

Revisiting the Past: Nostalgic Postmodernism in British Literature

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the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Abstract

There are more than five hundred novels published during the Victorian era still many British postmodernist writers recreate the Victorian setting, theme and characters in their works. The Victorian Era without a doubt is one of the most important and glories era of the British history. Even, now the novels of the Victorian age is considered as masterpieces. Even though there are over 500 novels published during this era, many contemporary British writers choose Victorian theme and style to compose fiction. The plots of these novels often take place in the nineteenth century or shift between nineteenth and twentieth century. On one side, where the Victorians were celebrated for their glorious achievements on the other hand, they were criticised for their double standards. Prostitution, child labor, racism, class discrimination everything increased during the Victorian era.

One of the reason behind British postmodernist writers particular interest in Victorians can be linked with their fascination with past. Although going back to the past for inspiration is not new in literature. However, there can be two reasons behind going back to the Victorian era. One is the British postmodernists are trying to rectify the past errors, fighting against the prejudice and ideologies of that time. Such as social hierarchy, nationalism, bourgeois hypocrisy, racial and sexual prejudices. On the other hand, they want to achieve the success of the golden era. It was during the Victorian era when novels became so popular. The characters, themes and devices of the 19th century are still considered as masterpiece. In order to figure that out, one need to look back at how history is represented in literature.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore why British postmodernist writers go back to the Victorian era for their work. Further I will analyze, by going back to the 19th century are they paying tribute to the Victorians or mock them. For this I have chosen two contemporary British novels, A.S Byatts *Possession* and John Fowle's, *The French Lieutenants Woman*. The thesis seeks to investigate the features of historiographic metafiction found in these books. Therefore, this proposal shall proceed in two major parts. The first part will analyse why the British postmodernist writers are particularly interested in Victorian era. The second part will be focused on the major texts that I will rely on throughout my work.

Keywords: Victorian, British, Postmodernism, British postmodernist fiction , history , past

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Chapter 1 Introduction

“Of all decades in our history, a wise man would choose the eighteen-fifties to be young again”

(Young 138)

In 1837, 18 year old young Victoria was declared as the queen of Britain. Thus, her regime from 1837-1901 is known as the Victorian Era. The period is well known for its social, economic and cultural context. The Victorian Era without a doubt is a vital period in British history, affecting different changes and improvements in all parts of life including literature. As a result, even now, Queen Victoria's reign remains extremely popular, and are often characterized as classic. Even though there are over 500 novels published during this era, many contemporary British writers choose Victorian theme and style to compose fiction. British contemporary writers often recreate themes of Victorian novels, such as the social, industrial and sensationalism, and intermix with postmodern elements such as parody and pastiche. The plots of these novels often take place in the nineteenth century or shift between nineteenth and twentieth century. They often took the popular themes of Victorian era such as science, religion, morals, identity and reconstruct the past according to their own contemporary thoughts. Most popular example is Jane Rhys *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys reconstructed Victorian myths and stories after feeling personal and cultural injustice towards colonizers by the colonial masters. Dwight Eddins termed her work as “retro-Victorian” (10). However, it was John Fowles *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, which got the attention for parodying Victorian culture, sexual and social norms. This novel uses postmodern elements to tell the story set in Victorian era. The

novel is “set in the mid-Victorian era, and the story belongs to that period; it is seen simultaneously, however, through the perspectives and sensibilities of both the nineteenth and the twentieth century” (Spear 49). In today’s time, this genre is known as historiographic metafiction.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore why British postmodernist writers go back to the Victorian era for their work. Further I will analyze, by going back to the 19th century are they paying tribute to the Victorians or mock them. For this I have chosen two contemporary British novels, A.S Byatts *Possession* and John Fowles’, *The French Lieutenants Woman*. The thesis seeks to investigate the features of historiographic metafiction found in these books. Therefore, this proposal shall proceed in two major parts. The first part will analyse why the British postmodernist writers are particularly interested in Victorian era. The second part will be focused on the major texts that I will rely on throughout my work.

Chapter 2 Research Methodology

In order to interpret the collected data and conduct my research, I will be going through the following theories. Here, my research will involve a proper investigation of primary and secondary sources such as: books, articles, journals and literary criticisms. I have selected two primary sources such as John Fowle's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and A.S Byatt's *Possession*. For secondary I will use different articles based postmodernism in British fiction which will support my thesis.

2.1 Postmodernism in British Fiction

2.1.1 What is Postmodernism?

Postmodernism is a broad movement that developed around mid to late 20th century across art, architecture, philosophy and literature. It also marked the departure from modernism. However, according to Ihab Hasan "modernism did not end suddenly so that postmodernism could begin rather they coexist now, so it's a continuation" (5). Lyotard defines postmodernism as "incredibility towards meta narratives" (10) such as Christianity, Enlightenment, Marxism or Capitalism. Postmodernism focuses on micro narratives rather than macro narrative. Postmodernist writers does not believe in any universal truth as the grand narratives claim. There is no one solution to all, no truth with capital T. The apparent reality is, according to postmodernists, is socially constructed, an artifact of scientific practice and language. This point

also applies to the investigation of past events by historians and to the description of social institutions, structures, or practices by social scientists.

According to postmodernists, language is not such a “mirror of nature”(45) as the American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty characterized the Enlightenment view. Inspired by Saussure, postmodernists claim that language is “semantically self-contained, or self-referential” (Holmes 7). The meaning of a word is not a static thing in the world or even an idea in the mind but rather a range of contrasts and differences with the meanings of other words.

Postmodernism gained popularity during 1960s. Pastiche, metafiction, parody, historic metafiction etc. are the features of postmodernism. Further, postmodernism has many different versions. For instance, South American and South Asian postmodernism focuses on magic realism. American postmodernism focuses on dystopic future and hyper reality. On the other hand, British postmodernist tends to the Victorian era.

2.1.2 Historiographic metafiction

Historiographic metafiction is a literary genre that brings the historical and fictional elements together as we often see in postmodern works. Linda Hutcheon explained the term historiographic metafiction around 1980. Historic metafiction “blends the creation of imagined narratives with critique on the various modes in which we create knowledge, such as history and literature.”(Gabardi 78). For instance, an author can construct a novel based on a historical occurrence but the character he/she will portray can be fictional. Many British contemporary writers took inspiration from Fowles and followed his style. For instance, A.S Byatt recreates Victorian style in her book *Possession* from a modern perspective. The book is about two modern-day academics as they research the paper trail around the previously unknown love life

between famous fictional poets Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel LaMotte. The book goes back to the Victorian era through the journal entries, letters and poetry, the academic finds in their quest. She also blends some real Victorian poets with her fictional characters. For instance, in the book Ash mentions that, he is a friend of S.T Coleridge and met Wordsworth a couple of time. However, throughout the novel Byatt question, how well can anyone know a historical figure? Some of the very intimate parts of poets' life will always remain hidden. For example, the scholars never found out that Ash and his wife never consummated their marriage nor that Ash has met his daughter. According to British postmodernist writers history is not fixed, it can always be seen from a new point of view. Historiographic metafiction "attempts to demarginalize the literary through confrontation with the historical, and it does so both thematically and formally" (Waugh 289). Unlike of following the stream of consciousness where the readers believe in the story, historiographic metafiction reminds the reader that the story is a work of fiction. In case of historiographic metafiction, it follows two different types of narration. Multiple point of view and openly controlling author. The author has little or no control over the characters. The character's often goes beyond the authors' authority. Further, this books can be readied from multiple point of view depends on the reader. This books are often left with open endings where the readers decide the fate of the story.

2.1.3 Intertextuality

Intertextuality is another postmodern aspect. The term 'inter-textuality' was developed by the poststructuralist Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, and since then it has been widely accepted by postmodern literary critics and theoreticians. Kristeva explained that there are two relationships

going on whenever we read a text. One that there's the relationship between reader and the author (the horizontal axis) and between the text and other texts (the vertical axis). Postmodernism does not believe in "origin" and all works of literature are connected with each other. It is the reason why postmodernist writers borrow a work of other literature and refer them in their own works. In case of postmodernism it is believed that all works of literature are connected with each other. It is the reason why British postmodernist writers borrow a work of other literature and refer them in their own works. For example, A.S Byatt in her book *Possession* has used many reference from Victorian poets, such as George Herbert's "The Elixir" or W.B Yeats "For Anne Gregory". Even the name of the key character Christabel is inspired from S.T Coleridge poem "Christabel". The voices of nineteenth century poetess such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickinson are recognizable in Christabel's character. Where on the other hand, the themes and style of different famous Victorian male poets, such as Robert Browning, Lord Alfred Tennyson are echoed in Ash's poetry. In an interview, Byatt mentions that what inspired her to create these literary characters was the realization that "the great Victorian poets have never been seen to be as great or as complex as they are" (Bentley 59).

2.1.4 Nonlinearity:

Nonlinearity and fragmentation is a common element in both modernist and postmodernist text. Temporal distortion in a postmodern text is used in many ways. It is a constant shifting of time and space. Postmodern writers celebrate this technique. In the postmodern novels, there are several situations occurring at the same time and sometimes they overlap and are also repeated. Such as in Byatt's *Possession*, chapter 14, Ronald and Maud while tracking Ash and LaMotte's trip, takes a break and goes to a place called Boggle Hole. In chapter

15 the narrator for the first time jumps back to 1850 without any poetry or journal registry. It shows that both of the couple went to the same place but in different time period. In case of Fowles *French Lieutenant's Woman*, the narrator keeps reminding the reader that this is a story about past from modern perspective. By shifting from one time to another, both the novel creates a bridge between past and present. However, it also gives the reader a sense of confusion.

2.1.5 “Death of the author”:

"The Death of the Author" is a 1967 essay by the French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes. Barthes' essay argues against traditional literary criticism's practice of incorporating the intentions and biographical context of an author in an interpretation of a text, and instead argues that writing and creator are unrelated. The author merely a “scriptor”(Barthes 4) a word he uses expressively to disrupt the traditional continuity of power between the terms “author” and “authority”(4). The scriptor exists to produce but not to explain the work. Every work is "eternally written here and now", with each re-reading, because the "origin" of meaning lies exclusively in "language itself" and its impressions on the reader. Barthes's "The Death of the Author" is an attack on traditional literary criticism that focused too much on trying to trace the author's intentions and original meaning in mind. Instead, he suggests to adopt a more text oriented approach that focuses on the interaction of the reader, not the writer, with it. That makes the text is much more open to interpretation.

Chapter 3

British Postmodernist writer's fascination with the Victorians Postmodernism breaks the rules about time in order to go beyond the established norms of fiction writing. For many conservatives and traditionalists in the west, the past is a mythic country where rules were rules and boundaries were made. The fact that this imagined history never existed does nothing to disturb its allure. Political and social conservatism emerged in Europe and America at precisely the same time as postmodernism became the new trend in the world of literature. Postmodernism may have looked new because it was different, but it was an essentially conservative movement in that it rejected progress as impossible. Postmodernism looked to an equally mythic past. Compared to modernism which always looked forward to the future, postmodernism resisted the revolutions of the sixties through nostalgically revisiting the past. British postmodernist writers often go back to the Victorian era for their work. One of the reason behind British postmodernist writers particular interest in Victorians can be linked with their fascination with past. Although going back to the past for inspiration is not new in literature. However there can be two reasons behind going back to the Victorian era. One is the British postmodernists are trying to rectify the past errors, fighting against the prejudice and ideologies of that time. Such as social hierarchy, nationalism, bourgeois hypocrisy, racial and sexual prejudices. On the other hand, they want to achieve the success of the golden era. It was during the Victorian era when novels became so popular. The characters, themes and devices of the 19th century are still considered as masterpiece. In order to figure that out, one need to look back at how history is represented in literature.

3.1 Correcting past errors

Victorian era is often viewed as the golden era of British history. On one hand, Victorians showed the dignity and family values of the monarchy and on the other hand existed the dark realities behind the curtain of respectability such as prostitution, pornography and crime. Many Victorians led the double faced life. On the surface, they led a normal respectable life where on the inside they indulged in many scandalous things. There is a list of people who were quite famous because of their works and contributions to the society but were also equally scandalous for their acts which were looked down upon as crimes in those times. Among them are, Oscar Wilde and Charles Dickens who were publicly humiliated for their sensational scandals. Often this kind of double standards are captured in literature. History and literature cannot be separated from each other. Literature captures each stage of historical events and often these historical events dominate the literature. New historicism can be used to explore literature's connection with history. "New historicism situates literary texts within history, but refuses to establish an authoritative aspect of history as it is apparently constituted by what figures as "the dominant ideology" of each historical period" (Berlatsky 18). New historicists look at literature from a wider range. They (new historicists) question the traditional idea of historical truth while new things said about the past are true. According to new historicists, "past itself is fiction since we can only know the past through forms of representation or of narrative"(19). We transform historical events into facts by using the works which represent the past, however often these works are recorded by the one person's perspective which often victimizes others. For instance when Charlotte Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre*, she emphasized on white supremacy where the voice of a colored woman was shunned. So, Jean Rhys reconstructed Victorian myths and stories after feeling

personal and cultural injustice towards colonizers by the colonial masters. This was the first step taken by postmodernist British writers to correct the historical myths. Further, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) is the most perfect example for how history can be fictionally depicted. Fowles uses Victorian themes such as sexuality and bourgeois double standards which is also causing cultural conflict in modern society. The protagonist of the novel Charles is a middle-class Englishman who is attracted to Sarah. Sarah is a young woman who was betrayed by a French officer. Through their relationship, Fowles connects the Victorian society to the modern times. He shows the flaws and double standards of the Victorian society from the eyes of modern time.

3.2 Recreating the Victorian glory

Victorian era was also the golden time for literature. Due to the invention of printing press, publication of the novels became much easier. While poetry was more dominant in the Romantic era, it was the novel which gain the popularity in the Victorian era. Charles Dickens dominated the first half of the Victorian era with his works such as *The Pickwick Papers*, *The Hard Times*, *Oliver Twist*, *The Great Expectations* and *Tales of Two Cities*. The Bronte sisters, Anne, Charlotte and Emily Bronte created some iconic novels which are still considered as masterpieces in literature. Such as *Jane Eyre* (by Charlotte Bronte), *Wuthering Heights* (by Emily Bronte) and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (by Anne Bronte). Later a major novel was George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Then it was Oscar Wilde, who put his wit and humor in Victorian literature. His *The Importance of Being Earnest*, showed the hypocrisy of Victorian era in a humorous way. The novels and characters are still iconic in modern times. Many contemporary

British writers took inspiration from this Victorian glory such as Margret Atwood, A.S Byatt, Michel Faber. A.S Byatt in her novel *Possession*, showed the difference between past and present. She showed how the people from the past were more passionate and how many postmodern theories are drying up that passion. Postmodern writers uses too many theories to analyze the past literature as a result, they failed to see the magic Victorians created.

Chapter 4

John Fowles's representation of the Victorian Era in *The French Lieutenant's*

Woman (1969)

The novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* uses epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter taken from the Victorian texts. (In literature, an epigraph is a phrase, quotation, or poem that is set at the beginning of a document or component. The epigraph may serve as a preface, as a summary, as a counter-example, or to link the work to a wider literary canon, either to invite comparison or to enlist a conventional context,). The narrator views the Victorian time through the eyes of the present time.

“By providing a current outlook on the Victorian era, the narrative maintains the retrospective view “made possible by history. In literary and historical analysis, presentism is the anachronistic introduction of present-day ideas and perspectives into depictions or interpretations of the past”. (Brown 23)

This type of narration helps the novel to view the past from the mirror of present. It also creates a historical framework of the novel. Fowles himself reveals his reason for taking inspiration from the Victorian era:

The novel I am writing at the moment (provisionally entitled *The French Lieutenant's Woman*) is set about a hundred years back. I don't think of it as a historical novel, a genre

which I have very little interest. It started four or five months ago as a visual image. A woman stands at the end of a deserted quay and stares out to sea... It was obviously mysterious. It was vaguely romantic. It also seemed, perhaps because of the latter quality, not to belong to today... The woman had no face, no particular degree of sexuality. But she was Victorian; and since I always saw her in the same static long shot, with her back turned, she represented a reproach on the Victorian age. An outcast. I didn't know her crime (Fowles 147).

Here Fowles states that he has no intention of writing a historical novel however the due to its Victorian protagonist, the novel turns out to be one. He further adds that:

In the matter of clothes, social manners, historical background and the rest, writing about 1867 is merely a question of research. But I soon get into trouble over dialogue, because the genuine dialogue of 1867 is far too close to our own to sound convincingly old. It very often fails to agree with our psychological picture of the Victorians – it is not stiff enough... This is the greatest technical problem I have; it is hard enough with modern characters, and doubly so with historical ones... “If you want to be true to life, start lying about the reality of it” (150).

Although Fowles denies *the French Lieutenant's Woman* as a historical novel however his writing style echoes Victorian traditions through the language and manners. As a result, he brings out the Victorian life through his fiction. The shift between past and present creates a separation between history and fiction. Characters in the novel, try to get out of the historical boundaries which confined them within a social and gender context from that era. So, the novel can be

readied as a Victorian novel due to the reflection of that era and at the same time it can also be seen as postmodern fiction due to the dilemma within the characters.

4.1 Historiographic metafiction in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

Neo-Victorian novels are often struggle to find a specific literary genre, for example some scholars count *The French Lieutenant's Woman* as historical fiction while others considered it as historiographic metafiction and more often it is counted as both historical fiction and historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction is considered more suitable for NeoVictorian novels as it goes beyond the limits. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is regarded as the “first British historiographic metafiction” due to “a godlike author who attempts to bestow freedom on his own characters” (Holmes 206). *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is historical because of its narrative technique and the setting of novel. As Holmes stated the narrator “juxtaposes nineteenth and twentieth century modes of thought, feeling, and behavior, enabling each to comment upon and qualify the other” (208). The narrator keeps reminding his reader that, the world he is showing is a work of fiction. Through this he is questioning the reality of Victorian novels. Fowles makes a parody of the realistic notion of Victorian novels. He uses realistic settings to show how artificial the Victorian novels are. Fowles used more literary works than historical facts to create the novel. He wants to reanalyze the past by connecting it to the present. The Victorian past is still alive through the work of past artists. Rather than trusting on the historical events or “facts” Fowles relies on the literary work. In this process, he not only reconstitutes the past but also shows that how mythical can be. According to Linda Hutcheon, the result is “the real and the imaginary, the present and the past merge for the reader” (84). The readers are aware of the fact that they are reading a Victorian story in a time when Victorian novels are no longer written.

As Munslow said, it is “a Victorian novel that is a contemporary novel about the Victorian novel” (217). Throughout the novel the narrator keeps reminding the reader that this is a story of past. The protagonist Charles is an aristocrat who is engaged with Ernestina, the daughter of a London merchant. He then encounters Sarah, a beautiful young woman who was abundant by the French officer. When Charles first time encounters Sarah the narrator commented “the whole Victorian age was lost” (Fowles 79). Charles desperately wanted to help Sarah. Charles starts to feel inferior to his fiancé when his uncle got remarried and he was disinherited from his wealth. He helped Sarah when Mrs. Poultney fired her from work. Charles fell in love with Sarah and asked her to leave Lyme for Exeter. After returning from a journey he tells Ernestina's father about his uncertain inheritance. Then the narrator gives the reader three alternative ending. In the first ending Charles does not choose to visit Sarah, rather he carry out his promise to Ernestina "and so ends the story" (348). In the second ending Charles stops at Exeter and meets Sarah and they have a sexual encounter. Charles discovers that Sarah is not a virgin and the story of seduction by the French lieutenant was a lie. He breaks off his engagement with Ernestina. However he cannot find Sarah because his servant Sam sabotages the delivery of his letter and he is rewarded with a position in Mr. Freeman's London shop. Here, the narrator flips a coin two give two conclusion to the story. After his many attempts, Charles one day finds Sarah. However, he is shocked when Sarah expresses no interest in reviving the relationship as she says "I cannot love you as a wife must" (487). Charles leaves the house, intending to return to the United States, wondering whether Sarah is a manipulative, lying woman who exploited him.

The novel has typical Victorian theme. The protagonist Charles leads a comfortable life in an aristocrat Victorian society. He chooses a girl to marry who goes according to the conventional norms. So the first ending with his finance “he felt himself coming to the end of a

story” (339) for preserving Victorian social class. However due to Charles and Sarah’s inner confusion this ending was unreliable. So the narrator moved on to the second ending where Charles figures out that he never loved Ernestina. Ernestina was the ideal woman according to Victorian standards which could help Charles to maintain his social position. In the beginning of the novel, the narrator slowly introduced the readers with the Victorian age. Later the narrator confesses to the readers that this is just a work of fiction.

This story I am telling is all imagination. These characters I create never existed outside my own mind. If I pretended until now to know my character’s minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in (just as I have assumed some of the vocabulary and 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 (41)

Although Fowles creates the novel by using Victorian styles and themes, the novel doesn’t follow any traditional framework or structure. There is no sense of reality in the novel. Again and again he reminds his readers that everything is artificial “I have pretended to slip back into 1867” (409). Fowles takes control from the narrator and is giving his characters the freedom to follow their own will. For instance, Charles disobeys the narrator and the narrator himself does not know where Sarah is. Unlike the Victorian narrators, here the narrator does not have the god like authority over his characters. Postmodernism is known for following many different and new type of styles and techniques. Postmodernism celebrate diversity. So the postmodernist writer often breaks the traditional role of the author. They (postmodern writers) often goes with the theories of structuralism. They tries to understand the “self”. According to structuralism,

“self” is a subject however it is no longer reliable. It is “dissolved” because “its functions are taken by a variety of interpersonal systems that operate through it” (Siegle 28). The “self” is based on conventions and social norms as a result, “self” is limited and cannot be trusted. According to Foucault “the author is always an ideological product constituted by specific operations, reading processes, and a collection of discourses.”(35). An author not only just write novels, his work is the reflection of his cultural and social conventions. So the author is unreliable. Many Victorian novels consist of such unreliable narrators. They often portrays one side of picture and highlights only their culture. So Fowles took away the godlike power from his narrator. Although the narrator is there but often his characters breaks free his control.

4.2 Multiple endings

As for the endings, the reason Fowles gave multiple endings for the novel is because he refuses his own story. Unlike Victorian novels this novel does not have a traditional ending. He shows the reader that this is not a Victorian novel so it can not follow the conventional ending. Further the second ending where Sarah expresses her disinterest to reunite with Charles is more of a modern ending than Victorian ending. Although the narrator is always there, however he is neither manipulating time nor the plot development. Through this he is creating a connection between past and present. He made a note at the time about the function of the novel, saying You are not trying to write something one of the Victorian novelists forgot to write; but perhaps something one of them failed to write. And: Remember the etymology of the word. A novel is something new. It must have relevance to the writer's now - so don't ever pretend you live in 1867; or make sure the reader knows it's a presence. (Fowles, 405).

So, it can be said that this novel is not actually a tribute to the golden age rather a reflection of that age for the modern readers. As a result, it became a neo-Victorian story with the postmodern narrative.

4.3 Theme of sexuality in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

Another theme that connects past with the present is the theme of sexuality. Due to modern readers desire to know the truth behind those suppressed feelings. Sexual desire is something Victorians always tries to resist. However many Victorian novels, had tried to touch this forbidden topic. Here again, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* draws a parallel between Victorian and contemporary times because of its very use of sexuality as a theme. Neo- Victorian novels always tries to expose Victorians double standards about sexuality. As Michel Foucault stated "Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home," and it is positioned to fulfill "the serious function of reproduction" (3). Fowles created a female protagonist who breaks the historical prejudices. Sarah the protagonist of the novel is known as the French Lieutenant's "whore" by the people of Lyme Regis. However, in reality Sarah is a virgin who's was only sexually involved with Charles. Her conflict if she will become a conventional wife or new type of woman living on her own. The repression of female sexuality and desire in a Victorian society is express through Sarah. As during Victorian era, female sexuality was taboo. Although Sarah expresses her own thought about her sexuality directly however she continues to suppress her desire. As a result, Charles and the readers failed to come any kind of conclusion from Sarah's behavior. In the second ending, we see a rather cold hearted side of Sarah's nature. Even though, Charles and Sarah have mutual sexual tension between them but their denial to their desires

makes it ambiguous. Just like Victorians, Fowles's characters struggle to accept their sexual desire. Many neo-Victorian novels have explored this topic of hidden sexual desires and took it as a theme for romance genre. Fowles himself confessed that he took inspiration from there.

As Fowles explains, there is an inspiration that has hauntedly taken him and forced him to create a Victorian world. Surprisingly, this figure coming from the Victorian times is a marginalised woman. Sarah is the very figure affecting the inspiration and the production of the novel in which she exists. Because of its inspiration—a female figure from Victorian times—this novel turns out to be a work of romance (or historical romance) written in a neo-Victorian fashion. Neo-Victorian fiction by getting benefit from the romance as a conventional genre, both reflects the real sexuality of women and male desire (which is suppressed by the Victorians): [...] remembering of the past is performed through a re-engendering of the historical past as romance. (Hudson 89)

According to White,

Romance evokes an unrepresentable other side to history,” and romance is regarded as “female fantasy” whose reality is excluded from the mainstream historical/realist novels. Thus, the position of realism and romance in the contemporary era should be taken into consideration: If realism can only deal with woman by relegating her to romance, if real history belongs to men, and women's history is merely the fantasy of the historical romance, postmodern cultural analysis of history and the ‘real’ offers a way of revaluing female discourse (3).

Now in modern times, “realism ceases to be the privileged form of representation for the real for historical reality” (14) and romance is seen as problematic. Realism means the “accurate representation of the past,” romance reveals the artificiality of it and “resists a nostalgic ‘coming to terms with the past’ [...] [instead it] insists upon the injustice of any such representation, especially that of realism, because [it is not possible] to come to terms with the past, we can never justly represent it” (15). Romance made us question if we really know the past or it was just a mere fantasy created by the Victorian authors. The difference between realism and romance gives an opportunity to the postmodernist writers to question the past. In *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, the female protagonist is not just a woman, she is a Victorian woman. So the Victorian woman’s sexuality is one of the important issue of the novel. *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, creates the bridge between past and present sexuality. Sarah has a bad reputation in the Victorian society. She is known as the French lieutenant’s “whore”. For Charles, Sarah’s sexuality is an escapism from social norms and conventions. So the novel focuses on individual sexual freedom.

According to Foucault,

If it was truly necessary to make room for illegitimate sexualities, it was reasoned, let them take their infernal mischief elsewhere: to a place where they could be reintegrated, if not in the circuits of production, at least in those of profit. The brothel and the mental hospital would be those places of tolerance: the prostitute, the client, and the pimp, together with the psychiatrist and the hysteric— those “other Victorians,” as Steven

Marcus would say— seem to have surreptitiously transferred the pleasures that are unspoken into the order of things that are counted. Words and gestures, quietly authorised, could be exchanged there at the going rate. Only in those places would untrammelled sex have a right to (safely insularised) forms of reality, and only to clandestine, circumscribed, and coded types of discourse. Everywhere else, modern puritanism imposed its triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence (4-5).

In Victorian novels only sexually liberated women who are confined by madness, prostitution or poverty. In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Sarah's sexuality breaks the social norms.

According to Victorian conventions brothel or asylum are the suitable places for Sarah. Sarah does not express any shame, so the society of Lyme Regis thinks “she must be mad or a whore” (Fowles 105). Yet Sarah goes to places outside of proper society. Sarah goes beyond her time.

She is just not another Victorian woman because it will confined her.

Through his female character Fowles achieves to transgress the boundaries of time periods by reflecting her from the perspective of ‘neo.’ There is an ambiguous attribute of the neo-Victorian novelists about the evaluation of sexuality in these two opposite eras: do they propose a more restricted or liberated kind of sexuality? Are they criticising or praising the Victorian norms of sexuality? From Fowles through Waters – and with some exceptions like Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* – there has been instead more than a hint of nostalgia for a less sexually knowing and brazenly expressive society.

(Hudson 34). Kaplan further adds that, “Its maligned and self-accusing heroine, Sarah Woodruff, assumed to be the French Lieutenant's ‘whore’ by the Lyme Regis population,

turns out to be a virgin whose only sexual encounter is with the stuffy, conscience-stricken protagonist, Charles Smithson” (97). Both Sarah and Charles is sexually attracted towards each other. However, both of them tries to suppress the desire as it is counted as negative. British postmodernist writers however shows the solution for this problem is to act upon the desire. British postmodernist writer’s depiction of sexuality “thrives upon the binary oppositions and hypocrisies of western culture -- oppositions and hypocrisies neatly encapsulated in a postmodern notion of Victorian” (Marks, 162). As Peter N. Stearns asserts, the stereotypical evaluation of “the repressed Victorian” posits the Victorians as the ones who were “responsible for creating the sex-negative culture that twentieth-century ‘moderns’ have rebelled against” (47). According to Foucault, it was

Victorians who made sexuality a research subject, “The Victorian period is a key moment in the history of sexuality; the era in which the modern terminologies we use to structure the ways we think and talk about sexuality were invented” (769). Victorian era assigned different gender roles to men and women.

Men possessed the capacity for reason, action, aggression, independence, and selfinterest [thus belonging to the public sphere]. Women inhabited a separate, private sphere, one suitable for the so called inherent qualities of femininity: emotion, passivity, submission, dependence, and selflessness, all derived, it was claimed insistently, from women’s sexual and reproductive organization. (Mitchel 30)

Men are associated with rationality, bravery and intelligence to dominate the society. On the other hand women were associated with sensitivity, irrationality and dutiful. “Women were so

exclusively identified by their sexual functions that nineteenth-century society came to regard them as ‘the Sex’” (32). Female sexuality was considered as taboo in Victorian society. Due to Victorians effort to suppress their sexual desire, in modern times this is attracting modern readers. British postmodernist writes not only allows the reader to explore this desire but also at the same time they expose Victorian hypocrisy about sexuality.

Chapter 5 Postmodern Vision of the Past in A.S Byatt's *Possession*

Just like Fowles, A.S Byatt's novel *Possession: A Romance* goes back to the Victorian era from the postmodern vision. However, Byatt shows the problematic nature of the postmodern world compared to the Victorian era. In the novel, Byatt doesn't use any historical figures however many reference to the Victorian texts and literary figures are there. This feature is known as "intertextuality". Intertextuality is another postmodern aspect. The term 'intertextuality' was developed by the poststructuralist Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, and since then it has been widely accepted by postmodern literary critics and theoreticians. In case of postmodernism it is believed that all works of literature are connected with each other. It is the reason why British postmodernist writers borrow a work of other literature and refer them in their own works. For example, Byatt in her book *Possession* has used many reference from Victorian poets, such as George Herbert's "The Elixir" or W.B Yeats "For Anne Gregory". Even the name of the key character Christabel is inspired from S.T Coleridge poem "Christabel". The voices of nineteenth century poetess such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickinson are recognizable in Christabel's character. Where on the other hand, the themes and style of different famous Victorian male poets, such as Robert Browning, Lord Alfred Tennyson are echoed in Ash's poetry. In an interview, Byatt mentions that what inspired her to create these literary characters was the realization that "the great Victorian poets have never been seen to be as great or as complex as they are" (Bentley 59). Further the novel is a mixture of Victorian and postmodern narrative. The present and the past, the history and the reality often collides with each other. Nonlinearity and fragmentation is a common element in both modernist and postmodernist text. Temporal distortion in a postmodern text is used in many ways. It is a

constant shifting of time and space. Postmodern writers celebrate this technique. In the postmodern novels, there are several situations occurring at the same time and sometimes they overlap and are also repeated. Such as in Byatt's *Possession*, chapter 14, Ronald and Maud while tracking Ash and LaMotte's trip, takes a break and goes to a place called Boggle Hole. In chapter 15 the narrator for the first time jumps back to 1850 without any poetry or journal registry. It shows that both of the couple went to the same place but in different time period. By shifting from one time to another, Byatt creates a bridge between past and present. However, it also gives the reader a sense of confusion.

When Byatts published *Possession* in 1990, it received many awards from home and abroad. The novel opened up to multiple interpretations of the twentieth century theories, such as psychoanalysis, feminism, structuralism, deconstruction. Postmodernism believe in diversity and openness and tries to the deconstruction of the historical description of the grand and past historical argument, to participate in the history of restructuring and interpretation, questioning the history of research. As postmodernism believes history can be interpreted not just in one way but in various ways. According to Georg G Iggers,

Historical discourse has three modes of interpretation: formal argumentation, complex arrangement, and ideological implication. He feels that the deeper structure of history is poetic and emphasizes the fiction and imagination of historical texts. Characteristics. The New Historicists broke the boundary between history and literature, believing that history and literature can be "intertextual". From this point of view, history is not only a record of past events, but a rhetorical text that is closely related to the ideology, value judgment and narration of historians.(89)

As, Foucault puts it, a "singular" history is no longer in existence, and it is replaced by the lowercase plural "history". In Byatt's *Possession* the past is being actively reflected. In the novel, there is "a very conscious historical consciousness and historical complex so that it will not erase the historical truth with its emphasis on poetic and historical imagery"(Elias 15). Byatt used many historical figures and events just to create a historical atmosphere of the past. As a result, it creates a mixture of the past's spirited and present's consciousness and a clash between imagination and reality. *Possession* is Byatt's attempt to understand past from the perspective of present. She attempt to "fill the gap in history by making use of the repetition of this narrative, building the historical system of knowledge of the past, expands the scope of our understanding, and makes her narrative more active"(91).

5.1 Pastiche in Possession

Byatt uses her knowledge of contemporary literary theories and Victorian literature to create a new from out of the past genres. In postmodern literature when, different styles, genres, narrative voices and devices are combined together to create a new work is known as Pastiche. Postmodernism does not claim to be new and unique, but rather utilizes the old artistic structures. For example, A.S Byatt *Possession* is not only a romance novel, but also a detective story, fairytale, poetry. In short, Byatt combined different genres and created her own narrative. She reconstruct the traditional romance, fairytale and detective stories to expose their hollowness in postmodern literature. "The highly intertextual nature of history is shown by means of numerous allusions to other literary works and genres of prose and poetry to lay bare its own fictionality"(Kaplan 16).

5.2 Intertextuality in *Possession*

The present protagonists Roland and Maud's connection to the Victorian characters (Ash and LaMotte) is shown through intertextual references. This makes the novel a pastiche of several genres such a fairytale, gothic and romance. The narrative also includes poetry, journals, epigraphs and detective stories. With reference to *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Patricia Waugh states that novels like this self-consciously parody the "structures of nineteenth-century realism and of historical romance or of fairy-tales"; however, they "defamiliarize such structures by setting up various counter-techniques to undermine the authority of the omniscient author, of the closure of the 'final' ending, of the definitive interpretation" (13). Further she adds that, "As a metafictional novel, *Possession* thematizes the acts of reading and writing and offers the intrusive commentary of an author-like narrator – the author-narrator intrudes in the middle of the narrative in three parts of the story. In this way, it exposes the process of construction of meaning and, subsequently, its fictionality."(15). Metafiction and intertextuality is correlated. Both of them makes a connection among texts. Intertextuality relates one text to the other texts. In case of *Possession*, the very subtitle "romance" gives the novel a metafiction tone. The novel creates a ground between romance and realism and creates a new form. "In contrast to its realistic incidents and settings, the subtitle "romance" provides the novel with a romantic atmosphere; moreover, the subtitle eradicates any expectations of a realistic portrayal of life"(20). The fictiveness of the world is an important feature in the metafictional novels.

In the beginning of the novel, a contemporary scholar Roland Mitchel discovers a secret affair between a famous Victorian poet Randolph Ash and a lady who is later identified as Christabel LaMotte. He is soon accompanied by Maud Bailey, Roland starts an academic and detective investigation that leads to a noticeable alteration in the Ash and LaMotte scholarship.

Both soon discovers some shocking letters which leads them to acquire the truth of the past. Ronald was previously tried to trace “the movement of Ash’s mind,” and he disliked the method of scholars and biographers like Cropper. With the discovery of the letters he became obsessed with Ash’s past. However, his “habitual pleasures of recognition and foresight” in reading Ash’s work are replaced by his present “mounting sense of stress” as he reads the letters. Furthermore, identification of the true identity of the reader becomes significant to Roland. He specifies letters as “a form of narrative that envisages no outcome, no closure”. Also, the letters did not represented a complete story because they did not know where they are heading .Further the letters are written for a specific reader not for everyone which is why narrative theories do not apply to them. Roland understands the Ash’s other letter (even to his wife) – seems to be “without urgent interest in the recipients” but these letters had been specifically written for LaMotte . As soon as others gets the hint of Ash’s secret, Roland starts to feel like his possession of the letters is lost. When letters of invitation coming from different universities in response to his article “Line by Line,” he realizes that the letters had created a distance between him and Ash, although they have brought him closer to Ash’s life. He feels that he had degraded his position like Cropper by being turned from a reader to a hunter. Roland starts to reread Ash’s poetry full-heartedly. He even acquires the ability to compose poetry; therefore, he starts with history and ends with poetry. On the other hand, Maud at first rejects the idea of LaMottes connection with Ash due to “cosmic masculinity” in Ash’s poetry. She also shows lack of interest in LaMotte’s life. She believes that “it’s the language that matters” but, as she says, Roland has “stirred something up”. Roland and Maud go through several narratives but they notice shortcomings in each of them due to the reporter’s misconception or lack of adequate knowledge. In Maud’s view, there is always some crucial thing missing in biographies (100).

Ronald and Maud sometime use different and overlapping narrative together to get the whole picture. It is in Crabb Robinson's diary that Roland identifies Christabel LaMotte. He finds it a fault that it does not point to LaMotte's knowledge of Ash's poetry. Later on, Maud shows him a journal of Blanche Glover in which there is a reference to the breakfast that was mentioned in the diary. Roland is puzzled that in spite of the fact that Cropper has described Ash's holiday in detail, he has not guessed the presence of a companion. According to Maud only a scholar could understand these gaps due to absence of a phrase like "Wish you were here"(235) in Ash's letters to his wife . After reading the other correspondence that they discovered in Sir George Bailey's house, they come to understand that Ash and LaMotte's work was influenced by their romance. To trace the lovers from the past , Roland and Maud travel to Yorkshire where they go through the poets' works that had been composed during that time and find common images in their poetry. For instance, Roland observes and points to the effect of light as he is sitting near the pool and Maud tells him that exactly the same images are there in *Melusina* . There Ronald and Maud exchange ideas and thoughts after Ronald reads *Melusina* and Maud reads Ash's poetry. They further investigates Blanche's suicide and questions whether or not it has had anything to do with Ash and Christabel's relationship. In Ellen's journal, Maud reads two letters from Blanche to Ellen, based on which they assume that the evidence that Blanche had referred to was Ash's "stolen letters". Maud becomes more interested to understand LaMotte's Yorkshire journey. Later Sabine de Kercoz's journal which makes it clear that LaMotte had been living at her cousin's house during her months of pregnancy. However, the fate of LaMotte's child remains a mystery. Finally, with the last letter they receive from Ash's grave, they discover the final truth. The scholars know that they have to rethink everything because of the new discovered truth that all Ash's post-1859 poems were influenced his affair with LaMotte. They also need to reconsider

their view on LaMotte's sexuality as she was not "exclusively" lesbian. Further they also need to reread her works from a new perspective. In spite of everything, Byatt shows that historical inquiry can't clear away all the dust of the past. In the final chapter, "Postscript 1868", shows the encounter between Ash and his daughter. Oblivious about his daughter's true identity, he gives her a message to her "Aunt" Christabel that she "met a poet, who was looking for the Belle Dame Sans Merci, and who met you instead, and who sends her his compliments, and will not disturb her, and is on his way to fresh woods and pastures new"(555). However, his daughter forgets the message, as a result neither Christabel nor the present-day scholars ever know that Ash has met her daughter. Byatt shows how no amount of literary analysis one can never truly dissolve the whole truth.

5.3 Parody of Postmodern theories

Possession can be seen as a parody of postmodern theories and fictions. By using the Victorian era, the novel connects the bridge between Victorian past and contemporary present. Further, Byatt creates a bridge between the past and present by setting up two parallel sets of the characters in both time periods. Further, compared to the past literature figures, modern academics of literature are shown to have lack of enthusiasm and freshness of mind. Modern academics is shown dry and lifeless compared to the passionate Victorians. The modern academics seems to be dependent on the past to make their life livelier. The richness of the Victorian past and the dryness of postmodern world is shown side by side in the novel. "In many ways a comparison between the past and the present, the nineteenth and the twentieth century, is precisely what [Possession] invites us to do, structured as it is a diptych displaying on one of its panels a Victorian scene and on the other portrait of the 1980s" (Gabardi 201). The passion of

Victorian lovers are revitalized, which was dried out by postmodern theories. Both Roland and Maud come to lose their trust in literary theories as they notice the destructive role of deconstructionism on their feelings of desire and love and the power of passion in their Victorian counterparts. Byatt shows, postmodernist scholars become deeply obsessed with the Victorian past due to their personal and professional reasons. Byatt rewrites the Victorian era from a postmodern context. Lena Steveker considers *Possession* a 'memorial novel' as "it is engaged in exploring the cultural present within the context of the cultural past of the Victorian Age".(qtd. in Mitchel 32). In the beginning of the novel, Victorian era is seen as gloomy, dark and mysterious. When Roland discovers the secret letter of Ash, he describe them to Maud as "because they were alive" (Byatt 56). He introduces, then, the idea of living past: "The book was thick and black and covered with dust [...]" (9). The description of the book shows how modern scholars view the Victorian era. The book is shown are dirty and long forgotten. It shows how modern scholars underestimates the people of past. Further, one of the important theme of this novel is the quest to uncover the mystery. *Possession* shows the difference between truth and the documented facts. It also shows that not everyone's life is an open book and therefore historical documents cannot possible keep every secret. As a result, past is often collides with the present in such a way that the reader cannot tell who the narrative is referring to. Even few objects such as LaMotte brooch (which Maud wears), Ash's pocket watch (which Cropper owns) seems to connect past with present. Further, in the novel, Roland and Maud are described "paced well together", (283) and in the Victorian narrative Ash tells LaMotte "We walk well together our paces suit" (304) suggesting a strong parallel between the two couples. Ronald refers Maud as "princess suffering the muffled pea", whereas Ash refers to the mattresses upon which LaMotte sleeps as "separating a princess from a pea" (307). Roland states that "were being driven by a plot or fate that seemed,

at least possibly, to be not their plot or fate but that of those others.”(456). He realizes the connection between him and Maud with Victorian couple Ash and LaMotte. “Byatt combines the Victorian moment of fragmentation with contemporary postmodern conceptions of narrative. She renews the recurring notion of time and make the combination of past and present a positive experience” (Yates 89). Byatt’s argues, in her selected essays “On Histories and Stories” that “we cannot understand the present if we do not understand the past that preceded and produced it”(11).

In *Possession*, Byatt questions both modernist and postmodernist historiography concerning the former’s certainty in recovering the past as it actually was and the latter’s rejection of any possibility of understanding the past. “Through portrayal of the scholars’ academic quest, Byatt suggests that a partial possession of the past is possible if both the textual and contextual narratives are investigated by means of different approaches of historiography” (Yeats 70). As a result both Ronald and Maud do not only relies on historic documents rather they use their own textual analysis and look upon different scholars, visit different places, read journals of different people to trace the past. However, the postscript makes it clear that in spite of all their attempts, they never understood that Ash had visited his daughter and had written an undelivered letter to LaMotte. The unreliability of the truth is another important characteristic in British postmodern literature. In *Possession*, Byatt tries to show that the past cannot be knowledgeable and the quest to uncover the truth of past remains misdirected. As a result, modern scholars do not discover the secret love affair between two Victorian poets as the end of the novel reveals. The ending shows that they will always remain oblivious from the whole truth. Even the Victorian characters never knows the whole truth. For instance, LaMotte dies without

knowing that Ash's wife, Ellen, did not give the letter in which LaMotte confessed that their daughter had survived. Ash, on the other hand, dies not knowing that LaMotte had sent the letter or that his daughter did not deliver his last letter to LaMotte. Besides neither Roland nor Maud discover the fact that Ash and Ellen's marriage was never consummated or that Ash found his illegitimate daughter. As a result, only the reader knows the full information through the complete text.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This research deals with how contemporary writers view the past from modern perspective. Both Fowles and Byatt, recreated the past in their works however, their vision about the past is quite different from each other. By creating a bridge between history and fiction, the novels shows how past events are depicted in history. The novels creates a fictional story by using historical settings. In case of histotrophic metafiction, “the novels lay bare the exclusively narrative nature of historical understandings by their simultaneous self-reflexivity and historicism; they both employ and subvert narrative history through offering multiple or inconsistent narratives to challenge the claims of its truthfulness” (Butler 81). While in these two novels, textuality and the possibility of acquiring the past differs from one to another. Fowles shows the flaws and double standards of Victorians. Fowles used postmodern conventions such as self-conscious author, duality of presentation and multiple endings. He presented the readers a realistic picture of the nineteenth century with the viewpoint of modern times. Where he mocks the hypocrisy of the Victorian literature. Byatt on the other hand, in her novel *Possession*, showed how passionate Victorians were compared to postmodern writers. She showed how postmodern writers are ruining the literature by overanalyzing with various postmodern theories. By doing so, they misses the true essence of literature. Byatt pays a tribute to the Victorians which is the golden era of literature.

Fowles in his novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* shows the dual life of Victorian. *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is also a love story between Charles and Sarah, the nineteenth century characters whose story is coming through the narrative of a narrator who makes use of

observation of an observer. “Going through the story, the narrator intervenes from time to time to assert his ideas, have a comment, or elaborate on a concept or a situation. The novel is an example of postmodern playfulness”(Aubrey 24). Fowels used postmodern conventions such as self-conscious author, duality of presentation and multiple endings. He presented the readers a realistic picture of the nineteenth century with the viewpoint of modern times.

Byatt on the other hand, in her novel *Possession*, showed how passionate Victorians were compared to postmodern writers. She showed how postmodern writers are overanalyzing past literatures. By doing so, they miss the true essence of literature. Further, she shows how much one can know about history. In the novel, many scholars claimed to know all about poet Ash’s life. In reality, they always missed out the most important and passionate part of his life, which inspired him to compose many of his works.

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