Chapter II

History as Narrative

Historiography assumes vital significance in any critical approach to the study of History as well as histories. The term “History” represents the academic discipline whereas the word “history” stands for the narrative. Historiography has many connotations and associations. It is often used to refer to the study of the theories, methods and principles of historical research, the results of which are typically presented in the form of a historical narrative. It can also represent a typology that highlights changes, continuities and discontinuities in historicizing practices. Historiography has also been used as a term for the studies that examine the writings of particular historians or philosophers of history, and describes their methodologies or periods of interest. It particularly deals with the problematic involved in the narrativization of histories.

A comprehensive analysis and enquiry into the theoretical issues involved in postmodern historiography is essential as many radical changes have taken place in the thought patterns of the discipline recently. In the postmodern era, the historical imagination has paved the way for innovative techniques and practices. The contemporary postmodern historians do not subscribe to the methods of history writing followed by the modernists. Their new strategies reinforce the previously successful methods historiography with postmodern epistemology and narratology. They attempt to construct the meaning of the past by relating it to the present on the one hand and try to
resolve the problems that emerge while connecting histories to History on the other.

For the postmodern historians, the central problem of historiography is the question of representation. The postmodernists as well as the poststructuralists reject the idea that representation corresponds unproblematically to reality. But they accept the position that reality never exists outside the system of representation. Reality can be represented through narrative which is often defined as an indirect way of representing reality. The reality represented in the narrative is not independent. It corresponds to the reality that exists or is experienced in the external world. This is equally true of historical and literary narratives. But the postmodernists contend that reality is confined to textual representation or narrative. This is a dilemma which postmodernist historians encounter. Narration is only a way of representation. Representation gives shape to reality through writing, constituting or inscribing. Thus, reality gets expressed in the process of representation. Narrative becomes the medium in the process of this representation of reality. So, the reality represented in the narrative is relative; it is conditioned by the politics of representation or the elements of narration.

The constitution of narrative itself is a complex issue in postmodernism. When narrative is considered as re-presentation of events, it mainly re-presents space and time to animate characters. In this respect, narrative allows humans to perceive the world in a specific form. There is a human tendency to identify the narrative as real. Though narrative reveals some features of real objects,
narrative can never be on an equal ground with reality. So, it is only an illusion to believe that narratives constitute real objects.

Postmodernism emphasizes an incredulity towards grand narratives with grand origin and grand teleology. In this context, the conventional perspectives on History need to be reviewed. As narratives can provide only partial vision of real objects, postmodernism believes only in little narratives. Metanarratives are narratives about narratives and they discuss the objective vision of reality. Their fabulistic self-reflexivity reveals layers of reality. Historians like Keith Jenkins, think that history in its capsized form indicates the imperial nature of traditional linear narrative history. It implies that conventional history has an imperial centre. Metanarratives discuss the complexity and problematic of creating narratives. The radical critique of metanarratives in postmodern historiography leads to the notion of the emergence of metahistory. In metahistory, the focus of interest shifts from narrative to history. As metahistory is non-linear, it challenges the totality of vision or coherence of facts. In the matter of cultural history, metahistory resists the totalizing and homogenizing tendency of conventional history and represents the heterogeneity and porosity of culture. But metahistory also refers to the formal structures of the methodological practices followed by historians in narrating history.

The notions like metanarrative and metahistory are the products of postmodernism. Metanarrative examines the possibility of a totality of vision or completeness of understanding in any discursive practice. Derrida argues
that totality or completeness of signification is impossible primarily due to the characteristics of sign and the nature of discourse as a mode of representation. Metanarrative is only a critical intervention to examine whether discourses can be universalized through a totality of structure or form. The concept of metanarratives can be applied to all discourses, including history. Metanarrative is a narrative about narrative dealing with the nature, structure and signification of narratives. Metahistory is the history of historical narratives. It examines whether a global understanding or complete objectivity is possible in narrative history. This is achieved through the intervention of metanarratives. In metahistory the critical focus is on history rather than on the narrative. So, metahistory incorporates all the discursive practices in history and evaluate them. Metahistory rules out the possibility of either a universal understanding or a complete objectivity in narrative history.

Traditionally, history is regarded as an independent, impartial and objective body of knowledge. So, historical representation of past events is considered unbiased and direct. This is true if history is objective and its narration is linear. But this linear conception of history is challenged by the discontinuous discursive practices followed by postmodern historians. Postmodernist historical discourses question the validity of metanarrative historical practices and make them problematic. Postmodernist thinkers attempt to redefine the nature of history and to evolve a new historiography. According to Benedetto Croce, Douglas Ainslie and George G. Harrap, the new historiography does not evolve “by solving the antithesis between imaginative
romanticism and materialistic positivism” (1921: 310 - 11). This observation reflects the actuality of history. According to the Hippolyte Taine, the causes of all events can be referred to the three term formula: “la race, milieu, et la moment.” The casual explanation of the narrative in relation to the three factors makes a structural form for history. This positivist view contradicts imagination and subjectivity in romantic vision. The duty of the new historians is to evolve a methodology of historical practice which can combine elements of the traditional historical discourses with postmodern historical discourses. Michel Foucault, for an instance, has tried to bridge the gap between continuous and discontinuous forms of discursive practices in history with his genealogical method. Though Foucault has complicated his perspective of history with other factors like power, hegemony and ideology, his approach to historical discourses is evenly balanced.

The ideological resonance in historical discourse has certainly influenced structuralist thinking. Roland Barthes, in his essay “The Discourse of History,” remarks: “historical discourse is in its essence a form of ideological elaboration” (Jenkins, 1997: 121). Barthes argues that “history” is historiography, a process of writing in which the traces of the past are worked into a narrative form of representation. In his perspective, the “ideological nature” of historical discourse emerges from an examination of the way in which historical narratives are structured. He means that the ideology represented in the narrative resonates with the structural form of the narrative: ideology is only an extension of the structure.
The postmodern perspective questions the validity of the sources and documents used in the historical writings. The recording of historical facts and events inevitably includes the personal choices of the historian. This provides a subjective dimension to historical narratives. But, subjectivity is shaped by culture and its ideology. In this sense, history depicts the cultural and ideological discourses of a given society. Many fiction-writers are also confronted with the problem of perceiving the past. The narrative interface of history and fiction blurs the distinction between the intertexts. As both history and fiction tell stories, historiography is an order of knowledge not different from the writing of fiction. Besides, the large number of past events compels the historian to make a selection of the events and the order of their prominence before proceeding to narrate history. The selection and the order of the events are the personal choices of the historians. This also adds to the subjectivity of the narrative.

Postmodernism creates a new sensibility of celebrating a decentred/fragmented subjectivity. In postmodernist thinking, a text need not have a centre. The chaos of the external world is internalized into the text as its chaotic structure/form. The perspectives of postmodern criticism on language, identity and truth are influenced by Derrida's deconstructionist philosophy. Derrida has also influenced the narrativization of history. The open-ended narrative, the question of cultural identity, parallels, the problematic nature of language like figuration and rhetoric, the artificiality of representation, the deconstruction of binary oppositions and the intertextual nature of narrative are
some of the prominent features of the postmodern notion of historical narratives. Incidentally, these are also the characteristics of fictional narratives. This makes history and fiction identical as narratives.

Fictional writing is not objective in the sense that the events narrated or the characters portrayed are not verifiable. The French theorist, Michel de Certeau also observes in *The Writing of History* that though writing is not objective and about the “real” world, it imposes a rational order on narrative. Likewise, history can never be about objective reality; but it has a logical structure and a coherent form. “The past,” he argues, “is the fiction of the present” (1988: 10). Certeau points to the possible fictionalization of the past in writing history. His term “entombment,” focuses on the significant interaction between two modes of constructing/using history. Certeau regards historiography as an act of entombment by which the writer both commemorates and hides the past, events as well as figures of history. His text, *The Writing of History*, posits this tension as manifest in both the form and content of the narrative, through intratextual relationships. Historiography, therefore, makes selective reflection of events and personages through historical narratives.

The problematic of narrative in postmodernism shows that historiography demands scientific and systematic study of history. Generally, two methods are followed in historiography: empirical and genealogical. Empirical history is in fact imperial history, the mainstream history, conventionally accepted and written from the perspective of the rulers.
As the dominant groups are the rulers of any society, empirical history represents only the dominant groups. The subordinate or marginalized groups are conspicuous by absence in mainstream history. The histories narrated from the perspective of the marginalized groups are called genealogies. Cultural constructs like race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and so on separately and in combination determine the identity of the marginalized groups. So there are different genealogical histories written from the perspective of the blacks, women, the working class, the lesbians and so on.

An analysis of the diachronic and the synchronic study of history is important here. The diachronic study of history analyses the evolution or development of the history of a community whereas the synchronic study of history analyses the history of a particular period. The diachronic study of history is problematic as it provides no certainty of facts and points to the silences, absences, voids and gaps in history. Even though diachronic history is a continuous narrative, it appears as discontinuous due to the voids, probably created by insignificant rulers, whose periods are not memorable and worth representing. On the other hand, certain rulers stand aloof as tycoons while their subjects never get represented in history. So, historians “periodize” history to reveal its imperial nature through a synchronic study. This is to underline the importance of rulers or dominant/subordinate groups who are either unrepresented or misrepresented in the history of a community at a given point of time. The postmodern notions of historiography especially from the points of view of historians like Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur,
Dominick LaCapra, Louis Mink, Michel de Certeau and Arthur Marwick, have affected a radical change in the perspective of the narration of history. Narration of history becomes problematic when viewed from a marginalized perspective. There are many postmodern historians who deal with the problems of narrating history. The term ‘New History’ is used in contrast with the old or traditional history. New History includes the history of marginalized groups, history of mentalities, history women, history of the blacks, and history of sexuality. In spite of their divergent views on the issue of subjectivity/objectivity in history and their conflicting notions on the deconstruction/reconstruction of history, they entail a redefinition of history from the postmodern/poststructuralist perspective.

Postmodernism also challenges the possibilities of realism. This threat has its impact on various realms of the society. The realist position of the possibility of grand narratives has been replaced by little narratives in the postmodern period. Grand narratives are totalizing systems of grand origin and eschatology, which give the illusion of giving sense and direction to human lives. The Marxist vision of a history of humanity based on the dialectic of classes provides a totalitarian vision of empirical history. In the postmodern period, the grand narratives have become meaningless. All worldviews that claim absolute notions of truth are artificial constructions. Relative truth principles, rather than totalitarian systems, gain predominance in postmodernism. Postmodernism rejects all forms of absolute truth claims and rejoices in relativism. Postmodernism deconstructs traditional notions of
language, identity and writing. Construction of identity is connected with language and is problematic in postmodern perspective. As narratives function through the medium of language, the narratives reveal the self of the writer; language becomes self-reflexive.

Language calls for the study of its evolution as a cultural construct. This concept of language redefines writing. Identity is a process of becoming, constructed from the points of similarity and difference. Identity is not something discovered; rather, identity is continually constructed within the vectors of resemblance and distinction. The meanings of identity categories are continually deferred through the never-ending processes of signification. This leads to the possibility of multiple, shifting and fragmented identities that can be articulated in a variety of ways. Identity is a cultural construct as the discursive resources that form the material for identity formation are cultural in character. The concept of identity is unintelligible without language. Identity manifests itself through language.

Language is the material medium to represent perceived reality. So the conceptualization of self is conditioned by language. Self becomes a product of language, a linguistic construct, generated in the process of narration. Liberal humanists believe that the self, which has a unified and unique identity, is endowed with the power of reason. But Freud decentred the liberal humanist idea of the self. In postmodern discourses, there is always an uncertainty about the identity of the self. In contemporary sense, the self is a field of possibilities and identity is an ever-changing process of becoming. With the postmodern
critique of the representation of the self, the conventional means fail to represent the self. The conventional structure/form presents only an incomplete sense of the self. In postmodern narratives, the writer is tempted to subvert the structure or form of writing. The self is a site where subjectivity is constructed. In this regard, the comment of James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium on the concept of the self is appropriate: “Self takes us immediately to the myriad sites where subjectivity is constructed in today’s world” (2000: 81). So the representation of self becomes the critical focus of every writing practice, where the consciousness of the artist evolves with the ever-revolving and ever-changing self.

The idea of intertextuality refers to the self-conscious citation of one text within another as an expression of the enlarged cultural self-consciousness. Increased awareness of intertextuality is a sign of the postmodern condition. The intertextual blurring of histories within postmodern representations of the past and the present creates a bricolage that juxtaposes the previously unconnected signs to produce new codes of meaning. As Julia Kristeva argues, the concept of intertextuality refers to the generation and accumulation of meaning across texts where all meanings depend on other meanings generated in alternative contexts. The textual meaning is always unstable and it cannot be confined to particular words, sentences or texts. Meaning does not originate from a single source, but it is the outcome of relationships between texts, which leads to intertextuality. The concept of intertextuality stresses the instability of meaning, its deferral through
the interplay of signs, traces and texts. In postmodern writing, different kinds of (dis)similar texts are incorporated to make it intertextual.

The imperial characteristic of history is also reflected in the narration of standard literary histories. Literary histories are author-oriented. In the literary histories of the colonial powers, the writers of the colonies are juxtaposed with the writers of the empire. This was a deliberate attempt to erase the cultural differences between the colonizer and the colonized. This makes Stephen Greenblatt to regard such literary histories the voices of the victorious and the vanquished, juxtaposed, mixed and impure. Greenblatt calls for the need to review the writing of literary history from a cultural perspective. In “Literary History and Literary Modernity,” Paul de Man points out the need to revise the foundations of literary history in order to extend this notion beyond the historically delimited field of “literature.” He observes: “the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of war and revolutions” (1971: 165). The problematics of writing history as a postmodern narrative for the analysis of literary texts constitute a terrain of interdisciplinary study. Postmodern writings, in general, constitute a laboratory of narratives.

Historians encounter several problems while writing history. With the limited resources, they try to construct various texts of history. Historians also attempt to fill the gaps in history from their creative point of view. This may be criticized as distorting history with biased interpretations. Linda Hutcheon observes in The Politics of Postmodernism: “historians are readers of fragmentary
documents and, like readers of fiction, they fill in the gaps and create ordering structures which may be further disrupted by new textual inconsistencies that will force the formation of new totalizing patterns” (1989: 87). These inconsistencies contribute to the making of subjective identity based on differing interpretations on the nature of history.

One of the characteristics of postmodern history is that it incorporates anachronism, fantasy and extreme invention. Any written history becomes a challenge to the previously written histories. The production of an alternative version of historical events calls into question the validity of the official version of history. This process only invalidates the new version of histories and emphasizes its fictional nature. This draws attention to the fact that a system that imposes structure on chaos or disorder is a fiction. Narrative history is the practice of writing history in a story-based form. It can be divided into two types: the traditional narrative and the modern narrative. Traditional narrative focuses on the chronological order of history; it is event-driven and it centres on individuals, actions and intentions.

But modern narrative focuses on structures and general trends. It breaks away from rigid chronology and explains the significance of non-linear narrative. Historians who use the modern narrative find that the traditional narrative focuses on what has happened and not on why it has happened. The traditional narrative reduces history into fixed compartments and does injustice to history. Historians who explore the traditional narrative think that the modern narrative overburdens the reader with trivial data that is
insignificant to the progression of history. It is the historian’s duty to exclude the inconsequential elements from history. Otherwise, the reader may believe that minor, trivial events are actually important. The postmodern perspective of history necessitates a re-examination of history in the context of the author’s orientation. This also requires a re-examination of the previously written histories. The historical contexts limit the accountability of the narrative.

Historical narrative is a conjunction of present action on a past object that is conspicuous by its absence. All past events are eligible to be narrated. But the inescapability of narrativization of past events is conditioned by the historian’s choice. In this context, Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, remarks: “All past ‘events’ are potential historical ‘facts,’ but the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be narrated” (1988: 73). It is impossible to question the integrity of historical facts. But the sources from which they are gathered or the ways in which they are presented may vary. These sources are notified by Hutcheon as the ones in which literature too has a dominant role.

The past events have no meaning by themselves. They are meaningful only when they are given a narrative form in relation to the present. Consequently, the traces of the past are observed in the present. She observes: “The past really did exist, but we can only know it today through its textual traces, it’s often complex and indirect representations in the present: documents, archives, but also photographs, paintings, architecture, films, and literature” (1989: 78). The sources of narratives are manifold and varied. The use of these sources undergoes a process
of selection and interpretation. Hutcheon explains how narrative becomes problematic in historiography: “Given that narrative has become problematic in historiography as well as fiction, what is interesting is that the same issues arise: narrative representation as a mode of knowledge and explanation, as unavoidably ideological, as a localizable code” (1989: 54). She means that narrative is a mode of representation and ideology is the code in a historiographic or fictional text. She observes in *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English–Canadian Fiction*:

… to write history (or historical fiction) is (equally) to narrate, to re-present by means of selection and interpretation. History (like realist fiction) is *made* by its writer, even if events are made to seem to speak for themselves. … What historians call ‘narrativization’ – making experience into a story – is a central mode of human comprehension. (1988: 66)

She emphasizes here the parallel between realist fiction and history. Both are constructed stories, representations of human experiences, selected and interpreted.

Language, as a material medium, provides a sense and direction to the narrative. Hutcheon regards both literary and historical expressions as linguistic constructs. She makes her argument unambiguous in the following words:

However, it is this very separation of the literary and the historical that is now being challenged in postmodern theory and
art, and recent critical readings of both history and fiction have focused more on what the two modes of writing share than on how they differ. They have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. (1988: 105)

She means that history and fiction are linguistically constructed genres; their interrelations are historically conditioned and their signification is temporally determined.

Subjectivity in historical narrative is constructed through the figurative language. Hayden White argues in, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, that all historical explanations are rhetorical and poetic by nature. He formulates methods for classification and analysis and applies them to the “great” nineteenth century historians Michelet, Tocqueville, Ranke, and Burckhardt and to the “great” nineteenth century philosophers of history, Nietzsche, Marx, Hegel, and Croce. For White, history is inherently poetic because each historical account is a story with a beginning that leads to an end, as opposed to a chronicle which begins and ends rather haphazardly, satisfying not just the question “what happened?” but also “what is the point?” To tell his story, each historian chooses a mode of *emplotment*, a mode of
argument, and a mode of ideological implication. White suggests “an elective affinity between the act of prefiguration of the historical field and the explanatory strategies used by historians in a given work” (1973: 427). Re-presentation of historical events is a matter of choice and interpretation. Narration involves a combination of different acts/ processes: choice, order and implication.

Recent exponents of scientific historiography argue that real life can never be truthfully represented as having the kind of formal coherency met within the conventional, well-made or fabulistic story. Traditional historiography features the predominant belief that history itself consists of lived stories, both individual and collective. The principal task of the historians is to uncover these stories and to retell them in a narrative. The truth/objectivity of the story rests with the correspondence the story has with the real people lived in the past. The literary aspect of the historical narrative is solely related to certain stylistic embellishments. This renders the account vivid and interesting to the reader rather than to the writer. This kind of poetic inventiveness is characteristic of fictional narratives. But both history and fiction are narratives as well as stories. This leads to the question of the writer’s use of imagination as part of the narrative.

Since history and fiction are stories, they cannot be categorized into the real and the imaginary. Postmodern discourses rule out any difference between the real and the imaginary, or between fact and fiction. White, in his *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation,*
comments on the recent theories of discourse which do not make a distinction between the real and the imaginary:

According to this view, it was possible to believe that whereas writers of fiction invented everything in their narratives: characters, events, plots, motifs, themes, atmosphere and so on. Historians invented nothing but certain rhetorical flourishes or poetic effects to the end of engaging the reader’s attention and sustaining their interest in the true story they had to tell. Recent theories of discourse, however, dissolve the distinction between realistic and fictional discourses based on the presumption of an ontological difference between their respective referents, real or imaginary, in favor of stressing their common aspect as semiological apparatuses that produce meaning by the systematic substitution of signifieds for the extradiscursive entities that serve as their referents. (1987: 21)

It becomes evident that the real events can be emploted in a number of possible ways. Narratives have the common aspect of a semiological function in which meaning is constructed through a substitution of signifieds for referents, both real and imaginary. This can be called a performance of meaning.

There is nothing tragic, comic or farcical in the narratives of real events, when only the performance of meaning is considered. In this context,
the sentences/texts become mere linguistic constructions. In this regard, White explains:

The production of meaning in this case can be regarded as a performance, because any given set of real events can be emplotted in a number of ways, can bear the weight of being told as any number of different kinds of stories. Since no given set or sequence of events is intrinsically tragic, comic, farcical, and so on, but can be constructed as such only by the imposition of the structure of a given story type on the events, it is the choice of the story type and its imposition upon the events that endow them with meaning. (1987: 44)

He maintains that meaning is constructed by the choice of events and the structure of narratives. As the choice is personal, there is an element of subjectivity in the narrative and its meaning. In spite of the performance of meaning created by the narrative of events, White suggests, that the truth value of statements should not be neglected. It is because the scientific facts of history are baldly narrativized by historians, and the same facts are dramatized or novelized by the creative writers. This is the truth of the narrativization of narratives. White points out that this practice is due to the dependence of fictional discourses on the more archaic discourse of myth:

This is why a narrative history can legitimately be regarded as something other than a scientific account of the events of which it speaks—as the Annalists have rightly argued. But it is not
sufficient reason to deny to narrative history substantial truth value. Narrative historiography may very well, as Furet indicates, “dramatize” historical events and “novelize” historical processes, but this only indicates that the truths in which narrative history deals are of an order different from those of its social scientific counterpart. The relationship between historiography and literature is, of course, as tenuous and difficult to define as that between historiography and science. In part, no doubt, this is because historiography in the West arises against the background of a distinctively literary (or fictional) discourse which itself took shape against the even more archaic discourse of myth. (1987: 44)

White argues that the distinction between historical and fictional narratives is too narrow to be defined. He also underlines that fiction writers depend on myth for objectivity in narration.

Hayden White, again, in his *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, postulates the reasons for revising the older mimetic model theories of historical discourse. He emphasizes the linguistic structure of narratives. He claims that historical narratives cannot be matched with any extrinsic reality, but they always remain in the state of verbal images:

> It is for reasons such as these that we must reject, revise, or augment the older mimetic and model theories of historical discourse. A history is, as Ankersmit puts it, less a picture intended to resemble the objects of which it speaks of a model
‘tied to the past by certain translation rules’ than ‘a complex linguistic structure specifically built for the purpose of showing a part of the past.’ In this view, historical discourse is not to be likened to a picture that permits us to see more clearly an object that would otherwise remain vague and imprecisely apprehended. Nor is it a representation of ‘an explanatory procedure intended finally to provide a definitive answer to the problem of “what really happened” in some given domain of the past. On the contrary, to use a formulation popularized by E.H. Gombrich in his studies of Western pictorial realism, historical discourse is less a matching of an image or a model with some extrinsic reality than a making of a verbal image, a discursive ‘thing’ that interferes with our perception of its putative referent even while fixing our attention on and illuminating it. (1999: 6)

White’s views of the narratives create a problematic in the field of representation. Historical narratives are predominantly verbal whereas literary narratives are more figurative.

White relies on a relativist view of historical knowledge. It can be traced to the scientific principle that the truth is relative. The signifiers of historical representation are undeniably related to the external reality. The expression of the external reality is limited through the medium of language. As language represents the external objects, we signify the same by means of linguistic constructs. So, historical representations through linguistic
narratives are the only tenable means available to approach reality. White argues for the same relativist view for the historical knowledge:

I am thought to hold a relativist view of historical knowledge. Actually, I do hold that there is an inexpungeable relativity in every representation of historical phenomena. The relativity of the representation is a function of the language used to describe and thereby constitute past events as possible objects of explanation and understanding. (1999: 27)

White maintains that relativity of truth is a function of language rather than a characteristic of the narrative.

White provides us with enough circumstances which limit the plurality of our experiences of subjectivity. When an objective account is shared by many people, various interpretations are possible due to the infinite potentiality of the details of events. There is also the possibility for an infinite extension of the context of a particular event by multiple process of signification by different individuals. The criterion of the phenomenology based on the Latin dictum esse est percipi – to be is to be perceived – is not valid here as there is a definite past in history connected with historical facts. White argues his point by citing the assassination of the U.S. President, John F. Kennedy as the example:

However, any attempt to provide an objective account of the event, either by breaking it up into a mass of its details or by setting it within its context, must conjure with two circumstances:
one is that the number of details identifiable in any singular event is potentially infinite; and the other is that the context of any singular event is infinitely extensive or at least is not objectively determinable. Moreover, the historical event, traditionally conceived as an event that is no longer observable, and hence it cannot serve as an object of knowledge as certain as that about present events that can still be observed. This is why it is perfectly respectable to fall back upon the time-honored tradition of representing such singular events as the assassination of the thirty-fifth president of the United States as a story and to try to explain by narrativizing (fabulating) it – as Oliver Stone did in JFK. (1999: 72)

White here underlines the elasticity and indeterminacy of the objective details of historical events.

White identifies the postmodernist method of historical writing as different from the modernist practice. He thinks that the traditional technique of narration is not tenable in a postmodern context. He stresses that the derealization of events is necessary in the contemporary circumstances:

After modernism, when it comes to the task of storytelling, whether in historical or literary writing, …Modernist literary practice effectively explodes the notion of those characters who had formerly served as the subjects of stories or at least as representatives of possible perspectives on the events of the story;
…and the actions of the characters so as to produce the meaning-effect derived by demonstrating how one’s end may be contained in one’s beginning. Modernism thereby entails what Fredric Jameson calls the derealization of the event. (1999: 74)

The traditional methods of narration become obsolete in the postmodern context because the production of meaning in postmodern narrative is autotelic. Jameson finds the implication of postmodernism in the depthless sense of the present and the loss of historical understanding marked by fragmentation, instability and disorientation. Postmodernism celebrates a fragmented subjectivity which is matched by a fragmented, incoherent and chaotic textuality. Hutcheon champions the postmodern paradox in her *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. The reader at once acknowledges the fictionality of the text and engages with it intellectually and emotionally:

… while he reads, the reader lives in a world which he is forced to acknowledge as fictional. However, paradoxically the text also demands that he participate, that he engages himself intellectually, imaginatively, and affectively in its co-creation. This two-pull is the paradox of the reader. The text’s own paradox is that it is both narcissistically self-reflexive and yet focused outward, oriented toward the reader. (1984: 7)

The postmodern text is self-reflexive and reader oriented at the same time. She means that the textuality of the postmodern text is multiple.
History is accessible only through partial and partisan narratives in which it is realized. This leads to the question of “factuality” of facts. For Hayden White, “history” is an “emplotment,” which is literally a story of the world imposed on it by historians. He argues that the truth of a narrative cannot be established by any objective, external criterion. As there are different historical accounts, it becomes difficult to distinguish them from fact and fiction. The relevance of “reality” becomes infractuous in this context. Richard Rorty, in his *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, proposes the true dimension of the postmodern enterprise. He regards language as the agent that constitutes reality: It is “to drop the idea of language as representation and to de-divinize the world” (1989: 21). When narrative is placed in the field of representation, the language becomes the medium representing a reality. The language is not the reality; it is only a material medium which helps to get reality represented.

According to Jameson and Foucault, history is accessible only in textualized form: that is, through documents or narratives. It is true that these documents have real “referents” that existed in time, as each sign has a real object it refers to. It is a fact that we always speak from within history. According to Foucault, we can never describe our own archive or our own discursive history. The historian/narrator narrates history from within the textualized history. For objectivity, the historian is required to narrate history from outside. Peter Novick, in *That Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession* appropriately defines historical
objectivity. He states that objectivity limits the role of imagination that the postmodern novelists are often engaged in:

The assumption on which [historical objectivity] rests include a commitment to the reality of the past, and to truth as correspondence to that reality; a sharp separation between knower and known, between fact and value, and above all between history, and fiction. Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation: the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accounts for the facts; if confronted by the facts, it must be abandoned. Truth is one, not perspectival. Whatever patterns exist in history are ‘found,’ not ‘made.’(1988: 1 - 2)

He points to the importance of interpretation in historical narratives. It is implied that the narrativization of the past is rather a difficult task. Inventing a story based on the facts collected from history is an easy task. In this process, historians or novelists impose their own order and meaning on those facts, using their own language and argument. Written histories, in this manner, can never escape the subjective experiences of individual writers.

Hayden White has been a central figure in the literary discussion on historiography. His theories on the methods, functions and nature of historical discourse seriously challenge the assumptions on which the field of history has traditionally been based. Contemporary relativistic view of historical knowledge that historical narratives can be equated with fictional narratives is put forward by White. The role of constructing a narrative out of empirical
data occupies a central role in the philosophy of history. For instance, characteristics like causality and teleology have been claimed to be linguistic phenomena which do not form part of historical reality.

M.C. Lemon explains and makes evident the relationship between story and narrative in his *The Discipline of History and the History of Thought*: “It is true there are many types of story, one of the major distinctions being between factual and fictional ones. But what enables us to subsume them all under the term ‘story’ is that at the minimum, and necessarily, they assume the narrative form. They narrate events” (1995: 42). He means that history and story, factual or fictional, are primarily narratives.

White claims that all stories, including historical ones, are fictions. This radical suggestion of equating fiction with scientific historical narratives blurs the generic division between the two narrative forms. This is especially noteworthy, as it leads to a vital perspective on the problem of historical representation in postmodernist novels. In *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language* Arthur Marwick points to the nature of language used in postmodern works:

Language is difficult, slippery, elusive and allusive, that it is far from easy to express what we mean in a precise and conclusive way, and that, indeed, people listening to us or reading what we
have written may well take away very different meanings from
what we intended. (2001: 12)

He points to the ambiguity of linguistic expressions. A writer of a narrative, fictional or historical, has no control over the interpretation of the text by the readers. In postmodernist narratives, the writer also contributes to the plurality of interpretation with his/her abstruse language.

There are many points of similarity between historical narratives and literary narratives. They are linguistic constructs endowed with imagination. In this context, Marwick remarks: “history is simply a branch of literature, in which the ‘narratives’ of historians do not significantly differ from the novels of novelists” (2001: 12). But he makes a fundamental distinction between professional history and novel writing. For him, “professional history is very different from the writing of novels, and, therefore, is not literature in that sense of the term” (2001: 262). He differs from the view of Paul Ricoeur, who “insists that history is essentially the same as novel-writing” (2001: 263). The duties of historians entirely differ from that of novelists. Marwick explains:

The fundamental duties of historians, to make contributions to knowledge about the past in as accurate and well-substantiated a way as they possibly can, are very different from those of novelists. ‘Accurate,’ ‘well-substantiated’ and, indeed, ‘duties’ are really not words that one would apply to novelists. (2001: 263)

A historical narrative is verifiable and well-knit whereas a fictional narrative is not verifiable, its accuracy is indeterminate and it need not be well-knit.
The difference between historical narratives and literary narratives arises primarily due to the role of imagination in narration. According to Marwick, as discussed in his *The Nature of History*, there is a close affinity between story and history: “… in many European languages the word for history is the same as the word for story” (1989: 20). He argues that the historian’s task is similar to that of a novelist, he gives insights to readers: “historical writing must in some sense tell a story; it must contain narrative, a sense of movement through time” (1989: 235). Story, narrative and temporal movement constitute a historical writing. Marwick explains:

...there are those in the scholarly community who see history as essentially a literary activity, whose value is not so much that it casts systematic light on the past but that it gives insights, rather as novels do, into the preoccupation of the age in which it was actually written, and, perhaps, invites admiration for the author's very virtuosity. (1989: 20)

He draws the parallel between history and novel as narratives and brings it to a logical conclusion.

A work of fiction is a historical source indicating a representation of people’s lives at a given time, and a metaphor of the society. In this sense, fiction is historically conditioned. White, in his *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, remarks that a work of fiction is a metaphor of a certain society in time. It has similar characteristics of a historical narrative: “… qualities that make them metaphorical statements suggesting a relation of similitude between such
events and processes and the story types that we conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meanings” (1987: 88). A fiction is a metaphor of events and processes that make up human life.

Dominick LaCapra, the famous historian, has made some major contributions in historical methods. He envisions that language which helps to refer to objects and historical statements depend on inferences from textualized traces. For him, the position of the historian cannot be taken for granted. His fundamental allegiance is to empirical historical practice. LaCapra, in his *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, argues: “… from a historical perspective, the very idea of the end of history might seem to be a nonhistorical absurdity” (2004: 1). So, the ends and means of history constitute a contradiction in a textual narrative.

Narrativization of history often involves ahistorical practices. In his *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies*, LaCapra exposes the close affinity between history and art. He establishes the fact that historical issues can be represented through art, however indirect it is in its factual status:

When historical issues, past contexts, or particular social or political problems are discussed, the result is at times an unmodulated indirectness and allusiveness that has a suggestive role in the treatment of literature and art but may be of more limited value in other areas. (2000: 202)

Art and literature are more oblique and suggestive than history as a form of narrative. A work of art like a novel is an artifact that is both artistic and
A novel embodies, reflects and projects the experiences and attitudes of a given people at a given period of time; it also reflects in significant ways the systems of beliefs and cultural references of those people. Ricoeur, in his *Time and Narrative*, brings forward the central argument that “history is intrinsically historiography . . . a literary artifact” (Vol. I, 1983: 162). Literary texts have always been associated with, and shaped by, history. On account of this, the similarities between historical works and novels are easily noticed by readers.

White illustrates his constructive similarities between history and fiction. He remarks: “There are many histories that could pass for novels, and many novels that could pass for histories, considered in purely formal terms. Viewed simply as verbal artifacts, histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another” (1973: 122). Ultimately, it can be argued that both writers of history and writers of novels share the same goal; they wish to give their readers an illusion of truth and authenticity. The term historiography as writing of history is paradoxical in the sense that history is real and writing is imaginative. Certeau, in his *The Writing of History*, points that “historiography (that is “history” and “writing”) bears within its name the paradox - almost an oxymoron - of a relationship established between two antinomic terms, between the real and discourse” (1988: xxvii). He underlines the discursive nature of history as a representation of the real.

For White, the difference in the representations of a novelist and a historian lies in the way they present their ideas and visions of what they
consider the reality. Novelists use indirect methods in depicting that reality “by registering a series of techniques” (1973: 122). But, the historians are expected to approach their subject matter more directly “by registering a series of propositions which are supposed to correspond point by point to some extra-textual domain of occurrence or happening” (1973: 122). History is conceived to be truthful and part of “the real world,” whereas fiction is a creation of the author’s imagination and is, therefore, biased and subjective (1973: 121). He means that a historical narrative is objective whereas a fictional narrative is subjective.

According to White, the historical narratives also possess aspects of fictional narrative. In making history or in reading or interpreting it, readers are persuaded to use their imagination. They are prompted,

… [to] experience the “fictionalization” of history as an “explanation” for the same reason that we experience great fiction as an illumination of a world that we inhabit along with the author. In both, we recognize the forms by which consciousness both constitutes and colonizes the world it seeks to inhabit comfortably. (1973: 99)

The apparent reading of the text is due to external world and the social consciousness shared by the author and the readers.

Moreover, both history and prose are alike in the sense that people use the same patterns in order to make sense of the world that they see or depict. For White, in making history or fiction, “it does not matter whether the world is
conceived to be real or only imagined; the manner of making sense of it is the
same” (1973: 98). Some works, when first published, have been seen
essentially as works of history; they have later become works of art. In this
regard, White comments: “it is reborn into art” (1973: 118). Imaginative
writers like novelists, on the other hand, are concerned not only about “the
real” but also about hypothetical events. These events are shaped through their
imagination. In this respect, White observes:

Novelists might be dealing only with imaginary events whereas
historians are dealing with real ones, but the process of fusing
events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality
capable of serving as the object of a representation is a poetic
process. (1973: 125)

Whether the narrated event is real or imaginary, the craft of harnessing the
events into a coherent whole is a poetic art.

A work of an imaginative writer portrays and refers to the historical as
well as the socio-political events that occur in the same time-space location of
the culture that it aims at to represent. White underlines this idea: “Although
historians and writers of fiction may be interested in different kinds of events,
both the forms of their respective discourses and their aims in writing are often
the same” (1973: 121). He finds some parallels in the form and objective of the
fictional and historical discourses:

All written discourse is cognitive in its aims and mimetic in its
means. And this is true even of the most ludic and seemingly
expressivist discourse, of poetry no less than of prose, and even of those forms of poetry which seem to illuminate only 'writing itself.' In this respect, history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation. (1973: 122)

History and novel are identical in their functions as narratives and in their objectives and forms.

As primary forms of narratives, historical and literary discourses share certain common aspects of language. White, in his *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, argues that the syntactics of a historical text and that of a narrative prose discourse are identical: “. . . historical work as a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse” (1973: ix). For most thinkers in Germany, history is foremost a science; but for White, it is nothing but an art. Historiography is a poetic construct; so historical knowledge is always an aesthetic construct. It can never be a direct reflection of reality. It is only a realistic representation of life. White’s radical thought shifts the reference of the narrative from literature to historiography. On the question of the dividing line between historical and fictional narratives, he wants to keep narratives strictly in the field of representation. In this regard, he observes:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by "finding," "identifying," or "uncovering," the "stories" that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between "history" and "fiction" resides in the fact that the historian "finds"
his stories, whereas the fiction writer "invents" his. This conception of the historian's task, however, obscures the extent to which "invention" also plays a part in the historian's operations. (1973: 6-7)

This is a real concern that points to the possibility of some degree of fiction in historical narratives.

The concept of history as narrative defended by White represents a constructive approach to historiography. He states that historical works in general take the form of a narrative. In *Postmodernism and History*, Willie Thompson argues that this form of narrative is used in the sense of a “coherent and ordered representation of events or developments in sequential time” (2004: 132). According to White, all historical explanations are rhetorical and poetic by nature. White’s view of historical texts as literary artifacts erases the distinction between history and story. He thinks that the language of both history and fiction are metaphoric and rhetorical.

White’s theory challenges the truth claims of history and questions the relevance of History as an academic discipline pursuing the truth about the past. Mary Fulbrook, in *Historical Theory*, argues that White’s term “nondisconfirmability” indicates the fact that all historical narratives are equally plausible, or equally untrue (2002: 29). White’s concept of history as a narrative, as a literary genre, questions the claims of truth and objectivity in historical work. But Fulbrook points to the irrationality of pursuing historical knowledge as an end in itself: “… since there is no way of accessing the past
independently …, there is little point in pursuing history as a discipline dedicated to the pursuit of the truth about the past” (2002: 65). History as a discipline should develop a wide perspective and unconventional views. In the context of White’s theory, the objectives of History need be restated.

The objective of History can be redefined by considering history as a political construct. Peter Munz, in his essay “The Historical Narrative,” claims that “there is no absolute distinction between facts and stories or narratives and that it would be quite wrong to think that a narrative is a composition made out of facts and that the facts in any sense whatever, are ‘given’ ” (Bentley, 1997, 857). Facts and fiction merge in narratives through the alchemy of authors’ imagination. In this context, Edmund E. Jacobitti argues in Composing Useful Pasts: History as Contemporary Politics: “… the only way that history can be rescued from ‘knowledge’ or ‘truth’ is to recognize it as political argument” (Jacobitti, 2000: 29). History as a political construct can redeem its position as an academic discipline. In The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act, Fredric Jameson claims: “there is nothing that is not social and historical–indeed, that everything is, in the last analysis, political” (1981: 20). This is especially true in the case of alternative histories written or rewritten by the subalterns. Alun Munslow also discusses the political dimension of historical construct in his Deconstructing History:

We impose stories on the past for a variety of reasons which are explanatory, ideological and political. Narratives are not detached vehicles for transmitting past realities, nor less can
historians discover the true narratives of the past in the evidence of human intentions and beliefs. (1997: 140)

He suggests that historical narratives are not mere evidences; they are ideological and political constructs. Georg G. Iggers, in his article “Historiography between Scholarship and Poetry: Reflections on Hayden White’s Approach to Historiography,” points out an error in White’s conception of finding truth value in historical narratives. He observes:

White’s error is that he argues that because all historical accounts contain fictional elements they are basically fictions and not subject to truth controls. For him there are not only many different possible accounts of any set of events and interpretations of any set of documents, but all of them have the same truth value. (2000: 383)

Iggers means that the truth values of historical narratives are not relative in spite of the selection and interpretation of the author.

Historical narratives proceed from empirically validated facts or events. They necessarily require imaginative steps to place them in a coherent story. They also represent a selection of historical events. Thus, truth is limited. Rhetorical, metaphorical and ideological strategies of explanation are employed by historians to narrate various events. According to Alun Munslow, narratives explain why events happened, but they are,

… overlaid by the assumptions held by the historian about the forces influencing the nature of causality. These might well
include individual or combined elements like race, gender, class, culture, weather, coincidence, geography, region, blundering politicians, and so on and so forth. So, while individual statements may be true (or) false, narrative as a collection of them is more than their sum. (1997: 10)

History is a collection of narratives. It is largely unaffected by individual narratives.

The historicity of events can be captured only in the structure and form of a narrative. In *Time, Narrative, and History*, David Carr states: “in the nature of time, narration is the only realistic representation of the past” (1986: 94 - 95). This statement emphasizes the fact that historic reality is not accessible except through the intermediary of language. Jameson argues that it is one of the ways by which we impose meaning and formal coherence on the chaos of events. This view is also endorsed by Munz, in his essay “The Historical Narrative”:

… in order to do justice to time, it must be described in a narrative form. Any other form of description fails to take account of the fact that the past bears the mark of the arrow of time. Narrative is the only literary device available which will reflect the past’s time structure. (Bentley, 1997: 852)

Narrative provides a pattern, form and structure to the past time and events. Munz asserts that the time dimension can be represented only through narrative.
Unlike creative writers, historians do not invent anything; they operate within pre-existing, collectively developed frameworks of assumptions, knowledge and questions. Their works assemble evidences comprehensively and attempt to establish a convincing interpretation. According to Willie Thompson, history “brings to life” the times, the conditions and the mentalities under consideration (2004: 62). History unravels human situation, mindset of people and their cultural condition. According to Fulbrook, individual creativity and imagination inevitably enter the historical works (2002: 73). This is because historians are also human beings endowed with imagination and insight.

Historians require the insights to select, arrange, perceive and interpret the historical events with vision and originality. In *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, White observes that historical imagination “is often described as putting oneself in the place of past agents, seeing things from their point of view, and so forth, all of which leads to a notion of objectivity that is quite different from anything that might be meant by that term in the physical sciences” (1987: 67). White’s concept of history as narrative has caused quite a stir and has nourished the debate between empiricists and postmodernists about the nature of historical knowledge. Developing historiography means developing historians’ conscience and practice. White’s concept of history as narrative, therefore, represents a constructive approach to historiography. White, in his *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe,*
puts forward the theory that the four tropes of metaphor (representation), metonymy (reduction), synecdoche (integration) and irony (negation) prefigure the production of any historical narrative. When combined with particular modes of argument (ideographic, organicist, mechanistic, contextualist), emplotment strategies (romance, comedy, tragedy, satire) and ideological commitments (anarchist, conservative, radical, liberal), they constitute “the historiographical ‘style’ of a particular historian or philosopher of history” (1973: x). So the style of a historian is constituted by certain permutation and combination of tropes, argument, emplotment and commitment. In his *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, White describes history as “a verbal artifact, a product of a special kind of language use” (1999: 4). He believes that histories have a poetic and linguistic structure, and that every narrative history relies on certain basic linguistic tropes. Moreover, White is influenced by the genre theory of Northrop Frye. White adapts Frye's central idea of the four elementary plots to his theory of historical narratives. These basic or pregeneric plots, according to Frye, are romance, tragedy, comedy, and irony-satire. White considers these pregenres as the four basic modes for the emplotment of history.

White describes his relativist view of historical knowledge in almost all of his works. He also outlines his views on the question of realism in historical representation, both in history and fiction. In this context, White generalizes:

. . . historical discourse is not to be likened to a picture that permits us to see more clearly an object that would otherwise
remain vague and imprecisely apprehended. Nor is it a representation of an explanatory procedure intended finally to provide a definitive answer of ‘‘what really happened’’ in some given domain of the past . . . is less a matching of an image or a model with some extrinsic reality than a making of a verbal image, a discursive ‘‘thing’’ that interferes with our perception of its putative referent even while fixing our attention on and illuminating it. (1999: 6)

His relativist view emerges from certain inherent characteristics of language. Pointing to the discursivity of history, he claims that “the relativity of the representation (representation of historical phenomena) is a function of the language used to describe and thereby constitute past events as possible objects of explanation and understanding” (1999: 27). He means that representation is a function of language and the events are mere objects that explain the structure of a narrative.

While illustrating the problem of realism and representation with the Holocaust as the extreme example, White follows his main idea already advanced in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*. A historical event can be described in several different modes of writing, but there is no getting outside the order of discourse because stories are always linguistic artifacts. In other words, he denies that there can be an ontological difference between an interpretation of historical facts and a story
told about those facts. But White thinks that there are significant changes from
the traditional narrative to the present view of language:

. . . first, narrative is regarded as a neutral “container” of
historical fact, a mode of discourse “naturally” suited to
representing historical events directly; second, narrative histories
usually employ so-called natural or ordinary, rather than
technical, languages, both to describe their subjects and to tell
their story; and third, historical events are supposed to consist of
or manifest a congeries of “real” or “lived” stories, which have
only to be uncovered or extracted from the evidence and
displayed before the reader to have their truth recognized
immediately and intuitively. (1973: 392)

Language functions as a medium that helps to realize the truth represented in
the narrative.

The problem for history and historians is that histories are never simply
a series of propositions (statements of fact), each of which can be verified or
falsified. For White, “history,” as an account of the past, may be understood as
“a list of facts [that] is transformed into a story” (1973: 393). Interestingly, he
asserts that the realism of modern historical writing develops using modern
narrative techniques like interior monologue or the omniscient narrator. This,
for him, is the way, as elaborated in Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis
Effect, the representation of history can reach to the “experiences that are
unique to our century (like the Holocaust) and for which the older modes of
representation have proven to be inadequate” (1999: 42). Postmodern narratives have new narrative strategies which have more transforming power than the traditional ones.

The four basic plot structures discussed by Frye represent only the invariant pregeneric plots of all narratives. In literature, they are often blended with the historical genres and subgenres, and their conventions and stylistics in order to form new kinds of combinations. In other words, there is a rich tradition of different genres in the history of fiction as well as in historiography. It can be argued that ignoring these generic traditions is to forget that generic conventions play a great role in the reception as well as production of texts. In other words, generic expectations as institutionalized criteria play a great role in making a distinction between fiction and historical narratives.

White argues that there is a distinctive lack of self-reflexivity within the field of history and it is this view that has led him to an investigation of what he refers to as “metahistory.” In History in Crisis?: Recent Directions in Historiography, Norman J. Wilson states that metahistory suggests something “beyond history” (1999: 114). In “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” White argues that “metahistory” is the practice of attempting “to get behind or beneath the presuppositions which sustain a given type of [historical] inquiry” (White, 2001: 1712). White postulates that history is a verbal fiction similar to the fictional forms in literature: “In general, there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are:
verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences” (White, 2001: 1713). As a narrative, history is nearer to literature than to social sciences.

White explicitly destabilizes the distinction that is generally drawn between literary and historical writing; a distinction that hinges on the assumption that the former is concerned with representing the possible/imagined fiction, whereas the latter takes as its object of representation the actual/“real” fact. While conflating these two fields of writing, White clearly acknowledges that it is in fact possible to “know the actual by contrasting it with or likening it to the imaginable” (White, 2001: 1727-8). White, in other words, does not do away with the “old” binary opposition. Instead, he deconstructs this dichotomy and questions the concept of mimesis in historical narratives as well as its ontological status.

History is characterized by past events, the narration of which appears to be impersonal and objective. History, according to White, is generally perceived “as a kind of archetype of the ‘realistic’ pole of representation” (White, 2001: 1719). It rests on the assumption that such a narrative has the ability to represent things the way they *really* are. White points out that ontologically speaking, historical discourse is not different from literary discourse: both exist as discursive constructs. In this respect, the term *histoire* as applied in many contemporary fiction is significant, since it is used
as a major tool by critics to postulate historical narratives. In this context, Paul Cobley remarks in his *Narrative*:

_Histoire_ is an order of language, especially found in writing, identified by the French linguist, Emile Benveniste. _Histoire_ is a ‘historical’ utterance, invariably characterizing past events and is frequently used by historians. In _histoire_ there is no intervention of the ‘speaker’ or ‘enunciator’ into what is written: a historian using _histoire_ will not use personal pronouns such as I or you, and everything to do with the present moment of the utterance will be excluded. _Histoire_ attempts to be impersonal and, even, objective. (2001: 233) [Emphasis mine]

He means that it is an impersonal and objective way of narration of past events.

The basis of historical knowledge consists of documents including narrated texts. Paul de Man, in his “Literary History and Literary Modernity,” claims that “the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or revolutions” (1971: 165). Literary history looks at writing as a physical document and as an artistic process. Consequently, reflection and representation are essential parts of the study of history and literature. In this respect, literature can also be seen as a vehicle to understand history. Keith Jenkins, in his *Refiguring History: New Thoughts on an Old Discipline*, states that “nothing is ever intrinsically historical;” objects of enquiry can be used as evidence within “any number of (historical) discourses without belonging to
any of them” (2003: 39). He points out that the historical nature of a narrative is extrinsic. In the postmodernist approach to history, “evidence” does not simply equate with “facts,” as explained in *Re-thinking History*. “Statements of fact” become “evidence” only when used to support a particular historical interpretation or explanation (Jenkins, 1991: 49-50). In other words, the relation between fact and evidence is not general. All facts are not evidences; facts selected to substantiate any interpretation are evidences.

The set of parallels between history and story leads to another set of parallels between historians and storytellers. The postmodern historian, Keith Jenkins, has raised the question whether historians are storytellers or whether it is possible to tell true stories about the past. In *Re-thinking History*, Jenkins argues that there is no history, only histories constructed by historians’ perspectives. The historian employs literary narrative as a device to create a meaning for the past, a framework to tell his/her (hi)story. As explained in *The Postmodern History Reader*, “facts are always facts within the way the “referred to past” has been “put under a description” (Jenkins, 1997: 17). Jenkins endorses White’s philosophy of history. He argues: “… if ‘facts’ are to be significant historically, they can only gain that significance through being narrativized. This narrativization in its emplotment and troping confers on the facts a significance that a different emplotment and troping could take away” (1997: 385). He means that facts attain historical significance when they are narrated.
It is an established fact that historical and novelistic discourses resemble each other. In *Between History and Literature*, Lionel Gossman has shown that “at any given time there tend to be many points of resemblance between the discourse of historians and that of novelists” (1990: 243). He shows that both eighteenth century fiction and historiography are characterized by the distinction between story and discourse. He finds that both fiction and history give prominence to discourse:

The ultimate unifying center of eighteenth-century historical writing, it has been said, is the narrator himself rather than the narrative of events: the latter exists largely as a pretext for "philosophical" commentary, and for the sake of the community of *philosophers* that this commentary was expected to establish between narrator and reader, and among readers. History, in this important respect, was not essentially different from fiction. (1990: 243)

He underlines the discursive nature of history and literature. Moreover, Gossman claims that both the nineteenth century historiography and fiction replace the overt narrator of the eighteenth century historical narratives with a covert narrator so as to reject the narrative conventions of the Enlightenment (1990: 244). Dorrit Cohn neglects this view; she emphasizes the historicity of the story and the distinction of discourse in historiography. In *The Distinction of Fiction*, she proposes that “fictional narrative is unique in its potential for crafting a self-enclosed universe ruled by formal patterns that are ruled out in all other
orders of discourse” (1999: vii). Fictional narrative is a formal pattern conditioned by the structure of a discourse.

Since the concept of fiction is historically and diachronically conditioned, it is necessary to determine the factors that help the understanding of fiction. An interesting response to this problem is given by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen in *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective*. They claim that fiction should be seen as determined by the mode of utterance (*fictive utterance*) located in a social practice rather than by an assembly of certain distinctive linguistic or stylistic features. According to them, some social, cultural and institutional circumstances make the utterance of a fictional text possible. This view is compatible with the idea that fiction has distinctive features when compared to other discourses: the reader often recognizes fiction precisely because of these features. As Lamarque and Olsen point out, it is difficult to ground a convincing theory on these features, as they are historically relative and changing (1994: 32 – 40). Fictional features are in a flux; their historical character varies.

There is a distinction between the narrative techniques of historiography and fiction. White and other supporters of the linguistic or narrative turn in historiography have not been able to show convincingly that historiography does not differ in its narrative features and conventions from fiction in the present historical and cultural context. Moreover, the reading conventions and institutionalized criteria are such that people generally do not read
historiography as fiction. Many readers disagree with it and claim that it is *fiction* rather than truthful description of historical event.

Narrative history and historical fiction are different genres. In “The Kinds of Historical Fiction: An Essay in Definition and Methodology,” Joseph W. Turner claims that it is appropriate to make a distinction between narrative history and historical fiction with regard to generic conventions. In Turner's argument, the emphasis is on the readers' expectations. According to him, the readers’ historical expectations are different for the different kinds of historical fiction. He distinguishes between (1) documented historical novels that have direct links with recorded history, (2) disguised historical novels, where there are similarities between recorded history and the story of the novel, but no direct references between them and (3) invented historical novels, where the principal characters and events are all invented. The reader's historical expectations grow in degree and kind, along the continuum from the invented through the disguised to the documented historical novels (1979: 345). The transition is gradual and orderly. Interestingly, Turner sees the disguised historical fiction as encouraging a retrospective activity on the part of the reader:

In a situation where anything is possible, reader’s [sic] expectations tend to be minimal or non-existent; and since the disguise signals the author's privilege to change history in any way he should choose, it becomes rather difficult for the reader to know in advance what will happen. […] Perhaps then, we should
posit a certain passivity on the part of readers of disguised historical novels, less an anticipating of the disguise than a waiting to see how it is developed. We might say, in other words, that in conventional examples of this type of historical fiction the reader interprets the referential component of the novel retrospectively. (1979: 346)

The reader’s response is falsified by disguised historical fiction. Turner acknowledges that some kinds of historical novels have distinguishable aims of their own. Turner's theory is practically viable as it enables the differentiation between various kinds of historical novels and their relationships to history and reading.

The digressions from the official/empirical history in postmodernist fiction point to the fact that fiction has an objective different from that of the historical narrative. This justifies the concept of the autonomous character of fiction. The role of such an alternative version of official history, or in Brian McHale's term “apocryphal history,” is complicated (1987: 90). There is no monolithic history of any nation; there are histories corresponding to different perspectives. As Cohn, remarks in her *The Distinction of Fiction*, alternative histories can be either socio-politically or aesthetically inspired. In other words, they require interpretations that deal with them “either as ideological strategies or as artistic games” (1999: 90). Even if postmodernist historical fiction flaunts digressions from official history, it may do this in order to question the ideological basis of particular historiographies.
Historians and fiction writers use the same devices in historical narrative and fiction. In “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” White argues that the very mechanisms and “tools” used in the act of fiction-making are no different from the ones used by the historian. Both novelists and historians are producers of texts. The historian cannot claim to have any access to “reality” – past or present – outside the language. Thus, his description of any given event in itself is an interpretation; never the “original” thing itself: “As a symbolic structure, the historical narrative does not reproduce the events it describes; it tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thought about the events with different emotional valences” (White, 2001: 1721). The form and structure that the historian chooses for his historical account affect and shape the interpretation of events and, therefore, the meanings assigned to them. White effectively argues that there is no such thing as scientific objectivity within the field of history. Historical narratives are always imbued with certain values that characterize a given culture. Thus, historical narratives are always culturally biased.

Historical narrative is often figurative. In emphasizing the poetic nature of historical accounts, certain implications regarding referentiality and “truth” emerge. An ordinary reader of a historical narrative never verifies it with the original documents. In this respect, White remarks: “We cannot go and look at them (the original events) in order to see if the historian has adequately reproduced them in his narrative” (White, 2001: 1718). There is no definitive materiality against which the historian’s claims can be verified. There are only
texts; an increasing layer of intertextuality makes the past even more impenetrable. White explains:

> Each new historical work only adds to the number of possible texts that have to be interpreted if a full and accurate picture of a given historical milieu is to be faithfully drawn. The relationship between the past to be analyzed and historical works produced by analysis of the documents is paradoxical; the *more* we know about the past, the more difficult it is to generalize about it. (White, 2001: 1719)

He suggests that the possible verification of the historical events make the generalization difficult and adds to the uniqueness of the events.

Despite this paradox, history inevitably continues to be written. White does not dismiss the quest for historical knowledge. Rather, he points to the fact that one cannot make assertions about “what really happened” without using representation. Everyone, including the historian, is involved in representation games all the time. Thus, historical narratives do not provide us with an unrestricted and unproblematic access to historical “reality” or “truth.” This is exactly what White urges historians to acknowledge: it is something that is highly problematized and emphasized in historiographic metafiction.

The conventions of historiography and novel are identical in certain respects. Hutcheon’s preoccupations with the conventions of historiography are reminiscent of White’s theories in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. White questions the conceptions of historiography as an “objective”
and “semi-scientific” discourse (1987: 27). Both history and novel are literary artifacts. Like the novel, White claims, historical narratives “wish to provide a verbal image of ‘reality’” (1987: 122). As a discourse, this always involves an act of interpretation on the part of the historian. The historian attempts to determine from a known chronology of events (what happened) their significance in the scheme of things (why it happened) (1987: 53). In other words, a particular meaning is imposed on a specific text, which in turn dictates the kind of story he or she will tell. This is a kind of narrative “reconstruction” (1987: 51). White calls this device emplotment. He thinks that the imposition of this kind of a plot structure on the events of history is necessary. White, therefore, concludes that historical narratives are “verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found” (1987: 82). Ultimately, White contends that historiography retrieves the possibility of creating a kind of “knowledge” about the past that is both understandable and relevant. He explains:

…to say that we make sense of the real world by imposing upon it the formal coherency that we customarily associate with the products of writers of fiction in no way detracts from the status as knowledge which we ascribe to historiography. It would only detract from it if we were to believe that literature did not teach us anything about reality, but was a product of an imagination which was not of this world but of some other, inhuman one. (1987: 99)

The coherent form and status of knowledge attributed to both history and fiction underline the fact that they are didactic products shaped by imagination.
In the text, historical or fictional, there is not so much a conflation of reality and fiction. Rather, a text recognizes that our knowledge of reality must inevitably be mediated by fictional elements. It is the blurring of fiction and reality that Hutcheon emphasizes in her works on postmodernism. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, Hutcheon examines how historiographic metafiction incorporates postmodernism to its other formal aspects and wider philosophical themes:

> It is part of the postmodernist stand to confront the paradoxes of fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general, and the present/the past. And this confrontation is itself contradictory, for it refuses to recuperate or dissolve either side of the dichotomy, yet it is more than willing to exploit both. (1988: 106)

Postmodernism celebrates mutation, but rejects dichotomy as schemes of decentred subjectivity. Postmodernism often exploits the polar model of structure in textual representation wherein the poles are constructed as interrelated.

Fictionalization of facts and factualization of fiction are the twin processes used in historiographic metafiction. In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon explains: “Postmodern fiction often thematizes this process of turning events into facts through the filtering and interpreting of archival documents” (1989: 57). In other words, postmodern fiction transforms past events into historical facts through the process of interpretation. The interpretation of history is the first step in the historical writing process.
Historians are readers as well as interpreters of the past. Therefore, historians are creators and artists. They can act as filters through which events are selected and transformed. Undoubtedly, the power of historians comes from their ability and opportunity to tell the story of what happened. This takes place through representation. But “representation is always alteration, be it in language or images, and it always has its politics” (1989: 92). In this process, the objectives of an author will certainly be highlighted. Representation, as a form of linguistic mediation, is a political process.

The meaning of the past is constructed in the context of the present. According to Hutcheon, the meaning of the past is achieved through historiography. Therefore, historiography enables the reader to understand the past. History can be studied as a source of traces of the past. Some examples of the traces of the past are letters, speeches and official government records. The representations of these traces are the documents, and the books written based on these documents, among others. These representations act as filters or windows through which one interprets such traces. The concepts of “history” and the “past” in connection with the nature of historical narratives have been analyzed, theorized and problematized in certain post-structuralist and postmodernist discourses. These findings indicate that historians have overcome the difficulty of making distinctions between traditional modes of narrative strategies and the postmodern styles of narrativization. With the use of techniques like metanarratives, postmodern historians try to encompass the whole history within their spectrum of thought. While histoire refers to
an objective representation of events, discourse indicates the irregular interruption of the author or narrator as a personal commentator. In this respect, Paul Cobley observes in *Narrative:

*Discours* is an order of language indentified by the French linguist, Emile Benveniste. *Discours*, unlike *histoire*, takes place in the present tense, assuming a speaker and hearer who might be referred to as I and you. *Discours* corresponds to the kind of intervention in metafiction whereby a rupturing effect by a narrator who speaks directly to an implied reader interrupts any existing *histoire*. *Discours* can be found in audio-visual narratives as well as written ones. (2001: 230) [Emphasis mine]

Cobley differentiates between *histoire* and discourse on the one hand and identifies between verbal and non-verbal narratives on the other. Representation involves a mediation of reality. A mediated reality can be easily appropriated. So, Terry Eagleton thinks that ideological manipulation is possible in any form of representation. In this respect, historiography is also ideologically influenced. He argues in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction* that writing either “history or historical fiction is equally to raise the question of power and control: it is the story of the victors that usually gets told” (1983: 15). Historical events are hierarchically structured. Representation always conditions what is known of the past. As Hutcheon asserts in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, knowledge of the past can never be reduced to a simple operation of “objective recording” (1989: 74). In other words, our knowledge
and understanding of the past always involve subjective acts, such as selection, composition and evaluation of certain past events.

Postmodern narrative techniques deconstruct realist writings. Hutcheon observes in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, that postmodern writing has a strong tendency to employ narrative strategies that explicitly challenge the assumptions of realist literature. It challenges the realist position of a “direct and natural link between sign and referent or between word and world” (1989: 32). It is perceived that the realist medium has an inherent ability to reflect the empirical world and historical events in a faithful manner. The postmodern perspective challenges the empiricism of historical narratives. The postmodern view of history as *discourse* stresses that any historical document always constitutes an act of interpretation. Fredric Jameson's *Political Unconscious*, which organizes the Marxist and materialist critical study he has undertaken evolves as the principal law, the advice to contemporary writers: “Always historicize!”.

Jameson’s historical imperative is the characteristic of materialist literary criticism which distinguishes itself from ‘traditional’ literary criticism and its aestheticising affirmation of eternal literary values.

Raymond Williams has defined history as “an account of real past events” and “the organised knowledge of the past.” But White’s concept of history as narrative challenges the “reality” of past events and even questions the significance of History as a discipline. In this context, Jameson conceives of historical narrative as a political construct. This conforms to the textual politics of any narrative. Narratives, historical or fictional, are identical as
literary artifacts constructed through figurative language. Postmodern historiography demystifies traditional understanding of history.