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Celebration of Skepticism in E. L. Doctorow's *The Waterworks*

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This thesis entitled “**Celebration of Skepticism in E. L. Doctorow’s *The Waterworks***”, submitted to the Central Department of English by **Mrs. Tara Khadka** has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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Abstract

By applying Hutcheon's theoretical formulations about the politics of irony in relation to skepticism in *The Waterworks*, this research proves how irony that happens in discursive communities maps the micro-politics of power relations by linking it with the issues related to science, morality, industry and politics in small practices and in local events. The investigation and interpretation about those in power politics and system are dubious in the novel and therefore it induces skepticism. In doing so, Doctorow's social concern for human rights and liberty questions premises of American Dream and ideals of her democracy. The novel thus is the sad illustration of the condition of American society, which boasts of its civilization.

Contents

Acknowledgements	Pages
Abstract	
I. Introduction	1-7
<i>The Waterworks</i> and the Revisiting of post-Civil War America	
II. Theoretical Modality	8-25
Irony: A Discursive Strategy and Literary Device of Skepticism	
III. Celebration of Skepticism in <i>The Waterworks</i>	26-48
IV. Conclusion	49-51
Works Cited	

I. Introduction

The Waterworks and the Ironic Revisiting of post-Civil War America:

E. L. Doctorow's *The Waterworks* contains a postmodern celebration of skepticism in its ironic narratives that partakes more general indecisive characteristic to the novel resulting in indeterminacy and uncertainty. To grasp accurately the irony in *The Waterworks* one needs to be aware of the skeptical stance, which the author takes on account of the claims and the hopes of the New York City. Doctorow's skeptical stance is his own way of reasoning. He mocks the New York City and exposes its pretensions. He provides his most disturbing indictment of American society during the period of 1870s. The New York City he explores belongs to powerful men who regulate their affairs quite beyond any concept of morality, nationality and the sense of purpose. The novel attacks dogmatic assertions of truth or absolute knowledge with doubt and questions. Therefore, the double bind in Doctorow's vision and perception in the novel is an inherent part of his interrogation into the authenticity of officially recorded history and traditional epistemology associated with it.

Doctorow has taken a kind of nineteenth century tale and rewritten it at the end of the 20th century with the spirit of late twentieth century consciousness about history. So, history enters into the novel as ideology. It is the critical revisiting of the time of 1870s. In doing this, Doctorow avoids adopting the nostalgic visiting in order to develop a kind of parallel to or reflection of our own times in the world of 1871s. It is a novel about all modern industrial culture, its presumption of continuous modernity, and the extent to which modernity is an illusion.

The New York was in the industrial process and it was the force that was affecting the shape of the civilization. A symbol of the changing city, which is the source of the title, is the vast reservoir behind high walls in the north of the city, providing water to supply industry and the expanding population. The industrialization of the New York City is one of the most important processes in the development of the modern country, but lacking the humanity. It produced the effects and shaped the forms of consciousness and unconsciousness that is related to the maintenance and transformation of existing systems of power. Capitalism was flourished with industrialization, which fetishised the human world into fragments. People began to value money above all the things. Relations are built and broken on the basis of money. Human world became a universe of moneyed entities that manipulates the affairs without humanity, motivated solely by the basest instincts of self-preservation. In such social background, *The Waterworks* is a historical novel intended to show something about today's America. This is basically that the single-minded pursuit of wealth does not produce happiness, which is obvious but often ignored in practice.

Doctorow is questioning this force because it made the system corrupt and government the head of bribery and extortion controlled by Boss Tweed in 1870s. Doctorow's target is the system itself to attack because it produces different ends that corrupted the humanity itself. After the North's victory in civil war, America was under the corrupt government led by Bill Tweed. This is the historical truth. The Tweed Ring is at the height of its power, its tentacles everywhere. Doctorow's central narrative themes have always been a uniquely American historical perspective. In *The Waterworks* he adds the following years of the Civil War, perhaps the greatest example of man turning on man, brother on brother in history. Human beings are

equal, equally capable of inflicting the cruelest of inhumanities upon one another, and equally capable of feeling loss at the core of very beings.

Doctorow is not complacent about this modern industrial civilization because there is nothing colorful about it. The accelerating industrial process made the outer world over complex, brutal, vice and fraud. The city turned into metropolis, the local markets into global market forces. And the laws of science replaced God's purposes. This shift in development provides scope for irony in the novel.

The story begins with freelance writer Martin Pemberton catching sight of his dead father in a carriage on Broadway. He was supposed to be some months dead. The father had been a rich man, a former Civil War profiteer and slave trader. And his son had been disinherited following an argument about morality. He rebels against his father's ways. He got himself disowned from his fortune. He chooses to be disinherited, but he cannot accomplish his inner urge to make sense of his world or establish his identity. He embodies duality. Inwardly, he is guided by excessive morality. But, his outward world is hostile, complex, dehumanized and alienating. In such clash, he carried this thunderstorm wherever he went. This is the essential ironic nature of the novel. He then, begins hunting around for clues to his father's strange reappearance. The youth soon vanishes.

What is ironic about the act of looking to death, a fictive death, for moral guidance is that human beings are normally accustomed to looking at life for principle of living? Looking at death in order to learn about life causes Martin's partial detachment toward life. He himself is imprisoned in the bizarre world of a mad scientist Sartorius. His life happens to fail in his attempt to provide good reasons for it.

Mcllvaine, Martin's sometime employer, the editor of daily newspaper and the narrator of *The Waterworks*, takes up the search for Pemberton with the help of police captain Edmund Donne. Mcllvaine soon discovers that Pemberton's sighting was not delusion, but part of a conspiracy as large as New York itself.

Mcllvaine and Donne's pursuit of Sartorius takes them to the heart of society's obsession with science and technology, and leads Mcllvaine to ask a question that's as old as the Garden of Eden: is there a point where the pursuit of knowledge becomes immoral?

Narration is a kind of fictionalizing but not; as Doctorow argues in his well-known essay *False Documents*, a falsification. Rather, fiction embodies the envisioned truth of the moral character of society. The both historical personages and the details and the fictional persons and the details are presented with the skeptic attitudes that they look ironic and hinted towards social reform. So, the initial pursuit of *The Waterworks* moves into the society at large. The search for Martin Pemberton leads to the discovery of Augustus Pemberton's treachery, Simmons's exploitation of children, Sartorius's unnatural experiments and finally the Tweed Ring's corruption of municipal politics. Writer, thus, communicates indirectly the socio-political ideology of the time in the shape of the veiled attack. Therefore, in recording the reminiscence of a journalist, the novel has captured the spirit of America in 1871s. Yet, this reprise of the past is not nostalgic visiting, it is written with questioning and doubting spirit which admits epistemological limitations and proceeds with due caution in searching for the truth and right courses of actions.

Every piece of writing is the documentation of past events and the experience of particular writer. Such socio-cultural situatedness of the writer and the construction of the composed order of that context are shown with intense self-consciousness in

The Waterworks. The writer's involvement in the historical narrative is political engagement and a personal experience. So the Pemberton story is only the strategy to tell Doctorow's sense of the New York City, in its past and at the end of 20th century. Being in the time of many rising revisionist theories, Doctorow maps the post civil war era with the spirit of historiography. In doing so, the narrativization of the past events is not concealed but is shown to be consciously composed into narrative whose constructed order is imposed by the narrator named McIlvaine in the novel. The events are the inscription within history no doubt, but what is important here, is the concealed attitude of writer towards the materiality of that historical past real.

The post civil war bureaucracy was taken as impartial democratic and public service oriented by the official American history but *The Waterworks* shows it from different point of view. The bureaucracy was motivated by money and will to power. The single-minded pursuit of knowledge has gone beyond any sense of morality. The mad doctor chased after the knowledge that makes a perverted sort of sense. McIlvaine understands this morbid curiosity that human beings have, and as a result, he concludes Sartorius as a one-dimensional manifestation of evil. After all, what human beings seek is the glory of a revelator. They are headed forward whether for good or evil. And Sartorius was the Revelator. He turned his field hospital into a laboratory for revolutionary techniques. He has intuited the germ basis of disease. He has transfused blood and is preparing to perform organ transplants. A certain segment of population is judged unworthy of life and sacrificed to experiments intended to benefit those who were wealthy. *The Waterworks* unworthy are the throwaway children of the New York City. The street children are captured and killed to take body fluids without mercy. Mercy was not his motive; knowledge was.

The modern science is in progress but not in the service to humanity. It has changed the old worldview. The modern world is inflicted with intolerable reality of science. For Doctorow the intolerable reality of science is an aspect of a sinister world order, a world of fact without value, a demonized world of Dr. Sartorius and derangement of natural order of father and son.

Doctorow's vision and perception of the past real is double bind, as at once he seems upbeat and at others dreary. At times he celebrates the vivacity and energy of the city. And at others, he is anxious seeing the city as an embodiment of human sin. So, his picture of the city is more complete as he comprises both the good and the evil. Doctorow documents the inane social doings of the class of new wealth of 1871s and in doing so he passes his judgments that New York was in commercial cunning. It produced enough wealth for itself but it was at the cost of humanity. Doctorow reports not only what he sees but puts them in some delusion. In this way, he induces skepticism.

The events and the people in the history cannot be seen and heard yet the mental attitude of the time can be conducive to all. And though they are absent men, their story is a tale, they are living in the words and words have no physical existence, they leave a space. This space is measured and defined. The house is solidly constructed, the floors are designed, and there is a nice tile in the bathroom. This house can be looked at, walked around and lived in. The reconstructed building is indeed a good place to dwell in. In the same manner the house of fiction can measure the voices of history. History is revisited with new critical assessment. It is visited with an expectation of allegedly unsatisfactory state of affairs. Therefore, irony is a way of writing that bridges the gap between the questionable reality of the past and the positive ideals of the perfection of humanity.

Hence, Doctorow puts past events into the new political discourse and interprets in *The Waterworks*. He attempts to engage the historical events in such a way that it reactivates the political awareness. Here, irony, a literary device of skepticism functions as a politically motivated counter discourse. It reconstructs the interpretative representation of socio-political period after civil war with critical reassessment. In this assessment, the transmission of information of the past and the concealed attitudes of a historian is surfaced. Doctorow's attitude here is skeptical. He questions the beliefs, values and the norms the New York embodies. Therefore, *The Waterworks* is postmodern metafiction where the attitude is incomplete because there are limits to the use of words and the discourse is fragmentary clearly indicated by the heavy uses of ellipses and the gaps. So, the epistemological status of historical explanation remains not fixed and final but provisional. In this way, the celebrated skepticism in the novel is the inherent part of Doctorow's interrogation to the authenticity of official history of America during the period of post civil war era.

II. Irony: A Discursive Strategy and Literary Device of Skepticism

Irony as a discursive strategy reads the designation of text as parodic and places the textualized phenomenon in a parodic relationship with the past. In its parodic and satiric reprisal of the past, it represents a rejection of the values not only doubting and questioning of them. Moreover, this reprise of the past is not nostalgic, it is written with doubting and questioning spirit which admits epistemological limitations and proceeds with due caution in searching for the truth and right courses of actions. Before one can reject the past, one must be skeptic. And before, irony becomes satire; one must take a dogmatic stance on the values rejected and the opposite values endorsed. Irony, thus, as a literary device of skepticism attacks dogmatic assertions with doubts and questions that intends the motive of social improvement.

Irony lies in the assumption that all cultural forms of representation are ideologically grounded; that they cannot avoid complacency with social and cultural relations and thus, their undeniable political import. The politics of irony is a discursive presence in its social dimension. Irony's discursive presence in cultural criticism arises mostly from the space between what is said and what is not said; between "brute events of the past and the historical facts we construct out of them"(The Politics of Irony, 57). This duality of inner and outer meaning is the scope for ironic observation. And this distinction leaves the vibrant vacuum that invites readers to make comments, interpretations and further representations. This incongruity leads to doubts and questioning. And thus this function of irony is definitely compatible to essential skepticism that attacks dogmatic assertions with doubt and questioning.

When the world outside appears indistinguishable from ironic narratives, irony has achieved its purpose. Instead, irony "doesn't reject or refute or turn upside-down

but quietly casts decent doubt and leaves the question open...because uncertainty is intrinsic, of the essence”(The Alluring Problem, 14). There is not a single proposition that can be claimed with certainty. Irony not only states the opposite of what it means but casts doubts to the authoritative codes of beliefs. William H. U. Anderson points out the working definition of skepticism as “ a doubting and questioning spirit which admits epistemological limitations and proceeds with due caution in searching for the truth and right courses of action”(16). Skepticism attacks authoritative code of beliefs, values, truth and absolute knowledge. And such skeptical caution results in uncertainty and indeterminacy. In this way irony in conceptual sense, is akin or correlative to skepticism in doubting and questioning spirit. Moreover, Anderson’s consideration of irony as a literary device of skepticism underlines this concept as he says “ irony is a tool or weapon employed by skepticism at certain times and under certain circumstances”(20). This means that irony is determined more by context than phrasing. Therefore, the same statement could be ironic in one context and totally unironic in another.

Postmodern ironic meaning making process admits its own provisional formulation that gives dogmatic stance to the narrator in most of the recent fictions. There are many instances of ambiguity and doubt in human experience and in surrounding environments as well. So, the fundamental epistemological question always remains skeptical. Therefore, ironic meaning comes into being along with its possible politics through the canceling of existing meaning and replaced by true meaning. But this is not the static nature of ironic meaning because “there exist dynamic and rapid oscillation between what is offered and what is being contested”(32). This implicit gap in postmodern historiographic texts provides irony an instrument for what Jameson calls “trivializing historical representation”(47). The

effect thus is to subvert or undermine the authenticity of officially recorded history and the mode is ironic one.

Irony functions tactically in a wide range of political situations legitimating or undercutting a wide variety of interests. It happens because postmodern has been the widespread phenomenon that brings a definitive change of direction in the development of culture. We live in a postmodern world “in architecture and design, in film, and music, in art and fiction, in poetry and literary criticism, even in politics, postmodernity is everywhere on display...”(2). In such scenario, irony is not a limited rhetorical trope or an extended attitude to life but “ a discursive strategy operating at the level of language (verbal) or form (musical, visual, textual)” (Hutcheon 10). Reappropriating existing representations and putting them into new and ironic contexts is a typical form of postmodern critique. While exploiting the power of familiar images, it also “de-naturalizes them, problematizes them, makes visible the concealed mechanisms” which work to make them seem transparent and vibrant, and foregrounds their politics, that is to say, “the interests in which they operate and the power they wield”(12). Irony functions in such socio-political interactive dimensions therefore, there exist intending ironist, intended audiences- the one that makes and the one that does not make the irony. To put it more explicitly, ironies exist whether or not they are intended. For example, the narrativization of past events is not concealed; the events no longer seem to speak for themselves, but are shown to be consciously composed into narrative, whose constructed order is imposed upon them by narrating figure. In thus way, putting the narrative into ironic contexts involves questioning the act of imposing order on the chronicles and the sequences of the past.

Ironies may be intended yet may remain unperceived by others. So, there are dynamic and plural relations among the text, the ironist, the interpreter, and the

discursive situation surrounded by the circumstances. Therefore the task of interpreter is simply “to decode or reconstruct the hidden meaning that is doomed to be accessible beneath the stated one” in such critical circles (15). The endeavor of encoding strategies of meaning making through representation becomes constructing and interpreting, not of objective recording rather interpretive representation of the past events, which are given meaning by the very discourse of the historian. The ironic strategy is therefore to expose the “space between self-conscious inscription within history of the existing, and often-concealed attitude of historians toward the materiality of the historical past real”(47). This space is the space of “provisionality and undecidability, partisanship and even overt politics- these are what replace the pose of objectivity and disinterestedness that denies the interpretive and implicitly evaluative nature of historical representation” (71). In addition, the communication of the ironic relation between the said and the unsaid is based upon intentional move. Irony is on the one hand, “an interpretative and intentional move: it is the making or inferring of meaning in addition to and different from what is stated, together with and attitude toward both the said and the unsaid”(11). Textual or contextual evidences initiate this move. On the other hand “irony is the intentional transmission of both information and evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly presented (11).” Therefore the epistemological status of the historical explanations is not fixed and final but provisional.

The inverted commas and quotation mark irony. If all interpretation is a re-creation, there is no need to master the original language of the text; rather inverted commas can be put in every re-creation. Peter J. Leithart writes “Postmodernism is often associated with the triumph of the inverted commas, the ironic mood in which nothing is serious”(1). For example, Kant’s rational religion places the inverted

commas around nearly every Christian dogma. For him the “Son of God is not Jesus but the ideal state of humanity pleasing to God”(1). Likewise, he adds up, “true Church is not the empirical Church with its sacraments and dogmas and structures of authority, but the democratic ethical community that has matured beyond the fetishism of traditional religion”(2). Similarly when confronted with a “liberal” and “conservative dilemma” Kant writes, “erring on one side or the other is simply sin...liberal and conservative have no meaning whatever (1). They only mark relative positions in the world, the true Christian being liberal beyond any earthly liberalism” believes in the “forgiveness of sins”(2). Here Kant denies the humanist structures and functions of traditional religion by putting Christian religion into ironic mood. Kant’s questioning of the orthodoxy and authenticity of traditional religion is called religious skepticism in philosophy.

Irony can be considered transideological in its politics. It uses and abuses contextual and intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions. In this way irony subverts that power. “Irony can be provocative when its politics are conservative or authoritarian as easily as when its politics are oppositional and subversive: it depends on who is using/attributing it and at whose expense it is seen to be (15).” Ironic strategy then crosses the ideological boundaries. Moreover, irony directly confronts the past of literature as well as it uses other non-official documents. Irony as a discursive strategy has its transideological political functions. It means that irony can be used either to undermine or to reinforce both conservative and radical positions. In the ironic discourse, “every position undercuts itself,” in which the ideologically engaged writer might come to deconstruct her/his own position (16). Despite these tricks, the critical edge of irony still make it a, as Chambers says,

“possible model for oppositionality whenever one is implicated in an system that one finds oppressive” (qtd in Hutcheon 16).

The transideological politics of irony functions constructively to initiate a new oppositional position and it works in a more negative way as well. For instance, from a point of view of exterior to the system, “it would be the product of that system that would be negatively ironized ”(17). The writer would stand outside in a position of power. By contrast the more constructive function of irony would target the system itself of which the writer was also a part. The endeavor of the writer to target the system to produce different ends can problematize the products of the existing system. In this case Foucault’s notion of problematization though never repudiation of our traditional modes of representation in the discourses of knowledge reinforces the concept of transideological political functioning of irony as dual and contradictory. However, be it conservative or radical in its politics, irony achieves its end because of its use of parodied situation over what is actual event in the history.

The issues of authority and power are encoded in the notion of discourse. Therefore, its interactive dimensions cannot be treated separately from the critical circles of social, historical and cultural aspects. These aspects are normally considered the realm of mimesis. But postmodernism challenges our mimetic assumptions about representation. Postmodern theory thus has provoked this rethinking about historical narratives. Both literary and historiographical references are self-conscious. They are not the auto representation. “The referent is already inscribed in the discourses of our culture”(119). And irony acknowledges its “identity as construct, rather than as simulacrum of some real outside”(119). We have never known the things in themselves but through the representations. The real is “enabled to mean through systems of signs organized into discourses on the world”(qtd in Hutcheon 31). This is

where the politics of representation enters. The real is put into discourse and interpreted. And the interpretation is not the truth but the representation. So, there is nothing natural about the real. The real is always mediated by representation.

Representation can no longer be considered a politically neutral and theoretically innocent activity. The inherent quality of narrative fiction is an interrogation into the repetition. Representation tends to grant certain transparency however its political complicity produces the simulacrum of the real. Hutcheon argues:

The postmodernism is not degeneration into hyper reality but a questioning of what reality can mean and how we can come to know it. It is not that representation now dominates or effaces the referent, but rather that it now self consciously acknowledges its existence as representation that is as interpreting indeed as creating, its referent, not as offering direct and immediate access to it”(37).

Irony oscillates between the actual events of the past and the historian’s act of processing them into facts. Irony therefore is instable. This multivocal instability admits that there can exist ironies that expose the unfinished and contradictory nature of historical affairs. In this regard, the postmodernist notion of narrative is immensely influential. This means “we live in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions...situating ourselves at the interaction of several narratives” not yet finished (45). Irony, thus, works to point to the complexities of historical and social reality. Social reality is always comprises the voices of not only the dominant and privileged groups but the voices of marginal, subordinates, colonized and the victims. So, irony as an oppositional theory has the power to make those voices loud and bring the understanding of a feel of hierarchy. In addition, irony has the power to change

that reality, at least for time being. It is because of the transideological nature of irony that it both reinforces authority as well as it can be used to oppositional and subversive ends.

The arrival of the postmodern has changed the nature of contemporary culture along with direction of cultural criticism. The deconstructive potential of irony is often linked to the view that it is “self-critical, self-knowing, self-reflexive mode that has potential to offer a challenge to the hierarchy of the very sites of discourse, a hierarchy based in social relations of dominance” (qtd in Hutcheon 30). Such a power to undercut and overturn is called the politically transformative power, which focuses on the concept of irony as the counter discourse that is politically motivated. Then, it attempt to usurp the standard views of the past in order to replace them with an interpretative rearrangements of past events and the processes of recording them. Irony as a counter discourse, hence, takes into account the hierarchies based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and such. Irony here becomes oppositional theory “to displace and annihilate a dominant depiction of the world”(30). Postmodern irony contests the hierarchies both unmasking their powers and their limitations.

The self-reflexivity of postmodern historiographic fiction also raises the issues of ideological import. The production of both literature and history is filtered through the imagination of writer and historian respectably. Both are documentary on form and plot structure reflexes its status as representation of historical events not of facts. This is then destabilizes and dismantles the “genre, style and the form of representation step by step”(110). This process of dismantling makes the form of representation parodic. It is not accidental, of course. Irony has often been the rhetorical vehicle of satire. If high art and culture is put into the popular conventions, it offers a good example of parodic representation. In this process it is the regional

and popular art of the poor and the socially marginalized that gets underlined. Such particular parodied text only can explain unmotivated details other than what is stated. Multiple and obvious parody like this can bring out the politics of representation by baring and thus challenging ideological mystification.

Postmodernism as a recent method of criticism remains historical and political because of its parodic historical references. Through such parodic reference, postmodernism works toward a public discourse that would show its political self-exposition. Hutcheon argues that postmodernism in fiction is to describe the paradoxical and historically complex form for which she calls “historiographic metafiction”(40). Historiographic metafiction blends the self-reflexivity of metafiction with an ironized sense of history. This mixture brings to the fore the distinction “between brute events of the past and the historical facts we construct out of them”(Politics, 57). In doing so such fiction draws one’s attention to the problematic status of historical representation. Hutcheon asserts that historiographic metafiction foregrounds discursively constructed nature of reality “by stressing the contexts in which the fiction is being produced-by both writer and reader” (Poetics, 40). Her focus is primarily on artist as producer. He/she is a fabricator and he/she includes and excludes whatever he/she wants and does not. For Hutcheon the interaction between past and present the old and new is what gives “formal expression to a belief in change within continuity”(32). In such parodic recall and reexamination of the past, irony is never “to exclude seriousness of purpose” in postmodern fiction but “for a direct engagement of the viewer in the processes of signification through re-contextualized social and historical references”(26-27 and 32). In doing so within changed socio-political contexts, an ideological and social intervention can be made possible. This possibility refers to the past and the fabrication of history. In such

intervention, bitter social realities such as corruption, greed, slavery, pain, death can be recognized.

Irony's transhistorical nature is often been used as Walker reminds us "a weapon of dominant cultures to keep the subservient in their place"(30). Irony sometimes conservative in its use can be self-betraying as well. Because historical individual can sometimes be biased towards particular ideology as he is "something that springs from a recognition of the socially constructed self as arbitrary, and that demands revision of values and conventions"(30). And this revision involves the crossing of the borders of high culture, which means the devaluation of all received ideas. There is still a tendency to see ethnic, local or generally popular forms of narrative fiction a subcultural. For this reason irony is an appropriate tool to focus on the problematic forms of postmodern representation. The deviation of the dominant depiction of the world is seen to be especially significant here. In any literary form, when ironic meaning is coded, it serves to blur "the distinction between illusion and reality, between fact and fiction, between symbol and what is represented" (40). And consequently this subverts the disparity between marginalized and privileged.

The postmodern frame of cultural critique has accepted the impossibility of univocal and stable meaning. Because of this multiple production of meaning, irony has achieved a privileged status as an interpretative strategy. This multiple production of meaning, "through deferral and difference is seen to point to the problematic nature of all language and forms" (57). Therefore, ironic solution of multiple meanings might challenge any notion of language as well as any notion of attitudes as giving one-to-one referential relation to any single reality outside themselves. About how to model meaning Hutcheon suggests:

In order to deal with the issue of ironic meaning, you have to go beyond traditional concepts of semantics, where meaning is discussed in terms of truth-conditions or the relation of words to things, and look as well to pragmatics, to the social and communicative exchange of language. There would seem to be no other way to talk about the strange semantic fact that we can use language to convey messages that are different from what we are actually saying. (58)

Postmodern frame of political critique problematizes the triangular model of relation of history to reality, reality to language and language to history. This space reinforces the concept that truth and knowledge are not absolutely attainable through reasons, senses or any other means. The use of parody to challenge the officially recorded history from within and the use of irony to implicate and yet to critique is typical of postmodernism. Along with the obvious and much politicized case of postmodernist texts, it has been irony that gets particular important in refocusing on historicity through parodic intertextuality.

The study of how the attribution and production of ironic meaning is a social activity involves the “ways in which systems and codes are...transgressed in social practices” (58). It also involves the ways in which the construction of meaning is influenced by “the surrounding tension-filled environments” (12). Hutcheon further writes:

Ironic meaning, in practice- in a social/communicative context- is something that “happens” rather than something that simply exists. And it happens in discourse, in usage, in the dynamic space of the interaction of text, contexts and interpreter. (58)

The power of unsaid to challenge what is being offered makes ironic space in such critical circles. Ironic meaning becomes transparent even in aesthetic situation of the fiction because of the engendered disappearance of the historical referent. The historical novel no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only represent our ideas and stereotypes about that past. There is no realism left in the text rather it is a shock of grasping the confinement of textual events that make us aware of a new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek history by way of our own images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach. Ironic meaning however is not “straightforward semantic inversion” it is instead “a communicative process” (58). History is not in reach rather one grasps historical past in some mediated fashion, i.e. through communication. In this regard Hutcheon’s arguments about ironic meaning propose three major semantic characteristics: relational, inclusive and differential.

Hutcheon defines irony as a relational strategy in the sense that- “it operates not only between meanings (said, unsaid) but between people (ironists, interpreters, targets)” (58). She elaborates on this by arguing:

Ironic meaning comes into being as the consequence of a relationship, a dynamic, performative bringing together of different meaning makers but also of different meanings, first, in order to create something new and, then...to endow it with the critical edge of judgment. (58)

To discuss it more explicitly, ironic meaning is the result of bringing together of what is offered and what is hidden, the offered is often contested by hidden one, thus making the provisional formulations of meanings. The unsaid is always the understanding of what is excluded, marginalized and dominated. In addition, the said gets meaning only in relation to unsaid and vice versa. Not only the unsaid gets

meaning, it gets evaluative attitudes that makes concealed politics understandable. Here, Hutcheon clarifies that this relation is not the “relation of equals” rather “the power of the unsaid to challenge the said is the defining semantic condition of irony” (59).

Similarly, another semantic characteristic of ironic meaning as Hutcheon argues is inclusiveness. Ironic meaning is simultaneously multiple that it includes both stated and unstated without rejecting one. In fact, ironic meanings do not have to reject literal meaning in order to get what is usually called the ironic one. To clarify this inclusive mode, Hutcheon uses different images. She argues ironic meaning is “double exposure” in terms of “a playing together of two or more semantic notes to produce a third (ironic) one...” (60). She further invokes the image of “triple-voicing” in music: two notes played together produce a third note which is at once both notes and neither” (60). These images provoke the concept that ironic meaning is something in flux, not fixed. The rapid perceptual movement between said and unsaid makes a new space, which is indeed ironic one like the third note in music. The said is not cancelled nor the unsaid is highly privileged. Both co-exist to make the third semantic note that is necessarily the ironic note. Ironic meaning does not cancel out the said or unsaid rather it “comes into being” with “its possible politics” by “conscious rejection of the literal meaning and the substitution of an ironic (often opposite) meaning” (61).

The description of inclusive model of irony is based upon the definition of irony as “antiphrasis” or semantic reversal (61). Antiphrasis means, “use of a word or phrase to convey an idea exactly opposite to its real significance” (62). This view of irony as bringing together not of binary choice of words or ideas rather through “an inclusive one bound up in a complex set of psychological motivations of characters...” is extended further with respect to the concept of appropriateness of

condition by I.A. Richards and John Searle, who writes: “the mechanism by which irony works is that the utterance, if taken literally, is obviously inappropriate to the situation” (61). If the situation becomes inappropriate, “the hearer is compelled to reinterpret it in such a way as to render it appropriate, and the most natural way to interpret it is meaning the opposite of its literal form” (61).

In the frame of speech act theory, irony is taken in semantic terms as simply “antiphrastic inversion on the level of the word” (62). It is the philosophical basis for inclusive model of irony. Hutcheon argues reminding us that in general level of definition solely the opposites and contraries does not make up the whole of ironic meaning. The differential aspect of ironic meaning operates:

Where the sign points to something that differs from its literal meaning and has for its function the thematization of this difference...Ironic meaning forms when two or more different concepts are brought together... The unsaid is other than different from the said...the ironic sign would thus be made up of one signifier but two different but not necessarily opposite signifiers. [Irony happens due to its differential semantic identity and] it gets form from the dynamic, performative and social dimensions of ironic happenings...[irony’s differential relation to signified] create a composite, different, interdependent meaning.
(64)

In this way irony’s meaning making process is context-dependent. Irony is always structured on a relation of difference. Ironic meaning exists by the differential relation to its first meaning, which becomes a device to convey the multiplicity.

Irony as a political strategy carries with it considerable risks in cultural criticism. This is because differences lie in our culture and thus the danger of misunderstanding. Different culture exists in different countries, in different generation and at different times. And the risk is evolved here. The documentation of past along with present involves varies shifts in cultural practices. The questions of who may use, and interpret irony when where and how revolve around these critical circles. Therefore, ironic meaning making process is never going to be end. This process brings to the fore how we make historical facts out of brute events or how our various sign systems grant meaning to our experience and “experience is open to multiple interpretations, of which no one is simply right, and that the co-existence of incongruities is a part of structure of existence”(qtd. in Anderson, 23).

Irony both marks the difference from the past and the connection with the past. Postmodern historiographic fiction is a form of ironic rupture with a past because it paradises the past. And this past is the literary period known as modernism. The modernist notion of “art as a closed, self-sufficient autonomous object deriving its unity from the formal interrelations of its parts” is both “instated and then subverted”(125). Postmodernism both asserts and then undercuts modernist notion of work of art in its attempt “to retain aesthetic autonomy while still returning the text to the world” (125). Here, Hutcheon reminds us that this “world” is not “the world of ordinary reality” rather the world in which these texts situate themselves is the world of discourse, the world of texts and intertexts”(124). Postmodern historiographic fictions situate themselves within historical discourse yet refuse to surrender their autonomy as fiction. This contradictory doubleness is a form of serious ironic parody. The intertextuality of “history and fiction take on parallel status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the world and literature” (125). The textual

incorporation of both world and literature functions “as a constitutive structural element of postmodern fiction” (124). Thus the constant ironic signaling of difference at the core of similarity characterizes postmodern fiction as parody of past. Indeed, “to parody is not to destroy the past, in fact to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it” (120).

The crossing of the boundary of literature and history and thus the vast dialogue among them has been made possible by Bakhtinian notions of polyphony, dialogism and heteroglossia- the multiple voicing of a text. His insistence on the dialogic element in every utterance sparked a more overt interest in the issue of intertextuality. Within every text other text reside or echo their presence. Therefore intertextuality blurs the generic distinctions. In such subversion, every utterance, event and situation becomes questionable and irony gets its free play.

Irony works in a dialogic or intersubjective way involving or even establishing community. In one hand, novel is constituted dialogically giving the spaces to multiple voices. On the other hand, the detailed knowledge of the personal, linguistic, cultural and social references of the speaker and audience in such community give way to be sure that a statement is intended ironically. This community shares the common beliefs, values and techniques, which functions as a mutual context for the use and comprehension of irony. This multiple interaction between and among the texts and their participants in particular situations creates an ironic mode in cultural critique. Indeed, in interpreting any conversation or artistic texts “circumstances of utterance” should be taken into account (qtd. in Hutcheon, 90). These circumstances are in fact the ideological subtexts of cultural practices in which particular text is evolved. We belong differently to the different worlds and this belongingness makes possible communities to exist. These communities are indeed discursive formations

because there is the multiplicity of communicative process in the circle of power, knowledge and truth. This critical circle “forms the basis of the expectations, assumptions and preconceptions that we bring to the complex processing of discourse, of language in use”(89). About how irony happens in discursive communities Hutcheon further adds:

Irony rarely involves a simple decoding of a single inverted message, it is more often a semantically complex process of relating differentiating and combining said and unsaid meanings and doing so with some evaluative edge (89).

In differentiating and combining unstated and stated meanings, marginalized, colonized and ignored gets space, the unsaid is often the issues of marginal groups such as of race, gender and ethnicity. These issues at hand is not only simply stated but emphasized with some judgmental attitudes that gives way to understand the politics behind such marginalization. The process of exploring the unstated out of such space leads this endeavor towards an ironic mode. Anderson’s insistent on the function of irony basically as questioning is remarkable here: “ Irony may or may not have the opposite meaning, may or may not have the intention to deceive but must always have the interplay or literary function to raise doubts to the veracity of what is being said and to question its (moral?) value...”(20).

The discursive communities are defined as multiple forms of contact and modes of interconnectedness of contemporary life. Such communities are discursive in the sense that they are formed by the cultural discourses. Hutcheon defines contemporary communities not only as “ internally complex” and “highly differentiated” but also “continuously and rapidly configured” (92). This notion of communities as dynamic and highly unstable reinforces the concept that sharing of

beliefs and customs involves an awareness of diversity and mobility. Thus, this multiple voicing of community makes irony to happen. Irony in this glaring sense is a generous skepticism, which believe at once in one thing and the other of the same thing. It is very normal and essential part of postmodern cultural scenario because people even if they believe on both of the things they can not do both of two things but they must have been in some way prepared to have done either. Such dilemma is universally recognized in human existence and in surrounding environments; therefore all epistemological questions remain skeptical.

In this way in any text, the writer is a historical individual with logically conceived consciousness and his/her universe is never-finished undefined production of a new space of significance. The multiple voices of characters is open and in free play and the meaning is always becoming. The oscillation of the multiple voicing gives rise to the different interpretations. Interpretation employs institutional analysis and ideology, which in turn forms the discursive community. It is in this multidimensional circle where doubting and questing arises, and when ironic mode is employed political meaning becomes transparent. Thus, irony activates not only one interpretation but also the many deconstructive interpretations.

III. Celebration of Skepticism in *The Waterworks*

The Waterworks is an ironic commentary on the American dream and democracy, a postmodern meditation on the impossibility of reconciling science and humanity, truth and language, morality and lives, and faith and suspicion. Doctorow takes a skeptical stance on account of those beliefs, norms and values. By doing so, he also problematizes the grand history of post-civil war America. He does not make his way clear to resolve such epistemological contradictions. His doubting and questioning of historical events give dogmatic stance to the narrator, ironic look to the novel and a chance of critical assessment of those satiric commentaries to the reader. The novel, then, turns into an ironic allegory of greed in post civil war era caused by the general perspective on American dream. Moreover, *The Waterworks* carries within itself a fragmentation of the psyche of its main characters Augustus Pemberton and his son Martin Pemberton. The novel tends towards radical decentering in its use of language, history, its beliefs and ideologies as a whole. It suspends judgment and refuses to locate authority over the things. Instead, it juxtaposes what we think we know of the past with an alternate representation that brings to the fore the postmodern epistemological question of nature of historical knowledge. Indeed, the book's deep suspicion on earthly authority, its narrative strategies and ironized sense of history complements postmodernism's celebrated skepticism.

Historically American Dream means a promise of freedom and opportunity for all. In the American Dream, anyone who works hard could expect to have a happy and prosperous life. But, the ideals of American dream began to fail and individuals became the victims of modern industrial civilization initiated by capitalism. Many people lost their homes, their family names, their heritage and became bankrupt; "All of them had lost their family names, these vagrant Flower Marys, these Jacks and

Billys and Rosies...They begged...They did the menial work of shops and at days end made their beds on the shop floors”(65). The quick rise and fall of fortune was common in those days in New York. People could rise immediately in wealth so they used it for absurd ends. Augustus Pemberton had been a rich man, a civil war profiteer. His money was easy earned. Therefore, when he died, the fortune had disappeared, leaving the widow and son virtually destitute.

Many people from outside country sought fortune in America. And everyone was seeking fate for himself or herself. Augustus Pemberton is one among them. He arrives in America “ as a penniless, unschooled Englishman who hired himself out as a house servant” at first (31). But later he becomes the merchant of the city. He is cited as an example of “ a fulfillment of the American ideal” (31). Therefore, the “change of circumstances” was so common in New York (133). The American Individualism brought about a heightened awareness of the self and consequently a growing antithesis between inner and outer world. It produced an alienated private life. Augustus Pemberton leads such a private life that his doings and even the causes of his death are unknown to his own wife Sarah Pemberton. He thinks that he is “ privileged to possess the secret of fate discovered in the material side of life” (Conrad, 91). But this vanity is easily shattered by Martin’s moral challenges when he documented his merchandising house as an example of bribery.

In such historical context, Doctorow uses irony to foreground the absurdity of ideals of American Dream exposing the shattering emotional impacts upon people of 1870s generation.

People's view of war was being transformed from the romanticized, glorious image of the past into a deadly machine of death and destruction, made vivid by the many mentions Doctorow makes of crippled war veterans begging in the city's streets.

“...deism even in the 1870, was a scandal, self-idolatry...” not in the service of humanism(32). The street children were so common that they “flowed among us and around us under our feet and off the edges of our consciousness”(65). The city was in disaster, Doctorow rhetorically questions, “...is there any street, any neighborhood, any place in the city that won’t eventually be the scene of disaster.... The city compounds disaster: it has to. History accumulates them. I grant you that” (60). Doctorow presents his process of making the understanding of historical past along with the characteristic feature of New York.

New York was in industrial process. People sought their fortune in business. New norms and values were also in the process of becoming. Workers “in various industries began spontaneously to leave their workplaces in support of the idea of an eight hour workday” (63). They used to strike for it. The legislature had made it law several years before. But the employers of the city had simply ignored it. All over the city, “men were meeting in halls, making speeches, marching through the streets...” (63). But they were responded brutally. They were accused of “disturbing the peace and refusing to do an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay” (63). Everywhere else there was the characteristic New York impatience- shouts, urges. Martin Pemberton is “one of these troubled souls...” (35). Doctorow’s description of such scenario is akin to today’s emerging industrial cities in developing countries.

Doctorow yet is not totally pessimistic about the emerging industrial society; the sign of hope hovers around him. He writes, “...of course we had mission homes, children’s aid societies, orphanages and industrial schools...”(66). But they were not sufficient. They would not meet the need. Along with positive changes, the speed of growing social evils was accelerating.

Doctorow adopts the method of the historical novelist, using a narrator of the period. The narrator declares, “ I have given voice to the events of my life and times...I have taken the vow to do it well and truly”(59). The novel is about New York City and its premises and progresses. “...a hard historical city this was” Doctorow writes, it was “...going through the same kinds of affairs it goes through today” he gives the reason to report it; it was “...a city of souls whose excitements were always been reportable”(64).

Even today New York is the most exciting world city. The events and incidents occurring here cover the world news. The ups and down in its business affect the world globally. In this way, the details of the time are at once more subtle and obscured – they may seem everyday normal doings and unremarkable. Doctorow does not write great events but makes small ones interesting. He reshapes the post civil war era with the sprit of late 20th century. So, the reader must make comparisons with present-day New York on his/her own. Doctorow writes: “these young men [Martin Pemberton and Harry Wheelwright] were a wary generation” because of the deterioration of American individualism (3). Augustus Pemberton’s yearning for immortality and Martin’s imprisonment in a bizarre land, the science fictional world involving a mad scientist Sartorius culminates the novel. Augustus embodies stupidity to resist the death itself. This self-delusion is his primary flaw. Therefore, martin’s quest for his father, the savior, the protector, and the patron becomes quest for an evil, the destroyer. When martin comes to McIlvaine declaring in sober tones that his father is still alive, McIlvaine assumes he is speaking figuratively about the presence of evil, “the continuum of original sin” (93). And Doctorow very ironically writes: “ Resurrection is so truly exceptional that it has so far occurred only once in history” (43-44). He is parodying the death of Christ. Obviously, the unexpected appearance of

his father was “ a torment of his mind” (43). He carried this thunderstorm wherever he went. He cannot fight against it nor he attempts to turn towards good. Rather, Martin disappears. He is “perhaps too vulnerable ever to accomplish anything”(3). So, his life turns towards tragedy without achieving anything. This frustration of the psyche of the characters ironically reflects the troubled souls of the post-war generation. Martin’s defiant subjection cannot resist the circumstances though he chooses “the deprived life of a freelance” (3).

The intensity of the failure of modern civilization is also highlighted through the ironic commentary upon the civil war. The civil war was thought to be an initiative for prosperous modern civilization but “the materials of the war [turned to be] ironic objects of art or fashion” (3). The literary intent of this rhetorical remark points to the materially based presumption on the meaning of life. Harry Wheelwright, an artist “drew mutilated veterans...[from] the street...with pointed attention to their disfigurement” in his painting. The soldiers became physically disabled in the war. They became a subject in drawing. But they could not become the subject of attention in the government. So, McIlvaine comments: “ ... his drawing were the equivalent of...cultural critiques”(3). Yet Harry is an example of how human being embodies duality. At once, he must be realistic and if necessary he must veil the truth. He sketches in oils the maimed and disfigured veterans of his society. Yet, out of necessity of earning a living he portrays the fashionable New York scenes designed purely for the market. In this way, “the soul of the city” in 1871 is ironically contextualized with the effect of horrible civil war in the novel (3).

Augustus Pemberton, a corrupt businessman, made his fortune dealing shoddy goods to the union army and by dabbling in the slave trade. He accumulated wealth by “supplying the army of the North with boots that fell apart, blankets that dissolved in

rain, tents that tore at the grommets, and uniform cloth that bled dye”(3). The intensity of corruption is highlighted through the ironic demonstration of the negatively charged word images- fail, dissolves, tear and bleed. They ironically point out the failure of American Dream and consequently the dissolution of desire of people for prosperous life. Doctorow is skeptic towards ideals of American Dream. He is not convinced whether those grand claims truly brought prosperity in the lives of minorities and locals. Only few in power got benefited leaving the large portion of population underprivileged.

Therefore, irony in the novel turns to be political as it is directed at the subversion of long rooted business corruption and corruption in bureaucracy. Augustus Pemberton is not only a bad supplier in war; in worst, he is a slave trader. Such a double corruption to the government is ironically resurfaced in the narrative description where slave trader’s act is described as

They sailed ships to Africa right here from Futon Street, and sailed them back across the ocean to Cuba, where the cargo was sold to the sugar plantations. [...] Profits were so enormous they could buy another ship. (5)

In the above quote, Doctorow ironizes the worst form of moral perversion and impairment of virtues by the person in power by giving historical referent. The use of the word ‘cargo’ shows the color discrimination in America. The colored people became human refuses and were treated as trade objects. Augustus Pemberton, a figure of villainy resembles the real life villains we encounter today playing with other people’s money and making fortunes producing nothing. They make tremendous profit using the money of public in turn giving nothing. It shows the worst aspect of business in our time. In this way Doctorow puts the past events in

fictional form that leaves the ironic space to make meaning out of the relation between both said and unsaid and between past and present.

Another instance of corruption is seen when the policeman, Mr. Donne found an entry in the accounts of the city's Water Department. Twelve million dollars was issued for "the improvement of the Croton Aqueduct" (208). But he discovered that there had been no such work done to improve the reservoir. Instead, it is hinted that the money goes to the scientist Sartorius who conducts his experiment in the same reservoir. He is keeping Augustus Pemberton with other aging capitalists including Mr. Vanderweigh Mr. Carleton, Mr. Wells, Mr. Brown and Mr. Prine hiding around *The Waterworks* of the Croton reservoir. Apparently, *The Waterworks* was the symbol of the changing city but within itself it is hiding the monstrousness of culture. They have been rejuvenated by the means of vital fluids and cells extracted from the still living bodies of abducted street-orphans. They "lived in the limbo of science and money" (224). Dr. Sartorius who offers them a chance at immortality personifies the worst aspects of science at this time. Martin says, "He does not think of defending his actions. He is not weakened with a conscience" (214). Sartorius is amoral and it is this chilling inhumane viewpoint that represents the changes overtaking the world. Martin himself becomes captive of the evil doctor and witnesses the exchange of youth for age. Doctorow in this way offers a more disturbing view of these street kids.

The very sharp satire is felt when Sarah Pemberton says, "President [Lincoln] ...could see evil at a distance but not where it crept up behind him"(72). Augustus Pemberton was "among commercial contractors given a dinner at the White House by President Lincoln in recognition of their service to the Union"(72). This is historically correct and this occasion is used in the novel to pass comments upon the vision of president Lincoln. He was a man who could sense evil but could not locate

from where it would come. He did not have visionary power. So, irony here is intended towards social motive as it aims to correct such moral deficit.

The ironic reprise of the social past offers an internalized sign of certain self-consciousness about our culture's means of ideological legitimating. It raises political awareness. Sarah Pemberton is conscious about her situation but she has no choice. "She was a woman in the profound humiliation of an entirely fooled life"(136). In some instances Doctorow seems telling the silenced story of the everyday life of women in 19th century. He shows how lack of speech turns to be the lack of identity. This is true of Sarah Pemberton who has no right over the things. So, she does not make effort to come to a conclusive judgment. In feminist critique, the politics of such representation is inevitably the politics of gender:

She [Sarah Pemberton] did not speak of her own background...(70)[Most of the women] ... have no choice but to set their course for life and never veer from it (72)...she had...patience for everything-patience for the monstrous thieving husband...patience for the absent stepson...patience for her current, enigmatic situation, of which [McIlvaine] was now made aware (78).

Postmodern ironic strategies are often used to point to the historical power of these cultural representations. When McIlvaine realizes his awareness about Sarah's turmoil and passive situation, he foregrounds the stereotypical representation of female characters intended for male viewing. It is the same case with Emily Tisdale, the second and the last female character presented in the novel.

Augustus Pemberton was corrupt businessman. Moreover it is very ironic that Martin wrote a thesis for a 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. For documentation he used Augustus's merchandising house as his prime example. McIlvaine says it was "...brazen.... To do a reporter's job on your own family?"(71) Such type of rhetorical question is the ironical tactic through which Doctorow hides his attack behind a mask of naivety. Martin prefers to be disinherited from his father's property. And moreover he proves his father's property as black. Martin's this choice of disinheritance is figuratively the choice to disrespect the evil. Augustus is enraged by this and "condemn him as a ...callow idiot...who did not know the first thing of the real world" (72). His 'real world' is the world of material prosperity whether its source is good or evil. So, he renounced his son and disowned him from that moment. Martin blinded by excessive moralism, said: "Then I'm redeemed!" (73). There was the generation gap because "There was always the clash of cultures..." (44). After all, these details serve to say that even family members take skeptic stance in many instances of familial matters. It was also the clash of business and morality, which "express the monstrosity of culture" (58). It was the derangement of natural order of father and son. The "reconciliation never took place", Sarah concludes, "It is such a sad terrible thing, ...because its consequences go on. The finality...echoes ", affecting the generations to come (73). This remark is very tactically intended towards the civil war. The civil war ended with the North's victory in it. But the reconciliation between the two states never took place. The slaves were freed but the owners of the plantations and the newly freed slaves terrorized their fellow countrymen as they rape burned and sacrificed one another and their belongings for some higher ideals. They took lives to save lives. So the consequence goes on. The material as well as psychological devastation of war continued to affect the generation to come.

Therefore there is no such universal law that can bind human beings together. Human relations are built and broken simultaneously according to the moods of the participants.

The thesis prepared by Martin touches upon the historic civil war in America. The question of slavery was given more importance than any other issues around the civil war. As a result, other social evils got chance to raise that spoilt public life in general. The corruption in bureaucracy, government and business baffled the situation. Municipals “were nothing if not absurd- ridiculous, simpleminded, stupid, self-aggrandizing. And murderous.”(192). Doctorow generalizes those qualities as the qualities of all men who prevail in the New York City. He further passes the comment upon the corrupt bureaucracy through the narrator’s description of the municipals:

The Municipals were an organization of licensed thieves...Police jobs were customarily bought. Every exalted rank, from sergeant up through lieutenant, captain, and on to the commissioner, paid the Tweed Ring for the privilege of public service (85)

The boss Tweed held the dictatorship everywhere. The peoples who were appointed in public service had to pay certain percentage of their salary to Boss Tweed. It was the worst form of bureaucracy New York practiced during the aftermath of civil war. It was because of the reason that, the attention was paid only to the issue of slavery at the cost of other social motives. Doctorow not only all the time describe the regressive politics of the time, hopes continues to exist as he writes, “...there were some exceptions to the rule...”(85). Edmund Donne was good among the large organization of two thousand; “Donne was an accidental. Among the naturalists, when a bird is seen well beyond its normal range, it is called an accidental”(85). He was the only person who had not paid Tweed for his public service. But yet evils do

not cease to exist. He “was suspended from duty pending an internal investigation by the Municipals: He had had no legal basis for stopping the white stage in the street...and he had entered the premise of the Home without the warrant”(173). In this way, the details and the events are presented with the evaluative attitudes that they look ironic and hinted towards social reform. Irony here poses a skeptic look rather than judicial attitudes towards the events.

Doctorow uses irony to comment further on the tragic failures of inner city lives in New York. The city “blindly sought its perfection...[It produced] enough wealth for itself...without noticeable damage”(67). The minor damages were so pervasive but the city only counted the advancements. The political edge of the novel gets sharpened when McIlvaine shows the disloyalty of William Marcy Tweed. McIlvaine says: “Tweed held directorships [everywhere] ...he had his own judges in the state courts, his own mayor, Oakey Hall, in City Hall, and even his own governor...He gave jobs to the immigrants and they stuffed the ballot boxes for him”(10). These details work to highlight the abuse of power and McIlvaine concludes this political failure as a failure of modern civilization as a whole. Doctorow is questioning the whole modern industrial civilization itself. The modern civilization, thus, is negatively ironized. As the narrator himself is the part of that civilization, the function of irony here becomes more constructive. His endeavor is to use that system with all the drawbacks the system allows, to highlight the weaknesses so that it could change the products of the system. The New York was on the process of building its new values and norms but it was building at the cost of humanitarian values. In doing so, irony as a weapon brings down the conservative politics that obstructed route to the American dream for minorities.

The ironic critic of false hopes of American dream is further surfaced through the portrayal of the city in general: “Everyone doing business with the city- every contractor, carpenter, and chimney sweep, every supplier, every manufacturer...”(10). None was sincere towards the development of the city. Disloyalty is further surfaced when McIlvaine says, “...everyone who wanted a job...had to pay...[certain] percentage of his salary to Boss Tweed”(10). Information here is not merely presented rather McIlvaine gives judgmental attitudes towards what is explicitly presented. In doing this, the intentional transmission of both information and evaluative attitudes of irony comes to the fore. Some people were doing business with the city making big profit and letting the city nothing in return. In addition they had to offer bribery to Boss Tweed. In this way, these all together served to make “a city falling into ruin, a society in name only?” (10).

There are many instances of ironic remarks in the text. McIlvaine is using the word ironically as he comments upon the discussion between two lovers, Martin Pemberton and Emily Tisdale. “Martin was attacking Emily for her faithfulness”; McIlvaine says, “...the subject appeared to be fidelity. Not infidelity...”(101). Generally, infidelity is expected to be the subject of quarrel between couples but it is very absurd that Marti attacks Emily for her fidelity. Martin himself says to Emily “I live with this burden of your waiting for me, it is always Emily waiting”(50).

Similarly, another instance of ironic remark is seen when McIlvaine says, “there is no intelligentsia in this city... there are only ministers and newspaper publishers”(8). McIlvaine here means that ministers and newspaper publishers in the city are the class of “weak intellect”(12). In this way, these details expose the inescapable vulnerabilities of our civilization. There was “Greene Street” known for prostitutes (17). There were newsboys who lived “warring lives” (15). Doctorow

further adds, "...you need the money to flow freely before the water can..."(60). With all these details, Doctorow very satirically writes, "the war of succession made us rich"(12). But in fact, the war dismissed the social values and it made people corrupted.

Sartorius's scientific knowledge as functional is ironically surfaced in the novel. He is the ultimate embodiment of science for science's sake devoid of any relation to humanity. The portrayals of horror images of the street children are the result of our era of declining humanitarian sensibility. It echoes the nonhuman consequences of rise of materialism and consumer capitalism in twentieth century.

The religious and the material aspects of American life are satirized for their indifference towards alleviating the problem of the street children. Novelist writes, "...for certain religious sensibilities such children fulfilled the ineffable aim of god. For the modern folk, Mr. Darwin was cited, and the design was Nature's"(66). In New York, the presence of poor children in the street became common and normal. This is the reality of America today as it was in the 1871s. Doctorow's sense of past and present can be noticed when he writes, "the awful indulgence of society change from era to era" but yet essential evil remains forever (67). New York "blindly sought its perfection" at the cost of humanitarian values (67). It produced "enough wealth for itself...without noticeable damage"(67). The damage of the life of children was insignificant for the government and the corruption in the bureaucracy was unnoticeable. What was important was the issue of slavery. So, many social evils initiated at that time.

The modern qualification of scientific knowledge as good and just is put into question in the novel. In modern societies knowledge was equated with science; science was good knowledge and it was contrasted to narrative. Narrative was bad,

primitive and thus irrational. Knowledge however was good for its own sake. But in postmodern societies, knowledge becomes functional. Things are learned to use them not only to know them. Knowledge as good and truth is questioned in postmodern society. This instance of questioning is figured in the character of Sartorius as scientist. Scientific knowledge was thought to be unbiased rational capacities. But in the case of Sartorius, it is very ironic that he is motivated by intellectual greed, money and power. McIlvaine suggests the power this anarchist gains through his unusual knowledge of science. Power and knowledge are perhaps most plainly united in his quest for immortality. He practiced excess in science and ended as a condemned inmate in a mental asylum as a result of committing the sin of epistemological pride putting all knowledge in question.

Sartorius represents the postmodern fashion of emphasizing on dehumanized subject in fiction. He is one of “the amoral energies human life in society generates” that use knowledge in dehumanized way (197). Augustus Pemberton’s body is used “as a field for scientific experiment”(193). On the one hand, Sartorius virtue is in the service of power and money, and on the other, Augustus Pemberton is motivated by blinding greed to be immortal. As a result, Martin is in moral dilemma whether to “cry with joy” that his father is alive or to be in despair in finding “a depth of human deceit” in him (185). Augustus “has pretended to die merely to abandon his family and leave them destitute...”(139). It was intentional that “...he contrived his death to abandon his family ”(139). This dilemma makes Martin to question his own purpose in life. Martin shouts, “What was my purpose?” and he gives his own answer “Everything and nothing” giving the very absurd answer to himself (185). Therefore at last when Martin is rescued, his nature is changed “...the characteristic impatience...the suffered worldview...all of it softened, or chastened” (180). Because

he was too vulnerable to change the circumstances, so at last he accepts his fate “...becalming...of the intensity in all his feeling”(179). Doctorow presents Martin in “peaceful resolution” after his rescue from the laboratory of scientist Sartorius (179). There was no sign of “slightest anger or bitterness” in him (179). Doctorow’s deliberation here is to show the postmodern celebration of the ruin. Martin’s easy acceptance of his fate at last leads to many moral questionings and doubts, because moral questions and answers are not always straightforward. Martin’s case is the circumstance of injustice, yet it continues to occur in human societies because societies cannot be chastened. And such moral question does not always assume answers, but induce doubt and raise questions and leaves reader in moral dilemma.

Sartorius practices excess in science. He believes that he is such a great scientist who can defy mortality itself. He experiments medical technologies on patients “so rich and desperate that they are willing to try anything, pay anything, to forestall death” (46, necropolis news). Though the blood transfusions, hormone infusions and marrow transplants was wonderful achievements in medical science, Sartorius went too far, “beyond sanity and morality” (789,Of...). He derived those fluids from children. Doctorow himself in one interview says, “ There were thirty to forty thousand vagrant children running around. Children who were unclaimed, who were totally on their own. People called them street rats”(340, The City...). It was the city of the time in post civil war when “ American civilization began to produce more human refuse”(46, Necropolis News). E. L. Doctorow writes, “...vagrant children slept in the alleys, Rag picking was a profession...”(page). Sartorius exploited those vagrant children. They were simply left at the mercy of law of nature believing in Darwin’s principle of survival of the fittest. Actually if the city is to be perfect, such innocent children in poverty and darkness should be treated humanly. Thus, irony

here functions constructively as it hints such implied suggestion that if America is to be ideal model of democracy and human rights it must spread equality on the bases of humanitarian values.

Doctorow broadly uses irony as a narrative politics that subverts the totalizing narratives. His irony partakes a more general indecisive characteristic to the novel. The speech of the narrator is continually interrupted by ellipses that give his sentences a fractured quality and seem to represent a habitual pause. He uses many dots in his narrative that hints a hesitancy to deliver consecutive thoughts. "There is a difference," he remarks, "between living in some kind of day-to-day crawl, through chaos, where there is no hierarchy to your thoughts, but a raucous equality of them, and knowing in advance the whole conclusive order...which makes narration...suspect"(67).

Doctorow's interest in narrative experimentation is evident in the novel. And because of the metaphysical self-consciousness, the novel includes the world of the reader as well. Doctorow writes, "...can you understand...can you imagine...you may think you are living in modern times, here and now, but that is the necessary illusion of every age... I assure you..."(11). This direct conversation with the reader blurs the generic distinction between reality and imagination. Moreover, the representation of the self and the other in history in fictitious form is done with this intense self-consciousness. Writer's involvement in historical narrative is a political engagement and personal experience. And the writer generates more than art both in fiction and history. Therefore, Doctorow time and again seeks to legitimate his narrative performances as public history and private experience. He writes, " I would act privately on what I knew...To tell you the truth, apart from everything else, I smelled a story"(26-27). So, the Pemberton story is only the strategy to tell his sense of the

truth. Therefore, he makes Martin Pemberton, a fictively personal character, politically and historically engaged in the post civil war era. Doctorow's narrative carries a suggestiveness about the contemporary narratives that escapes the totalizing view of narration as linear, sequential, objective, omniscient, fixed and clear-cut. Thus, *The Waterworks* is postmodern metafiction that refers not to the aesthetic past but simply to the past and the fabrication of history. This is the direction in which *The Waterworks* moves in a number of ways:

This is a story of invisible men, dead men or men indeterminately alive...of men hidden, barricaded, in their own created realm behind the thick walls of the brownstones of New York...You have not seen them, except in the shadows, or heard them speak, except in the voices of others...They've been hiding in my language...men who are only names in your newspapers...powerful, absent men. (214)

This formulation describes a trend in contemporary narrative, namely the way a number of narratives turn one's attention away from the aesthetic past and toward a more broadly conceived sense of history as textually mediated and constructed. Doctorow uses the narrative tale-telling voice to document the historical events. "Undeniably. *The Waterworks* is a tale," Doctorow in an interview says the Pemberton story is only the tale of dead and physically absent men, yet they influence the society as their types are rooted in social set of mind (36, *The City...*). The events and the personages in the history cannot be seen and heard yet the mental attitude of the time goes on influencing the generation to come. And though they are absent men, their story is a tale, they are living in the words and "Words have no physical existence", they leave a space (36). This "Space is measured and defined. The house is solidly constructed, the floors are parqueted floors, and there is a nice tile in the

bathroom”(36). This house can be looked at, walked around and lived in. The reconstructed building is indeed a good place to dwell in. In the same manner the house of fiction can measure the voices of history. It is visited with an expectation of allegedly unsatisfactory state of affairs. Therefore, irony is a way of writing that bridges the gap between the questionable reality and the positive ideal.

The strategy of irony operates in verbal level as well. In verbal context, the meaning of irony is the consciousness of the inadequacy of language. This inadequacy is suggested by the use of many ellipses, dots and the linking word and:

Donne bent over and held up the lamp. And there, on a pallet,
something moved...scraggly-bearded, weak-eyed and blinking, lifting
a skeletal arm against the alight...a poor soul, nothing but rags and
bones...whom I had ...difficulty recognizing (163).

One of the most striking features of this passage, characteristic of the novel, is the number of ellipses and dots it uses. These devices simulate oral speech and have the effect of suggesting gaps, portions of the narrative that cannot fully realized by readers, the writer, or the narrator. It also hints toward the inabilities of human memories to capture the whole moments in the past. In Doctorow’s revisiting the 1870s, he cannot fully report the fact in fact. Instead, he has taken a kind of nineteenth century tale and rewritten it for our time.

The Waterworks uses the postmodern technique of speaking about its own genesis. The novel is the reminiscence of a journalist named McIlvaine. Within this reminiscence, there is another reporter planning to write a memoir, which centers upon him rather than on other family sagas. McIlvaine says, “ I will never tell of these things in my memoirs. When I write my memoirs I will be, the subject of the

narrative...my own fate will be another story...not this one”(109). It means to acknowledge the ideology of the subject and to recognize the differences of race, gender, class and sexual orientation of that situatedness. Yet he doubts that whether something is left or not to write about in saying, “...I’ve given myself so completely to the narrative that very little of my life is left for whatever else I might intend for it...”(236).

Talking about its own origin is typical of postmodern metafiction that does not confuse reader of its fictional world as real. In addition, it makes reader aware that every piece of writing is the documentation of events and experience of that particular writer. The narrativization of the past events is not concealed but is shown to be consciously composed into narrative whose constructed order is imposed by McIlvaine here. The events are the inscription within history no doubt, but what is important here, is the concealed attitude of writer towards the materiality of that historical past real. Doctorow documents the “...inine social doings of the class of new wealth” of 1871s and in doing so he passes his judgments that New York was in “commercial cunning”(21-19). Writer, thus, communicates indirectly the socio-political ideology of the time in the shape of the veiled attack. Therefore, in recording the memoirs a journalist, the novel has captured the spirit of America in 1871s.

McIlvaine sees a much darker grittier city; yet his observation seems to follow his mood. At times he can be positive and upbeat, celebrating the vivacity and energy of the city: “O my Manhattan!” he declares early on (5). At others he is anxious and dreary, seeing the city as a kind of embodiment of human sin: imagining how “ the lungs of the young country boy fill for the first time with the sickening air of the meat district...the stockyards and slaughterhouses”(25). Most of the time, though, McIlvaine’s eye merely reports what it sees, seemingly without evaluation, but

actually what he sees is a more realistic and complete picture of the city. “Greene Street was known for its prostitutes,” notes McIlvaine, among other things and gives his evaluative attitude that, “it was badly in need of repair”(17). Perhaps he thinks he has landed not in New York but on the chest of a monstrous carcass and is inhaling the odor of its huge bloody being.

The Waterworks is all about art’s dispersal, its plurality. Art is not free of other discourses, institutions, free above all of history. The copies, intertexts and parodies make the novelistic art as dispersal. The Boss Tweed account and the many events related to the civil war is of course the copy of the same event rendered in other forms of art. Such historical facts enter into the novel as ideology. The novel echoes the point of view of many other texts as well. It is written with the postmodern fashion of writing historical metafiction with intense self-consciousness about its origin. And it parodies the glory related to the civil war as the most morally impaired person Augustus Pemberton’s “funeral was a remembrance of its glory” (33).

Historical truths are multiple and such truths, as McIlvaine makes clear is not bound to verifiable facts, “We did not feel it so necessary to assume an objective tone in our reporting then, we were more honest and straightforward and did not make such a sanctimonious thing of objectivity” (29-30). In this context, he licenses himself to disrupt chronology to make “narration...suspect” and keep reader “in the same suspension...” (123).

Postmodern posits such disruption in chronology as the characteristic feature of most recent fictions. In *The Waterworks*, this epistemology is mainly evinced in the narration when Martin says, “The means of human knowledge are far from understood” (94). Therefore, “Linear thinking would not find them [Martin Pemberton, Dr. Sartorius and Simmons]” (115). In this respect, McIlvaine is

presenting only the “sense” of the city because the things in themselves is never known (94). And in so doing, he frees himself to construct narratives of his own imagining: “I found myself...imagining them...” (81), “...I hold his [Martin Pemberton’s] image in my mind and I will assign it to him here, out of the chronology of things...” (177). McIlvaine is also editing and compressing the events as he himself says; “I’m compressing everything” (201), and incorporates dreams as well; “Here is Sartorius as I dream of him...(217), and “Here is the dream’s conclusion”(219), into his telling. Such are the characteristic features of Doctorow’s narratives that contain both the vision of a fiction writer and the perception of a historian as well.

New York is both a living organism “Like Nature”(67), and a “necropolis”, a cemetery (13). In Doctorow’s description, there is double bind in his vision and perception of the things, places and the persons. The Reservoir is rendered a sacred center. Water, a natural element, often identified with life and rebirth, is a basic element of cosmic performance. But in New York, such sacred associations are ironically transformed. Water, is here then an oppressive force. Literally, the Reservoir operates as a life-giving center, supplying New York with water but here the source of life is tied to Sartorius who damages the children. This duality is surfaced through the ironic juxtaposition of two such discordant meanings New York embodies.

The Waterworks comprises the question of destiny, fate, creation and divinity. All these epistemological associations are put in Doctorow’s narratives and they are fictionalized. By doing so, he is hinting that there is no universal law that can assure order in cosmic existence. In McIlvaine’s narration there is the story of “invisible men, dead men or men indeterminately alive”(213). They are hiding in language. In

this respect, McIlvaine finds kinship with Sartorius who also searches for a language with which to express the invisible;

The truth is so deep inside, so interior, it operates...in the total disregard of a recognizable world that would give us comfort, or in which we might find beauty or the hand of God...Philosophy poses the right questions, but it lacks the requisite diction for the answers. Only science can find the diction for answers. It is only the matter of right diction? Finally, yes we will find the language, the formulae, or perhaps the numeration...to match God. And God himself cannot be relied upon for the answers? Not as God is now composed. (242-43)

The above narration both epistemologically and linguistically concludes the novel. Narration, creation and divinity all are linked in the passage. God was assumed to be the creation of humanity's language but now god is composed. So, it cannot give beauty and comfort. The discoveries made by science undermined the old source of comfort. To McIlvaine, science is the real root of transformation that has turned the old world into the new. Doctorow seems to be questioning where is the fundamental faith- in science or in religion? But the answer is unknowable because truth is so deep inside. Even the limitation of language and forgetfulness itself distance meanings from truth because truth is so interior that it blurs McIlvaine's visionary intent: "I'm an old man now, and I have to acknowledge that reality slips"(236). His present vision of the past reality is his youthful memories and he is old now. The past and present co-exist in his moment and reveal now the incomprehensible pattern of fate. In the series of narrations, while Donne's narration offered the means to "recompose the world comfortingly in categories of good and evil" (141), Sartorius and McIlvaine ambitiously seek a language that could theoretically recognize God and reveal all that

is unseen. Sartorius dreams that science can provide this language while McIlvaine looks instead to his own account as the means to “transcend reporting” and communicate his “secret” story that is so crucial to his existence (113). But all is in vain because language cannot grasp the final signified. Therefore, “Finally you suffer the story you tell,” McIlvaine concludes. And the result is as he says, “an uncanny feeling-when the story ends I will end” (236). It justifies his status as a narrator in the novel.

In this way, the waterworks is a sad illustration of condition of America, which boasts of its civilization. Doctorow using the narrator of the period after civil war follows his revisionist account of the post civil war New York. The New York was transfigured by the irresistible winds of science and industry from a small city into the very symbol of metropolis. And those two impersonal forces brought the chilling inhumane viewpoint that is overtaking America even today. Thus Doctorow doubts American claims about its laws and customs, democratic values and human rights and concludes that its civilization is a social failure.

IV. Conclusion

The Waterworks is a critical revisiting of the field of several years after the civil war. It takes very different and complementary look at the New York City of earlier days. In this visit, Doctorow mediates on many social institutions and the discoveries made by science in the social background of the city in 1870s. And his wisdom of industry, commerce, government, bureaucracy, science and morality is skeptical. He cannot resolve the contradictions associated with modern industry, medical science and politics. Rather, he ironizes the norms, beliefs, values and viewpoints initiated by them. He evokes the doubts over the things he describes. Then, he questions and satirizes the historical events and problematizes the grand history of post-civil war era that induces skepticism in *The Waterworks*.

The New York was heightening in business. So, the quick rise and fall of fortune was common in those days in New York. Many people from outside country came in America. And everyone was seeking fate for himself or herself. Therefore, the change of circumstances was so common. In such historical context, Doctorow uses irony to foreground the absurdity of ideals of American Dream unmasking the shattering emotional impacts upon people of 1870s generation. In McIlvaine's descriptions of Martin and his post-war generation, the echoes of the 1870s can be heard: the youthful rebellion and mistrust of authority and their anger over their elders' misdeeds.

The details and the events of the New York City are presented with the skeptic attitudes so they look ironic. And motive here is social reform. His view about the New York City is more realistic and complete. The city comprises both good and evil. Irony here poses a skeptic look rather than judicial attitudes towards the events and

the city. Doctorow evokes ironic doubt over the things he describes for abuses cannot be condemned at first unless not questioning the validity of the established order.

The Waterworks is clearly the parodic echoing of the officially recorded history of America. In this echoing, emphasis is placed on the new perspective i.e., the use of the ironized sense of history. Doctorow places the fictional phenomena together with the historical events and the personages. In doing so, not only their formal connection is brought into attention. Instead, the similarities of form of both fiction and history point to the ironized sense of both content and form. This is where the satiric power of ironic placing of events and attitudes comes into play. And in this remaking of existing understanding of historical past and putting them into new and politicized uses, Doctorow allows them to remain accessible, familiar and powerful in a worldly way that can be reconstructed anytime. Doctorow's narratives thus, contain both the vision of a fiction writer and the perception of a historian as well.

Doctorow writes in the novel that the waterworks is far more than the Pemberton account. This far more is of course the question of destiny, fate, creation, divinity and the apparent simultaneity of time. All these epistemological associations are caught in McIlvaine narration and by fictionalizing them he is able to hint that there is no conscious, rational autonomous and universal law that can posit order in cosmic existence.

In nutshell, the novel is the questioning of the past events as real. Doctorow documents the historical events in fictitious framework. They are put into discourse and interpreted. It self-consciously acknowledges its existence as representation. Therefore, Doctorow is not offering direct access to the period after the civil war but making different version of the time. So, the inherent quality of Doctorow's narrative fiction is an interrogation into the official history. It tends to grant more transparency

to the period with some evaluative attitudes. And these attitudes are skeptical. Writer, thus, communicates the socio-political ideology of the time in the shape of veiled attack. In recording the reminiscence of a journalist, the novel has captured the spirit of America in 1871s. Yet, this reprise of the past is not nostalgic visiting, it is written with questioning and doubting spirit that admits epistemological limitations.

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