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AN ANALYSIS OF DANIEL MARTIN BY JOHN FOWLES: A POSTMODERN NOVEL WITH THE ASPECTS OF THE VICTORIAN BILDUNGSROMAN

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Abstract

John Fowles, one of the most significant post-war English novelists, produced remarkable postmodern novels in which he combined fiction with history. Dealing with the concepts of internal exile, individual isolation and loneliness, he dwelt on duality, fragmentation, discontinuity, the combination of the past and the present and the search of the individual for whole sight. His novel, Daniel Martin, portrays these features, however it not only includes these aspects of postmodern novels, but it also acquires the significant characteristics of the Victorian Bildungsroman, one of the remarkable types of realistic novels. Thus, the aim of this study is to identify the combination of realism and postmodernism in Daniel Martin in the light of the struggles of the protagonist, who tries to eliminate his fragmented identity and to achieve a sense of wholeness, so in this paper the characteristics of postmodern novels will be analyzed together with the traits of the Bildungsroman by concentrating on the relationship between history and fiction.

Keywords

John Fowles, *Daniel Martin*, Postmodern Novel, Victorian Bildungsroman

1. Introduction

John Fowles is one of the most significant post-war English novelists, who produced remarkable postmodern novels in which he linked fiction with history. The theme of internal exile, its link with the independent character, “individual solitude and isolation characterise the life and thought of this very popular novelist” (Thorpe, 1982, p. 9). Between 1952 and 1960, although Fowles wrote several novels, he did not have them published considering them incomplete and lengthy. And then, he achieved success with his novels most of which became bestsellers. His outstanding works can be regarded as follows: *The Collector* (1963), *The Aristos* (1964), *The Magus* (1965), *The French Lieutenant’s Women* (1969), *Daniel Martin* (1977), *Mantissa* (1982), *A Maggot* (1985), as well as the texts for photographic compilations, including *Shipwreck* (1975), *Islands* (1978), and *The Tree* (1979) (Goosmann, 2006).

Analyzing Fowles’s *Daniel Martin* in terms of postmodern characteristics, one can recognize the link between history and fiction, duality, fragmentation, discontinuity, the combination of the past and the present and the search for whole sight. On the other hand, the long descriptions of places and characters and some aspects of Victorian Bildungsroman employed in the novel, reflect the 19th century Dickensian realistic novel convention (Burden, 1979, p. 149). Therefore, the parody of the Dickensian realistic novel convention can be observed in the work together with the major elements of postmodern novel. Analyzing the characteristics of Victorian Bildungsroman, it can be described as a novel of formation, education, self improvement, maturation in which the protagonist is in a quest. As a result of her/his quest, s/he discovers her/his identity through her/his literal and metaphorical journey (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 134). In *Daniel Martin*, the protagonist Daniel, in other words Dan, also learns from his experiences in his journeys and comes into view as a more matured character at the end of the novel, but what he undergoes takes place in a postmodern context.

2. Exploring the Aspects of Victorian Bildungsroman in a Postmodern Context in Daniel Martin

In the novel, the personal history of Daniel Martin (Dan) including duality, inconsistent time and setting, forward and backward movements in narration, the most significant elements of postmodernism, is reflected in a fragmented manner and the narrator tries to combine all of these disconnected parts with one another like the historical data brought together by the historian, because “[I]like the novelist, the historian should also make

use of his constructive imagination in order to unite the fragmentary and incomplete historical facts” (White, 1978, p. 47-48). Therefore, the protagonist, like a historian, attempts to discover his past and eliminate the fragmentations in his personal history by combining them with his own novel that he attempts to create in the work, so that “confronting of past mistakes, the exploration of Self, and the importance of the past to understanding the present” can be recognized (Foster, 1994, p. 119) both in Fowles’s novel and his character’s novel.

The influence of one’s past upon her/his present and future plays a fundamental role in *Daniel Martin*. In this sense, Dan’s personal history has an enormous effect on his dilemmas, failures and on his inability to live in the present and look forward. Dissatisfied with his screenplays, repenting for his friend, Anthony’s committing suicide and being weary of his inability to capture reality and to write a novel, Dan escapes from his past, his personal history, which results in his failure to enjoy the present and to link his past with his present state. So, he indicates his desire to run away from his past as follows: “I would murder my past if I tried to evoke it on camera” (p. 90). Therefore, Dan’s conflict with the past causes a huge gap between his personal history and his present condition. In this respect, in a conversation, Fowles points out the importance of exploring the past in Dan’s capturing the reality and associating it with the present in these lines:

The connecting that takes place in that book is between Daniel Martin and his past. He’s got himself into a world where you can keep the past very safely at arm’s length and not really have anything much to do with it. The course of that book shows him trying to get in contact with it again. (Vipond, ed., 1999, p. 129)

Dan’s trying to search for his fragmented identity leads him to a quest in which he explores his past, as a result the aspects of Bildungsroman appear in a postmodern setting. Dan’s contact with his past, his worries, dilemmas and his inability to cope with the reality can be observed throughout the novel. Therefore, “the past must in that way continue more present” (*Daniel Martin (D M)*, p. 196) both for him and his lover Jane. Consequently, in the novel, Daniel Martin’s personal history and its traces upon his future draw attention; so in his work, Fowles employs flashbacks that reflect the personal history and conflicts of Daniel Martin including his childhood, adolescence, failures in his career as a screen player and writer, his collapsed marriage and affairs with women, desiring for his friend’s wife Jane and envying her marriage. Similarly, Dan likens the individual to “an object, an artifice, an antique, a flashback...something discontinuous and disconnected from present being” (p. 89-

90). Thus, the references to the character's personal history make the novel appear as a Bildungsroman in a postmodern context.

Although Dan's search for his past throughout his quest contributes to the aspects of the Victorian Bildungsroman, it does not mean that it completely reflects the traditional aspects of Bildungsroman, because it is clear that the discontinuity in human nature, the protagonist's dependence on the flashbacks and his disconnected history are highlighted in the novel by means of the disjointed events, shift of time, space and narrators, which are the most significant characteristics of postmodern novels. In such a postmodern setting, all these incidents in the novel are narrated in a self-reflexive manner, which gives voice to the narration process and creation style of the narrators. Dan's whole story is told by means of multiplicity of fragmented texts, inconsistency in terms of time and setting and Dan's dual personality. While Dan's daughter Caro's relationship with a middle – aged man is discussed in the chapter titled "Tarquinia," in the following chapter "Breaking Silence" Dan and Nell's first married years and Caro's birth are told, as a consequence it is obvious that time changes swiftly and events appear discontinuously. Fowles explains the function of the forward and backward movements along these lines:

My idea was much more of views of various past events all regarded as being equidistant on the horizon, so that it wasn't in narrative, chronological framework. Like bits of coloured glass. You know, when you get very close to stained glass you can't think what on earth the whole window looks like. (Vipond, ed., 1999, p. 128)

The forward and backward movements, the characteristics of postmodernism, are employed to help the protagonist discover the fragmented parts of his own history, therefore like the protagonists of the Bildungsroman he tries to explore his own identity. Since Fowles reflects various multiple selves, narrators and fragments in order to achieve wholeness in disorder, Dan is in chaos throughout his quest, so "Dan is trying to emphasize the way in which he is involved in his own story, so that the third – person objectivity he seeks is inseparably mixed with first – person subjectivity" (Loveday, 1985, p. 109). For instance, the chapter "Crimes and Punishments" is told in the first person narration, whereas the next chapter "Catastatis" is written in the third person narrative. Thus, the character is in a quest like the protagonists of the realistic novels in the chaotic setting of postmodern novels.

Dan seeks for whole sight in his quest to discover the undiscovered parts of his identity by questioning his own self, his sexuality, so he goes back to his past and turns to the present intermittently. In this sense, David Bohm's significant "Quantum Theory of

Wholeness and Implicate Order” comes to the fore in Dan’s search for wholeness in fragmentations. David Bohm stresses that “all the separate objects, entities, structures, and events in the visible or explicate world around us are relatively autonomous, stable, and temporary “subtotalities” derived from a deeper, implicate order of unbroken wholeness” (Pratt, 1993, p. 3). Thus, as Bohm emphasizes, the fragmentations of events and structures in one’s life form wholeness. The individual goes through her/his inner quest in order to achieve whole sight, a complete reflection of identity and reality through the fragments in her/his life. Likewise, in *Daniel Martin* the protagonist experiences his inner quest, like the protagonists in a Bildungsroman, in order to attain a complete reflection of his identity through the fragmentations in his life. Due to his fear of facing his past and his worries to look forward, Dan explains how he is surrounded with disintegration of incidents, characters and time along these remarks:

As at so many potentially fraught junctures in my life I could invent too many variations, almost as if I lived the event to its full before its limited reality took place. All writing, private, and mental or public and literal, is an attempt to escape from the conditioned past and future. (p. 138)

Therefore, writing his novel, which turns out to be his own personal history, Dan will be faced with his hidden past that he wants to escape. It can be emphasized that “the Fowlesian novel is always a new quest for personal authenticity, a place in which the self of the protagonist is to be tested, tried, stripped, and subjected to ordeal” (Conradi, 1983, p. 18). Similarly, *Daniel Martin* highlights the protagonist’s, Dan’s quest for his personal authenticity and his novel becomes an appropriate means to achieve “otherness, an objectivity, when it came to distinguishing between his actual self and a hypothetical fictional projection of himself” (*D M*, p. 427). As a consequence, Dan escapes from first person narration in his novel and employs the third person narration while portraying the panorama of his own life. Thus, “Dan has his character in focus and has found that with the third person the author can be both inside and outside at the same time; he can hold himself out at arm’s length to get the objective view and crawl back inside to get the emotional amenities of the first person” (Tarbox, 1988, p. 100). It is obvious that fragmentation and discontinuity, the most significant elements of postmodern novels, can be recognized in Dan’s own story, which is reflected in fragments both in *Daniel Martin* and within Dan’s novel.

In this respect, by means of the fragments in terms of events, settings and time, Dan’s search for authenticity, consistency and reality is in the foreground within the fragmentations

of his own life. Together with the contributions of his novel to his self-realization, his love towards Jane also contributes to his self-awareness. Dan discovers some lines in a work Jane is reading and recognizes the importance of his past along these lines: “For each individual is the synthesis not only of existing relations, but of the history of these relations” (p. 207). So, in his interaction with Jane, Dan solves not only “the enigma in Jane” (*D M*, p. 430), but also the enigma in himself. In other words, “it is Jane who is responsible for Dan’s ability to see whole, and that ability in turn makes it possible for him to write his novel. With Jane as his mirror he is able to see the travesties he had made of his life, and he also begins to understand what he calls reality” (Tarbox, 1988, p. 104). Thus, the protagonist's quest contains his self-discovery not only through his physical journey but also through love. After reaching his hidden past and coming to terms with it, he begins to write his novel more effectively.

Moreover, in the novel, the mystery behind the inner self is questioned not only through the references to the personal histories, but also through the references to history in general. For instance, there is a reference to the statements of Lukacs, one of the most significant the philosophers, who concentrate on man’s position in society and who questions whether one can escape reality or not (*D M*, p. 534). In this sense, Dan also questions his own identity and his personal history in the novel by combining his past with the fictional parts in his own novel like a historian, who puts together the fragments of historical data by means of fiction (Fletcher & White, 1976, p. 28). As a result, bringing the problematic parts of his past to his novel, the protagonist, like a historian, makes use of his own history and combines it with fiction in accordance with the postmodern understanding.

When Daniel Martin’s personal history is reflected in his own novel he attempts to write, one of the most remarkable elements of postmodern novels, “duality” appears. In Fowles’s novel, Dan emerges as the first person narrator of his own story, which gives the novel an autobiographic sense and the novel appears as if it were a Bildungsroman; whereas in his own novel the protagonist comes into view as the third person narrator, so he is defined as “two people” (p. 56). Dan’s “doubleness” is described in the novel as follows: “A psychoanalyst might say he was searching for the lost two-in-one identity of his first months of life; some solution for his double separation trauma” (p. 254). Therefore, his double identity, the multiple recollections of his past contribute to the self-consciousness of the novel.

Together with the contributions of his novel and Jane to his attaining whole sight, the journeys of the protagonist also enable him to reach self-realization and discover his hidden identity. The reflection of the places Dan has travelled is stressed by himself as follows: “I

have never quite understood why some places exert this deep personal attraction, why at them one's past seems in some mysterious way to meet one's future, one was somehow always to be there as well as being there in reality" (p. 345-46). It is clear that the physical journey of the character plays a very important role in his mental and metaphorical journey, as a result he becomes more matured and experienced. In this sense, as Aubrey emphasizes, Fowles focuses on the tradition of the travel narrative, particularly the modernist travel narrative, which employs the journey not only to portray the exotic but also to reflect the self-exploration of characters (1991, p. 212-13). Therefore, by means of his physical journeys, Dan goes through his mental journey in which he is faced with his own identity and his personal history that he defines as his "lost civilization"(p. 354).

Accordingly, the journeys, which give him the opportunity to discover the lost civilizations and their mystic features, also make him realize the lost civilizations in his own self. Especially, the effect of his journey to Egypt should be taken into consideration; in this respect, Dan is influenced a great deal by the River Nile trip in Egypt, so that he defines the silence of Nile as "endless, indifferent, like time itself" (p. 504). Thus, "water, silence, leaves, peace, [being] out of time" make him tranquil and expand his perspective of life. Furthermore, the ancient civilization in Egypt and the Pyramids make Dan remember the ruins within his own identity and the idea of death, therefore when he sees the ancient souls, he turns backward and remembers the loss of his friend Anthony and also Andrea, who committed suicide. "It occurred to him that he was perhaps not so removed from these ancient kings and queens as he liked to think. He too was haunted by remembering and being remembered, by death and his own death" (p. 510). As a result, like the protagonists in a Bildungsroman, he does his best to discover his identity through his physical journey.

In addition, he learns "the key of life in Egypt," from the term *qadim* that means holding power from the past and never to relinquish it, so that he also holds power from his past when he is faced with it in Egypt and then can look forward. Consequently, he confronts his personal history that causes his alienation from the present and begins to realize his own personality. As a result his journey to the River Nile broadens his vision and helps him "see life totally, in its essence and its phenomena; the force, the thought, the seriousness" (*D M*, p. 534). So, Fowles highlights the necessity of the quest for exploring selfhood and achieving self-discovery so as to see life totally as follows: "This thoroughness of vision is more important than any seeming recipe for success in life. We still haven't beaten Socrates' most famous piece of advice: Know thyself" (Relf, ed., 1998, p. 375). As a consequence, the need

to know one's own self and the importance of discovering the unknown in one's personality attach great importance to reach whole-sight.

In this sense, Daniel Martin widens his knowledge and perspective of life while learning about the ancient Egypt culture as the protagonist of a Victorian Bildungsroman does. According to Egypt culture, man consists of *ka* and *ba*, which enable the person to gain her/his individuality and oneness. While the former stands for the personal immortality, which is based on the body, the latter signifies the spirit, individuality, which will be transferred to *khu*, the divine spirit, after death. Therefore, Dan likens these terms to the wholeness and oneness in himself and Jane when they come together. Consequently, his travel to the Old World, in other words, his geographical travel, brings him mentally to the past and then to the present. In this sense, "Dan is not in flight, in escape: he is in fact returning, and especially within time, to a mental continent of dependence and attachment, a temporal dimension of his life and of reality that circumstances are forcing him with considerable pain to rediscover"(Fawkner, 1984, p. 44). In this respect, his journey extends his horizon and understanding of wholeness, as a consequence he experiences the process of rediscovery of his identity as a whole, so the novel acquires a sense of Victorian Bildungsroman in which the protagonist achieves discovering her/his identity.

In the light of his journey to Egypt, the River Nile, Syrian Desert and Palmyra, Daniel Martin (Dan) realizes his buried side while visiting the ancient ruins, tombs and the buried archaeology of civilization. Therefore, "Dan as narrator finds his true voice during his trip to Egypt with Jane. Here he begins to discover what his story is about and to apprehend his own plot" (Cooper, 1991, p. 196). As a result, he achieves to break the barriers around himself, becomes determined to write and recover his relationship with Jane as can be seen in the words of Dan: "I've betrayed the only two things for which I ever had any talent. Handling words, and loving one single other human being wholly" (p. 631). Therefore, the positive impact of his journey to Egypt upon the character's self-improvement and enlightenment should be taken into consideration. As Aubrey also highlights, "[t]he importance of the journey cannot be overestimated, for it is the outward analogue to inner, personal growth and the opening up of consciousness, just as the ruins and fragments of past civilizations are analogous to the individual's past-in-the-present" (Aubrey, 1999 p. 227). It is obvious that after acquiring whole sight, Dan attains the inspiration to write and to love Jane wholly. Thus, he achieves broadening his vision and considering life through a wider perspective by means of his physical journey, as a consequence like the protagonist in a Victorian Bildungsroman,

he undergoes not only a literal but also a mental, spiritual and metaphorical transformation at the end of the work.

Moreover, the function of art in capturing the reality and gaining the ability to perceive life totally is also highlighted in the novel. Dan likens the individual to a painting, which exists in reality, but remains out of time: "One always there. There is no past or future" (p. 569). Therefore, like the painting, in the beginning Dan does not have a past or a picture either. But throughout the progress of the novel, he undergoes a progress as well and begins to attain his lacking side. In the end, Rembrandt's self-portrait in London art gallery plays a considerable role in Dan's picturing himself and his realizing his loneliness, isolation and at the same time his belonging to the present time.

3. Conclusion

Finally, in *Daniel Martin*, Fowles illustrates the literal and metaphorical quest and the self-discovery of his character Daniel Martin (Dan), who struggles to shape his identity and his art, to acquire a sense of unity and to see life and himself totally. In this sense, in the novel, the multiplicity of the fragmented and discontinuous narrators, characters, settings and events, the shift of time and places, simultaneous forward and backward movements, reflect the distinctive characteristics of the postmodern novel. Consequently, in Fowles's *Daniel Martin*, the fragments of Dan's life are portrayed within the fragmented and discontinuous texts in which Dan attempts to capture reality, to realize the connection of his past with his present and to gain whole sight. In this postmodern context, the protagonist's attempts to discover his identity, to broaden his mind and enlarge his vision through his quest, like the efforts of the protagonist in a Victorian Bildungsroman, contribute to the unique and distinctive structure of the novel, thus at the end the protagonist achieves realizing his unexplored identity through his quest.

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