



RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring Postmodern Elements in Jorge Luis Borges' Short Story "The Other Death"

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ABSTRACT

The study explores Postmodernism elements in the short story "The Other Death" by one of the renowned postmodern authors Jorge Luis Borges. The researchers have identified the elements of postmodernism in the story to substantiate the claim that the story is a postmodern text. The study is exploratory in nature and involves the use of the qualitative approach. Moreover, the study has been carried out and analyzed under the lens of Postmodernism. For this purpose, the study uses content analysis of the Jorge Luis Borges short story "the Other Death. For the current study, the researchers have invoked the theory of postmodern fiction mentioned in The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction by Bran Nicol. This research study has used the interpretative method to analyze the text of "The Other Death". Content analysis has been widely used through the lens of postmodernism of literary texts. The findings of the study have shown that the story carries many postmodern elements but the major elements explored by researchers are: Inter-textuality, Metafiction, and Magical Realism. The short story is intertwined with diverse rich elements to represent diverse meaning for the readers. The text carries literary allusions and the commendatory of the author as well along with the elements of magical realism that makes it a well-knit text for postmodern analysis.

KEYWORDS Fiction, Inter-textuality, Jorge Luis Borges, Magical Realism, Metafiction, Postmodernism

Introduction

Literature has always been subjected to many changes and dramatic shifts which have ultimately affected the subject matter of literature. Similarly, various movements in literature have brought about greater shifts in its content and subject. Postmodernism is one such movement that has had a paramount impact on every genre of literature. Hootie (2014) explains that postmodernism is such a philosophical movement that always puts question marks before human dogmas, philosophical beliefs, and rationale doctrines in a way that places all homogenous ideas together.

Al-Shalabi (2015) writes that the very term postmodernism is much debatable topic of discussion in literary academia nowadays. He defines that the term was coined by Nichol Contends. To him, this has been a movement that maintains a reaction against the values of modernism. He further adds that postmodernism has roots in architecture and it was a reaction against modern architecture started from the lands of America which spread across the other parts of the world within a short span of time. Hooti (2011) defines postmodernism as ushering of a new age where every activity is unclear, obvious-mystery,

and hard to comprehend. This era marks that every meaning, and implication is incomprehensible.

Further Sheeba (2017) argues that postmodern literature generally encompasses a great degree of features of stylistics and ideology. It shows the entire focus is on the key traits like distortion of reality, elements of fragmentation, unreliability on the part of the narrator, plots of both nonlinear types marked with touches of paranoia, black humor, and questions about the status of the author (Ahmed, Lashari & Golo, 2023). Ashraf (1991) advocates that postmodernism as a movement negates absolute truths and denies fixed definitions. He further accounts that postmodernism has a long history and traces its roots back to the publication of *A Study of History (1947)* by Arnold Toynbee. He adds that this movement of postmodernism is related to modernism and often questions, doubts, and is skeptical about the metanarrative discourse of modernism. Khan (2017) narrates that Postmodernism is a conscious movement that spread by great scholars and philosophers like Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Richard Rorty, and Michel Foucault. The postmodernists admit that Western civilizations in the false belief of supremacy have wrongly justified their domination (Ahmed, Lashari & Golo, 2023). It has partially presented the idea of truth, and reality and has often distorted both truth and reality, even knowledge which later became the subject matter of postmodernist study (Lashari et al., 2023). The postmodernists are interested in studying traditional, false beliefs and do not favor fixing things. He (Khan) again maintains that postmodernists are mainly those who are against these traditional beliefs and are anti-reality rather they deem reality according to the diversity of notions and beliefs (Lashari & Umarani, 2023). Finally, they are of the view that reality can be as diverse as human perception and psychology (Khan, 2017).

Postmodernism in Literature

Postmodern literature is deeply rooted in the study of modern ideologies, political changes, and cultural shifts in society. Recently in literature, this postmodern philosophy and above all a postmodern theory have occupied a paramount place in the realm of art, history, literature, and architecture. It has no exception to culture, intellectual growth to aesthetic pleasure in society. The very term postmodernism initially appeared in the literary discourses of Latin American writers during the 1930s and 1940s since then it has been a much debated topic in literary circles and academia (Preda, 2015).

Sheeba (2017) in her study defines the key characteristics of postmodern literature are mainly influenced by the influence of modernity and without understanding modernity; postmodern thought cannot be understood clearly. These features are ambiguous in nature and ambiguity in literature is a key feature of the postmodern texts. Besides the negation of religious dogmas, reality is individual; anti-positivity and validity are even the subject matter of postmodern literature.

Postmodern literature is hard to comprehend and understand on account of its diverse outlook. In literature, this postmodernism stresses difficult language, various forms, and difficult jargon and terms. Further the way of presenting literary texts in the entire form of ambiguity and the readers find it hard to get the gist of the texts.

Not only it, Postmodernism also negates the use of simple language and does not favor simplicity but rather keeps the texts confusing, unclear, and ambiguous. Even this postmodern theory distorts reality and mars the identity thus identity crises are again can be studied under the layers of postmodernism.

However, the term postmodernism in literature is used to give multiple shades of context and meaning. Even postmodern literature does not offer solutions to the problems and issues rather makes them more complex and intangible. This is the very reason that many critics are of the view that postmodernism is only a theory quite far from reality. Shaikh (2009) defines postmodernism is marked with an era of pessimism, hopelessness, and individuality rather than optimism and clarity.

Postmodernist critics in the field of literature deliberate upon issues of contemporary society and ultimately contemporary life. They portray society and culture. The postmodernist literature mainly gives exposure to life which is chiefly deviated from the centre. Postmodernism does not deem any art and field of study as separate rather it studies objects and their relation to the centre irrespective of isolation (Sharma & Chaudhary, 2011). The critics of postmodernism are engaged in experimentation with the earlier works and always are reluctant to change the mode of narration and structure of the text. These critics are in a habit of breaking the old and traditional forms of all works and trying to reframe and re-contextualize them as per the needs and demands of the readers. They are always pluralist in their nature and relativist in their outlook even if they openly deny and negate the very concepts of unified and individual truth and reality (Crews, 1999). There is a great possibility of skepticism among all postmodernists and that is why they are doubtful of everything even of the times in which they live. These postmodernists always raise their voices about every sphere of life from political, social, and religious issues related to contemporary life which are the subject matters of literature (Barret, 1997).

Literature Review

Postmodernism as an intellectual movement has had a huge impact on different fields, including education across the globe. Since the dawn of the late 20th century, this school of thought has spread throughout the world. This intellectual movement has also spread throughout Muslim countries. As the intellectual movement, postmodernism is not only a major concern in scientific approaches, but also in a variety of political, social, educational, and other fields. However, this movement is not a methodical movement whose rational background and didactic consequences may be exactly and well-defined; moderately, the approach of this school of thought necessitates renovating the form and integrating numerous inclinations. Consequently, there is discussion over the explanation of postmodernism and its association with modernism as well as the explicit identification of its forerunners and its educational consequences.

Aydin (2006) in his research points out that we can embrace postmodernism as a postponement of modernism. However, postmodernism arose as a reaction to the globalization of modernism in terms of information, concentration, and ideals as well as the rise of humanist philosophical principles. The researcher further admits that postmodernism adopts the realist objective approach and societal cultural values and principles. As a result, postmodernism is regarded to be opposed to any ideals founded on ontology, epistemology, and rationality. It has a stance that is diametrically opposed to comprehensive human tactics and humanist ideals.

According to Gandy (1997), postmodernism is being studied in different ways. Firstly, it can be studied many kinds of art and architecture. Secondly, it can be studied as a historical period mainly beginning from the late 20th century. Furthermore, it is an era in which information is experienced as fundamental epistemological. The researcher further maintains that the time of postmodernism has been both a historical and a serious conundrum.

Forghani et al (2015) research study maintains that Postmodernism highly arose in Western materialistic surroundings. It mainly stresses heterogeneity and contingency and throws out any absolute trust or worth. However, opposes essentialism and contemplates human individuality to be a societal paradigm. Moreover, it discards the notion that human values are highly constructed on evolving authenticities and also junks the indispensable effect of human activities on their destiny.

According to Akter (2018), postmodernism highly encourages a diversity of viewpoints which improves our ability to know and comprehend one another. It's a good idea to dismantle all of those factors in today's rational, imaginative, and enlightening procedures. The researcher furthermore advocates that modern ideologies, the presence of detached reality, and the ultimate truth clearly characterize postmodernism. In the same manner, Kahraman (2014) in his research admits that Postmodernism is defined as a structure and response to modernism. Postmodernism is a form of modernism that grapples with and comes to terms with impossibilities that exist in and of life. Moreover, it is also a separation of modernity.

Abdullah (2013) in his research study advocates that this school of thought is primarily concerned with the subjectivity and pliability of values in human life. It clearly pervades all aspects of existence. It was a break with modernism which recognized human beings' capability to generate, develop, and transform their atmosphere through logic, experimentation, and technical information. However, the negative effects of World Wars and imperialism resulted in great suffering for humanity in the long term. As a result, a new worldview emerged, discarding rationalism's utmost power, realism's domination, and utter truth's supremacy, all of which are symbols of postmodernism.

Ghunshyam (2009) in his study elaborates that postmodernism and critics of this theory find it very controversial and rather deem it a phenomenon to challenge for this theory puts a question mark before every modern concept. Additionally, it is based on all contradictory notions and beliefs found in politics, art, culture, and literature. He further quotes the statements of Hutcheon in the words that postmodern critics and postmodern writings are characterized by the writings of authors who willingly distort history and are in the habit of self-reflexivity.

Sharma (2011) argues that Literature and works written by postmodern authors exhibit key features of an era that is reported after World War -II. These writers mainly employ some features like paradox, fragmentation, and multiple voices and narrators in their works. Further, they are entirely interested in going against the ideas of Enlightenment and modernism. The theory of postmodernism in literature as a whole is very complicated and undefinable. However postmodern writers infer many meanings and mainly postmodern novels have been marked with the tendencies of the quest for identity and reality.

According to Maule (2018), it is an anti-modernist critique. The difficulty with modernism was its postulation of universality, as well as its claims to transparency. The postmodern distinction mainly stems from its failure to incorporate the fundamental assessment of the modern, as well as its incapacity to achieve such transparency. It also rejects all words used by modernists such as logic, authenticity, objectivity, and truth. The researcher further admits that postmodernism as a literary movement has highly infiltrated all social systems and caused a cultural shift. According to Kahraman (2014), postmodernism is a network of societies that has developed its life procedures. However, postmodern societal values not only foresee the freedom of mind but also preserve the local ethos.

Material and Methods

The present study involves the qualitative method of research which is, according to Flick (2009) a suitable way to study the non-numerical data to explore the ideas or to develop new ideas. Gay (2009) also supports this method and states that in this type of research, the data is collected in a natural setting and the ideas are also analyzed in their original state.

Interpretative Method

Various methods are used in the study of the texts; however, this research study uses the interpretative method to analyze the text of "The Other Death" by Louis Borges. Many scholars recommend this method for the analysis of the texts. Bryman (2004) supports this method to find new meanings in the texts. Similarly, Silverman (2005) also encouraged this method and called it hermeneutics. This method has been widely used for the textual analysis (Lashari et al., 2018)

Theoretical Framework

The main objective of this research study is to explore the postmodern elements in Borges' short story "The Other Death". In this regard, the researchers have employed the theory of postmodern fiction mentioned in *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* by Bran Nicol. Nicol (2009) mentions the following elements of the postmodern fiction.

Inter-textuality

It is the direct or indirect reference to the other texts, and genres (Nicol, 2009, p. 73).

Metafiction

It is the self-reflective technique in which "a text highlights its status as a fictional construct by referring to itself" (Nicol, 2009, p. 16).

Magical Realism

It is the technique in which the writers mix up the realist and the fantastic elements. This technique mainly violates the physical laws or the rational understanding of things.

Results and Discussion

Intertextuality

Intertextuality refers to the technique in which a literary text, directly or indirectly refers to other texts or genres and draws ideas or direct quotes from them.

There are various places in the text of "The Other Death" that refer to other texts drawn from other texts. At the beginning of this story, the narrator refers to the essay that was written by Ralph Waldo Emerson with the title "The Past". The narrator states "About two years ago, I believe it was (I have lost the letter) Gannon wrote me from Gualeguaychu to announce that he was sending me a translation, perhaps the first to be done into Spanish, of Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem "'The Past'" (p. 223). This line shows that the main idea of the story is based on Emerson's essay "The Past". This is the idea that this story relates to

history, war, and the death of a character whose name is Pedro Damian. Further, it also discusses the theological idea of whether God can remove the past.

There is also an indirect reference to William Faulkner's "The Sound and Fury". However, this reference is not directed pointed to the text of the novel but to the title of the novel. It says that "The sound and fury of Mesoller were the full extent of this story (p. 223). Moreover, this usage of "The sound and fury" may also refer to William Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' where it says "It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing (Shakespeare, 2008). However, these two references have the same significance or meaning as both references point to the disorder of the city.

This story revolves around the mystery of the death of a character whose name is Pedro Damian. This name Damian may also refer to the person whose name was Robert-Francois Damiens (1715-1757) and who was publically executed brutally during the rule of French King Louis XV (Foucault, 1995). This person is mentioned in detail in Foucault's "Discipline and Punish". This text may refer to French Damiens because both characters are known for their death. This way, the mystery of the death of Damian may also refer to the real-life Damiens who were executed horribly in France. Although this may be an indirect reference this may be a reference to this historical person who made his place in the history of capital punishment.

Further, this story also refers to Joseph Conrad's 'Lord Jim' and the character with the same name (Conrad, 2000). The narrator states "The gaucho Martin Fierro, I thought, is less memorable than Lord Jim or Razumov" (p. 224-225). In the same line, there is one more reference to another text as well. It is toward the protagonist Kyrilo Sidorovitch Razumov of Joseph Conrad's 'Under Western Eyes' (Conrad, 1996).

This story also contains a direct reference to the American short story writer Edgar Allan Poe. In this story, Edgar Allen Poe is referred to as a complex, accomplished and remarkable writer. In this regard, the narrator of the story gives a short commentary "With the beginnings of a sense of terror I saw that he was looking at me strangely, so I bluffed my way into a literary argument about the sort of person who'd criticize Emerson-a poet more complex, more accomplished, and unquestionably more remarkable, I contended, than poor Edgar Allan Poe" (p. 226).

Part III of Dante's 'Divine Comedy' The *Paradiso*, is directly referred to in this story (Alighieri, 2010). About some lines of the text, the narrator states that "I discovered it almost magically in Pier Damiani's treatise titled De omnipotentia, which I sought out because of two lines from Canto XXI of the *Paradiso*-two lines that deal with a problem of identity" (p. 227). Similarly, the Greek philosopher Aristotle is also mentioned in this story. The narrator quotes the idea of Aristotle that "In the fifth chapter of his treatise, Pier Damiani maintains, against Aristotle and Fredegarius of Tours that God can make what once existed never to have been" (p. 227). The *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas is another text that is referred to in this story. The narrator quotes from this text that this book denies that "God can undo, unmake what once existed" (p. 227). The great Roman poet Virgil is also referred to in this story. The narrator states "I will have told the story of a true event in much the way that naive Virgil, two thousand years ago, thought he was heralding the birth of a man though he had foretold the birth of God" (p. 228).

All these references make it clear that the postmodern element of intertextuality is abundant in this story and this text refers, directly and indirectly, to various historical and well-known texts and draws ideas from them.

Metafiction

Metafiction is the postmodern technique in which the text refers to itself and accepts its fictionality and does not claim that it is true.

In this context, "The Other Death" does not pretend that it is true or that whatever is narrated happened somewhere. There are various places where the narrator of the story confesses that the events that have been told in this story have more than one version. The narrator says "Absurdly, Col. Tabares' version of the events embarrassed me" (p. 224). This shows that the narrator treats this text as fictitious and may be told in various ways.

There is one more confession of the narrator where she accepts the fictionality of the story. In this confession the narrator says "That winter, the lack of one or two details for my tale of fantasy (which stubbornly refused to find its proper shape) made me return to Col. Tabares' house" (p. 225). This line makes it clear that the narrator accepts that this tale is the tale of fantasy that is the birth of his imagination.

There is one more place where he admits that this story is a work of fiction and is not based on truth. The narrator confesses "I am not certain that I have always written the truth. I suspect that within my tale there are false recollections" (p. 228). This line shows that the story is the birth of memory or recollections. These recollections may be false recollections. In this regard, it can be said that the story accepts its fictionality and does not claim to be true.

Magical Realism

Magical realism refers to the mixture of fantastic and realist elements. It involves the use of such events that violate the physical laws and create a magical situation.

Magical realism is another postmodern element that can be found in the story. We can find that in this story the dead man returns to his native land. This event violates the physical laws and creates a rather magical situation. The prime example of magical realism in this story is when the narrator tells us that "Pedro Damian, Ulrike suggests, died in the battle, and at the hour of his death prayed to God to return him to Entre Rios. God hesitated a second before granting that favor, and the man who had asked it was already dead, and some men had seen him killed. God, who cannot change the past, although He can change the images of the past, changed the image of death into one of unconsciousness, and the shade of the man from Entre Rios returned to his native land. Returned, but we should recall that he was a shade, a ghost" (p. 226-227). From this example, we can understand that the man walks back to his native land as a ghost which is the prime example of magical realism.

Discussion

After the analysis, this research study comes up with the findings that the first postmodern element in Borges' story "The Other Death" is intertextuality. In this regard, this story refers to various texts and draws ideas from them. The texts that this story refers to include "The Past" an essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Faulkner's 'The Sound and Fury', Shakespeare's "The Tempest", Joseph Conrad's 'Lord Jim' and Under Western Eyes, Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica and Dante's 'Divine Comedy'. Further, it also indirectly refers to Damians who is mentioned in Foucault's 'Discipline and Punish'. Apart from texts, it also refers to Aristotle and Edgar Allen Poe whom the narrator says that he was a complicated and very remarkable writer.

The second postmodern element that we find in this story is metafiction. Metafiction is the type of fiction in which the narrator admits that it is a work of fiction and does not claim that the events that are narrated are true or happened somewhere. In this regard, there are various places in this story where the narrator confesses that this is a work of fiction or fantasy. At one place he confesses that events that are narrated here have more than one version which shows that some versions may not be true. At another place, the narrator confesses that in this story he is not certain that he had always written the truth. Further, he accepts that this story is based on recollection and that there may be some false recollections. Such confessions by the narrator make it clear that this story warns readers that this is the work of fantasy or fiction and may not be treated as truth.

The third postmodern element that we find in this story is magical realism. Magical realism is a technique that is commonly used in postmodern fiction. In this technique, the physical laws are commonly violated and the mixture of realism and magic is presented. In this story, we find that the dead man walks back to his native land as he had prayed to God and God accepted his prayer. However, he walks back to his native land as a ghost. This walking back of a dead man to his native land is a good example of magical realism as these events violate the physical laws and create a situation that is rather magical or fantastic.

Conclusion

After the analysis and findings, this research study concludes that Borges's short story "The Other Death" is a typical example of a postmodern short story. It has the element of intertextuality in which it directly or indirectly refers to various texts, thinkers, or philosophers. Many texts are mentioned in this story. This story also uses the ideas that are drawn from other texts. It also used the indirect quotations of other philosophers such as Aristotle and bases its arguments on those quotations. Further, this story also contains the elements of metafiction in which it warns the readers that this text may be treated as a work of fiction and it does not claim that all that is narrated in this story is based on truth. Moreover, the technique of magical realism is also used in these stories which gives it a fantastic touch and makes it a good postmodern story.

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