

Scott and Sharar as Historical Novelists

A Contrastive Study of Narrative Techniques

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Abstract

Narrative techniques hold great importance for the appropriate creation of novel. They are important especially in the process of writing a historical novel.

The purpose of this paper is to point out the great differences in narrative techniques of Scott and Sharar in their historical novels. Scott and Sharar have some similarities and some dissimilarities as far as the narrative techniques are concerned. This paper concentrates on their contrastive points as they extremely differ in the use of plot, language and style.

Narrative techniques are extremely important for the creation of historical novel. Scott and Sharar hold a great importance as historical novelists in English and Urdu literatures respectively as they are the initiators of this genre in their languages. Both of them have used important narrative techniques in their novels. They resemble in the use of dialogue, soliloquy, scene depiction and epistolary technique. There are also some glaring disparities between the two novelists in their modes of narration. They completely differ in the matters of plot construction, language and style.

Sharar lays special emphasis on a systematic and coherent plot, on the contrary Scott has a cavalier attitude in this regard, which sometimes mars the artistic quality of his works. Scott himself was conscious of this narrative deficiency in his works and said that he could not build a coherent plot in spite of all his endeavours

“I have repeatedly laid down my future work to scale, divided it into volumes and chapters and endeavoured to construct a story which I meant should evolve itself gradually and stringly, maintain suspense and stimulate curiosity; and which finally should terminate in a striking catastrophe. But I think there is a demon who seats himself on the feather of my pen when I begin to write and leads it astray from the purpose. Chapters expand under my hand, incidents are multiplied; the story lingers while the materials increase; my regular mension turns out a Gothic anomaly and the work is closed long before I have attained the point I proposed”⁽¹⁾

In spite of the admitted necessity of paying some attention to plot Scott thinks in the last analysis, that to have a tightly fitted narrative structure is in no way an absolute requirement for a successful novel because, in his opinion, human life itself is not

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coherent and lacks sequence. He comments in his novel **The Monastery**

“The general course of human life may be quoted in favour of this more obvious and less artificial practice of arranging a narrative. It is seldom that the same circle of personages who have surrounded an individual at his first outset in life, continue to have an interest in his career till his fate comes to a crisis.”⁽²⁾

Again he says:

“In fine whatever may be the vote of severe critics, we are afraid that many of the labourers in this work on literature will conclude with Bays “What is the use of the plot but to bring in fine things”. And truly if the fine things really deserve the name, we think therein pedantry in censuring the works where they occur, merely because productions of genius are not also adorned with a regularity of conception carrying skillfully forward the conclusion of the story which we may safely pronounce one of the rarest attainments of art”⁽³⁾

Scott’s comments indicate that he was satisfied with the way in which he constructed his novel and preferred spontaneous development of the narrative to restricting it in the bounds of plot. David Daiches also comments that “Scott was never the obsessed artist but the happy writer”⁽⁴⁾ He did not follow a set pattern. Sometimes he begins right in the middle as is the case in **The Heart of Midlothian**, and **Old Mortality**. **The Heart of Midlothian** begins with explosive event of the Porteous Riots, which is central in the novel and launches straight into the novel’s action and meaning. Thomas Seccomb comments on the unusual beginning of **The Heart of Midlothian** in the following manner.

“Generally Scott begins at the beginning, but not so here. The story at once plunges the reader into a state of things which he cannot comprehend without knowledge of three previous circumstances — the relations of Robertson and Madge wildfire with Effie Deans and with The Fife Smugglers. To pause in the course of the story, to give bald straight forward narratives of these past events, is the novelist’s plain and obvious method but it is also the least artistic. On the whole Scott steers well. The past is gathered from its effect on the present, from the dramatic confessions of the sin stricken actors, from the wild and whirling words of the crazed girl”⁽⁵⁾

The kind of narrative structure presented in **The Heart of Midlothian** can be termed as loose structure. It was more congenial to Scott’s temperament. The reason for this trend can be traced in the particular characteristics of the Romantic Age to which he belonged. It seems that the romantic assertion for the spontaneous expression of feelings had developed in him a casual attitude towards plot and he preferred to

make his novels lively and attractive through the artistry of dialogues and realistic presentations of the characters.

On the other hand Sharar lays special emphasis on a systematic and coherent plot and develops his story with a proper division of chapters and gives it an appropriate sequence of the beginning, middle and the end. He believes in maintaining the coherence of the story with the help of a well-knit plot. He takes great care to maintain the discipline, coherence and suspense in the events of the story. All his novels have consistent and concordant plots. Syed Waqar Azim has paid a great tribute to Sharar in this respect and acknowledges that Sharar has a complete awareness of the fact that the plot of a novel is a developing shape of the events.⁽⁶⁾

It can be inferred from the study of Sharar's novels that his story starts with a delightful preface, then goes through different stages and reaches a logical end. It has to face difficulties while passing through different stages. These very difficulties invoke the interest of the reader and create in him a desire to cling to the novel till the end of the story. Sharar's **Malik-ul-Aziz Varjana** can serve as one of the finest examples as it has a well constructed plot which follows an appropriate development of the events. Sharar has divided it into twenty chapters and has created such a sequence and consistency that the plots and events develop steadily. In order to maintain the interest of the reader throughout the novel, he has employed the technique of suspense and curiosity at many stages of the novel. According to Mumtaz Manglori, for the first time in the history of the Urdu novel Sharar realized the importance of coherence and balance between character and plot and used it accordingly⁽⁷⁾. This comment indicates that Sharar is aware of the importance of plot.

Sharar divides his plot into different chapters and assigns a separate name to each one of them. By this method he is able to create a division in the events of a novel. He also makes use of a double plot. Along with the historical events, a fictitious romantic tale proceeds simultaneously for the interest of the reader. He creates coherence between the historical and romantic events as his thoughtful plan for the development of plot works behind it. The beginning of **Mansoor Mohna** can be quoted, after translation into English, as a prominent example:

“Our story starts from 390 Hijrah. The great wave of victories which had reached Spain after crossing Africa in the early centuries of Hijrah at one side and had extended to Afghanistan after crossing Syria, Iran and other countries on the other side, was touching the boundaries of India this year. The banks of River Attock became the battle fields for those great wars which defeated the power of great Ayrans and rewarded the Muslims with success”⁽⁸⁾

The Preface clearly paves way for later development of the plot that is about some invasion of India. In the same way some of his other novels, such as **Flora Florida**, **Maftu Fathe** and **Firdous-i-Barin** can be presented as examples of novels

having consistent plots. In fact there are two waves of events in his historical novels: one wave is that of historical events and the other is that of romantic events. They do not go side by side but are merged into each other. In this way the coherence and correlation is maintained between them and many romantic events are created out of historical events. **Malik-ul-Aziz Varjana** can serve as an illuminating example of this technique. After fixing the historical period, Sharar starts creating the romantic events in such a manner that they are merged into each other. At some places the historical events are separated from the romantic ones but only where it is inevitable to do so.

Scott and Sharar also differ in the use of language. Scott's language is reflective of the culture and environment of his characters, while that of Sharar does not correspond to the environment of his characters.

Scott used Scottish language for his Scottish characters and made English ones speak in their own native language. Graham Tulloch appreciates this device and says that

“Despite his popular reputation as the great romancer Scott was, as has long been recognized, in many ways a realistic writer. His presentation of Scots dialect conforms with this so far as we can now tell it reflects the actual sociolinguistic situation in Scott's own time”⁽⁹⁾

The situation referred to by Graham Tulloch is reflected in Scott's novels. In this situation Scottish language was increasingly coming to be associated with the lower classes, the less educated and the older generation and he used their speech and manner in his novels. Scottish speakers in Waverley Novels are lower clan people and relatively uneducated. If they belong to upper classes they also belong to older generation. Hence he makes use of Scottish language in order to present his characters and situations in a true and natural manner. David Murison has paid a great tribute to Scott for his great art in creating the speeches for his characters and says that

“Just as he created a whole gallery of characters of all kinds and conditions, excelled only by Shakespeare, he created a great variety of Scottish and English languages and rings the changes in the speech in all sorts of subtle ways”⁽¹⁰⁾

The Fortunes of Nigel is a novel which illustrates the switching from Scottish to English. The scene is London and the characters in the main are an enclave of Scottish people from the king down ward, strangers in a strange land. The Scottish banker Heriot who is obviously doing well in South, uses formal English to all around him but breaks out into Scotch when he hears Richie Moniplies who is from his native town Edinburgh Ramsay, the clock maker expatiates on his trade in the language of the text books on chronometry but uses his mother tongue in his personal affairs. Even the king is made to accommodate himself to his audience and mood. In moments of excitement as in the stag hunt in Greenwich Park or when speaking to Scottish courtiers, he reverts to Scotch in the court. He speaks a formal pedantic Latinate English laced however

with some Scotch especially when he is being facetious, an attempt, no doubt, to represent himself in his popular character as amalgam of scholar and cloven:

“This Dionysius of Syracase caused running workman to build for himself a lugg-p’ yekan what that in, my lord Bishop”.

“A cathedral, I presume to guess answered the Bishop” what the deilmn- I crave you lordship’s pardon for swearing-but it was the cathedral-only a lurking place called the king’s lugg, where he could sit undescried and hear the converse of his prisoners”⁽¹¹⁾

By this kind of speech Scott wants to remind his readers that Scotland once had a national language of its own. In his introduction to **The Chronicles of the Canon Gate** he refers to an old Edinburgh lady Balior who speaks Scotch in the country accent and tries to prove that “it seemed to be the Scottish as spoken by the ancient court of Scotland to which no idea of vulgarity could be attached”⁽¹²⁾ But Mrs. Balior speaks English throughout the novel. Amongst the heroines of Scott **Jeanie Deans** is the only one who speaks Scotch in **The Heart of Midlothian** but it is a Scottish language of varied register or intensity. To her father it is the ordinary speech of Lothian peasant, to strangers like Saddletree and Staunton it is much more comprehensive. When she is in England she obviously tries to make herself intelligible in English though the occasional Scots word drops out; when she first meets the Duke of Argyll, she is as formal as her school English will permit but when, to set her at ease, he speaks of Scotland, the familiar topic brings out her scotch more fluently. But the antithesis is not merely between high society English and low society Scotch people, Scott has depicted the difference between the two cultures; it is also the discrepancy between the ruler and the ruled which is vivified by the use of two languages.

Professor Ernest Weekley considers that of all individual writers next to Shakespeare whose formative influence on English is beyond all comparison, Scott has contributed most to the English vocabulary. Thus it is clear that Scott’s novels have the richness of language which reflects in the sheer bulk of his work. His great sweep, range and the extra ordinary variety of the content itself is a proof of the vitality he impaired to the words he used and in so many cases effectively recreated.

According to an estimation made by David Murison “among Scott’s 30,000 word vocabulary are included 3,000 words used only in Scotland or having meanings peculiar to Scotland and belonging to the remains of old Scots language”⁽¹³⁾

Thus it can be inferred from the thorough study of Scott’s use of the language that he provides his readers four models of narrative, firstly ordinary English narrative with a few Scotch words, secondly the recorded eighteenth century Scottish speech narrative, thirdly the written Scottish language of uneducated Scotsmen and fourthly only barely explored language of the written narrative of an older educated class who speaks Scotch informally, in a mixture of Scotch and English. The depiction of these

four varieties of language is contributive to his versatility of themes in various novels. Hence Scott makes his characters speak in their own native tongues.

On the contrary each of Sharar's characters speaks in the typical Urdu language, even if most of them belong to Arabia. The reason for this tendency can be traced in Sharar's lack of familiarity with Arab culture and language. His **Manoor Mohna** is the only exception in this regard. Due to his own exposure to Hindi language and culture, he is able to make his Hindu characters speak in Hindi. Though this aspect of Sharar's narrative can be regarded as blemish for his works, it is justified from reader's point of view as his reader is an average Indian Muslim who knows the Urdu language only. His basic aim was to infuse enthusiasm and zeal in his people so he had no choice but to let every character speak in Urdu. Sharar's language is rhetorical. His diction is alluring and consists of a beautiful combination of ancient and modern expressions. His language abounds in similies, metaphor and allegory. Sometimes he uses those Arabic and Persian forms which are currently used in the Urdu language.

Sharar was familiar with English prose style, so he was able to transplant the beautiful contrivances of English language into Urdu but his similies and metaphors are exclusively eastern. Like Scott, he was a poet and his poetic temperament and aptitude made him adopt a rhetorical diction in prose. It was convenient for him to colour his narration with different poetic techniques. According to Syyad Waqar Azim, Sharar excels in the spicy use of language and this was done to provide enjoyment⁽¹⁴⁾. The examples of this spicy use of language can be observed in **Hasan Angelina**.

“The sun had set and the Turkish flag was fluttering on like a bird in the sky. The dim light of the early moon seemed to be descended from the eastern mountains⁽¹⁵⁾. (Translation)

Pyam Shah Jehanpuri appreciates Sharar's use of language and says that in the matter of language and narration he is not only superior to his contemporaries but to his successors as well ⁽¹⁶⁾. In spite of the fact that Sharar exceeds in prose diction, he himself confesses his that his combination of words create carelessness and confusion. He writes that:

“I am neither concerned with the school of Delhi nor with that of Lucknow. I write as I can manage⁽¹⁷⁾. (Translation)

Thus it is evident that both Scott and Sharar differ in the use of language Scott makes his characters speak their native tongue while Sharar has to use the Urdu language due to his own and his reader's lack of familiarity with the native tongue of his characters.

Scott and Sharar also stand opposite to each other in the matter of style. Scott's style is objective as his own personality never intrudes into his novel, while Sharar's style is subjective and his personality as a novelist seems to be dominant in his works.

In the matter of description Scott only states the period or the year of the theme of his novel. The social, moral and political aspects of society are revealed through the

interaction of characters and by the objective narration of the events. The bravery or timidity of the characters is exposed by their own actions. Scott does not interfere even if the characters like Alan Fairford and his father in **Redguntlet** seem to be the portraits of himself and his father. Throughout his novels he observes the principle of negative capability and negates his own personality while depicting the events and people of his novels. Hence he is the best example of T.S. Eliot's term of a catalyst⁽¹⁸⁾. Like a catalyst he remains unchanged but helps his characters and events to completely conform with each other.

On the other hand Sharar is a subjective writer his personality remains dominant in his novel and can be strongly felt in the narration of certain events and characters. The great and brave heroic figures become lifeless due to his subjective intrusion. He relates the events in his own descriptive manner and does not let them emerge spontaneously as a result of certain moral, social and political elements. In fact he has no concern with the society of a particular era. His only concerns are the warfare and brave deeds of his heroes in the battlefield. He relates these events in his own manner and does not let them follow their own course. His own personality remains prominent throughout the narration.

Thus it can be concluded that Scott and Sharar are drastically different from each other in the elements of plot, language and objectivity. Though Sharar insists that he is not at all inspired by Scott, but the historical perspective in which Sharar comes after Scott, is evident of the fact that Scott's novels served as models for him. He innovated and modified the pre-existing style of English historical novel according to the needs and situations of his own country. Consequently Sharar's art of historical novel is indebted to that of Scott. Both of them can be paid tribute for being the pioneers of historical novels in their respective languages. Their endeavours are contributive to confirm the validity of this genre for the forthcoming generations.

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