

**REUSING OF HISTORICAL MATERIALS IN *THE TROTTER- NAMA***

**BY A. SEALY AND *A HISTORY OF THE WORLD IN 10½***

**CHAPTERS BY J. BARNES**

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**Abstract**

*There is no doubt that the comparative study of literature will provide the opportunity for cross-cultural studies with a global worldview. In order to highlight the hidden parts, which the exclusive focus on a national literature tends to blur, we need to cultivate reading across all boundaries specifically linguistic and national. In this article, Irwin Allan Sealy's "The Trotter-Nama; A Chronicle" and Julian Patric Barnes' "A History of The World in 10 ½ Chapters" are selected to be examined. Whereas, both of the authors belong to the postmodern era, their view about history and the way they use history in their novels is brought into the focus. To have more healthy and meaningful conclusion in our comparative study we choose novels, which were published almost at the same time with only one year in between. Allan Sealy's first novel "The Trotter Nama; A Chronicle" (1988), tells the story of seven generations of an Anglo-Indian family. And Julian Barnes's "A History of The World in 10 ½ Chapters" (1989) is a collection of short stories in different styles; however, at some points they echo each other and have subtle connection points.*

**Key Words:** Postmodernism, History, Metafiction, Parody, Narration.

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**Introduction:**

**I**rwin Allan Sealy, born in 1951 in Allahbad, Uttar Pradesh in India. His creativeness and his skill in detailing is visible from his first novel *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988), which is magical account of seven generations of a dynasty. His second novel *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar* (1998) is totally in different style where description finds at its best. This great shift in style appears as if the writer of this is not Sealy himself. He is the author of two other works *The Brain Fever Bird* (2003) and *Red: An Alphabet* (2006).

Allen sealy' first novel, *The Trotter-Nama*, is written in mock-epic style, in which the author very skillfully combines history with fantasy, and the real with the imaginary. It contains of the lives of seven generations of Trotters, an Anglo-Indian family whose lineage in India began with Justin Trottoire, a French mercenary, in 1750's. *The Trotter-Nama* is arguably the most affecting and impressing ethnic articulation in Indian literature in English. By giving a powerful statement on the Anglo-Indian community in India, a minority community with a complicated origin and a still more complicated history, it plays the role more important that a novel.

*The Trotter-Nama* is a fiction of two hundred years of family chronicle, concentrated in two cultures. It deals with the story of an Anglo-Indian family, the heroic founding father of which was a French Mercenary Officer who lived in the eighteenth century. The novel could be considered as a journey trough the history from eighteen century, which delving into the magnificent old days, expansion, and degradation of the Anglo-Indian community from glorious past to its emaciated present. *The Trotter -Nama* seemed to be inspired by G.V. Desani and Salman Rushdie. Its structure is very aspiring; it brings together a vast variety of characters in an unalike situation raging from the playful to the gloomy, from

pleasant to pathetic. The seventh Trotter, Eugene, who is a painter and the forger of miniatures, narrates the history of the community to the readers.

Julian Barnes is an acclaimed English writer. He is a prolific author of fictions, non-fictions and short stories. He was born in Leicester, England. Julian Barnes is also known under the pen names of Dan Kavanagh for his crime fiction writing but also as Edward Pygge and Basil. His writing has earned him considerable respect and awards such as Man Bookers Prize for his novel, *The Sense of an Ending* in 2012. His novels almost deal with the themes of history, reality, truth and love.

*A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* is Barnes' sixth novel, which was published in 1989. This novel explores the relationship between art, death and religion, through a number of stories linked by images of shipwreck and survival. Though this novel, in fact, is a collection of stories but Barnes insists on consider it as a novel according to his definition of novel; "A long piece of writing with something wrong in it." Almost all the stories in this novel contain the same motifs such as water, mythical stories and shipwreck.

These two novels main theme was their using historical materials as a subject matter. Both novels are base upon the true or the imaginative historical incidents. In *The Trotter-Nama* the author more specifically brings into the focus only the history of the small community, hence, in the novel, *A History of The World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, the author uses more general view of the history.

In this article, with the knowledge that the eyes of two authors are from different cultural and background, the techniques of their historical writing will be examined. Although, this comparison is not going to reveals any certain facts about the writers and their way of writing, still brings the attention of the readers and provide a general view about the two writers.

There is always an ongoing interest in the historical curiosity either of the small community such as Anglo-Indian society or of more general concept such as the world. In postmodernism, all problem is considered to be rooted in our partial and insufficient knowledge of the past and history, so that this curiosity in finding the truth about history is almost for exploring the contemporary dilemma's of national or human identity.

### Reusing of Historical Materials:

Comparing to other common subject matters such as uncertain situation of human being, truth, and belief, the use of historical materials as subject matter for fictions and literary prose is clearly not a frequent in imaginative twentieth-century literature.

The relationship between the writing of history and fiction mostly has vexed literary theorists. There have been critics of postmodernism, notably Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton, who have accused postmodern art generally of a historicism and "depthlessness." (Postmodernism6). For Jameson in particular, postmodern art becomes as evasion of history because of its use of pastiche which he defines as a "weakness" form of parody or satire, with very little of the critical potential of either (Postmodernism17).

Postmodern fiction's quest for finding its way to history and world seems no more happening innocently. The un-innocent historiographic metafiction categorized within historical discourse, while accepting their fictional nature, is a kind of deep contradictory doubleness, which shows having both fictional and historical intertexts.

Since the rise of postmodernism in 1970s, parody is one of devices that of frequently used in culture, literature, film, design and architecture. If we define the term parody, it is a work created to mock or make fun of an original work that often used in comedy. Besides, this simple definition of the term, most of the postmodern theorists and critics give their own definition of the parody as well. According to Hutcheon: "To parody is not to destroy the past; in fact to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it. And this, once again, is the postmodern paradox. So that experiencing the history by ourself is some thing impossible"(126). While, Linda Hutcheon considers parody as a value to postmodern literature and sees it as an implicit political critique and historical awareness, Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, sees parody empty of any political bite and call it "blank parody"(postmodernism 17).

Using parody in postmodern fiction and particularly in historiographic fiction seems so essential due to inaccessibility of the historical materials for everyone. Here, the two selected novels used parody to bring the past and a history little close for the readers. However, same part of history was used as a material for previous novels and writing, in these novels the innovative way of narration and presentation is noticeable.

In any historiographic fictions the past is presented only through its text and its traces. The novel, *The Trotter-Nama*, besides plenty of historical information that is given to the reader, provides the situation in which the readers raise their questions of the incidents. The racial and cast discrimination and the community's problems within the Indian context bring to mind. *The Trotter-Nama* is A. Sealy's first attempt to re-imagine the history of Anglo-Indian beyond the conventions of tragic realism. Unlike the pervious attempts for fictionalizing this community's history, such as *Midnight Children* by Rushdie, this novel tries to put the tragic atmosphere of the history aside and gives the new perspective of the events. This innovative way of seeing the matters is also applied in the novel *A History of The World In 10 1/2 Chapters* by Julian Barnes.

In the novel, *A History of The World In 10 1/2 Chapters*, we encounter the situation, in which the author presents an innovative perspective of looking the historical fictions, specifically the mythical and biblical stories. The novel suggests the readers to ponder more about the ways history has been given to them, implying that history might not as easy as they considered it to be. Each chapter deals with the story that basically hints the matters would influence the history till it reaches to us. Julian Barnes intention of bringing the history and the ways history influenced by, in the stories of the novel provides the wide view about a history to the readers.

The first story which is hilariously revisionist account of Noah's ark, narrated by a passenger who doesn't appear in Genesis, not only is re-telling the story in a new perspective, but also, it brings to the focuses the point that each perspective has its own importance to the truth of the past. Other chapters, as well, are dealing with the relation between history and art, power, science and human interpretation.

The narrative of the historiographic fictions is one of the significant matters, since the history is obscure and cannot be seen. That is the way of narration that determines the authenticity or brings doubts about a history in the fiction. According to Stanly Wolpert in *A New History of India*, "The narrative produces doubt about the authenticity and credibility of the western historian by introducing his actual voice where it is not expected, where it seems intrusive" (164/165).

The narration is one of the differences between Western and Eastern historiographic fictions. Unlike Eastern historiography, Western's historiography

is empty of defensive and polemical tone. In the process of history-writing, the history that is strived to record has excluded by the western author, while in East, the playful use of history is the salient result of the final work. In *A History of The World In 10 1/2 Chapters*, parodying of the history may indeed question the authority of the historiography, while in *The Trotter-Nama*, the playful use of Anglo-Indian history is the final result. Although, in both novels humorous tone of the narration is the one of the similarities, the other aspect of the narration is totally differs. In Barnes *A History of The World In 10 1/2 Chapters* each chapter got its own narrator but in *The Trotter-Nama* the story is narrated by one narrator. On the other hand, in *The Trotter-Nama* the juxtaposition of embarrassing documentary record and the narrator's own coyly straightforward style blurs the lines between the prose of history and the parody of fiction.

According to Jameson, postmodern historical novel or "historical metafiction" (Hutcheon) could only represent the history through pop image of past. For Hutcheon, postmodern parody is not ridiculous imitation but rather is a "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the heart of similarity"(26). Postmodern intertextual parody, according to Hutcheon, is situated in historical discourse.

In *A History of The World In 10 1/2 Chapters*, restoring history and simultaneously putting into question the authority of any act of historical writing by using both history and fiction in the same intertextual network is notable. The author seems intentionally compare the historical events and the changes has happened to it in art such as painting and fiction, in order to refer the unauthentic nature of both history and art.

The paradoxical nature of postmodern parody is "both to enshrine the past and to question it"(126), however is "a past that can be known only from its text, its traces- be they literary or historical"(125), as Hutcheon stated in her book, *Poetics of Postmodernism*.

This conception of the parody of history, as Loretta M. Mijares quoted from Judith Plotz' characterization of *The Trotter-Nama* as in her article is "cheerfully unreliable book, flaunting the constructedness of all history . . . Sealy emphasizes the pastness and unknowableness of the past, its distinction from the present, and its unavailability except of the past, its distinction from the present, and its unavailability except through strenuous verbal reinvention" (Fetishism of The Original 12).

By reading *The Trotter-Nama* carefully, an intelligent reader would understand that Hutcheon's concept of parody and its dual nature is rather far away from this novel's curious approach to its history. The novelist presents exactly verbatim documentary sources of Anglo-Indian history. *The Trotter-Nama* is proving that available but ignored history of the community is there however, textualized. In most of historiographic Metafictions such as *The Trotter-Nama* and *A History of The World In 10 1/2 Chapters*, parody appears as a strategy for historical survival; the unreliability introduced by parody transforms the reader of the novel into a history. In this factor also the dissimilarity appears between the two novels. While, the narrators in *A History of The World In 10 1/2 Chapters* attempt to push the readers towards the doubts and unbelief of the history, the narrator of *The Trotter-Nama*, by being as faithful as possible to the documentation, tries to give knowledge of the past as it happens. Might one of the novelist's intentions by using parody is questioning the past and transform the readers to it but the readers of *The Trotter-Nama*, due to its novelists faithful citation of the parliamentary papers, would have knowledge of these historical facts without doing the research. Such faithful retelling by the author, would also raise the idea that the novel was not written to question the authority of the history, but it make available an account of history more known than previous.

Another dissimilar factor between the selected novels in this article is that, unlike the wide number of audiences in the novel *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, *The Trotter-Nama's* readers might limit to the Indians. As Loretta M. Mijares argues in her article that unlike Kumar claim that *The Trotter-Nama's* intended audience is Indian, the only audience that would readily recognize these allusions are "The Other-Anglo-Indians"(13).

#### **Conclusion:**

The most remarkable fact about postmodern novelist, therefore, is that they have constantly turned to the collective past as a source of inspiration. Such ongoing interest in history resulted in the wide range of historical subjects. Some of these novels, like *A History of The World in 10 1/2 Chapters*, deal with the general concept of the world history from twentieth-century or reaches further back, while some other novels, like *The Trotter-Nama*, have been plotted on more specific part of a history, such as a history of a marginalized community. Undoubtedly, the literary adaptation of historical materials is conventionally

considered as the major part of historical novel, though some critics such as Jameson would call it blank and meaningless or as Sir Walter Scott endowed this genre with widely imitative shape.

The dissimilarity of the selected novels in this article, such as the tone of the narration, the number of audiences addressed by the authors, a historical area the authors used as a material and the different techniques for using the parody is remarkable. Although, both of the novels, due to belonging the same era, are considered as a postmodern novel, aforementioned factors are significant to be noted. I will hope to show that apart from indeterminacy and linguistic or historical nihilism, the goal of J. Barnes and A. Sealy's novelistic practices is not to dwell forever in those concepts but to engage history and even dramatizing it with all the difficulties of doing so.

At the end, it is a helpful reminder that all statements and notions about history should be said and read with a healthy dose of skepticism. The very fact that so many postmodern novelists take such an interest in the past and in the difficulties of writing it down makes the charge of a historicism questionable. The Trotter-Nama sometimes turns satirical, affecting but due to its creative genius it is very impressive to read. And in short, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* is a stately aspiring and inventive work of fiction, in the traditions of Joyce and Calvino, from the author of the widely acclaimed *Flaubert's Parrot*.

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