

**TYRANNY, FEUDALISM AND THE *THIRD REICH*: THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL
EMPLOTMENTS IN KEN FOLLETT'S *WINTER OF THE WORLD* AND
SIR WALTER SCOTT'S *IVANHOE***

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Abstract

Hayden White, in his controversial Metahistory, analyses the historical material handled by fiction writers and develops the concept of emplotment or the narrating of stories based on their form. He proves satire to be based on Contextualist and Liberalist theories. Likewise, romance is based on Formist and Anarchist theories. The paper evaluates Ken Follett's Winter of the World as a satirical emplotment where the agents are susceptible to the system which never changes. Ivanhoe by Sir Walter Scott may appear to be a celebration of chivalry but it is in fact a Formist writing where the events reveal the historical plot behind the fictional plot.

Keywords: *emplotment, metahistory, Contextualism, Liberalism, Formism*

Once considered unreliable sources of information and mere forms of entertainment, historical fiction was estimated to dwindle and disappear after the nineteenth century. Surprisingly, it has made a comeback in the twenty-first century and many award-winning authors have confidently used the much scorned form gracefully and renown has followed them. Dame Hilary Mantel (1952 -) is the pioneer of modern historical fiction. She has put down the Thomas Cranmer affairs in her trilogy with a vengeance. *Wolf Hall*, *Bring up the Bodies* and *The Mirror and the Light* - all published after 2010 - have made her the only woman writer to win two Bookers. Philippa Gregory (1954 -) is obsessed with the wives of Henry VIII. Her *The Constant Princess* (2005), *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2001) and *The Boleyn Inheritance* (2006) are all about Catherine of Aragon, Jane Seymour and Anne Boleyn. She has also presented historical men and women as legends. *The White Queen* (2009) is a pen portrait of Elizabeth Woodville, the mother of Edward V. *The White Princess* (2013) is another chronicle of Elizabeth of York.

Kenneth Martin Follett (5 June 1949 -) is a Welsh writer of historical fiction. He sees plots in historical facts from the murder of Thomas Becket to the *Third Reich* of Hitler. His historical fields are vast and his plots colossal. Bringing age old histories to the eyes of a modern twenty-first century reader, Follett makes them see what was not seen and understand that which was meant to be hidden. His *The Pillars of the Earth* (1989) and *World Without End* (2007) are narratives revolving around the sleepy town of Kingsbridge but they extend to the truth behind the murder of Thomas Becket and explain how Henry I lost his heir through foul play. The Century Trilogy is an immense set of narratives and sub-narratives on the First World War, the Second World War, the Third Reich, the Spanish Civil War and the Cold War. *Fall of Giants* (2010) and *Winter of the World* (2012) reveal the

secrets behind the failure of the League of Nations and the uprising of the once weakest forces called Nazis.

Sir Walter Scott, though well known as a writer of historical romances, is little known as an *Anarchist* and a *Formist*. The *Waverley* novels are all that exist of his archives of *Anarchists* and *Formists*, under the cloaks of romantics. This paper compares how a modern historical fiction writer uses modes of emplotments against that of a nineteenth century writer. Emplotments form the heart of Metahistory, a modern connotation of the historical consciousness. Emplotments suggest the meaning of a story through its form. They arrive at content through the structure. Hence, they are based on *Structuralism*, *Deconstruction* and a little bit of *Anthropology*. The sequences of events that are gradually revealed are also emplotments. Following Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Hayden White categorizes them as romance, comedy, satire and tragedy. These reveal the true nature, and thereby the truth about history, based on those facts hidden between the lines of sarcasm and the phrases of irony.

Ken Follett's *Winter of the World* is the story of the five families who survive the Second World War and the atrocities of Hitler. Carla Von Ulrich is a German girl who cannot become a doctor because Hitler would like women to stay at home and produce babies for the nation. Volodya Peshkov is a Russian spy who recruits Hitler's trusted follower to report every move of the Nazis to the Red Army. Billy Williams would like to stand for MP in London but he is denied his ambition because he is from the coal mining families in Wales. Daisy Peshkov, the American heiress wants to marry George Fitzherbert and become the Viscountess of Aberowen, Wales. Behind these characters lurks what White calls the historical fields of *Nazism*, *Conservatism*, *Liberalism* and war.

Satire is the emplotment of Follett in *Winter of the World*. The best among the emplotments, satire gives the opposite meaning of the plot. As Hayden White implies; "Stories cast in the Ironic mode, of which Satire is the fictional form, gain their effects precisely by frustrating normal expectations about kinds of resolutions provided by stories cast in other modes" (7). The characters are gloomy and realize that the world is a masque for them. The system to which they belong is not what it seems. It was made to enslave them, "painting its grey on grey" (White 10). The first part of the novel, which is ironically named 'The Other Cheek', is indeed an exposition where tyrants do not present their 'other cheek' to be slapped. Hitler is shown as the Chancellor of the Nazis, who are mere minorities in the Reichstag. He gains power through the support of the 'Stormtroopers', the young men who join the team for fashion's sake. Hitler is pointed out for having a love affair with Elizabeth Cerruti, the wife of the Italian Ambassador. His hatred for Jews is evident when his authorities beat up Dr. Isaac Rothman's son and cut off his fingers. The characters are all in a cesspool. Carla becomes a part of Volodya's spy unit and all her friends are sent to concentration camps with the Jews.

Each mode of emplotment has an argument and an ideological implication. In the case of satire, the argument is *Contextualist*. This is a functional conception of the meaning

or events in a field. The events are explained through context of their occurrence. The agents and events have a functional interrelationship which can be discovered through colligation, or the threads that link the individual or institution under study to its socio-cultural present. They proceed as Hayden White mentions:

The Contextualist proceeds by isolating some element of the historical field as the subject of study, whether the element be as large as the French Revolution or as small as one day in the life of a specific person. He then proceeds to pick out the threads that link the event to be explained to different areas of the context. The threads are traced backward in time to determine the origin and forward in time to determine the impact (18).

The events are set in motion beginning with Boycott Jew Day as soon as the Reichstag is burnt to the ground. Hitler rises into power and everyone in Europe joins the Fascists. Lloyd Williams who is against Hitler and his ideals, departs to fight in the Spanish Civil War against the Fascists. But he discovers that the Russian Communists are even worse. They kill their own men to show off their power. Carla, who is thrown into a concentration camp, jumps with joy on seeing the Russian Red Army soldiers breaking open the camp. She too discovers that the Communist soldiers are worse than the Nazis:

The man then grabbed an elderly woman, took her hand and pointed to her wedding ring. Hannelore said, "Are they going to rob us of what little the Nazis didn't steal?" They were. The tall soldier tried to pull off the woman's ring. When she realized what he wanted, she took it off herself and gave it to him...Those few who had any valuables that had not been stolen or traded for food handed them over. Liberation by the Red Army was not going to be the happy event many people were looking forward to. But there was worse to come (Winter of the World 717)

The Manhattan Project is successful and the scientists are horrified of their creation: "The scientists never used the word 'bomb'. They called it 'the Gadget'" (*Winter of the World 728*). Everyone talks of bringing the League of Nations into effect - and Germany was already in debt because of the expenses of the First World War - when the very nation that initiated the league drops an atom bomb on Hiroshima. All the events have their origin in a bankrupt and poverty-stricken Germany. This points back to the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm, who blamed the Jews and socialists as the reasons for the First World War. The impact can be determined by an even more poverty-stricken Germany, divided into East Germany and West Germany by wall.

The ideological implication of satire is that of *Liberal*. They require the society to not change completely but only in parts. These changes must be brought about by educated processes like elections. Liberals look for an improvement in the future and discourage means of attaining 'utopia' in the present. In the third part of the novel - named 'The Cold Peace' - Russia wants to compete with America in its nuclear arsenal. But Stalin does not rush it up. He wants to analyze the American technology and wait for the right moment. In the concentration camps, Jews, socialists, rebels and homosexuals are tortured by being

thrown as food to starved dogs but the others wait. Lloyd wants to oppose Winston Churchill but he does it through the refined process of standing up in the election.

White is of the opinion that the heroic has no function in a satire. No particular character is raised to the pedestal of a hero in an ironic historical fiction. Ken Follett brings in a number of characters from different parts of the country who are all part of Hitler's *Third Reich*, which ultimately swallows 'the Fuhrer'. The ironic style of Follett attacks religion, aristocracy and the upper-middle class. "Ironic styles have generally predominated during periods of wars against superstition, whether the superstitions in question be identified as naïve religious faith, the power of the monarchy, the privileges of aristocracy, or the self satisfaction of the bourgeoisie" (White 232). The system of tyranny, be it the *Third Reich*, *Russian Communism* or the Miners' association in Wales, is the same. Headed by a tyrant, the system never changes.

Romance is the opposite of Satire and here the hero transcends over the world. It is the age old conventions of good triumphing over evil, hatred and jealousy over love. But the tyrant who heads the system remains the same and evil prevails even after the hero has transcended. The Grail Legend that transcends King Arthur is a typical example. Arthur wins and after his death, his system of the Round Table collapses and his knights become greedy and wander away. *Ivanhoe* by Walter Scott is another example of the perfect Romance type of emplotment. Wilfred of Ivanhoe triumphs over not just the evil Brian de Bois-Guilbert but the entire system of Feudalism when he fights in the Tournament of Ashby and Templestowe. Heroic though he is, he cannot do anything to stop King John. Nor does the domination and oppression of the Templars and all the French nobles come to an end.

The formal argument of a Romance is *Formist*. White defines this as:

The Formist theory of truth aims at the identification of the unique characteristics of objects inhabiting the historical field. Accordingly, the Formist considers an explanation to be complete when a given set of objects has been properly identified, its class, generic, and specific attributes assigned, and labels attesting to its particularity attached to it. The objects alluded to may be either individualities or collectivities, particulars or universals, concrete entities or abstractions (13).

The *Formist* gives more importance to characters and particular events than the field. The plot structure of *Ivanhoe* rests heavily on the vivid characters and historical events like the Tournament at Ashby, the siege of Torquilstone and the lists of Templestowe. Scott uses the rise of King John and the French nobility as the main plot, stringing along the massive historical events. The ideological implication of a Romance proves that the main characters are diehard Anarchists who toil to abolish the present society and substitute it for a community with a sense of humanity. Wilfred fights hard along with Locksley and the Saxons to re-establish the reign of Richard I in England. They endeavour for cataclysmic changes, idealizing the natural part of innocence and picture the present as vile and corrupt, into which they themselves have fallen. Tainted by conventions of the period, Wilfred refuses to touch the Jewish Isaac and though he has feelings for Rebecca, *Shanlax International Journal of English*

he does not marry her. The nobility of the period corrupted chivalry to their facility. Chivalry itself was an emblem of favourism, despotism and a love for bloodshed. Ivanhoe loves battles and tournaments because he deems it as honour:

“The love of battle is the food upon which we live - the dust of the ‘melee’ is the breath of our nostrils! We live not - we wish not to live - longer than while we are victorious and renowned - such maiden, are the laws of chivalry to which we are sworn, and to which we offer all that we hold dear.” “Alas!” said the fair Jewess, “and what is it, valiant knight, save an offering of sacrifice to a demon of vain glory, and a passing through the fire to Moloch? - What remains to you as the prize of all the blood you have spilled?” (Ivanhoe 363).

Ivanhoe has fallen into the very system which he fights against. Chivalry, in all its appearance of glory and splendour, is the nobility’s control over their equals just like how Feudalism is their control over their inferiors. At the end of the novel, the innocent Rebecca is caught up in the cobweb of superstition and condemned to be burnt at the stake for witchcraft. Witchcraft was another system - one initiated by *Malleus Maleficarum*, a book published by the Catholic priests - to take control of women who threatened to break apart the hierarchy by getting themselves educated. Rebecca is a renowned physician whose skill is condemned as necromancy. Tyrants such as King John and Lucas, the Grand Master of the Templars are terrified of men like Isaac owning a lot of money and educated women like Rebecca, threatening to break apart the ideal womanhood of meekness and obedience. Hence they create systems that the transcendent heroes themselves accept involuntarily. Ivanhoe has to fight in the lists to save Rebecca from dying the death of a witch. Chivalry prevails even then. And condemning innocent women does not stop either. That is why, Isaac and Rebecca leave England for good.

Both Ken Follett and Sir Walter Scott have used emplotments to reveal the system that swallowed the field. Their works can be compared as in the following table:

Table 1: Modes of Emplotment, Argument and Ideological Implications in Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* and Ken Follett’s *Winter of the World*

Mode of Emplotment	Mode of Argument	Mode of Ideological Implication
1. <i>Ivanhoe</i> - Romantic. Though Ivanhoe is liberated from personal evil, he is still prey to the systems of Chivalry and Feudalism.	<i>Formist</i> - the plot is explained through objects and events. Wilfred and other minor characters participate in lists, sieges and battles. The plot is constructed through these historical events.	<i>Anarchist</i> - the characters try to abolish present society and replace it with what they believe to be a better one. Wilfred gets rid of Brian and saves Rebecca, yet he cannot destroy Chivalry nor the Templars.
2. <i>Winter of the World</i> - Satire. The major characters are the captives of the newly substituted system. Carla finds the Red Army even worse than the Nazis.	<i>Contextualist</i> - the ‘threads’ that link events to the individual or the institution. Volodya’s spy unit depends on the loyalty of his German officials to Hitler.	<i>Liberal</i> - only fine tuned and educated methods of transition are allowed. Even when the world is in chaos after the nuclear holocaust, elections do nothing to rid tyrants from the system.

Source: White, Hayden. “The Poetics of History.” *Metahistory*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014. Print.

Historical fiction misrepresents a subject. For instance, Scott assures the readers that Richard I would eventually claim his throne back. History records him being captured en route to England and handed over to Henry VI. He had to be ransomed back and immediately went to France and died there of a fatal wound. Scott portrays Richard I as better than Prince John of Anjou but history reveals that he had beheaded 2,700 Arabians in Palestine and the Crusades were an utter fiasco because of his disputes with Philip II of France and Leopold of Austria. Likewise, Follett ensures us that the death of Hitler is a new beginning. In fact, that was when the brainchild of Nazism is born in the form of the Stasi. White refers to this as the dehistoricization of events. The deliberate “misrepresentation of the subject is essential to diminish it” (qtd. in White 45). This is to ensure the system - whether it is Feudalism, the *Third Reich* or Nuclear Holocausts - continues to ensnare and diminish the presence of the giants. Historical fiction aims at revealing the system than demolishing it. Emplotments are tools of a historical fiction writer and these are used to excavate and exhibit that century after century, history is made in exactly the same way.

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