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Postmodern Pastiche and Narrative Reconstruction in Orson Scott Card's *Speaker for the Dead*

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Abstract

This paper examines the experimentation in narrative reconstruction by Orson Scott Card to explore different psychological and social themes in the novel *Speaker for the Dead* (1986). The paper focuses on analyzing the structure of the novel and Card's use of different genres to develop the dialogue and construct the narrative framework of the novel. It is a combination of different genres, and this paper analyses the amalgamation of various genres by Card to produce a postmodern work of literature. Orson Scott Card has combined different genres of English and World Literature, quotations, allusions and concepts borrowed from other works to make the novel rich in information and aesthetically well structured. The paper studies the significance of combining different genres to help the reader to interpret the text as an amalgamation of different emotions and perspectives, and finally combining all to make an independent aesthetic work of literature. Analyzing through Fredric Jameson's concept of Pastiche, the paper argues how the author reconstructs various fragmented stories through multiple and conflicting perspectives rather than relying on a unified narrative. Furthermore, the paper investigates how the amalgamation of science fiction, religious discourse, anthropological inquiry, detective fiction, and philosophical reflection create a hybrid textual space which is prime characteristic of postmodern pastiche.

Keywords: Framework, postmodernism, perspectives, science fiction, pastiche, hybrid, discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Postmodern literature proclaims the diversion from modernistic literature and to some extent tries to contest the tenants of modernism. Besides highlighting the

distinctions between the two, it experiments also by utilizing the concepts of modernism. Postmodernism attempts to be unique and admits that some heights of modernistic literature cannot be achieved or recreated in the postmodern writings. It highlights the lack of

originality through blending or imitating the different styles of moderns in postmodern works, whether it is in paintings, architecture or in literature. They amalgamate different styles and forms in effort to create a different and unique style borrowed from the predecessors. Pastiche is closely related to postmodern intertextuality, it means to combine or 'paste' together different elements. It can be a mixture of genres, styles, culture and concepts. There is an interesting fact regarding 'pastiche', that B.S.Johnson in 1969 released his novel *The Unfortunates* in a box to make it flexible to assemble according to the interest of readers.

Pastiche and parody are often considered as confusing terms in postmodernism. Though both focus on copying and imitating the existing works, style and content yet critically they treat the art in different manners. In Parody there is imitation of style, genre or literary work but with a motive to alter it. It imitates a work but in a satirical way to depict the original to the low level. On the other hand pastiche is an imitation without much change. It is often considered as 'Blank parody'. It represents the pluralistic, chaotic and information drenched dimensions of the postmodern society. It is used by many postmodern writers to highlight chaos and lack of originality in postmodern society. Through Pastiche writers create a unique narrative by combining different genres to depict the conditions of postmodern society. The different writers have used the technique of pastiche in their works, William S. Burroughs combines science fiction and detective fiction, Margaret Atwood synthesizes the genre of science fiction with fairy tales; Umberto Eco amalgamates fairy tales, science fiction and detective fiction to produce new literary works. These postmodern writers depend on the collage of different genres to create a new works.

Pastiche is a French word which means "a work of art imitating another author's style." Its use in English can be traced to 1980s and 1990s. The French word Pastiche is derived from

the Italian 'pasticcio', which means a kind of mixed pastry, it indicates towards a musical form composed of various parts from other composers. Russell Sturgis defines Pastiche in general way to extend it to the other art forms. According to him a Pastiche is "A work of art produced in deliberate imitation of another or several others, as of the works of a master taken together" (Sturgis 73). Similarly, Dyer defines it as "pastiche is a kind of imitation that you are meant to know is an imitation" (Dyer 1). The postmodern 'pastiche' shows two influences the "musical medley" in meaning and an idea of a "hodgepodge." *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines pastiche as "an artistic work in a style that imitates that of another work, artist, or period." ("Oxford Learner's Dictionaries")

Orson Scott Card's *Speaker for the Dead* was published in 1986. It is a sequel to Card's famous novel *Ender's Game*. It has won the Nebula and Hugo, the biggest of the science-fiction awards in 1986 and 1987, respectively. It is also made into a graphic novel. After the success of *Speaker for the dead*, two sequels *Xenocide* and *children of the mind* followed. *The Speaker for the Dead* carries forward the story of guilt ridden Ender from previous novel, *Ender's Game*. In this novel Ender does not come to defeat the aliens, but to rescue. The plot of the novel is woven around the themes of understanding and coexistence with the alien race, and efforts to save them from another xenocide.

Postmodern Pastiche: A Theoretical Perspective

According to Margaret Proust pastiche and parody often confuse public with their closeness to each other, due to the complex and mixed nature of all parodies, which are humorous remakes of linguistic or artistic performances. Linda Hutcheon defines parody as "repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (Hutcheon 6) Parody is considered as a technique which transforms the work, while

Pastiche is a technique of imitation characterized by marking similarities rather than differences. The difference between pastiche and caricature here is a matter of degree: pastiche is more neutral and less satirical in purpose. Fredric Jameson in his essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" highlights the lack of originality and dependence on the already written in the following lines:

What is clear is merely that the older models - Picasso, Proust, T.S. Eliot - do not work any more (or are positively harmful), since nobody has that kind of unique private world and style to express any longer. And this is perhaps not merely a "psychological" matter: we also have to take into account the immense weight of seventy or eighty years of classical modernism itself. There is another sense in which the writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds - they've already been invented; only a limited number of combinations are possible; the most unique ones have been thought of already. (4)

In short, pastiche is commonly a technique to mix various genres to create a new work, the work may incorporate the components like metafiction and temporal distortion. Postmodernist writer Thomas Pynchon has used in his works the elements of detective fiction, science fiction, and war fiction and songs. According to S.E. Gontarski:

[Samuel] Beckett's cutting and pasting his reading onto his own stock of prose produced a discourse that Giles Deleuze might call 'rhizomatic' or a technique Fredric Jameson might call Pastiche. That is, these early works are finally assemblages, intertextual layerings, palimpsests, the effect of which is to produce (if not reproduce) a

multiplicity of meaning in a manner that will come to be thought Postmodern in the second half of the twentieth century...." (23)

Postmodernist scholar Frederic Jameson describes pastiche as "blank parody." He emphasizes pastiche as a technique which depicts how the concept of a norm in postmodern art and literature is replaced by "private styles and mannerisms," Jameson pessimistically regards pastiche as similarly replacing value-laden parody. He calls it "blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs" (17). It may, he concedes, involve some humor, being "at the least compatible with addiction—with a whole historically original consumers' appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself and for pseudo events" (45). He defines postmodern pastiche as an empty form because it is the perpetual reflection of a self-centered consumer society which has lost its sense of history. According to Jameson:

But many of the newer postmodernisms have been fascinated precisely by that whole landscape of advertising and motels, of the Las Vegas strip, of the late show and Grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery and the science fiction or fantasy novel. They no longer "quote" such "texts" as a Joyce might have done, or a Mahler; they incorporate them, to the point where the line between high-art and commercial forms seems increasingly difficult to draw." ("Postmodernism and Consumer society" 1-2)

Jameson emphasises the significance of amalgamation of different styles and genres to produce relevant and appropriate literature in the postmodern era. He underlines the fascinating factor which can be produced

through literature constructed on the framework of different genres.

Genre Hybridization as Postmodern Pastiche in *Speaker for the Dead*

The *Speaker for the Dead* is a radical hybridization of genres that opposes the traditional belief of uniformity in literature. The author has mixed genres, conventions which blur the line between high and low culture to challenge the established norms of realism. This novel is a mixture of Science, Religion, Detective, Mystery, Feminism etc. Card combines all these different genres to produce a future oriented work. As a perfect example of pastiche the *Speaker for the Dead* erases the boundaries between the high art and low art by mixing the different genres. Card correlates the elements from different genres in the novel to produce new meaning in new conditions.

The author begins his novel as an adventure of the protagonist from planet to planet in the search of a suitable place for the bugger queen. The quest to get redemption for his past sins makes the *Speaker for the Dead* an adventurous novel. Ender has travelled to a hundred worlds to find a suitable place for the regeneration of bugger species. He becomes a 'Speaker for the dead' to redeem himself from the sins of his past and to explore the world for Hive Queen. It is ironical that he speaks about bugger which he killed 3000 years ago. In remorseful tone he says "I'm afraid that this voyage has cost me more than any other" (*Speaker for the Dead* 135). He has left his dear ones for these travels to different worlds. In the process of redemption from past sins, he writes a book about buggers named *The Hive Queen*. The motive behind writing *The Hive Queen* was to spread the story of a wiped out race to the universe and to repent for his deeds. He wrote another book by the name of *Hegamenon*, it was about his brother Peter and their relationship. It seems that author has intentionally set the interstellar travel as one of the themes to give the adventurous flavor to the novel. To describe

the intensity of his travels, he says "The longest I've stayed anywhere since I began serving as a Speaker was the year and a half I lived in Reykjavik, on Trondheim" (*Speaker for the Dead* 156). The protagonist travels from planet to planet and coming around the new worlds gives a feel of space odyssey to the readers.

The basic genre under which the novel falls is science fiction. Though it not does come under the category of hard science fiction, but depicts the advancements of science and technology and its effects on human existence in the universe. The novel starts after 3000 years after the Bugger war. Ender who was six years old in the *Ender's Game* novel is still of 32 years because of relativity. His travels with the speed of light have kept him alive for so many years. Card has used the concept of Relativity to set his novel after 3000 years. Through the use of scientific concepts Card makes his protagonist a logically possible person, who is alive even after thousand years and yet of 32 years. Card has explored the science and technology to the best of the needs of the plot. Relativity has been used as a kind of magic realism in the novel. To explore the human quest to study another races and to incorporate the theme of racial dominance Card has used biological elements in the novel. All the conflicts start with the human efforts to study the Pequinochs and Descolda virus spreading on Lusitania. Biology is used in the novel to depict the interaction between Pequinochs and humans. The humans are studying the Pequinochs and the spread of a secret and fatal descolda virus. The Starway congress has established a proper station in Lusitania to study the gene structure of Pequinochs and the cause of a fatal Descolda virus. Novinha, Pipo and Libo are the main biologists who are studying the genes of Pequinochs to find out their connection with the virus. The following lines from the text depict the biological details used by Card in the novel:

In the reed cell, as a genetic molecule came unglued, several large ambient proteins affixed themselves to the open

strands. In humans, the DNA tries to recombine, but random proteins insert themselves so that cell after cell goes crazy. Sometimes they go into mitosis, like cancer, and sometimes they die. What's most important is that in humans the Descolada bodies themselves reproduce like crazy, passing from cell to cell. Of course, every alien creature already has them. (*Speaker for the Dead* 27)

The Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction which features counterculture antihero trapped in a high tech dehumanizing society. The elements of Cyberpunk can be found in the relationship between Jane and Ender. He is equipped with an Artificial Intelligence, Jane, in the form of an ear piece. The function of Jane is described as "Then the small computer implant worn like a jewel in his ear told him of the cruel death of Pipo, the xenologer on Lusitania, and instantly Andrew became alert" (*Speaker for the Dead* 30). Jane is a computer program to assist Ender, but their relationship seems to be more emotional than the mechanic. It is impossible to differentiate the character of Jane from other human characters. It looks more human than the other human characters when it comes to emotions. Card has amalgamated the elements of Astronomy, Biology and Cyberpunk to explore the different themes in the novel.

Narrative Reconstruction through Generic Blending

The author has used the element of mystery in the novel. The structure of the novel is framed in such a way that it constitutes of mysteries and their revelation. In the initial chapters of the novel author uses mysterious spread of Descolda virus to set the story. The biologists who are studying the Pequinochs start dying in a mysterious way. The Starway Congress terminates all kind of contacts between humans and Pequinochs to stop the suspicious deaths of the biologists. Pipo finds something mysterious about Descolda virus and

its connection with the Pequinochs. He is found dead on the very next day. Pequinochs have murdered him in strange way by ripping apart his stomach. The whole human community is frightened by the mysterious and brutal death of Pipo. Libo, the son of Pipo also dies in the same mysterious manners while working on same project. None knows the reason of these deaths and Starway Congress shuts the research on Pequinochs and Descolda. When Ender arrives at Lusitania to speak on Marcos' death, he finds that Novinha is hiding something from him. Jane says to Ender;

So you see, it's still a mystery to us. If you really intend to speak Marcos Ribeira's death, somehow you'll have to answer that question-- why did she marry him? And to answer that, you have to figure out why Pipo died. And ten thousand of the finest minds in the Hundred Worlds have been working on that for more than twenty years. (*Speaker for the Dead* 139)

The only person who knows the answers of all the mysterious incidents is Novinha. She is reluctant to reveal anything about the death of her husband. Novinha knew the secret of Descolda virus but did not tell anyone about the truth. She kept things secret until disclosed by Ender through his speaking. The author has also blended the elements of mystery through the suspicious incidents like Novinha's marriage to an infertile man, Marcos. Though she was in love with Pipo yet in a mysterious way she married Marcos. She hides files of Descolda virus and never lets anyone to access the hidden secret. The death of Pipo and Libo provokes the cultural tension among the two races which helps author to incorporate various themes in the novel. The unknown reason of brutal and mysterious deaths gives the detective form to the novel. Ender is summoned to speak for the death of Novinha's husband, Marcose. As a Speaker, he needs to know the reason of the death, so that he can speak about the past life of the deceased person. He notices

that none is willing to tell him anything. The cancellation of earlier calls to the Speaker was also suspicious for him. Ender comes to Lusitania on the call to speak but secretly he is finding a suitable place to survive for bugger hive queen. It was mandatory for him to solve the secrets of the Lusitania before settling down the hive queen there. Miro says "Let them wonder how the Speaker is going to solve everything for them. I trusted in the Speaker..." (*Speaker for the Dead* 239). Ender endeavors to unveil the reasons behind all the mysterious happenings in Lusitania. He investigates from Ribeira family but they are reluctant to provide him the desired information. Like a detective, he tries to uncover the reality behind every suspicious incident. He notices that Novinha has forbidden her children to reveal any secret to the Speaker. To know the secrets of Novinha's life, he befriends her children so that he can win their trust to ask for the information. With the help of Navioh, son of Novinha, Ender accesses to the secret files containing the information of Descolda virus. He reveals the truth of the Descolda virus and its relation with Pipo, Libo and Marcose. Along with the secret of the Descolda virus and suspicious deaths, he also solves the question why Novinha married Marcos. It is through the character of Ender as a Speaker that Card reveals the plot of the novel to the reader. Speaker appears as a kind of savior for the Lusitania which is struggling with the mysterious circumstances.

The author has infused the angle of romance first through the character of Libo and Novinha and then at the end by the union of Ender and Novinha. Pipo's son Libo and Novinha love each other and want to marry. The emotional aspect of the characters is depicted under the theme of love. Amidst all the tension and mysterious revelations of Descolda virus the romance between Libo and Novinha flourishes. "The pain and remorse of that day drew Libo and Novinha to rely on each other even more, as though darkness bound them closer than light" (*Speaker for the Dead* 26). They

want to marry each other but Novinha sacrifices her love to save the life of Libo. She knows the secret about Descolda virus, to prevent the files from Libo's access she refuses to marry him. Card depicts the love and emotional relationship between Libo and Novonha in the following lines of the text:

"Because I don't want you to die."

She saw comprehension come into his eyes. Yes, that's right, Libo, it's because I love you, because if you know the secret, then the piggies will kill you, too. I don't care about science, I don't care about the Hundred Worlds or relations between humanity and an alien race, I don't care about anything at all as long as you're alive.

The tears finally leapt from his eyes, tumbled down his cheeks. "I want to die," he said. [Original inverted commas] (*Speaker for the Dead* 40)

She marries an infertile man, Marcose, so that he can save the life of her lover. Even after marriage she had physical relations with Libo and he was the biological father of her six children. Libo's brutal death by Pequinohs breaks her from inside to transform her into an emotionless woman. Ender's interference and emotional attachment with her children disturbs her. She does not want a stranger to manifest love over her family and try to enter her life. It is the secret of files which forces her to show a fake unsympathetic character to all her loved ones. If she loves and feels for someone it means she has to give permission to access the secret files. She loves Ender but does not want closeness to save his life. In the end, when Ender solves all the mysteries and restores peace between Pequinohs and human communities of Lusitania, they both unite and admit love for each other.

The plot of the novel *Speaker of the Dead* revolves around the cultural conflict and the sin and redemption themes. Amidst the endeavors

of the protagonist to redeem himself and save the aliens from genocide, Card has successfully blended the feminist angle in the novel. Card depicts Novinha as a lonely woman struggling in the patriarchal community. Despite her sacrifices, she has to live as an oppressed female. Her efforts made for the family and the society never gets recognized and appreciated. Card portrayed a society that ignores good side of women and concentrates on manifesting their shortcomings. The condition of women is described in the novel as:

There isn't a human society I've heard of where bachelor groups like this are anything but outcasts, without power or prestige. No wonder they speak of the females with that odd mixtures of worship and contempt, one minute not daring to make a decision without their consent, the next minute telling us that the women are too stupid to understand anything, they are varelse. Until now I was taking these statements at face value, which led to a mental picture of the females as nonsentients, a herd of sows, down on all fours. (*Speaker for the Dead* 178)

Novinha has to pay price for her love for Libo and compassion for others. Marcos himself an infertile man never shows respect and love to his wife Novinha. He abuses her and even tries to harm her physically. She silently faces the trauma of domestic violence for the sake of her children. Even her children denounce her for adultery and treat her as a sinner. Card highlights the religious discrimination against the women as:

Libo's widow was not the only one who cried. Many hundreds of the eyes that watched her go were also filled with tears. To discover Novinha was an adulteress was shocking but delicious: the steel-hearted woman had a flaw that made her no better than anyone else. But there was no pleasure in finding the

same flaw in Libo. Everyone had loved him. His generosity, his kindness, his wisdom that they so admired, they didn't want to know that it was all a mask. (*Speaker for the Dead* 180)

The discrimination between male and female is obvious and stark. Libo and Novinha both were involved in a physical relationship but the Church punishes her only. Bishop provokes people to never forgive an adulteress. It is considered as their duty to punish a sinner woman. Despite facing hate, domestic violence and denounced by the church as sinner she never loses perseverance to safeguard the community. Card has depicted the female conditions in Piggy culture which are more deteriorated than the human society. Female Pequinohs live in a distant colony separated from the male residence. They do not have any identity. Their only purpose of life is to give birth to Pequinohs and die. They are nothing more than reproducing machines. When Ender goes to female community of Pequinohs he is awestruck to hear from 'Human' that "oh the little mother never have names" (263). They all are called as 'Wives', except that they do not have any existence in the Piggy culture. The leader 'wife' says "...his mother was very strong and courageous. She made herself fat in bearing her five children. 'Human' a Piggy himself mocks the sacrifice of 'wives' on hearing from leading wife that her mother was brave and strong to give birth to five children. Card mocks satirically that even the difference of race is unable to change the discriminatory attitude of male towards female. Pequinohs consider it is the duty of 'wives' to give birth to children. 'Human' in a mocking way, puts hand on the forehead of the 'wife' and says "Five children is a very good number. And she was fat enough to feed them all" (*Speaker for the Dead* 263). Only those become adult who are sterile and unable to pass their genes, the rest of them die giving birth to the infants. A 'wife' gives birth to thousand Pequinohs at a tender age and the moment they are born, they start eating the

mother. They all die during their pregnancy and in the efforts to give life to children who never return again to the 'wives' community. Ouanda herself a woman feels the pain of female Pequinhos "All the mothers, they're born, they mate, they give birth and die, all in their infancy. They never even know they were alive" (*Speaker for the Dead* 266). Card has successfully highlighted the feminist issues in the *Speaker for the Dead*. The females of both the communities are suffering. They have been deprived of their identity and the respect they deserve from the society. Their sacrifices are considered as their duties.

Card has portrayed Lusitania as a planet where Catholicism dominates the belief of the people. Religion is more important for the people of Lusitania than anything else. Religion is depicted as the main cause of social turmoil in Lusitania. The entry of a Non-Catholic to preach about a humanist movement shakes the dominance of Catholic Church. The agents of the Church endeavour to stop Ender from speaking in the community. Bishop tries his best to provoke people against the Speaker. The dominance of religion and people's submissiveness to serve the religion is depicted as:

"Rejecting it!" said the Bishop. "Do you think I'm a fool? I may detest the pseudo-religion of these blasphemous Speakers for the Dead, but if this is the only way God has opened for us to preserve the vital records of the Church, then I'd be a poor servant of the Lord if I let pride stop me from using it. Our files aren't prioritized yet, and it will take a few minutes, but I trust that the Children of the Mind will leave us enough time for our data transfers." [Original inverted commas] (*Speaker for the Dead* 89)

Along with the cultural conflict, Card has infused the religious angle to show the psychological turmoil in Lusitania. The Church

controls the life of people to the extent that they consider Ender as their enemy. Novinha criticizes the dominance of Church in a satirical way, she says "Who else in this benighted city was familiar enough with the Hive Queen and the Hegemon to want a Speaker, and independent enough of Bishop Peregrino to dare to call for one" (*Speaker for the Dead* 107)? She considers Lusitania as a city where enlightenment is overshadowed by the fear of Church. According to her none had ever read the books *The Hive Queen* and *Hegemon* defying the laws of Church. Novinha is an open minded lady, who does not believe in the dogmatic laws of Church. But she cancels her call for the Speaker under the fear of Bishop. Later on, Bishop charges her with the sin of adultery for her relations with Libo. Card has used references from various religious texts to create a conflict of religious ideologies. He criticizes religion as, "The computer will train you. It isn't like a religion-- you don't have to memorize any catechism" (*Speaker for the Dead* 34). Ender is considered a Protestant who has come to instigate people against Church. Bishop compels people to not believe in a religion other than Catholicism. He terrifies people by the name of God to preserve the dominance of Church. Through his logical preaching Ender enlightens the people about the ways of God. Card has portrayed a community with multiple ideologies to depict human submission and struggle to reach the God. He endeavors to expose the dogmatic religious practices in a satirical way.

CONCLUSION

The Speaker for the Dead is a radical hybridization of genres that opposes the traditional belief of uniformity in literature. The author has mixed genres, conventions which blur the line between high and low culture to challenge the established norms of realism. His novel is a mixture of Science, Religion, Detective, Mystery, Feminism etc. He combines all these different genres to produce a future oriented work. As a perfect example of pastiche

the *Speaker for the Dead* erases the boundaries between the high art and low art by mixing the different genres. The author correlates the elements from different genres in the novel to produce new meaning in new conditions. He has meticulously combined all the different genres to frame a complex narrative to effectively depict the multi-narratives operating in the society. He has utilized postmodern concept of Pastiche to incorporate the diverse genres for producing an innovative and unique work of literature. The novel not only demonstrates the proper use of the concepts and description of particular styles, but also combines different genres, old and new styles, and varied states of human emotions through the amalgamation to aptly depict the development of new formal features in the society with the emergence of new social life.

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