

Characteristics of the Neo-Victorian Novel in the "French Lieutenant's Woman" By John Fowles

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Abstract

In this article, literary currents (modernism, postmodernism) are considered as a reaction to the violation of human rights, the horrors of war and post-war events, the special direction of the current of postmodernism in English literature is the wide use of the term "Victorian literature", the definition and interpretation of the neo-Victorian period in postmodernism, the use of general research methods such as comparison and evaluation of the period, specific literary approaches in the literary work, such as the historical-cultural approach in the study of the relevant time and place, some main features of postmodernism, the author's point of view, the demonstration of philosophical-aesthetic dominance, and an opinion about psychological structural approaches is held.

Keywords: Postmodernism, neo-Victorian period, research methods, violation of human rights, general characteristics of postmodernism literature.

Introduction

The current of postmodernism in literature began to take shape in the second half of the 20th century. Translated from Latin and French, "postmodern" means "modern", "new". This literary movement is seen as a response to human rights abuses, the horrors of war, and post-war events. It began by rejecting the ideas of enlightenment, realism and modernism. But in modernism, the main goal of the author is to find meaning in a changing world, while postmodernist writers talk about the

meaninglessness of what is happening. They deny the laws of life and prefer chance above all else. Irony, black humor, fragmentation of the story, mixing of genres - these are the main features of postmodernism literature.

The general characteristics of postmodernism literature are as follows: (1) objective reality does not exist; (2) no scientific or historical truth (objective truth); (3) science and technology (even reason and logic) are dubious instruments of established power rather than tools of human progress; (4) reason and logic are not valid for everyone; (5) there is no such thing as human nature (human behavior and psychology are socially determined or constructed); (6) language does not refer to reality outside itself; (7) no specific knowledge; and (8) no general theory of the natural or social world can be true or valid (all illegitimate "metanarratives").¹

A lot of scientific research works have been carried out on the literature of postmodernism, including French writers J. Derrida, J.F. Lyotard, M. Foucault² and others contributed greatly to the development of the philosophy of postmodernism, Western literary critic Charles Dickens³, -, Russian scientists E. V. Kolodinskaya, O. V. Dzhumailo, O.A. Tolstoy, N. A. Soloveva, Yu. S. Reineke and others focused on the experimental development of postmodernism in English literature, traditions of the Victorian novel, artistic and historiographic features.⁴

There is a special current of postmodernism in English literature. Its appearance is associated with the Victorian literature of the 19th century. In current literature and literary criticism, the term Neo-Victorian, Neovictorian, antivictorian is widely used. The term "neo-Victorian novel" is now widely used in contemporary literature and literary criticism, a term that first appeared in Dana Schiller's article "The Past Redeemed in the Neo-Victorian Novel" (1997). The author defines it as a historical novel that combines postmodernist historiography with a traditional cultural-historical approach, and turns to the past in order to observe how this past is changing under the influence of modern events. The researcher includes the novel "Possession" by A. Byatt and the novel "Chatterton" by P. Ackroyd among neo-Victorian novels. Researchers J. Fowles's "The French Lieutenant's Wife" (1969) and J. Rhys's *Antoinette (The Wide Sargasso Sea, 1966)* is considered the first neo-Victorian postmodern novel depicting the Victorian era. Currently, researchers S. Waters, P. Ackroyd, A.S. Byatt, P. Carey, D. Lodge, C. Palliser, G. Swift, E. Tennant and other modern English writers include the works of

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/postmodernism-philosophy/Postmodernism-and-relativism>

² https://studme.org/197301184904/filosofiya/poststrukturalistskie_interpretatsii_fuko_derrida_zh-f_liotara#584

³ <https://ziyouz.uz/ilm-va-fan/adabiyot/charlz-dikkensning-iqrori/>

⁴ Колодинская Е. В. Историческое прошлое как предмет высказывания : современная англоязычная проза и постмодернистская историография (Г. Свифт, Дж. Барнс) : дис. ... кандидата филол. наук : 10. 01. 03 / Е. В. Колодинская. — М., 2004. — 139 с. ; Джумайло О. В. За границами игры: английский постмодернистский роман 1980—2000 / О. В. Джумайло // Вопросы литературы. — 2007. — № 5. — С. 7—45.;

Толстых О.А. Английский постмодернистский роман конца XX века и Викторианская литература: интертекстуальный диалог. Автореферат диссертации на соискание ученой степени кандидата филологических наук Екатеринбург –2008. 24 с; Соловьева, Н. А. (2006). Английский роман в эпоху постмодерна. Человек: Образ и сущность. Гуманитарные аспекты, (1), 136-154. URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/angliyskiy-roman-v-epohu-postmoderna> (дата обращения: 13.06.2023). Райнеке Ю. С. Исторический роман постмодернизма и традиции жанра (Великобритания, Германия, Австрия) : дис. ... кандидата филол. наук : 10. 01. 03 / Ю. С. Райнеке. — М., 2003. — 211 с.

neo-Victorian novels.⁵ The purpose of our article is to analyze the features, characteristics of the neo-Victorian novel in "The French Lieutenant's Woman" by John Fowles.

Materials and research methods

In postmodernism, general research methods such as defining and interpreting the neo-Victorian period, comparing and evaluating that period were used. The literary work uses specific literary approaches, such as the historical-cultural approach to the study of the relevant time and space, some main features of postmodernism, the author's point of view, showing philosophical-aesthetic dominance, and psychological structural approaches.

Results and their discussion

Postmodern's own "What is the Neo-Victorian Novel?"⁶ (Stephanie Carroll 2015) offers a number of definitions of this phenomenon. However, most scholars define this term as Miss Jessica Rose Miss neo-Victorianism is contemporary fiction that employs Victorian settings and/or styles to self-reflexively invoke the Victorian era for the present ⁷(2013), Along with Elizabeth, who saw neo-Victorianism as a "deliberate misreading, reconstruction, or re-creation of nineteenth-century works across genres and media and up to the present day" (2012) and, as Louise Hadley puts it, "neo-Victorian fiction" defined as "contemporary fiction in the broadest sense⁸. A work deals with the Victorian era in plot, structure, or level" (2010). This is also related to the problem of different strategies used in postmodern fiction (Kochergina & Kozyreva, 2015).

Heilmann and Llewellyn's influential definition suggests that the neo-Victorian "is in some sense self-consciously engaged in movement and (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)examination" of the Victorian era.⁹

Whether in literature, film, television, or other media, neo-Victorianism typically describes historical fiction set in the nineteenth century, devoid of any sense or metaphysical purpose, of events that make no sense today. By this time, several writers tried to show this period and tried to reinterpret the themes typical of the Victorian era: 1) the theme of women; 2) children's theme; 3) a new interpretation of Victorian writers and the socio-political environment of the Victorian era.

Firstly, the image of women became the main topic in this period, that is, through some works, the image of women and the position of upper-class ladies of that time, the humiliation of lower-class women. Fictional Victorian women in four novels of the Neo-Victorian era: "Tipping the Velvet" by Sarah Waters (1998) ; Belinda Starling's *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2006); Jude Morgan's *Charlotte and Emily: a novel about the Brontës* (Emily and Charlotte, a novel about the Brontë

⁵ Скороходько Ю.С. Неовикторианский роман как форма интертекстуального диалога с викторианством в английской литературе // Мировая литература на перекрестье культур и цивилизаций . 2015. №2 (10).

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⁶ Carroll, S. (2015). What is The Neo-Victorian Novel? URL: <http://www.stephaniecarroll.net/2015/12/whatis-neo-victorian-novel.html>, [accessed on 5 May, 2017].

⁷ Rose, J. (2013). So what is neo-Victorianism? A Working Definition. Pastbooks. URL: <https://pastbooks.wordpress.com/2013/11/05/so-what-is-neo-victorianism>, [Accessed on 5 May, 2017].

⁸ Hadley, L. (2010). *Neo-Victorian and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁹ Heilmann, Ann and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

sisters, 2010); and A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990). The analysis of each novel is divided into three parts, which focus on women's authorship/autobiography, sexuality, and independence and freedom. This division is seen in emphasizing the similarities between the novels as well as focusing on their differences. In addition, English writer John Fowles's work entitled "The French Lieutenant's Woman" also tells about the position and social life of women of that time. It was for this reason that women, their lives and problems were separated from men's lives. During this period, women were seen as too stupid to understand men's problems. A woman's image is degraded, and a simple answer can be said: "Nature had created in woman 'a being whose principal functions are evidently intended to be love, leading to generation, parturition, and nutrition... She is the sex sacrificed to reproductive necessities.'"¹⁰ (Nature has created a basic being in woman, whose functions are love, generation, birth and nourishment... She is a sex sacrificed for sexual needs).

Secondly, neo-Victorian fiction often shows an interest in children's stories, A. S. Byatt's *Children's Book* (2009), in children's literature, Margaret D. As Stets points out, readers are rarely considered in terms of neo-Victorianism. Sharon Bickle compares Cory Doctorow's short story *Clockwork Fagin* for adults and shows the contrast between Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and neo-Victorianism. In it, criticism and general conventions try to break it. He discusses the study of the influence of the politics of young people's fiction on neo-Victorianism, considering the term's principles, which can shift between 'materialist aesthetic' and 'anti-materialist'.

Thirdly, by the neo-Victorian era, many writers were portraying the social environment of that time and their works. The following are the writers who created during this period: Julian Barnes's "Arthur & George", A. S. Byatt "Possession", 1990 and "Angels and Insects", 1992 Peter Carey "Jack Maggs", 1998, and "Oscar and Lucinda" Michael Cox "The Glass of Time", 2008 and "The Meaning of Night", 2006 Bella Ellis/Rowan Coleman "The Vanished Bride", 2019, Shelley Jackson's "Patchwork Girl". Electronic hypertext fiction, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Sarah Waters *Affinity*, *Fingersmith*, 2002, *Tipping the Velvet*, 1999.

Before considering the Victorian conception of John Fowles in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* during this period, we need to focus on some general facts. The Victorian era is also about the Victorian era itself. Victoria was named after Queen Victoria, who joined the English language and ascended the throne in 1837 and died in 1901. These dates also define the boundaries of the entire country and are also called the Victorian era. Queen Victoria was very young when she ascended the throne, only eighteen years old. She was Queen of England for 63 years and during these years the country became one of the leading industrial powers of the developed world. The general prosperity of the country is determined by the period of his rule. In the second half of the 19th century, the living conditions of the population improved significantly, although they did not look good at all from our point of view today. Changes in living conditions were closely related to progress in other fields, such as science and especially the growth of trade, which led to economic prosperity. During the Neo-Victorian period, the population was divided into 3 categories. The most important and central part of middle class life was religion. Although the middle classes differed from the nobility, there was a strong tendency, especially in their piety. The middle classes could imitate the lifestyle of the upper class. The upper classes and nobility could live their lives independently of the "main" middle class, and the power of the nobility was the respect they had from the common people.¹¹ On the opposite side of the social ladder were the lowest classes. It's an irony that they didn't have to take care of anyone else like the upper class. Their terrible living conditions have worried many modern writers and critics, and they continue to attract the attention of not only scholars, but also many people today. Due to the lack of money, the whole family lived in one room,

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 43

¹¹ Ibid., p. 32

the children together with their parents. It went to the extent that parents could not hide their sexuality and often led to child prostitution and pregnancy.¹²

Fowles is the usual omniscient narrator in Victorian fiction, but uses irony and exaggeration. He decides to write a book about the Victorian era:

....I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and the 'voice' of) a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does. (p. 85)

His characters are chosen from all the traditional classes that appear in any class, and he wrote *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. In the novel, characters such as a gentleman from an upper class, a nobleman (Charles) and a girl from a very rich class (Ernestina), overly pious Mrs. Poulteney, servants Sam, Mary and Mrs. Fairlie can be seen in the center of the work.

Ironically, Charles himself is a victim of social evolution: his social class is on the verge of being overtaken by the lower classes "more for survival", and when Ernestine's father offers him a partner in the family business, Charles cannot accept it, because he believes that Mr. does not consider - it cannot adapt to a changing environment, and therefore it has become a "victim of evolution". (p. 228)

Sarah is viewed by all of Lyme Regis as sexually promiscuous, and her reputation is tarnished by what everyone believes to be true about her illicit "affairs" with a French lieutenant. People call her a "prostitute" and she is hated by many and pity by some - premarital sex is considered inappropriate in the society in which she lives. This is a clear example of irony. Sarah is not sexually immoral and is actually a virgin for most of the novel. Most people try to hide ugly secrets about themselves in order not to get a bad reputation, and Sarah contributes to the creation of a false story about herself:

"....Thus it had come about that she had read far more fiction, and far more poetry, those two sanctuaries of the lonely, than most of her kind. They served as a substitute for experience. Without realizing it she judged people as much by the standards of Walter Scott and Jane Austen ...She was too striking a girl not to have had suitors....But...she saw through the too confident pretendants. She saw their meanness's, their condescension's, their charities, their stupidities. Thus she appeared inescapably doomed to the one fate nature had so clearly spent many millions of years in evolving her to avoid: spinsterhood." (pp.50-51)

Conclusion

Fowles uses every detail we can think of to describe life in the Victorian era. In the book we can feel the greatness. Changes in the nineteenth century, such as the rising status of the middle classes as well as the lower classes and the already beginning decline of power, the aristocracy, and even the harsh lives of the peasants, the sad endings of some of the farmers, Sarah's father, and the maids Millie and Mary who are alluded to about, these servants are also rural people who moved to the city to find better jobs. His story includes themes such as different sets of traditional rules and applies to different situations, the most important of which are courtship, men and women, masters and servants or visitor relationships. Fowles uses characters from all major social classes. The tools used to develop the story are the contrasts between the two main female characters, Ernestine and Sara, the former representing Victorian convention, the latter repres

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¹² Ibid., p. 81,82

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