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HISTORICAL FICTION: A POSTCOLONIAL VIEW OF SIR WALTER SCOTT'S WAVERLEY

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Abstract

Starting in Europe as a Western literary genre, the historical fiction emerged as meta-fiction and magic realism against the progressive dilemmas and anxieties of modern life. Writers of historical fiction managed to find a relationship between an event and history, which is recently referred to as 'historical narration'. The narration is utilized as exchangeable with history for the sake of understanding the actual fact in the past. The first who employed this type is Sir Walter Scott who is credited with establishing historical fiction and is famous for his Waverley Novels (1814) which was set during the era of the Jacobite uprising and brought him to the tip of his contemporaries. The current study will utilize the textual analysis of the selected novel from the postcolonial point of perspective. In fact, the postcolonial theory portrays history in both place and time focusing on religion, cultural economics, and societies in that postcolonial literature traces and interprets the premises of the past and their repercussions. With reference to the character of Waverley, Scott's most favorite persona, the paper will therefore investigate and examine his way of living in colonies, coping with others, and how the he as colonized can overcome existential political and cultural crises. The aim of the paper is to show what exactly happened in the past and what impacts are seen in the present. The investigation will focus on traditional and Scottish tribes, Jacobite and Hanoverians, the colonizers and colonized people, and their interconnected yet paradoxical relationships.

Keywords : Postcolonial, Walter Scott, Waverley, meta-fiction, Jacobite, Hanoverians

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BACKGROUND

The historical novel is critically an important and popular genre in the postcolonial studies. Historical writers managed to portray the past events in their works “as it actually was” in order to convey a real image of the past. Since colonialism has altered the whole world, the link between history and colonial literature has been elaborated by critics, scholars, and theorists to find out a theoretical conceptual bridge between these two entities.

Moving towards the era pre the nineteenth century, people used to tell stories, of folklore and myths from their own in a form of folk traditions, which were narrated orally. They borrowed this type from the west. The narratives were a combination between reality and fiction. Storytellers, used to narrate events from the glorious past, especially, battles, victories, authorship, honor, and noble characters. They tried to use their own words, dialects, and language to introduce a very clear truth to the audience. The stories were mostly historical, and the connection between history and the narration is very close. Thus, historical fiction can be interpreted as a term that is widely associated with narratives in its traditional and old-fashioned forms.

Historical fiction is essentially western began in Europe and then expanded to cover the east. It is to recall historical events by constructing the reality of modern culture that novelists expose the reader to the complexity of the truth of the past to illustrate reality. This is rather significant because historical fiction is being offered as an alternative to history as a way of understanding the actual past. Alternatively, the genre of novel is the best representative to the contemporary historical fiction rather than other genres of literature. However, there is a much critical debate when defining historical narratives. For example, Lucasto Miller, in *The Times*, pointed out that historical fiction “transmuted the past into fiction in radically different, and innovative, ways”. In that, Miller, referred to “an identifiable shift in literary taste”, as he stated (*The Times*). In the British daily newspaper, *The Guardian*, historical novel is defined as a combination between “traditional and innovation”. It may be a product of economic realities (1992:September).

In *The Distinction of Fiction*, Dorrit Cohn pointed out that historical novel has “a significant historical dimension”. What is meant by historical dimension is that a reader may admire certain novels than the other; there is privilege. This is more importantly depends mainly on a subjective evaluation that the reader is the one who decides whether the text is historical, depending on her/his context, experience and knowledge, viewing the historical dimension as a central theme in the text as there are many other themes. Historical novelists and authors should be familiarized with the spirit of the age, *Zeitgeist*, to convey a real image of the event. This does not come from emptiness but from searching more and more through a certain period. Otherwise, it is better to the novelist to describe an event happened in his time, and this will be a history to the coming generation (Jones,1945:109).

In his *The Forms of Historical Fiction*, Harry Shaw defines ‘Historical Novels’ as “works in which historical probability reaches a certain level of structural prominence”. This suggests that history might mean various things of various literary works and it is a part of a cultural mainstream, available to the genre of novel in general, not only the historical. If we can consider the novel as a part of historical fiction, then history plays a distinctive role in the structure of the novel. According to Shaw, “we cannot make sense of historical fiction unless we recognize that history plays a number of distinctly different roles in historical novels” (Shaw 165).

In most respects, Lukacs was very accurate in his description to the history of the novel. He states that it is a “great stream from which tributaries branch off, only to rejoin and further enrich it in due course” (Shaw 170). Relatively, Walter Scott’s works are branched off from the novels of the 18th century, exploring the importance of history and united them with the 19th century novels affecting by Balzac, and enriching them with new techniques and insights. Scott depends on cultural assumptions and formal techniques of the main traditions. As he followed Balzac and Dickens, Scott is followed by Hugo and Thackeray.

Historical fiction sets a historical event of a certain era that the writing seems as a marker of civilization. It is an important tradition to state postcolonialism. Realism is one feature of the historical novel which is centered to the literature of the colonized societies. The genre can be read as a serious interpretation of the actual past. A postcolonial historical novel traces the premises of the past. It also sets its characters, settings, events in a well-built historical context. The characters may be real or fictional. The way between fact and fiction is called ‘faction’. It is a real event with colors and images that is used for the sake of stimulating the reader because, in the novel, it is seldom to find differences between history and fiction.

Fiction can be a lodges’ fine art for the following proofs: Jane Austen is admired by many writers. Henry James is developed by Emily Bronte. Eden managed to make her novel as sentiment through using fictional techniques.

Sir Walter Scott was the cavalier of his contemporaries in a point that he was very serious about history and historians. His opinion about historical novel is so close to Gifford’s argument. Scott argued that a successful historical novelist should “take his seat on the bench of the historians of his time and country” (Scott, Erskine 1817). This means that the sense of history is based on the two criteria: place and time. The place has a great importance in Scott’s life because he believes that location is one factor of making history. In one of his autobiographies (1808), Scott describes how a sense of place grew with him throughout his life.

Post Colonialism

Post colonialism is a theory that is concerned with history and culture together. It deals with economics, religion, military power in relation to what is called colonial hegemony by some forces on some other locations. Relying on this theory in portraying and describing historical events means dealing with both place and time. Postcolonial critics try to investigate the historical works which happened previously, produced by those who are colonized in particular. For example, a postcolonial critic may be interested in some historical works such as *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe in which the colonial ideology is shown in the protagonist’s attitude towards the personality of the protagonist, Friday, the boy Crusoe knew throughout his journey, and towards the land on which he has shipwrecked (Tyson 377). The same is in *Things Fall Apart* by the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe which describes the colonial life in the southeast of Nigeria and the hegemonic movement of European armies. The negative effect on the colonizers is seen through the technique of shifting ideas in this literary work that thousands of people were killed and enslaved because of the domination of the Western culture.

Postcolonial literature is concerned with the consequences of colonialism on subjugated and oppressed people. Literature which deals with themes of racism, alienation, identity, dislocation, conflict, migration, and religion.

Critical Comment

Since Sir Walter Scott is one of the most famous celebrities and a best-seller novelist, he has an immense fame because of his novels that his work is translated into nine international languages, and he, because of that, received praising from many writers and critics: For instance, John Hayden states that “no writer before him had been so well received by his contemporaries” (20) because of his hospitality. According to Richard Maxwell, “the Waverley novels circulated through the Anglophone world ... It is a slightly overstatement to say that prose fiction in the Romantic period became the novels of Walter Scott” (8). William Clair declares that the most sold copies of novels is Scott’s.

Scott believed in telling truthful events in the past history but did not believe in changing history for the sake of convenience to his fictional works. G. M. Young stated that Walter Scott can definitely make historical documents because he deals with “every document as a record of conversation, and go on reading till you hear the people speaking” (Sawltter 166). The reason behind the success Scott achieved in recreating history is his dependence on the social relationships of the human beings with the surrounding in creating a historical vision. What Scott wants to convey through his fictional works is to show how the past was and how the social environment participated in manipulating history. Mostly, in many of his works, Scott displayed past time images through the use of the rhetorical devices. Scott, on the other hand, presents his fiction as if it is divided between the nostalgia of the past which becomes a passion to him, and the respect of the present.

However, there are some disadvantages in Sir Walter Scott’s novels. His reputation and popularity gained decline at about the beginning of the twentieth century when his less popular novel, *Kenilworth*, had been taught at schools in that the reaction of the students was negative. Moreover, Paul Scott said that it is Scott’s “romanticism, Toryism, and militarism” (3). Furthermore, E. M. Forster describes Scott as “unskillful writer who wrote badly-plotted novels: He is seen to have a trivial mind and a heavy style. He cannot construct. . He has neither detachment nor passion” (20).

The *Waverley* novels is one of the best overwhelming Scott’s works which was published anonymously in 1814. It is one of the first historical novels that tells the truth in the Western tradition. *Waverley* is so popular for it addresses a number of historical themes under the roof of colonialism. The story is a journey between two ages and two regions; Jacobites and Hanoverians; traditional tribes and new Scotland. The novel started by introducing the middle-of-the- road hero, Edward Waverley, and his family. Edward, the protagonist is the son who heirs his uncle Everard who has no children. The father Richard is a Hanoverian. The uncle is a Jacobite sympathizer usually supports the Stuarts. The father arranges a commission for his son with the Hanoverian army at a Platoon in Scotland. The son failed in training, and he was accused of treason and desertion, after that he left the army. Fergus MacIvor and Colonel Talbot, according to Lukacs, are exemplary figures “represent social trends and historical forces”. They are the embodiment of the putatively typical qualities of Highland Scottish and English societies. Fergus MacIvor and colonel Talbot represent social forces of conflict. A mediate character, the hero, takes place in the mid position between these two characters who stand for “historical-social types”, (42) contradictory forces. Waverley is the archetype of this figure.

According to Lukacs, these figures stand for figures of struggle; capitalism and clan-based order of the Highlands. While the hero does not exemplify a social order. He is known by the relative absence of positive qualities.

The research also employs the notions of “subaltern” and “otherness” as one element of the postcolonial theory. The notions gained momentum, at the end of the twentieth century, in particular, as a corollary to globalization. The paper, also deals with the notion of “otherness” by Edward Said. Said utilizes the concept as a postcolonial term dealing with those who are discriminated in their country or in the host country.

Travelling through the time or through the space makes the individuals move physically to pass the borders across cultures, this what historical narration is based on. In the *Waverley* novels, the Lowland Scotsman or the Englishman, Waverley travelled from one culture into another, north to the Highlands at a time when the national feeling was entangled by sympathy. The mobility of the protagonist took him to discover new geographical areas, a journey to a new social area, a new culture, and after all back home. This type of journeys is discussed by Franco Moretti “northbound journey is above all anthropological in nature since crossing the Anglo-Scottish borders drives the protagonist backwards through various stages of social development into clan life and an older, more heroic Scotland” (37). Diaspora is also seen in the novel in the juxtaposed ideas; old and new cultures; Jacobites and Hanoverians; traditional tribes/Scots and the new Anglicised society.

The novel runs in a nonlinear structure and the historical layering connects both place and time and this is seen through the narration of the protagonist who tells the story after sixty years, concerning the place in its two ages; old and new; Highland and Lowland. Tradition, folklore, and legend are of a significant purpose in the novel that Scott employs these figures in order to recreate an image of the two juxtaposed borders, to connect the feelings of the characters to the environment in which they live in, and to understand various forms of life of the two spheres of the nation, and to enact the customs of everyday situations of individuals. The language of the text seems neutral.

The selected novel is full of devices. The devices are used to represent reality. The most distinctive device is ‘journey’. The journey, in the narration stands for a symbol of mobility, transformation between cultures, politics, and lands. The journey also represents an observation of a natural scenery. Another device used is ‘battle’. The battle is a symbol of diversity. It is the climax of the plot that brings together two opposite political forces in action.

Subaltern

The term means “inferior rank”, first adopted by Antonio Gramsci. The term refers to the people of the working class like peasants, or workers, and other lower class people. Gramsci utilized the concept on the lower classes in Soviet Union who are colonized by the dominant classes. The term “subaltern” is highlighted by Gayatri Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1985) which is a criticism to the work of the subaltern studies group. The section deals with those who are not party in ruling discourses in Scott’s society. Scott tries to give them voice in *Waverley* novels by portraying them as symbols of power, strength, with different identities. As Antonio Gramsci states, the subaltern individuals are “those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes” (198). Gramsci adds that “their history is essentially the history of states and groups of states” that the history of the ruling discourse of the state is needed.

The term ‘subaltern’ is used by a collective of historians named ‘Subaltern Studies Groups’ in the late 1980s. The group was founded by Indian scholars, Ranajit Guha, the main founder. The aim is to study the issue of subaltern people in South Asia. It is to provide a distinct view based on the history of the subaltern people in India, especially. The argument is Marxist that the subaltern is something divided and its parts cannot be

coherent and there is weaknesses in formulating the subaltern individuals' identity; therefore, it cannot speak.

The first subaltern study in Scottish literature was done by Douglas Mack. Mack, in his book, *Scottish Fiction and the British Empire*, published in 2006, agrees that in Scotland there is conflict between the elite and subaltern classes writers to manage the power of narration and suppress other narrative voices. According to Mack interpretation, Scottish writers are of two main groups: those who are close to the British imperial power are able to adjust themselves to the British society to earn profit. However, the second group writers are those who wanted to lead a distinctive Scottish identity and have a limited access to the British imperial power. Consequently, the elite class writers in Scotland consists of such authors like Walter Scott and John Buchan who have a powerful contribution in creating a collective British identity.

On the other hand, the British identity was a challenge to subaltern Scottish writers like the Ettrick Shepherd and James Hogg who managed to present an alternative subaltern voice. In the book mentioned above, Mack presented his idea about the subaltern characters in the *Waverley* novels. He states that "The *Waverley* novels, could be, and were appreciated in all sorts of ways, for all sorts of political positions, but one of the crucial aspects was symbolic legacy" (67). In the novel subaltern characters have no voice, they cannot speak.

According to Frantz Fanon's concepts of violence and resistance, the subaltern characters in the novel are analyzed according to three main groups: The poor with low economy, the Scottish Highlanders and Jacobite people who are politically defeated and marginalized, and people of oriental origins and background such as Jews, Indians, gypsies, and others. Although the three groups are essentially unrelated to each other, they share many things in common such as hegemonic power.

In the *Waverley* novels, the subaltern voice is heard through the presentation of the subaltern characters. For example, Redgauntlet, Rob Roy, and Saladin are presented as symbols to disguise whose identity is both shifted and hidden; therefore they have freedom to mobile inside and outside their lands. This characteristic makes them contact with all society classes. Disguise, in the novel is dealt with as a way of recovery against oppression and a political form to resist the hegemonic power of society. Moreover, Subaltern people use dialectic spoken language; non-standard language such as Scots in order to resist the ruling class. This is argued by Pittock "inevitably reinscribed altermentality rather than erasing it" (73).

Otherness

In his book, *orientalism* (1979), Edward Said defines the self-other relationships as something like "the vacillation between the familiar and the alien" (69). Said uses the concepts 'familiar', and 'alien' to represent the relationship between the 'self' and the 'other'. Because of the terms are colonial, hence, it may stand for and interpret any relationship between two opposite entities in any society. For example, colonizers and colonized people; East and the West; strengths and weaknesses, or good and bad. These opposites result in the "validity of the divisions of races into advanced and backward" (205), as Said suggests. The presentation and creation of the 'other' in the *Waverley* novels is not more than a reflection to the anxiety that constitutes Scott's awareness of the status of Scotland; the conflict between the imperial ruling classes and the colonized people. Scott was "the post-Enlightenment observer", described by Bhabha as "tethered to, not confronted by, his dark reflection, bears the resentment of the dispossessed while aiming to occupy the master's place" (Lincoln 56).

In the *Waverley* novels there is an argument on cultural diversity and centralization, especially, at the time the British hegemony dealt with the formation of British identity against the Scottish. Within the British control. Scotland constitutes itself as the 'other' and Scott himself acknowledges a chance to explore the otherness of Scotland as a nation's agency to provide an opportunity to speak. Scott at the same time, represented the oriental as a respectable entity and self-determining that having origins in the Enlightenment of Scott. The prime era of Scott's orientalism is between the late 18th and early 19th century when a collective group of writers were asked to apply a model of philosophical history relying on the studies of the nature of human and the society of orient states. This would be based on the stadial theory as one methodology of the philosophical history. The comparison between European and Asian countries from the political, cultural, and social aspects.

The *Waverley* novels, besides that they can be understood from the philosophical history of the Scottish Enlightenment of oriental fiction, it is possible to realize them according to Fratriotism notion by Murray Pittock. The concept is defined by Pittock, in his *Scottish and Irish Romanticism*, "a mindset which arises from conflicting loyalties generated by inclusion in a state with which one does not fully identify" (28). Pittock adds that there are two major forms of Fratriotism "the preservation of one's submerged national identity in the politic realm in foreign countries, and the adoption of colonized nations and cultures as a means of expressing reservation concerning the nature and development of empire, of seeing oneself in the other" (98). The notion of otherness is corresponded in the act of seeing oneself as the other.

Scotland, in the *Waverley* novels is illustrated through the presentation of the variety of different subaltern characters from both the West and the East. Although the voice of the subaltern characters is never heard, Scott's voice in the presentation of Scotland's distinctive role with the union is never muted in his fiction.

Conclusion

The paper deals with the following groups of people in Scotland: Jacobites, the Covenanters, Orientals, the Scottish Highlanders, and Lowlanders. The presentation of the postcolonial term 'subaltern' by Homi Bhabha in the novel is useful in Scott's representation of Scotland since his feeling to his country is very vivid that he revealed it in his letters and journals. Scott displayed his characters as they came from subaltern backgrounds to speak through various means against the ruling voices. Considerably, this is one means of acting to resist against the ruling power, and at the same time can be understood as Walter Scott's hospitality to his country. Also, the notion of the "other" by Edward Said is dealt with in the paper. Scott presented the subaltern/low class people as the others in their country that they feel strangers, could not achieve their goals, and deliver their voices. They are colonized by other powerful forces. Nationalism and national identity in the colonized societies is treated as challenges and dangerous potentials. Through the symbol of 'journey', Scott explores the potentiality of the history of his country and investigates the past to create a means to understand the present.

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