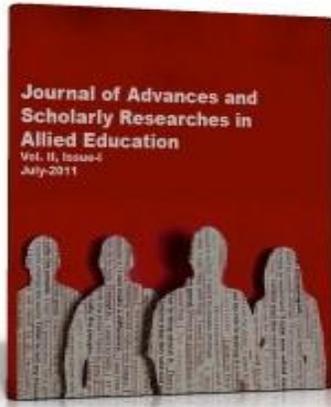


DECEITFULNESS AND AVIDITY IN EDUCATION-A STUDY OF SELECTED ACADEMIC NOVELS



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ABSTRACT

Tracing the conflicts, the desires, the Deceitfulness and hypocrisies inherent in the university set up, the thesis demonstrates that individuals within the academe are in no way different from those outside the academe. They try to put on a mask that everything is fine but the writers of academic novels are engaged in the task of tearing this mask and portraying the insider's real experience and perception. The thesis is divided into eight chapters and the introduction gives a brief critical survey of the American academic novel and of academic novels from various other regions of the world. It tries to show the differences in the attitude of various writers of academic novels. While certain novelists are engaged in depicting the plight of professors, some others are keen on showing the students' problems, yet others deal with the problems on the administrative side. But whatever may be the area of study, these writers are keen on assessing the flaws in the University. They cannot leave it, because it is the arena from which they can speak. Finally the thesis projects

the view that though the academicians have their defects yet we should allow room for the fact that they too are individuals and they too are liable to make mistakes. That is why writers like John Barth resort to black humor to point out the mistakes of those within the university. Indirectly he wants reform our universities and colleges and he has to a certain extent made individuals think about their role in forming our universities. He has kindled us to think, but the outcome is very difficult to assess.

The novels taken up for this

John Barth's----- Giles Goat Boy

Edward Fitzgerald's----- This Side of Paradise

Mary McCarthy's----- The Groves of Academe

Philip Roth's----- The Professor of Desire

Salinger's----- The Catcher in the Rye The Professor's House

Willa Cather's study are :

Basically all these novels are campus novels yet there is a marked difference in the style and the views of these novelists.

The chapter on This Side of Paradise analyses the intellectual versus sexual conflict in the mind of Amory Blaine, the protagonist, whose intellect is shaped by his puritanical mode of thinking; this predilection prevents him from swaying towards the sexual, yet the conflict persists. Amory finally tries to resolve this conflict and to know his "SELF." The knowledge gained by his experience enables him to be of use to the society at large.

The chapter dealing with The Catcher in the Rye is a thorough study of Holden Caulfield, the chief character in the novel, who is always in a state of flux and whose complex nature leads to different readings of the novel. Holden being a psychic personality, the novel has been studied keeping this aspect in mind.

Willa Gather's, The Professor's House was chosen for its vivid portrayal of the material versus spiritual conflict in the mind of Professor Godfrey Peter. Philip Roth's, The Professor of Desire highlights the physical urges and conflicts experienced by David Kepesh. He gives undue importance to passion and hence loses his reasoning capacities regarding what is V'or thy in life. Mary McCarthy's Groves of Academe is chosen for the novelistic stance it takes towards women and education. Further it is one novel which clearly depicts the interdepartmental clashes within the university. Giles Goat Boy is chosen entirely for its post-modernistic attitude towards academe and education. It aims to jeopardize all our prior notions of sex, intellect and spirit. It is a breakthrough of all academic novels because it denies labelling individuals and ridicules all our educational pursuits.

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic novel or campus novel is a term describing a particular genre of novels usually comic or satirical, which have a University setting and academics as principal characters. An early example of the campus novel in America was Nathaniel Hawthorne's Fanshawe published in 1828. From then on we have had a series of authors working on the academic novel.

In the early academic novels the authors had the protagonist reject the academy as "merely a world of ideas" (Lyons: 134). The undergraduate protagonist tends simply to be disillusioned with the academic experience. This was mainly due to the hypocrisies inherent in the college society. The established tradition of the academic novel portrayed the college men as a roisterer and the professor a pedant. Gradually there was a change in the depiction of the under-graduate. He began to reject his role as a rowdy but he knew very little to become a philosopher. Also there was an attempt made to portray the professor as the complete antithesis of a pedant.

In spite of the attempt at these changes, most academic novels followed the age-old pattern where a young instructor, full of grand ideals about teaching would have to fight the hoary traditions of the school. He is usually unsuccessful in his attempts and being disillusioned he leaves the profession. This is a most frequent ending of academic novels. For instance, this has been the ending for Irving Stone's Pageant of youth (1933), George Weller's Not to Eat, Not for Love (1933), Mary Jane Ward's The Professor's Umbrella (1948) and Martin Larson's Plaster Saint (1953).

There have been cases where the novelist depicts the professor leaving the profession. This happens when the professor feels that the institution is so un-intellectual and that there is little hope for education. This type of ending shows the author in a bad light for instead of propounding ways for improving the current educational setup; he would cause only disillusionment in the minds of his readers.

One such example is Grey Towers (1923)—by Zoe Flannagan in which a young woman returns with great plans in her mind to improve her Alma Mater. But she finds that the University has prioritized business motives to its own integrity. When she tries to bring about a change to this set up, she is dismissed.

Robert Herrick's Chimes (1926) is another novel, which depicts the flaws in the administrative rules, laid down by the University officials. The University aims to raise the moral and economic standards of the nation by giving everyone Higher Education. But this only adds to the trouble of the lecturers who are overburdened. Clavercin expresses his disgust thus:

The very sight of a dissertation or thesis gave Clavercin an attack of "mental nausea" for he felt that for one useful, illuminating piece of research sponsored by the University.. there must be at least a hundred utterly arid products, whose sole utility was to train some second — rate mind, fit

only for elementary teaching - how to use a card - catalogue and other apparatus of scholarship (Lyons: 137).

What the writer stresses here is that Higher Education forced on the student cannot bring any good results. The University had only frustrated the teachers by making them lose interest in their respective areas of research.

By the end of this experiment, Clavercin is exhausted and he feels that the American Universities that gave so much attention to the teaching and investigating of "literature" were "the most unliterary places in the world, most purely barbarous in spirit" (Lyons: 138).

Another issue focussed in this novel is Clavercin's view that the University can even be run by a "despotic President"⁷⁷ rather than by its "smaller benefactors." He feels that if the University is run by the *dGriors* then it can only be bullied by the opinions of the middle class, the conservative, well- to-do citizen! (Lyons: 1 38).

In this novel, Herrick seems to object to the views held by Dorothy Canfield Fisher in The Bent Twig (1 922). Fisher had depicted her view that the University could be run more efficiently by *donors* from the same University community than by elite Presidents. Herrick seems to be biased in his views.

In Wanda FraikenNefPs Lone Voyagers (1929), a young man Keith Lamberton, an eighteenth century scholar, who has come from Harvard to Chippewa English Department is disillusioned at the Chippewa University. His wife tells the story. The main focus of the novel is on the difference in the attitudes towards teaching. While the Lambertons consider the study of literature as a discipline, which is dependent on the history of ideas, the others mainly view teaching as a performance in front of the students.

Also we find that the novelist delves deep into the University community and categorizes people according to what they speak. Neff is of the view that one type can discuss only current events and the latest theatre shows. While the majority is interested in talks concerning students and faculty politics, only a few are really interested in their subjects. Only the latter are concerned about the growth of the University. Lamberton hopes to change the attitude of many students by talking to them. But the novel has a major drawback. Since Lamberton acts on the instructions of his wife, there is not much of force in his statements.

What Lyons feels is that writers such as Herrick and Wanda Neff have not focussed on a single character, because of which the ideas projected are lost without creating the intended effect. There are also novelists who have projected the teaching position as being a hindrance to the budding artist. Thomas Wolfe's Of Time and the River depicts Eugene ~ a teacher, who considers his teaching position as a burden, yet must continue to do so for his survival. Each class is a terror for Eugene. The thought of the class he had to meet the next day "fed at his heart and bowels" and as "the hour for a class drew nigh he would begin to shake and tremble as if he had an ague" (Lyons: 141).

Not only did he detest the students but also his colleagues who are shown to be mean hacks. He describes them thus:

They wasted and grew sick with hate and poison because another man received promotion, because another man had got his poem printed, because another man had eaten food and swallowed drink and lain with women. And they smiled and sneered at one another.. .they never struck a blow but they spoke lying words of barbed ambiguity, they breathed the weary hatred-laden air about them into their poisoned lungs (Lyons: 142).

Wolfe's portrayal of the students too is very harsh. For instance, he shows the females as gossiping ones who flaunt their flesh before others. Eugene's main interest is in Abe Jones, a Jew who does his best in class. He feels that his classes would only benefit him and not others because they don't seem to be interested as they are caught in the "garbled chaos of their lives, the glare and the fury of the streets" (Lyons: 144).

Thus, Wolf's projection of University life is pessimistic in as much as he believes that the city itself is inherently evil and can bring no good to literature or life.

Watkins' Geese in the Forum (1940) dealing with the University named Beauregard attempts to bring out many of the evil aspects of educational progressivism widely prevalent in Northern institutions. It portrays the life of John Burgess who refuses to accept favors from the trustees of the University. His wife is frustrated because of this and she later elopes with a novelist. But Burgess is determined not to leave the place and he continues in his attempts to improve the University.

This novel is different from other novels of this period, which had depicted the hero as running away from difficult situations. The novel is fairly successful in projecting the flaws in the university set up. The faculty wives are shown as incorrigible *gossips*; the president is portrayed as swindling a quarter of a million dollars for his own use. There are special characters like Dr. Worthington who have been introduced to highlight the age-old belief in those days that one had the right to be educated, if one's father had been so. By this, we are made to meditate on the present educational set-up and introduced to people like Dr. Worthington who will not accept any change. For instance, he says: Democracy! Democracy in education! Ideas are too precious for the mob. The mob is turning our college into something cheap; we're not changing them. In my time you went to college because your father did; now you go because your father didn't. I still believe

the function of the college is to lead the mob in the right direction. We'd better see to it that we run our school for the cream of the Southland, not the clabber of New Jersey (Lyons: 80).

One defect, which Lyons sees in such novels which ridicule the University rules and practices is that, they do not suggest another alternative that could be followed. There have even been cases where the practices abhorred in Geese in the Forum have been defended. For instance, in Robert Gessner's Youth is the time (1945), the instructor Christopher Nash, makes all attempts to improve the University but it is of no use. When he tries to discipline them, a girl student is all complaints and she says:

If our English is imperfect, kindly consult not our teachers but our neighbors. If our manner is brusque, do not blame Emily Post. The lady has never sought our acquaintance.. Our hopes, aspirations, dreams - whatever they are, are of little consequence.. we are the raw material of the conveyer belt, a four year run through the factory, a diploma slapped into our outstretched hands, and we're out in the cold, just where we were when we started (Lyons: 148).

All through the novel we find that students want to relate themselves more to their immediate surroundings than to the past ages.

Gessner seems to pour out his views through the mouth of his protagonist Christopher Nash. Nash actually suggests in a staff meeting that the students themselves decide what subjects they want to learn. This infuriates the other members of the faculty. What Gessner wants to point out is the narrow medievalistic tendencies of these people. We are forced to think when Eugenia protests: "We need some sort of mental discipline, why is okay to a point. But why the horse and buggy when we live in an airplane age? That's what gets me" (Lyons: 149).

The novelist's aim is to create an awareness among the students that it is upto them to come up with suggestions for improving our current educational set-up. He stresses that we need more and more "Eugenia's" whom can put forth their views strongly and will be able to bear the wrath of others who oppose it.

In this novel Nash has to face the anger of the "arch medievalist" and his hatred shocked them and embarrassed them. Nash is fired and the novel ends with the "medievalists" remaining powerful. The novel projects only one-sided views and not the whole picture as such.

2.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the present study are:-

- To trace the conflicts, the desires, the avidity and deceitfulness inherent in the university set up.
- To Critically survey the American academic novels.
- To analyze the differences in the attitude of various writers of academic novels.

3.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For quotations from primary texts, the following editions were used: Barth, John. Giles Goat Boy. Rev. ed. New York: Double Day and Company. 1987.Fitzgerald, Scott. F. This Side of Paradise. Reset U.S.A: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960.Mary McCarthy. The Groves of Academe. Harcourt: Brace & World, Inc. 1952.Philip Roth. The Professor of Desire. Reprint, New York: Bantam. 1978.Salinger, J. D. The Catcher In The Rye. Reprint, New York: Random House Publications, 1951. Willa Cather. The Professor's House. Reprint U.S.A: Alfred A. Knoff, Inc. 1969.References

to pages from primary tests are given parenthetically with the following abbreviations followed by their page numbers.

- G. G. B-----~ Giles Goat Boy.
- T. S. O. P-----~ This Side of Paradise.
- G. O. A-----~ The Groves of Academe.
- P.O.D.----- “Professor of desire”
- C.I.R.----- “The Catcher in the Rye”
- T.P.H..-----“ The Professor’s House”

4.CONCLUSION

It has taken a long time for all academic novelists to accept this fact. Traditional novelists were very keen on maintaining a mask that all is fine within the academy. But gradually writers such as John Barth wanted to tear this mask and portray the insider's real experience and perception. The traditional novelists did not want to accept the fact that individuals within the academe are liable to make mistakes. They wanted to place academicians on a high- pedestal and treat them as demi-gods. While the modern novelists were aware of these flaws, they tried to give excuses for their behavior. But it is only the post-modern novelists like John Barth who are prepared to accept academicians along with their flaws. He is of the notion that to classify individuals based on their intellectual ability or sexual misdeeds is atrocious. What Barth wanted was to deny classification entirely because he felt that today's world is always shifting and so are individuals and that we

cannot afford to place individuals into watertight compartments. Hence he wants each reader to have their own conclusions regarding the novel Giles Goat Bov.

Barth's aim is to completely jeopardize all our notions of the university. He gives a new definition saying that the university can no longer be viewed as a place of "knowledge" but as one that harbors ignorance and acts as a harbinger of myths related to education. Also he drives home the point that the university perpetuates social stratification and moral insensitivity. All these aspects have been analyzed in Giles Goat Bov.

Further Writers like Fitzgerald who were of a puritanical background considered sexual issues to be taboo and did not discuss them at length in their novels. This attitude can be found in This Side of Paradise. That is why we find the conflict between the intellectual and the sexual persisting in the mind of the hero. Finally because of the hero's puritanical mode of thinking he begins to know of his SELF.

The Catcher In The Rye by Salinger is another step in the advancement of the academic novel because the protagonist is a student, that too, a psychic personality and his views are given importance. One who is in the margins, a student with low grades, is given a voice and his ambivalent feelings towards sex, money, love and his teachers are vividly brought out.

There are academic novelists like Mary McCarthy, Salinger, Willa Cather and Philip Roth who all have dealt with one particular aspect of the university. For instance, Mary McCarthy's The Groves Of Academe deals with the politics of power confronting the various members in a department.

Her novels can be called "Novels of Ideas" because she portrays individuals who want to believe in flattering abstractions than in reality, which limits our thinking. Hoar and Mulcahy are keen on sticking to their ideas and this brings about their downfall. She has also drawn our attention to the fact that there are lecturers who exploit students for their own benefit. She says that this is because of the complacent nature of the students who are satisfied in whatever position they are. They are not ready for any positive change. This is what irks McCarthy. When she was a student she was for change because she was dissatisfied with the then university set-up. Hence she is of the view that students are the ones who can really bring about any change.

Willa Cather's The Professor's House shows the material versus spiritual conflict in the mind of Professor Godfrey Peter. His intellectual pursuits only help him in gaining material aspects, while Tom Outland's spiritual pursuits help him realize his ideal, giving him unalloyed happiness. The spiritual and cultural aspects of life are highlighted rather than mere material gains.

Roth's The Professor of Desire stresses the conflict between the moral responsibility a professor has and the sexual desires, which come in its way. David Kepesh fights a recurring battle between passion and reason but ultimately gives in and thereby passion clouds his reason. Thus all through our study of the American academic novel we are exposed to a variety of characters. Some protagonists desire intellectual gains, others material gains and there are yet others who want to indulge in sexual gains. The various conflicts that assault individuals within the academe along with their ambitions and hypocrisies have been highlighted in this study. Some overcome their conflicts while others succumb to them. But the novel, which is a major break-through, is Giles

Goat Boy, because here we find that Barth wants to explode all our myths relating to intellectuality, spirituality and sexuality. He is against giving a single identity to any person, as every person is at the same time himself and his opposite. He is also aware that physical needs are as important as intellectual ones. So he denies classifying individuals within the academe or elsewhere for he is of the notion that today's world is always shifting and we cannot afford to have fixed notions of any particular subject or person. His approach is an all-inclusive approach, which incorporates the views of all individuals and certifies all the views to be equally true. He wants the readers to have their own conclusions regarding his novels. And what he has done is to make people think about their role in shaping our universities and thereby the world at large.

Hence the American academic novel has come a long way. It has opened new avenues for further research. For instance, a methodical study could be made by selecting all academic novels based on chronology and dealing with academic novels published over a particular period of time.

Along with the chronological study of academic novels published over a period of time, researchers could also group their novels particularly showing the distinction based on the types of protagonists. Also an in-depth study could be made, taking into account any one aspect of university life. Further we could generate more comparative studies in the area of the academic novel. For instance the academic novel published in America could be compared with those published in England, Canada, Africa, India and various other countries. The differences in the attitude of the writers along with the differences in the portrayal of universities and its academicians could be a very challenging one.

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