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Fictionalization of History in Stephen Chobsky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

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Letter of Recommendation

Susandesh Adhikari has completed his thesis entitled "Fictionalization of History in Stephen Chobsky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*" under my supervision. He carried out his thesis from August 2016 to April 2018. I hereby recommend his thesis to be submitted to viva voce.

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Approval Letter

This thesis, entitled "Fictionalization of History in Stephen Chobsky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*", submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Susandesh Adhikari, has been approved by the undersigned members of the thesis Research Committee.

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Abstract

Present research efforts to search the fictional nature of history utilizing the new historicism as conceptualized by Michel Foucault and Stephen Grenblat. This research casts light on how history is discursive and constructed phenomenon in Chobsky's novel The Perks of Being Wallflower. This research probes into the unreliable character Charlie, one-eyed Jew living In America. He narrates the incidents in broken English with several discontinuities. Charlie presents a dreary, hellish picture of America of the early 1990s. However, he withdraws his own narration in the course of novel. He even claims that he is not sure about the incidents happened in his life because he is suffering from mental illness. Throughout the unreliable narrative of Charlie, Chobsky deconstructs the traditional notion of history as the matter of facts and he claims that history is the matter of fabricated power politics.

Keywords: History, Discourse, Fictionalization, Knowledge, Perspective, Truth, Holocaust

Introduction

This research paper focuses on Stephen Chobsky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Inside the narration of Charlie there are many gaps and unreliable incidents about world war and literary history. This novel leads us in the world of fake imagination of history. In the same way the perks of being wallflower excavates that history cannot present exact reality. Chobsky, through the character of Charlie who is intelligent, thoughtful and philosophical person, observes upon the truth and fixity of history. Charlie also discusses about the pre-established legal and formal general principles of human condition such as death, marriage and separation. He has vast reading of literary history, as he states in the novel, but quiet discontent with it due to its falsity and analyzes the generalizations about history and human conditions. He memorizes and examines various incidents of his own personal life as well as historical incidents by analyzing himself and history but he fails to capture the realistic evidences. Charlie is a unreliable narrator who has been damaged both physically and psychologically. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is the story of a new high school student, Charlie, told through his letters to a person never identified to the reader. Charlie struggles with apparent mental illness throughout his letters, but he never clearly tells about the problem. Rather, it becomes evident in the background of many of his accounts. So, he critiques generalizations about history and human conditions, questions such pattern and deconstruct them. On this basis, the research aims to prove the notion of critiquing generalizations about history and human conditions inside the text.

The purpose of the research is to investigate how historical generalizations or claims become unable to carry fixity and truth behind any occurrences. At the same time, the study's focus is on how a predetermined principle behind various human

conditions fails to be applied in each individual condition thoroughly. Since antiquity, some rationalists, historians and political thinkers have created the fixed knowledge, ideologies, truths and principles but such canonical boundaries are being questioned and demolished in the course of time. So, this research aims to create radical thought and action to question and break such monolithic and canonical boundaries through the character of Charlie.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower questions the existence of the contemporary grand narrative inside the story of Charlie, which also helps to question human history. Traditionally human history and truth are taken as the matter of truth and reliable but they are unable to be fixed and to be applied in each and every cases due to changeability of time and truth. Various ideological characteristics, incomprehensible nature of human phenomena, impossibility of certainty, and changeable nature of memories in the narration of Charlie appear as unreliable.

The study dramatizes the logic of historical truth and generalizations of principles about human condition. Charlie, a character of the novel, travels over his long course of life to find truth or conclusion. He recalls and examines the time and events in his life such World War II, his escape from concentration camp, sex, separation, re-meeting, job and makes his own history but without any proofs. He finds no historical fixity and true general principles behind the human conditions. He finally comes to question and deconstruct the notion of historicity and certain principles behind the phenomena of human life. Such issues in the novel examines the problem in historicity and generalization on human conditions and raises the issue of deconstruction of both in the light of historicism and new historicism. How do the so-called rationalists, historians and authoritative institutions create false history? Why historical truth cannot be created? How do generalizations about history and human

conditions fail to speak the truths? These are some of the questions, this research raises to solve. The novel is the story of Charlie who travels long course of his life with several ups and downs. Charlie is now living in New York with his family. He is a student of Bill who is knowledgeable about English literature and history. With his one good eye, he looks through the telescope of history, exploring the cultural landscape of a planet which has just sent a man to the moon yet which is chaos with social and political cant and a spiritual emptiness. Chbosky uses language to show how Charlie grows during this year. His sentences become more structured and organized and he learns many new words that he constantly tries to implement in his letters. Every time Charlie is not certain about the meaning of a word he puts them in brackets, but he still learns the confidence to use them: "It seems like a rather 'auspicious' beginning" (Chbosky 91). Our focus is often moved onto how Charlie writes, since he talks about it multiple times during the novel: "I should stick to the subject, though. That is what my teacher Bill tells me to do because I write kind of the way I talk" (Chbosky 12). The language is also a sign of how Charlie is doing. In a letter at the end, where he is realizing what his aunt Helen did to him, his writing is in disarray in terms of structure and language. A critic named Donald Cromwell puts forwards his concept about Chbosky's discussion about memory in the novel:

In addressing these questions, Chbosky's voice is potentially enigmatic when objective details are purposely left out. He spares on physical details as if to shy away from the hard facts that memory can't provide. The only physical detail we get about any of Charlie's statements is the way they wear their hair. Dialogue and gossip instead form the basis of what Charlie remembers, which makes nearly every conversation doubly interpreted. As Charlie says later in life, All my 'conclusions' are reversible. (21)

Donald talks about the feeble memory of Charlie in this commentary. Another critic Daniel Hartman has analyzed the novel from the perspective of the memory.

Memory, individual rather than collective, accounts for who we are and what we have become. And early memory is particularly valuable, though it can be misconstrued. Its influence can persist throughout adult life, though what is cause and what effect may be difficult to judge. In this short but compelling novel Hartman tracks the origin of one particular memory through a long and apparently uneventful life towards an explanation that leaves traces of unease that are difficult to dismiss. In this connection, he further adds:

The facts are quite simple. Three school-friends, of whom the narrator, Charlie, is one, are joined by a fourth, Adrian Patrick, who is much cleverer than any of them. Nor can he understand why Charlie's mother should leave him a small legacy and the news that she possesses . . . Charlie's diary, which was the virtual gallery of incidents of her own life. (52)

What remains in his memory is the discomfort he felt on that weekend, a discomfort he cannot explain even at an advanced age. The clue might lie in the diary, but attempts to get hold of it are unavailing. He is up against an initial misalliance to which others are being added, containing the same characters but no further explanation. However the present research does not go against the abovementioned criticisms, rather it seeks to find out the dialectics of the present grand narrative in every respect.

Chobsky's novels are characterized by the way that carries regret, emotional conflict, nostalgia and yearning for freedom. Chobsky's growing popularity has resulted in a substantial and wide-ranging body of critical responses to his novels, primarily in the form of interviews and reviews in the press and popular media.

Chobsky was thus for a time widely regarded as a writer of “popular” rather than “serious” fiction. Due to his public acknowledgement of his literary ability (Hartman 12). A body of academic or scholarly criticism has been slow to emerge. Peter Child confirms Chobsky as a “serious writer in his sensitivity to exploring issues facing contemporary humanism and liberalism such as the challenges of living in a changing world, the ability to create a balance between individual freedom and moral responsibility” (2). He regards Chobsky as one of the key figures of contemporary English fiction. Arianna Vailas seeks to establish the triangular relationship amidst dystopia, present and future. His view about the power of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* to set up link amidst these three things is straightforwardly mentioned below:

Dystopian novels incriminate the present in their distorted representations of an imminent future. Chbosky’s novel recounts the story of The Boy, reflecting upon their prescribed life within a confined community. Her experiences take place in a world that is uncannily akin to our own, the only major difference being that human cloning is at the forefront of modern medicine, an issue over which scientists and ethicists of this world are still debating. (23)

The question of ethics is inherently involved in the nurturing of mechanical hounds’ to securing and enhancing the lives of the people. This novel has raised several questions like whether is it ethically admissible to mechanical hounds’ as subhuman beings or not and whether is it anti-humanistic to compel clones to donate their organs to those suffers from incurable diseases. Along with these questions, the notion of humanism comes to be intermingled.

There are an increasing number of critical commentaries, some of which have been referred to in this study, that demonstrate the range of Chobsky’s talent.

Particularly on his fictions that move away from the disturbing and disruptive sensationalized themes. Critical evaluations of his later work agree that his fiction has become a discussion point for social and cultural commentary. For example, Peter Child again comments that Chobsky's "opens the novel to a psychological realm in which the sense of crisis was felt focuses on a detailed discussion on the binary of Darwinism and literature in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*" (25). Child briefly draws parallels between historical accuracy in representations of World War II and the events Holocaust in the text drawing comparisons to other historical texts and news media clippings. He convincingly shows how Chobsky reflects human consciousness of moral being in which we seek to find unity out of randomness, order out of chaos, and to pursue 'truth' in the process. For Child, the novel should emulate this dynamic moral thought.

The proposed thesis is library based research. It will use a close, discursive argumentative style which will draw on concept of New Historicism along with pre-established legal and formal principles behind any specific human conditions as the novel is question upon such agenda. Authentic cites, guidance from the lectures and professors will be supportive tools for research. Stephen Greenblatt's ideas of fictitious nature of truth is applied to make the thesis prove the hypothesis. Different extracts from novel related to the notion of inadequacy of history and principles on human condition will be brought to prove inadequacy of generalization about history and human life. Foucauldian concept of discursive knowledge and Derridian concept of polesemic nature of language are used to challenge the hitherto grand narrative and to prove the fictionalization of history in the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* .

New historicism, which emerged in the late 1970s, rejects both traditional

historicism's marginalization of literature and new criticism's enshrinement of the literary text in a timeless dimension beyond history. For new historical critics, a literary text does not embody the author's intention or illustrate the spirit of the age that produced it, as traditional literary historians asserted. New historicists ask, "How has the event been interpreted?" and "what do the interpretations tells us about the interpreter?" (Veese 288). New historicists, strictly a matter of interpretation, not fact. There is no such thing as a presentation of facts; there is only interpretation. Furthermore, new historicists argue that reliable interpretations are, for a number of reasons, difficult to produce. Any two historians may disagree about what constitutes progress and what does not for these terms are matters of definition. The main concept of new historicism is that new historicists believe in the impossibility of objective analysis. Discourse is a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, and it expresses a particular way of understanding human experience. Although the word discourse has roughly the same meaning as the word ideology, and the two terms are often used interchangeably, the word discourse draws attention to the role of language as the vehicle of ideology. New historicism views historical accounts as narratives, as stories, that are inevitably biased according to the point of view, conscious or unconscious, for those who write them. The more unaware historians are of their biases-that is, the more "objective" they think are-the more those biases are able to control their narratives.

Michael Foucault is quite possibly the most influential critic of the last quarter-century. His interest in history is about nonlinearity of history. His enterprise is essentially to historical discourse and to textualized history. Foucault refuses to see history in terms of linearity and development. Rather, he sees it in terms of a kind of power struggle. Power for Foucault is not necessarily a repressive, tyrannical things;

it is a generative, productive force. Power is that which binds together the disparate forces of a society (even though that binding is illusory). No event stems from a single, coherent cause, but is the product of a vast network of signification and 'power'. This is evident in his volume *Discipline and Punish* (1997).

Stephen Greenblatt's brilliant studies of the Renaissance have established him as the major figure commonly associated with New Historicism. He in his book *Poetics of Culture* takes history as a text that is interpreted by different cultures to fit the ideological needs of their own power structures, which is a new historical concern. In this context, new historicism might be defined as the history of stories cultures tell themselves about themselves for Greenblatt. Or, as a corrective to some traditional historical accounts, new historicism might be defined as the history of lies cultures tell themselves. Thus, there is no history, in the traditional sense of the term. There are only representations of history for him. Likewise another critic Louis A. Montrose takes history as texts and textualization of history. He emphasizes on a dynamic, temporal model of culture and ideology—a ceaseless jostling among dominant and subordinate positions, a ceaseless interplay of continuity and change—such a perspective opens both the object and the practice of cultural poetics to history.

Alun Munslow in his text *Deconstructing History* questions the reliability of the history. For Munslow, history (as a discrete body of institutionalized knowledge-production, i.e., discourse) must reconcile itself with its postmodern self-consciousness; a reflexive self-consciousness that drapes a curtain of doubt over the hard-line empiricism that has defined history as a distinct and organized discipline since the late 19th century. Munslow provides an admirable survey of how our postmodern suspicion of representational thinking and the “metaphysics of presence” undermines and transforms conventional historical thinking and practice.

Deconstructing History does not entail an actual “deconstructive” reading of history (780). Rather, it is an introduction to the intellectual and academic problems pertaining to history as discipline – specifically; “the challenges that a deconstructive impulse poses for the vast nexus of foundational beliefs and unshakable certitudes underlying modern academic historical writing and research” (87). And while Munslow’s definition of “deconstruction” inevitably draws on many of the ideas and problems commonly associated with that body of thought, he relinquishes any responsibility or obligation to pay particular fidelity to any definitive “theory” or “school” resembling “deconstruction.” In addition, this is where the first problem arises: Munslow understands deconstruction as a way of “reading” history is purely functional. “The deconstructive impulse rests in a peeling-back process [that] seeks out that which is repressed in the text (primary or secondary) – not only what is hidden from the naïve reader but also what is hidden from the intention of author(s)” (111). What is lost here is the way in which the text is supposed to deconstruct itself.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower is about the elusiveness of identity and the treachery of memory, regret and the hope of redemption. Though its atmosphere is dreamlike, it actually is hyper-realistic, portraying with enigmatic precision of a very high order “real” life as each of us actually experiences it. Thus, the novel is the first person account of mentally deformed narrator Charlie who lives in Newyork. He wants to account the historical truth and personal truth as real eyewitness. However her all efforts topple down like the house of cards.

New Historicists, greatly influenced by Michel Foucault’s concept of discursive analysis of Power relation, which gives another strategy of political reading of the texts. The power relations are reflected through discourses, which do not find overt manifestations but implicitly expressed in the text. Charlie the

protagonist of the novel is professor in his occupation. Charlie is an adult who remembers his school days. He claims that he is the future author of the greatest biography ever written of different writers. His teacher Bill also encourages him to read different books. Throughout the novel he meditates on the human condition, past, present, and future. He accounts about second Great War. He is an observer and a half-blind prophet in a time of social decay. Charlie, sees the world through adult eyes, his mind, and his heart. He filters the world through his own thought. And yet, the truths he knows are intuitive, and he realizes that value in life is found through making and acknowledging the human connection and bond, and living up to the spiritual and moral truths of the "human contract" (43). Finally he himself tells that there is not demarcation between fiction and facts.

Chobsky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* depicts the narrative of Charlie in Newyork. The book chronicles about different incidents in the life of Charlie, as he prepares for the death of his aunt Helen, a woman who sexually molests him. A good deal of frantic strategy takes place around Helen's bedside. His son Wallace, a lifelong burglar, is convinced that his father has hidden cash in the pipes in their New Rochelle home, and tries to find it. Meanwhile Charlie's own sister, has stolen unique manuscript about moon exploration from an Indian scientist, and Charlie must see to its return before the police get involved. Yet the strange humor of these stories takes place strictly in the unconsciousness of Charlie himself. Whatever Charlie narrates in the novel seems to be false and discursive only.

The concept of new historicism was developed from the concept of genealogy developed by Fredrich Nietzsche. Later Mitchael Foucault developed the concept of new historicism questioning the old archeological model of history. Historicists, greatly influenced by Michel Foucault's concept of discursive analysis of Power

relation, come to give another strategy of political reading of the texts. The power relations get reflected through discourses which do not find overt manifestations but implicitly expressed in the text. Foucault further focused upon the intricately structured power relations in a given culture at a given time to demonstrate, how that society controls its member through constructing and defining what appears to be universal. It implies that New Historicists “aspired to a politics of culture” which is covertly manifested in a text because power structure is administered by the state. “The state’s control of its citizenry was internal rather than external. The state subjected its people by creating them as subjects, devising fixed categories under which people could be described and thus controlled.” This was the conjunction Foucault evoked as “Power Knowledge” (Foucault 86). Foucault observes History as the discourse between the social and the aesthetic circular in his text *Discipline and Punish*. He further defines history as:

The final traits of history is its affirmation with knowledge as perspective.

Historians take unusual pains to erase the element in their work which reveal their ground in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy the unavoidable obstacles of their passion. Nietzsche’s version of historical sense is explicit in its perspective and acknowledge in its system of injustice.

(90)

Foucault attempts to discover the system of particular discourse and relate it with the study of power and knowledge. He interprets it as essential historical discourse and textualization of history. He refuses history in terms of linearity and development. Rather he observes history in terms of power struggle. Historical continuity for Foucault is paradoxically discontinuity. Knowledge is not knowledge of self rather it is only perspective.

The very beginning of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* shows feeble situation of the protagonist. Charlie's biography is conflicting wit in his own narrations. As an adult, he lays claim to be a clever wit memory: "I figure that maybe I can write something that you can relate to" (16). He gains this symbolic dimension because, like someone in a myth, he came back from the death. However, he is reluctant to claim the authority that seems to belong to him as a survivor. His life seems sorted out, a chain of little victories and failures with no real unresolved past mysteries.

Charlie fails to capture the reality and lost in the maze-like experiences. He is psychologically disturbed due to regular use of drugs. His eyes are also dull due to misshapen of accident. In Greek myth, Tiresias's blindness is the price of his ability to see the future, but Charlie, who has lost only one eye, seems to have gained only partial insight into the cosmos—enough to ask questions, not enough to find answers. This incomplete mysticism is captured in one of the novel's most memorable passages, when Charlie sees some illegible graffiti on a vacant building: "Most scrawls could be ignored. These for some reason caught on with Mr. Charlie as pertinent. Eloquent. Of what ? Of future nonbeing . . . But also of the greatness of eternity which shall lift us from this present shallowness" (45).

The Perks of Being a Wallflower is loaded with the Charlie's past activities and his present responses. He looks back and tries to find truth about events which happened in the past not so much to him, but to people with whom he was once connected. He tries to find out what exactly happened and how he was personally involved in it. The novel is concerned almost exclusively with memories . For Charlie, there is no evidence to support or disprove truthfulness of his memories in the first part of the book, apart from his own reflections of their reliability. In addition, Charlie gives the reliability of his memories many thoughts. Through the

whole novel, Charlie challenges the exactness of memory, either by his own thinking, or through his recollections of discussions between his friends. Charlie spent most of the years as a reader in school, revolving around with English teacher Bill. In particular, he was good friends with English teacher, however he claims that he was good friend of different writers. However, about this incident there is no objective record.

Charlie's constant questioning of truthfulness of his own memory makes the reader aware of her unreliability. Paradoxically, at the same time, it gives Charlie an aura of frankness and honesty. Charlie of course is an unreliable character, but his unreliability seems to result from fallibility of memory, not from a twisted personality and intentional lying. Charlie seems to be as honest with the reader just as he is with himself. This appears as the problem, however, because it is often hard for her to confess himself bad feelings or to recall unpleasant or shameful memories. This tendency can be observed:

To tell you the truth I do not know where they are appropriate to use. I am not saying that you should not know them. You should absolutely. But I just have never heard any one use the word corpulent. And jaundice ever in my life.

That includes teachers. So what is the point of using words nobody else knows or can say comfortably? (Chobsky14)

Problem in objective truth is accepted by Charlie himself. Truth is no more than representation. It is difficult to reach nearer to objective truth. One should be satisfied with symbols.

Charlie sometimes turns to the reader in search of compassion or in an attempt to be emphatic. Indeed as a narrator Charlie involving in reading various novels like *The Cather in the Rhys* and *The Side of paradise* he involves in social and political

questions. He is not a self-denying man. Whatever may have been the statement for Charlie about sexual intercourse he is not reliable in his account. His perception towards Helen, a rich, beautiful and promiscuous young woman whose sexuality is offensively ripe justifies the same fact of his sexual attraction: "And she kissed me she kissed me. It was a kind of kiss that I cannot tell my friend" (78). That comment on sexual smell is not new for Charlie. Charlie in the beginning narrates about his physical relationship with Helen but in the course of novel he again narrates that he is not sure whether he has relationship with Helen or not. This shows the unreliable narration of Charlie in this novel.

Pioneers of new historicism theory are Michel Foucault and Stephen Greenblatt. The New Historicists have drawn upon Foucauldian tenet of discursive nature of literature which is a cultural construct; however, a complete harmony in society is illusory because constant but repressed struggles keep on running parallel between powerful and powerless in the society. In literature, the suppressive and marginalized voices against dominant power structure and stricture is heard implicitly, meaning thereby, text does not display the dominant and overt history, however hidden history or histories are intertwined in literature.

Stephen Greenblatt allows the strategy of speaking with the dead, as an ethnographer and writer speak with the living being while alive, so the reader / critic and New Historicist can speak with the writer through his text, thus positioning the new historicist as a second interpreter. Thus a New Historicist tries to read the text of a past author who was present in his own time as an ethnographer. Seturaman remarks that this condition does not allow a New Historicist to be objective in his study of the work composed in remote past: "The New Historicism, while trying to understand history cannot be objective and we can never recover the past without our

own present self modifying what used to be considered objective and stable” (574).

Likewise, Jackson too speaks with the same canon as he writes:

Nevertheless, as readers of past literature, we are demonstrably decayed because we do not bring to it the experience that it required for its imaginative and intellectual realization in its own time; instead we bring the experience that is required for the realization of literature in our time, an experience in which only fragments of the earlier experience survive. The consequence is in several respects analogous to the antique statue’s loss of limbs. (38)

Just as an antique and broken image needs repair to come in its previous condition, similarly the text can be actualized by the reader with his present perception because through this he tries to reconstruct the past with his imaginative faculty, while at the same time maintaining a close nexus with the present too. The suggestion being that the New Historicists lay emphasis on the necessity of awareness of the critic while analyzing a text because he belongs to present but has to read the text written in the past and has to reconstruct the past with two sorts of historicity working parallel.

The narrative of Charlie shows that how his memories which did not fit into his own perception have altered the incidents of the novel. He is “. . . big boy just like we always did," (Chobsky 212). It is late night in his house, Charlie cannot sleep, partly because he is obsessed with the pickpocket he has seen at work on the bus he takes to. He has cornered on that man and is going through an old man’s wallet, “still in rapid currents with his heart, like an escaping creature racing away from him”(49). Charlie pulls the cord and gets off the bus, hoping that the pickpocket will not follow. He dodges into a building and waits for a while, then makes his way to a hamburger joint where he orders a cup of tea. He does not see the pickpocket and thinks pickpocket has eluded him. "By now Charlie's greatest need was for his bed. But he

knew something about lying low. He had learned at school, in forests, cellars, passageways, cemeteries" (50). He fails to recognize and remember who exactly that pick pocket was? Charlie has seen the pickpocket at work several times since the first sighting, but when he tried to report to the police, He fails to report the exact incident. It is Charlie, however, who always found it difficult to unrust that incident of pick pocketing and perceived it as an issue. Charlie also fears, that it will also happen to him, who will be "left with a lifetime of bitterness" - that is the reason, why he decided to suppress memories of that incident (50). Charlie's present situation, concerning his present state of mind, it is ironic to see. What he narrates is no more than fabricated narration. Moreover, Charlie's character falls rather in the category of the "social backdrop", or "cartoonist's doodle" (Smith 12).

The Perks of Being a Wallflower is a frame story; a fact that readers learn late in the plot. Part one, two, and three describes a fictional realistic universe, which is shattered in the novel's epilogue where it is revealed that the novel's protagonist is Charlie. In the beginning, he explains how he has manipulated events to fit into her narrative intended to make amend for the damage of his life. The narrative, thus, entails a historical perspective, because it is self-consciously aware of its own status as fiction and automatically questions the relationship between fiction and reality. The novel questions what is considered the truth when fiction is presented as reality. Postmodern theory focuses on what history and literature share, rather than what separates them:

They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic construct, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally

intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. (Hutcheon 105)

In postmodern theory, history is not considered obsolete, but is rethought as a human construct. In other words, history is a factual representation rather than a fact. It does not deny that the past existed, it only argues that history only will be accessible through text: “We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are texts” (16). Historical facts will only be accessible through a representation, made available in textual form. Linda Hutcheon has coined novels that combine history with a historical perspective as ‘historiographic fiction’, because they implement a self-reflective perspective while claiming to portray historical events and personages. Hutcheon considers these novels not just metafictional, nor historical because they are both metafictionally self-reflexive while speaking about real historical realities (5).

The Perks of Being a Wallflower is a historical novel because of its setting, which takes place in the past. It captures the issues of 19670s in America, then moves on to World War II including different novels, and ends in contemporary time. Jie Han and Zhenli Wang argue that the novel is historical because of how “the fates of individuals are intermingled with the verisimilitude of history and society. And history, fact and fiction are knitted into the narrative framework” (136). What makes *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* different from the classic understanding of a historical novel is that Chobsky offers more information than the historian. Chobsky combines historical facts with fiction, therefore, automatically blurring the lines between fact and fiction. The effect is that he creates a new version of the whole by narrating the past in a new manner. As a result of this, Chobsky provides a number of possibilities that would have been ignored by the historians, as these are not part of

the historical truth. However, Han and Wang argue that these possibilities are no less real than historical facts: “Those possibilities, whether they are real history of the past or not, are no less real in his fictionalized world” (137). Chobsky, especially, blurs the lines between fact and fiction in the scenes where he depicts Charlie’s presentation about the novel *On the Road*. Here, he combines the historical event with his storytelling. In their article, Han and Wang count that many of Charlie’s depictions of war are influenced by his father’s experiences during the Second World War, which makes his methods similar to that of the historians. While the historical facts may not be depicted mimetically, they are still historical facts because “in his fictional world, history becomes fictionalized. The writer’s design of plot and structure reflects his attitude towards history” (137). In that way, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* becomes a historical novel with a postmodern perspective, because the intention is not to depict real life events mimetically, but to depict a representation, or a revision, rather, of the past in a new context .

The historical aspect that is added to the narrative in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* creates a parallel between the storyline of Chobsky’s novel and the construction of his novel. In the construction of his novel, Chobsky implements historical facts (particularly his aspect of presenting literary history) in order to underline the history of World War II . Additionally, the historical aspect is added in the meta fictional frame, because Chobsky is using Charlie to make the reader aware of the choices he has made in the process of rewriting his own historical past. Charlie’s presentation of novels he read never be factual and will always be a reconstruction of a factual event from the perspective of the present. The constructed nature of the depiction of novels, therefore, serves as a parallel to Charlie’s plot construction. Charlie can never factually represent his own historical past, but will

again be a particular construction seeking to achieve a particular effect his relationship between history as an objective, external set of events and individual experience as subjective and making mistake is an interesting tension. The historical novel use both the individual experience of the character with the historical context in order to create a multidimensional narrative as Manzoni explains “The historical novelist is required to give not just the bare bones of history, but something richer, more complete. In a way you want him to put the flesh back on the skeleton that is history” (3). The individual experience is the breathing flesh whilst the history is the sturdy skeleton and both novelists bring this metaphor alive in their novels.

Foucault considers history in the model of discursive knowledge. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* rejects the traditional historians' tendency to read straightforward narratives of progress in the historical record: "For many years now," he writes, "historians have preferred to turn their attention to long periods, as if, beneath the shifts and changes of political events, they were trying to reveal the stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances, the irreversible processes, the constant readjustments, the underlying tendencies that gather force, and are then suddenly reversed after centuries of continuity, the movements of accumulation and slow saturation, the great silent, motionless bases that traditional history has covered with a thick layer of events" (3). Foucault, by contrast, argues that one should seek to reconstitute not large "periods" or "centuries" but "phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity" (4). The problem, he argues, "is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits" (5). Instead of presenting a monolithic version of a given period, Foucault argues that we must reveal how any given period reveals "several pasts, several forms of connection, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies, for one and the same science,

as its present undergoes change: thus historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves" (5). Foucault adopts the term "archaeology" to designate his historical method and he articulates what he means by that term by specifying how his method differs from both traditional history and the traditional history of ideas.

In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Charlie uses narrative in order to account the history, as an external set of events, to reshape it using his story. Throughout the novel, the first person narration gives the readers a false sense of reassurance where at the end of the novel, it is revealed that it is in fact Charlie's unreliability. Barnes argues "How are we, as readers, to believe in the validity of the innermost thoughts and motivations of these characters when, as it turns out, they are told from the perspective of someone who has a clear interest in how we judge the story." The diverse narrative perspective gives the reader a chance to experience history in different perspective based on the characters individual experience. However Charlie believed that unlike objective sense of history, her stories was "under no obligation to the truth, he had promised no-one a chronicle" (280). He blurs the link between history and stories and it appears that neither is telling the truth but they both work together in order to create meaning. History is created because someone has to give their account what has happened, how else one would know about the suffering of soldiers in World War II or the French Revolution and it is the person's individual experience is that account is from. The account of a German in the Holocaust and a Jew would be distinctly different but it is in literature that "the only place [Charlie] could be free" (280). To create what he wishes, whatever ending he wanted, it was a place he could reshape history. However, he discovers that "in later years, he

regretted not being more factual, not providing himself with a store of raw material. I would have been useful to know what happened, what it looked like, who was there, what was said” (Chobsky280). His memory, his individual experience of history does not compare to the objective and factual idea of history, it is that “raw material” (280).

Discursive nature of truth can be further explored through Charlie’s character. Charlie is characterized as an adult, who cannot distinguish between the fictional world and real life, we must remember how that presentation of Charlie derives from himself. In other words, he has chosen to represent himself this way because it will give a particular effect. A critic Finney characterizes Charlie as a man who lets art shape his life just as much as he shapes that life into his art: “His observation of life around him is conditioned by the fictional world that holds his in its grip” (78). He is surprised to find that the lecture is taking place in a large hall and not a small seminar room. He stands before friends and began to speak about the movie *Wonderful Life*:

The family watched It’s a Wonderful Life which is a very beautiful movie and all I could think was why did not they make the movie about uncle Billy?

George Baley was an important man in the town because of him the whole bunch of people get out of the slums. He saved a town, and when his dad died, he could do it. He wanted to leave an adventure but he stayed behind

(Chobsky 76)

Charlie perceives both the dream and reality in the same line. What he assumes about Billy is wrong because he is the character of the same movie. Charlie’s life is shaped around the books he reads and he only understands the world through familiar narratives. In the library, his first reaction is to understand the scene from a point of view he is already familiar with:

Couldn't remember where I heard it or read it. I said maybe it was in *This Side of Paradise* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. There's a place near the end of the book where the main kid is picked up by some older gentleman. They are both going to an Ivy League football game, and they have this debate. The older gentleman is established. The kid is "jaded". Anyway, they have this discussion, and the kid is an idealist in a temporary way. He talks about his "restless generation" and things like that. (Chobsky 105)

The misinterpretations of events that make his notice Charlie looking "so huge and wild" (Chobsky 123) and his previous mention of him as "a maniac" (Chobsky 119) are indications that "Charlie is shaped by a melodramatic imagination that originates in the books he has read" (Finney 79). Charlie draws on literature in all shapes of his life, which makes him enable to disentangle his life from the things he reads in his books. Literature is intervened in every decision he makes and everything he perceives, causing his to misinterpret particular events.

The reader, however, does not have enough information to decide whether to believe Charlie and whether to stand on his side or not. For instance, Charlie did not say how and why exactly he came to Newyork. There is a basic paradox in the way Chobsky makes use of Charlie's voice. Even as Charlie disclaims the moral authority of the survivor, the logic of the novel depends on that very authority to sustain its deep criticisms of American society. Chobsky elides the contradiction somewhat by making Charlie a very untypical American. We learn that he spent most of the years as a student in school, palling around with English intellectuals and the books. In particular, he claims that he was good friends with J. D. Salinger, "who acts in several ways the novel's imaginative foil" (Wilson 12).

Charlie seems very little interested in social and political questions. The

disaster he sees unfolding around him is spiritual, moral, and above all Charlie's view of his past is challenged only by his own thoughts about (un)reliability of memory. He does not have any other sources of information about his past than his memories - no tangible records, and with people who could remember the same events as him he is either no longer in contact, or they are dead. So he does not expect to find out much about his past anymore. Yet, with the strange inheritance, new questions arise. He does not deserve knowledge about literary texts and writers. He does not know anything about the situational context in which it was written, he does not know what precedes and what follows. Yet he tries for its interpretation, especially of the last, unfinished sentence. At the point Charlie starts to think, whether his settling for a content, peaceable life was a good option. "Yes indeed if Charlie had seen more clearly, acted more decisively, held to truer moral values, settled less easily for a passive peaceableness which he first called happiness and later contentment. If Charlie hadn't been fearful, hadn't counted on the approval of others for his own self-approval..." (Barnes 88 – 89). As Charlie searches for tangible evidence of his past, his old feelings start to reappear and with them, long buried, suppressed memories. "Just when you think, everything is a matter of decrease, of subtraction and division, your brain, your memory may surprise you. As if it's saying: Don't imagine you can rely on some comforting process of gradual decline – life's much more complicated than that" (Barnes 112). When his old feelings for his past renew, the old memories connected with it come up. All these memories are strongly connected with emotions, which he forgot thanks to his "instinct for self preservation" (Barnes 112).

Again, apart from political reading of the text, New Historicists also suggest that since literary text embodies numerous voices and is discursive in nature, hence, an innovative process of reading is but a quintessential methodology to be adopted

and that best method is of dismantling the text which is the prominent feature of deconstruction.

This validates that fact that after dismantling the texts the multiplicity of meaning be put forth “On the one hand, therefore, historicism is suspicious of the stories the past tells about itself; on the other hand, it is equally suspicious of its own partisanship. It offers up both its past and its present for ideological scrutiny.” (Hamilton Intro 3). This is because “the textuality of the text leads to its textuality is closer to deconstructive method of studying the text through its ‘polysemy’ and expanding traces” (Hamilton 223). Since text is the product of society and embodies it and hence contains multiple meanings as Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of ‘dialogic’ nature of text overlaps with this. Roger Webster says that language for Bakhtin has the potentiality of multiplicity because language “for Bakhtin is not in any sense fixed and stable but always in a state of flux; meaning is never singular and uncontested but rather plural and contested” (40). According to Bakhtin language is dialogic and the text displays ‘many voiced’ and ‘hetreglossia.’

At the end of the novel Charlie writes letter to unknown reader. We come learn more about the circumstances of his own life through this note. However, we notice about his nerves -- "I do not know what is wrong with me. It’s like all I can do is keep writing this gibberish to keep from braking apart"(Chobsky 205). Sam agreed that he should move, and "told everyone that her father's lifework, his memoir of Salinger"(Chobsk 156). Yet “once all the questions are answered, the reader is left in the same state that Charlie is in the book’s final pages—floored at life’s essential mysteries, and frustrated that they cannot be relived” (Hartman 12). Charlie’s searching for answers about his past caused reappearance of his repressed emotions and memories: it induced Charlie to revise his past actions and his way of thinking. It

removed Charlie's protective shield of self-deception and brought a strong feelings of remorse and unrest.

Finally, the theme of History in the novels discussed occurs on the narration of Charlie, the theme of memory is implemented by the unreliable narrator Charlie who tells story depending largely or exclusively on his subjective recollections of the past. Chobsky essentially creates a plot with the purpose of presenting how narratives are constructed by plot structures. He does this by creating a character like Charlie, who is an 'author' himself. Charlie's story is autobiographical, however, with his manipulations of events we learn that he has essentially created a plot structure, which has the purpose of achieving particular effects. Additionally, it is evident that he lets the plot actually produce events that never happened, again, emphasizing the constructed nature of his narrative. The different ontological levels of control in the story serve to understand how all narratives are plot structures, which has the purpose of creating particular effects. Chobsky has, for example, chosen to let Charlie end up with vascular dementia, which lets him have an ethical dimension to his narrative. As readers, we are again confronted with the notion that what seemed like a realistic storyline is not at all realistic, because we never know whether Charlie have forgotten certain events.

Memory in the plot is covered by the interconnection with other themes and by the importance of the theme for the story. As Charlie searches for tangible evidence of his past, his old feelings start to reappear and with them, long buried, suppressed memories. "Just when you think, everything is a matter of decrease, of subtraction and division, your brain, your memory may surprise you. As if it's saying: Don't imagine you can rely on some comforting process of gradual decline – life's much more complicated than that" (Chobsky 112). When his old feelings for

holocaust, the old memories connected with it come up. All these memories are strongly connected with emotions, which he forgot due to “instinct for self preservation”(112). Therefore, suddenly he remembers Hele’s dancing in her room and the feeling of intimacy between them, although earlier he mentioned Helen never danced. At the end of the novel, Charlie finds out why Helen leaves him a notebook. We learns more about the circumstances of mental disorder. Yet “ I told this to my psychiatrist, but he said it was too soon to draw any conclusion” (Chobsky 106). Charlie’s searching for answers about his past caused reappearance of his repressed emotions and memories: it induced Charlie to revise his past actions and his way of thinking. It removed Charlie’s protective shield of self-deception and brought a strong feelings of remorse and unrest.

In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the retired narrator Charlie resumes his content and rather uninteresting life. He came to a point, when he accepted his life as it was, non-special and average, but as he says, peaceable, with no reason to feel regrets about his past. First he admits that he has read several novels like *Cather in the Rye*, *To Kill a Mocking Bird* and *The Side of Paradise*. He also tells that let he has knowledge about the contemporary American society. But he himself withdraws his own narration at the last of the novel revealing about his unconstant psychology, these all evidences clearly shows that unreliable narration of Charlie in the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. As a narrator, he tries to be honest, but he himself is aware of the unreliability of his memories and admits that he has no evidence to ground his story. For the reader, the clues for Charlie’s unreliability are his unwillingness to recall unpleasant memories or his searching for the reader’s compassion while recalling controversial matter. When a mysterious bequest from literary history, World War II, and with it a corroboration of his past actions, appears

on the scene, Charlie is induced to revise his notion of past. His feelings and memories from the past which he deliberately forgot reappear. As his self-preserving shell breaks, Charlie is left with feeling of loneliness, remorse, and unrest at the end of the novel.

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