

USING COLLAGE FOR CREATIVE WRITING

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Introduction

Often associated with fine art practice with a postmodern epistemology, the lexis *collage* has its root in the French word *coller*, which means to paste or to glue. And this etymological meaning is still at the core of many existing definitions of the term, “a pictorial technique that uses photographs, news cuttings, and all kinds of objects” (Osborne 1970:251), a subcategory of assemblage (Seitz 1961). Truly, the technique in its construction/production level operates with two typical operations – segmentation and composition. Of the two, the first is wrenching fragments from various sources, and the second is putting the fragments in a particular space. When finished, collage art appears to be concerned mainly with the juxtaposition of prefabricated elements into a visual entity.

The technique of combining materials in a single work of art is not new; it has been common since ancient times. God Ganesh is a collage of elephant's head and human body; Sati's father Dakshya Prajapati is a collage of he-goat's head and human body. Nonetheless, collage as a technique distinguished from such phenomenon is a twentieth century development (Seitz 1961). Picasso is credited for popularizing the technique through its intensive use. Later, the technique proliferated so significantly that collage “have had great influence in various fields of artistic work”

(Fox 1946: 234). Photography is one of such domains where collage persists. David Hockney's *My Mother, Bradford, Yorkshire*, 1982 is one of the examples of collage in photography. This proliferation shows how the technique that was primary in painting has proliferated in other forms of art.

Using collage in writing shares basic traits of the notions like pastiche, intertextuality, simulation and hypertextuality because the fundamental operations in all these techniques – cut and paste – are significantly used in collage art too. Nonetheless, collage and other notions are far apart different. Major point of departure in collage technique is the use of third technique to which I have used the term 'suture': it concerns the space between the pasted materials/objects and provides space for utilizing emotion/intellect of the writer.

Sources for Segmentation

Collage technique draws no boundary for writers in terms of selecting materials for segmentation – writers are free to choose content. Possible sources for collage text can be anything ranging from fantasy to social reality, oral form of literature to written texts, subjective experience to objective reality of science. It however does not mean that the process is always anarchic. At least two constraints confine writers to specific sources: first the interest of the writer and the second the availability of material (Acharya 2007: 91).

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Oral literature, which is viewed as literature of a pre-literate culture, ranges from epics, ballads, folk narrative (legends, myths and folktales), rituals (chants), proverbs, to jokes and sayings. In addition to their variety, they are easily accessible as well. With the effort of writers like Edward Burnes Tayler, James Frazer, Grimm brothers, Franz Boas and others, most of the oral literature is now in print. As a result, collagists have a large corpus in the already existing stock of epic and ballad. In addition to oral literature transformed into written, there is abundance of written texts. Since the discovery of Hellenic art and invention of printing press in the fifteenth century, and subsequent proliferation of publication, almost all the domains of human interest have been recorded in texts. Consequently, the archive of usable texts for any writer now is unimaginably rich. Moreover, they are easily accessible due to their availability through the medium like internet. Leak's remark, "[classical literature] remained, and it remains, the dominant mode of literary expression" (1993:8), is worthy to recall here.

Along with these sources, another major source can be writer's situatedness (Said 1992:1212). The significance of writer's situatedness, as Said has postulated resides in collage writing's assumption: geographic location has serious repercussion in intellectual production. The materials that writers can draw from their situatedness need not necessarily be in Platonic sense of imitation: their situatedness can take any of the forms like Aristotelian understanding of improvisation, or any form.

Treatment to Segmented Material

Once the sources for writing are segmented, they can be given different treatment like

parody, pastiche, allusion among others. The techniques I am discussing here map out subtle differences that Gerald Genette points out among the six techniques – parody, transposition, travesty, pastiche, caricature and forgery. Rather I concentrate on the three major techniques: pastiche, parody and allusion.

Allusion, a reference to a person, place, or events in general sense, is an instance of shared language between two works. But allusion is not a quotation or citation as allusion does not repeat word-for-word of the source and more importantly it does not necessarily attribute to the source. Another treatment parody is "one of the major modes of formal and thematic construction of texts" (Hutcheon 1985:2). Commonly agreed as a technique that started with Hageon of Thason (sometime between the eighth and fourth century B. C), parody is viewed as "repetition with critical distance, which marks distance rather than similarity" (Hutcheon 1985:6). After the effort of Russian Formalists who revived parody from the repression of post-Enlightenment emphasis on the need for genius, it has become very widely used technique. The technique can range from very subtle to complex strategies. Regarding the source, it can be any materials ranging from any syntactical structure to an epic like discourse. An instance of shorter parody can be Victor Hugo's statement that parodies Caesar's heroic, *Veni, Vidi, Vici* (I came, I saw, I conquered) into *Veni, vidi, Vixi* (I came, I saw, I lived). The third treatment which is possible to wrenched material is pastiche; it is "like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in dead language; but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry" (Jameson 1991:65). Writing created through this technique borrows ostentatiously from the archive of

existing materials and use in different context and at various levels – quick passing allusions to using one book as a necessary base to another. An example of the latter type can be Amy Lowell's *A Critical Fable* as it uses James Russell Lowell's *A Fable for Critics*.

Collage in Use

Though there are writings of different genre that have employed collage, this paper demonstrates how collage is used in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*. The play essentially dramatizes story of Henry Higgins who accepts a challenge from his friend Colonel Pickering to transform Eliza Doolittle into a well-spoken duchess. And once the work is accomplished, Higgins demonstrates intention to abandon her. It infuriates Eliza and makes her abandon Higgins. MacCarthy summarizes the play as, "a story of an artist who turns a live girl into a work of art, and then by a considerable effort of self control restrains from falling in love with her" (1951:108).

Shaw's play *Pygmalion* derives materials from many sources and employs the techniques like pastiche, parody and allusion. The major source for the play is Tobias Smollett's *The Adventure of Peregrine Pickle* derived from Ovid's Pygmalion-Galatea myth – it provides canvas for other materials to paste. Over the story, he has inserted pieces from Henrik Ibsen's two plays *A Doll's House* and *When We Dead Awaken*, and socio-linguistic reality of the time.

The plot of *Pygmalion* is a pastiche from Tobias Smollett's (1895) *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* (chapter 87). In Smollett's plot, Peregrine meets a poverty stricken teen aged girl, pays money to her mother, takes her to his home, trains her to speak and behave like

a lady of dignity. Ultimately, he succeeds in his mission and witnesses her run away with his valet. Like Peregrine, Higgins meets Eliza, a "creature with her kerbstone English" and claims that he can "pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party" (Shaw 1991:16). After wagering with his friend Pickering, he succeeds in passing her off as the most graceful lady of London. Finally, like Peregrine, Eliza runs away.

We can find segmentation in characters as well. They are drawn from not only real people of Shaw's time but also other sources. One of such sources is Greek mythical figures. For instance, Eliza is a collage of Galatea of the myth and Nora of *A Doll's House*. Two traits of Eliza – one prior to her success at the party and another post to her success – remind us of both the characters. Eliza's one self, like Galatea's, is functional only as an instrument in the hand of an expert. But another self that gets revealed after her success at the party and consequent event is totally different from Galatea's. Here, Eliza is as violent as Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Another character Higgins resembles the mythical sculptor in various ways. Higgins is, like the sculptor, a passionate artist when he is "interested in people's accent" (Shaw 1991:32). Similarly, Alfred Doolittle is a derived piece. The potential source for this character, as Henderson states, is Lickcheese: "Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father, belongs to the genius that Shaw created as far back as the early 1890s with Lickcheese in *Widower's Houses*" (Henderson 1956:133).

Parody, which is equally used to treat the segmented materials before arranging them in the canvas of play, is worth discussion. Shaw has adopted and subverted the wrenched materials ranging from plot to dialogue. An instance of parody at dialogue level is presented below.

Higgins: Eliza, Elizabeth, Besty and Bess,
They went to the woods to get a bird's nest.

Pickering: They found a nest with four eggs in it.

Higgins: They took one a piece, and left three in it.

The dialogue between Higgins and Pickering is a parody of a nursery rhyme, which reads, "Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie/ Kissed the girls and made them cry/ When the boys came out to play/ Georgie Porgie ran away" (Opie 1951:158).

Conclusion

While the paper argues for the implementation of collage technique, there is no wish to suggest that collage is the only way to creative writing. The aim is to argue that collage is one of the easiest and most powerful ways to write, as it is created through three basic principles of art construction: segmentation, composition and suture. Of these three principles, the first two are very easy as they do not demand for great craft. The third, on the other hand, is both easy and complex. It is easy in the sense it provides space for the expression of emotion/intellect of the writer, and difficult in the sense it demands for more craft if the writer wants to give writing a coherent look. A very good instance of coherent collage in creative writing is G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*: it demonstrates how materials can be segmented and treated before they are pasted in canvas. As Shaw has taken the 'grand narratives', to use Lyotard's notion, as a canvas and inserted fragments derived from other sources over it, the play is modern. To create postmodern texts is much easier. There is no need of 'grand narratives': writers can create texts by collecting 'local narratives' and pasting them together.

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