

## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

E. L. Doctorow, as a typical twentieth century American novelist, sociological writer and a writer of diverse themes, is interested in weaving a connection between history and story, fact and fiction in his works. Particularly in the novel *The Water Works*, (1994). Doctorow uses the historical context of the times just after the great Civil War, the War of Secession. It was a time of the national crisis; the American federation was threatened by the Southern States which wanted to continue slavery as opposed to the Northern ones, the abolitionists, led by the President. Though the Union was saved, it was a costly conflict that cost a heavy loss of life and property.

Edgar Laurence Doctorow, popularly known as E.L. Doctorow, is widely regarded as one of America's pre-eminent novelists of the 20th Century. His work is philosophically probing, employing an adventurous prose style, and the use of historical and quasi-historical figures, situations, and settings. Politically active and outspoken, Doctorow advocates the active social roles of writers as the agents of change and watchdogs of humanity. Writers, Doctorow seems to claim, have the responsibility of taking on the role of seers and visionaries, of leaders and commentators, relating themselves to their immediate society.

Doctorow was born on January 6, 1931 in the Bronx, New York. He was named after the great poet and short story writer Edgar Allen Poe, who had also lived in the Bronx. Doctorow's parents were both second-generation Americans who descended from Russian Jews. Doctorow's household was rife with literary, intellectual, and political discussion. He would later characterize his childhood milieu as a lower middle-class environment of generally enlightened socialist sensibility. Both Doctorow and his older brother had aspirations of being novelists.

Upon finishing grade school, Doctorow attended the prestigious Bronx High School of Science. He then enrolled at Kenyon College in Gambier Ohio, a liberal arts school known to be a hub of literary study. One of Doctorow's professors at Kenyon was the renowned poet and critic, John Crowe Ransom. At this point, Doctorow was not focused on a literary career, however, preferring to major in philosophy. He also tried his hand at acting, appearing on stage in a number of campus productions.

After earning his undergraduate degree with honors in 1952, Doctorow moved on to graduate study in English drama at New York's Columbia University in the autumn of 1952. Here he was introduced to the work of the German Romantic playwright Heinrich Von Kleist, whose writing had a profound effect on the young student. Doctorow later modeled the protagonist of his most famous novel, *Ragtime* on the hero of one of Kleist's novels.

While studying at Columbia, Doctorow met and married Helen Setzer, a fellow graduate student. He was drafted into the Army in 1953 and was stationed in Frankfurt, Germany, where Helen gave birth to the couple's first child. Upon leaving the service, Doctorow returned to New York, where he got a job at the reservations desk at La Guardia Airport. Tired of this, he moved on to a position as an expert reader for Columbia Pictures. His responsibilities included reading a novel a day and writing a 1200-word critique evaluating its cinematic potential. Doctorow acknowledged that the job gave him insights into the structure and pacing of genre novels that he would later use in his own writing.

In 1959, Doctorow accepted a job as an editor for the New American Library. He remained there until 1964, using his free time to work on his own fiction. In 1960, Doctorow published his first novel, *Welcome to Hard Times*. A Western genre story, it was set in the newly settled Dakota Territory of the 1800s. The tale was told from

the point of view of the mayor of the frontier town of Hard Times, in the form of a series of journal entries. Critics responded favorably, and the book was later turned into a motion picture starring Henry Fonda. Although Doctorow was now an established novelist, he was still unable to support his family entirely through his writing. He, therefore, accepted the post of editor-in-chief at Dial Press in 1964.

In 1966, Doctorow completed work on his second novel, *Big as Life*. This time he chose science fiction as his genre, spinning an outlandish tale about a group of people who band together to fight off two giant humanoids attacking Manhattan. The book was perplexing to some reviewers; others dismissed it as potboiler science fiction. Doctorow later withdrew the novel from print entirely apparently disappointed at the critical reception it received. Doctorow worked as an editor and has since taught at colleges and universities. His best-selling novels have often focused on the working class and the dispossessed of earlier decades in the U.S.

Doctorow is known for his skillful blending of fiction and fact into reconstructions of eras in American history. His first work was a novel of the 19th-century West, *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960), but he did not win wide recognition until *The Book of Daniel* (1971). As editor-in-chief at Dial Press, Doctorow spent the last few years of the 1960s working with some of the most talented authors of the time, including Norman Mailer, James Baldwin, and Richard Condon. But he quit his position in 1969 in order to devote more time to his own writing. The fruit of that effort was Doctorow's first non-genre novel, *The Book of Daniel* (1971). The novel is a fictional biography of a young man whose parents have been executed during the Cold War, suggestive of the fates of convicted spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. The title character was based on Michael Meeropol, the son of executed Communist spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Doctorow believed the execution was a major political

crime of the 1950s and tried to express his confusion and outrage through the character of Daniel. He did extensive research into the lives of the Rosenbergs in preparation for writing his book. *The Book of Daniel* was nominated for a National Book Award and made part of the required reading list at a number of colleges and universities. The novel thoughtfully explores America of the 1950s and 1960s, mixing fact and fiction in a fashion that would become a Doctorow trademark.

In *Ragtime* (1975) Doctorow rewrites the rules of the historical novel in his inventive story, set at the turn of the twentieth century and incorporating real events and actual personages. The novel is set in the decade prior to World War I, weaving together a number of interconnected story lines, featuring both real-life and imaginary characters. Historical figures such as Harry Houdini, William Howard Taft, and Sigmund Freud appear in its pages, though the major themes of the novel revolve around the fictional Coalhouse Walker, a black piano player persecuted for a crime he did not commit. The term ragtime recalls in ones mind the ragtime era in American socio-political history—the early twenties when the problem of racism and economic depression was plaguing the American society. The reality of poverty, injustice and inequality have been historicized and contextualized around the Civil Rights Movements of the sixties. The novel was an enormous critical and commercial success, fulfilling Doctorow's own vow that the book would reach vast new constituencies. It won Doctorow the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction and was adapted as a feature film in 1982 and a Broadway musical in 1997.

With his fifth novel of the 1980's, *Loon Lake*, Doctorow returned once again to historical fiction. Set in and around the Adirondacks during the Great Depression, the book follows the wanderings of an ambitious drifter. Its experimental prose style

and non-linear structure made it a difficult read for some, but critical response was mostly positive.

Doctorow's next novel, *Billy Bathgate* (1989) again explores the relationship between history and myth, as it follows the title character through his immersion in the gangster underworld of the 1930's. Young Bathgate's mentor throughout is the real-life gangster, Dutch Schultz. One of Doctorow's most accessible and accomplished novels, *Billy Bathgate* became an international bestseller and earned Doctorow the National Critics' Award.

During this same period, Doctorow himself was exploring that relationship through his actions and public pronouncements. Now an internationally famous and acclaimed author, he found time in his hectic schedule to publicly expound on his views about political and cultural matters. In 1980, Doctorow appeared before a Senate subcommittee to decry the encroachment of the entertainment industry into publishing. Doctorow became extremely active within the literary community. In 1982, he was appointed the Lewis and Loretta Gluckman Chair of American Literature at New York University. In 1984, he was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

Doctorow's eighth novel, *The Waterworks*, appeared in 1994. Set in New York City in the aftermath of the Civil War, the suspenseful narrative is told by an old, wry newspaper editor. Its real protagonist is Martin Pemberton, one of the paper's employees, who embarks on a quest to find the father he thought was long dead. As the novel develops, it also centers on Augustus Pemberton, a tycoon presumed to be dead until his son spots him one day on a Manhattan street. Doctorow grandly recreates the world of Boss Tweed and waterfront taverns, the era of robber barons and the mansions they erect in their capital of capitalism. The mystery is never quite

solved, even though the novel's detective does penetrate the waterworks, the venue for the metropolis's conniving financiers. Laced with historical and contemporary allusions, the book echoes earlier Doctorow works in its sweeping examination of the interaction among different social classes.

Thriving on its openness and flexibility, the novel has become the most important literary genre of the modern age. The novel differs from the prose romance in that a greater degree of realism is expected of it, and that it tends to describe a recognizable secular social world, often in a skeptical and prosaic manner. Special subgenres of the novel have grown up around particular kinds of characters, setting, as in the historical novel, and plot as in the detective novel. American novels in the 19th century were explicitly referred to as romances. James Fenimore Cooper's historical novel *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* (1850), and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851)—the latter two heavily allegorical and containing supernatural elements—properly belong in this category. In the last decades of the century, however, a shift toward realism occurred. Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1883), a revival of the picaresque novel, is romantic in its Mississippi River setting but realistic in its satirical attack on religious hypocrisy and racial persecution.

By the end of the century Henry James had brought his moral vision and powers of psychological observation to the novel in numerous works, including *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897), and *The Ambassadors* (1903). These novels are not only masterpieces of realism but also—in their carefully crafted form, experimental point of view, and superb style—supreme examples of the novel as a literary genre. A lesser figure, William Dean Howells, realistically portrayed a marriage and divorce in *A Modern Instance* (1882). In the twentieth

century, America produced a great number of novelists populating and influencing the world literary scenario. Explicit writings on socio-political realities and events became common. It is in this context that Doctorow's *The Water Works* can be fruitfully studied as a text that is largely shaped by context: a novel that combines the fictional with the factual and vice-versa. Thus, as brief survey of his novels indicates, it is not something new for Doctorow to use the historical events to weave his stories and novel. In this context, it is inevitable to understand how the textuality of history and historicity of text seamlessly intertwine to give birth to various sorts of discourses which may be literary, legal or political. Very often, what seems purely a literary venture is deeply saturated with political interest, whereas, at other times the official history is merely a fabricated, truncated and adopted version of the reported reality once again revised to suit the interest of the dominant stakeholder in the power politics of a country. Michel Foucault provides an interesting method of reading history, now popularly so called the new historical method. In his world view, history as it was conceived to be in the previous times to be chronologically systematic and linear, is a myth. History is a play of different elements, all of them somehow and to some extent making their presence in the writing and creating of history. Thus seen, history is not a faithful recording of event and fact and narration of what happened in the past; rather it is the reflection of the interest of those who are officially in power. But to stop here would be simply to over simplify Foucault's historical perspective. Power is not only vertical: these in upper posts do not control everything—they are controlled in turn by those whom they think are in control of. Power relation is intricate at the same time horizontal and vertical.

Since one of the basics of New Historicism is that politics is pervasive, all discourse are impregnated with political interest and biases. Any text, written from

any quarter, inevitably partakes of this power play, and tries to create a truth effect of its own kind as it suits the promote or circulator of that particular version of truth. Seen thus, power is not a one-way traffic, but an intricate network of give and take relations, influences, coercions and discourses that produce truth effect. New Historicism developed in the 1980s, primarily through the work of the critic Stephen Greenblatt, and gained widespread influence in the 1990s. New Historicists aim simultaneously to understand the work through its historical context and to understand cultural and intellectual history through literature, which documents the new discipline of the history of ideas. Michel Foucault based his approach both on his theory of the limits of collective cultural knowledge and on his technique of examining a broad array of documents in order to understand the *episteme*, the knowledge, of a particular time. New Historicism is claimed to be a more neutral approach to historical events, and is sensitive towards different cultures. Foucault's conception of power is neither reductive nor synonymous with domination. Rather he understands power as continually articulated on knowledge and knowledge on power.



## Chapter II

### History Redefined: New Historicism

#### 2.1 Historiography and New Historicism

The way of perceiving history as a mere recording of facts and events of the past became dubious by the mid twentieth century. Critical concepts about history had been proposed as early as the late nineteenth century by the German philosopher Frederick Nietzsche. There arose a New Historical school based on the critical insight as propounded by the French scholar Michel Foucault in his numerous books such as ....

New Historicism denies the claim that society has entered a post-modern or post-historical phase, and allegedly ignited the 'culture wars' of the 1980s (Seaton, 2000). The main points of this argument are that new historicism, unlike post-modernism, acknowledges that almost all historic views, accounts, and facts they use contain biases which derive from the position of that view.

Historiography can be understood as the art of writing history using multiple sources as diary, memoir, journalism, personal encounters and anecdotes etc. It is the act of writing, because something or even does not become history by the mere virtue of happening or being. If that was the case, there would be an objective truth, one version of history, and the question of multiple comprehension and version of history would not at all be raised. Now any and all source can become the source of history, provided they come to a discourse making or recounting of the past as it seems from the present. Because, as Foucault says, the search for objective truth is like the search for origin which is never going to be accomplished. The very fact that we cannot re-invent and re-live the past makes it impossible to go the exact historic situation. So, we need to be content with what ever glimpse, fragmented view of history we can

have. In the case of *The Waterworks*, we have the version of American history of the 1870s as it appears to the recollection of a journalist

The foundations of Foucault's New Historical theories were already laid, as it were, by Nietzsche, who viewed historical as a serving instrument for the better attainment of human personality. In his work *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* Nietzsche opposes the school which views history as something unchangeable and sacred, a factual data of truths. Rather, to him, history is inextricably mingled with the personality traits of the historian, immensely moulded by the contemporaneous order of events and society. The subjective biases, hopes and aspirations, passions and fears of the writer is unavoidably reflected in the history recorded.

Besides calling into question the objective truthfulness of history, Nietzsche warns humanity of the unsettling and crippling effects of history. Taking a particular utilitarian standpoint, he argues for a history which becomes a source of inspiration and energy rather than a debilitating imposition and limit setting spectral voice from the past. He goes so far as to warn that history after a certain point can be a restrictive power on life. Therefore we have to accept it so far as it helps life:

We need it for life and action, not as a convenient way to avoid life and action or to excuse a selfish life and a cowardly or base action. We would serve history only so far as it serves life; but to value its study beyond a certain point mutilates and degrades life." (21)

For Nietzsche history is thus no longer the mere representation of truths; that would not be useful in any way, and understanding the truth is beyond human capacity. What makes history important to us is determined by its usefulness to serve life. The proper

and creative use of history is what matters, not the knowledge of history per se. as he puts its practical usefulness and need:

History is necessary above all to all man of action and power fights a great fight and needs examples, teachers, and contemporaries [. . .]

Polybius is thinking of the active man when he calls political history the true preparation for governing its is the great teacher that show us how to bear steadfastly the reverses of fortune reminding us of what others have suffered. (29)

That said, Nietzsche accepts that every man and nation needs certain knowledge of the past through the three different types of history that he names a monumental, antiquarian and critical. The need of the historical knowledge is determined by the specific situation of the person and nation.

In this same line, there came another thinker from France, recognizing and appreciating the novel stand taken by Nietzsche and gave currency to the terminologies such as genealogy, new historicism, discourse, knowledge and power, and reconstruction of history. Influenced greatly by the philosophy of Nietzsche, and a political awareness of his own, he transcends the idea of history as a linear documentation of event of the past. There lie some subtle differences between the two critical minds, and this difference renders Foucault a more sophisticated thinker. For Nietzsche, all human conduct is ultimately inspired by the concept of will to power. But in the postulates of Foucault, it is not the traditional knowledge or notions that guide the contemporary socio-political moves. There can be no grand narratives of history, for what is true, therefore history, varies at different ages and times. Thus, at the heart of history lies not a continuity but discontinuity and differences.

## **2.2 Redefining History: A New Historical Approach**

As a method of reading and explicating literary texts, New Historicism arose in the United States vehemently refuting the then current text-based or formalistic criticism. It was argued that a new historical approach was needed which would move beyond the narrowly formalistic approach to literature which excluded political and social circumstances or context. Without taking into account the context of its genesis, the theorists of the new movement argued, no work can profitably be read and understood. Actually, New Historicism has been a response not to literature proper but to literary studies; to the question of the materiality of literature.

The new historicism developed during the 1980s, largely in reaction to the text-only approach pursued by formalist New Critics and the critics who challenged the New Criticism in the 1970s. New historicists, like formalists and their critics, acknowledge the importance of the literary text, but they also analyze the text with an eye to history. In this respect, the new historicism is not "new"; the majority of critics between 1920 and 1950 focused on a work's historical content and based their interpretations on the interplay between the text and historical contexts, such as the author's life or intentions in writing the work.

In other respects, however, the new historicism differs from the historical criticism of the 1930s and 1940s. It is informed by the poststructuralist and reader-response theory of the 1970s, as well as by the thinking of feminist, cultural, and Marxist critics whose work was also "new" in the 1980s. They are less fact- and event-oriented than historical critics used to be, perhaps because they have come to wonder whether the truth about what really happened can ever be purely or objectively known. They are less likely to see history as linear and progressive, as something developing toward the present, and they are also less likely to think of it in

terms of specific eras, each with a definite, persistent, and consistent zeitgeist (spirit of the times). Hence they are unlikely to suggest that a literary text has a single or easily identifiable historical context.

New historicist critics also tend to define the discipline of history more broadly than did their predecessors. They view history as a social science like anthropology and sociology, whereas older historicists tended to view history as literature's "background" and the social sciences as being properly historical. They have erased the line dividing historical and literary materials, showing not only that the production of one of William Shakespeare's historical plays was both a political act and a historical event, but also that the coronation of Elizabeth I was carried out with the same care for staging and symbol lavished on works of dramatic art.

New historicists remind us that it is treacherous to reconstruct the past as it really was—rather than as we have been conditioned by our own place and time to believe that it was. And they know that the job is impossible for those who are unaware of that difficulty, insensitive to the bent or bias of their own historical vantage point. Thus, when new historicist critics describe a historical change, they are highly conscious of (and even likely to discuss) the theory of historical change that informs their account.

New Historicists argue that all levels of society share in the circulation of power through the production and distribution of the most elementary cultural and social "texts." Power does not reside somehow "above," with lawyers, politicians, and the police, but rather follows a principle of circulation, whereby everyone participates in the maintenance of existing power structures.

Whereas Marx-inspired Cultural Materialists tend to examine sites of subversion in literature, New Historicists, inspired by Michel Foucault, tend to

concern themselves with forces of containment and the ways hegemonic forces consolidate the status quo. New Historicists look at moments of rupture to examine how forces of rebellion are still able to surface any moment the slightest possibility is created.

Like Cultural Materialists, New Historicists reject the New Critical precept that texts are autonomous units that should be examined without bringing in what New Critics termed the "intentional fallacy" (i.e. biographical criticism) or the "historical fallacy." New Historicists, by contrast, argue that texts are always intimately connected to their historical and social context, especially perhaps when texts attempt to repress that context. To put it another (psychoanalytical) way, history serves as the repressed unconscious of literature.

New Historicists reject the Western tendency to write history from the top down (e.g. political history) or in grand narrative strokes. They are instead more concerned with what Lyotard terms *petits récits* or little narratives. Particularly how such little narratives participate in the consolidation and maintenance of the status quo

New Historicists tend to follow the post-Lacanian and post-Marxist view of ideology; rather than see ideology as false consciousness, as something that is obscuring one's perception of the truth, New Historicists argue that to recognize your own ideology is like pushing the bus you're riding on, since it is so much a part of the way you perceive the world and its workings.

A way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. Although this term seems as if it should be self-explanatory, it has in fact been inflected by its re-definition in the work of an important precursor for New Historicism, Michel Foucault. In his work, Foucault argues that power is not merely physical force but a pervasive human dynamic

determining our relationships to others. Power is also not necessarily "bad," since it can also be productive. We could also say that power is essential to a just society; all people exert a certain power over us insofar as we defer to their needs and desires. The moment we cease to acknowledge this power an other has over us, then we deny that other's humanity (his/her human rights.) As Foucault puts it, "slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains" (Foucault, "Subject" 221). However, power also refers to the (often surreptitious) ways in which a dominant group exerts its influence over others. Though this hegemonic power may (at some end point) rely on the threat of punishment, it does not necessarily rely on actual physical enforcement on a day-to-day basis. According to New Historicism, all texts may be examined for their historicity, just as any historical phenomenon, no matter how apparently trivial or unimportant can be analyzed much as one would analyze a literary text.

Many new historicists have acknowledged a profound indebtedness to the writings of Michel Foucault. A French philosophical historian, Foucault brought together incidents and phenomena from areas normally seen as unconnected, encouraging new historicists and new cultural historicists to redefine the boundaries of historical inquiry. Like the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, Foucault refused to see history as an evolutionary process, a continuous development from cause to effect, from past to present toward the end, a moment of definite closure, a Day of Judgment. No historical event, according to Foucault, has a single cause; rather, each event is tied into a vast web of economic, social, and political factors. Like Karl Marx, Foucault saw history in terms of power, but unlike Marx, he viewed power not simply as a repressive force or a tool of conspiracy but rather as a complex of forces that produces what happens. Not even a tyrannical aristocrat simply wields power, for the

aristocrat is himself empowered by discourses and practices that constitute power.

Not all new historicist critics owe their greatest debt to Foucault. Some, like Stephen Greenblatt, have been most nearly influenced by the British cultural critic Raymond Williams, and others, like Brook Thomas, have been more influenced by German Marxist critic Walter Benjamin. Still others—Jerome McGann, for example—have followed the lead of Soviet critic Mikhail Bakhtin, who viewed literary works in terms of polyphonic discourses and dialogues between the official, legitimate voices of society and other, more challenging or critical voices echoing popular culture. Stephen Greenblatt's brilliant studies of the Renaissance have established him as the major figure commonly associated with New Historicism. Indeed, his influence meant that New Historicism first gained popularity among Renaissance scholars, many of whom were directly inspired by Greenblatt's ideas and anecdotal approach. This fascination with history and the minute details of culture soon caught on among scholars working in other historical periods, leading to the increasing popularity of culturally- and historically-minded studies. This general trend is often referred to as Cultural Studies.

The late seventies and early eighties faced a plethora of interpretations seemingly coming from two diametrically opposing sides. The New Critics, on the one hand, were busy in explicating all texts as self-sufficient, autonomous being. On the other hand, the poststructuralists, especially the deconstructionists, after the fashion of Jacques Derrida, were all set to expose the fundamentally unstable and internally contradictory nature of literary texts. There was an intellectual confusion as to whether anything was comprehensible or more or less definite. At such times New Historicism arose to give a direction to the muddled state of criticism. It was a method of the political interpretation of literature. New Historicism considers literature as a



social force that contributes to the making of individuals. The fact that New Historicists attribute the directive role to material or economic conditions in the production of literature takes them very near to Marxist critics. Both have the same central assumptions: first to call into question the traditional view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse with its own forms and principles and then to dissolve the literary text into the social and political context from which it issued. In fact, New Historicism is not 'new'; it follows on the same path already set by Marxism, in that it also relates literature, a product of human consciousness and imagination, with the material condition of the society in which the writer is born and raised. As D. G. Myers, a scholar in this field writes:

In New Historicist interpretation, as a consequence, history is not viewed as the cause or the source of a work. Instead, the relationship between history and the work is seen as a dialectic: the literary text is interpreted as both product and producer, end and source, of history. One undeniable side benefit of such a view is that history is no longer conceived, as in some vulgar historical scholarship, as a thing wholly prior, a process which completes itself at the appearance of the work. At the same time, though, it must not be thought that the New Historicism dispenses with the cognitive category of priority. For the New Historicist it is ideology, not history, which is prior. The literary text is said to be a constituent part of a culture's ideology by virtue of passing it on; but the ideology nevertheless exists 'intact' intelligible, in a form separate from (and therefore prior to) the work. If it didn't, the critic could not discern a relationship between work and ideology;

and if the ideology were not prior to the work, it wouldn't be a historical relationship. (Myers)

The underlying assumptions of this school are briefly touched upon in what follows here. New Historicism goes against literary formalism: the exclusion of social and political circumstances, or the context, cannot be divorced from the interpretation of literary works. The view that a poem is a self-contained object, a verbal icon, a logical core surrounded by a texture of irrelevance, is unacceptable to this mode of interpretation. Thus the New Historicism in literary study has been a response not to literature but to literary studies. It has been called forth not by the subject matter under study—not by actual poems, novels, plays—but by the institutional situation in which young scholars now find themselves.

Within the ranks of the New Historicism, literature is considered to be one of the social forces that contribute to the making of individuals; it acts as a form of social control. Although most New Historicists are scrupulous to distinguish themselves from Marxist critics, the fact remains that the central task of the New Historicism is the same as that of Marxist criticism: first to call into question the traditional view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse with its own problems, forms, principles, activities, and then to dissolve the literary text into the social and political context from which it issued.

The major philosophical propositions of the moment can be shortly subsumed here. First, literature is historical, meaning that a literary work is not primarily the record of one mind's attempt to solve certain formal problems and the need to find something to say; it is a social and cultural construct shaped by more than one consciousness. The proper way to understand it, therefore, is through the culture and society that produced it. Next, literature, then, is not a distinct category of human

activity. It must be assimilated to history, which means a particular vision of history. Further, like works of literature, man himself is a social construct, a result of social and political forces—there is no such thing as a human nature that transcends history. Renaissance man belongs inescapably and irretrievably to the Renaissance. There is no continuity between him and us; history is a series of "ruptures" between ages and men. And, as a consequence, the historian or critic is trapped in her/his own historicity. No one can rise above their own social formations, their own ideological upbringing, in order to understand the past on its terms. A modern reader can never experience a text as its contemporaries experienced it. Given this fact, the best a modern historicist approach to literature can hope to accomplish, according to Catherine Belsey, is "to use the text as a basis for the reconstruction of an ideology" (qtd in Myres 4 ). Traditional historical scholarship believed that the recovery of the original meaning of a literary text is the whole aim of critical interpretation. But the New Historical approach makes it clear that recovery of meaning is impossible, to attempt it childish. What is of the central concern in this mode of criticism is the recovery of the original ideology which gave birth to the text, and which the text in turn helped to disseminate throughout a culture. This dimension of critical interpretation has been neglected by traditional scholarships. A traditional formalistic approach, treating the text as self-contained, can never locate these ideological operations. Only a historicist approach, treating the text as one element in the ideology of an age, can hope to lay them bare. The purpose of New Historicist inquiry is the reconstruction of the actual, as opposed to the represented, relations in which people lived during a particular time. Literary works are both what a culture produces as well as what reproduces the ideology. Historicism presumes that artistic fiction does not imitate human action; it mediates it. That is, fiction is defined as the lens through

which a certain portrait of the human experience is brought into focus. And as mediation rather than as imitation of social practices, it can be thus be said to shape rather than to reflect an understanding of an age concerning human experience and potentiality.

However, New Historicism does not view history the cause or the source of a work, as the excerpt from Myers clarifies. Instead, it views the relationship between history and the work as a dialectic one: the literary text is interpreted as the product and the producer, end and source, of history. Literature is shaped by history and in turn tries to create or guide history too. This reciprocal influence of literature denies both the extremes, the autonomy of literature as well as its purely directive and propagandist role. To some extent, literature is free from outside factors; it is product of the creative faculty of the human mind. But in the final analysis the creative and critical orientation of the writer themselves is conditioned by the materiality of their life. That is so because the writers and their consciousness both are based on a particular socio-political milieu the escape from which is practically impossible for them. The critic Louis A. Montrose, makes a study of this subject in his influential book *Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and politics of Culture*:

By the historicity of texts, I mean to suggest the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing - not only the texts that critics study but also the texts in which we study them. By the textuality of history, I mean to suggest, firstly, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question - traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex

and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement; and secondly, that those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the 'documents' upon which historians ground their own texts, called 'histories'. (242)

The whole point of the New Historicist enterprise, Jean E. Howard says, "is to grasp the terms of the discourse which made it possible [for contemporaries] to see the 'facts' [of their own time] in a particular way—indeed, made it possible to see certain phenomena *as* facts at all". At first glance, this objective appears to be little different from that of traditional historical interpretation: the discourse of the past is grasped in its own terms. But what has been subtly introduced is a comparison. The New Historicist sees facts that the people of the time did not, and this special insight is what enables him to grasp the discursive practices that produced the facts that the people did see. Foucault included the panopticon in his discussions on the technologies of power in part to illustrate the idea of lateral surveillance, or self-policing, that occurs when those who are subject to these techniques of power believe they are being watched. His purpose was to show that these techniques of power go beyond mere force and could prompt different regimes of self-discipline among those subject to the exercise of these visibility techniques. This often meant that, in effect, prisoners would often fall into line whether or not there was an actual need to do so.

The distinctive terminologies popular in this discipline are: "discursive practices," "representations," "mediations," "contradictions," "ruptures," "subversion." What the New Historicism offers to students of literature is the joy of new explanations, new paradigms. It does not designate an unexplored area of scholarly investigation. It does not raise new problems, new questions. If its attempts to "historicize" literary study were merely an inducement to look into new kinds of

documents, to ask about the relation of literature to social history in a new way, the movement has performed a service for scholarship. New Historicist thinkers tend to take a more nuanced view of power, seeing it not exclusively as class-related but extending throughout society. This view derives primarily from Michel Foucault. In its tendency to see society as consisting of texts relating to other texts, with no 'fixed' literary value above and beyond the way specific societies read them in specific situations, New Historicism also owes something to postmodernism. However, New Historicists tend to exhibit less skepticism than postmodernists, and show more willingness to perform the 'traditional' tasks of literary criticism: i.e. explaining the text in its context, and trying to show what it 'meant' to its first readers.

## Chapter Three: Textual Analysis

### 3.1 *The Water Works*: A Fictional Realism

Doctorow writes fictional work blending the fictional with the real. It seems he is not satisfied with mere presenting an imaginative literary output, but he wants to probe into the historical reality too. But if he does so officially declaring to write a history, he will not be able to embellish it. So, he purports to write a fictional work so as to get ample liberty in weaving story but at the same time he specifically refers to historical places, events, dates and people which render the novel a historical undertaking too.

To begin with, the difference between what is the phenomenon and what is nomenon, what perceptual real is and what is in itself real, is not something new that entered the sciences and theories in the modern ages. The question was faced by the primitive humanity as well, and, if one does not get offended easily, even Pontius Pilate asked Jesus what truth was. Truth, or reality, is what human beings seem to be seeking for since ages, but they have not come to the ultimate truth. Only provisional ones they get, and those truths change in course of time. One comes up with one idea of truth, but another means something else by the same word.

Meaning, there is no water tight definition and delineation between reality and fictionality when one comes to novelistic literature. As it has been set in the premise in the discussion of New Historicism, somehow or other the write and writing are influenced by, influence and adjust in a larger contexts of other writers and writings, socio-politics and economy of the times. As Doctorow himself advocated in his public writings and speeches, "there is no longer any such thing as fiction or nonfiction; there's only narrative". The narration, done with presumed objectivity on the part of the state becomes documented as plans, policy and laws,; if done by individuals or

organizations given to recording truths it becomes report and history; and if it is done by individuals with a certain degree of imaginative interpellation and manipulation and playfulness, it is designated a literature, in this case the narrative is novel.

With this insight in mind, one enters profitably to explore the text *The Waterworks* to see how much of realism, in this context the realism appertaining to American history and present, is sown in the novel by a writer who as late as the recently held Presidential election of the United States was invited on various occasions to deliver cutting-edged speeches on issues as diverse as the rise of Christian fundamentalism in America, the Civil Rights Movement, Abraham Lincoln and the contestant Barack Obama, and what not. One cannot justifiably blame Doctorow of trying to play jack of all trades, given the situation that today in the world a novelist and a poet and a storywriter—one recalls the Chilean poet and Nobel-laureate Pablo Neruda; the Nigerian novelist and storywriter Chinua Achebe and the like—who have to take on double responsibility at once: one that of a creative, gifted individual to create literature, the other the more than average commonsensical mind of the society to guide it in times of need as a seer and leader.

Questions about the mixture of history and fiction are again apropos for a discussion of *The Waterworks*. Some consideration of its gothic elements may also provoke an exchange of ideas. A lively debate, however, is most apt to result from a challenge to the moral ambiguity of a character like Sartorius, or a challenge to the reliability of the narrator. Some questions in this relation are: What vision of America after the Civil War does the author present in *The Waterworks*? What perspective does McIlvaine bring to his narration? When he says, "you suffer the story you tell," what should the reader infer about the reality of the yellow journalism, corrupt bureaucracy and politics, degenerated moral and spiritual ethics as faced by America



today? These, and similar questions draw the fictionality of the fiction into the historicity of reality. This is where the formalistic, asocio-political and arts for art's sake approach fails to read the text in its proper historical context. Hence the need and significance of, though notoriously debated, theory of New Historicism and the power political re-reading as propounded by Foucault and company.

Doctorow's interest in narrative experimentation is evident again in the novel in question. The motives of the narrator may therefore resemble the vanity of the men who seek immortality from the mad doctor, and the reader often wonders if the story is not being told from the limbo of the waterworks. Doctorow's focus on a particular time and place in American history also demonstrates again his inclination and talent for historical fiction. Just as he used newspaper accounts for many details in *Ragtime*, Doctorow provides a very realistic setting for *The Waterworks*. By creating a narrator who is the editor of a newspaper, the author gives investigative, speculative and espionage dimension to what would otherwise have been merely a fictional work. To appreciate the full import of this proposition, one would do better to turn to the author himself who blatantly professes the worldliness of the writer: "the writer isn't made in a vacuum. Writers are witnesses. The reason we need writers is because we need witnesses to this terrifying century."

A commonsensical reader would not find it any surprise that the United States of America was primarily a fabled land of ample free space for those desirous of working in the fertile but rugged landscapes. After the arrival of the British, French, Dutch and various other Europeans there, America started assuming a nation-statehood of its own. By the mid eighteenth century, the fact was felt both by the British empire desirous of maintaining the control over the American colonies for fat revenues, as well as by the industrious American settlers who did not want to pay the

undue tax to the British monarchy and government. This led, early on, to a war at first in news print. Hence, the development of journalistic literature in the American soil can be accounted for by this historical context. Any one interested and even if only little read in American annals knows of the influence the print media had, down from the election campaign of the abolitionist Abraham Lincoln to the infamous communist hunt of the fifties to the global American news agencies enjoy today.

Doctorow denies that the world of art and life are entirely different world. He treats the contemporary problems in a society-conscious way, both in his literature and in his every day speeches, non-fictional writings. Speaking about the problem of religious fundamentalism in light of the September 11 2001 attack on Twin Towers and the Pentagon, he became critical both of the Christian and the Islamic resurgence. As Doctorow comments about the American president in the article titled “Bush's Intelligence”, there is no doubt a fellowship, a relationship between arts and science and philosophy:

What does it say about the United States today that this fellowship of the arts and sciences and philosophy is called to affirm knowledge as a public good? What have we come to when the self-evident has to be argued as if--500 years into the Enlightenment and 230-some years into the life of this Republic--it is a proposition still to be proven? . . . How does it happen for reason to have been so deflected and empirical truth to have become so vulnerable to unreason? (Doctorow, 4)

For some time now we have been confronted by a religiously inspired criminal movement originated in the Middle East that advertises its values by suicidal bombings, civilian massacres and the execution of arbitrarily selected victims by the sawing off of their heads. However educated, well-to-do and politically motivated the

leaders of this conspiracy may be, they have invoked an extreme fundamentalist reading of their sacred text to mentally transport their rank and file back into the darkness of tribal war and shrieking, life-contemptuous jihad. This fundamentalist revival is a warning to world peace, and Doctorow was addressing the same issue in the citation above. Once again, his personal interest and involvement in the task of commenting on political, cultural and social, issues is made evident by the excerpt, underlining the importance of a New historicist approach to literature and authorial creativity impregnated by the socio-political realities of the times.

The spatial setting of the novel is Manhattan, New York. The title of the novel derives from the Croton Aqueduct or Old Croton Aqueduct which was a large and complex water distribution system constructed for New York City between 1837 and 1842. It brought water by the force of gravity alone 41 miles (66 km) from the Croton River in Westchester County into reservoirs in Manhattan, where local water resources had become polluted and inadequate for the growing population of the city.

The island of Manhattan, surrounded by brackish rivers, had a limited supply of fresh water available, which dwindled as the city grew rapidly after the American Revolutionary War. Before the aqueduct was constructed, residents of New York obtained water from cisterns, wells, natural springs, and other bodies of water. But rapid population growth in the Nineteenth Century and encroachment on these areas as Manhattan moved further North of Wall Street, led to the pollution of many local fresh water sources. The poor were forced to rely on well water made palatable by adding spirits, prompting temperance campaigners to call vigorously for a municipal provision of water.

The need for a new supply of fresh water was crucial and in 1837 construction began on a massive engineering project to divert it from sources upstate. The Croton

River was dammed, aqueducts were built, tunnels dug, piping laid and reservoirs created. Iron piping encased in brick masonry was laid from the Croton Dam in northern Westchester County to the Harlem River, where it continued over the High Bridge at 173rd Street and down the west side of Manhattan and finally into a Receiving Reservoir located between 79th and 86th streets and Sixth and Seventh Avenues that is now the site of the Great Lawn in Central Park. The Receiving Reservoir was a fortress-like building 1,826 feet (557 m) long and 836 feet (255 m) wide, and held up to 180 million gallons of water. Thirty-five million gallons flowed into it daily from northern Westchester. The Aqueduct opened to public use with great fanfare on October 14, 1842. The day-long celebration culminated in a fountain of water that spouted to a height of fifty feet from the beautifully-decorated Croton Fountain in City Hall Park. Among those present were then-President of the United States John Tyler, former presidents John Quincy Adams and Martin van Buren, and Governor of New York William H. Seward. Water started flowing through the aqueduct on June 22, 1842, taking 22 hours for gravity to take the water the 66 kilometers to reach Manhattan. Even though only 6,175 houses had been connected to the system by 1844, the Croton water had already dramatically impacted both domestic hygiene and interior design. Baths and running water were being built in the private homes of wealthy New Yorkers and public bathing facilities were created for the masses. The water system had another inadvertent beneficial consequence. The decline in the number of residents drawing water from the city's wells resulted in a rise in the water table which flooded many cellars. To address this problem, the city built sewers in many residential streets.

The capacity of the Old Croton Aqueduct, large as it was, could not keep up with the growth of New York City, and construction on a New Croton Aqueduct

began in 1885; it went into service in 1890, with triple the capacity of that of the Old Croton Aqueduct. It currently supplies ten percent of New York City's water. The Croton Reservoir continued to supply New York City with drinking water until 1940, when Commissioner of Parks and Recreation Robert Moses ordered it drained and filled to create the Great Lawn in Central Park.

Today, remnants of the aqueduct still exist. Although much of the original masonry has been either removed or covered up by growth, a frequently-used walking and bicycling path runs along the easement of the former aqueduct. The Old Croton Trailway State Historic Park and Trail extends for 42.2 kilometers in Westchester, providing public access many parts of the town. The Trail enters New York City at Van Cortland Park and runs through the Bronx alongside Aqueduct Avenue and under the southern part of University Avenue.

A portion of the Old Croton Aqueduct, running from the Croton River to Manhattan, was listed as a National Historic Landmark in 1992. The aqueduct also is listed as a Historic Civil Engineering Landmark. The same aqueduct becomes the central symbol of the burgeoning New York city for the novel *The Waterworks*, providing the catchy name. Thus the very naming of the novel carries with it a historical, material fact about New York city. It is not all fiction, but historical and material facts too are interspersed in the novel.

The second chapter of the novel indicates the temporal setting of the plot of: “it would have been sometime in April 1871” referring to the narrator’s second last meeting with the freelance Martin Pemberton, who then got mysteriously disappearance to the anxiety of the family and curiosity of the those who came to know of his disappearance and tried to solve the mystery. It was an age of, as the novelistic narrator declares, of news print:

We are in the realm of public life now-the cheapest commonest realm, the realm of newsprint. My realm. I remind you William Marcy Tweed ran the city as no one had before him. He was the messiah of the ward politicians, the fulfillment of everything about democracy they believed in. He had his own judges in the state courts, his own mayor, Oakley Hall, in city Hall, and even his own governor, John Hoffman, in Albany. (10)

So, as the narrator who is himself as journalist, lays bare the reality of politics in America: some tycoons have the destiny of the nation at their beck and call. William Marcy Tweed is too notorious a name in American politics to be missed by a reader. He is Sometimes informally called Boss Tweed, he was convicted for stealing between 40 million and 200 million dollars from New York City taxpayers through political corruption. Tweed was head of Tammany Hall, the Democratic Party political machine that played a major role in the politics of 19th century New York. Tweed made his entrance into politics when he organized the Americus Fire Company No. 6, also known as the "big six" as a volunteer fireman. Tweed was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1852, the New York City Board of Advisors in 1856, and the New York State Senate in 1867. Financiers Jay Gould and Big Jim Fisk made Tweed a director of the Erie Railroad, and Tweed in turn arranged favorable legislation for them. Tweed and Gould became the subjects of political cartoons by a journalist Thomas Nast in 1869. In April 1870 Tweed secured the passage of a city charter putting the control of the city into the hands of mayor, the comptroller, and the commissioners of parks and public works. He then allowed contractors and others to submit invoices for inflated amounts or for work that was not done. The total amount of money stolen was never known, but has been estimated

from \$75 million to \$200 million according to *The American Pageant*. Over a period of two years and eight months, while he had over 1,000 workers at his command, New York City's debts increased from \$36 million in 1868 to about \$136 million by 1870, with few costs or expenditures to show for the debt. Tweed was accused of defrauding the city by having contractors present excessive bills for work performed—typically ranging from 15 to 65 percent more than the project actually cost. The extra charges were said to have been divided among Tweed, his subordinates and the contractors. The most excessive overcharging came in the form of the Tweed Courthouse, which cost the city \$13 million to construct whereas the actual cost for the courthouse was about \$3 million), leaving about \$10 million for the pockets of Tweed and others.

Thus an unsavory reference to the corrupt politician is made in the novel, rendering it a historical document. The other unmistakable reference is about the American settlement and later the secession from The British colony and the subsequent Civil war.

The emergence of the States under the British colony in the Northern America would possibly have not come to be a reality had it not been for the development of science and technology, buttressed firmly and backed spiritually by the urge to render every American settler capable of and appreciative of the importance of literacy and education. The credit thus goes to the wide and salutary influence of media, namely the print media. This historical reality is addressed in the novel time and often. The historical period being referred to here is the post-Civil War era:

I assure you, New York after the war was more creative, more ready, more of a genius society than it is now. Our rotary presses put fifteen, twenty thousand newspapers on the street for a penny or two.

Enormous steam engines powered the mills and factories. Gas lamps lit the streets at night. We were three quarters of a century into the Industrial Revolution. (11-12)

As the narrator comments, it was an era of mass production, over consumption and people were given to the practice of excess in every field. This predatory hunger for more and more production and consumption gave birth to the consumer and producer American society and economy that the world witnesses today. The burgeoning city of New York becomes the central identity of the massively increasing American productivity and consumerism. At a time when the rest of the world was either already satisfied with the growth rate it had achieved, say, in the British Isles and Germany, or was just sluggishly crawling toward modernization and industrialization, the Americans were able to boast to have an ever-expanding economy. Their ambition is represented by the fact of the mobility of structures in New York: “Almost a million people called New York home, everyone securing his need in a state of cheerful degeneracy. Nowhere else in the world was there such an acceleration of energies. A mansion would appear in a field. The next day it stood on a city street with horse and carriage riding by” (13).

The description of Broadway, a section of New York, is done in the novel to give a vivid dense of the busy and burgeoning American life in line with the mercantile economy. It was a place where one would have the feeling life is full of hustle tussle, and opportunities and challenges and aspirations too. A scene of it busyness and crowdedness:

Broadway, as the main route for commerce, was, as usual, chaotic. Drivers snapping their reins and teams shying with that rhythmless gait given to horse when there is no open space ahead of them. A



discordant ground music of hooves clopping on cobblestone. The cries of reins men, the gongs of the horse cars, and the hum of their flanges on the tracks. The rattling wheels and drumming boards of innumerable carriages, stages, wagons, and drays. (39)

The history of the United States of America grew out of religious controversy as well as the desire of the monarchs to expand their empires. It was accompanied by human longing for more and more land, new land, and adventure. On the top of that, the colony became populated by those expelled from the European countries: the pirates, thugs, murderers, runaways etc. so it had a variegated composition. It was the result of both exploration and colonization on the one hand, and of banishment and crime on the other. Famous is the story of the Protestant Christians persecuted in England setting out for the American land. The names of the ships thus used for crossing the Atlantic are still flouted in literature as the emblems of an expedition. The migrants are recognized by the names of the vessels they used for the voyage rather than by their proper names. This historical reality is reflected in the following excerpt.

All if them had lost their family names, these vagrant Flower Marys, these Jacks and Billys and Rosies. They sold papers or day-old or flower, they went around with the organ grinders to play the monkey's part, or indentured themselves to the peddlers of oysters or sweet potatoes. They begged-swarming on any warm night in the streets and alleys of the bawdy districts. (65)

We know that the first colonies that became the United States were for the most part English, sustained by the English traditions, and named after English lands such as

Georgia, Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, New York, New Hampshire, New England etc.

Such are the references in the novel which make it impossible to dump it as a mere product of pure imagination. It is a novel with much realism and historical facts presented in a new way. The perspective deployed in presenting the unearthed history is surely granted within literary convention, such as the writer the knowing the unknowable thoughts of the characters, the unearthed histories etc. So the fact that the novel is a product of imaginative faculty of an individual does not invalidate it as mere fiction. In a New Historical light, it is easy to assume a considerable portion of historicity gets into the fictionality of a fictional work. This is what is meant by the situatedness or contextuality of a text. In the case of *The Waterworks* too, the realism is as pressing as is the fictional aspect.

### **3.2 Textuality of History and Historicity of Text**

One of the defining characteristics of the New Historical movement is to reconstruct the possibilities of history gone unrecorded or suppressed. The officially, linear version of history that the general public is given to know, is not always the true history, the only history. More often than not, the official version happens to be a concocted one, crooked and essentially manipulate to suit the interest of the stakeholder in the power politics of the nation.

Doctorow has established a distinct vein of writing novels. He either writes in autobiographical vein about his personal history, or in a socio-political and historical vein, about the national history as in novels like *Billy Bathgate*, a tale of Prohibition-era gangsters; *The Waterworks*, which is set in 1870s depicting the rise of reportorial journalism, industrialism and the like in New York, and *The March* a fictionalized account of General Sherman's Civil War march through Georgia. As Matthew A

Henry writes in the article “Problematized Narratives: History as Fiction in E. L. Doctorow’s *Billy Bathgate*”, Doctorow has shown how a writing and rewriting of history other than the official one, is possible and how best an author can exploit this possibility:

E. L. Doctorow has made a career out of historical fiction, and he is renowned for both examining and rewriting America’s past... Such writings of history are possible because for Doctorow there is no fact or fiction, only narrative. [ . . . ] Doctorow admirably exploits the dark areas of history, offering interpretations of the past which, although not denied by the historical records, jar our assumption and undercut our trust in the official record. (32)

So, this observation reveals that Doctorow’s fictional works are often intended to explore the factual world. The plot of the of the novel set in New York City in 1871, centers on Augustus Pemberton, a tycoon presumed to be dead until his son spots him one day on a Manhattan street. Doctorow grandly re-creates the world of Boss Tweed and waterfront taverns, the era of robber barons and the mansions they erect in their capital of capitalism. The mystery is never quite solved, even though the novel's detective does penetrate the waterworks, the venue for the metropolis's conniving financiers. In doing so, Doctorow exposes the upper hand corruption and power mongering has taken in American politics.

According to New Historicism, all texts may be examined for their historicity, just as any historical phenomenon, no matter how apparently trivial or unimportant can be analyzed much as one would a literary text. By the same logic, a work of art can be seen as partaking in the making and /or recording of history. The novel gives real accounts of the industrial and print media development in America. Since the

purported narrator of the novel is himself a reporter, he often talks of the rise of journalism publication of periodical and the circulation of news through papers. This serves the two purpose that Doctorow wants to exhibit, that, as he advocated so memorably “there is no longer any such thing as fiction or nonfiction; there's only narrative” and as the narrator of the novel MacIlvine says “we have to suffer the story we tell”.

The rise of America as a free and conscious society is traceable, among other factors, to the development of the free press in the first place. The novelist, himself an editor and columnist for years, appreciates this reality. In the novel, there are instances wherein the press industry is described in positive terms regarding its positive contributions to the society. The print journalism in America never ran short of good stuff of news; it is a land of news and event. This is a historical reality is recorded in the lined below:

Our high-speed rotaries had come along around 1845, and from that moment the amount of news a paper could print, and the number of paper competing, suggested the need for a self-history of sorts, a memory file of our work. So that we would have at our disposal a library of our past inventions, and needn't always spin our words out of nothing. (31)

The earlier settlers in the New Found Land used to keep diaries and journals to give a sense to their life in a new land. Then began the sending of letters and news to the trans-Atlantic friend and relatives back in England or in other part of Europe. Soon, the Americans themselves excelled in the art of telling stories, both literary and informative. Hence it is no surprise hat every major, successful writer in America

once had been an editor or a reporter. One may turn to Mark Twain or Wendell Holmes, or Henry James –at some they all have acted as newspaper people.

July 4 is the national independence day of the United States of America. The historical day occurred on July 4 1774 when the representatives of the thirteen States of American colony agreed proclaim the Declaration of Independence. In the Declaration, the forefathers of the United State of America as we witness today, had vowed to uplift the independence and honor of the nation even at the cost of their lives. A free democratic nation was envisioned them. But with the passage of time, it proved how difficult it was to abolish slavery, and to establish social justice.

But I happened to present the day it was dedicated, a July Fourth. It had taken years for our incorruptible government to bring it to us-you need the money to flow freely before the water can-years of men in top hats poring over blueprints and raising their arms and pointing and given instructions to the stolid engineers awaiting their pleasure...blasting, the ring of pickaxes on the Manhattan schist ...dray team groaning with loads of rubble (60)

The day has now lost somewhat in dignity; the government is more interested in strengthening its office by getting favors with the moneyed classed than by standing for the democratic and humanitarian virtues. The lack of civil dignity for then non-whites ultimately would sound the bugle of the Civil War. The novel touches upon the impending war as well: “It is Independence Day, 1842. The War Between the States is two decades ahead. . .” (60)

### **3.3 Instances of Blend of History and Fiction in the Novel**

The late nineteenth century America, after the bitter experience of the Civil War, costing the lives of hundred thousands topped finally by the assassination of the

president himself who had risked emancipating the black slaves, was once again a bright nation with the official abolition of slavery. The national poets like Walt Whitman were singing of the beauty and vigor of life free and frolicsome. There were moralistic and optimistic poets and writers. The development in the field of transport and technology of railway track and photography, industries and factories, were making America a nation to reckon with in the world. Doctorow ventures to write of the same decade in American history, the 1870s.

As the critic Brian Diemert opines, the novel is a metaphysical story: “For *The Waterworks* is, among other things, is ironic commentary on the American dream, and a postmodern meditation on language, authorship, history and epistemology, all within the form of all metaphysical detective story” (352). Interestingly, the fact that the shifting references between the factual and the fictional undercut the differences between them, ultimately forcing the reader to think whether they are reading a history book or a novel. It is a much suggestive gesture on the part of Doctorow to make the fictional and historical characters come across and comment upon each other.

As the novel recounts, the narrator is regularly sent pieces of information by his publisher. Once, that happens to be an issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* which contains an article by no less a personage than Oliver Wendell Holmes. The historicity of the novel under study is undeniably propped up by references to well-known American poets and literary figures such as James Russell Lowell, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Their emphatic presence in the late nineteenth century New England is inescapably to any one interested in American letters. William Wendell Holmes is recognized as the poet who was nationally revered and at his death the nation mourned. Now, Holmes is a well-known

poet popularly known in the literary circle as the chief of the Boston Brahmins. First the historical account:

Holmes was railing at certain ignorant New York critics who were not sufficiently in awe of his fellow trinomials of New England literary genius, Jesus Russell Lowell, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Though he didn't identify the offending critics, it was clear from his reference that Martin Pemberton was one of them – I had run his piece on the subject early in the year, in which he had said of those men, and Mr. Holmes with them, that their names were too long for the work they produced. (16)

As a writer Doctorow could not have missed the famous historical sense as forwarded by Thomas Stearns Eliot in his classic essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that every writer is seen in a spectrum in comparison to the ones prior to and following them. On the one hand, the fame commanded by these writers though a century back, would have been a matter of concern to an aspiring writer like Doctorow who seeks no less national recognition than Holmes commanded. So far, so good. But he instrumentally uses the fictional character, a journalist named Martin Pemberton, to comment upon his predecessor vis-à-vis their works. Their works might or might not have been so long, but their names were too long, long in comparison to their worth. This reminds one of the famous Bloomian theory of the anxiety of influence felt by the later writers when they see that the position they have aspired for has already been occupied by their predecessors. This personal concern has got expression in the novel in the form of a reporter's playful comment on the famous American poets.

On the other hand, by making the fictional character Martin Pemberton come into the scene to comment upon the historical poets, the novelist is effectively suggesting how easy it is to insert fiction in history. In other words, the demarcation line between fact and fiction, story and history is too thin to keep one genre unadulterated from the other. This observation then leads one to call in question all the hitherto established official and state version of history and truth. That is the project of New Historicism too. In this light, the novel *Water Works* can be seen as a profitable undertaking to the scholarship of New Historicism.

The corrupt character of New York police is not a fiction; and there are some officers who are neither lured by temptations nor intimidated by superior officers is not a fiction either. But such officers are few and far between in the service. The novelist makes a pungent comment on the corrupt bureaucracy through the narrator's description of the officer named Edmund Donne:

I decided first of all to tell what I knew of Edmund Donne, a captain with the Municipal. You may not appreciate how extraordinary it was that I, or anyone else in the city of New York, for that matter, would confide in a police official. The Municipals were an organization of licensed thieves. Occasionally they interrupted their graft-gathering for practice with nightsticks on the human skull. Police jobs were customarily bought. Every exalted rank, from sergeant up through lieutenant, captain, and no to the commissioner, paid if they wanted to be assigned to one of the more lucrative precincts. (85)

The narrator says Donne was the only captain he knew who had not paid for his commission. This is a severe critique of the failed and rotten to the core bureaucracy in the so-called most advanced democracy in the world. The scathing remarks of the



critical write spares none, neither the ecclesiastical nor the temporal authority, nor the civilians' lack of the sense of propriety who commit all and sundry types of idiosyncrasies ranging from experimentation for immortality, divorce at the slightest provocation, and the meaningless gangsterism and killing.

Once more, one can turn to the page of the text to see the play and confluence of historicity and imagination pure and perfect. The importance of sermons in early New England is still evident in the literature of the times. Indeed, the first American literature was distinctly a religious one. In the earlier days, listening to sermons was considered an essential Christian act. John Calvin had declared that "true preaching and reverential hearing of the gospel were indispensable for a true church to live and grow. The church ministers strove to rouse men and women to come out of apathy and repent and believe in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. The sermons were lengthy exercise in logic, more like legal documents than the simple religious preaching. Such preachings were recognized and published by the local newspapers the next morning.

Referring to the famous author of flagrant novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the Christian service of those days that got ample coverage in the papers, the novel recounts some interesting points. An excerpt goes here:

The clergy were considered dignitaries of the city, and religious diction was assumed to be applicable to the public issue of the day. We had reformer churchmen like Reverend Parkhust who were out to unseat the Tweed government, and well-known theoreticians like Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. My own Charles Grimshaw was not so eminent, but what he said was picked up that day by a few of us. . .

(143)

There is here again the reference to the famous writer whose novel about the misbehaviors inflicted upon the blacks by the whites in America inflamed the civil war, is a historical and factual detail. No portion of imaginary detail is attached here. But at the same time, the novel takes the liberty of commenting upon the rise of church influence and the episcopate by bringing an imaginary pastor Charles Grimshaw. The novelist himself is no champion of any particular religious belief. He is for an open democratic society, as his speeches reveal. He touches upon the issue of religious sermons with an intent. It is done to fulfill the need of creating literary space for passing comment on the part of the author who is staunch defender of secularism and non-interference policy of the state in matter of religion and cultural practice.

Talking of the decline in humanitarian sensibility with the concurrent rise of mercantilism and materialism in America, the novel makes some scathing observation. Both the religious and the materialist sects are satirized for their indifference towards alleviating the problem of the street children. In a city like New York, the presence of the poor children is taken normally by the commoners. This is a reality of America today as it was in the 1870s:

For certain religious sensibilities such children fulfilled the ineffable aims of God. For the modern folk, Mr. Darwin was cited, and the design was Nature's. So the Flower girl Mary, and the newsiest and the rest of these child beggars who lived among us, were losses society could tolerate. Like Nature, our city was spendthrift and produced enough wealth for itself to take heavy losses without noticeable damage. It was all a cost of doing business while the selection of the species went relentlessly forward, and New York, like form, blindly sought its perfection. (66-67)

The religious ones would brush aside their responsibility with the excuse that it was some unexpressed, unknowable plan of God, who is in control of everything, to cause the presence of the street children in the rich city. Similarly those who professed to believe in Darwin's principle of selection of nature according to which the survival of the fittest is the rule of nature, the street children were simply left at the mercy of the law of nature. If they survive and thrive, they prove they are better than other who die out; if not they die too. The city can go on without being affected in the slightest by their loss. Every one in New York is too busy and money minded to bother about the life and future of such children. Actually, the city would be perfect if only such useless creatures were swept away from its face. This is the suggestion given by the passage. But that is not the solution provided by the novel. The novel only refers to them as a serious issue to be addressed by the nation and the individuals if America is to boast its opulence. With a considerable section of its innocent children in poverty and darkness, the nation cannot be an ideal model of democracy and champion of human rights.

The narrator's employ Pember Martin, when he was yet an undergraduate at Columbia, had written thesis for course in moral philosophy on the "business practices of certain private suppliers to the Union during the war....Showing that they engaged in profiteering, and delivered goods of substandard quality, and so on. For documentation he used Augustus's merchandising house as his prime example" (71). There is here again a blend of fact and fiction working in the making of the novel. The Martin story is a concocted idea whereas the civil war is a reality. The southern states, known as the Federalists, wanted to keep slavery, but the northern ones called the Unionists were for the abolition of slavery. The thesis prepared by Pember Martin touches upon this historic civil war in America but the narrator adds more fictional

spices to render it a work of art, as when he mentions that Martin did mention that “his father was among the commercial contractors given a dinner at the White House by President Lincoln in recognition of their service to the Union” (72). But at that time, the accusation against August Martin was not made. He might have been involved in some fishy business activity, but it was not revealed till then. This occasion is used by the novel to pass comments upon the abolitionist president Abraham Lincoln as well. Lincoln had thrown a dinner at his official residence in honor of the business people who had helped the Union through the war period. He was a man who could sense evil but could not locate from where it would come. As a character in the novel tells the story, the “the White House dinner was held long before the charges came out, and by a president who could see evil at a distance but not where it crept up behind him” (73). This is historically correct: Lincoln knew he was going to be remembered for his single act of emancipating the slaves, he knew his life was being sought after. But he did not know how to bring the Civil war to a decisive end soon; he did not know how he would be shot dead by an actor in the theatre. Referring to the issues of slavery Abraham Lincoln had said that the question of Slavery was more important than any other. The slavery issue was related to sectional competition for control of the territories, and the Southern demand for a slave code for the territories was the issue used by Southern politicians to split the Democratic Party in two, which guaranteed the election of Lincoln and secession. On March 4, 1861, Abraham Lincoln was sworn in as President. In his inaugural address, he argued that the Constitution was a more perfect union than the earlier Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union, that it was a binding contract, and called any secession legally void. He stated he had no intent to invade Southern states, nor did he intend to end slavery where it existed, but that he would use force to maintain

possession of federal property. His speech closed with a plea for restoration of the bonds of union. But the Southern states mad a Confederacy and declared war against the Northern abolitionist Union States, thus the bloody Civil War in America.

A literary text can be studied in the context of its periodicity. In this regard, *The Waterworks* is a postmodern novel which uses the postmodern technique of speaking about its own genesis. The novel is, if we are to take the words of the narrator, the reminiscence of a journalist. Within this reminiscence there is another reporter planning to write a memoir which centers upon himself rather than on other family sagas.

“I will never tell of these things in my memoirs. When I write my memoirs I will be the subject of the narrative. I do not intend to go down as a passionate devotee and self-appointed secretary of the Pemberton family ... that lived for a while.....in the brilliant heart-quaking civilization of New York. My own fate will be another story ....not this one.” (109)

The reporter might or might not have the time to write of the memoir but the novel has recorded his family narrative any way. In recounting the reminiscence of a journalist the novel has captured the history of the United States of America in the 1870s.

Finally, the novel is mostly about the profession of journalism with its quirks quiddities as it developed in America. This fact is time and again emphasized by the novel. One more instance of how the novel recounts the historical development of the profession in America is cited below as a concluding part of this section:

Yet I will tell you now about the seven columns of the newspaper. In those days we ran stories straight down, side by side, a head, subheads,

and story. If you had a major story you ran it to the bottom of column one and took as much of the text column as you needed. It was a vertical paper, no heads shooting across the page, no double-width columns, and few illustrations....It was a paper of seven columns, of words, each column supporting its weight of life, holding up, word by word, another version of its brazen...terrors. The first paper were commercial sheets, mercantile advices, with cotton prices and ship sailings---sheets, you could serve on a dinner plate. Now we ran off eight papers of seven columns, and only if you stretched your arms wide could you hold the paper taut to its full width. And we had readers of the city accustomed to this.(114)

This account is a factual historical account of the size, page numbers, coverage items and readers of newspapers in America in the late nineteenth century. No adulteration of fiction here. This excerpt is a good source to have an idea of the voracity and love of the nineteenth century Americans for reading and newspapers. The late nineteenth century America was, as the reading of the novel exposes greedily growing in riches, industrialized, given to reading and listening to rumors of different sorts, and in many ways not unlike the modern America we know. The American spirit is evident in the hustle-bustle life of the New York City.

## Chapter IV: Conclusion

Edgar Laurence Doctorow's novel *The Waterworks* makes an effort at recounting a literary, fictional version of American history as it was in the 1870s. In doing so, he makes an experiment in narrative technique. Doctorow is known for his skillful blending of fiction and fact into reconstructions of eras in American history. Doctorow's interest in narrative experimentation is evident again in *The Waterworks*. This time, however, the point of view is not a recollection of childhood as it was in *Ragtime*, *World's Fair*, and *Billy Bathgate*, but a retrospective of adult experience by an old man. The motives of the narrator may therefore resemble the vanity of the men who seek immortality from the mad doctor, and the reader often wonders if the story is not being told from the limbo of the waterworks. The mad doctor is finally put behind the bars, the desire of a millionaire August Pemberton to stay immortal fails miserably, and his body is found much strained. Doctorow's focus on a particular time and place in American history also demonstrates again his inclination and talent for historical fiction. Just as he used newspaper accounts for many details in *Ragtime*, Doctorow provides a very realistic setting for *The Waterworks*. By creating a narrator who is the editor of a newspaper, Doctorow provides space for investigative and detective fiction. His work is philosophically probing, employing an adventurous prose style, and the use of historical and quasi-historical figures, situations, and settings. Politically active and outspoken, Doctorow advocates the active social roles of writers as the agents of change and watchdogs of humanity. His social concern, advocacy for human rights and liberty, and undaunted criticism of the establishment earn for him the recognition of an international readership.

*The Waterworks* is set in the burgeoning New York City in 1871, and focuses on a certain reporter named Martin Pemberton whose tycoon father Augustus

Pemberton, is supposed to be dead. But one day Martin spots his father on a Manhattan street, and sets after searching out the reality. Finally, it transpires that with the help of a doctor named Sartorius, the tycoon has been trying to get immortal. The waterfront taverns where the old rich man kept himself hidden is ultimately found out by the group of investigators consisting of the narrator of the novel MacIrvine, the police officer. The power mania everything related to it is thus exposed in a mysterious way, finally making space for comments upon the nature of the American government and society at large. The plot of the novel takes place in New York City in 1871, right after the Civil War, and the Tweed Ring is in power in the city government. The narrator is a newspaper editor of the Telegram, an evening newspaper. He has a freelance writer, an interesting writer, who disappears. The book follows this editor's attempt to find out what happened to this writer. It's a far more complex story than that, that is the central way the thing turns someone disappears and someone else is trying to find him. The whole book is a process of discovery, and in the course of it more is discovered than could have been anticipated by the immediate situation. In the mid nineteenth century, they brought water down from the Croton River for New York City, and built a marvelous aqueduct all the way miles and miles down to the city. And they built a reservoir right in the middle of town, the Croton Holding Reservoir at 42nd and 5th Avenue, which is the site of the New York Public Library now. It was a huge thing in the city, a broad expanse of water, practically like a lake. This is the place the novel is set in. It takes place in some unnamed but real locations at the reservoir in the waterworks building in New York. A man sees a toy boat on the water that sinks; he goes into the waterworks and sees some men who have found an obstruction in the sluice gate and it's a child, the owner of the toy boat. That's basically what happens in the story. The delivery of water was a



very important technological advance in this country in the 19th century. New York didn't really have any water until the 1840s -- until then they had bucket brigades when things caught fire. And of course there were all these terrible fires in New York.

Doctorow grandly re-creates the world of Boss Tweed and waterfront taverns, the era of robber barons and the mansions they erect in their capital of capitalism. The bureaucracy, politics and science of the States is controlled by the tycoons and power mongers. It was the historical reality of the post Civil War era. The greed of the tycoon for longevity and even immortality has made him invest much money upon the amoral, if not insane, doctor Sartorius. Replete with historical and contemporary allusions, the book echoes earlier Doctorow works in its sweeping examination of the interaction among different social classes, and the reality of politics controlled by big houses and merchants. The historical reality of American nation becomes the basis of the fictional work, thereby making it a case of the blend of fact and fiction.

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