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History And Its Discontents: Analyzing The Historiographic Metafiction In The French Lieutenant's Woman And Waterland

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Introduction

Graham Swift's Waterland and John Fowles' The French Lieutenant's Woman, deliberately embrace the idea of history while also challenging historical comprehension, critics have praised both works as exceptional examples of historiographic metafiction. According to Hayden White, every narrativized history is relative, and the historian is inherently impositional. In line with White, Linda Hutcheon describes postmodern historical fiction as the kind of fiction that paradoxically and self-reflexively uses the idea of history while also rejecting its veracity. In light of White and Hutcheon's theories, this paper aims to analyze, compare, and contrast Graham Swift's Waterland and John Fowles' The French Lieutenant's Woman to demonstrate how, despite the problematic nature of the idea of reclaiming the past as it truly was, these novels approach the concept of history in different ways.

Keywords: Postmodern historiography, historiographic metafiction, subversion, self-reflexivity.

Introduction

The widespread use of historiographic metafiction has shown how postmodern historiography had a significant impact on the literature of the era. The potential of reconstructing the past through narrative has been a challenge to history philosophy since the late 1960s. Postmodern historiography has emerged as a result of this problematization, which has been accompanied by the application of structuralism and poststructuralism theories to historiography. In keeping with this pattern, British society has come to frequently invoke the customs of the Victorian era. Historical novels that thematically and/or structurally mirror, reflect, or reconstruct Victorian literature have proliferated in the literary world as a result, particularly up to the first half of the 1990s.

By using and then subverting Victorian literary traditions like historical fiction and mimetic realism, the authors of these works have primarily sought to highlight the shortcomings of historical narratives and to question the notion of knowing the past. The neo-Victorian writers have often employed the tools of the type of fiction that Linda Hutcheon subsequently dubbed "historicographic metafiction" in their selfconscious reimagining of the Victorian era and literature. The French Lieutenant's Woman by John Fowles is now considered a classic in this genre. Many British writers, such as Graham Swift, Julian Barnes, Peter Ackroyd, Charles Palliser, A. S. Byatt, and Sarah Waters, have attempted to write neo-Victorian novels in the style of historiographic metafiction in the years that have followed. The French Lieutenant's Woman by John Fowles and Waterland by Graham Swift (1983) are the main subjects of this essay. Since these novels both self-consciously adopt the notion of history and simultaneously problematize historical understanding, they are generally regarded as outstanding historiographic metafictions. They are intended to represent several of the most significant approaches to addressing the problematics of history in fiction. Hayden White's concept of metahistory and Linda Hutcheon's explanation of the idea of historiographic will serve as the main foundation for the study's theoretical framework. It is widely believed that postmodernism has lost trust in the possibility of knowing the past; this skepticism is coupled with the belief that the past will always be present in the present. These self-reflexive novels are demonstrated to depict many perspectives on the past and its relevance in the present by utilizing a combination of Victorian and postmodern literary styles.

According to Nietzsche, "[t]here are no facts in themselves." A meaning must always be introduced before a fact can be established (Brown 4). Similarly, the historian shapes the fact that is a depiction of the event that has happened in his historical narrative. While postmodernism acknowledges that events have already occurred, it rejects the idea that the ultimate historical truth can be discovered. Brown claims that the primary reason postmodernism rejects empiricism's "certainty about the past" is because it uses "narrative" to portray the past (29). In postmodern theory, the past and history are separated from one another, just like event and fact. History is exquisite because it is "untouchable, ultimately unknowable, and excruciatingly tantalizing as well as terrifying, for there resides Truth," whereas the past is our memory (Elias 53). History "in all its sublimity can never be grasped fully in narrative form," according to Kate Jenkins (Brown 113). According to Jenkins, comprehending the past through reading implies that the past can and must be understood as a text, which is in line with Derrida's theories (25). Consequently, the postmodern historian examines the past as a "text" and seeks out its ephemeral potential meanings rather than the history itself. In postmodern historiography, it is not the existence of the past event but consideration of the narrative representation as a means of understanding the past event that is challenged.

Hayden White disagreed with the scientific approach to history in the 1970s, following Nietzsche, Foucault, and Barthes. He views history as a literary discipline and is regarded as the most well-known postmodern historiographer. According to White, historiography's narrative form is what gives the past significance. He does not dispute the past's existence, but he believes that there is no way to find it because it lacks direction. This limits our ability to access the past to a historical narrative whose structure and significance are dictated by the historian. White contends that even though we are unable to comprehend the world, we shouldn't refrain from writing about the past. Rather, he contends that "the power of narrative to shape us ideologically as well as recognizing that the past we are construing in narrative is not reality" are both demonstrated by reflexive writing of the past. However, the past cannot be fully recovered and presented in the narrative since historiography is never finished. White recognizes relativism in all historical presentations since the narrative explanations do not represent the ultimate trustworthy truth.

According to Linda Hutcheon, postmodern literature, sometimes known as "historiographic metafiction," is self-reflexive and metafictional fiction that challenges history (Poetics 5). According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction problematizes "any bases of certainty (history, subjectivity, reference)" by installing and then removing what it is disputing (Poetics 57). Thus, "multiplicity and disparity" take the place of "narrative singularity" in historiographic metafiction (Poetics 90). According to postmodernism, the only way we can understand the world is by our past and present "narratives" of it; similarly, historiographic metafiction exposes the past's inherently narrativized nature because we can only know it through texts (Poetics 128).

With reference to White's challenge of the knowledge that is acquired through historical narrative, she says that historiographic metafiction paradoxically uses and problematizes both "the documentary sources" and "the narrative form of history" (*Poetics* 56). The novels discussed in this study expose such problematization in the sense that they simultaneously employ and question the authenticity of historical narratives. However, the point is that these novels differ in their treatment of the relationship between historiography and narrativization. She claims that historiographic metafiction paradoxically employs and

problematizes both "the documentary sources" and "the narrative form of history" in relation to White's critique of the knowledge gained through historical storytelling (Poetics 56). In the sense that they both use and cast doubt on the veracity of historical tales, the novels covered in this study disclose this problematization. The key difference between these books, though, is how they handle the connection between narrativization and history.

The French Lieutenant's Woman is a neo-Victorian novel that critically examines both the Victorian past and the present to reinvent the nineteenth century. The novel's historiographic metafictional tactics support its critical stance. Linda Hutcheon cites books that are "both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" as examples of "historicographic metafiction" (Poetics 5). The French Lieutenant's Woman appears to be the story of Charles and Sarah, two nineteenth-century characters whose lives are told by a narrator who employs an observer's perspective. As the story progresses, the narrator occasionally breaks in to express his opinions, offer a commentary, or go into further detail about a particular idea or circumstance. The reader gradually realizes that the novel is more about history and storytelling than it is about Charles and Sarah. The storyteller's focus is on the storytelling process rather than the final product, which is the tale of Charles and Sarah. Furthermore, this novel seriously questions the veracity of the narrativized history.

The book is composed of multiple interconnected storylines that are organized by various "writers," including the narrator, Sarah, and the impresario. Each of these authors adopts a different strategy while playing the part of a historian who is not immune to impositionalism. In order to legitimize the Victorian present and parody its underlying contradictions, Sarah fictionalizes her own past. She uses the very characters whose paradoxes she wants to undermine, much like a parody writer might. She exploits the adherents of the two diametrically opposed Victorian philosophies—the puritan bourgeois Mrs. Poulteney and the Darwinian and aristocratic Charles—in the process. Her "narrative" reveals both of their hypocritical positions.

In order to reproduce the past as it truly was, the twentieth-century impresario places himself in the Victorian era and follows the characters around in their daily lives, acting as an eyewitness. However, it is eventually revealed that there is some tampering in his account. Furthermore, by using highly sardonic narratives and giving the reader three possible outcomes for the story, the narrator who emplots the impresario's reports of the "events" in order to transform them into narrativized "facts" openly reveals his own impositionalism and inauthenticity as a writer and historian. He emphasizes the function of authors and historians in portraying the worlds by undervaluing the thorough and rational outcomes of his numerous endings. The storyteller takes the role of a postmodern historian who in his portrayal of the events related to the fates of Charles and Sarah, verifies the impossibility of recovering the past by means of narrative.

According to Hutcheon, the novel's structure is based on the interconnected stories of multiple authors, including Sarah, the narrator, the impresario, and Fowles, whose stories form the novel's interwoven universes. Through his or her narrative, each of these "writers" creates the "text" of the past. To expose the hypocrisy of Victorian society, Sarah fabricates a false past for herself. Similar to a writer of historiographic metafiction, she uses the very ideas she is trying to challenge. She thus uses Mrs. Poulteney and Charles, two exemplifiers of Victorian-era religious and secular ideas, to highlight their flawed "truth."

Similar to the impresario, Fowles' narrator tries to give the events that are reported by this twentieth-century observer—who places himself in the nineteenth century—meaning and order. The narrator introduces himself as "a local spy" and "a person of curiosity," attributions that indicate his intentionality (4). The narrator thereafter examines the likely skewed perspectives in the evidence that the observer has given him. "The kind of man who cannot bear to be left out of the limelight, the kind of man who travels first class or not at all, for whom the first is the only pronoun, who in short has first things on the brain," he says of the observer (461). He makes use of Barthes' concept of the "reality effect," which arises from the assertion of historical objectivity. Since all reality is fictional, the narrator claims that the observer "very evidently regards the world as his to possess and he contends that he has not broken the illusion" and that the reality his characters live in is just as real as the one he has already broken. As a result, he claims that he is unable to fully control his characters (97). He challenges the reader's understanding of reality by raising doubts about the difference between "real" and "imaginary" (97). In his view, even one's past cannot be real since, in order to be turned into a book or an autobiography, it is fictionalized: "you dress it up, you gild it or blacken it, censor it, tinker with it"; moreover, "the real reality" is something we are "in flight from" (97). Hayden White points to the matters of selection of the narrative form and emplotment of the accounts of the past on the part of the historians (Southgate 541). The narrator of FLW repeatedly imposes his presence

upon the narrative through his intervening emplotment – although he introduces himself as "the kind of man

who refuses to intervene in nature" (461). He occasionally steps in to discuss his own thoughts or experiences, pose a sarcastic query, provide some context, show that he is aware of upcoming events, rectify his earlier conclusions, predict the reader's response, challenge the reader's conclusion based on his contemporary perspective, acknowledge his uncertainty, lack of sufficient knowledge, or limitations, give the reader a hint or an explanation of the setting, critique his own writing style, support his own authorial position, or defend his narrativization technique. He also claims that, as a writer, he does not have complete control over his characters; for example, he cites the scene in which Charles defied his directive to return to Lyme Regis by traveling to the dairy. He later admits outright that he has concealed something in his tale. The narrator declares, "I will hide names no more," after disclosing the Rossettis' identities (456). He acknowledges in the final chapter that it is not necessary to introduce new characters at the conclusion of the novels, but he also notes that the observer has already made an appearance in the train. The point is that his sardonic tone in each of these instances betrays his strong impositionalism, which diverts the reader.

Despite using impositionalism to exercise his dominance, the narrator occasionally admits his own failings. The narrator claims in chapter 13 that he has no idea who Sarah is. According to him, everything there is the result of his imagination, and if he asserts that he knows what his characters are thinking, it is because, according to traditional wisdom, "the novelist stands next to God" (95). The novelist "tries to pretend that he knows everything," even if he doesn't. However, he cannot be a conventional novelist because he lives "in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes" (95). He then makes direct fun of Victorian-era literary tropes, such as autobiographies, the characters that stand in for their writers, and entitled chapters (95). He then highlights how readers expect the author to have his "puppets" behave in a realistic manner (95). He states that he plans to write in this section of the story as follows: "Chap. Thirteen – unfolding of Sarah's true state of mind," but he is not allowed to follow her wherever as he pleases because he is a "novelist" and not a man in the garden gazing up at Sarah (96). According to him, all novelists have one thing in common: "we wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is" (96).

He goes on to say that since novelists are aware that "a world is an organism, not a machine," they are unable to plan the world of their works. Therefore, for a "created world" to be authentic, it must not be planned by its creator; otherwise, it is "dead": "It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live" (96). He alludes to the scene in which Charles went to the Dairy in defiance of his command to return to Lyme Regis (96). He also predicts how his reader would respond: "Oh, but you say, come on" (96). He goes on to assert that he is "the most reliable witness" (96). He believes that in order to portray "real" characters, he must grant them "autonomy" and "freedom" (96). He characterizes God as "the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist" (96), drawing comparisons between God and the author. He goes on to say that even in the most avant-garde novels, the author is still there to create; the important thing is that he is not the Victorian Age's "omniscient and decreeing" creator (97).

FLW goes back in time to critique the literary and social flaws of the Victorian era. The work both uses and challenges the social and literary conventions of the Victorian era while revisiting it. Through depictions of Victorians' tastes, norms of conduct, and the manner in which the era's advancement is demonstrated, it parodies the inconsistencies of the time that the reader becomes aware of. The narrator purposefully hides the contradictions of the time in his sardonic narrative. The main idea is that irony is crucial to the text's meaning establishment. As a result, the characters say or do not behave in a number of ways that contradict their beliefs. The book complies with postmodern historiography's requirements. It avoids the conclusion, either directly or indirectly expresses the historiographers' impositional perspective, explains how the historian/narrator emplotted and foreshadowed the past, and highlights the limitations of narrative in accurately reliving the past. Fowles challenges "narrative singularity" by providing multiple endings that highlight the inability of story to accurately retrieve the past, in addition to depicting the tainted character of the source and historiography and the inherently textual nature of the past. Because he encounters three different versions of the story's consequences, which represent the unstable implications of the past rather than the history itself, the reader is made aware of the limitations of knowing the past as it actually was. The illusive and fictional nature of history causes the emergence of multiple truths. The novel does not deny the existence of the past event but creates a correspondence between the past event and its narrative representation.

Waterland reveals the contradictory union of the necessity of stories and the knowledge of their fictiveness in its historical self-consciousness. The novel blurs the line between history and fiction since it is a historiographic metafiction. As a result, even though it primarily deals with the idea of history and gives the reader multiple historical narratives, it also challenges the historical reports themselves. To put it another way, it both praises and critiques history. Furthermore, recognizing that all understanding is inherently tentative, the novel demands the existence of stories in order to comprehend the world, without distinguishing between history and narrative. Therefore, the story is also tentatively designed to address the constraints of interpreting the past. Tom's story veers between the past and the present, just as he alternates between upsetting and elevating history. Additionally, the work simultaneously undermines and affirms the need of story in comprehending the world. It presents history as a narrative construct. It confirms that narrative, whether in the form of history or fiction, ensures human existence in the world and that stories give the world meaning. Therefore, it emphasizes its provisional character while emphasizing storytelling as the sole way to make sense of one's past. Furthermore, even though he emphasizes the importance of narratives and explanations, Tom learns that it is impossible to develop a holistic perspective on the world. He thus acknowledges that history is imaginary and does not differentiate between it and fiction, much like a postmodern historiographer. He maintains that the world's meaning is ascribed through fairy tales and histories, and in his metafictional search for history, he offers a blend of world and private histories in addition to the fairy tales. His story spans several historical periods, including the Victorian era, the Ice Age, and the days of empire decline. Three definitions of the term "Historia" are provided in the epigraph, and the idea is that all three apply to the story, illustrating the limitations of historical understanding right from the start of the book: 1. inquiry, research, and education. 2. a) a history or events narrative; b) any type of narrative, including an account, tale, or story. Tom Crick tells the tales of his past and present while also looking into the past. He uses the evidence—such as his grandfather's notebook, his and the others' conjectures, his parents' fairy tales and legends, and the actual keys—to access the past in the meantime, but the conclusion turns out to be ambiguous and provisional. Three episodes make up Tom's story: the history of the Fenland, which spans the seventeenth century to the end of World War I; his teenage years, when Dick killed Freddie, Mary aborted her child, and Dick killed himself; and the 1980s, when Mary kidnaps a baby and Tom is forced to resign from his position. The order of these episodes is similar to how Tom explains history: It simultaneously moves in two directions. As it moves forward, it moves backwards. It repeats. It makes diversions.

Waterland paradoxically emphasizes the story's importance and its fiction in the process of reconstructing the past. Tom Crick walks through the steps of being familiar with history. He claims that his mother used to make up stories about history when he was a boy and he was terrified of the dark (61). He continued to view history as a "myth" while studying it in school until "the Here and Now" firmly told him that he was now a part of history and that "history was no invention but indeed existed" (62). He began studying history as a result, and now, forty years later, he has come to the conclusion that "history is a yarn" (62).

However, Tom argues that this fictionality of history is not a weakness; rather, he believes that history and stories are essential to the survival of both the storyteller, who must tell stories "to unload those most unbelievable yet haunting of fairy-tales," and the listeners, in this case the children, "to whom, throughout history, stories have been told [...] in order to quell restless thoughts" (7). As a result, he realizes that "History itself: the Grand Narrative, the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears of the dark" (62) is what he is trying to learn from history. To put it another way, man seeks meaning in history because he recognizes its artificiality and wants to find comfort in it. Tom believes that the "tangled stuff" for creating stories is "pity," "curiosity," and "fear" (248). He attributes man's accomplishments in knowledge to his insatiable curiosity, saying that "the world shall have come to an end" when that inquiry is extinguished (203-04). To put it another way, the world exists as long as history does. "Nothing is worse [...] than when curiosity stops," he says, urging the kids to continue being curious (206). In addition, he says: "When curiosity is lost, people die" (206).

Tom wants to give his life to the students in "the complete and final version" (8). The novel illustrates how such a goal can never be fulfilled. According to Tom, the question "why" comes up when people are unhappy with the present, and this is when "history" starts because it transforms "Why" into "If": "If only we could have it back." A fresh start. We wish we could go back... (106-07). "Historia," which means "inquiry," he adds, helps us "learn [...] from our mistakes so it will be better, in future" (107).

Thus, we require history because of "our pressing need to ask the question why" and because of our "sense of wrong" (107). The key idea is that the response to the first why prompts the subsequent whys, which leads to the query, "When-where-how do we stop asking why?" (107). Stated otherwise, "At what point do

we feel that we have an explanation, even though we know it is incomplete?" (107–108). Because "history is that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge, of actions themselves undertaken with incomplete knowledge," he restates his belief that the question "why" will never be answered (108). According to him, history simply teaches us "the patient art of making do" (108), not how to reach "Salvation" or "A New World." Furthermore, we become conscious of "the limits of our power to explain" as a result of such an explanation attempt (108). However, it is "folly" to "ignore" history since it makes us "realistic" and "teaches us to avoid illusion and make-believe" (108). "Although it gets harder the more you ask it, though it gets more inexplicable, more painful, and the answer never seems to come any nearer, don't try to escape this question Why," Tom advises his students, encouraging them to keep asking "why" (130). He adds that we may learn "how," "what," "where," and "when," but "will we ever know why?" (204).

Waterland is a historical fiction book about the past. It encompasses the vast range of historical periods from prehistoric to postmodern. Tom Crick tells both his personal and public histories, much like a postmodern historiographer, thereby exposing his incapacity to provide a well-written one. Regressions, discrepancies, conjectures, and questions abound in his accounts. Ironically, as a history teacher, he is unable to provide his students with a coherent and well-organized historical perspective. In his historical analysis, Tom connects the events of centuries ago to the present; in other words, he demonstrates how the current state of affairs is a result of past occurrences. The problem, however, is that such continuity is not evident in his own historical account. After discussing the purposes of history, he asserts that it is the reason why humans have survived and developed a realistic perspective. Tom begins to view history as a narrative and connects it to the only means of survival. He compares Scheherazade, whose only means of survival was her storytelling skills, to man's situation at the end of the world. Waterland challenges contemporary ideas of historiography regarding progress by employing fictional techniques to explain historical occurrences. As the novel progresses, the reader actually begins to see the development and demise of the Atkinson Brewery as a metaphor for the rise and fall of the British Empire. From a different angle, in keeping with the claims of postmodern historiographers, Tom finds history as a discipline terrifying because he perceives no order in it; hence, he makes an effort to impose order on it through his stories. But when his stories become increasingly disjointed and plotless over time, the reader realizes that he is failing at this process.

Waterland places a strong emphasis on the fictional elements of historiography, but unlike FLW, it argues that the relationship between history and fiction can be therapeutic in that the loss of the past is not as regrettably handled as it once was. The novel, being a work of historiographic neo-Victorian fiction, reveals the development and fall of imperial England. Through the use of fictional techniques for historical explanations, the novel challenges the teleological and progressive perspectives on history. According to Tom, stories—and later histories—come from man's idea of truth as a disorganized, terrifying concept that lacks purpose and structure. Through stories, man attempts to provide order to the chaotic truth.

The tragic reality is that the "waters return" and that this elusive order is temporary. Furthermore, because "the here and now" is both odd and empty, man must make stories. throughout the midst of the tragedies he is destined to encounter throughout life, stories provide him with solace. The book also emphasizes how history and memory are both manufactured. He is more interested in the act of remembering the past than in the scientific outcome of historical research. Like the River Ouse, the direction of memory and history is subject to change. The novel challenges modern historiography and its claim of objectivity through presenting multiple narrative forms including private and public histories and fairytales that originate from the need to fill the "wide, empty space of reality." Tom says that he wants to fill the gap between him and the world with books (47). In the last phase of his attempt, he no longer treats history as a science; instead, he relies on his speculations. As a postmodern historian, Tom attempts to discern Dick's – and mankind's – origin, not through research, as the Enlighteners do, but by means of narrative. Ironically, the idea of progress is severely limited in the case of Dick who stands in opposition to the Darwinian notion of the progressive movement of mankind to the present perfect state in history.

Conclusion

The novels emphasize the function of narrativization in portraying historical events by obfuscating the line between historiography and fiction. In addition to highlighting the importance of the narrative as the sole method for gaining historical comprehension—since narrativization gives the chaotic events of the past purpose and coherence—they also highlight how it fails to result in a thorough understanding of the past because the past is invariably written down and read as a text. In other words, the novels challenge the veracity of narratives in the true depiction of the past by depicting the textualized past and the process of learning about it. At the same time, they demonstrate that history cannot be understood without narrativization. The chaotic past is given order by the historian's narrativization, yet this order inevitably comes with the historian's intentionality and impositionalism, which makes all historiographies relativistic. This issue is made more severe in The French Lieutenant's Woman, as it is demonstrated that the hegemonic ideology of the past and present directly wrote the past. As a result, it is completely impossible to recover the past in a genuine manner. Similar to Waterland, the book explores the need for someone who experiences the struggles of "the here and now" to study and write about the past.Both the necessity of making an effort to comprehend the past and the impossibility of obtaining a true historical explanation are conveyed by the multiple contradictions in Tom Crick's narrative/historiography.

Tom and Swift believe that studying the past removes people from the stresses of the present, or what Tom refers to as the "Here and Now." The distinction between FLW and Waterland is that the former uses narrative as a tool of trapping, whilst the latter uses it as a means of escape. In Waterland, it becomes the only thing Tom has left to bond with and find comfort in, whereas in FLW, Charles is caught within Sarah's historical attempt. But in general, historiographic metafiction exposes the historical building process. Similarly, these neo-Victorian books reveal the artificiality of the Victorian Age through the use of historiographic metafictional techniques.

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