

Metafiction and Historical Metafiction in the two Contemporary Novels of John Fowles (Magus, Lady French Lieutenant)

Hanan Ali Hussein Al-Shammari

Ministry of Education - Open Education College - Babil center

Shahrazad596@gmail.com

Abstract:

In Fowles's contemporary novels *Magus* and *Lady French Lieutenant*, the complex relationship between metafiction and historical metafiction provides a compelling exploration of narrative and its relationship to history. Fowles challenges traditional conventions through conscious narrative techniques while making readers question the nature of reality and authorship. It engages readers in a self-reflexive exploration of storytelling and challenges traditional notions of history and fiction. It is easily can be seen that one of the unsolved issues in postmodern movement novels is the connection between past and present this make a lot of discussion between authors and critics about the present effect or Circumstances partied the narration of history . This paper discusses how Fowles uses these narrative devices to craft multi-layered narratives that blur the limits between fiction and reality, by examining how Fowles uses these techniques to create multi-layered narratives that make readers reconsider the nature of reality and authorship.

Keywords: Metafiction, historical metafiction, narrative technique *Magus*, *Lady French Lieutenant*

الخيال والخيال التاريخي في روايتين معاصرتين لجون فاولز (ماجوس زوجة ضابط فرنسي)

حنان علي حسين الشمري

وزارة التربية / الكلية التربوية المفتوحة – مركز بابل

Shahrazad596@gmail.com

الملخص:

في روايات جون فاولز موضوعي الدراسة "ماجوس" زوجة ضابط فرنسي " يستحضر فاولز العلاقة المعقدة بين الخيال والخيال التاريخي الذي فيهيقيم استكشافا مثيرا للسردية والعلاقة التاريخيه معها . تحدى فاولز العرف السائد والتقليدي من خلال تقنيات السرد الواعية بينما يجعل القارئ يتشكك في طبيعة الواقع والمولف سويا . وتدمج القارئ رحلة انعكاس شخصية في السرد القصصي لياحدى بذلك مفاهيم الخيال والتاريخ سويا . من السهولة ان ترى بعض القصص والقضايا التي لم تحل في عصر وحركة قبل الحداثة ومنها الربط بين الماضي والحاضر واستحضار احدهما بتوقيته غير توقيته وهذا الذي رفع مستوي المناقشة بين العديد من الكتاب والنقاد حول تأثير الحاضر وظروفة علي استحضار سردية الماضي هذه الورقة البحثية تناقش كيف استخدم فاولز الادوات السردية لصياغة سرد متعدد الطبقات الذي يطمس الحدود بين الخيال والواقع من خلال فحص كيفية استخدام فاولز لخلق هذه الطبقات السردية المتعددة والتي تجعل من القارئ اساسا بين الواقع والكاتب

Introduction

John Fowles' contemporary novels, "*The Magus*" and "*The French Lieutenant's Woman*", are typical works that intertwine the elements of metafiction

and historical metafiction to present to the readers a unique and spectacular literary experience. In both novels, Fowles skillfully employs these narrative techniques to challenge traditional literary conventions and explore the intersection of narrative and history.

In metafiction, the author intentionally includes references to storytelling itself to blur the lines between truth and fiction. The purpose of this paper is to analyze John Fowles's use of metafiction in two recent novels: “The Magus” and “The French Lieutenant's Woman” will investigate historical metafiction, a subgenre that uses a metafictional framework to reimagine historical events and places, John Fowles uses metafiction as a narrative device in his novels to subvert the norms of fiction writing and captivate readers on numerous levels. Despite their differences, “*The Magus*” and “*The French Lieutenant's Woman*” both contain aspects of metafiction (Buchberger, 2009, pp. 58-66).

John Fowles uses the narrative device of metafiction in his writings to subvert traditional tale structures and provide a rich, multilayered experience for his readers. Despite their differences, both *The Magus* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* use metafictional techniques. Through following Nicholas Urfe as he becomes entangled in a web of secrets and illusions, *The Magus* takes readers on a philosophical and psychological trip. In the context of this literary work, Fowles employs the technique of metafiction by constructing narratives in which the boundary separating fiction and reality are the distinction constantly unclear. Readers, like Nicholas, should be satisfied with exploring truth and perspective as they follow him during his adventures on an ambiguous island inhabited by mysterious people or characters. Fowles' use of metafiction in *The Magus* pushes his readers to question the validity of the story being told and to examine closely into the story delving hidden implications.

In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Fowles employs a great utility in historical metafiction (Palmer, 1974). The novel, which is located in the nineteenth century but was composed in the twentieth, analyzes the moral and social values of Victorian England at the same time showcasing a compelling love story. By inserting authorial commentary and alternative endings into the historical story, Fowles subverts the reader's expectations of a conventional historical romance by using this metafictional device, Fowles encourages his readers to consider the author's place in the narrative, the nature of storytelling, and the effects of free will in the reader's mind to indulge in the story. Both of these new novels by John Fowles use metafiction to draw readers' into a more in-depth examination of fiction writing.

The French Lieutenant's Woman utilizes historical metafiction to subvert traditional historical narrative, while *The Magus* plays with the borders of reality and illusion. To further enhance the reading experience, these stories have

metafictional elements that make the reader consider the nature of fiction and its relationship to reality. We cannot define postmodernity so that we have a clear and reasonable idea of the meaning of modernity. Although the term itself is used in many senses and contexts, it cannot be clearly defined.

Critics and literary theorists have a fairly good idea of what they mean by modernity, a movement that began in the early 20th century, specifically after the First World War. This applies to some imaginative and poetic techniques, stylistic devices, methods of writing experimental procedures, the use of spatial form, the dominance of metaphor, and the striking juxtaposition of image and style.

It is described as a particular style that came to prominence in the period following -World War II period. Postmodernism is an opposing response to rational thought and the new approach to literature. Also, authors often produce historical history as a term originally formulated by literary theorist Linda Hutcheon. "Postmodern stories suggest that rewriting or reintroducing the past in the fictions and in history, in both case, is to open it to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive," says Linda Hutchison. - Representation of the past, historical metafiction, "play on the truth and lies in the historical records. (Waugh, 2001)

Objectives:-

- - Analysis approach of metafiction and historical metafiction in John Fowles's The Magus and The French Lieutenant's Women and their impact on narrative structure.
- - Discuss Fowles's challenge to traditional literary conventions through conscious narrative techniques to prompt readers to question the nature of reality and authorship.
- - Clarifying the implications of Fowles's narrative techniques for telling stories and history and the dynamics of interaction between author and reader in modern literature.
- - Contributing to the academic discourse on the works of John Fowles and their importance in the context of contemporary literature and literary theory.

Method and Materials:

This paper uses a multifaceted approach to analyze John Fowles's The Magus, and French Lieutenant's Women through metafiction and historical metafiction. This includes analyzing texts, applying literary theory, comparative analysis, investigating historical context, and developing an interpretive framework. In addition, connected literary theory texts on metafiction and historical metafiction are used, along with scholarly articles, books, and critical essays on Fowles's work.

Literature review:

Postmodern novels are a literary current that includes several different styles and techniques but is characterized by transcending traditional techniques of narrative

and expressing human experience in new and innovative ways. These narratives can be complex, and diverse and often deal with social, psychological, and political issues. Postmodern narratives attempt to make connections between the past and the present in a variety of ways. aims to depart from the deterministic perspective of history, which sees history as a linear, teleological path leading to a certain goal or result.

In summation, Linda Hutcheon's challenges the notion of history as a sequential, purpose-driven process and emphasizes the postmodern propensity to regard the past as a flexible narrative element, highlighting its relationship to the present. Conventions of historical narration are often played with, reinterpreted, or subverted in postmodern tales. (Duman,1988)

According to Linda Hutcheon's claim, the postmodern approach to storytelling examines the past and how it connects with history. This is an analysis of the statement , Linda Hutcheon's concept of Historiographic metafiction aims to establish a connection between literature and the world by blending fictional elements with historical events.

The postmodern tale suggests an imitation of re-writing then after re-presenting the past in narrative yet into history . This part indicates that rewriting or reinterpreting the past inside a story's framework is a common practice in postmodern tales. By doing this, they want to show the past as a story component rather than just a dry historical report.

"Of each case, to originate such up according to the present, according to stop it besides being eventual or teleological." (Stout, 1996)

Another opinion from Patricia Waugh who says one thing that makes metafiction different from other types of fiction is that it uses a self-aware and systematic approach known as the lines between fantasy and reality. It deliberately and purposefully poses questions about the relationship between the narrative and the real world; in fact, metafiction is that type of storytelling or narrating that breaks the walls and makes the characters themselves complete the story itself. In this type of literature, the writer tells the story, but he knows how to present it. He breaks the fourth dimension or wall of the reader by giving the meaning to manifest in different ways, such as Narrative Intrusion, Playful Self-Reference, Multiple Narratives, Deconstruction of Genre and Interplay of Truth and Fiction (Waugh, 2001)

Mark Currie is known for his academic contributions to the field of metafiction and the exploration of self-reflexivity within literary works. The publication of his work titled "Metafiction" occurred in 1998. Currie examines the concept of metafiction, a literary genre characterized by its self-referential nature and its exploration of the narrative process, arguing that it possesses an intrinsic self-critical quality. In his analysis, Currie emphasizes the self-critical nature of

modern metafiction, where authors deliberately break the illusion of reality to comment on the process of storytelling and criticize conventional narrative techniques. Metafiction often blurs the boundaries between storytelling and critique as it engages in a kind of self-examination and self-reflexivity. Authors use metafictional techniques to invite readers to question the nature of fiction, authorship, and the act of reading itself.

Currie has shown us how literature may be used for self-reflection and critique of narrative. It invites readers and researchers to investigate how literature might disrupt narrative standards and be self-referential and self-critical. (Currie, 1998). John Barth is well recognized as a notable American novelist who has made significant contributions to postmodern literature and metafiction. In the aforementioned quotation, Barth concisely characterizes metafiction as a literary methodology that frequently exhibits greater resemblance to a novel than to the actual world. The aforementioned assertion underscores the self-referential and self-conscious characteristics of metafiction, as it directs focus towards the fabricated and contrived elements of storytelling and narrative in juxtaposition to conventional literature, which endeavors to provide an engrossing and authentic portrayal of reality. Metafiction places its emphasis on the deliberate process of storytelling and the acknowledgment that the text is a creation of human imagination rather than a straightforward representation of reality. (Barth, n.d)

Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" explores the concept of textual interpretation from the perspective of readers' viewpoints and backgrounds, rather than solely relying on the writer's experience or point of view.

Barthes argues that the meaning of a text is not fixed but rather emerges through the diverse interpretations of readers, which enriches the literary work and challenges traditional notions of authorship. (Ming-Ying & Li, 2018)

The French Lieutenant's Woman

"The French Lieutenant's Woman" by John Fowles is seen as one of the initial samples of historical metafiction in the Victorian era. It builds and breaks down the Victorian novel as a model, looking at the norms, doubts, and social restrictions of the time, novel is a parody of Victoriana; using old-fashioned structures to make it seem current. It questions the truth of history and the connection between fiction and history Charles Smithson, a follower of Darwin's theory of evolution, and his fiancée Ernestina Freeman meet Sarah Woodruff, a mysterious woman who is called "Tragedy" or "The French Lieutenant's Woman" The story takes place in the late 1860s. The book uses metafictional elements, like images that reflect on themselves and talk about the story within a story, to look at the past and how history and reality relate to each other. (Vesna, 2021)

In this novel, Fowles depicts metafiction to critique Victorian ethics and values which were dominant narratives in that period of literature in both history and

literature, he tries to break all the discipline of that period's fiction as a result of all that conflict finality, which explores the factiousness of the narratives or novels in particular, that all reflect Fowles own beliefs about the ambiguity or absurdity of the social life of humans.

In "The French Lieutenant's Woman", John uses metafiction as a motivation by postmodernist wish to critics the total control and reliable narratives in both literature and history. All of the metafiction elements capture the ideology of Victorian fiction and breach all the traditions and norms of the genre as the different struggles and confection finality in the novel shows his own beliefs. People call "The French Lieutenant's Woman" a historical metafiction novel. Historical metafiction is a type of writing that mixes historical facts with fictional events, making the difference between the two less clear. It often has parts that are self-reflexive, make fun of past norms, and use unreliable narrators. When talking about "The French Lieutenant's Woman," it is said to use comedy and question the truth of history. The book questions the usual way stories are told, looks at different versions of history, and asks what the connection is between history and reality.

This novel introduces new readers to their own comprehension and modern values that were opened by the author by letting them think differently than in the Victorian era. John Fowles's creativity in historically using metafiction ; it's like a turning point in narrative form that makes other authors of postmodernism like Julian Barnes and Ian McEwen. Metafiction nowadays is familiar to many, opining on an older period, and adding additional layers of historicism . (Tew, 2009)

The use of self-conscious and self-referential features in the novel brings attention to the activity of writing and the progression of the narrative. This involves the author's presence in the book, the manipulation of forms and conventions, and the development of alternate universes inside the novel. The work of art tackles the boundaries separating reality from fiction while also creating and deconstructing Victorian norms.

"Historiographic Metafiction in John Fowles's 'The French Lieutenant's Woman'" is a book that looks at John Fowles's novel and the idea of metafiction and historical metafiction. It looks at three main features of hiatorigraphical metafiction: parody, intersexuality, and the use of an unreliable narrator. Fowles makes fun of Victorian literature and social norms in "The French Lieutenant's Woman," which shows how history and fiction are connected. "Possession" by A.S. Byatt is looked at in terms of intersexuality and how it helps readers understand how a work is connected to its social and cultural surroundings. (Steveker, 2009)

Overall , The novel use of metafictional elements, such as self-reflexive images and discussions of the story within a story, contributes to its exploration of the past and the relationship between history and reality through cultural , social

and political aspects of the novel , and helps in a deeper understanding of the messages and themes it addresses .

The Magus

John Fowles, in his work *The Magus* combines a combination of postmodernism and metafiction as a means to question standard narrative forms and structures .The intentional fusion and intertwining of various literary trends seeks to elicit a heightened reader consciousness, obscuring the distinctions between fictional and actual realms into the confines of this particular literary composition, the author adeptly utilizes metafictional devices to immerse the primary protagonist into a realm of illusion, so compelling him to navigate the intricate boundaries that separate reality from the realm of fiction. Through the portrayal of the protagonist as a resilient character inside the narrative, the author effectively creates a sense of tension that prompts the reader to critically examine the delineation between the fictitious and non-fictional elements of the story. The utilization of a multi-layered strategy for storytelling in this context serves an intentional objective of providing several levels of narration inside the novel. This technique effectively reveals different aspects of the protagonist's existence . (Berets)

The subject matter under discussion pertains to a series of occurrences or incidents. “The Magus” the central character, Urfe, embarks on a journey to a Greek island where he encounters a diverse cast of individuals, some of whom he has not previously encountered, yet all identified just as Conch is. Consequently, the indistinct boundaries between reality and fiction give rise to a distinct kind of narrative, which is a prominent aspect of John Fowles' literary approach.

Fowles adeptly employs postmodern devices, such as intertextuality, to distinguish his work from other literary compositions that employ comparable approaches. Additionally, the author used the narrative of the colonel as a means to provide a potential resolution for readers (Holmes & Fowles, 1991)

The Magus exemplifies his postmodern and metafictional inclinations, prompting readers to contemplate the essence of reality, truth, and the author's narrative construction . The interplay between the past and present is a prominent unresolved concern throughout postmodern literary works. This phenomenon engenders extensive discourse among authors and critics on the impact of contemporary factors or conditions on the narrative construction of history. This study aims to address the thematic concerns explored by Fowles *The Magus* (1965). Additionally, it seeks to examine the significance of historical literary output, particularly within the context of current or contemporary fiction that employs a narrative structure. The author deviates from conventional norms and transitions to an alternative approach, effectively showcasing their narrative

proWess through the utilization of these techniques .By liberating the reader from the confines that typically dictate their emotional state, the author establishes a distinct separation from the traditional novel structure. This subtle interplay between fiction and reality serves to evoke a sense of nostalgia and establish a connection between past and present event (Boccia)

The connection between Metafiction and historical Metafiction in the novels “The Magus” The French Lieutenant’s Woman “

According to numerous critics and authors, there exists a correlation between metafiction and historical metafiction in the novels penned by John Fowles. This connection is established through the amalgamation of literature with the surrounding world, thereby involving readers in a transformative journey and eliciting events from the past. Consequently, this fusion engenders a novel form of writing known as historical metafiction, which can be perceived as a response to conventional historical narratives. This response is characterized by elements such as reflexivity, intersexuality, parody, and irony. Through this literary approach, the author employs his imaginative faculties to either envision the past or bring it into the present, disregarding any limitations imposed by historical knowledge. Consequently, Fowles transcends the boundaries that separate fact from imagination and reality from fiction

The significance of historical metafiction in postmodern literature is in the creative approach of writers who establish a distinct connection between the past and present, or the realms of truth and fiction. This enables the emergence of a fresh perspective that facilitates the evocation and active engagement with historical events . In "The Magus," as we mentioned earlier Fowles uses the technique of building narrative frameworks that operate on several diegetic levels, establishing a multitude of distinct worlds inside the text. He cleverly explores the use of embedded narratives in postmodernist novels and uses metafiction as a technique of multiple narrators, unreliable narration, and self-consciousness as an action of narration. This becomes his style of writing. A multiplicity of narratives and narrators engage in a continuous and ever-changing interaction while the person in question takes on many personas and hides his real identity (Pătrașcu, 2012).

In "The Magus," Fowles employs metafictional techniques such as multiple narrators, unreliable narration, and self-conscious references to the act of storytelling (Fest 2016)(Flanagan 2017).

These techniques challenge the reader's perception of reality and blur the boundaries between fiction and reality. Similarly, in "The French Lieutenant's Woman," Fowles incorporates metafictional elements by including authorial intrusions, alternative endings, and self-reflexive commentary on the writing process (Eco 1985)(Genette 1982). These metafictional devices serve to highlight

the constructed nature of the narrative and invite the reader to question the relationship between the author, the reader, and the characters within the story. Furthermore, both novels can be considered historical metafiction as they engage with and subvert traditional historical narratives and conventions (Crowley 2015)(Hite 2007). Fowles challenges the idea of objective historical truth and instead presents multiple perspectives and interpretations of events, emphasizing the subjective nature of history and the role of the author in shaping the narrative (Chapman 2016)(Genet 1982). Overall, Fowles's use of metafiction and historical metafiction in these novels adds layers of complexity and reflexivity to the narratives, encouraging readers to critically engage with the text and question the nature of storytelling and historical representation.

Conclusion

Finally, Fowles's success as a writer can be attributed to the flexibility of his approach to writing: "He breaks the rules". Fowles hated any restrictions or limitations whatsoever, and he always tried to invent everything new in his writing. He was the first who from the very start did not take a side of reading by allowing the reader to investigate the story. The limits or boundaries between the reading activity or skill and writing one, in this case, do not exist. Fowles by breaching the rules in writing conventions, as a supreme truth, encourages the reader by the fact that the reader gets an invitation into the story and makes the reader an essential component of the storytelling which follows the protagonist Nicholas Urfe as he finds himself caught in a web of delusions and manipulations that blurs the lines between reality and fiction. John Fowles is more than just a writer; he's a smart and skilled writer who can make specific types of writing that are both easy to understand and complicated. By doing so, he can create an illusion of reality by distinguishing it from reality and vice versa, leaving readers with unanswered questions and inviting them to become active participants in the writing or creation of events and characters rather than merely readers.

Although *Magus* is more of a metafiction than a historical metafiction, in "The French Lieutenant's Woman," he confronts not just the conventions of literature but also the constraints of the time. The events on which the story is based are usually set in the past, making it effortless to switch between the two forms of narration. By skillfully exploring the event with no sure finality, Fowles invites the reader to put themselves in the place of the writer and become a culturally knowledgeable reader rather than a typical one in his novel about a mysterious woman named Sarah Woodruff and a man named Charles Smithson who is torn between his desires and those of society. Overall, both "The French Lieutenant's Woman" and "The Magus" provide a clear depiction of metafictional and historical metafictional techniques throughout the entirety of the stories' events, with the authors' stated goals being to "blur the boundaries of his aim in writing the reality

and fiction and make the readers indulge themselves in the events and participate in the narrative" (both).

Overall, John Fowles' "The Magus" can be considered a work of historical metafiction that uses metafictional elements to critique Victorian ideology, question historical narratives, and explore themes of masculinity and the construction of reality. It engages readers in a self-reflexive exploration of storytelling and challenges traditional notions of history and fiction.

It is easily seen that one of the unsolved issues in postmodern movement novels is the connection between past and present. This makes a lot of discussion between authors and critics about the present effect or circumstances that parted the narration of history. This paper tries to follow the consideration that Fowles attempts to take in *Magus* (1965) and it tries to follow the important of the historical production of literature especially in modern or contemporary fiction which narrates, the author breaches the traditional norms and shifts himself to another one. He showed his talent of narration using these techniques by freeing the readers from the chain or constraints that put him in the mood of reader only not surfing in the novel as a participant and make that slight journey between fiction and reality and provoke the past with present and connect the present with the past.

Work cited :

- Barth, J. (n.d.). *Lost in the Funhouse* (1988 ed.). New York: Anchor. (n.d.).
- Berets, R. (1973). *The Magus: A Study in the Creation of a Personal Myth*. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 19(2), 89–98. <https://doi.org/10.2307/440890>. (n.d.).
- Boccia, M. (1980). "Visions and Revisions": John Fowles's New Version of "The Magus." *Journal of Modern Literature*, 8(2), 235–246. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3831230>. (n.d.).
- Buchberger, M. (2009). <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/handle/2438/6558>. /, UK: Brunel University School of Arts PhD Theses. (n.d.).
- Currie, . (1998). *Metafiction*. New York: Longman. (n.d.).
- Holmes, F. M., & Fowles, J. (1991). History, fiction, and the dialogic imagination: John Fowles's "A Maggot." *Contemporary Literature*, 32(2), 229. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1208363>. (n.d.).
- Matarneh, M. (2015). The dialectic of past and present in John Fowles's. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 4(2), 49-57. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.23/2015.4.2/23.2.49.57>. (n.d.).
- Pătrașcu, C. M. (2012, October). John Fowles and 'The Magic Web of Storytelling.' *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 63, 307–316. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.10.043>. (n.d.).
- Steveker, L. (2009, October 15). *Identity and Cultural Memory in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt*. Springer. (n.d.).

- Stout, R. (1996). things that happened beacuse they should. Oxford Universoty press Inc.New York: Oxford University press. (n.d.).
- Tew, P. (2009). Metafiction, historiography, and mythopoeia in the novels of John Fowles. <http://bura.brunel.ac.uk/handle/2438/6558>. (n.d.).
- Vesna, U. K. (2021, October 14). Historiographic Metafiction in John Fowles's "The French Lieutenant's Woman", A.S. Byatt's "Possession" and Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children." Croatian Digital Theses Repository. <https://zir.nsk.hr/en/islandora/object/unizd%3A6194>. (n.d.).
- Waugh, P. (2001). metafiction , the theory and practice of self- consious fiction (2001 ed., Vol. /). the Taylor & Francis e-Library,. (n.d.).
- William J. Palmer, The Fiction of John Fowles: Tradition, Art, and the Loneliness of. (n.d.). (n.d.).
- William J. Palmer. (1974). The Fiction of John Fowles: Tradition, Art, and the Loneliness of. Selfhood: Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press. (n.d.).