A SPECIFIC KIND OF SELF-REFLEXIVE METAFICTION IN MANTISSA'S WORK

[1]Sodikova Bakhtigul Ibodullayevna, [2]Bobojonov Dilshod Jumakul ogli
[1,2] Denov Institute of Entrepreneurship and Pedagogy, 2nd year doctoral students

Abstract. *In this article of our research we analyze "Mantissa" a specific type of self-reflexive metafiction. "Mantissa" can be read as a reflexive work focusing on the art of writing, creativity, and how in extremis the real is depicted. As such, it is firmly part of Fowles's aesthetic, a formal exploration of fiction's apprehension of life, of the world, and of the inner self. Novel, characterization can be said to have been conducted almost always around a representational function, and characters in novel have conventionally been aimed to represent the social, economic, and psychological realities of individuals. The aim of this article is to examine the ways postmodern fiction transgresses the conventions of novel-characterization and analyses of characterization in John Fowles' Mantissa to illustrate how postmodern fiction explores certain postmodern concerns through its characters and thus sets a new mode for characterization in novel.*

Keywords*: metafiction, self-reflexive, postmodern, interpretation, technically experimental novel.*

Introduction. In postmodern fiction, character can be said to embody the postmodernist conceptualization of self by subverting the notion of centered self mainly through fluctuating between multiple names, identities, configurations, hence the selves. Rejecting the coherence, consistency, and rationality that define anthropocentric perception of self, postmodern character denies singularity and stability with regard to its own being by liberally traversing different time periods, adopting different identities, and roles. In relation to this, character in postmodern fiction proves to be extremely fragmented, discontinuous, and fluctuating.

Published in 1982, John Fowles' Mantissa, can be said to be one of the least known novels of Fowles as far as its critical reception is concerned. Despite the scarce and most often disapproving criticism, Mantissa is, in fact, *"a highly suggestive work, subject to a variety of plausible interpretations" (Haegert 175)* and also one of Fowles' most technically experimental novels. Mantissa, in its narrowest sense, tells the story of an author, Miles Green, and his relationship with his muse, Erato, during the writing process of a novel, which turns out to be Mantissa itself. Through the dialogues between Miles Green and his muse, Erato, the novel explores such issues as the role of inspiration in the construction of a literary text, the authorial ownership, and the nature of literary production.

Discussion and results. As regards characterization in Mantissa, it can be claimed that the way Fowles implements characterization proves to be one of the most significant aspects of the novel that contribute to its postmodern quality. The novel portrays only a few characters: Miles Green, Erato, and her disguises, Nurse Cory and Dr. Delfie.

To begin with, the most significant postmodern imprint in the characterization of Mantissa can be observed in its employment of an author- character, Miles Green. In Mantissa, Fowles brings the authorial voice into the novel by depicting the novel's protagonist, Green, as the author of Mantissa itself and creating the illusion that the novel is written during the reader's act of

reading. Green denies the object and passive position which is conventionally attributed to character. He is not only presented to be writing the text he is within but he is also given the opportunity to comment upon the structure, form, and content of the text he is part of.

The novel opens with Green waking up in a hospital room experiencing a kind of memory loss. Even though neither Green nor the reader is aware of Green's authorship at the beginning of the novel, Green's authorship is implied by Nurse Cory when she measures time with page numbers:

'How long have I been here?'
'Just a few pages.'
'Pages?'
She had folded her arms, and yet again there was the ghost of a quiz in her watching eyes.
'What should I have said?'
'Days?'
She smiled more openly. 'Good.'
'Why did you say pages?'
'You've mislaid your identity, Mr. Green. What I have to work on is your basic sense of reality. And that seems in good shape" (M 19).

The association of the time with page numbers becomes the first indicator for Green to become conscious of his presence in a book. Yet it is only in the end of the first part that Green recognizes his status as the author. His muse, disguised as Nurse Cory, takes a paper from the desk, claiming that it is Green's story which he has just written. As she starts to read those papers, the novel turns back to its beginning. This analepsis points at the fact that Green's act of writing starts the moment he wakes up from his sleep in the assumedly hospital room.

Even though Green is presented as the author of Mantissa, the novel also puts into question his authorship by exploring the function of inspiration in the construction of a literary text by depicting muse as character. Dr. Delfie and Nurse Cory, who are initially depicted as conducting a kind of sexuality-based treatment on Green, are revealed to be different identities Green's muse, Erato, adopts in the course of narration. After Green comes to recognize his identity as author and Erato's identity as his muse, the couple starts to discuss over such issues as the nature of a literary text, authorial ownership, and also the text they are part of. The sexuality between Green and his female muse, Erato, is eventually implied to be the symbolic representation of the writing process which is jointly conducted by the author and the muse.

The idea that the **author and his muse** play an equal role in the production of a literary text is reinforced when Green decides to end his relationship with Erato. When Green attempts to leave the room, the door of the hospital room vanishes and the couple is trapped inside the grey room. Considering that all of the incidents and dialogues between Green and the muse symbolize the act of writing, itself, Green's inability to leave the room thus points at his inability of getting out of his own mind and also his inability to complete the writing process without the aid of muse. Erato's statement that "*you can't walk out of your brain"* (M 123) also confirms the fact that all of the incidents presented in the novel in fact take place in Green's own mind..

Green and Erato simultaneously become characters, authors as well as the first readers of the same text, and thus fluctuate between subject and object positions. Although they are introduced as characters in the beginning, they are transferred to the authorial position in the course of the novel. Hence, Fowles' characters can be regarded as not essentially **the author's products**;

on the contrary, their existence is presented as contextual, dependent on and limited to the covert and overt positioning and repositioning of the other characters within the text.

Another postmodern imprint in Fowles' characterization is observed in his **presentation of muse Erato- a mythological figure** that symbolizes artistic inspiration - as a character. Fowles' borrowing a mythological figure and inserting it into his fiction as a character thus serve to show that literary texts cannot be regarded as monolithic; contrarily, their construction and meaning are always and inevitably related and linked to other texts.

In addition to exemplifying transworld identity and reinforcing the intertextual quality of the novel, Erato can also be explored in terms of her failing to fulfil the representational function and embodying postmodern perception of self, which is fragmented, fluctuating, and decentred. One cannot indeed pinpoint a single certainty with regards to Erato's character for she displays an ontologically problematical status. As the muse does not have an existence in the empirical sense, her ontological reality is problematized and investigated throughout the novel by herself and Green. Green, for instance, gets frequently and overly confused with regard to Erato's ontology:

'First you don't exist. Then you've been endlessly screwed by other men. Come on, make up your mind - which is it, for heaven's sake?'

'I am perfectly capable of making the kind of comparison I might have made, had I existed as I actually am. If I was.' 'You can't not exist and actually be. They're mutually contradictory" (M 89).

Even though both Green and Erato agree that she does have some kind of existence, neither of them can exactly comprehend her unique ontology. Accordingly, every time they attempt to define the nature of Erato's existence, they find themselves lost in paradoxes not being able to reach a logical conclusion. Yet, considering that Green is writing a novel at the time and they are part of this book, they eventually come to conclusion that Erato is merely a figment of Green's imagination. When Green asks Erato *"who the devil do you think you are?"* (M 85), Erato confirms that she is merely a creation of Green's mind: *"I don't think, I know. I'm just one more miserable fantasy figure your diseased mind is trying to conjure up out of nothing" (*M 85).

Even though novel-characters are entirely fictional and do not have an empirical existence, they still have a unique ontology in the fictional realm. Regarded as particular individuals, characters are given human attributes and biographical backgrounds and are also portrayed within a social, historical, and cultural environment. Nevertheless, Erato's problematical ontology firstly as a mythological figure and secondly a figment of Green's imagination renders her existence doubly problematical as a postmodern character. Moreover, her lack of a distinct physicality as the representative of artistic inspiration hinders her from having a stable external appearance throughout the novel.

Fowles' characterization in Mantissa significantly contests the representational function of the novel-characterization observed in the earlier periods. The characters in Fowles' novel are not aimed to represent human beings, or their social and psychological realities. Instead they are aimed to embody the postmodern view of world where everything is discursive, textual and self is fluid and fragmented.

Mantissa's narrative perspective expresses an extreme, solipsistic subjective position, that of a depiction of the inside of the implied author's brain, and represents an examination of how one individual male perceives and constructs a fictional world, one that becomes inextricably confused with the "real" world. The focus of the narrative is the creation of a novel, or its "birth,"

and the relationship between the male implied author and his female muse, Erato, who also enters the frame of the narrative precisely to confront the author about how she is depicted in his apparent novel (within the overall, actual novel by Fowles).

Conclusion. Mantissa occupies an interesting position in Fowles's literary output, as by the time of its publication in 1982, he was by his own estimation, and by that of certain literary critics, occupying an almost untenable position as an author. He remained a stubborn bastion of realism and humanism in a literary world given over to postmodernism, deconstruction, and third-wave feminism.

The novel is divided into four sections, each preceded by an epigram dealing with either the relationship between men and women, or the division between mind and body, thus focusing the reader on two of the central themes of the novel.

The novel is a playful account of the birth of a novel and the relationship between the male novelist (Miles Green) and his female muse (Erato). There are parallels between Mantissa and his previous novel, Daniel Martin, in that both take as their mise en scene the creation of the novel with which the reader is currently occupied. Unlike Daniel Martin, however, the implied author is not content to ignore the conventions of contemporary theorists and quotidian standards and conventions and instead pursue his own approach to realism.

REFERENCES

1. Postmodernism and "the other side"', in Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A reader, edited by John Storey, London: Pearson Education .2006
2. "John Fowles as a postmodernist: An Analysis of Fowles's fiction within metafictional theories" Opperman, Serpil. Ankara 1987
3. "Aesthetic consciousness in the Novels of John Fowles" by Kenneth Marggraff: April 23, 1973
4. "Modernizm and post-modernizm and the novel of John Fowles" Baggee, Shyamal
5. "Existentializm and writing: A multi-critical approach to John Fowles" Sebti, Najat. 1992