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Ain Shams University
Faculty of Education
English Department

“History and Fiction in the Novels of Robert Graves”

A Thesis

Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of
M.A in Teacher Preparation (English Literature)

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“History and Fiction in the Novels of Robert Graves”

submitted by : Amany Mohamed Fouad

Abstract

The thesis discusses the relationship between history and fiction in the novels of Robert Graves with the aim of locating his novels

in time. This is done by the analysis and interpretation of his autobiographical and critical writings to arrive at a concept of history that can be used in the analysis of the historical novels in question.

The thesis is divided into four chapters and a conclusion.

Chapter 1: “History and fiction”

This chapter deals with the theoretical definitions and relations.

- Definitions of history.
- The rise of Historicism.
- Historicism and the historical novel.
- Graves’ historical novels in question.

Chapter 2: “History and the Reconstruction of the Past”

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of history and the reconstruction of the past in **I Claudius** (1939) and **Claudius the God** and **his wife Messalina** (1943) which are not merely in the modern sense novels but they are also precise careful reconstruction

from all the available sources from the Rome of Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius himself; to this end Graves made use of all his interests in the history of archeology of the ancient classical world especially in the military and political matters, and in the psychology of violence and crime.

Chapter 3: History and Society in Wife to Mr Milton

This chapter is devoted to the study of Graves' wife to Mr Milton (1944) which is enriched with pictures of social life of England in the seventeen forties.

The national British History is treated as a blend of the historical and social circumstances in Britain in the seventeen forties which was the age of increasing religious cranks and creeds of historical controversies besides the considerable campaigning interest.

Chapter 4 History and Religion in King Jesus (1946)

This chapter analyses king Jesus as a religious reinterpretation of the biblical history.

In King Jesus Graves sets out a hypothesis which turns all Jewish and Christian traditions completely upside down as the Jesus of Graves' book is not the sacrificed savior but the last heir to the throne of Judah.

In conclusion the thesis relates the findings of the study of the novels in question.

Key words:

- 1- Historicism.
- 2- Historical novel.
- 3- Comparative literature.

Introduction

Introduction

Over a period of some twelve years, Robert Graves wrote four novels which came later to be viewed as a sequence entitled historical novel. The first novel I, Claudius was published in May 1934 and achieved such an unexpected success that it was published in thirteen editions and translated into seventeen languages.

Before the end of the same year 1934, Graves wrote Claudius the God and His Wife Messalina, which goes side by side with I, Claudius to complete a very important aspect of the Roman history in the peak of its uprising. Then, in 1943 Graves treated the national British history in Wife to Mr Milton which reflects the blend of the historical social circumstances in Britain about the seventeenth century and to what extent these circumstances affected everyday life as well as social life. In 1943, Graves wrote a religious reinterpretation of the biblical history in King Jesus.

This thesis falls in the category of comparative literary studies as the concern of the comparative studies is not only to clarify and distinguish the relations amongst different types of literature, but also to shed light on the relation amongst literature and all the other branches of science. This thesis aims to highlight the relations amongst Historicism, historical novel and literature.

The theme I am taking up for my study in Graves' historical novels is the historical theme as Graves is considered to be one of a

very few writers for whom history and the historical events were wide spread and domineering themes. Graves has always been interested in those moments in space and time when history has taken a new important turn or when history has something totally different to be achieved. (Cohen 83)

Graves has an ability of being able to return back with his thoughts to the past and manage to imagine what was happening and what was about to happen. Besides, he has a very good memory for anything he wants to remember at whatever time he wants to remember it; that is why Graves' historical novels are of special literary value and of historically distinguished hall mark; besides, they are worth reading in any time and for any culture.

Graves is one of those very few writers who has centered his life and his self experiences on writing texts that are worth reading. One of the most worth reading texts is the historical novel simply because history and its effect are some elements that can never be demolished or erased willingly or unwillingly. The center of Graves' interest as a writer of history and historical fiction is the ancient world with all its struggles, combats, clashes, and turmoils.

The writing of historical novels proved Graves to be one of the most, if not the best, conscientious and painstaking prose writers. Graves' historical novels have a rare kind of literary contrast as he never lets a word pass out unless he is completely satisfied and wholly proud that it expresses what he intends no more and no less.

The thesis also aims to highlight Historicism as a concept which was introduced for the first time by Paul Hamilton in his book Historicism (1997). "Historicism is a critical movement insisting on the prime importance of historical context to the interpretation of texts of all kinds". (Hamilton 23)

Therefore, the aim of Historicism is hermeneutical, just to make works of different periods and of various attitudes much more accessible to the modern reader by reflecting the historical background. It tends to create a new understanding and update judgment of the work concerned. Through the interpretation of the texts, historicism managed to portray the past and make it more readable for both the modern reader and generations that are to follow every now and then. "Historicism combats empty Formalism by pulling historical consideration to center stage of literary analysis". (Hamilton 23)

Historicism tends to evolve and create a method of describing knowledge and culture in the actions, manners, interests and attitudes of the heroes of the historical writings. Hence, historicism is suspicious of its own partisanship. On the other hand, it is equally quiet suspicious of its own interpretation of the stories the past tells about itself. In another sense, historicism offers both its past and its present for precise ideological investigation. (Veerse 18)

Therefore, this thesis examines Graves' historical novel as a type of writing that helped him to present his view of historicism as

a whole world and his own concept of history as a narrator of good works. The thesis also highlights the concept of historicism from a literary perspective concerning Graves' historical novels.

Due interest is given to Graves' autobiography, Good Bye to All That and his recent interview (in the end of his life time) Conversation with Robert Graves, published in January 1990, four months after his death.