Postmodern Themes and Techniques: Embarking an Innovative Reading of Narrative Texts

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Abstract

This study is approaches postmodern literature's thematic and technical characteristics. It demonstrates how literary themes and techniques intersect with each other in postmodern literature through narrative descriptions and fictional events. The duality of postmodern themes and techniques will be further elaborated by discussing postmodern literary characteristics that offer genuine and unprecedented fictional qualities. The discussion of the relationship between literary themes and techniques would yield in cogent critical interpretation; whereby fictional texts add to the cognitive background of the readers and their view of reality and their social milieus. This background enriches the current scholarship on postmodern literature and how it could be interpreted and comprehend within its social and cultural circumstances.

Key words: Fiction; Narrative; Postmodernism; Techniques; Themes

INTRODUCTION

The study of literary themes and techniques comprises various methods and tools depending on the nature of the text and how it contributes to related movements and critical disciplines. Moreover, themes and techniques are relative because they are tackled differently in relation to literary periods and their cultural backgrounds (O'Neill, 1994). They are perceived by authors, critics, and readers; and it largely depends on the way by which a text could be interpreted within the contemporary historical era. The analysis of any work draws on the people's state of affairs and how they interact with each other (Aldama, 2011). Themes and techniques are natural and contiguous as they assist the evaluation of literary works through a deductive process; whereby readers could infer diverse themes by pursuing the implied essence of literary writings via scrutinizing the functions of their techniques.

The relationship between themes and techniques is also connected with the authorial view of reality. In other words, authors have their own view of reality and they tend to project deliberate notions left for the receptive audience to be grasped according to the contemporary social and cultural issues (Pavel, 1986). Here, themes and techniques are appropriated by the authorial concern with reality and how truth might be pursued through the text's narrative recounts and fictional descriptions. Readers, on the other hand, participate in perceiving the roles of literary themes and techniques. They pay special attention to the authorial treatment of certain themes by means of specific techniques. Authors' comment on reality is conveyed to the readers in the literary layers of their narrative works; and readers delve deep into these layers to explore the target theme and how it could help to understand reality (Pholer, 1997). The mutual relationship between readers and authors encounters each other in the fictional expressions within the wide scope of the text's thematic demarcations. This relationship, consequently, is sustained by the critical appreciation. Readers need critical and theoretical backgrounds to highlight the authorial treatment of themes in narrative texts (Bal, 1985). In this way, readers follows pedantic appreciation of these texts' themes and techniques.

This study, therefore, focuses on the attributes of postmodernism literary themes sand techniques and how they complete each other.

DISCUSSION

Postmodern experimentation had been followed by authors to create genuine literary narrative devices. These devices might prolong the narrative genres that would lose their innovative spirit (O'Donnell, 2023). Therefore, experimentation serves as a progressive style linking the exhausted narrative elements, and giving them replenished vigor. In this way, some genres, such as pastiches, are needed for the sake of polishing the pre-modern literary elements and techniques. The importance of such pastiches lies in the utilization of fictional works' narcissistic narrative techniques that enhance their reflection of the authorial voice in the text. This voice inherently represents "the authorial propensity for establishing such aesthetic form is accomplished by narcissistic narrative perspective, which implicitly refers to the presence of the authorial voice in the plot" (Abu Jweid, 2023a, p.21). As a result, the authorial narrative voice is conveyed through the plot's postmodern experimental pastiche, which is a prominent style of contemporary literary writings offering "divers literary themes that are very essential for grasping the cultural context in which it was written" (Abu Jweid, 2023b, p.18).

The experimental capacity of postmodern writings is a conspicuous characteristic of innovative narrative styles. These styles are commonly used for reinforcing fictional works' creative techniques that unravel the latent authorial implied presence in the plot. The concept of polyphony, furthermore, is another decisive narrative aspect of postmodern fictional writings. In essence, the concept of polyphony incarnates certain voices that naturally exist outside the text (Norrick, 2000). However, they are projected in the text via the characters' voices revealing the author's predilection to comment on reality by inserting his/her implicit voice through the characters' speech. As a result, the postmodern attributes of the concept of polyphony which designates the theme of reality. This theme embodies postmodernism's relative view of reality. In other words, postmodernism; as a literary movement, looks into reality as being relative rather than being absolute. The relative nature of postmodern reality is literarily carried out by the diversity of polyphonic voices in fictional plots because "the notion of polyphony is inherent in the narrator's voice that carries out the author's voice" (Abu Jweid and Sasa, 2020, p.342). The concept of polyphony, therefore, has two concomitant functions, namely, thematic and technical roles in the fictional texts that "reflect the essence of literature" (Abu Jweid, 2022, p.22).

The use of allegory is another obvious factor of postmodern experimental narrative. Allegory enables authors to describe reality in a symbolic style. In this way, postmodern text abounds with symbolic descriptions of how reality could be reflected within the bulk of fictional plots. This is because allegory is harnessed for the sake of highlighting reality in its abstract sense. It is considered as a narrative vehicle for coping with social or cultural changes which imprint the whole literary status quo (Punday, 2003). The symbolic attributes of allegory are primarily connected with the indirect message of fictional plots through which various themes and techniques come into being. The use of allegorical narrative allows the author to deal with interconnected themes in the fictional plot since "allegory reveals the implicit metafictional authorial presence in the novel's narrative structure to accentuate the author's subjective voice" (Kaur and Abu Jweid, 2018, p.1). Hence, postmodern allegory links the author's abstract ideas with the text's concrete themes. It emerges within the wide scope of narrative events allowing authors to have profound commentaries on reality outside the fictional text. As a rule of thumb, allegory has a contiguous literary affinity with the postmodern narrative modes.

The paradoxical nature of postmodern allegory reinforces the text's multifarious thematic layers that interact with each other on the grounds of logical flow of ideas harnessed by authors to offer an objective look at reality. Consequently, allegory is the premise of realistic recounts that could not be detached from reality that is highlighted by narrative points of view. The thematic peculiarities of postmodern allegory primarily reflect the genuine descriptions of people and events pertaining to society or culture engulfing the entire external factors of the fictional text; whereby themes "might be elaborated in the broad scope of writing works reflecting the drastic changes affecting the genuine spirit of literature as a whole" (Abu Jweid and Ghanem, 2024, p.6).

Dystopia is another key narrative factor of postmodern literature. The common and traditional view of dystopian literature highlights the imperfect aspects of life where everything is presented as being bad and comprehensively negative. In some cases, postmodern literature looks into dystopian life through science fiction because it brings about destructive sequences to the life of man (Reid, 1992). In the first place, postmodern literature approaches the conventional contrast between dystopian and utopian writings in order to demonstrate how they contradict with each other. In fact, they negate and oppose each other in every meticulous detail. In postmodernism, consequently, science fiction is the core of the thematic contradiction between utopian and dystopian fictional writings because "dystopia is, thereupon, encompasses the negative features of the society. Being so, science fiction approaches dystopia as the trivial products of any society. It does

not restore the whole society. Neither does it attempt to replace dystopia with utopia" (Abu Jweid, 2020a, p.101). As a result, utopia is the nexus of postmodern science fiction writings due to its authentic treatment of life's negative sequences which emerged in the early phases of postmodern fictional writings.

Since fiction themes, furthermore, reinforce the perception of postmodernism's cultural and social issues that influence the lives of individuals and communities. The diversity of scientific inventions during postmodernism had led to the appearance of cultural fragmentation. That is, postmodern life had witnessed tremendous technological progress together with drastic social changes that had made people's communication relatively limited (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). As a sequence, this communication had become the essence of fragmentation i.e., the detached social reality based on each person's privacy and view of life. Postmodern literature reflects this reality by means of social relativism and fragmentation; and "the complexity of science fiction emanates from the fact that postmodernism abounds with scientific discoveries, like relativism, the fragmentation of reality and indeterminacy" (Abu Jweid, 2020a, p.101). Science fiction, therefore, is one of the latent themes of postmodern dystopian literary writings. This is because it is a part of the fictional premise of unprecedented themes tackled in postmodernism's narrative techniques.

Postmodern literature, moreover, is characterized by the use of intertextuality; whereby genres employ and make use of other literary works. To put it another way, intertextuality allows works to be interpolated within the broadest context of new works that try to reiterate the previous works' ideas but in different ways (Allen, 2011). The intertextual utilization of previous canonical works enhances the contemporary postmodern genres dealing with emerging and continuous appearance of socio-cultural themes since "postmodernist critics try to highlight the 'intertextual elements' in literary texts" (Abu Jweid, 2020b, p.95). Literary intertextuality, therefore, is the basis of the mutual relationship among texts that imitate each other's technical qualities, but they harness them in various thematic contexts. As a result, it serves as a vehicle of conveying previous literary grandeur via experimental styles in order to reinvigorate the dwindling sense of postmodern styles. Incorporating the elements of previous literary writings empowers the authentic and innovative styles used to express and describe diverse themes since "intertextuality is a process of reading another text, whereby an author's work becomes a re-writing process by reading other texts i.e., the written work is a reformulation of another one" (p.95). Consequently, postmodern intertextuality is the dual writing style employing two inextricable works related to different literary eras, namely, the past

literary works and their manifestation in contemporary counterparts. In this duality, literary "themes are key factors to explore the embedded authorial tone which has an effect upon the reader's perception of the text within the wide scope of literature as a human product" (Abu Jweid, 2023c, p.1).

Postmodern literature encompasses the fictional elements and components that are tackled in modern and even pre-modern literature. Being so, postmodernism involves modernism's utilization of fictional elements, yet, it uses them in a different way (Richardson, 2008). It gives modernism a new literary vigor to enhance the over-utilized literary elements due to the fact that "modernism has offered a technical narrative analysis of this experimentation in literature, especially the novel. Artistic experimentation yields the necessity of exposing pre-modernism's literary decline and its possible amendment" (Abu Jweid, 2021, p.8). The genuine styles of postmodernism are appropriated within modernism literature. However, it bolsters its aesthetic quality for the sake of finding possible fictional paths in exposing realistic themes and techniques. This is because modern literature borrows its literary quality from pre-modern canons which are passed down to postmodernism through modern writings. This process is a mere imitation of previous literary genres that become mature during modernism; and it reaches its aesthetic reality in postmodern writings as "modern fiction relies on literary imitation of previous literary works in an almost similar manner. Modern fictional authors did not compose innovative literary forms so that they could not produce any literary genuineness" (p.8). Postmodern writings, therefore, are empowered by modernism's employment of authentic and experimental techniques; which, in turn, transform into grand narrative techniques polished by fine realistic themes projected in the course of fictional plots (Sim, 2001). This aesthetic quality is ascribed to postmodern authors who follow erudite literary dexterity in dealing with intricate themes concerning people, society, and reality. Hence, postmodern themes and techniques intersect with each other forming unprecedented literary compositions about life and man.

CONCLUSION

This study discussed the attributes of postmodern literary themes and techniques. It looked into the meticulous characteristics of postmodern fictional narrative styles for the sake of enriching the readers' literary backgrounds concerning the contemporary changes affecting the nature of literary writings. In the first place, the study's main contribution lies in the discursive orientation of postmodern literary themes and techniques from a critical perspective. As such, the contribution is ascribed to three related findings. First, the study of postmodern themes

and techniques helps readers to understand the nature of postmodern literary avant-gardism, which signifies the core of any creative writing and its human functions. In this regard, postmodern themes and techniques were found experimental and innovative; and this inherently adds to the possibility of analyzing of literary works in an academic way.

Second, postmodern themes and techniques were tackled from a critical perspective. Being so, they could be employed in interpreting fictional writings via critical appreciation of the written texts. The critical analysis of postmodern writings, therefore, paves the way for exploring new meanings within the text. Consequently, genuine ideas could be further elaborated for the sake of discussing and analyzing diverse literary genres, not only the narrative ones. The duality of postmodern themes and techniques might be inseparable as they complete each other in a coherent way. They are traditional components of any fictional writings, but they become more vital and effective when they are perceived through postmodern innovative styles. Third, postmodern themes and techniques help researchers to follow sound methodology when they attempt to apply a close reading or textual analysis of postmodern narrative writings. They are needed for revealing the latent literary nuances that are still being generated by authors by dint of avant-garde narrative styles. That is, authorial pithy and terse expressions can find their parallel connotation when they are treated through pursuing precise diction and phrases reflecting reality overwhelming the external conditions of the written text.

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