

Self-Reflexivity In Robert Nye's *The Voyage Of The Destiny*

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to study Robert Nye's novel *The Voyage of the Destiny* as an example of Self-reflexive fiction. Self-reflexivity is one of the major characteristics of postmodernism. Self-reflexive fiction draws readers' attention to its own writing process and that reveals its fictional status. It also challenges the tradition approach to literature as the representation of reality. Nye's novel *The Voyage of the Destiny* is a fictional account of the life of Sir Walter Raleigh, a very famous poet, an explorer, adventurer, and lover of Queen Elizabeth. It is characterized by self-reflexive narrative which reveals its identity as fiction and questions the objectivity, authority and the authenticity of the recorded and documented history of Sir Walter Raleigh.

Key Words: Postmodernism, self-reflexive fiction, self-reflexive narrative, etc.

Introduction:

Self-reflexive fiction is the sub-genre of postmodern literature. It can be described as metafiction, self-conscious writing, introverted novel, the self-begetting novel, etc. Self-reflexive novel is self-conscious form of writing that emphasizes its fictional status. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Lawrence Stern's *Tristram Shandy* are the early examples of self-reflexive fiction. In the postmodern context, the main purpose of self-reflexive fiction is to challenge the conventional approach to literature as the representation of reality and reveal its true nature as fiction. It deliberately breaks the linear frame of narration and directly comments on its structure. It draws readers' attention to the process of writing and reveals its

identity as a fictional text. John Fowles, Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes, and Jeannette Winterson are well-known writers of the self-reflexive fiction.

Robert Nye (1939-2016) is a prolific and well-known English poet, novelist and playwright of the post-war or contemporary fiction. Nye's bestselling novel, *Falstaff* (1976). It won The Hawthornden Prize and the Guardian Fiction Prize. Nye is mainly noted for his historical novels and biographical fiction of William Shakespeare. The hallmark of his fiction is its ability to take the facts of everyday life and to transform them into fantastic happenings so that myth and reality become as one.

Nye's *The Voyage of Destiny* (1982) is a fictionalized account of the life of Sir Walter Raleigh, a very famous poet, an explorer, adventurer, and lover of Queen Elizabeth. The narrator of the novel is Raleigh himself. He narrates his own story through writing his fictional journal which he begins in 1618 while abroad the Destiny. The novel begins with Sir Walter Raleigh who is released from the Tower at the age of sixty. After the release, Raleigh decides to go on his last voyage in search of the legendary gold of El Dorado. Raleigh wants to write about his journey and his encounter with the natives, the Spanish army, pirates and court intrigue in his journal. He also confesses about his relationship with Queen Elizabeth. Writing his personal journal, Raleigh intends to correct the public record of his life and his reputation. He narrates his story via a series of letters to his son and wants to leave a written legacy for him.

Sir Walter Raleigh, the narrator of the novel talks about his own attempt to write a journal and his purpose. According to him, he writes to find out the truth of his own life. According to him, the book comprises three voyages. The first one is the voyage of Destiny which is set in the present time. The second voyage is the voyage of his history in which he confesses about his past events. The third voyage is the most important for him as it compares the earlier two and reflects on his the past and present. Thus, he himself describes his book.

While recounting his journey, Raleigh breaks his frame of narration and directly comments on his own method of writing, and brings to the notice of the readers his own method of writing and how his account of the past is based on his memory.

“It occurs to me that my method in this writing is most curious, yet necessarily so. I am recreating past for you. ---- I report just the outward events and remarks to the best of my memory.”(72)

SirWalter Raleigh is a self-conscious narrator who is aware of the contradictions and inconsistencies of his account of life. He is a typical postmodern unreliable narrator who claims the truthfulness of his account and also subverts it by pointing out his confusions and doubts. He is also unable to find out what is a truth and a lie.

“I have written no lies. But neither have I written the whole truth. How could I? --- The truth is somehow knowable, but untellable or if unknowable, only to be approached by the cancelling out of the ignorance after another.”(318)

Thus, the novel represents the postmodern understanding of the Truth and reveals the impossibility of gaining a single absolute truth.

While writing about his report on the Defeat of the Armada, Raleigh highlights its fictitious nature and reveals the source of the text. He further tells how he has copied his report from ‘Report of the Truth of the Fight about the Isles of the Azores.’

“I was proud of that sentence. Five paragraphs long! 312 words! Such a verbal puissance, such rich irony.” (253)

“If I had fought the Armada I could have said less. Because I didn’t, I took 312 words to sink 240 ships.” (254)

Here, Raleigh not only reveals the fictitious nature of his report but also challenges the objectivity and authority of historical report.

Robert Nye’s novel ‘The Voyage of the Destiny’ is a postmodern novel. It is highly self-reflexive in its narration. Nye has used a typical postmodern self-conscious narrator who not only reveals its identity as fictional text but also subverts the documented and recorded historical narratives of Sir Walter Raleigh. Thus, Nye has represented the postmodern understanding of Fiction and History in this novel.

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