniqueness, relevant past and already established fundamental assumptions. Then, this, rightly takes us to what Linda Hutcheon states in her essay, *Beginning to Theories Postmodern Literature that the term postmodernism, when used in fiction, should, by analogy, best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past*" (3). The presence of the past is one of the shades already embedded in the postmodern aura. Consequently, an interpretation of the text would perhaps go futile, if the relevant past was not taken into cognizance while understanding specific text which is considered to be a part of postmodern space.

The literary piece of art produced during postmodern space itself has larger scope to be concocted, and this has adroitly experimented, modified and snarled into each other, as Linda Hutcheon rightly opines, In the postmodern novel, the conventions of both fiction and historiography are simultaneously used and abused, installed and subverted, asserted and denied. And the double (literary/historical) nature of this intertextual parody is one of the major means by which this paradoxical (and defining) nature of postmodernism is textually inscribed. (5)

Therefore, it seems, postmodern literature is all about hypothetical experimentation with all those literary genres. In other words, the boundaries between the literary genres blurred in the postmodern age. The postmodern authors have examined and tried almost all the literary devices, there in the postmodern period to create an alternative version, which furthermore, results in a more concrete form of what Linda Hutcheon termed *Historiographic Metafiction*. As the aforementioned author has meticulously conceptualized more wobbly ideas or to be specific postmodern thoughts that have been practiced and enjoyed by postmodern writers. The intent here is to see how the Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon sees postmodern space as an appropriate representation of relevant history, fiction which overtly enunciates its fictive qualities, and how this has been well incorporated into postmodern discourse. And this is how the author firmly believes that the elements of

Historiographic Metafiction exist all over the postmodern period. Here, she tries to synchronize her ideas of historiographic metafiction with that postmodern ethos.

According to the critic Linda Hutcheon, *Historiographic Metafiction* texts overtly talk about their qualities which are inclined to be 'self-reflexive' and throughout the presence of the past is seen, which means, a text is directly or indirectly related to the past, which is referred as 'Intertextuality'. These characteristics are well emanated from postmodern thoughts. Postmodern fiction reflects history, and metafictional qualities and these are found in almost every classic of the postmodern age. This makes a clear distinction between traditional historical fiction and Historiographic metafiction which is proposed by Linda Hutcheon. An individual text comes out of already existing discourse and thoughts which are integrated by the author keeping an eye on the current phenomenal changes. This, perhaps to some extent persuades thereader toward the historical past of the text to apprehend it. In every phase of history, distinct narrative techniques and ways of presentation are used to create an alternative thought which is going to be completely different from the original. In her essay, the critic Linda Hutcheon emphasizes

The intertexts, however, function in similar ways, and their provenience is again double: there are actual historical intertexts (documentaries on Dresden, etc.), mixed with those of historical fiction (Stephen Crane, Celine). But there are also structurally and thematically connected allusions. (9)

A text is somewhere inherited, and indeed related to its literary or historical past, thus meaning has been created for its reader by structuring itself within the pre-existing discourse of history and theory. Linda Hutcheon's concept of intertextuality seems more outspread, rather than limited to the literariness of the text, simultaneously augmenting historical reference and focusing on fundamental theory. This intertextuality is seen as a denominator in her concept of Historical metafiction where this does only speak about 'only of itself' but also vocalizes, as Jacques Derrida in *Art of Literature its non-identity with itself* (211). The autonomy of any text highly relies on there-existing discourse. The fictional elements are often embedded with that historical references and theoretical discourse, this iintorglargerxtent visible in Linda Hutcheon's notion of Historiographic metafiction, a concept that has been the predominant practice of representing postmodern aura.

The claim of intertextuality proposed firmly by the critic has been supported by others as well. Postmodern thinking is highly affected by the notional changes that emerged during the transitional period. There wasn't any straight line of discourse, instead of this period was seen as a fluctuating representation of intertextuality. In some way, postmodern fiction produces an alternative of its kind, Patricia Waugh rightly states in her text *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction, More diverse and more effectively concealed or mystified, creating greater problems for the post-modernist novelist in identifying and then representing the object of 'opposition'. Metafictional writers have found a solution to this by turning inwards to their medium of expression. (11)*

It was during the postmodern period that the medium of expression and presentation of thoughts found a different place in the postmodern spirit. The writers during postmodernism were more inclined toward parodying and intertextual. The postmodern writers were very keen on preserving the essence of existing discourse while parodying it or making it interlinked. Linda Hutcheon says *To parody is not to destroy the past; to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it. And this is the postmodern paradox. (6)* The critic believes that during the postmodern period, writers have identified new approaches to interpreting postmodern perception, and they did not destroy the past while imitating references from history and theory. This has been incorporated into the postmodern ethos.

Postmodern literature is a representation of amalgamated reality. There has not been a straightforward way of identification, authors are highly influenced by the multiplicity that emerged from modernism, and this could lead to producing duce a productive way of presentation. The practitioners of postmodern space have extensively emphasised not to destroy the past or approaches that existed during modernism, instead they exploited earlier discourse effectively, which seems to be interlinked throughout postmodernism in the form of multiple modes of depiction.

The fiction stemmed from postmodernism, evolving and d gradually from experimentation and *self-referential transparency* (Derrida,211). This is, by analogy relevant to the discourse provoked bytmodernist's perception. The authors who were a part of *so-called postmodern representation were not homogeneous in their modes of writing. Yet amongst the multiplicity was a common purpose* (Woods, 64). Multiplicity or multi-mode depiction has been constantly availed at its best to conceptualize postmodern ambiguity. Many terms have been coined to give a specific way of portraying how postmodern fiction represents an alternative version to existing literature. A bulk of terms have found thitherward during the postmodern period, whether it is *surfiction*, *post-contemporary fiction* by Jerome, Susan Strahler's *actualism* or Linda Hutcheon's *historiographic metafiction* on the intent of all those terms to depict and produce an account of fiction which came out from intertextual references, focused on its structural-existence. All of them pop up towards decentralization of ideology that seems to be the dominant component in postmodern fiction through what Julia Kristeva already formulated *A text, before....it is a permutation of texts, intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another. (Desire in Language,36)*

History has been converged by way of reference, and is interrogated and then extended with that of postmodern

conscientiousness. According to Dr Bhatnagar, this phase of *literary phenomenon owes its existence to the cumulative impact of several pursuits and disciplines*. (3) Postmodern fiction came into existence by questioning historical references and identifying several disciplines which would often seem predominant in fiction and this has rigorously assimilated into metafictional novels, a term which seems to be apparent all-over postmodern fiction. What Linda Hutcheon believes by demonstrating through her concept of historiographic metafiction, gradually emerged out from postmodern metafiction because that is a central plank of any discussion of postmodern literature. (Wood,70) Hence, all these deliberations on metafiction are well integrated with the historical allusion and quintessential fundamental postmodern discourse. For that matter, the critic Linda Hutcheon interrogated the postmodern perception and conceptualized the raw ideas and further extended them as 'Historiographic Metafiction'.

The grounds on which the critic, Linda Hutcheon articulated her ideas of historiographic metafiction exist in postmodern fiction. This is visible in her writing when she states that both history and fiction have been linked through the common denominators of intertextuality and narrativity is usually offered not as a reduction, as a shrinking of the scope and values of fiction, but rather as an expansion of these. (Hutcheon,11) Intertextuality is the vehicle to intersect postmodern fictional ideas. A text is a part of the post-modern impression and has certainly gone through fragmentation and reflexivity, parody and imitation of style, literary displacement, and indeed its validation in the light of postmodern discourse and multiple disciplines.

According to Linda Hutcheon, the following texts have been categorized as an explicit narration of historiographic metafiction elements. These are; *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Ragtime*, *The French Lieutenant Woman* and *The Name of the Rose*. These are, no doubt, a direct narration of her ideas of historiographic metafiction, but apart from these texts, much other postmodern fiction corpus echoed similar elements. The writing of Salman Rushdie in his *Midnight's Children* also demonstrates various intertextual references, the main character seems quite conscious about his fictional existence, which is an absolute metafictional element. The Spanish writer, Carlos Fuentes also renders similar narration through his novel *The Death of Artemio Cruz* which is influenced by Orson Welles's novel *Citizen Kane* published in 1941, takes us back to the Mexican revolution, and the characters seem to be going back and forth, denoting its metafictional conceit, all of these show the influence of discourse of socialism and Catholicism throughout the novel. Too close to Linda Hutcheon's idea of historiographic metafiction also extended in American postmodern fact through the writings of Don DeLillo through his novels like *The White Noise* and *Libra* which is a perfect assimilation of history and fictitious narrative. The text is based on the assassination of historical figure John F Kennedy and the lead character is seen involved in a fictional conspiracy. The author has very well demonstrated the fundamental discourse of communalism through the character, and many incidences. Because Linda Hutcheon perceives postmodern fictional cosmos as not just literature and history, however, that form the discourse of postmodernism. (Hutcheon,16). Postmodern fiction is heavily a demonstration of contemporary discourse, without reflection and cogitate on, this might not suffice to say, postmodern fiction exists. The crystal-clear influence of contemporary thought has been well incorporated by writers and tried explicitly to show the postmodern reverberation through the texts which, does not concern itself with its ability per se to imitate reality. It focuses on the difference between art and reality and displays its consciousness of this distance. (Inger.22). Postmodern metafiction is always focused on interlinking the gap, more inclined towards interrogation and it's a conscious representation that is visible in postmodern fiction.

Thus, the existence of historiographic metafiction elements is discernible, and the author firmly demonstrates this in fiction produced throughout the postmodern period. Hence, postmodern narration is all about moulding history and fiction into that of postmodern discourse. Writers seem to be very occupied with a sense of metafictional narrative. All the narrative techniques were experimented with, altered and fabricated in the light of postmodern interpretation. They are more into describing the process of narration, rather than simply focusing on the facts. That's how postmodern perception is modified and dominated throughout the period by various terminology to be specific Linda Hutcheon's *Historiographic Metafiction*. Therefore, Linda Hutcheon believes in the existence of historiographic metafiction in postmodern perception.

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