

Chapter - 2

History as/and Fiction

Postmodern historical novels depict history in a unique and different way, unlike the traditional historical novels. The novelists portray history and include in it the direct representation of the historical events and the historical figures. In this process, they deconstruct and dehistoricize history. The faithful narration of the historical events, objective presentation of the historical figures and an attempt to present the truthful history are the notions postmodern novels repudiate thoroughly. The novels do not portray the faithful narration of history; the novelists deliberately modify, invent, and present an altogether different version of the history. Robert Scholes, calls it as ‘fabulative histories’ and posits that:

These are fabulative histories that mix fact with fantasy in ways unique to this time. We might speculate endlessly – and fruitlessly – about why this is so. But that it is so, is incontestable. The fabulative impulse has achieved its most impressive results when it has worked most closely with the raw material of history”. He further adds, “Yet it is frankly fabulous, delighting in stories for their own sake and outrageously inventing totally implausible “documents” to fill the lacunae in the historical record”. (206)

The postmodern novel presents history in terms of its provisionality and indeterminacy. It does not mean that postmodernism refuses the status of history. The postmodern approach motivates the writers to deal with history differently and adopt the same in their writings. As Hutcheon puts it:

The provisional, indeterminate nature of historical knowledge is certainly not a discovery of postmodernism. Nor is the questioning of the ontological and epistemological status of

historical “fact” or the distrust of seeming neutrality and objectivity of recounting. But the concentration of these problematizations in postmodern art is not something we can ignore (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 88).

Postmodern writers diminish the difference between the historical works and the literary works terming them as similar discourses. Both discourses create the system of signification by which we understand the past and its reality. Further, meaning does not lie in the actual events, since they have already passed, but in the system of signification by which we come to know the history in present times. Hutcheon points out that, “This is not a “dishonest refuge from truth” but an acknowledgement of the meaning making function of human constructs” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 89).

Modernism did not approve of historical significance and hence, it was considered as an ahistorical. Whereas, postmodernism openly accepts and reinstalls historical contexts. In the task, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge. On the one hand, postmodernism installs or includes historical contexts in the works of art, and on the other hand, it repudiates all the conventional notions regarding genuine historicity such as the authenticity of historical data. Postmodern reversion to history does not imply its nostalgic return to its own past, but it views history with a critical eye stuffed with irony that distances itself from nostalgia. In other words, postmodernism installs historical contexts and ironically both questions and problematizes the entire notion of history. Just as the myths of freedom, equality, and justice, which have been subverted by postmodernism, the myth of objective and factual history is also denounced and negated by postmodern theorists and writers. Scholes rightly points out, “We had a dream. We always had a dream. And we pretended it was real until we believed the pretense. *The Sot* –

Weed Factor, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and *The Public Burning* are offered as atonement for the guilt of having created a fabulation and pretended it was real.” (209)

It has been widely accepted that the revisit of the past has nothing to do with nostalgia as it evokes irony within it. Postmodern writers, when they revisit the past, generate the sense of irony that distances their visit to the past from the conventional way of nostalgic visit. Ironical representation of the past can be seen in the narration of any historical event depicted in the postmodern novel. Doctorow portrays a historical scene with an ironical touch. He narrates, “Everyone wore white in summer. Tennis racquets were hefty and the racquet faces elliptical. There was a lot of sexual fainting. There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants”. (4) This tinge of irony continues to trap the reader from the beginning to the end of *Ragtime*. The past must be revisited, but it is certainly not an innocent act of representation. Authors such as Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, and E. L. Doctorow present America not as something gigantic or superpower but as torn by disorder and chaos, and they deconstruct the notion of patriotism and national homogeneity through parody. In *Ragtime*, Doctorow presents America in a flux during the first decade of the twentieth century, when social, economic, and political changes formed both the national and the individual identities.

Along with the tinge of irony, the postmodern novels include the ex-centric parts of the society, traditionally excluded by the novelists. For example, the characters such as Coalhouse Walker in *Ragtime*, Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, Fevver in *Night at the Circus*, and Richard Nixon in *The Public Burning* are ex-centric figures, who are given central roles in the novels. In *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), a ‘historiographic metafiction’, Jeanette Winterson deconstructs the distinction between fact and fiction, and patriarchy and matriarchy (father/mother; man/woman; culture/nature; head/heart) to narrate the voice of the ex-centric or the ‘other’. Set in the 7th

century, the novel narrates the stories from the perspective of the voice of the 'other' the Dog Woman, who presents an alternative version of the history of the same period and defies the totalitarian representation of history of the 7th century. The writer questions the totalitarian and general perspective of history that ignores the voice of the other and the margin. It is construed that postmodernism ideology emphasizes plurality and accepts the difference by rejecting the conventional sense of cultural universality. Postmodern novels, both thematically and technically, flout the norms of the conventional novel. Thematically and ideologically, they deconstruct the binaries of the margins and the center, and technically, they deconstruct the binaries of the fiction and history.

Both the novels and the historical works use common narrative style: teleology, causality, and continuity. Since the visit of the past is only possible with the present ability of the writer to view, interpret, and narrate, certain avowed irony and provisionality are bound to be there in the representation. Umberto Eco argues that the present postmodern tendencies consist of reorganizing the past and asserts that the past cannot be destroyed or avoided.

The relationship between history and the fiction has been widely discussed. Postmodern fiction by fictionalizing the historical contexts and events problematizes and interrogates the traditionally assumed authority of historical data. The narrative and interpretive nature of the third person voice of objectivity, which is common in both history and the fiction, has been widely accepted by both historians as well as the novelists. The lacunae in the so called the third person objective representation of reality is also recognized by the postmodernists such as Hutcheon and many others. Hutcheon posits in this context:

In the postmodern writing of history – and fiction (*Midnight's Children*, *The White Hotel*, *Slaughterhouse Five*) – there is a deliberate contamination of the historical with

didactic and situational discursive elements, thereby challenging the implied assumptions of historical statements: objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of representation (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 92).

The process of writing history is given new definition in postmodernism. Postmodern historiography is all about imaginative reconstruction of the past through the process of writing. It is the postmodern rethinking of the problem of how we can have knowledge of the past. Coupled with exploratory and narrative modes of writing, this imaginative reconstruction defies objective modes of faithful representation and takes historiography into a different route where events and facts shape themselves on their own. Hutcheon says in this regards:

This is the context in which the postmodern historical sense situates itself: outside associations of enlightenment process or development, idealist/Hegelian world-historian process, or essentialized Marxist notions of history.” She further adds, “The past really did exist. The question is: *how* can know that past today – and *what* can we know of it? (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 92)

In this way, the grounding and the base of the historical knowledge previously ubiquitously accepted has been negated and questioned in the historiographic fiction. On the same point, Foucault points out that the conventional approach to view history must be challenged. He asserts, “The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled. Necessarily, we must dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions” (88). He further adds, “It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting” (88).

Recent criticism has pointed out the mental activity of a historian in the act of writing. Any historian, while writing a historical even, has to envisage the event in his mind. During this process, he puts himself in the target situation and tries to interpret and narrate the event. In other words, a historian re-enacts the events or characters in his mind before putting them into text. Historians like R G Collingwood and White have openly questioned objectivity and reliability of a historical text. White argues that whether the text belongs to the category of fiction or non-fiction, the said discourses are achieved only through the narrative practices.

Metafiction, in fact, intensifies this imaginative reconstruction of history as it exposes and reveals the very process of selecting, ordering, and modifying not only the fictional element of the fiction but also the non-fictional elements of the history. This is why Hutcheon calls the process as “Historiographic Metafiction”. Historiographic metafiction negates the common sense belief in relation to fact and fiction. It further shows that both history and fiction are primarily discourses; it makes us believe that discourses are nothing but human constructs and parts of a signifying system. The textualization of the past is something that poses ontological questions.

The roots of this textualization of history lie in poststructuralist theories, which reduce history to mere texts. The past can never be attained in its pure form, but it can only be reached through chronicles and archival documents. The poststructuralist idea of textuality eschews all the conventional ideology or concepts in terms of how we perceive history.

The facts of history cover the events concerning the empire, the kings, and the important personalities. History has never been and perhaps cannot be all-encompassing one. Postmodernism takes a turn towards the ex-centric: the blacks, the poor, and the downtrodden,

who are always ignored in the conventional narration. The novelists like Doctorow, Barth, and Pynchon review the history from the perspectives of the ex-centric.

Derrida has refuted the notion of linear historical temporality, and this has proved to be the metaphysical foundation of historiography. According to Derrida, historiography is always teleological and it imposes meaning on the past and does so by postulating an end and origin. And the same is done in fiction. The primary difference between the writing of history and the writing of fiction is that unlike history, fiction with its self-conscious nature turns provisional and radical. Like Derrida, Foucault displaces coherent narrative and favors discontinuities, gaps, and ruptures. Against the centralizing forces such as origin, voice, development, and evolution, Foucault puts an effort to reassert the plural, heterogeneous, the particular, and the dispersed in the context of history. Hutcheon says, “historiographic metafiction shares the Foucauldian urge to unmask the continuities that are taken for granted in the western narrative tradition, and it does so by first using and then abusing those very continuities” (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 98).

Historiographic metafiction does the job of questioning the boundaries between fiction and history. It looks more for the similarities than the differences. Because of this, both are identified as linguistic constructs, narrative forms with subjectivity, apparently non-transparent in terms of language and structure, and having co-existing intertexts in the textuality. Historians like Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra share the same suspicions and interrogations as already posed in the historiographic fictions such as *Shame* and *The Public Burning* in terms of the traditional conventions of narrative, the problems of reference, subjectivity, and their identity as textuality. In other words, the confidence in the empiricist and positivist epistemologies has been shaken in postmodernism, whether it is a form of history or fiction. It is important to note that

postmodernism does not reject the traditional conventions; instead, it first uses or installs and then abuses or contradicts the very conventions. Hutcheon emphasizes her point:

I have been arguing that postmodernism is a contradictory cultural enterprise, one that is heavily implicated in that which it seeks to contest. It uses and abuses the very structures and values it takes to task. Historiographic metafiction, for example, keeps distinct its formal auto-representation and its historical context, and in so doing problematizes the very possibility of historical knowledge (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 106).

Hayden White elaborates his new concept of *Metahistory*. He states that the purpose of metahistory is to pose questions and find answers concerning the epistemological status of historical representations. In *Metahistory*, he suggests that a new kind of fictional history emerges when the distinction between history and fiction is blurred. Many critics point out that history has become rather “metafictional” than fictional only, for the ultimate aim of postmodernist history is to lay bare the devices whereby reality of the past is constructed through the writing of history. White also claims that metafictional self-consciousness paves way to metahistorical self-consciousness in history writing. He rightly points out, “My own analysis of the deep structure of the historical imagination of Nineteenth century Europe is intended to provide a new perspective on the current debate over the nature and function of historical knowledge” (2).

Unlike the modernist tendency to place art superior to common life, postmodern work actually tries to break down the walls between the elitist art and the actual world. It is one of the perspectives of the postmodern artist to break down the wall by including the historical personages in a fictive manner and metafictional style of writing. Both history and the fiction are porous genres that have elastic boundaries. Postmodern novel works to confront the paradoxes:

fictive/historical presentation, the particular/the general, and the present/the past. For example, Christina Wolf's *No Place on Earth* talks about the fictive and imaginative meeting between two historical personages: dramatist Heinrich von Kleist and poet Karoline von Gunderode.

Postmodern fiction rewrites history from an altogether different point of view and prevents history from being conclusive and teleological. In the rewriting process of history, postmodern fiction leads to the indeterminacy and provisionality of history. The past can be altered and modified in the present time. Postmodernism deliberately confuses the entire process of verification and presentation of history in the fiction. In historiographic metafiction, the play of true and false game is seen. In the novels like *Ragtime*, *Burning Water*, or *Famous Last Words*, certain details of the historical record is deliberately modified in order to suggest and project the deliberate or inadvertent errors in the historical records. As Hutcheon says rightly, "Historiographic metafiction acknowledges the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its *textualized accessibility* to us today." (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 114).

Hutcheon gives many examples of postmodern authors from different cultures who write historiographic metafiction. Some of them are as follow: Christa Wolf, Salman Rushdie, Michael Coetzee, John Fowles, Julian Barnes, E. L. Doctorow, Umberto Eco, Gabriel García Márquez, Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera, William Faulkner, Don DeLillo, Peter Ackroyd, Graham Swift, Ronald Sukenick, Timothy Findley, John Dos Passos, D. M Thomas, Michael Ondaatje, E. M. Foster, and Thomas Pynchon. They all expose textuality of the historical discourse. Hutcheon maintains that for Doctorow, "there is no neat dividing line between the texts of history and literature, and so he feels free to draw on both" (*Poetics of Postmodernism* 136).

Postmodern fiction does not dissociate a work of art from history unlike the modernists. History is nothing more than a mere residual text of the past and a text is a form of discourse just as the other discourses. *Ragtime* is one of the examples of postmodern fiction that works to show the postmodern treatment of history. From the beginning to the end of the novel, a curious and an unusual way of inscribing and then reconstructing the history of that time is noticed. The blurring of the boundaries between history and the fiction in the novel, a common characteristic of historiographic metafiction, underlines Doctorow's mistrust for the objectivity of history.

Doctorow offers an interpreted and fictional version of twentieth century American history in *Ragtime*. Although the novel leaves an impression that this version is an almost reportorial and presents an objective account of American social life, it curiously mixes real persons and events with fictional characters and events. Even if, some characters and events are verifiable, for the most part, the author invents and recreates their history and emanates the quality of historiographic metafiction. Doctorow rewrites his characters' lives and identities by inventing plots and stories about them.

Similar reconstruction of the American history is found in Don DeLillo's *Libra*. In *Libra*, the writer fictionalizes the events surrounding the assassination of President of John F. Kennedy, and creates speculative accounts of Lee Harvey Oswald, who assassinated the President. The writer mixes the historical figures and fictional character, and creates a different history of the time. He also includes William Guy Banister, who was also associated with the conspiracy of the assassination, in the process of fabrication. Just like Doctorow, the writer, too, creates an inseparable fusion between the fact and fiction, and history and narrative. The assassination of the President has left many theoretical conclusions that could have shaped the event. The writer questions the reliability of the historical accounts and offers several other versions of the same

event. With the fictional recreation/modification/fabrication, the writer attempts to thwart the historical claims pertaining to objective narration. Both Doctorow and DeLillo recreates the American history of a specific period or events.

Doctorow, in *Ragtime*, captures the social picture of the ragtime period when America was going to be a superpower. In his attempt, he wants to prove that history cannot be static or fixed for once and all. Present viewpoint always alters the past and hence, history is usually in a constant flux. Paula Anca Farca rightly states:

Doctorow emphasizes the economic and social changes that took place in America during the Ragtime period and underscores these further transformations in the characters' identities and even the narrator's. America at the beginning of the last century was on its way to becoming an economic power, but it had to deal with poverty, inequalities, and civil rights violations. The nation was trying to search for its own identity while changing, integrating these changes, and consequently rewriting continuously its identity. Similarly, Doctorow's characters change and rewrite their identity in an attempt to find their own identity. The author juxtaposes the changes that occurred in the country with the fluctuations in the characters' lives, and by doing that, he shows that history itself is in flux and is rewritten continuously (3).

Doctorow's novel shows the blurring of boundaries between the fiction and history, and it hints at the continuous reconstruction/recreation of history through the discourse. *Ragtime* imitates the genre of the historical novel and reveals its limitations as a source of completeness or objective truth. Paula Anca Farca rightly adds, "Doctorow does not consider history as a reliable field and treats notions such as truth, reality, and objectivity in an ironic fashion" (1).

From the very beginning of the novel, an unusual tryst with the history is found. The novel opens in the setting of the first half of the twentieth century in America. A reader is trapped in the never-ending play of history in terms of its provisionality and indeterminacy. The questioning of the accepted historical data and simultaneously presenting an altogether different version of history is found, and the reader, to his or her disbelief, is somehow forced to question the truth of the accepted history and compare it with the alternative or the fictionalized version of the same historical truth presented in the novel. The novel begins with the historical account of the murder of the famous architect Stanford White by Harry K. Thaw. Evelyn Nesbit, a celebrated beauty of that time of history, is allegedly associated with the murder of Stanford White. The novel ironically points out at the media hype of that time, which stated the act of murder as ‘the trial of the century’.

In an interview with Paul Levine, Doctorow confesses that:

History as written by historians is clearly insufficient. And the historians are the first to express skepticism over this ‘objectivity’ of the discipline. A lot of people discovered after World War II and in the fifties that much of what was taken by the younger generations as history was highly interpreted history” (Levine 58).

In the novel, one finds a curious mix of historical personages and fictional characters, and thereby a constant negation of historical authenticity is carried out. Both historical events and characters along with fictional characters and events combine to form a different and an inventive history. The writer does not deny the existence of the narrated history in the novel, but he certainly questions our ability to know history in its authentic form, as we are helplessly dependent on the textual availability of a particular historical span. There are no indubitable grounds based on which history can rely. Numerous other postmodern writers explore the same

point. Chris Scott's *Antichthon* is an example of such work in which historical authenticity has been questioned. The novel tells the tale of the real historical figure, Giordano Bruno. In doing so, it calls into question the nature and value of so-called historical fact and the validity of eyewitness accounts. At a certain point, the writer shows the state of history as something constructed or fabricated. Caspar Schopp is another historical figure in the novel whose job is to record history. His integrity in a job of clerk is questioned, when an ecclesiastical authority indicates, "The record, what's that? Posterity, that makes sinners of wise men and saints out of fools. We pay our clerks to write it, pay them according to the need. Ours is spiritual, theirs material. This German now, Scioppius, he's in Rome. We're watching him, expect some promise there" (181). It is comprehended that both the novels question the relations between fact and fiction, truth and imagination. The conventional boundaries between them are transgressed.

Historical personages are not glorified in *Ragtime*; in fact, they are ironized against their own status, history, and achievements. Harry Houdini, an escape artist, one of the popular figures of history, has been presented with perpetual irony throughout the novel. Levine points out in this regards:

From the beginning, the cool, detached, slightly ironic narrative voice, so different from Daniel's intense, involving, complex rhetoric, distances us from the events of *Ragtime* as it rewrites American history. *Ragtime* begins with the conventional view of the turn of the century as an age of innocence but then reveals the social and economic conflicts that remained barely suppressed beneath the surface" (51-52).

The actions of Houdini in the novel are interwoven with the fictional characters. It is a curious and inventive blending of history and fiction endorsed by the writer. Houdini, for example, accidentally takes a fictional visit to the Mother's house and meets those characters. Throughout

the novel, such a blending and interweaving of historical characters with the fictional ones is observed. This shows an implied mingling of fact and fiction in such a way that it becomes difficult to distinguish between them.

Doctorow proves the point that both history and the fiction are ultimately narratives, and they carry the aspects of subjectivity, textuality, and linguistic arbitrariness. Postmodernism dissolves the thin line of demarcation between history and fiction or fact and fiction. The mixture of the historical figures with the fictional characters and the fabricated portrayal of the historical figures pose serious questions against the truth-value of the past. This complicates further the already complicated relationship between history and the fiction.

The writer narrates the fabricated version of the relationship between Evelyn Nesbit and Harry K. Thaw. During their pre-marital affair, they meet at a private castle in Austria. It is a controversial matter whether such a trip took place in history. Further, the writer shows an irrational and sadistic face of Thaw when he whips brutally on her buttock and the back of her thighs. Ironically, the people around the place mistake those screams with sexual pleasure. Such a fabricated description of a historical event poses many questions against the reliability and objectivity of historical data. When Nesbit narrates Thaw's cruelty to White, his reaction towards Nesbit is highly private and cannot have any historical record. It can be construed that no one can either entirely reject this event or entirely accept it. Doctorow narrates the event in his own words, "Oh my, oh my, Stanford White said. He kissed the spot. She showed him a tiny yellow and purple discoloration on the face of her left buttock where it curved toward the cleft. How awful, Stanford White said. He kissed the spot" (25). This phenomenon suggests questioning of the historical metanarratives based on authenticity and objectivity. Several postmodern fictions depict this historical problem of narration. In *The General in His Labyrinth*, Marquez portrays

the fictionalized and subjective narration of Simón Bolívar, liberator and leader of Gran Colombia. The writer recreates the last fourteen days of the historical figure, which are not found in any available historical record. The writer presents a fictional narrative of the last days of the historical figure. He exposes the nature of historical documents and the role of a historian that is both subjective and interpretive. During one incident the writer narrates an incident with relation to the historical figure who is shown with an uncharacteristic powerlessness:

The truth was that even his most intimate friends did not believe he was abandoning either power or the country. The city was too small and his own people too punctilious not to know the two great flaws in his dubious departure: he did not have enough money to go anywhere with such a large entourage, and having been President of the Republic, he could not leave the country before a year had passed without the permission of the government, and he had not even had the guile to request it.

Both Marquez and Doctorow present the fictionalized and interpretive narration of the specific elements from history, and negate the claim of the historical truths. Similar historical distortions are seen in the novels of John Crowley and Lance Olsen. In *Love & Sleep*, John Crowley narrates fictionalized version of the history of the Elizabethan Era. The writer includes multiple historical figures such as John Dee who was a mathematician, astronomer, astrologer, occult philosopher, imperialist and adviser to Queen Elizabeth I, Edward Kelley who was known for his magical investigations, Giordano Bruno who was an Italian Dominican friar, philosopher, mathematician, poet, and astrologer, and many others who belong to the same period. The writer fictionalizes the historical period by the way of presenting a different versions surrounding the historical figures, and reconstructs the history by fabrication, subjective interpretation, mixing real and the fictional characters, and assigning new roles to the historical figures. In *Calendar of Regrets*, Olsen, too,

narrates the subjectivized and narrativized history pertaining to specific events and historical figures. The writer recreates/fabricates/distorts historicity. The subjective fabrication or reconstruction pertaining to the death of the painter Hieronymus Bosch, mysterious mugging of former CBS anchor Dan Rather at Park Avenue, and an interview between forensic psychiatrist Park Dietz and the man who assaulted Dan Rather is shown in the book. Just as Doctorow includes historical figures and recreates a different version of history, Olsen attempts to recreate the events with relation to the historical figures such as Hieronymus Bosch, and Dan Rather. They are presented in a different historical context that is either interpretive or fabricated. For instance, the incidents pertaining to the death of the painter Hieronymus Bosch cannot be ascertained in its totality. The writer establishes the fact that it is not tenable to consider history as complete or final. The writer while deconstructing history shows utter incredulity towards the truths and metanarratives vis-à-vis history.

Such postmodern efforts to reconstruct history and provide multiple interpretive stories suggest our inability to capture history in its totality. The availability of the historical record is always subjective and selective, since an objective and complete authentic record of the history is not possible. Brian McHale rightly argues that in the traditional historical novel “historical realms – persons, events, specific objects and so on – can only be introduced on condition that the properties and actions attributed to them in the text do not in actuality contradict the ‘official’ historical record” (87). The realist novels persist with the idea of achieving objective reality and postmodern fiction overtly contests such a possibility of objective narration. An ontological boundary between the real and the fictional is either blurred or repudiated in postmodern fiction.

Many critics brings out some similarities between John DOS Passos’ *U.S.A* and Doctorow’s *Ragtime*. These similarities are limited to the thematic grounds only. They show the similarities

in the choice of the subject, historical background, and the social and economic environment of the period in America. Despite having these similarities, there are certain differences and contradictions between the two works, which cannot be ignored. As Levine points out in this issue, “For Dos Passos, history has an objective order which provides the structure of his fiction. For Doctorow, on the other hand, objective history is a chimera” (52). For Doctorow objective narration of historical reality is something beyond human reach. In *U.S.A.*, history and fiction are considered as different and unique entities with different narrative strategies. Dos Passos, indeed, adopts interpretive strategy to narrate history, but he does not go beyond the conventionalities of representation. Doctorow’s view of history is quite different. Levine says in this regard:

On the other hand, *Ragtime* is shaped by the conflation of history and fiction where the boundary between the two seems to disappear. Not only does Doctorow invent incidents in the lives of his historical personages but his ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ characters meet and mingle promiscuously on an equal footing, both victims and agents of their own projections of history. (52-53)

Ironization is the only mirror through which history can be viewed. Irony puts history against its own threshold in a way that it loses its nostalgic charm. The glorious and celebratory history is not tenable in postmodern times. Houdini’s character epitomizes the function of irony in postmodern texts. His great art and incredible tricks that he proudly performed in front of people ooze nothing but sheer irony in the novel. His being invited to perform his magical and incredible tricks in front of the jokers and freaks from the circus is nothing short of fiercest irony shown against his extraordinary skills. Many of his tricks have been trivialized in the novel. His performance at the Tombs is one of them, where he faces humiliating, and shocking behavior from a prisoner. The writer narrates the incident:

Houdini could not help staring. The prisoner's cell glowed like a stage in the perpetual dusk of the cavernous prison. The prisoner stood up and waved, a stately gesture, and his wide mouth offered the trace of a smile. Quickly Houdini began to dress. He put on his briefs, his trousers, his socks and garters and shoes. Across the well the prisoner began to undress. Houdini put on his undershirt, his shirt, his collar. He tied his tie and set the stock pin. He snapped his suspenders in place and pulled on his jacket. The prisoner was now naked as Houdini had been. The prisoner came up to the front of his cell and raising his arms in a shockingly obscene manner he thrust his hips forward and flapped his penis between the bars. Houdini rushed down the promenade, fumblingly unlocked the cellblock door and closed it behind him (32-33).

One cannot trace this event in any of the available historical documents. Doctorow ironizes the celebrated skills of Houdini by juxtaposing them with the trivial and fabricated incidents. He reiterates the point that the past did exist at one point of time, but it must be ironized or trivialized. Paula Anca Farca rightly points out that:

Ragtime looks like a descriptive novel because its author observes the American social life, but, in fact, it is an experimental because the narration's reportorial style is ironic. Doctorow's prose sounds newspaper-like, but lacks facts. Doctorow's reportorial style is misleading if readers think that what they read is historically objective. His narrative experiment refers to a presentation of fictional situations in an objective fashion as the author invents stories about both historical and fictional characters (4).

The trend of ironization and trivialization of history is found in many postmodern fictions. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Kurt Vonnegut presents the history of Dresden with a perpetual touch of irony. The representation of events related to war, the characterization of the main character

Billy Pilgrim, and the tone of the writer exude nothing but irony. In fact, the alternative title of the novel *The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* represent the irony of war, and war is compared with the children's play. Irony becomes the guiding force of the novel. The writer ironically uses the short sentence, "So it goes" to ironically trivialize the seriousness of the subject of the death. Both Doctorow and Vonnegut persist with irony in their revisit of the past and trivialize the past heroism and glory.

Doctorow keeps on introducing more and more historical figures in the fiction. It is not their inclusion that excites the reader, but the fact that all of them are assigned some fictional/non-fictional duties in the novel. Doctorow presents Freud's visit to the US. The visit, indeed, took place in history, but in the novel, it has been subjectively narrativized. The visit, instead of turning out to be celebratory one as Freud was an established psychologist, turns out to be an ironical one. Doctorow goes beyond the actual visit and fictionalizes their experiences by fabricating the events surrounding Freud and company. For example, Freud did not like the facilities and rude behavior of the people of the US. After being treated inappropriately by a guide during their visit to Niagara Falls, he vents his frustration by calling the visit as fruitless. The author states, "He had not really gotten used to the food or the scarcity of American public facilities. He believed the trip had ruined both his stomach and bladder. The entire population seemed to him over-powered, brash, and rude (41).

There are no records to verify Freud's disappointments with America. He further says to Earnest Jones that, "America is a mistake, a gigantic mistake" (41). It is, indeed, retelling and recreating the stories of the past. This act gives the reader an idea that history is nothing but a fabricated and subjective narrative. The inclusion of the historical figures is indicative of the blurring of differences between history and fiction. This act of mixing the historical figures from history and

fictional characters takes the novel to the new direction. All the historical figures such as Freud, Ford, Morgan, and Houdini are stripped of their mythical glory of the past. The range of this demythologizing is not limited to any specific field or area. He includes the figures from politics, literature, and social workers. He ironically portrays the condition of Theodore Dreiser after the publication of his novel *Sister Carrie*,

Coincidentally this was the time in our history when the morose novelist Theodore Dreiser was suffering terribly from the bad reviews and negligible sales of his first book, *„Sister Carrie“*. Dreiser was out of work and too ashamed to see anyone. He rented a furnished room in Brooklyn and went to live there. He took to sitting on a wooden chair in the middle of the room (30).

On this account of demythologizing, Levine remarks:

The freedom that Doctorow achieves by this strategy is quite dazzling. The fictional characters like Coalhouse Walker take on a certain gravity as they enter history while the representative figures of the age are both illuminated and demythologized, as in Freud's boat trip through the Tunnel of Love with Jung. Even the great villains of an era of rapacious capitalism are radically altered (53).

Fabricated and fictionalized narration of historical figures in the novel is found throughout the novel. Evelyn Nesbit, an actress, develops an infatuation with the little girl, a fictional character. She spends time with the poor family and stays with the little girl and his father Tateh. No historical record or supportive documents can be found to corroborate such incidents. This suggests that it is an imaginative and fictional narrativization of history or an alternative version of history. In this process, a consistent attempt to eradicate the distinction between fact and

fiction is made by the writer. Nesbit's existence as an historical figure is undeniably a fact and her infatuation with the little girl is a fabricated version of the past. There are many more instances like this in the novel. The young brother's short-lived affair with Nesbit is an example that suggest the writer's suspicion on both concreteness and credibility of historical documents. These fabricated versions show an alternative version of history the possibility of which cannot be negated completely. In order to negate the truth claims of the historical records, postmodern writers inscribe both the events pertaining to history and the figures. Don DeLillo in his *Underworld* narrates the fictionalizes stories of the real-life figures such as J. Edgar Hoover, Bobby Thomson, Frank Sinatra, Jackie Gleason, Lenny Bruce, and others against the backdrop of contemporary history and popular culture. He also narrates some of the important historical events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and Soviet Union's atomic weapons program. For postmodern writers, history becomes a subjective matter, and rather than treating it as the final truth, the writers like DeLillo and Doctorow present the narrative aspects of history.

Bakhtin's concepts of "dialogism" and the "carnavalesque" prove the point of repressed, unnoticed, or silenced histories that negate the monologic discourse of the canonical history. This dialogism can be understood as alternative voices of history. Bakhtin develops his idea of "dialogism" and "polyphony" in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Dialogism, as opposed to monologism, enables different voices in a literary text to exist simultaneously and in interaction with each other. In postmodern fiction, dialogic voices are found that represent multiple and, hitherto unnoticed versions, and probable or alternative versions of history. Doctorow follows this trend of generating an alternative version of history that presents silenced history (voices of black people and feminist sentiments), unnoticed or probable versions of history (presenting highly confidential/subjective/interpretive matters in terms of historical figures that can neither

be accepted nor entirely rejected), and alternative versions of history (inventive and fictional presentation of historical events, data, and historical personages). Bakhtinian carnivalesque in the reading of historiographic metafiction, then, has a liberating influence on the suppressed histories, since carnivalesque rejects the hierarchy between the voices and creates topsy-turvy.

This act of mixing fictional shades of history, verifiable history, fictional characters, and events continues to challenge all the established notions related to history and fiction in the novel. We find the narrative moving towards the three directions: the first one is related to the descriptions of the available and verifiable history, the second one is the fictionalization of history in which historical figures are given fictional shade or history is fictionalized by the way of mixing the real historical data with the fictional or inventive data, and the third one based on pure fictional characters. For example, the narration of the life of the characters such as Tateh, the little girl, and the younger brother is fictional one, the narration of verifiable historical data of the historical figures such as Nesbit, Houdini, Thaw, White and few others represent verifiable historical representation, and their connection with the fictional events and fictional characters is a mode suggestive of historical-fictional narration, which fictionalizes history and provides an alternative version of history.

The subject of treating history differently is a common point of discussion in major postmodern fictions. But the writers deal with the problem of historical representation differently. In *The History of Love*, Nicole Krauss presents the stories of the Holocaust through the two narrative strands: the Holocaust survivor Leo Gursky and fourteen-year-old Alma. The two narrative present two versions of the same story of the Holocaust. The reader is puzzled with the two versions espoused by the writer and forced to question their credibility. The inability to depict history in its totality results into the postmodern irony, which becomes an indispensable mirror to

view history. D M Thomas in *The White Hotel* presents another view of history. An ironical representation of the Holocaust is seen in the novel, wherein the entire portrayal of the holocaust is fraught with ironical viewpoint. The fabricated and subjective narration of the holocaust show nothing but series of events, including the gruesome genocide, stuffed with unbearable irony. The events like death, injury, oppression, and gruesome incidents are ironically presented by the female narrative voice of Frau Anna G. (the voice of a margin). The writer narrates an irony of death in one of the incidents pertaining to the horrors of the Holocaust: “There was a clatter of spades and then heavy thuds as the earth and sand landed on the bodies, coming closer and closer to the old woman who still lived. Earth started to fall on her. The unbearable thing was to be buried alive. She cried with a terrible and powerful voice: “I’m alive. Shoot me, please!” (249). History has been a matter of contention for the writers such as Thomas, Doctorow, and Krauss.

Doctorow maintains that history cannot be grasped in its totality and capturing the past in the text is not possible as language, in postmodern times, assume the quality of Derridian differance, in which infinite play of the signs eschew language of its determinacy. In *Ragtime*, Nesbit’s relationship and association with Emma Goldman can be found in historical records, but there are certain instances such as Emma Goldman massaging Evelyn Nesbit and a few other private moments narrated in the novel, which are not present in any of the available historical records. Doctorow proposes that truth is something beyond our grasp. Residual traces of truth can be had, which are always incomplete and unreliable.

The novel encompasses as many historical figures as possible and thereby presents various shades pertaining to history of that time. Doctorow includes historically controversial journey of Peary’s North Pole expedition. The controversy lies in the matter of reaching the exact point of

North Pole. It has not been proved that he reached North Pole and investigations have proved that he ended his journey a few miles away from North Pole. In the novel, Peary starts his journey with both historical figures and fictional characters: Methew Henson (historical figure), the father (fictional character) and few others. He chooses a particular event or a figure from history and then modifies, distorts, reconstructs, ironizes and presents an altogether different version of history.

Doctorow points out that history is not something fixed or unchangeable; it changes with time, and present must alter or change history in terms of interpretations and modifications. For example, the controversy of the Thaw trial and outcomes are reinterpreted and narrated differently in the novel. Both in novel and in reality, Nesbit is offered twenty five thousand dollars for her positive testimony in the trial as a key witness. Despite having few similarities, the treatment and approach of the writer is highly narrativized or subjectivized. The private detectives hired by Thaw prove her relationship with the Younger Brother and subsequently, the Thaw family reduces their financial support to her. It can be clearly seen that the Younger Brother is a fictional character and hence, it cannot be verified in historical record. This is how Doctorow mixes fact and fiction with inseparable intricacy.

History has been treated in a similar way by many postmodern works. The narrator of *The Public Burning* puts it in this way:

What was fact, what intent, what was framework, what was essence? Strange, the impact of History, the grip it has on us, yet it was nothing but words. Accidental accretions for the most part, leaving most of the story out. We have not yet begun to explore the true power of the Word, I thought. What if we broke all the rules, played games with the evidence, manipulated language itself, made history a partisan ally? (Coover 137)

One also gathers that Doctorow negates the idea of objective representation of truth in any form whether historical or realistic. History is not an exception and the idea of objective representation of historical truth is a myth. In fact, there is no transparent truth at our disposal.

Doctorow continuously exposes Houdini's eccentric behavior and ironically presents his character as a kind of caricature against his greatest skills and tricks. He is shown not only as an ordinary man but also as a person prone to humiliation in the novel. Doctorow mentions at one point in the novel, "For all his achievements he was a trickster, an illusionist, a mere magician. What was the sense of his life if people walked out of the theatre and forgot him?" (103). Levine rightly points out at the ironized past narrated by Doctorow:

In Doctorow's hands, history demystified becomes a ragbag of accidents (the Archduke is assassinated when his chauffeur takes a wrong turn); coincidences (both Tateh and Henry Ford deal with the same Franklin Novelty Company); parallels (Coalhouse Walker meets Booker T. Washington in the same place that J. P. Morgan entertained Henry Ford); and misunderstandings (the Archduke congratulates Houdini on the invention of the aeroplane) (54).

Doctorow continues to mingle history with fiction throughout the novel. On the one hand, the novel assumes the status of a historical work and on the other hand, it keeps on reminding us its own fictional status. Many critics consider such novels as mock-historic novels as they both faithfully include the historical data and with its fabrication tools reconstruct or distort the conventional knowledge about the history. The author presents historical figures of America such as Henry Ford and Pierpont Morgan. By including many historical figures, the author continues his task of subjectivization, narrativization, reinterpretation, and fictionalization of the historical figures. With omniscient narrative strategy, the author presents both observable and

interpretive or inventive description of historical figures. As he indicates, “But Ford’s achievement did not put him at the top of the business pyramid. Only one man occupied that lofty place” (143). Here he presents Morgan as a man who occupies that lofty place. He further describes Morgan in the following words:

Morgan carried a gold-headed cane. He was at this time in his seventy-fifth year of life – a burly six-footer with a large head of sparse white hair, a white moustache and fierce intolerant eyes set just close enough to suggest the psychopathology of his will. (143-144).

Both Ford and Morgan have been narrativized in unique and peculiar ways. Despite Morgan’s condescending approach towards Ford, they have been shown as friends spending time together. Morgan says, “I want to meet that tinkering fellow. What’s his name. The motor mechanic. Ford” (144). Narrativization coupled with fictionalization and subjectivization distort and deconstruct history.

The weight of irony keeps on increasing as the novel proceeds further. The historical figures are presented ironically. Doctorow narrates Morgan’s empire of that time. He has been shown as the most influential person of that time and said to have helped America during the time of economic crisis. Doctorow ironically juxtaposes his economic and political superiority during that time with the chronic disease on his nose. Irony keeps on flowing in the novel ceaselessly.

It is important to note that the relationship between Ford and Morgan is very peculiar. Both of them are shown to have different mindsets. Morgan, in particular is shown more peculiar and weird than Ford. He believes in the idea of reincarnation and resumption of life after death. He associates Ford with one of the available mummies in Egypt. He indicates:

He had no illusions that Ford was a gentleman. He recognized him for a shrewd provincial, as a piece of wood. But he thought he saw in Ford's use of men a reincarnation of pharaohism. Not only that: he had studied photographs of the automobile manufacturer and had seen an extraordinary resemblance to Seti I, the father of the great Ramses and best-preserved mummy to have been unearthed from the necropolis of Thebes in the Valley of the Kings" (149).

It shows not only the fictional and peculiar relationship between Ford and Morgan but also suggests an unusual reconstruction of history stuffed with irony.

Both the fictional characters and the historical figures are fused together in the fabricated events of history. The fusion, at times, seems to be so intertwined to be separated. Both the fictional, verifiable historical data, and the fabricated events based on history are interconnected. This is how Doctorow plays with both history and fiction or in other words, fact and fiction. He denies the common sense belief regarding the acceptance of fact and fiction. It can be seen, for example, in the relationship between Younger Brother and Emma Goldman, a historical figure of that time who has been known for anarchist activities. Being an anarchist by nature Younger Brother meets Emma Goldman and joins her anarchist activities. The association between fictional and real historical figures grows naturally as the novel progresses.

Such an intertwining of historical figures and fictional characters are common in postmodern fiction. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, an interweaving of non-fictional characters such as Bernhard V. O'Hare, Mary O'Hare, Gerhard Müller, and Kurt Vonnegut, with fictional characters such as Billy Pilgrim, Roland Weary, Wild Bob and a few others is found. In *The White Hotel*, the case of Anna G. draws on the real cases of Freud. Freud's communication with Anna G. hints on the possibilities of real case studies, but it is an example of the fictionalized historical events

pertaining to Freud. In *The Name of the Rose*, historical figures such as the Inquisitor Bernard Gui, Ubertino of Casale and the Minorite Michael of Cesena play important parts in the novel. The novel, while portraying these historical characters, presents an alternative version, in which the interweaving of fictional characters with the historical figures becomes the tool to negate the objectivity of history.

In *Ragtime*, the ironical tone of the author continues to flourish. It is both blatant and subtle. Blatant irony in the cases historical figures and subtle irony can be found at the metafictional level. For example, an omniscient narrator presents the novel, and he knows about the details of the characters and events. There are incidents when the narrator does not know about a situation, an event, or a character. It is clearly identified when the narrator does not know about the fictional character Coalhouse Walker. He states:

Here, given subsequent events, it is important to mention what little is known about Coalhouse Walker Jr. Apparently he was a native of St. Louis, Missouri. As a young man he had known and admired Scott Joplin and other St. Louis musicians and had paid for his piano studies with money he earned as a stevedore. There is no information about his percentage. At one point a woman in St. Louis claimed to be his divorced wife but that was never proved. There were never located any of his school records in St. Louis and it still is not known how he acquired his vocabulary and his manner of speaking. Perhaps by an act of will". (190).

Such gaps in postmodern fiction question and ironize the all-know attitude of the traditional omniscient narrator. The novel installs both history and omniscient point of view, and subverts them by manipulating and ironizing them continuously in the novel.

The narrator remains ambiguous and changes his identity throughout the novel. Some critics suggest that the omniscient narrator is the little boy and others deny the very existence of a narrator's persona and opine that the story tells itself in *Ragtime*. There is one instance when the narrator refers to himself in the first person: "Poor Father, I see his final exploration. He arrives at the new place, his hair risen in astonishment, his mouth and eyes dumb" (269). Here, the narrator refers to Father as "Poor Father," and thus, one can argue that the little boy is the narrator. Because he was not with his father when the latter died, the little boy must interpret his father's last exploration and his entire family's history. The slippery status of a narrator coupled with zigzag narration does not follow a logical or chronological sequence in recording some of the characters' stories, thoughts, and conversations. His narration of the early twentieth century American society leaves the reader with a fictional overview of American society and the changes that occurred at the beginning of the last century.

Doctorow gives new shade of meaning to the historical events and associates a particular historical event with another crucial event related to the fictional character in the novel. The fusion between the factual event based on history and fictional event of the novel creates an altogether different world in the novel; the place where fact and fiction coincide harmoniously and correspond with one another. During the political campaigning, the attempt to assassinate Roosevelt, which he survived with a lifetime injury, coincides with the cruel incident during which Sarah is badly wounded and dies in the hospital. Wishing to petition on behalf of Coalhouse Walker, she goes to the venue and unfortunately finds her death. Her innocent wish gets cruel treatment when the militia misunderstands her intention and guns her down with heavy punches. The death of Sarah infuriates Coalhouse Walker and launches himself on the task of avenging against the entire system which is responsible for not only the injustice incurred upon

him but also the death of Sarah, who happened to be the only good cause to live for him. The author meticulously carries out this fusion when he brings together the factual event based on the attempt to assassinate the political leader and an unfortunate death of a fictional character Sarah. The focus of the writer is to carry out this curious blending of fact and fiction in an innovative way in the novel. The historical figures intermittently appear and disappear in the novel bringing inventive history and making curious fusion with the fictional characters. George Bowering in his *Burning Water* acknowledges this phenomenon of the blending between fact and fiction. He says, "The imagination depends upon facts, it feeds on them in order to produce beauty or invention, or discovery" (155). Michael Ondaatje, a postcolonial writer, who contests the historical metanarratives, problematizes history, and provides an alternative version of history, makes a similar attempt. He heavily draws the entire materials for his novels from history and restructures a different version by blurring the boundaries between history and fiction. In *The English Patient*, and *Kid*, subtitled *Left Handed Poems*, the writer inventively fabricates history. He presents a fictional biography in *Kid*, subtitled *Left Handed Poems*, which attempts to create an alternative version of history of the legendary American outlaw, Billy the Kid, and in the process, he recontextualizes the social and cultural forces of the historical time in the text. This recontextualization of history is also an important aspect in *Ragtime*.

It is important to point out that Doctorow borrows the plot from "Michael Kohlhaas", a story written by German author, Heinrich von Kleist, and he recontextualizes it in a different context. The German author wrote the story based on the historical character Hans Kohlhase, who himself has been a controversial figure for the historians as the facts and events related to the historical figure have not been agreed upon. Doctorow rewrites the story of "Michael Kohlhaas" that is already rewritten by Heinrich von Kleist on the historical (controversial) figure. In other

words, Doctorow writes an inventive story of Coalhouse Walker based on the historical work of Heinrich von Kleist, who wrote his story based on a controversial historical figure “Michael Kohlhaas”. By doing so, Doctorow ironically presents the history in a fictionalized form and negates the terms such as objectivity, truth, and originality. By this act of intertextuality, he creates a different version on the historical figure and places him in the context of American history. Postmodern literary work does not pretend to be new and original but uses the old literary forms, genres, and other literary tools such as kitsch, quotation, and allusion to recontextualize their meaning in different linguistic and cultural contexts to confront the past with the present.

The novel ceaselessly endows fictional shades to the historical figures, confuses the relationship between fact and fiction, and rejects the possibility of objective record of historical events. The author presents the historical figures like Thaw and Houdini intermittently and their historical stature is confused with the involvement of fictional elements. Houdini’s affection for his mother and his attempts to hear the voice of his dead mother cannot be authenticated in the history. This different, inventive, and unverifiable version of history in relation to the historical figures suggests an idea of disbelief towards the authentication of history. Doctorow describes Houdini’s affection for his mother in the following words: “He wanted to see his mother Cecelia’s tiny figure and feel her hands touch his face. But since that could not be, he decided to see if it was really possible to speak with her”. (208). His experiments with magical tricks aimed at getting in touch with his dead mother inspire him to carry out more dangerous escape tricks and get closer to death and the coffin. Doctorow rightly points that, “Perhaps it is true that he could no longer distinguish his life from his tricks” (212). He further adds, “Every feat enacted Houdini’s desire

for his dead mother” (212). His unusual attempts to get in touch with his dead mother cannot have any historical reference.

Such historical fabrications and reinterpretation with fictional shades attached to the real historical events and figures are seen in many postmodern fictions. Timothy Findley in his *Famous Last Words* change, reinterpret, and fictionalize historical events, and just as Doctorow mixes fact and fiction together, Timothy Findley attacks common sense distinctions between fact and fiction. In the novel, the central character, Mauberley, is borrowed from Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, who is a fictitious poet in the work. Findley presents him in an altogether different historical context. For example, his love for Wallis Simpson, a real historical figure, is purely fictional. The fictional character is involved in the group code named Penelope, which involves historical figures like von Ribbentrop, Rudolf Hess, Charles Lindbergh, Hitler, Count Ciano, and a few others. These historical figures are assigned fictional roles to create alternative versions or fabricated versions of history. Findley narrativizes historical period of Germany in 1941. The writer narrates the subjective recreation or reimagination of one of the events of history, “Hitlar raged; screaming at the two men; “How could you have let this happen? Englang will say a knife has been plunged in my back! My allies will desert me! They will say I cannot be trusted! Think of the secrets Hess has taken with him! Damn you! Damn you! To have let him slip through your fingers. . . Damn you!” (301-2). It is construed that Findley in *Famous Last Words* and Doctorow in *Ragtime* carry the task of fictionalization and reinterpretation of history a particular span in history.

Doctorow reiterates the point that it is not possible to capture the record of history. History has a span of time with multiple angles, and all the angles consist of different stories. He says, “A rumor in certain circles had it that Pierpont Morgan and Henry Ford had formed a secret society”

(209). One can never know whether they formed any secret society or not. According to Doctorow, we can never reject the possibility just on the bases of the fact that we do not have evidences. In other words, Doctorow highlights our inability to gather evidences for all the events that might have happened at a particular time in history.

The climax of the novel is centered round the extremist and intimidating actions of Coalhouse Walker. Towards the end, new additions of historical figures are seen. The final scene takes place at Morgan's library, which is seized by Coalhouse Walker. Coalhouse Walker sets two outright demands: the life of Will Conklin and a complete makeover of his car. Doctorow presents a world wherein fact and fiction become inseparable. It can be seen that Charles S. Whitman, a historical figure, who once exposed corruption in city police, comes to rescue the city from the deadlock created by Coalhouse Walker. The fusion of fact and fiction or history and the fiction takes an intensive route.

Along with Whitman, a historical figure, Booker T. Washington is introduced for the aid of the grave situation in the novel. The famous black man of that time comes for the mediation process between the government and the team of Coalhouse Walker. In the end, both historical figures and fictional characters meet together to resolve the deadlock created by Coalhouse Walker. The result of this deadlock is produced by the intervention of the Father. The climax results with the rescue of the other teammates, including the Younger Brother, the Ford Model T repaired and made in its original form, public humiliation of Will Conklin, and the death of Coalhouse Walker.

In one of the final scenes, Morgan is engaged in his weird experiments in Egypt. His entire night stay in the Pyramid of Giza is something that can never be imagined to have happened in the life of Morgan. Such a modification of the life of the historical figure and the presentation of a

different version of the history is the arena possessed by the writer throughout the novel. Robert Scholes rightly figures out, “The fact that an “innocent” history, a collection of facts and deeds, is itself a myth – and a myth that has lost its power to command belief. Art enters the scene even before the turning of deeds into words”. (207)

The historical modification and fabrication coupled with the tinge of persistent irony is a common phenomenon among the postmodern writers across the globe. The postmodern tendency to deny the existence of objective truth, be it history, or the reality is seen in the works of leading authors. Malamud’s *The Fixer* presents a fictionalized version of the history of Beilis case. Menahem Mendel Beilis was a Jew who was unjustly imprisoned in Tsarist, Russia with the false charge of the murder of a Christian boy. The entire event has been represented in a kind of fictionalized version of the history of that time. Malamud altered some of the very basic facts of history related to the case. Further, the author invents the fictionalized characterization, which includes the dreams, inner thoughts, and emotions of the historical character. One can never create or imagine the exact details regarding a person belonging to history. Yakov Bok is shown as a reflection of Menahem Mendel Beilis. Whereas Beilis was a respectably married, father of five, legally employed and having few friendly acquaintances outside the Jew community, Bok is represented as a childless, devoid of a happy marriage; his wife ran off with a goy, illegally employed and absolutely friendless. The character is infused with both imagination and factual data in relation to the history of that time. The author invents the character by the use of dreams, hallucinations, and implausible and imaginative talks with other historical as well as fictional characters. Both Doctorow and Malamud attempt to prove that history is just a text bound by the norms and conventions of narrative techniques.

Different writers have their own narrative patterns to deconstruct history. For example, the historical revisit of Marquez is different from the narrative technique utilized by Doctorow or Findley. Marquez utilizes magic realism as a tool to ironize, deconstruct, and reconstruct a different version of history. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the writer ironizes the atrocities and oppressions carried out in the wars. He simultaneously ironizes and reconstructs the symbolic and permanent war between the liberals and the conservatives. His postmodern view of history is visible in one of the incidents narrated in the novel:

Those fickle tricks of memory were even more critical when the killing of the workers was brought up. Every time that Aureliano mentioned the matter, not only the proprietress but some people older than she would repudiate the myth of the workers hemmed in at the station and the train with two hundred cars loaded with dead people, and they would even insist that, after all, everything had been set forth in judicial documents and primary-school textbooks: that the banana company had never existed.

Marquez points out at two things: the unreliability of the memory and the tempering of the historical events at the hands of the historians or the dominant class of society.

Just as Doctorow inscribes the historical characters and then fictionalizes them with modifications and fabrications of commonly accepted historical truths, Milan Kundera modifies and fabricates history in different ways in his works such as *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, and *Immortality*. In one of the scenes of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* Kundera presents the historical story of Gottwald and Clementis, both Communist leaders in Prague. Gottwald delivers a winter speech with Clementis by his side. In a gesture of solidarity, Clementis removes his hat and places it on Gottwald's head. Four years later when Clementis is charged with treason and eventually hanged, his existence and place has been removed from

history. Postmodern writers assert and reiterate the possibility of the effacement of historical data not suitable to the dominant class of the society, or historical representations are always focused on the dominant and the powerful sect. Postmodern writers hint at this historical bias against the powerless and underprivileged sect. In *Immortality*, Kundera, similarly, presents a controversial relationship of the great Goethe with young Bettina. He presents her controversial correspondence with Goethe and fictionalized narrativization of their affiliation.

Both fabrication and reconstruction of history as well as an ironical representation of history are epitomized in *Ragtime*. Doctorow's *Ragtime* is an example that shows the interdependent relationships between fact and fiction, or rather history and imagination. Both affect and shape each other. Levine remarks on the issue, "*Ragtime* is not only proof of the proposition but a splendid example of how fiction can revise our understanding of history, of how imagination can reclaim the world of facts" (61).

Just like what Doctorow does in his *Ragtime*, Umberto Eco in his *The Name of the Rose* mixes fact and fiction in a way that they become inseparable. Eco plays with the fine line between fact and fiction, a line that always seems ready to dissolve. He includes medieval history of Italy; the time when the Catholic Church was at its peak and papal authority was considered a very significant and dominant. In the novel, several historical figures are shown who take part in the actions initiated by the fictional characters. William, the main protagonist of the novel, is asked by the abbot of the monastery to investigate the series of mysterious deaths. The fabrication and presentation alternative versions of history is seen when, just like *Ragtime*, multiple historical figures and fictional characters in the novel combine to form another version of history. The non-fictional characters like Ubertino of Casale and Michael of Cesena are one of the historical figures who participate in the task of reconstructing of history. History needs to be reconstructed

and it does not have an objective and authentic stance as previously considered by the historians. The narrator of the novel *The Name of the Rose* puts human incapacity to record the history in following words:

Perhaps, to make more comprehensible the events in which I found myself involved, I should recall what was happening in those last years of the century, as I understood it then, living through it, and as I remember it now, complimented by other stories I heard afterward – if my memory still proves capable of connecting the threads of happenings so many and confused (4).

His novel, *The Name of the Rose*, purports to be a history written by Adso of Melk. The history presented by the writer is a narration followed by three previous narrations on the same history, including the history written by Adso of Melk. And this is why Eco has to say, “French scholars are notoriously careless about furnishing reliable biographical information, but this case went beyond all reasonable pessimism. I began to think I had encountered a forgery” (xv). Eco represents the inventive and reconstructive way of writing history in his other novel *Baudolino*. The novel, too, narrates the fabricated history with the involvement of plenty of well-known historical figures and fictional characters. The novel is about the adventures of a young man named Baudolino in the mythical Christian world of the 12th century. This trend of fabricated history can be clearly seen in *Baudolino*. At one point in the novel, the historian Bishop Otto tells Baudolino that lying is linked with history: “If you want to become a man of letters and perhaps write some Histories one day, you must also lie and invent tales, otherwise your History would become monotonous” (43).

Both Doctorow and Eco present alternative or inventive versions of history and deny the unquestionable truths regarding history. Postmodern writers like Doctorow, Eco, Kundera,

Vonnegut and others challenge the truths of history and present the alternative versions of history. In fact, they diminish the very difference between historical documents and the fiction by putting them into one common phenomenon called narrative. Regarding the quality of narrative, Cameron points out:

This 'character of narrativity' is the essential point, for it makes such histories much more persuasive than the banal facts and figures of recorded history. However, such persuasiveness has its downside, for it can mislead just as much as it can enliven and entertain. Whatever the validity of such claims, the question one is confronted with is whether such skeptical criticism leads to a rejection of false knowledge or, paradoxically enough, an increased susceptibility to it. While it may be good to rewrite the encyclopedia every day, it has often been the case that such rewriting has not made one any more intellectually rigorous when it comes to exposing genuine falsehood (7).

This exploration of the past and the subsequent epistemological or ontological questioning are found in numerous works. In various countries, such examples of postmodern fiction representing or reconstructing history are seen. Among contemporary British fiction, Adam Thorpe's *Ulverton* is an example that falls in the category of historiographic metafiction. In the novel, Thorpe records and reconstructs history of an English Village by the way of presenting history through the collection of stories, myths and tales, mediated through a variety of texts that include written documents as well as oral texts. The novel deals with epistemological and methodological problems associated with history and historiography. The writer also questions the validity of the source materials and the nature of historical knowledge and interpretation. *Ulverton* presents the three hundred years of span pertaining to the village. The novel asserts that

we do not have a direct access to the past except through the external textual elements such as myths, tales, and other various discourses.

Postmodern novelists play the idea of representation and narration of the past. In order to present alternative versions of history, postmodern writers create an inventive fusion between real historical personages and the fictional characters. There are endless examples of the novels that work to create these versions. Just as Doctorow does in his novel *Ragtime*, Ismael Reed in his *Mumbo Jumbo* creates a curious fusion between history and fiction or fact and fiction. He includes real historical figures such as Warren Harding, 29th President of the US and James Weldon Johnson, an American author, educator, lawyer, diplomat, songwriter, and early civil rights activist. In the novel historical, social, and political events mingle freely with fictional inventions. The novel narrates the United States' occupation of Haiti, the attempts by whites to suppress jazz music, and the widespread belief that President Warren Harding had black ancestry. The purpose in the novel is not to represent a faithful or objective narration of history, but a deliberate attempt to negate the available version of history in favor of an inventive, fictional, or imaginative history. Similar deconstruction of the historical account is also seen in Italo Calvino's *Invisibel Cities*. In the novel, Calvino narrates the fictional account of the historical narration done by Marco Polo to Kublai Khan. Both are historical figures, but such encounters between them are not verifiable. By showing the narration of the historical accounts of various cities, the writer hints at both the unreliable narrative and subjective matters that account for this narration. The writer also hints at the unreliability in terms of language and its transparency or reliability as a stable source.

Their deconstructive act as a play of representation is noticed, in which postmodernist fictions persist to deconstruct the final signified. When one refers to Doctorow's *Ragtime*, Salman

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Eco's *The Name of the Rose* or Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, it is found that they present alternative versions of history, hitherto neglected or unseen. Regarding this blending of fact and fiction and the ironical representation of the past in *Ragtime*, John G. Parks mentions:

This blending, in often very humorous ways, of real and imaginary people gives his novel the feel of an "inside view" of history, stories not told in the schoolbooks. But the effect is not to trivialize history, but rather to demystify it, to promote a new historical self-consciousness. It does not sentimentalize the ragtime era, nor does it create nostalgia for a bygone age (62).

It can be seen that postmodern fiction clearly rejects the conventional approach to history. History is not an objective or authentic record of the past. In other words, history can never be authentic, and history in totality can never be captured. In addition to this, postmodern writers, question the conventional boundary between fact and fiction and try to diminish the distinction between them. This fictionalization and alternative versions of history presented by the postmodern writers highlight our inability to get access to the final truths of history. History is a distant façade of reality, which permanently hangs in the state of elusion, and we have no option but to view it ironically.

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