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**An Integration of Space and Time: An Exploration of Postmodern Narrative Element of Pastiche in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer***

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**Abstract:** Postmodern Narratives develop with the teleology of incredulity towards meta narrative, this tendency is exhibited by the character, the narrative and the technique used within the scope of a novel. The authors who fall under the purview of postmodernist writing amalgamate character, narrative and technique to accommodate to the postmodern sensibilities of the age. Since any creation cannot exist in isolation, postmodern sensibility and the postmodern creation or text also go hand in hand. This research paper tries to identify how the author Walker Percy has converged the age of creation of his work with that of the work itself through his work *The Moviegoer*.

**Keywords:** Pastiche, Postmodernism, Walker Percy, Existentialist Angst, Narrative Techniques.

**Introduction:** The America that Walker Percy portrays is an America that the contemporary readers are not used to, it is an America of deep rooted discrimination. As a theory of fragmentation postmodernism amplifies the actuality of division and portrays the racial discrimination in all its colours. Hence the text *The Moviegoer* is an eye opener in numerous ways. The novel itself is about a middle aged man, who is undergoing severe existential crisis. The protagonist is inspired from the life of the author in numerous ways. For the author despite being a medico never had an opportunity to take a fully fledged practice, this was because of his ailment. He was affected by tuberculosis in a time, where there no medication or cure for tuberculosis except isolation. The author chose to isolate himself far from his family and friends in a farm house, this time of hurdle put him through mental depression, and made him question several epistemological truths including religion, God and Arts. This novel being first of his creation inspired by his thought process written two years from his ailment, amalgamates all of his concepts that would reoccur in his later works as well. The protagonist Jack Bolling is a well settled man, who is entering his thirties. His idea of

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relationship is taking women around for a walk, since he loathes driving and finally going to movie with him.

**Elements of Pastiche:** The novel is set up in 1960's which is six decades into the invention of Cinema by Lumiere Brothers. Till date the motion pictures are considered one of the most magical forms of expression that ties the audiences together irrespective of class, religion and caste. Movie is seen as a pleasure point of masses. Hence even the people with lesser inclination towards art and literature develop a sense of deeper grasp and connection with movies. When Lumiere Brothers projected the first movie, *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory* in the year 1896 or the most famous movie *The arrival of Train at La Coitrat Station* in the year 1895, these movies have evoked severe reactions of agony, fear and exhilaration in the mind of audience. Six decades from the time of its invention, for many including Jack Bolling, the sense of fascination that a big screen provides has not vanished. As a matter of fact, numerous times, Jack Bolling faces the world amplified through his experience of watching a movie, and perceives cinema itself through life. Hence the readers experience a seamless interconnectedness between the worlds of cinema and Jack Bolling's life in the novel. The author Walker Percy also creates a character who is vast read, and continues reading and quotes from various texts. This provides an ample scope for intertextual references and postmodern allusions within the purview of the novel and its theoretical excogitation as well. The researcher would focus on the same in this chapter.

The decade 1960's is vital in contemporary times for movie buffs and critics alike, as it was this decade which gave rise to Hollywood as it is known today. It was during this time, twenty years down the wars, though the systems have not corrected itself out, there was severe social reformation and these became fodder as a subjects and provided a wider scope in terms of experimentation for the directors of the film. For example, 1960's experienced a raise of shocking movies that dwell on scientific experimentation and notions including zombies, and medical horrors. These movies were reminiscent of the horrors of Nazi Germany and other dread inducing narratives that people have encountered during the times of world war. The creators seamlessly connected this influence of scientific explorations and real life experiences in their narratives.

1960's also was the time, when technology was explored through gadgets, invention and other objects of curiosity inducing stuff like fast cars and guns. Hence the decade itself saw a rise of Western and James Bond movies, both in different ends of the spectrum. A similar influence can be felt in other genre of film making including horror, science fiction and oriental narrative. It was the time when a movie like *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) was made and received positive reviews today which has become a cult movie. Similarly one of the most prominent James Bond movies including *Gold Finger* (1964). This connection with film and America is projected in *The Moviegoer* as well.

Jack Bolling is created a little further in his conception of reaction from the protagonist's in the angry young man movement, in here he is seeking for not materialistic

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gains and his dissatisfaction arises out of his need to find the true essence of spirituality. But he does not know where or how to seek spirituality, he assumes the way to do is to travel. There are numerous indirect reference to several novels written during twentieth century when it comes to the connection between travel and finding the meaning as well. Some of the connections include *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac which has been published five years before *The Moviegoer*. Similarly, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* which was published ten years from the publication of *The Moviegoer* also has similar undertones. These elements of universality created by Walker Percy makes Jack Bolling a character that is etched in American roots. The preoccupation of Jack Bolling also, is American in nature, including his depression because of war, his representation of class division and his racial connotations among others. The plot of the novel itself is extremely simpler, set around the time of Mardi Gras, one fine day a middle aged man realises that he needs to understand spirituality, through his travel, his meeting of new people and in his own understanding he ends up understanding spirituality, right in the American soil he was born into. The researcher finds it interesting to explore *The Moviegoer* for postmodern elements as it is not a novel of postmodern sensibility in its outward style or stylistic alone but the concept of postmodernism is integral to the core of the novel, as the novel captures the spirit of America and the time period of America.

This includes art as showcased in movies; literature as represented by books; sensibility as projected in the views of Bolling's spirituality; political culture with the happenings of 1960's and cartography with American landscapes. But the exploration continues to the social life of the people as well, this is showcased in the representation of women and their role in American society. There is no change in the mindset of people, it still is patriarchal in nature, but it is also the time close to Radical feminism in its ideology. Hence women created by Walker Percy are the ones who have sexual freedom, employment and most importantly they look for empowerment in every aspect of life. But they lack the agency, as the men around them find it difficult to fathom their new normality.

While narrating about his philosophy towards movies, Jack Bolling mentions that he is happiest in a movie, even if it is a bad movie. Be it Binx or other young characters in the novel *The Moviegoer*, their existence becomes the essence of their life. They are not fazed or glamoured by the world of fiction that is weaved around them. They definitely are star struck, but that does not cease them from the need to ratify themselves and their own existence before authenticating the presence or existence of someone. Walker Percy, portrays this complex mindset of the youngsters like Jack Bolling in a sequence of incidents weaved around William Franklin Holden.

Jack Bolling on an eventful day takes a particular road to reach his aunt's house. He chooses the road, because he had read in the newspaper that William Holden will be shooting on the streets. Jack being a fan of the actor wants to catch a glimpse of this 1950's star. That's it. He does not plan to go and talk to him, or even make him sign an autograph, his idea of meeting a favourite movie star is to get a glimpse of him from a corner. It so happens that

Jack Bolling takes a turn in a lane, and few steps before him is William Holden. He is exhilarated by his presence, but does not showcase it in action. Walter Percy uses an exclamation point, "Today I am in luck. Who should come out of Pirate's Alley half a block ahead of me but William Holden!" (*The Moviegoer* 16) and ends that passage.

Jack Bolling who is walking behind him gets to observe the actor and the reaction of people around him. His presence creating no great impact or going unnoticed makes Bolling elated. This he explains by William Holden's interaction with a young couple who are walking between Holden and Bolling. The young woman notices Holden first and nudges her partner, who finds this piece of information questioning his existence. The young man goes into self-wallowing and starts to compare his life to that of Holden's. Holden who is searching for a match stick is helped by the young man, who lights up his cigarette. Even this act of favour, according to Bolling is done, showcasing no recognition of Holden by young man.

This deliberate act of not noticing the movie star, or not recognising the movie star provides the young man a power according to Jack Bolling. This narration of Jack Bolling, gives the readers his own perception of life and most importantly his existence. His rooting for another young man not be shadowed and to gain his own presence showcases his necessity for a corporeal existence of his own. The young man now, having gained confidence projects it on his partner by holding her tight. The essence of existence of a man becomes the predominant preoccupation of Jack Bolling and people of his age group that the movies that Jack Bolling mentions as well showcases the same.

The boy has done it! He has won title to his own existence, as plenary an existence now as Holden's, by refusing to be stampeded like the ladies from Hattiesburg. He is a citizen like Holden; two men of the world they are. All at once the world is open to him. Nobody threatens from patio and alley. His girl is open to him too. He puts his arm around her neck, noddles her head. She feels the difference too. She had not known what was wrong nor how it was righted but she knows now that all is well. (*The Moviegoer* 17)

For example, in the movie *Stagecoach*, Jack Bolling has a favourite scene that remembers often, it is the climax scene of the movie. It is a story of young man named Ringo, who has escaped from the prison to avenge his father and brother's murderer. On realising they have been shot by Luke Plummer he escapes the prison and goes in search for Plummer to kill him. Ringo is followed by Curley the guard who has to catch him and handover to the prison. The story is of adventure, survival and yet provides the meaning of existence. For Ringo the primary objective of avenging the death becomes secondary when he meets Dallas a prostitute whom he falls in love with, without knowing her background. Ringo also appears to be a kind hearted man, as he safeguards Curley and others from the stagecoach. In the end of the movie, after having avenged the murderer and his brothers who had come to shoot him; Ringo finally surrenders to Curley. But Curley lets him go away with Ringo by staging an artificial stampede.

This movie is an essence of escapism that Jack Bolling is yearning for. This hold to existence is because of the world war. The collective trauma that the people in the 1950's and 1960's have undergone having been a part of two world wars, having lost the members of their family, having had their body parts amputated and leading with the wounds for rest of their life time. These are captured not only through the movies that Bolling admires but also the books that he mentions. In a scene, when Jack Bolling is looking at his father's photo on the altar of his aunt's house. He could cease but feel remorseful about the time that he has not spent with his father. It is a picture of three men, one Dr Wills, Judge Anse and father of Jack Bolling. Their connection is that of first war, for they have all been soldiers and the photo itself is taken a year after the war, when they had decided to do a tour. There is another picture of Alex Bolling, which Jack Bolling compares to that of a face of First World War soldiers.

Only Alex Bolling is missing—he is in the third frame: an astonishingly handsome young man with the Rupert Brooke- Galahad sort of face you see so often in pictures of World War I soldiers. His death in the Argonne (five years before) was held to be fitting since the original Alex Bolling was killed with Roberdaux Wheat in the Hood breakthrough at Gaines Mill in 1862. (*The Moviegoer* 22)

In his discussion about his father, Jack Bolling mentions a poetry collection by Alfred Edward Housman titled *A Shropshire Lad*. The general theme of this anthology which consists about sixty poems is adolescence. It captures the brave life of soldiers who died while serving the monarch of England in the year 1887. The poetry collection though was not popular in the first years of its publication gained prominence during world war and is considered one of the finest war poems, with Kingsley Amis and Rupert Brooke influenced by the anthology. *A Shropshire Lad* is also about young man who are in war, who would probably lose their lives for the sake of country, and only thing that they will remember and feel nostalgic about is their adolescence life. The life in which they were carefree and only thing that mattered was living itself.

Come you home a hero,  
Or come not home at all  
The lads you leave will mind you  
Till Ludlow tower shall fall. (*A Shropshire Lad*)

Apart from direct references to literature, Walker Percy as well uses literary allusions of the writers of modern and postmodern era. He also makes mention of writers who capture the sensibility of existential crises. The characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern created by Shakespeare in his tragic play *Hamlet* has become epitome of existentialism. They are one of the archetypes like Sisyphus, Gregor Samsa and Meursault. The modern writers also were inspired by myths and classical plays that they drew characters from the existing plays and created their own narrative. While Tom Stoppard play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* provides the perspective of the two friends of Hamlet who die for no great reason

as a residue in the fight between Hamlet and his own uncle who has married his mother. Walter Percy plays homage to the characters who epitomize the sensibility of twentieth century by comparing them with the youths Jack Bolling and Wade.

My aunt turns into herself another degree and becomes Lorenzo himself. “Now here’s a distinguished pair for you,” she tells Kate and watches her carefully; she is not paying any attention to us. “The barbarians at the inner gate and who defends the West? Don John of Austria? No, Mr Bolling the stockbroker and Mr Wade the lawyer. Mr Bolling and Mr Wade, defenders of the faith, seats of wisdom, mirrors of justice. God, I wouldn’t mind if they showed a little spirit in their debauchery, but look at them. Rosenkranz and Guildenstern.” (*The Moviegoer* 29)

The author draws a similitude in the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to that of all the professionals who are caught in a rut of a life, with nothing to do other than their job, with no passion to pursue, with no art to induce them and with no partner to provide meaning for their existence. In a general sense Bolling and Wade are highly achieved individuals for they are stockbroker and lawyer respectively. Yet, in life they have succeeded in nothing according to them, they feel a great vacuum after being born in a generation where every ancestor of them is a brave hero, who have saved the country.

But they have nothing to do, nothing to prove and no courage left over in their bones to go and fight another country. This pushes them to a severe inferiority complex and a state of self wallow and pity. The author showcases their monotony by the books they read as well. They do not show off their reading material proudly because their reading materials are gender based. This is seen in the readings of Kate, Sharon and Linda for the women read romance novels or love stories. While the men read adventure and travel stories. This gender divided world is ridiculed by the author, in portraying them to be reading materials without the knowledge of the opposite gender. “Today I read *Arabia Deserta* enclosed in a Standard & Poor binder. She conceals *Peyton Place*; I conceal *Arabia Deserta*.” (*The Moviegoer* 54)

Jack Bolling goes ahead and explains with the direct annotations from the book *Arabia Deserta* as to why he conceals and reads this book. He also states that the adventure book does not provide him any answer to the questions that he has. And he explains the necessity to read serious books over genre based fiction. He mentions several books in vast topics covering theology, scientific reasoning, philosophy and epistemology among others. In his life the movie like *It happened One night* and *Arabia Deserta* are categorised as adventure stories or non-serious literature, while the search for spirituality and books on heavy scientific deliberations are serious literature and Bolling feels in understanding the serious literature can one focus more on the essence of life itself.

Until recent years, I read only “fundamental” books, that is, key books on key subjects, such as *War and Peace*, the novel of novels; *A Study of History*, the solution of the problem of time; Schroedinger’s *What is Life?*, Einstein’s *The Universe as I See It*, and

such. During those years I stood outside the universe and sought to understand it. I lived in my room as an anyone living Anywhere and read fundamental books and only for diversion took walks around the neighborhood and saw an occasional movie. (*The Moviegoer* 54)

**Conclusion:** Pastiche found its origin in music, arts, architecture and then in literature. As Hippolyte Taine puts it, Pastiche was the event that captured the moment, the milieu and the age. Its etymological root is in Italian, similar to that of the word 'paste'. Interestingly the word pasta also finds its origin in pastiche and all of these mean an assembly of versatile units yolked together. A bringing together or assemblage of disparate elements, of multitudes of ideas and thoughts can mean pastiche. The author Walker Percy tries to capture the mind of Jack Bolling and the likes of his generation through the way they perceive literature and life. He integrates the fiction with that of the decade and generation. This aspect of intertextual references does not cease to artistic materials but also to religious, cultural, historical contexts. Walter Percy uses Pastiche in order to amplify the connectivity of the world, to bring in a universal spirit into his texts and writings.

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