Hacettepe University
Graduate School of Social Sciences
Department of English Language and Literature

POSTMODERN REALISM IN JEANETTE WINTERSON'S *SEXING THE CHERRY*, ALASDAIR GRAY'S *POOR THINGS*, AND PETER ACKROYD'S *THE PLATO PAPERS*

Papatya Alkan Genca

PhD Dissertation

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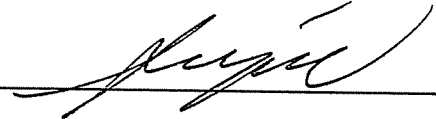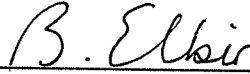English Language and Literature Program
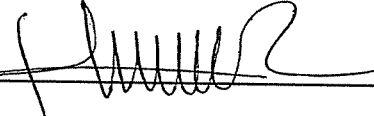
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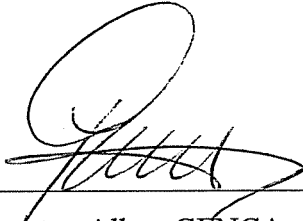
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Papatya Alkan GENCA

To my family

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ÖZET

Genca, Papatya Alkan. "Postmodern Realism in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry,* Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things,* and Peter Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers.*" Doktora Tezi. Ankara 2011.

Postmodernizm ve gerçekçilik çoğu zaman birbirlerinin karşıtı olarak düşünülse de, çağdaş İngiliz romanı bu varsayıma meydan okumaktadır. Realist ve postmodern yazın yöntemlerini tek bir bütün içerisinde birleştiren çağdaş İngiliz romanında "postmodern gerçekçilik" olarak adlandırılan yeni bir yazım biçimi görülür. Bu çalışmada Jeanette Winterson'ın *Sexing the Cherry*, Alasdair Gray'in *Poor Things* ve Peter Ackroyd'un *The Plato Papers* adlı romanları postmodern gerçekçilik örnekleri olarak incelenmektedir.

Bu bağlamda bu çalışma, postmodern gerçekçiliğin çağdaş İngiliz romanının ayırt edici bir özelliği olduğunu göstermeyi amaçlamakta ve postmodern gerçekçi romanların, gerçekçi yöntemleri tamamıyla terk etmediklerini; aksine, kendi bariz postmodern anlatılarında gerçekçilik geleneğini yeniden icra ettiklerini, fakat bunu da alt-üst etmeyi amaçlayan bir yazın yöntemi kullanarak yaptıkları sonucuna varmaktadır. Postmodernizm, çoğu zaman gerçekçilikten bir kaçış olarak görülse de, gerçekçilik, içerisinde çekişme, sorunsallaştırma ve yeniden sahiplenme içeren bir biçimde, bir yazın biçimi olarak postmodern İngiliz romanlarında hala görülmektedir. Bu çalışma ise *Sexing the Cherry, Poor Things* ve *The Plato Papers* adlı romanların derinlemesine incelemeleriyle bunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Jeanette Winterson, Alasdair Gray, Peter Ackroyd, postmodern gerçekçilik, tarihsel üstkurmaca, postmodern parodi, birbiriyle çatışan anlatıcılar.

ABSTRACT

Genca, Papatya Alkan. "Postmodern Realism in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry,* Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things,* and Peter Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers.*" PhD Dissertation. Ankara 2011.

Although postmodernism and realism have often been regarded as antithetical, contemporary British novel provides a challenge to this assumption. Combining realist and postmodern modes of writing, contemporary British novels produce what can be conceptually called "postmodern realism." This dissertation analyzes Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry,* Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things,* and Peter Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers* as significant examples of postmodern realism.

As such, this dissertation attempts to show how postmodern realism is a distinct characteristic of the contemporary British novel, and concludes that postmodern realist novels do not abandon the realistic mode; on the contrary, they reinforce the realist conventions in their obviously postmodern narratives, but in an overt subversive mode. Although postmodernism is often regarded as a flight from realism, realism is still present in the British postmodern novel, albeit in a contested, problematized, and re-appropriated way, as this study has demonstrated through in-depth analyses of *Sexing the Cherry, Poor Things,* and *The Plato Papers.*

Key Words: Jeanette Winterson, Alasdair Gray, Peter Ackroyd, postmodernism, realism, postmodern realism, historiographic metafiction, postmodern parody, contesting narrators.

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INTRODUCTION

Many British novels written since the second half of the twentieth century show a distinct postmodern orientation. This labeling situates them stylistically against the novels written in the realist mode.[1] However, such a clear-cut juxtaposition is in fact problematic because one can observe a merging of these two modes of writing in recent British fiction. Thus, the question is, as Amy J. Elias also asks in her article "Meta-*Mimesis*? The Problem of British Postmodern Realism," "can Realism be turning on us, confronting us in new and unexpected ways? Can one define […] a 'postmodern Realism' that is not a contradiction in terms?" (9).

This question requires a survey of the historical evolution of the novel genre in Britain because since the day of its inception in the eighteenth century the novel genre has always been associated with the concept of realism. Prominent critics such as Ian Watt, Walter Allen, Michael McKeon, and theorists like George Lukacs, and others have argued that the novel as a genre distinguishes itself from previous or other prose forms with its distinct realist mode of writing which they have discussed as "*formal realism.*"[2] Hence, representing reality accurately in language came to be regarded as a naturalized convention for the novel. In the nineteenth century, this embeddedness in realism was further reinforced, and the novel, which had established itself as a serious art form, became more deeply engaged with realism both technically and thematically. Therefore, formal realism achieved the status of *doxa*.[3]

In the early days of the twentieth century, the nineteenth-century realism was faced with a major challenge; and the doxified status of realism as such was challenged, specifically within what is now called the Modernist movement. This modernist mode of writing can best be described as a strong belief in

> [t]he autonomy of art, involving an active attempt by the artist to abstract art from social ideology in order to focus exclusively on the aesthetic medium itself.

> Belief in art for art's sake and the autonomy of art ultimately descentred the aesthetic project from representation and imitation of reality to a concern with the formal aspects of art. (Best and Kellner 126)

The Modernist movement can be seen as the first comprehensive challenge to formal realism; it transformed the realist conventions by introducing into the novel technical innovations such as the stream of consciousness technique, fragmented interior monologues, Bergsonian idea of time, and, above all, an emphasis on the discontinuous and fragmented inner reality of the human self. It is in this context that the formal properties of the novel came to be subverted, and the novel genre entered into an experimental phase in which the realist conventions were replaced with what can be called "psychological reality," which focuses on the mind of the characters for the reality effect and not the external data available in the surrounding environment. As Stephen Baker argues, "[i]n its negation and repression of realism, totality and chronology, modernism ends up provoking the reader its own rewriting in terms of realism, totality, and chronology" (26). Therefore, realism as a convention in literature was not only contested in the modernist mode of the novel genre but was also distinctively problematized. It has not, however, completely abandoned realism. Instead, it has transformed itself into what may be called the realism of the mind.

The modernist problematization of realism, and the realism of the mind, however, did not last, because in the 1950s there appeared a tendency among the novelists known as "The Angry Young Men," to return to what they called the "true" realist roots of the English novel. This approach was called "*low-key realism*" which looked up to the Great Tradition of the novel, but which could not replicate the artistic achievement of the Victorian Era. The authors of the 1950s reacted to the Modernist movement and its "experimental" style of writing so as to "reinstate 'realism' and the social novel," but they did this "in a minor key, so making the novel not a mode of formal or imaginative experiment but a practical instrument for expression" (Bradbury and Palmer 9). Hence the name "*low-key realism*." It was a rather short-lived movement, and in the 1960s and the 1970s the realist mode came under scrutiny again with the rise of postmodernism and the employment of postmodern techniques within the novel genre.

Realism evidently needs a clear definition because "it is an old concept, much used by many people and for many ends" (Brecht 81). It has widely preoccupied Western philosophical thought and literature. Like postmodernism, realism is defined in various different ways by different thinkers, novelists, philosophers, and critics. For example, according to John R. Searle, "[r]*ealism is the view that there is a way that things are that is logically independent of all human representations. Realism does not say how things are but that there is a way that they are*" (20) (emphasis in the original). William P. Alston, on the other hand, argues that his understanding of realism can be called "alethic realism" which is "primarily a doctrine about truth" (70). He further maintains that

> [w]hat it takes to make a statement true [...] is the actual obtaining of what is claimed to obtain in making that statement. If what is stated is that green is green then it is grass's *being* green that is both necessary and sufficient for the truth of the statement. Nothing else is relevant to its truth value. This is a *realist* way of thinking of truth in that the truth *maker* is something that is objective vis-à-vis the truth *bearer*. It has to do with what the truth bearer is about, rather than with some "internal" or "intrinsic" feature of the truth bearer, such as its epistemic status, its place in a system of propositions, or the confidence with which it is held [...] Truth has to do with the relation of a potential truth bearer to a reality beyond itself. (54)

Many more definitions of or discussions on realism can be found in the history of Western philosophy since it has always been part of the philosophical debates in Western thought. However, in this dissertation, realism is used to refer to literary realism, which indicates a specifically aesthetic tradition; therefore, the concepts of realism and the realistic refer to the "representation of reality" within the novel genre. In its literary usage, realism is mostly regarded as an aesthetic convention, rather than what philosophy concentrates on by asking epistemological and ontological questions. Besides, the convention is most closely associated with the Realist movement in the nineteenth century within the novel genre. As Amy J. Elias suggests,

> [w]hen critics talk about the origins of British Realism, they refer primarily to mid-Victorian fiction written between 1845 and 1880. Most critics identify at least some of the following four characteristics of this Realism: choice of typical subjects in a mimetic mode; authorial objectivity; the doctrine of natural causality

contributing to character motivation; and a particular attitude toward the world
that is seen as true. (10)

Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that this is rather a generalized perception of
Victorian fiction, and that exceptions and experimental modes are also present even
within the most realism-driven examples of the genre. This, indeed, does not mean that
the novels of the Victorian period were all written in the same way through a singularly
accepted realist mode. Nor does it mean that there was only one and true form of
realism to which the novelists conformed. Yet, realism in this era becomes the dominant
mode of writing in a rather sweeping way.

While the Realist movement marks the fiction-writing mode of the Victorian era in
England, the historical roots of realism are found in French literary culture in a more or
less isochronic timeline:

> The earliest recorded use of the word "realism" as a literary term was in a
> Parisian periodical, *Le Mercure Français,* in 1826, although it was not until the
> 1850s that the word found wide currency. By then, a short lived journal entitled
> *Réalisme*, had helped to make it more familiar, but as a style of painting as well
> as writing, although the main contributors remained the novelists themselves.
> (Walder 26)

Through the second half of the nineteenth century, French authors such as Gustave
Flaubert, Emile Zola, Alexander Dumas, *fils* and Honoré de Balzac put forth the basic
premises of realist fiction in their works both within the actual body text and in the
prefaces, which became important in the nature of the novel as a genre as well as the
role of the author in reflecting this nature in his or her writing. Stendhal, for example,
defines the novel as "a mirror walking along the road" in the Preface to *The
Charterhouse of Parma*. Likewise, Zola, in his Preface to *Thérèse Raquin,* provides a
thorough definition of the role of the author as follows:

> There should no longer be any school, no more formulas, no standards of any
> sort; there is only life itself, an immense field Where each may study and create
> as he likes... Hence, a dramatist should be aloof and never allow his own
> prejudices to intrude, but only observe, record and experiment with the sole aim

of demonstrating the truth. Therefore, a playwright should be allowed to treat any subject which would allow arriving at the truth. (n.p.)

The import of such premises in England can be traced in the works of Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, Elizabeth Gaskell, and especially George Eliot who is considered to be the exemplary representative of the realist movement in Victorian England.

In the most general sense, realism in literature can be defined as "the attempt to use linguistic and narrative conventions to create a fictional illusion of social and psychological reality that seems plausible to ordinary readers" (Holmes 11). Therefore, realism in literature is very much focused on creating probable and believable narratives that have a strong resemblance to reality as perceived by people. Moreover, seen in its socio-historical context, realism is

> [p]articularly associated with the secular and rational forms of knowledge that constitute the tradition of **Enlightenment,** stemming from the growth of scientific understanding in the eighteenth century. Underpinning Enlightenment thought is an optimistic belief that human beings can adequately reproduce, by means of verbal and visual representations, both the **objective** world that is exterior to them, and their **subjective** responses to that exteriority. Such representations, verbal and visual, are assumed to be mutually recognizable by fellow human beings and from the basis of knowledge about physical and social worlds. *The values of accuracy, adequacy, and truth are fundamental to this empirical view of knowledge and its representational form: realism.* (Morris 9-10) (emphasis mine)

Historically speaking, then, the Enlightenment project/ideal can be defined as the prevalent ideology, which accompanies the rise of the middle class, in the domains of epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. It also refers to a decisive break with the previous worldview, namely, the metaphysically (and religiously) charged medieval world. As such, the literature of such a worldview also aligns with the ideological implications of the Enlightenment. Hence, there is an emphasis on the values of "accuracy, adequacy, and truth." The logical outcome, then, is the insistence on the use of realism as the most appropriate "representational form."

One of the most important critics with regards to the discussion of literary realism both in its epistemological and ontological sense is Christopher Nash. What distinguishes him from other critics is his distinctive schematization of major lines of realist epistemologies, his categorization of realism's main characteristics, and his lucid explication. All of these render his views crucial and indispensable to the discussion of realism in this dissertation. In his book entitled *World-Games: The Tradition of Anti-Realist Revolt*, Nash puts forth the basic premises of realism. First of all, according to Nash, for the realist, "there is a positively determinable world – which we can call that of 'actuality' – external to the work of fiction, and which it's the fundamental responsibility of fiction to represent 'as it is' or 'has been'" (8). This idea is closely linked with the (supposed) representational power of language. According to Stuart Hall, for example,

> the meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea, or event in the real world, and language functions like a mirror, to *reflect* the true meaning as it already exists in the world […] So the theory which says that language works by simply reflecting or imitating the truth that is already there and fixed is sometimes called "mimetic."(24)

The emphasis on mimesis and its uses on fiction is another characteristic of realism since "the essentially right procedures for referentially-motivated fiction are those of *mimesis*, […] the material transcription of the empirically verifiable data" (Nash 8). In this mimetic understanding, the assumption is that there is a reality out there which language can unproblematically reflect and represent. For Erich Auerbach, mimesis in literature, especially as far as the novel genre is concerned, is based on "representations of everyday life in which that life is treated seriously, in terms of its human and social problems and even its tragic complications" (342). Moreover, "mimesis embodies the classical faith of all representations; that the world is both real and representable" (Hassan, "Realism" 4). The novel's method of representation is realistic because it aims to depict the world as it is. This realist effect is achieved by way of a depiction of details through a referential use of language. Referentiality postulates that there is a natural bond between the signifier and the signified; that words/signs function due to a presence of meaning-in-themselves, and that there is a direct link between the word and the

concept they refer to. Translated into the novel genre, referentiality refers to the belief that the novel has the ability to relate to the world, that it can transparently narrate/depict/talk about the world as it is. This is evidently based on the notion that an objective representation of reality is attainable.

Indeed, representation (of reality) has been a much debated issue since antiquity, and it has its roots in the mimetic theory initiated by Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle argues that it is in human nature to imitate: "[t]he instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures, and through imitation learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated" (*Poetics* 5-6). Aristotle considers modes of representation as natural to and indispensable for human nature. Therefore, the ability to create and manipulate signs, which is essential to people's learning processes and their existence in the world, is what distinguishes man from other animals. Moreover, according to Aristotle, art reflects not what *is* but what *can be* (i.e. probable): "it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen – what is probable according to the law of probability and necessity" (*Poetics* 17). That is why poetry, which Aristotle defines as an imitation of nature, aims at the universal representation of reality, an aim that involves necessity and probability. Aristotle's influence on literary criticism is undeniable; his contention that "man is an imitating animal" therefore that he "imitates" has constituted the basis for literary criticism for centuries. In the sixteenth century, for example, in his *Apology for Poetry,* Sir Philip Sidney reiterates the Aristotelian understanding of the debate over the value judgment/comparison between poetry and history arguing that "the historian, wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine" (90). Like Aristotle, Sidney values poetry over history on the account that the former produces knowledge of a universal kind while the latter produces of a particular kind, which Sidney sees as limited. Similarly, Ben Jonson, Alexander Pope, and Doctor Johnson have adopted this approach, firmly rooting mimetic theory in literary conventions. The realist assumption of representation is, then, closely associated with mimetic theories as well as with the

modern discussions on representation brought about by philosophers such as John Locke and René Descartes. The opposition of postmodernism and realism, then, is the result of the idea that they depend on two different politics of representation.

Plato, in contrast with the views of Aristotle on literature, is more cautious about the representative quality of literature; his theory of mimesis, according to Matthew Potolsky, is "hardly neutral in its aim and effect, for Plato's innovation fundamentally devalues the image" (16). While recognizing that literature is a representation, or that "authors purport to tell the truth about the world [Plato contends that] (contrary to popular belief) they lack real authority" (Nightingale 38). Plato also believes that literature is not "real" *per se*, thus may be, if not always, misleading. In this respect, what the poets show is not the real truth but "falsehoods." In order to clarify his claim by way of an analogy, Plato invites his readers to imagine three different "makers" of a bed, namely, the god, the carpenter, and the artist. He argues that the god's bed is more real because of its purely conceptual status. As opposed to this, although the bed made by the carpenter is tangible, solid and visible, which can render itself as empirically real, for Plato, it falls short of the reality of its ideal form, which is the one created by god. It can be argued that god's bed is the ideal and that of the carpenter's is the embodiment of that ideal in the world of appearances. The bed made by the artist is the most problematic one for Plato since it is neither the ideal nor the appearance of the ideal but a mere reflection, or imitation. That is why he bans the artist from his Republic arguing that "the art of representation is therefore a long way removed from truth, and it is able to produce everything because it has a little grasp of anything, and that little is a mere phenomenal appearance" (*The Republic* 339-40).

The impact of Plato and Aristotle on the evaluation of texts is undeniable; it is mostly due to them that most readings of literature assume, according to Kathryn Hume, "mimetic representation to be the essential relationship between text and the real world" (5). Hence the realist conviction that literature (or fiction in particular) has a responsibility to maintain this crucial link between what is "out there" and what is represented in fiction. What is "out there" is a

> "*cosmos,*" a complete integrated system of phenomena governed by some coherent scheme of rules (such as those of natural law, the assembled forces of history), whose only obscurity derives from its vast diversity and complexity, and whose truthful delineation depends ultimately on the comprehensiveness and rationality of its description. (Nash 8)

This idea is closely related to Empiricism, and nineteenth-century Positivism.[4] Both Empiricism and Positivism are influential in the formation and establishment of realist conventions, as well as the debate on realism starting with the nineteenth century. As George Levine maintains, "[t]he epistemology that lay behind realism was empiricist, with its tendency to value immediate experience over continuities or systems of order, and it was obviously related to the developments in empirical science as they ran through the century" (243). This empirical epistemology can be taken as the immediate result of the radical shift from the medieval worldview, which depended on a church-centered *logos*, to the Humanistic understanding of the world that puts the individual, rather than an already available, *a priori* order of being, on the fore. The novel, then, becomes the perfect tool to elucidate the individual experience. What the novel offered was, in fact, an attempt to solve the problem that was brought about by this new social structure, namely, the individual. According to Stephen Heath, the relationship between the novel and realism starts off from the idea of the individual and its newly achieved status in society:

> Realism, in fact, is produced in the novel as a social narration of the individual as problem: what, where, how is the meaning of the individual in this prosaic world, confronted thus by society, by history? The novel ceaselessly makes sense for the individual, brings him or her – hero or heroine but also simultaneously the reader as its addressed agent – into this new field of reality, into recognition, knowledge, meaning. Crucially, its realism is a response to instability: the novel coincides with the development of new form of social organization, that of capitalism, in which, precisely, society and the individual become the terms of reference, in which the social relations of the individual – "the individual and society," as we have learnt to say – become a problem as such. (109)

Accordingly, instead of pre-established rules, the novel favors the individual experience as its target. The possible subjectivity in the face of relating to this experience necessitates another important criterion for the realist mode, which is objectivity.

Objectivity is of utmost importance in the realist mode because elimination of subjective perception or perspectives in favor of attaining objective truth is regarded as the ultimate end of realism:

> Since among the greatest obstacles to our perception of the truth is the complexity – and inclination toward *parti pris* – of each individual subjective consciousness and the diversity among the "subjectiveness" that compose human existence taken collectively, the greatest effort mush be towards the ostensibly most "*objective*" articulation of data as possible ("nothing but the truth"), with the minimal visible intervention on the part of the "teller." (Nash 9)

This requires a willing self-effacement of the author from his/her narrative in order to avoid inflicting his/her subjective perspective at the expense of objectivity. The narrator functions like a camera, or, like "the eye of a little god" ("The Mirror") to quote Sylvia Plath, without addition or subtraction, rather, reflecting whatever is, truthfully.

Christopher Nash also focuses on the importance and necessity of probability as a premise of realism:

> Just as in the "actual" world at any one moment we may not have access to *all* the information we may seek on a given subject and consequently must strive to assess the probable truth based on the most exhaustive collection of information possible – fiction too should direct its attention towards an *exhaustive* disclosure of the "facts" ("the whole truth") and the presentation, finally, of what is most *probable* according to our past experience of the actual world, particularly as exemplified by the procedures of history and science. (8-9)

This fascination with facts is rooted in the eighteenth-century fiction.[5] Watt argues that the novel differentiates itself from the previous forms of writing, especially from the romance tradition, by way of its focus on representing verifiable data, objective truth, perceivable world as opposed to the fantastic world depicted in romances.[6]

Factuality and truthfulness are two major claims which can be observed in Daniel Defoe as well as in other eighteenth-century writers such as Henry Fielding, Samuel

Richardson, Charlotte Lennox and Fanny Burney. For example, in the Preface to *Robinson Crusoe,* Daniel Defoe casts himself as the "editor" of the book and claims that "[t]he editor believes the thing to be a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it" (n.p.). Likewise, in Fanny Burney's *Evelina,* the author openly declares that her aim in writing the novel is "[t]o draw characters from nature, though not from life, and to mark the manners of the times, is the attempted plan of the following letters" (9). While the eighteenth-century authors were focused on the newly-emerging novel genre as a respectable, factual representation of reality, in the nineteenth-century, the panoramic depictions of urban life posed as real portraits, as depicted in the novels of the nineteenth-century writers such as Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and William Thackeray. These novels came into prominence as representations of factuality. The realist claims were evident both in the prefaces and within the body texts of these novels. A palpable example of this approach can be seen, for example, in the Preface of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* in which Thackeray casts himself as the stage manager and likens the characters in the novel to puppets. Another example can be seen in Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall:*

> My object in writing the following pages, was not simply to amuse the Reader, neither was it to gratify my own taste, nor yet to ingratiate myself with the Press and the Public: *I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it.* But as the priceless treasure too frequently hides at the bottom of a well, it needs some courage to dive for it, especially as he that does so will be likely to incur more scorn and obloquy for the mud and water into which he has ventured to plunge, than thanks for the jewel he procures; as in like manner, she who undertakes the cleansing of a careless bachelor's apartment will be liable to more abuse for the dust she raises, than commendation for the clearance she effects. Let it not be imagined, however, that I consider myself competent to reform the errors and abuses of society, but only that I would fain to contribute my humble quota towards so good an aim, and if I can gain the public ear at all, I would rather whisper a few wholesome truths therein than much soft nonsense. (3)

The realist writer, then, is concerned with a truthful representation of contemporary life and society. His method relies on objectivity, that is, there is a great amount of observation and deduction which is faithful to the world outside. He erases his own personality to give the characters a voice of their own, unadorned by the comments or additions on part of the author himself.[7]

Yet, all these have become insufficient, ineffective, redundant, and, more importantly, problematic in the postmodern period. The constructed nature of fiction, which the realist novel so painstakingly tries to conceal from the readers' eye, become the focal point of interest in postmodern fiction. The proliferation of the definitions of postmodernism can also be observed in the categorization of the postmodern novel. Like postmodernism itself, the postmodern novel has been defined in different ways by various critics and theorists. These definitions usually focus on one divergent characteristic of the postmodern novel, disregarding the wide plethora of concerns the postmodern novel includes. Thus, while there are several, and often conflicting, definitions of the postmodern novel, they are usually either too limited or too inclusive in scope. As far as the British postmodern novels are concerned, Douwe Fokkema suggests that "the rejection of postmodernism in general by some academics in Britain has no real influence on the reception of British postmodern novels by the reading public because *in these novels international postmodern conventions are combined with native literary traditions*" ("The Semiotics" 168) (emphasis mine).

Evidently, the evaluation of the novel in Britain is construed around the relationship it has with realism, or its lack thereof. The novel in the postmodern age is mostly said to be taking an anti-realist position. Postmodernism and realism are almost always thought of as opposites due to the belief that they stand on antithetical poles in aesthetic terms. Realism is often associated with the representation of "situations from everyday life, coarse, unsublimated domains of reality, or with the mode or style of the representation (detailism, concreteness of depiction, dominance of description, transparent rendering, dominance of referentiality, etc.)" (Ronen 186). It is also, according to George Levine, related to a "self-conscious effort, usually in the name of some moral enterprise of truth telling and extending the limits of human sympathy, to make literature appear to be describing directly not some other language but reality itself" (240). On the other hand, postmodernism in literature is mostly considered as a mode of writing and thought in which, according to Best and Kellner, "naïve realism and representational epistemology, as well as unmediated objectivity and truth" (257)[8] are questioned, problematized, and contested through the employment of several techniques such as self-reflexivity,

bricolage, postmodern parody and pastiche, intertextuality, rewriting, and *mise-en-abyme*. In this opposition, while realism is thought to be concerned with a truthful representation of external reality, postmodernism is thought to be a refutation of such representational modeling.

If realism and postmodernism have opposing aesthetic stances and epistemological concerns, then, such a compound as "postmodern realism" may seem too difficult to reconcile, or it may even seem oxymoronic. The problem is more evident when one sees that not only postmodernism and realism are problematic in relation to each other but they are also problematic terms in themselves. Their meanings or definitions have always been multiple, sometimes conflicting, and often confusing. Therefore, before commencing an argument on how realism is manifest in postmodern fiction, or how "postmodern realism" as a new mode of writing has come into being, providing a thorough definition of postmodernism is *sine qua non.*

Postmodernism has dominated critical debates for over thirty years, and it is still a widely used and debated concept. Although the history of the use of the term "postmodern" dates back to as early as the nineteenth century,[9] it is not until the mid-twentieth century that postmodernism achieves world-wide acclaim. Its most obvious theory-driven debut is in the field of architecture. Starting off as a reaction to the over-dominating tenets of the International Style,[10] postmodernism in architecture refers to an assemblage of concepts such as "hybrid, polyglot, mongrel, collage, juxtaposition, inclusion" (Jencks, "Post-Modernism" 178). In his *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture,* Charles Jencks famously "heralds" the birth of postmodernism in the very moment of the death of modernism as follows: "[h]appily, we can date the death of modern architecture to a precise moment in time. […] Modern Architecture died in St Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 p.m., (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final *coup de grace* by dynamite" (9). Metaphorically and literally speaking, the dynamite destroys not only the building itself but also the very idea that has enabled that building come into being in the first place. And with the "clean" slate provided by the symbolic

destruction of modernism, or rather, upon the "ruins" of modernism, postmodernism is born.

Although Jencks provides such a definite date for the emergence of postmodernism, there is no consensus on what it is, how it functions, or what it exactly refers to. The very act of trying to define postmodernism has been a challenge in itself, because postmodernism as a term is used in a variety of different contexts and disciplines from architecture to painting, literature to photography, religion to philosophy, and science to arts. Since it is available in such a wide spectrum, it is almost impossible to attach a consensual meaning to it. Even in the same field of research, one can find different and often conflicting interpretations of postmodernism. Any discussion on and about postmodernism, then, seems to revolve around contentious ways to define the very term. Every literary critic, theorist, and philosopher suggests a different definition that concentrates on different divergent characteristics of contemporary writing and society which they deem postmodern. In this respect, in Larry McCaffrey's words, "[p]ostmodernism is, in fact, not a unified movement but a term that serves most usefully as a general signifier rather than as a sign with a stable meaning" (ix). Indeed, the very nature of the term conflicts with the attempt to define it, because postmodernism is considered to be a critical interrogation of everything that concerns humanity, and by nature, it defies any totalizing, unified definition. Nevertheless, it does promote a frame of thought specific to its use, nature, and conceptualization within the humanities. As Hans Bertens, for example, contends in his article "The Debate on Postmodernism,"

> the terms postmodern and postmodernism were even in the earliest stages of their circulation applied to the experimental art of the 1950s and 1960s and to the various pop art movements and manifestations that joined it after the mid 1960s. In its rejection of modernist forms, postmodern literature and postmodern art in general sought to deflate what it saw as overly pretentious and ultimately self-serving modernist views of art and the artist. (4)

Thus, postmodernism is closely associated with its contestation of what modernism and modernist view of art stand for. It is often thought that postmodernism comes into being as a reaction against what modernism is considered to have promoted, or against what is

thought to be inherent in modernity. Likewise, in 1939, in his *A Study of History*, Arnold Toynbee, who uses the term "post-modern" for the first time in this context, posits that the world has entered into a post-modern state, which is in clash with the values or ideologies favored by modernity. He argues that "[o]ur own Post-Modern Age has been inaugurated by the general war of 1914-1918."(qtd. in *OED*). Such a claim positions postmodernism as a historical category, which is dialectically in clash with its predecessor. Therefore, this view holds that the world has entered a new phase which is different from and in conflict with the previous phase, namely, modernity. In this case, postmodernity signals a departure from and a challenge to modernity. Yet, defining postmodernity as such does not really resolve the problem of postmodernism. It must be noted that, although sometimes used interchangeably, postmodernism and postmodernity are not the same. In Ihab Hassan's words, postmodernism "refers to the cultural sphere, especially literature, philosophy, and the various arts, including architecture, while postmodernity refers to the geographical scheme, less order than disorder, which has emerged in the last decades" ("From Postmodernism"). Then, while postmodernism refers to certain aesthetic tendencies and stylistic challenges and changes that aim to subvert the dominants of modernism, postmodernity refers to a historical period that comes after modernity. However, these explorations on the uses of the term in the Humanities, are still lacking in explaining the controversy over the term "postmodern." Concentrating on the very term "postmodernism," Brian McHale provides an in-depth inquiry into this problem. In *Postmodernist Fiction,* McHale contends that

> [t]his ISM (to begin at the end) does double duty. It announces that the referent here is not merely a chronological division but an organized system – a poetics, in fact – while at the same time properly identifying what exactly it is that postmodernism is *post.* Postmodern is not post modern, whatever that might mean, but postmodern*ism;* it does not come *after the present* (a solecism), but after the *modernist movement.* Thus the term "postmodernism," if we take it literally enough, *a la lettre,* signifies a poetics which is the successor of, or possibly a reaction against, the poetics of early twentieth-century modernism, and not some hypothetical writing of the future. (5)

In this respect, what McHale suggests is that the problem with the definition of the term arises, first of all, from the morphological formation of the word "postmodern." The

prefix "post-" signifies afterness. Hence, postmodernism can be considered as a new aesthetic epoch that comes after modernism. However, according to Richard Harvey Brown, the relationship between modernism and postmodernism is also a much debated and problematic issue since "[i]n much of the debate on postmodernism, it is said that either postmodernism is continuous with modernism; in which case the whole 'debate' is specious, or that there is a radical rupture, a break with modernism, which is then evaluated in either positive or negative terms" ("Postmodern" 3). Ever since the debate on postmodernism started, there has been a series of serious camping for and against postmodernism. Among those who consider postmodernism in negative terms, Jürgen Habermas and Fredric Jameson stand out as two of the most prominent theorists who put forth still debated and influential arguments which have very serious and important repercussions especially in the humanities. Habermas argues that

> The project of modernity formulated in the 18th century by the philosophers of the Enlightenment consisted in their efforts to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic. [...] The Enlightenment philosophers wanted to utilize this accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life- that is to say, for the rational organization of everyday social life. (9)

Habermas believes in the positive effect of modernism, in that the teaching of modernism enriches everyday life**.** He sees postmodernity as the "radicalized consciousness of representations" (4). For him, modernity is still unfinished and necessitates completion because only through modernity can human condition progress. Moreover, the problems which are seen as part of the Enlightenment cannot be solved by simply discarding the project of Enlightenment. On the contrary, what is required is further enlightenment. That is why Habermas deems modernity as an unfinished project, one that has an emancipatory power which has not been recognized by the defenders of postmodernism like Lyotard.

Like Habermas, Frederic Jameson considers postmodernism as a negative concept that hinders the progress that is rendered possible by modernity. According to Jameson, postmodernism is

a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order – what is often euphemistically called modernization, postindustrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism. (113)

For Jameson, postmodernism is closely related to the socio-economic expansion of capitalism in the second half of the twentieth century, and it refers to the last phase of capitalism, or "late capitalism," as he calls it, and this is yet another mode of production, perception, and representation that severs the ties of history from the present in such a radical way that the meaning-making faculties become obsolete. He also draws attention to the still prevalent continuation between modernism and postmodernism, claiming that the two are, in fact, not that unrelated, and that postmodernism draws on modernism in many respects:

radical breaks between periods do not generally involve complete changes of content but rather the restructuration of a certain number of elements already given: features that in an earlier period or system were subordinate now become dominant, and features have been dominant again become secondary. In this sense, everything we have described here can be found in the earlier periods and most notably within modernism proper: my point is that until the present day those things have been secondary or minor features of modernist art, marginal rather than central, and that we have something new when they become the central features of cultural production. (123)

Then, according to Jameson, postmodernism does not really bring forth a new way of comprehending the world that is radically different from modernism. If so, the debate on postmodernism or its "revolutionary" acts are not necessarily crucial. In other words, these acts do not bring a new insight to the already existing features. One can say, then, that the negative perception and reception of postmodernism revolves around two main concerns. On the one hand, it is argued that postmodernism does not really differentiate itself clearly and distinctively from modernism which it claims to critique. Thus, postmodernism is seen as a continuation of modernism, i.e. that whatever postmodernism is taken for is always already inscribed within modernism. On the other hand, it is argued that postmodernism is a product of the capitalist system which, in fact, does not really try to bring about an in-depth insight to art or life.

In spite of all these critiques, postmodernism is also considered to be opening an important window which is highly crucial to understanding the contemporary reality and the philosophical concerns of the late twentieth century. Brenda K. Marshall, for example, argues that postmodernism is a "rupture in our consciousness" (*Teaching* 5), and that "it has everything to do with how we read the present as well as how we read the past" (*Teaching* 5). Before the rupture brought about by postmodernism, the underlying idea, which is also one of the main tenets of modernist/Humanist worldview, was that through progress in science and technology, the human consciousness as well as the human condition would get better. However, according to the oft-quoted definition of postmodernism by Jean François Lyotard, postmodernism is "incredulity toward metanarratives" (ivxx), an incredulity that is embedded in the juxtaposition between modernity and postmodernity. According to Lyotard, these metanarratives lie at the core of Western philosophy, and are grand stories (e.g. progress through science and technology) and concepts that attempt to make meaning out of this world through one absolute truth or *logos.* What postmodernism renders possible is that it lays the grounds for the problematization of this logocentric worldview, pointing at its constructed (and politically and ideologically charged) nature. The problematization of metanarratives results in a perpetual series of what Lyotard calls "language games" where "'truth' is not the uncovering of the 'real' but a function of our construction of the world – or rather, of *a* world – according to the rules of a particular game" (Craig 231). Lyotard further argues that

> [t]he real political task today, at least insofar as it is also concerned with the cultural … is to carry forward resistance that writing offers to established thought, to what has already been done, to what everyone thinks, to what is well known, to what is widely recognized, to what is 'readable,' to everything which can change its form and make itself acceptable to opinion in general. (302)

The postmodern critique of concepts such as "Identity," "Origin," "Meaning," "Transcendence," "Reality," and "Unity," then, focuses mostly on the ways of contesting these concepts' totalizing claims, their attempts to homogenizing difference, and naturalizing their being. These metanarratives are rejected and problematized on the

grounds that they are Modernism's, or any other system of thought's ways of doxifying[11] their existence. What postmodernism fosters, then, is "provisional, socially constructed truths" (Bertens, "The Debate" 10) instead of overarching, totalizing, singular truth imposed by these metanarratives.

While Lyotard focuses on the ways grand narratives are put under critical interrogation by and within postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon, who is one of the most important thinkers of postmodern theory, concentrates on the literary and cultural repercussions of postmodernism. Unlike Jameson or Habermas, Hutcheon regards postmodernism in positive terms. And as opposed to Jameson's and Habermas' contention that postmodernism signifies a loss, i.e. loss of history, Hutcheon suggests that "the postmodern is not ahistorical or dehistoricized, though it does question our assumptions about what constitutes historical knowledge" (*A Poetics* xii). She contends that postmodernism is a controversial term, a "contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and subverts the very concepts it challenges" (*A Poetics* 3). This view evidently takes into account the indispensable link between postmodernism and whatever has come before it. It is because postmodernism is in constant battle with the past and past conventions while at the same time dependent on the very conventions or the past that it sets off to challenge. Hutcheon also suggests that "postmodernism challenges our mimetic assumptions about representation […] assumptions about transparency and common sense naturalness" (*The Politics* 30). As such, postmodernism is a mode of constant confrontation with the naturalized, neutralized, or doxified assumptions and concepts, and it is about how one perceives the world and how this perception is represented. Hutcheon further maintains that "[o]ur common-sense presuppositions about the 'real' depend upon how that 'real' is described, how it is put into discourse and interpreted. There is nothing natural about the 'real' and there never was" (*The Politics* 31). In this respect, postmodernism is inherently critical of the realist conventions, especially of the contention that language is a transparent medium of expression which can reflect the world as it is.[12]

In the field of literary studies, postmodernism has evidently created its own unique poetics. In this respect, it has become possible to talk about a concept such as

"postmodern realism." However, due to the nature of postmodernism, this realism manifests itself not in the singular but in the plural form, because even in the face of having certain rules or patterns, postmodernism maintains its incredulity towards frames and limitations, it also maintains its pluralistic and inclusive characteristic. In this respect, postmodern realism has a paradoxical relationship with the literary tradition which nurtures it and which also serves as a figurative "other" to stand against. In other words, this dual relationship lies in the nature of the prefix "para-" of the word "paradoxical" since it signifies both "alongside of" and "against" all at the same time.

What postmodernism overtly contests is the acceptance of realism as the most appropriate mode for fiction writing, Hence, such taken-for grantedness becomes a problematization in postmodernism. Thus, in the field of literary studies, postmodernism asks critical questions about the relationship between representation and reality, or, more accurately, the representation of "reality." In this respect, the postmodern critical gaze is turned onto the problematic nature of representation, and the way any representation claims to attest to any truth. However, representation, like realism and postmodernism, is a problematic concept. In *The Oxford English Dictionary,* "representation" is defined as

> an image, likeness, or reproduction in some manner of a thing; a material image or figure; a reproduction in some material or tangible form; the action or fact of exhibiting some visible image or form; the fact of expressing or denoting by means of a figure or symbol. ("Representation")

In this definition, what is implied is that there is a thing out there which is reproduced through an image, whether verbal or visual, or that there is an *a priori* reality which can be signified via a signifier. Yet, the problem is evident when one considers the relationship between the world "out there" and the world "represented." If language is the only means through which the world can be and is represented, this poses a serious problem as to what extent language is successful in truthfully representing the world as it is. This is highly relevant to the discussion of the opposition between postmodernism and realism, because their juxtaposition is based on the positions both take in relation to the politics of representation. Several critics and thinkers have already noted the

political and philosophical repercussions of the problematics of representation. According to Harvey Brown, for example,

> for postmodernists, the philosophical and political meaning of representation are closely linked. Classical and modernist theories of representation hold that meanings or truths precede and determine the representations that communicated them. By contrast, for postmodernists, representations are causes as well as effects; they can create the substance they supposedly reflect. ("Postmodern" 6)

Brown maintains that "[i]n this view, realist representations become true descriptions not by correspondence to their noumenal objects but by conformity between the dominant ontology and the conventional methods of aesthetically representing it" ("Realism" 135).

George Marcus and Michael Fischer argue that "[r]ealism is a mode of writing that seeks to represent the whole of the world or form of life" (23). Realism relies on the assumption that literature (the novel, in particular) can represent the world accurately and objectively. And the latter, postmodernism, takes a critical approach towards such assumptions. In this view, therefore, "[r]epresentation is no longer to be conceived as a form of mirror-like *reflection* (the emphasis on this word), but more a form of construction, making" (Grice and Woods 31). Representation, then, is never naïve, always already problematic. It raises questions about the relationship between the narrative and the narrator, individual and collective history, as well as about historical data and how it is shaped by the very narratives about them. This relationship between the text and the "real" world is one of the heavily contested issues in postmodern thinking, and more particularly in postmodern literature. From the postmodern perspective, the task of the writer has shifted from a faithful representation of reality to a contestation and a questioning of the assumed reality, bearing in mind its ideological and contextual connotations. Postmodern novels work within this framework, and in order to understand why and how this is done, a thorough definition of what the postmodern novel stands for is required.

The postmodern novel is sometimes defined as the fiction of global economy, a definition that feeds on the conceptualization of postmodernism as the outcome of a shift in the economic, political, and ideological climate brought about by what Fredric Jameson calls "late capitalism" (*Postmodernism* xviii). Hence, the literature produced in this era is an overt representation of the economic conditions created by capitalism. Yet, such a definition does not give any insight to the content and form of the postmodern novel.

It is also defined as "anything bad," or even as non-existent, an idea which stems from the negative reception of postmodernism due to the belief that postmodernism undermines, eliminates, or obliterates the concerns of fiction-writing, and that it replaces these concerns with a playful yet meaningless statements. However, this would be a rather reductive way of seeing things, and it provides no critical frame for an in-depth discussion on the innovative and novelistic qualities brought about by postmodern literature into the novel genre. Moreover, it is highly biased to dismiss postmodern novels as "anything bad," because obviously many postmodern texts such as Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose,* Italo Calvino's *If a Winter's Night a Traveler,* Christa Wolf's *Cassandra,* or John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* have been hailed as artistic innovations, both technically and thematically.

The postmodern novel is sometimes labeled as any text written after 1945. However, this statement is highly over-inclusive, and it overlooks both the technical and thematic diversities within postmodern fiction, and the fact that there are novels written in the realist mode after 1945 as well. As McHale puts it, "postmodernism should not be defined so liberally that it covers *all* modes of contemporary writing, for then, there would be of no use in drawing distinctions" (4). The same is true for postmodern fiction. Besides, although postmodern fiction has become somewhat dominant after 1945, it is by no means possible or logical to claim that every text written since the second half of the twentieth century can be called postmodern, as can be seen in John Fowles's *The Collector,* Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist,* and William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies.*

Several critics, such as John Storey, Frederic Jameson, Leslie Fiedler, Andreas Huyssen, and Simon During, draw attention to the thinning of the distinction between the high and the low culture, claiming that postmodern novel works on this blurring as well. Although this claim holds true for several postmodern texts such as Winterson's *Boating for Beginners,* Gray's *Poor Things,* Ackroyd's *The House of Doctor Dee,* or Barnes' *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, it would be an overgeneralization to suggest that *all* postmodern texts have such a quality.

It is also labeled, by critics such as Richard Todd, as the fiction of previously suppressed voices. It is true that postmodernism enables previously unheard voices – whether real or fictional – to be heard. It promotes a plurality of voices, point of views, worlds, and perceptions. Michel Tournier's *Friday,* Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* and D. M. Thomas' *The White Hotel*, for example, all attest to this. Yet, this quality does not predominantly cover all examples of postmodern novel.

The postmodern novel is basically defined as fiction about fiction that foregrounds its constructed nature. John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* Jeanette Winterson's *The Power Book,* and Salman Rushdie's *The Midnights Children,* for example fall into this category. These novels lay bare their technical devices as part of their narrative techniques, conflating the distinction between art and life. This tendency is observable in the two modes of postmodern writing, namely, metafiction and Historiographic metafiction.[13] Metafiction is the name given to fictional works "which examine fictional systems, how they are created, and the way in which reality is transformed by and filtered through narrative assumptions and conventions" (McCaffrey, *The Metafictional Muse* 5). Although metafictional mode of writing can also be observed in earlier texts such as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy,* Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales,* Homer's *The Iliad,* Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey,* for example, it is "a primary source of energy" (Currie, Introduction 2) in the postmodern mode. Mark Currie contends that metafiction "meant the assimilation of critical perspective within fictional narrative, a self-consciousness of the artificiality between language and the world" (Introduction 2). If reality is "a kind of collective fiction, constructed and sustained by the process of socialization […] especially through

the medium of language" (Berger 37), then, it can be argued that the authors of the postmodern era turn the formal properties of fiction writing into writing material of fiction itself. As Brian McHale argues, in his *The Postmodernist Fiction,* the novel attempts to create a seamless whole. Yet, seamlessness is constantly disrupted in postmodern fiction. He contends that "[e]veryone knows now that the conventions of nineteenth-century fiction were just that, conventions, and not a transparent window on reality, and there are other, equally legitimate means of getting access to the real besides Victorian realism" (220). The aim is to lay bare the constructed nature of any narrative as well as to demonstrate how the realist claims of any fiction fall short. In this respect, realism as a mode of writing becomes a wholly problematic issue: it becomes a problem of correspondence between the literary work and the reality which it supposedly imitates. It is this problematic nature of "mimesis" that is laid bare within such fiction. Postmodern novels specifically focus on the problematics of representation and set out to subvert the conventions of literary realism by exposing the very mechanisms of this process, i.e. the creation of a realist illusion:

> realist fiction, in an attempt to enact its own claims to truthfulness, practices the art of disguise by taking pretense to its utmost limits. In pretending to be a faithful representation of reality, it proceeds on the unvoiced hypothesis of a natural continuity between actuality and fiction. What is more, it actively encourages readers to make the same assumption. (Furst 104)

This is what the realist novel had aimed to do. In the postmodern mode, however, the authors play with the idea of representation, acknowledging its shortcomings while at the same time employing a realist mode in a subversive and playful manner. Postmodern novel, therefore, oscillates between realism as a literary convention and its subversion. Stating that postmodern novels are often metafictional in their form, Patricia Waugh suggests that "metafiction explicitly lays bare the conventions of realism; it does not ignore or abandon them. Very often realist conventions supply the 'control' in metafictional texts, the norm of background against which the experimental strategies can foreground themselves" ("What is Metafiction" 53). In this respect, any critique of realism is spoken from within realism itself, when the postmodern novel becomes predominantly self-reflexive, rather than a reflective mode of narrative. Thus,

postmodernism is a critical reflection concerning the descriptions of what is real and how such descriptions make sense in the framework of literary expressions. One of the critiques against postmodernism is that postmodernism relies

> heavily upon the broad changes with respect to social and political conditions and involving information society, secularization (loss of a telos), cultural democracy, the hybridization of cultures, and other thematic issues. The awareness of these changes has destroyed the traditional forms of legitimation. Exposure to the idea that no final legitimation is available anymore, however, did in practice *not* lead to the conclusion that all literary conventions are in principle arbitrary – that "anything goes" whatever one wishes to write. (Fokkema 22)

Rather, what postmodernism proposes is that each and every convention should be rethought and reworked in the contemporary context, that their shortcomings as conventions should be realized, and that one should never feel secure about their representational adequacy or accuracy. Mikhail Bakhtin argues that "[t]he novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and languages; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its peculiar structure, re-formulating and re-accentuating them" (*Dialogic Imagination* 4). In fact, Bakhtin's account needs one addition: the novel in the postmodern mode not only parodies other genres but it also parodies the novel genre itself, exposing its conventions, rewriting and reworking them from within. Bakhtin further maintains that "the novel – its text as well as the theory connected with it – emerges consciously and unambiguously as a genre that is *both critical and self-critical*" (*Dialogic Imagination* 266) (emphasis mine). While it is critical of previous art forms or other works, its critical gaze is also turned unto its own peculiar characteristics and conventions. This is valid not only for the postmodern novels but also for some of the earliest examples of the genre. While it is true that the emergence of the novel in the eighteenth century is related to realism in terms of form, it is a one-sided and incomplete account of the whole picture. Especially in the eighteenth century one can find a strong tendency to experiment with the link between fact and fiction, and an insistence to focus on the nature of fiction writing, observable most overtly in earlier works such as Diderot's *Jacques le Fatalist* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote,* and also in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy,* all of which are often considered either as anachronistically postmodern, or as the

forerunners of postmodernism. According to Robert Alter, "Sterne is one of the shrewdest literary critics of his century, and a central insight to his novel is that any literary convention means a schematization – and thus a misinterpretation – of reality. *Tristram Shandy* abundantly illustrates; moreover, that a new 'authentic' literature liberated from conventions is a sheer impossibility" (33). Thus, if realism is the convention to be worked through and with, then, experimentalism does not necessarily cancel out realism. There is a symbiotic relationship between realism and experimentalism, and between realism and postmodernism. Realism is not obliterated but put under erasure by the postmodern writers. Therefore, postmodern fiction both inscribes and undermines realist conventions. Hutcheon contends that **"**[i]n both fiction and history writing today, our confidence in empiricist and positivist epistemologies has been shaken – shaken, but perhaps not yet destroyed. And this is what accounts for the skepticism rather than any real denunciation; it also accounts for the defining paradoxes of postmodern discourse" (*A Poetics* 106). In a similar fashion, Molly Hite suggests that

> [t]he continuing controversy over whether postmodern fiction can have moral and political implications revolves around the question of whether only certain conventions of representation – realist or, on occasion modernist conventions – are capable of evoking "real world" concerns. The defining condition of postmodern textual strategies is of course that they disrupt precisely these conventions. (699-700)

Likewise, as stated by Bergonzi, conventions can be "used and modified, and extended but never completely escaped" (56). Yet, it should also be noted that these conventions are never naively employed in postmodern writing. So, as far as postmodern novels are concerned, the conventions are disrupted, yet are not destroyed; they are dislocated from their familiar usage, they are not terminated. As Patricia Waugh argues, as far as postmodernism in literature is concerned, "[w]hat began to emerge was a tendency or mood [...] which involved an intense sense of dissatisfaction or loss of faith in the forms of representation, the political and cultural practices, associated with Modernism and modernity" (Introduction 3). That is why postmodernism – and postmodern fiction, in particular – is often considered to be anti-mimetic, anti-realist. However, this dissertation aims to show that although "forms of representation" are problematic and are thoroughly problematized in postmodern literature, postmodernism is by no means

devoid of conventions and representational tools. Rather, postmodernism posits a critical interrogation of these conventions from within. As Baudrillard contends, "[t]he rhetoric of the real meant that the status of the latter had been gravely menaced (the golden age is that of language's innocence, where it does not have to add an 'effect of reality' to what is said" (142). Yet, in an age of lost innocence, realism becomes a postmodern realism: one that still uses certain conventions such as characterization and attention to detail, yet one that is painfully aware of the limitations of such conventions. So, postmodern realism uses the realist conventions only to point at their problematic nature, acknowledging the inevitability of the embeddedness of these conventions within the novel genre. All of these require a new approach to the evaluation of postmodern novels, especially within the British context. As such,

> A new approach should consider (1) whether some British novels are constructing a new form of Realism itself, one in a long line of Realist re-visionings in British fiction; (2) whether this new postmodern Realism upholds a mimetic aesthetic goal while paradoxically recognizing the demise of the Real; and thus (3) whether what separates 'traditionalism' from 'postmodernism' in some British fiction is not the mimetic premise of the former, but the different ontological bases of each, different worlds that both forms attempt to record and reconstruct. (Elias 10)

According to Harvey Brown, in the postmodern mode, "[t]he key question is no longer *what* the universal real, beautiful, or true is. Instead, the focus in on *how* reality and truth are constructed, both aesthetically and socially, in specific historical contexts" ("Realism" 135). Therefore, each historical moment or aesthetic movement produces its own version of (or way of representing) reality within literature. As J.P. Stern states, "[e]very age … has its own realism" (89). The realism of the postmodern moment is multi-layered, controversial, and critical, because reality itself is regarded as a discursively constructed, multifaceted concept. According to Cairns Craig, "[t]his 'constructivist' conception of our reality is often held to justify the playfulness of postmodernist art, which recognizes that its business is no longer to give an account of the 'real' but to play interesting games with the *possible*" (232). Since there are not one but many facets to "the *possible*," the representations become manifold as well. Thus, the ways of representing the pluralistic reality requires pluralistic realisms. Moreover,

realism itself is not a stable concept, but one whose meaning alters, according to what it comes to signify for its practitioners, in different periods or movements; "[r]ealism appears as rationality to classicism, as irrationality to romanticism, [and] as objectivity to nineteenth-century naturalism" (Hauser 720). When it comes to the postmodern age, then, realism comes to denote as well as connote something different than it did in the previous centuries, and it has undergone various modifications in time. As John Richetti argues,

> The "realism" that literary criticism has long attributed to the eighteenth-century novel may also need reconsideration, since the reality that these novels seem to mirror (or to dramatize as *real*) is decidedly not like our own and the individuals whom such fiction presents may share less with late twentieth-century persons in the developed Western world than we have been led to believe. (2)

Although realism sets out to meet certain claims, such as presenting the world as it is without any decoration or deviation from the truth, in reality when it comes to applying these "rules" into their writing, the novelists are faced with a problem. The problem of an accurate representation of reality within the novel genre has already been acknowledged in the nineteenth century where realism had its peak. In his "Art of Fiction," Henry James, for example, argued that "[t]he only reason for the existence of the novel is that it does attempt to represent life … The characters, the situation, which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one most, *but the measure of reality is very difficult to fix*" (63) (emphasis mine). Likewise, in *Adam Bede*, George Eliot drew attention to this difficulty while at the same time coming up with what is indeed required of the narrator: "[t]he mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath" (147).[14] The mirror, indeed, has been a very explicitly applied metaphor which is used to explain the ways in which realism claims to function. However, the mirror image also presents a deeper problem embedded within this claim. As Lilian Furst argues,

> Because of its potential for distortion, the mirror is a most dubious emblem with which to validate this concept of the novel as a human document, based on

observation and verifiable data, in which "*all is true.*" A mirror image has its parts reversed by an intervening axis or plane. "Mirror" is also etymologically connected to "mirage," through their common derivation from the Latin *mirare,* which means "to wonder" at as well as "to look at." So the word may connote to an optical illusion rather than the true picture that the realists claimed in their usage. Their attraction to this image serves to bring out their con-fusion of illusion and truth, their desire to pass illusion off as truth. (9)

So, even when the realist writer claims that he or she is turning a mirror to reality in order to reflect it truthfully, it is evident that the medium – the mirror – prevents such an unproblematic, seamless reflection. In this respect, it may be suggested that the truth-claims of the novelist also become highly problematic. The mirror image used in the nineteenth-century novelists still prevails, but with a twist. The mirror used by the postmodern writers is a two-way one: it enables one to see, but it also enables the one that sees to be seen. In the postmodern novels, this is presented as a problem. As Larry McCaffrey contends,

> Fiction cannot hope to mirror reality or tell the truth because "reality" and "truth" are themselves fictional abstractions whose validity has become increasingly suspect as this century has proceeded. Consequently we find that these works usually include a reflexive irony which mocks the realistic claims of artistic significance and truth; they also insist that the reader accept the work as an invented, purely made-up entity. (*The Metafictional Muse* 5)

Thus, postmodern fictions always expose their textual content as a constructed entity. The mirror is indeed turned inwards, towards the generic and formal qualities of the novel genre. This inward-directed look is mingled with the realistic claims. Indeed, what can be thought of as the binding dominant in postmodern fiction can be seen in the way these novels deal with/conceptualize/position themselves in relation to realism. Therefore, postmodern fiction can also be called a mode of writing which functions within postmodern realism. According to Harvey Brown, "[t]he interesting question is not *whether* there is truth, reality, or virtue independent of all possible accounts of it, but *how* such accounts are made adequate to their respective purposes and publics through poetic and political practices" ("Postmodern" 6). This is the core of the postmodern debate, which is projected in postmodern realism most appropriately.

Postmodern realism manifests itself in three basic ways; in its treatment of history, the treatment of "the subject," and the treatment of the writing form, pointing to the representational power of writing and the use of rewriting within the novel genre. These treatments are different in each novel, yet, all of them employ similar strategies to attest to such treatment.

Strategies employed in postmodern novels are rewriting, intertextuality, pastiche, parody, fragmentation, and merging of the factual with the fictive. In addition to socio-political implications of such employment, these strategies function as a means of constructing a hybrid form, which can be called postmodern realism. While being embedded in the concerns of postmodern writing such as fragmentation and playfulness, these novels are also engaged in a serious mode of combining the realist conventions/concerns with the contemporary problematics of these concerns, the result of which is a blending of the two.

Lilian Furst suggests that "the introduction of factual elements into realist fiction is one of its primary devices to buttress its authenticity as 'truth'" (11). In postmodern novels, the insertion of factual elements has just the opposite effect. Instead of asserting an authenticity, these elements function as a means of pinpointing the constructed nature of any text, even when the text makes reference to real historical figures. These elements then become the pointers of the problematic representation of the real.

In the postmodern mode, the real is understood as discursive, i.e. as linguistic representation; it is seen as a text to be interpreted, nevertheless, "despite recent attempts to displace or undermine the idea of realism as outdated or infected by humanist ideology, its use still persist, most of the fiction we read […] is realist in orientation" (Walder 17). Postmodern representations of reality and their problematizations manifest themselves in postmodern novels in various ways such as the authors' entering into the text, that is, the intrusion of a "factual being into a 'fictional' landscape" (McHale 703), and *mis-en-abyme*. As T. V. Reed argues, postmodern realism is "a self-conscious, ironic, politically engaged mode of writing," and that postmodern realism "employs the self-reflexive, realism-disturbing techniques

of modernism and postmodernism, but places these techniques in tension with the realist claims to represent and intervene in political life" (157). Therefore, realism in the postmodern mode both installs and contests the realist conventions. The necessity of such double rendering can be explained by acknowledging the necessity of conventions *per se.* As Jonathan Culler suggests in *Structuralist Poetics,*

> [t]o write a poem or a novel is immediately to engage with a literary tradition or at the very least with a certain idea of the poem or the novel. The activity is made possible by the existence of the genre, which the author can write against, certainly, whose conventions he may attempt to subvert, but which is none the less the concept within which his activity takes place. (116)

Because the postmodern novel displays an overt challenge and problematization of established conventions, it is often regarded as a "flight from realism." The distinction between rational and irrational, appearance and reality, interior and exterior, and fact and fiction has begun to evaporate due to the ideas brought forth by several theories which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, especially the post-structuralist theory. Significantly, the post-structuralist critiques of language have paved the way for the postmodern understanding (or problematization of) reality. The post-structuralist understanding that the relationship between text and world is highly problematic, "not because texts reflect or imitate reality but because reality is inevitably experienced as *textualized*" (Hite 700), becomes one of the postulates of the postmodern thought as well. However, it must be acknowledged that although postmodernism and post-structuralism share common grounds of understanding, it would be a mistake to consider them essentially equivalent: it must be noted that "while post-structuralism is a way of reading, postmodernism is a way of thinking" (Oppermann 124). Likewise, Ben Agger contends that

> Where poststructuralism suggests the ways in which language encodes and constitutes meaning, shattering the positivist model of a language user who plucks signifiers out of thin air and attaches them unproblematically to discrete things-in-the-world, postmodernism provides a larger philosophy of history within which it is no longer possible to project the possibility of substantive social change. (110)

As such, post-structuralism stands against the idea that language objectively reflects reality. Instead, it postulates that language cannot possibly refer to any thing other than itself. Seen as such, language is deprived of its privileged position to convey reality. If that is the case, then narratives which claim to mirror reality are deprived of their position, too. Likewise, as Grice and Woods suggest, "[r]ather than just being perceived as the creative imaginations and records of daily life, narratives and stories now become the important sites of political and social action. Everything is now seen to be mediated, textualized, […] reality is now put in quotation marks – 'reality'" (31). In this sense, the fundamental premise of realism, i.e. truthful mirroring or representation of the real, is also *sous rature*: it is not abolished altogether, yet, its shortcomings in representing an external reality is also acknowledged. Since language is no longer able to reach out and present reality in any accurate sense, its representations in literature become problematic as well. This is where postmodernism and post-structuralism overlap.

In fact, this relationship between postmodernism and post-structuralism is more evident when what Steven Best and Douglas Kellner call the "linguistic turn" is taken into consideration:

> It is the linguistic turn that shattered realistic assumptions about language, knowledge, and representation. The linguistic turn is an explicit realization that (1) the primary way human beings know and participate in their world is through language and (2) different linguistic maps bring different senses of reality and claims to truth. The linguistic turn, therefore, is the eruption into human consciousness of perspectival, contextual, and contingent nature of all truth claims. Language does not represent reality; rather, it shapes and constructs it, refracting the light of the world through its unique phonetic and conceptual prisms. (259-60)

Although language seems to have been deprived of its previous secure position during the postmodern mode, it does not mean that it is altogether deemed useless. Moreover, it does not mean that there is no possibility of truth in postmodernism or postmodern writing. There is a common misconception about the position taken by the postmodern writers or thinkers as if they constituted a unified group. There are, in fact, two camps in the first of which there are theorists "who reject truth, objectivity, and meaning altogether in favor of an ultraskepticism and relativism" (Best and Kellner 257), and the

second one includes theorists "who want to reconstruct modern epistemological concepts to provide new normative foundations for philosophy, social theory, and critique" (Best and Kellner 258). Evidently, in this dissertation, the second position is taken. As such, the use of the term postmodern realism refers to a new formulation of the concept of reality as represented within the novel form. This new formulation both uses and abuses the realist conventions while at the same time being very much informed by the concerns of the postmodern era. In order to elucidate this new formulation, one should look at the novels written in the second half of the twentieth century.

There have been various other alternatives as representative novels, or novels to be used as case studies, other than the ones in this study, as well as numerous other novelists available in the plethora of contemporary British literature. So the choice may seem rather arbitrary. However random the choice may seem, though, it was a deliberate one. A thorough analysis of the emanation of postmodern realism in contemporary British novel is possible only when the divergent and multicultural (as well as the multilayered) nature of the contemporary literary milieu is taken into consideration. Therefore, the novels of Jeanette Winterson, Alasdair Gray, and Peter Ackroyd are selected on the grounds that they come to represent quite discernibly the hybrid mode of "postmodern realism."

The novels analyzed in this study were selected as exemplary cases, especially for their openness to a critical interrogation, although they have not attracted as much critical attention as the other novels of the authors. With the exception of *Sexing the Cherry* by Jeanette Winterson, the other two, namely, Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things,* and Peter Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers*, are *not* considered to be their author's most acknowledged and critically acclaimed works. In the case of Alasdair Gray, it is his *Lanark* that has often been given much attention in critical debates. And, as far as Peter Ackroyd is concerned, most of the academic study focusing on his works is either on *Chatterton,* or *Hawksmoor,* but not on *The Plato Papers,* which has been usually ignored or dismissed for not having enough artistic value. *Poor Things* and *The Plato Papers'* having been neglected is one of the reasons for selecting them as case studies. As for *Sexing the*

Cherry, it may be argued that it is a most "exhausted" novel, because it has been the subject-matter of many a study and criticism. However, it has mostly been discussed or analyzed within the framework of either feminist writing or lesbian politics, and never within the argument of postmodern realism, even though its postmodernist mode has been discussed in the critical arena.

Postmodern realism manifests itself in Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* especially through the novel's employment of the *mise-en-abyme* technique, rewriting of history, and the prevalent use of intertextuality within the framework of historiographic metafiction. Peter Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers* is also concerned with historical representation and the problematization of the possibility of what *really* happened in the past. In this novel historiography and fiction writing blend and fuse to create a subversion of familiar realistic approaches to history. Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*, on the other hand, is more concerned with the mechanisms of textuality through its employment of postmodern parody of the narratives of epistolary novel, as well as Mary Shelley's gothic fiction *Frankenstein.* The critical evaluation of these novels reveals both the problematization and the interrogation of realist conventions in the novel genre from a postmodern perspective. Therefore, both the real and the textual are contested by way of laying bare the problematic relationship between the text and reality it is supposed to be mirroring, as well as the formal mechanisms of the novel genre through playful yet serious subversions of them from within these mechanisms themselves.

At the focal point of *Sexing the Cherry, Poor Things,* and *The Plato Papers* is a problematization of the position of the narrator. Long gone is the reliable narrator who functions as god in the text. He is replaced with an ever ambiguous, ever evasive, and ever unreliable voice that is constantly undermined either by the presence of other narrative voices or by the ontological precariousness of his position.

Both Gray and Ackroyd have repeatedly shown their reluctance to be labeled as "postmodern" authors. Rather, they claimed to be writing from a broader perspective which defies the limitations and, from their view, pretences of postmodernism. In a

similar fashion, instead of citing herself within the rank of authors such as Fowles, Rushdie, or Pynchon, Winterson has also claimed to be heir to Woolf and Eliot both of whom are modernists. However reluctant these three authors are to be called "postmodern," their writing style and the techniques they employ are still very much informed by the concerns of postmodern writing as well as the issues raised within this mode of writing. One way of solving this paradoxical situation, then, is to see the ways these authors combine and expand the two seemingly oppositional heritages of writing and an inscribed rootedness in the more conventional/realist fiction writing. A.S. Byatt suggests that "much formal innovation in recent English fiction has concerned itself, morally and aesthetically, with its forebearers" (21). Thus, all three of these authors are, in fact, writing within and from the framework of postmodern realism.

The current debates on the use and abuse of realism as a literary convention in postmodern British fiction and the argument that realism is still prevalent in the novel genre comprise the main body of this study. To this end, this dissertation includes an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion.

The first chapter analyzes Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* as a historiographic metafiction, and it specifically emphasizes the use of *mise en-abyme* and intertextuality in *Sexing the Cherry* within the context of postmodern realism. To this end, specific attention is paid to the rewriting of the fairy tale of "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," to the narratives of Jordan and the Dog Woman, who are the main narrators, and to the use and abuse of historical data, which is especially evident in the seventeenth-century background of the novel.

The second chapter concentrates on Alasdair Gray's *The Poor Things* in terms of its rewriting of Mary Shelley's gothic novel *Frankenstein*, and its reconstruction of a world of conflicting narratives. Gray's novel goes beyond a mere rewriting and posits itself as a postmodern realist text as it combines realist conventions, i.e. attention to detail, thorough descriptions and characterization with overt postmodern techniques, i.e. self-reflexivity, irony, and the insertion of intertextual references

The third chapter focuses on Peter Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers.* This novel is overtly concerned with the problematization of the possibility of knowing what *really* happened in the past. This is achieved through the employment of postmodern parody which functions as a means of subverting historical representations.

The selected novels of Jeanette Winterson, Alasdair Gray, and Peter Ackroyd all share a concern of how empirical reality can or cannot be represented within fiction. These novels embody the postmodern critique of realism both through a subversion of it as a convention, and as an insertion of it as an indispensable part of the novel genre in British fiction. They do not abandon the realistic mode; on the contrary, they reiterate and thus reinforce the realist conventions in their obviously postmodern structures. However, they do it in an overtly displayed subversive mode of writing, which is typical of postmodern novels. Through an analysis of Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry,* Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things,* and Peter Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers,* this dissertation concludes that although postmodernism is often regarded as a flight from realism, realism in British postmodern fiction as a mode of writing is still present, albeit in a contested and problematized way. Therefore, postmodernism is not a flight from realism, as it has been taken to be, but a fight with it from within, establishing a hybrid form that consists of both realist and postmodernist characteristics.

CHAPTER I

"I'M TELLING YOU STORIES, TRUST ME:" JEANETTE WINTERSON'S *SEXING THE CHERRY*

> *Time present and time past*
> *Are both perhaps present in time future,*
> *And time future contained in time past.*
> (T.S. Eliot, "Four Quartets")

Jeanette Winterson entered into the British literary scene in 1985 with her first novel *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit.* A semi-autobiographical work, which focuses on the life of a girl called Jeanette and her eventual "expulsion" from the Pentecostal community of which she was part due to her "dangerous liaison" with a girl, *Oranges* was an immediate success, earning Winterson the Whitbred Award for a first novel. Later, the novel was adapted for television by Winterson herself; and this adaptation won the BAFTA for Best Drama.

Her second novel, *Boating for Beginners,* was also published in 1985. Yet, Winterson regards this work "lightly," and argues that "I do know that this book was written for money in 6 weeks. Nothing wrong with that. I never write *my real books* for money, but I have no problem writing anything else with the bug in my mind" ("*Boating*") (emphasis mine). In this respect, *Boating for Beginners* is mostly excluded from her literary achievements although the book obviously has a lot to recommend itself in terms of its employment of postmodern parody and rewriting whether it is written for money or not.

The success Jeanette Winterson achieved with *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* was enhanced in 1987, with the publication of her next novel, *The Passion,* which is the winner of the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. This novel comprises of the alternating narratives of Henri, who serves Napoleon as his cook, and Villanelle, a web-footed girl with whom Henri falls in love. Winterson strengthened her stance as a full-scale writer with *The Passion*. Her other novels are *Sexing the Cherry* (1989) (winner of the E.M. Forster Award), *Written on the Body* (1992), *Art and Lies* (1994), *Gut Symmetries* (1997), *Power Book* (2000), *Lighthousekeeping* (2004), *Weight* (2005), and her latest novel to date is *The Stone Gods* (2007).[15]She collected her short stories in the book entitled *The World and Other Places* (1999), and she edited a collection of short stories by various authors including herself in *Midsummer Nights* in 2009. She is also the author of *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery* (1995), which is a collection of essays, as well as of *King of Capri* (2004)*,* and *Tanglewreck* (2006), *The Lion, The Unicorn and Me: The Donkey's Christmas Story* (2009), and *The Battle of the Sun* (2009) which are children's books.

The reception of Jeanette Winterson's novels in the literary circles was a mixed one. Her novels received both positive and negative critical attention. She was considered to be a very promising young writer in the 1980s. Charlotte Innes, for example, suggested that Winterson's entry into the literary scene is "a cause for rejoicing. Not only is she a lesbian whose work is informed by her lesbianism and a deeply feminist point of view, she is also a remarkable writer, and therefore accessible to anyone who loves prose that soars above the ordinary" (64). This positive reception continued throughout the 1980s. However, during the 1990s, after the publication of *Written on the Body* in 1992, the tide changed in a negative way. *Written* was dubbed as "the Great Bad Novel of the 90s" by Julie Burchill (qtd. in Onega, *Winterson* 5). For *Art and Lies,* Burchill also stated in *The Observer* that it is "a garish, artificial, bejewelled mechanical nightingale of a prose style" (26). Nicci Gerrard's negative remarks in the profile of Winterson in *The Observer* in 1994 were not helpful, either. In fact, this profile can be considered as the starting point of the clash between the media and Winterson, which continued for the most part of the 1990s.[16] Still, her novels became bestsellers both nationwide and on an international scale. At the beginning of 2000, with the publication of *Power Book,*

Winterson restored her "former glory." She seems to have made peace with the media. Nowadays, her focus has been directed at children's literature, and she is now widely recognized for her novels for children as well.[17]

As far as her reception as a writer is concerned, it can be said that she has been through a dramatic transformation from being the "1985s bright young thing through arrogant *enfant terrible* of the mid 1990s to kindly fairy mother in 2006 [with the publication of *Tanglewreck*]" (Andermahr 4). Thus, in the last three decades of the twentieth century, Winterson's reputation as a writer oscillates between opposite ends, and her scale of writing, as well as her stance within the literary milieu, covers a wide spectrum.

No matter what can be said about her reception, it remains true that Winterson has earned both national and international fame, and an interested reading public with her work. Although her reception has not always been positive, her novels, nevertheless, were widely read. This interest in Winterson's fiction can be explained with her choice of subject matter and her unique treatment of it.

The impact of her upbringing in a Pentecostal Evangelist family in her writing, and the resulting infatuation with the Bible and the Biblical stories observable in Winterson's work, have been noted by every critic commenting on her fiction. Yet, it is not the stories *per se* used in her novels that give her uniqueness, but the way she integrates them into the rubric of her overall writing style. Her style is unique because she combines different genres, styles, and forms, and she turns them into something both strangely familiar and new. It can even be argued that this combination results in a peculiar and particular hybrid form. This hybridity can be observed in Winterson's stylistic combination of "history to myth, aphorism to poetry and fairy tale to fact" (Thomson 2). It is autobiography and Biblical stories which are put together in *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*; in *The Passion,* history, passion, and magic are combined. Winterson comments on *The Passion* as follows: "I wanted to write a new fable and see how many rules you could break. To create a past that seemed authentic but would be a fiction, you need an invented language. I hated historical novels with fluttering cloaks" (qtd. in Jiggi, "Saturday"). In *Gut Symmetries,* there is a combination of science and

love. In *Power Book,* cyberspace and identity are addressed within the same storyline. In *Weight,* myth and autobiography are paralleled. And, in *The Stone Gods,* science, ecology, and history interact. In this respect, concepts or genres, which have not been thought of within the same context before, become closely associated with each other, whether in a positive or negative light, in Winterson's fiction. More importantly, her fiction, as Sonya Andermahr argues, "calls into question a whole host of cultural binaries such as fact/fiction, art/lies, history/story, science/magic, and male/female" (8). Her novels are almost always a blending of such opposites the result of which brings her in close proximity with the concerns of postmodern fiction, which has been known to have problematized these cultural binaries. Yet, in evaluating and commenting on Winterson's works, critics have often emphasized either her sexual orientation or her gender as the basis of her writing. Thus, the criticism is construed either upon a lesbian politics or on a feminist approach. For example, in her book *Heterosexual Plots, Lesbian Narratives,* Marilyn R. Farwell cites Winterson among the lesbian authors whose fiction reflects the thematic and ideological concerns of sexual orientation. In a similar fashion, Charlotte Innes argues that we witness in today's literary scene the arrival of groups of writers from "marginal" backgrounds dominating the field; "[t]he latest group of writers just beginning to have their sun in the literary sun are lesbians – that is, writers who are lesbian and whose work is obviously informed by it. Of these, Jeanette Winterson is an outstanding example" (64). Winterson's lesbian outlook overlaps with a feminist strategy of writing as well. Laura Doan, for example, argues that Winterson's fiction "mobilizes and animates a feminist political strategy of resistance, forcing and enforcing new mappings of the social and cultural order and providing alternatives to the weary boundaries and binaries of heterosexual patriarchal capitalist culture" (154). Even when her fiction is assessed within the framework of postmodernism, it is still somehow deeply related to lesbian or feminist concerns. In her book *Bodily Paradigms in Jeanette Winterson's Fiction,* Silvia Antosa, for example, contends that

> Winterson's combination of history, fictional stories and fairy-tales with an experimental style which privileged lyrical expression to "traditional" narrative, situates her work within postmodern fiction. Her deployment of postmodern techniques such as historiographic metafiction, parody, intertextuality, self-reflectivity, pastiche and rewriting of history, together with her interest in the

cultural constructedness of referentiality, are adopted mainly to challenge
patriarchal and heterosexual hegemonic discourses. (11-2)

Although Winterson is obviously nurtured both by her gender and her lesbianism, it would be rather restrictive to limit her work into an either/or dichotomy. Winterson herself is evidently disturbed by it since she says, "I am a writer who happens to love women, I am not a lesbian who happens to write" (*Art Objects* 104). Therefore, while it is true that her fiction definitely reflects certain feminist- or lesbian-oriented ideas or ideals, this assertion is irrelevant to the scope of this study. Rather, it must be stated that her fiction invites an in-depth theoretical argument, especially in relation to postmodern contestation of realism.

While it has been defined in various other ways as well, postmodern fiction is mainly about "the radicalization of incongruity, the transformation of actuality into possibility, and the multiplication of versions of the world, of the self, and of the story" (Hoffman 99). This statement is accurate and applicable to all of Winterson's novels to certain extents. In her novels, a concern with the usefulness of conventional realism is also evident. In *Passion,* for example, the repeated mantra of Henri is "I'm telling you stories, trust me." In *Lighthousekeeping,* the narrator says "[a] beginning, a middle and an end is the proper way to tell a story. But I have difficulty with that method" (23). These statements show how Winterson incorporates her concern with realism within the body of her fiction. Yet, such problematic positioning of realism is most overtly manifest in *Sexing the Cherry.* In Greg Clingham's words, *Sexing the Cherry* is

an elaborate, exotic, erotic tale set mainly in midseventeenth-century London but also in England of the 1980s. In temporal terms, the action starts in the 1640s, moves into a twilight world of myth, past and present, and ends (without conclusion) with a series of scenes alternating between the London of the 1660s – specifically the plague and the fire of London – and modern-day London. (59)

Plot-wise, *Sexing the Cherry* is the story of Jordan and the Dog Woman in seventeenth-century England, told through the alternating narratives of the two, and the story of their modern-day alter egos. Jordan is found by the Dog Woman, or "fished […] from the

stinking Thames," (11) as she calls it, and the Dog Woman is thus named because she breeds dogs for races. Together, they witness the arrival of foreign fruits, such as the banana and the pineapple, to England. Influenced by these, and because of his adventurous nature, Jordan decides to set sail and see the wonders of the world with John Tradescant, the King's gardener. Jordan gives accounts of his fantastic journeys to exotic places such as cities with no gravity, or cities whose citizens are forbidden to talk about love, and so on. At this time, the Dog Woman stays in England and joins in the battle between the Puritans and the King's men, supporting the latter. The second time-frame in the novel takes the reader to contemporary times in which the modern-day versions of Jordan and the Dog Woman show similarities in terms of character and name, or its lack thereof, to those of the seventeenth century. Modern-day Jordan, like his seventeenth-century equivalent, is curious about the wonders of the world. Yet, he satisfies his curiosity through his books, or through his visits to museums instead of experiencing them first-hand like Jordan of the seventeenth century does. Likewise, the modern day version of the Dog Woman is in a battle with the forces that are in power, only this time, they are not the Puritans but men in powerful positions, such as CEOs, high-ranking officers, high-rank military people, and politicians in influential places such as the World Bank and the Pentagon. The destinies, or paths, of the modern-day Jordan and the Dog Woman intersect as it does in the seventeenth-century time-frame, though, here, it is not a mother-son relationship. Instead, Jordan becomes an ally in the nameless female scientist's battle against mercury poisoning in the rivers caused by big factories and companies. The novel ends with the words of Jordan of the seventeenth century, alluding to T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets," on the human perception of "the future," and "the past," and how it all amounts to what the human mind makes of them: "[t]he future and the present and the past exist only in our minds" (144). Thus, it does not necessarily arrive at a closure, but leaves room for various possibilities of imagination.

In the novel, the characters start their narrations by revealing their names. Yet, there is a striking difference between the way Jordan and the Dog Woman conduct this. In Jordan's case, his name is revealed clearly: "My name is Jordan and this is the first thing I saw" (9). In the Dog Woman's case, no proper name is given; instead, a nick

name is provided: "I had a name but I have forgotten it. They call me the Dog Woman and it will do" (11). In the twentieth-century equivalent of the seventeenth-century characters, there is also a revelation of names. In addition to revealing his name, Jordan summarizes himself in a nutshell as follows:

> Nicholas Jordan. Five foot ten. Dark. Makes model boats and sails them at the weekend. Best friend Jack. No brothers or sisters. Parents can't afford a telescope. Has a book instead on how to navigate by the stars, and a pair of binoculars on a khaki strap. That's all there is to say about me. On the outside, anyway. (114)

There is also a description instead of a name for the female scientist: "I am a woman going mad, I am a woman hallucinating" (121).[18] In this respect, just like her seventeenth-century counterpart, this woman is deprived of a proper name which, in return, suggests that she is deprived of a secure position of identity. In accordance with the idea of postmodern subjectivity, her position in the text cannot be explained in terms of "individuality" or "character," but in terms of multiple selves. This assertion holds true for other characters in the novel as well. Because the modern day characters are considered to be the alter egos of the seventeenth-century ones, a consideration which refers to the multiplicity of selves, they can be considered as "postmodern subjects." According to Linda Hutcheon, the postmodern subject is

> something in process, never as fixed and never as autonomous, outside history. It is always gendered subjectivity, rooted also in class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. And it is usually textual self-reflexivity that paradoxically calls these worldly particularities to our attention by foregrounding the *doxa*, the unacknowledged politics, behind the dominant representations of the self and the other – in visual images or in narratives. (*The Politics* 39-40)

In a similar fashion, Alison Lee contends that "[p]ostmodern texts place the subject firmly within political, social, class, racial, and gender forces acting upon him/her" (xi). This is highly significant since postmodernism points at the idea that there is no fixed, knowable identity outside of the discourses made about those identities. The ramifications of Hutcheon's remark can be observed in the portrayal of the Dog Woman and Jordan since both of them are situated in relation to their gender (or the

problematics of their gender), which defies the conventional conceptualization as well as the textualization of gender roles and gender-appropriate behavior. This problematics is reinforced by the use of unconventional graphic representations for each character: a pineapple for Jordan, and a banana for the Dog Woman, both of which are conventionally associated with the male and the female, though in reverse order. Even the names of the characters become part of their discursive construction because "the Dog Woman," "Jordan," as well as "Fortunata," the dancer whom Jordan seeks, have connotative meanings that transcend being mere names. The names of the Dog Woman, Jordan, and Fortunata, as well as the namelessness of the female scientist have symbolic significance. Yet, their characters are more defined by the discourses made about them.

One particular example in the novel in which the characters are defined through the discourses made about them can be observed in the Dog Woman's definition of Jordan's character. The river, or the water in a more general sense, becomes the defining characteristic of Jordan, pointing at his openness to change, and at his unbounded nature:

> I call him Jordan and it will do. He has no other name before or after. What was there to call him, fished as he was from the stinking Thames? A child cannot be called Thames, no and not Nile either, for all his likeness to Moses. But I wanted to give him a river name, a name not bound to anything, just as the waters aren't bound to anything. (11)

The Dog Woman is also aware of Jordan's elusiveness because she regrets her choice of name since Jordan eventually leaves her: "I should have named him after a stagnant pond and then I could have kept him, but I named him after a river and in the flood-tide he slipped away" (11). In contrast to Jordan's "fluidity," the Dog Woman seems bound to the place she was born in. She does not leave England, neither literally nor metaphorically.

The title of the book comes from an incident that passes between Jordan and the Dog Woman in which they try to graft a cherry tree. Jordan defines grafting as: "the means whereby a plant, perhaps tender or uncertain, is fused into a hardier member of its

strain, and so the two take advantage of each other and produce a third kind" (78). While this incident is usually considered to be a reference to the ambiguity of gender prevalent throughout the novel, it should also, and more significantly, be taken as a reference to the superposition of realist and postmodernist modes of writing. In a similar fashion, Michael Gorra suggests that *Sexing the Cherry* "grafts together not just those two voices [voices of the Dog Woman and Jordan], but different narrative modes as well" (24). In this respect, the grafting of the cherry can be taken as a metaphorical rendition of what postmodern realism is about, because postmodern realism can be regarded as the product of a grafting between postmodernism and realism in which the result is, likewise, a third kind. Postmodern realism combines the ideological, technical, and thematic concerns of realism such as characterization and historical contextualization with an overtly postmodern awareness of the problematic nature of these concerns, thereby creating an "unnatural" third kind, which is both technically engaged in the reality effect while at the same time undermining the very effect it builds in a very postmodern manner. As such, underneath such a seemingly simple plot in *Sexing the Cherry* lies a rich treatment, and problematics of fiction writing, the novel genre, and the concept of realism from a postmodern perspective. This is most evident when its being a historiographic metafiction is taken into consideration.

As Greg Clingham argues, "[r]ather than offering itself as a teleologically belated comment on an already-formed historical past, *Sexing the Cherry* retells the past (and does so deliberately) so as to suggest an always-already engaged nexus of textuality and historical truth" (66). This retelling is realized in *Sexing the Cherry* mostly because it falls under the category of historiographic metafiction, which is a particular combination of historiography and metafiction. Metafiction can be defined as a form of postmodern fiction "which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh, "What is Metafiction" 40). Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris define historiography as "the study of the way history has been and is written – the history of historical writing," and they add that "[w]hen you study 'historiography' you do not study the events of the past directly, but the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians" (223).

Historiographic metafiction, which is coined by Linda Hutcheon in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism,* refers to "novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5). In this rendition, therefore, the attention is in two directions. Historiographic metafictions are aware of their fictionality, hence their constructedness and they also draw upon recorded historical events, and thus, they are situated in a historical matrix. *Sexing the Cherry* works on this double mode; and as Helena Grice and Tim Woods suggest, this novel is "about the insertion of fantasy into what is taken to be reality, or history, and the supposed fixed opposition of these three categories" (35). Thus, the distinction between these is openly blurred. Moreover, *Sexing the Cherry* is also about the insertion of "factuality" into what is taken to be fantasy, hence working through a double-coding.[19]

Historiographic metafictions make use of real historical characters and events. In *Sexing the Cherry*, for example, Charles I, John Tradescant, the Puritans, Oliver Cromwell are part of the narrative. Also, there are intertextual references to Francis Drake, William the Conqueror, Christopher Columbus, Lord Nelson, the English Civil War, and the Great Fire of London.

Hence, *Sexing the Cherry* is closely related to historical "reality" in its representation of it through the insertion of intertextual references to real people and the insertion of historically documented data. However, this historical reality and the reality of the novel are not the same thing. Hutcheon further argues that the world created by the novel genre

> has direct links to the world of empirical reality, but it is not itself that reality. It's a contemporary critical truism that realism is a set of conventions, that representation of the real is not the same as the real itself. What historiographic metafiction challenges is both any naïve realist concept of representation and also any equally naïve textualist or formalist assertion of the total separation of art from the world. (*A Poetics* 125)

Thus, historiographic metafictions question the naïve assumptions about the representational power of the novel genre, and they also challenge the assumption that

the world of the novel and the empirical world are completely different and separate entities. That is why the technical properties of the novel are laid bare – hence, the metafictional elements – and historical figures are integrated into the novel – hence, the historiographic elements. Historiographic metafiction can, in fact, be seen as a challenge to the separation of history and literature as distinct branches of study. It is a separation which considers the first as truthful, real, objective, and scientific while it regards the latter as fictive, subjective, and unscientific. The difference between history and literature has always been debated since the ancient times.[20] It has been also foregrounded in Leopold von Ranke's "scientific history" in the nineteenth century. Ranke argues that history should concentrate on "*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*," which can be literally translated as "how it actually has been" (vii). But, in order to tell how things have actually been, the historian relies on narrative and language, and thus, he blurs the distinction between history and fiction. This so-called difference between narrating history and storytelling in terms of their reliance on different epistemological systems has also been problematized by Hayden White. He argues that historical reality cannot escape the narrative tools used by literature, which is almost always juxtaposed to history in terms of their representational "powers" of reality, hence remarking the "ineluctability of figuration in the representation of historical reality" (White, "The Real" 16). In this respect, history as such is not so much of an objective science but rather, the historical "truth" it is supposed to have is a combination of "narrative choices and fictionalizing tropes" (Clingham 66). Therefore, history and fiction 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*. (Hutcheon, *A Poetics* 105) (emphasis mine)

In this sense, history cannot claim to attain a higher truth value compared to that of literature because its construction, too, is based on language, and it, too, has a conventionalized form of writing. History is also limited with and by language since language is the sole medium of communication. Thus, history becomes a textual artifact shaped by language. According to Alison Lee,

> the Realist aesthetic tended to distinguish between "lying" literature and "true,"
> "objective" history, and to ascribe a positive moral value to the fact. History was
> seen as accessible as pure fact, independent of individual perception, ideology, or
> the process of selection necessitated simply by creating a written narrative. (29)

In fact, here, Lee echoes the fundamental objections raised by Hayden White and various other theorists on the supposed superiority of history over fiction writing on the ground that history writing, too, necessitates the basic tool of fiction, that is, narration, and since both history and fiction make use of the same means, they cannot be at the opposing ends of the scale of truth-telling and lying. Historiographic metafiction, thus, is the grounds on which this dichotomic relationship between fact and fiction, history and literature is problematized.

Historiographic metafictions also have a deliberate focus on their ontological status as artifacts, as fictional works, or as written documents. Hutcheon contends that the "reality to which the language of historiographic metafiction refers is always primarily the reality of the discursive act itself (hence its designation as metafiction) but also to the reality of other past discursive acts (historiography)" (*A Poetics* 151). In *Sexing the Cherry,* this focus is realized through the insertion of meditations on the nature of time, identity, gender, and reality as well as through a problematization of the ability of language to transmit any given message clearly, or to create meaning. Moreover, the novel becomes a tapestry of a blending of the real and the fictive in order to highlight the problematic relationship between these two. This quality is one of the distinctive characteristics of Winterson's fiction in general. Similar overlapping of the real and the imagined can be observed in many of her novels. In *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit,* for example, there is a subversive and parodic reworking of the Biblical stories aligned with a mixture of several different forms such as myths, dreams, and fairy tales. Likewise, in *Boating for Beginners*, the Flood myth is rewritten in a playful and parodic manner. In *Passion,* the Napoleonic era is retold from the viewpoint of Henri, who, instead of concentrating on the achievements of Napoleon as a leader and war hero, foregrounds Napoleon's passion for chicken. In *Art and Lies,* Handel, Picasso, and Sappho, all of

whom are actual figures from history, are cast as characters who tell their "own" "story."

In *Sexing the Cherry,* in the Dog Woman's account, the historical events which took place during and after the reign of Charles I are intertwined with her personal history. Jordan's narrative, too, starts off with his first encounter with the spectacle created by the arrival of the first pineapple to England, and with his acquaintance with John Tradescant, who is the gardener of the king. Nevertheless, his account is also nurtured, for the most part, by his meditative thinking, his fantastic encounters with fictional characters in exotic – and almost always imaginary – places. Comparatively speaking, while the Dog Woman's physique is larger than life, Jordan's encounters and narrative are larger than life. Yet, when it comes to their narrative styles, it is the Dog Woman's which is down to earth, realistic, and even factual in the conventional sense. The tension rests on the juxtaposition between the down-to-earth account of the Dog Woman and the more meditative, on-the-verge-of-fantasy account of Jordan. As Greg Clingham points out, "[t]he two sets of characters … seem to have an undisclosed yet vital transhistorical connection with each other" (59-60). In this respect, these narrators, although different from each other, do not clash with or obliterate one another; rather, they complement each other's story-line, creating a complex set of events loosely attached to the plot.

In the accounts of both narrators, the "story" is incorporated with "history," thereby going back to the French root of the word, i.e. in French, *histoire* denotes both "history" and "story." Similarly, the use of the word "history" in English alludes both meanings, that is, both history proper and history as story, depending on the context. Brenda Marshall suggests that "the historiographic metafictionist refuses the possibility of looking to and writing about the past 'as it really was.' Rather s/he takes on an active role, and 'does' the past, participates, questions and interrogates" (151). Likewise, in *Sexing the Cherry,* Jeanette Winterson rewrites the seventeenth century both in terms of history and in terms of inscribing the stories of her fictional characters. She comments on her choice of setting, and suggests that the past serves for her as a canvas to write upon:

> I set it in the seventeenth century, around the beheading of Charles the First. I had more to do exploring the past as energetic space. I wanted to build another word-dependent world, not restricted by either realism or contemporaneity. The past is strange. We have never been there and we can never go there. I have never recognized the past as a document, rather I understood it as a kind of lumber room, full of trunks of old clothes and odd mementoes. There are as many narratives as there are guesses. ("*Sexing*")

In this respect, the past becomes a rich plateau of possibilities in which what might have happened becomes as important as what really happened in the process of rewriting that past from the present. In the novel, at the background of the plot is the rule of Charles I, and his conflict with the Parliament, which eventually leads to his trial and ends in his being decapitated. In the Dog Woman's words, what led to such events is as follows:

> As far as I know it, and I have only a little learning, the King had been forced to call a Parliament to grant him money for his war against the kilted beasts and their savage ways. Savage to the core, and the poor King only to make them use a proper prayer book. They wouldn't have his prayer book and in a most unchristian manner threatened his throne. The King, turning to his own people, found himself with a Parliament full of puritans who wouldn't grant him money until he granted them reform. Not content with the Church of England that good King Henry had bequeathed to us all, they wanted what they called 'A Church of God.' (26)

Although this is a rather emotional narration of the historical data, so far, the account is accurate in that what is narrated here is in accordance with what is recorded in history books. In the official history records, Charles I strongly believed in "royal power," and thus "was quickly at odds with the Puritan leaders of Parliament" (Lerner et al. 505). Moreover, even during the reign of James I, father of Charles I, the Puritans constituted "the dominant faction in the House of Commons and many Puritans were also prosperous merchants" (Lerner et al. 505), a fact which indeed was at the root of the conflict between the king and the parliament when it came to issuing new taxes to support the expenses of the war with France. However, while this accurate historical data provides a kind of structure for the novel, it also serves as a raw material to be shaped, and it is re-appropriated by Winterson. The king is only a "detail" in the novel, providing an air of authenticity to the narrative. The two main characters, Jordan, a

foundling, and the Dog Woman, a gargantuan figure, are alternating narrators in the novel whose paths intersect with that of the king's. Yet, history proper does not have a record of such figures. Alison Lee suggests that "[t]hese novels [historiographic metafictional texts] create an illusion of 'reality' by representing people, places and events which are historically verifiable. […] The use of 'real' names, places, and events, however, is asserted and almost immediately rendered problematic" (36). The made-up events and characters, as well as the already recorded events and persons in the annals of history are introduced and re-introduced by Winterson. Such a re-introduction can be taken as a resistance to the stability of meaning, and to certainty about understanding and evaluating the past, and also, most importantly, as a recognition of the multiplicity of truth and perspective. There are other historical figures such as John Tradescent, the younger, who is the Royal Gardener: "[he] said his name was John Tradescant. Then he gave a little pause and said, 'Gardener to the King'" (22). In addition to the king and the Royal Gardener, Queen Henrietta is also mentioned. She has given a mummy[21] as a present "to a favorite of hers who had made a wondrous garden full of continental devices" (15). This is Andre Mollet, the French gardener "who has come specifically to teach Tradescant the French ways with water fountains and parterres" (41) whose name is also given in the novel *ad passim*. Yet, apart from John Tradescant, who plays an important role in Jordan's life, the main characters and events narrated are, historically speaking, marginal, and most probably, fictive. Thus, the novel fictionalizes the historical figures and events, but also marginalizes the officially recorded history by putting them at the periphery rather than at the center.

Historiographic metafiction, then, plays a very important part in postmodern literature because it incorporates the two of the most overt concerns of postmodern writing, namely, self-reflexivity and the problematization of the representations of the past in fiction writing. The novel in the postmodern age becomes a commentary on itself, or its own status as fiction while at the same time a "tool" to draw attention to the inaccessibility of the past as an "out there," "ready-to-be-deciphered" phenomenon. The only possible access to the past is through the medium of language, which, in fact, means that any communication is hindered by the fact that it is communicated via an addressee, whose "objectivity" is questionable. If one assumes that people are

inescapably reliant on language to construe their perception of the world, then, any representation of reality is also inescapably language-bound, which makes it both subjective and ideological. A very similar perception is voiced in the novel in Jordan's account:

> Time 4: Did my childhood happen? I must believe it did, but I don't have any proof. My mother says it did, but she is a fantasist, a liar and a murderer, though none of that would stop me loving her. I remember things, but I too am a fantasist and a liar, though I have not killed anyone yet.
> There are those whom I could ask, but I would not count their word in a court of law. Can I count it in a more serious matter? I will have to assume that I had a childhood, but I cannot assume to have had the one I remember.
> Everyone remembers things which never happened. And it is common knowledge that people often forget things which did. *Either we are all fantasists and liars or the past has nothing definite in it.* (92) (emphasis mine)

His supposed proof as to the existence of his childhood comes from the reassurances of his mother. However, Jordan also acknowledges that she is not necessarily a reliable source. Moreover, his own memory proves to be fickle, since he openly admits that what he remembers as his childhood may not be the one he really lived and experienced in the past. Besides these, Jordan contemplates on the fact that people tend to remember things which did not take place while forgetting the things they did, which, he muses, is problematic because it leads to the conclusion that "*Either we are all fantasists and liars or the past has nothing definite in it*" (92). Here, Winterson provides a subtle yet striking questioning of the nature of memory which is supposed to provide the basic source for one's access to his or her own past. And the question remains, what should one do if the only link to one's past is an unreliable one which cannot be fully trusted? The contemplation on the nature of the past and how human mind perceives this past is one of the basic issues brought forth in *Sexing the Cherry*. The brief section entitled "Lies" can be considered as a summary of postmodern understanding of time, reality, and being. It is also engaged with the concerns of postmodern realism:

> *Lies 1:* There is only the present and nothing to remember.
> *Lies 2:* Time is a straight line.
> *Lies 3:* The difference between the past and the future is that one has happened while the other has not
> *Lies 4:* We can only be in one place at a time.

Lies 5: Any proposition that contains the word 'finite' (the world, the universe, experience, ourselves…).
Lies 6: Reality as something which can be agreed upon.
Lies 7: Reality as truth. (83)

Each "lie" here evidently begs clarification in terms of postmodern realism and postmodern critique of realist conventions.

In the first "Lie," what is indicated is that the past is inescapably a part of the present, and vice versa. In fact, it has a double-encoded nature in that while the past "writes" the present, the present constantly "rewrites" and re-appropriates the past in return. The present, then, is never an isolated entity severed from the past or the future. On the contrary, all of them are interconnected.[22]

The second "Lie" is concerned with the linearity of Time. The perception of time as a linear concept has already been challenged by the modernist writers, who take after the ideas developed by Henri Bergson.[23] This subjective treatment of time has become an important ingredient in postmodern writing as well.[24] As Paul Smethurst argues, "postmodernism has challenged the way the past is re-presented, the contemporary apprehended, the future envisioned, and it has changed fundamentally perceptions of space and place" (1). If there is a change of perception in terms of space and place, this also means that the perception of "the self" is also radically challenged and changed since the self cannot be thought of without being situated in time and place. This change of perception is voiced in the novel in one of Jordan's meditations as follows:

> This journey is not linear, it is always back and forth, denying the calendar, the wrinkles and the lines of the body. The self is not contained in any moment or any place, but it is only in the intersection of moment and place that the self might, for a moment, be seen vanishing through a door, disappears at once. (80)

What Jordan says is crucial, because it shows how postmodern novels problematize the "particularity of time, of place, and of characterization" (Furst vii), which are considered as the hallmarks of realism. Now this particularity is transformed into a

problematics of these concepts: time, place, and characterization are still important, yet, their importance stems from an urge to undermine the supposed unitary, unproblematic conceptualization of these.

The division of time into smaller units as past, present and future is a result of human perception or how human mind works. Thus, they are human-constructs, not god-given, unchangeable facts. Therefore, the premise "the past has happened in a singular and particular way" falls short when one takes into consideration that the past is not something that can be pinned down unproblematically. Angela Smith suggests that "[a]ny ascription to the totalitarian mode of historical narrative, to linear and finite understanding of time, and to a single 'true' reality, makes it possible to merely exist in the present without any awareness of responsibility to the past" (27). Hence, the third premise is considered to be a "Lie." Because it uses more than one time-frame, *Sexing the Cherry* captures this problematic nature more clearly. These possibilities come into being within the novel in a very explicit way. History fuses with fiction in *Sexing the Cherry* in such a way that historical characters and historically documented details are both juxtaposed and superimposed with the imagined characters and fictive events. While the Dog Woman's account provides the "factual" side of the novel, Jordan's provides the "fictional" in the extreme, coupled with a sense of being on the verge of fantasy and meditation. In a similar fashion, Grice and Woods note that

> Winterson's world is not simply one of the facts, but one of stories and narratives, which are faded within each other; hence the realm of the aesthetic and the imagination assume a new importance. This [*Sexing the Cherry*] is a novel that extols the realm of the aesthetic, set against the pure empirical world, releasing the realm of the imagination to form other important and acceptable places that need exploring. (33-4)

Thus, language becomes liberating once set free of the restrains of the "pure empirical world." Winterson explores the possibilities of language and aesthetics in her creation of this fusion of worlds, times, and characters. Language becomes a tool to probe into the memory line, both the remembered and the fantasized. The dichotomous positions of the real and the imagined are blurred, because Winterson seems to contend that the imagined is as important and real as the actual one. This importance is more explicit

when one looks at the section entitled "Hallucinations and Diseases of the Mind" in which the unreliable nature of memory is laid bare:

> *Objects 1:* A woman looks into her bag and recognizes none of her belongings. She hurries home. But where is home? She follows the address written in her purse. She has never seen this house before and who are those ugly children wrecking the garden? Inside a fat man is waiting for his supper. She shoots him. At the trial she says she had never seen him before. He was her husband. (81)

David Hume argues that "[h]ad we no memory, we never should have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person" (261-2). Although memory is not always what one thinks that he or she remembers, it does not change the fact that as long as one feels that it is real, epistemologically it is real. The novel works on this almost schizophrenic situation by means of creating a confusion of fact and fiction, which, in fact, designates that fact and fiction are not only fused but also, and more importantly, conned into one another. What is problematized here is the past as a problematic concept, be it one's own past or past as History. The question is, how can one be sure that history proper is what it is when one cannot even be sure what his or her history is? The inconsistencies of memory function as a way of showing how even the "rational, sequential, event-driven history is at root just as illogical in its granting primacy to certain features of the past as these are contemporary rereading of history" (Joyce, "Memory"). *Sexing the Cherry* dwells on this issue, and it does this by weaving the real historical events and characters with fictive ones. It is in this sense that postmodern realism manifests itself since the integration of the fictive into the historically accurate data constitutes the basis to problematize the assumed distinction between the two. The presence of both within the same context highlights the problematic nature of the truth-claims of the historical narrative while at the same time pointing at the negative perception of the fictive in relation to real.

As such, such a combination of the real and the fictive, historical and fictional constitutes the basis of postmodern writing to a great extent, according to Hutcheon. She contends that "[i]t is part of the postmodernist stand to confront the paradoxes of

fictive/historical representation, the particular/ the general, 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" (*A Poetics* 106). This is one of the main pointers of postmodern realism. Through an exploitation of realist and postmodernist strategies, postmodern realist texts display a seemingly oxymoronic yet crucial positioning: they maintain a realist façade, yet they also employ a postmodern framework. The blending of fact and fiction is intended to cause both a deliberate confusion and to alert the reader; who, at times, feels at a loss with what to believe as historically accurate data, and what to consider as the product of imagination. Likewise, *Sexing the Cherry* shows that the distinction between truth and lying, history and fiction, is not a clear-cut, unproblematic one. The novel juxtaposes the accounts of the two narrators, and creates a confusion of linear time and subjective time, of narrative authority, and of the perception of history as well as of story.

This is most explicit in Jordan's intertextual references and his meditations. The intertexts in Jordan's narrative serve a double purpose. On the one hand, they can be considered as a reflection of Jordan's meditative nature; on the other hand, they are the disruptive elements in the storyline which reinforce the fragmented style that is prevalent throughout the novel. They create a story within a story, culminating a *mise-en-abyme* effect.[25]

While there are individual examples of such intertexts within Jordan's account of the places he has visited, some of the examples are indicated by putting separate titles within the narrative. For example, the section entitled "The Flat Earth Theory" concerns itself with the subjectivity and unreliability of perspective, even for things or concepts which are scientifically proven:

> The earth is round and flat at the same time. This is obvious. That it is round appears indisputable. The globe does not supersede the map; the map does not distort the globe.
> […]
> A map can tell me how to find a place I have not seen but have often imagined. When I get there, following the map faithfully, the place is not the place of my imagination. Maps, growing ever more real, are much less true. (81)

In other words, two contradictory things can exist simultaneously without negating one another. Although this seems scientifically impossible or false, human perception renders such existence possible. While the Earth is round, human experience of it tells otherwise; human beings perceive it as flat. This dual nature can also be observed in relation to maps. On the one hand, maps are instructive and informative. On the other hand, they can be deceptive as Jordan experiences and narrates in his fantastic journeys.

The idea of a map and its connotations in relation to the idea of constructedness are rather obvious. Ihab Hassan defines maps as "our supreme fictions of the world, the surveyed side of our dreams" ("Maps"). While people tend to treat maps as factual data, maps are always already part of an agreed-upon constructs. This contention can be extended into the use of realist conventions which have been considered as the most appropriate, if not the only, way to narrate stories. However, on a different note, it should be acknowledged that they are but conventions. What postmodern novels display, then, is an awareness of such conventionality which is laid bare by a problematization of reality construed upon such conventions.

Susan Onega suggests that Winterson "redefines reality as complex and many-sided, and situates it in the realm of the fantastic, that is to say, in that frontier territory of epistemological uncertainty where the real and the unreal coexist" ("I'm Telling" 147). While Jordan's journeys are obviously part of his imagination, which means that they are of an imagined past, on a comparatively subtler level, the Dog Woman's "adventures" and her "historical" account are also an imagined past because, historically speaking, the Dog Woman's story is also made up. There is an ambiguity on whether Jordan really experienced those journeys on the corporeal level, or they are merely imagined. The ambiguity is further elicited by Jordan at the very end of the novel as follows:

> The future and the present and the past exist only in our minds, and from a distance the border of each shrink and fade like the borders of hostile countries seen from a floating city in the sky. The river runs from one country to another without stopping. And even the most solid of things and the most real, the best-

> loved and the well-known, are only hand-shadows on the wall. Empty space and
> points of light. (144)

Thus, the attention is drawn to the fact that the borders, limits, or rules are the products of human mind and psyche, and that they are not necessarily givens. It also draws attention to the fact that perception depends literally upon point of view, which also brings forth the inescapability of subjectivity. In *Sexing the Cherry,* it is pointed out that "there are only *truths* in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness *per se,* just others' truths" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics* 109). In this respect, while postmodernism does not deny the existence of reality, it does problematize the assumed singularity of such reality. And if there is no singular, unique, agreed-upon reality, then the equation of reality to truth becomes problematic.

In postmodern realist novels such as this one, intertextuality and the ambiguous nature of perception are foregrounded in the form of rewriting in *Sexing the Cherry,* along with historiographic metafiction, to draw attention to the manifestation of postmodern realism in the novel. Jordan's account contains a series of rewritings of mythology and fairy tales. Thus, this makes his account overtly intertextual. Hutcheon suggests that "[p]ostmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context" (*A Poetics* 118). The most obvious manifestation of intertextuality is evidently in the rewriting of the story of "Twelve Dancing Princesses."[26] In the novel, the fairy tale is narrated by one of the princesses as follows:

> We all slept in the same room, my sisters and I, and that room was narrower than
> a new river and longer than the beard of the prophet.
> […]
> We slept in white beds with white sheets and the moon shone through the
> window and made white shadows on the floor.
> From this room, every night, we flew to a silver city where no one ate or drank.
> The occupation of the people was to dance. We wore out our dresses and slippers
> dancing, but because we were always sound asleep when our father came to wake
> us in the morning it was impossible to fathom where we had been or how.
> You know eventually a clever prince caught us flying through the window. We
> had given him a sleeping draught but he only pretended to drink it. He had eleven
> brothers and we were all given in marriage, one to each brother, and as it says
> lived happily ever after. (48)

Up until this point, the account of the princess overlaps with the account of the original fairy tale. However, there is a twist in her story; while she admits that the story line is as it was suggested by the fairy tale, what happens afterwards is completely different. In the Brothers Grimm version, the fairy tale ends with a marriage between the eldest princess and the soldier. There is no mention of the fates of the other princesses, nor is there a reference as to the existence of any brothers of the soldier. Nevertheless, in *Sexing the Cherry,* the princess who narrates the story of her sisters and herself refers to the eleven brothers of the prince who finds out their secret, and the eventual marriage arrangement for all twelve sisters. She also admits that they all lived happily ever after: "[w]e did, but not with our husbands. […] For some years I did not hear from my sisters, and then, by a strange eventuality, I discovered that we had all, one way or another, parted from the glorious princes and were living scattered, according to our taste" (48). Then, each princess tells her own story, in her own way. In this respect, they rewrite the ending of the story by adding up what is left untold in the original fairy tale.

On the one hand, the rewriting of the fairy tale can be taken as a subversion of the male-dominated discourse found in the fairy-tale tradition, and as giving a fair chance to those who are – and in most cases, women – subjugated. Thus, one can expect to see a more practical – and, indeed, a more realistic – explanation and ending to the traditional "and they all lived happily ever after" mantra that is found in almost all fairy tales. None of the princesses leads a conventional or "appropriate" life (in terms of the norms of society) during their marriages, and their happiness is found only after the marriage is null, and not with the marriage.[27] On the other hand, each story contains in itself a more reinforced fantastical element full of intertextuality. It can be argued that Winterson's fiction is "all about setting the certainties of the realist novel adrift on the high seas of fairy-tale, romantic quest and high metaphysics" (Emck 21). In this respect, the new rendition of the fairy tale tradition does not only point at the unreliable nature of fairy tales due to their highly emphasized fictionality, but also to the problematic nature of any type of fiction writing in terms of its relation with reality, be it a fairy tale or a novel, since it always contains story-telling, which is subjective and open to interpretation.

The first princess falls in love with a mermaid and lives in a well. The second collects religious items, and when her husband objects to her collecting them, she kills him by wrapping "her own husband in cloth and gone on wrapping the stale bandages round and round until she reached his nose" (49). The third princess's husband turns out to be homosexual, and she kills both her husband and his lover "with a single arrow where they lay" (50). The fourth princess' husband marries her, according to the princess, "so that his liaisons with other women, being forbidden, would be more exciting" (51). She does not kill him, but he dies because his body is "raddled with disease" (51) due to his perpetual promiscuity. The fifth princess's story contains yet another fairy tale, the story of Rapunzel. Her role in the story is that of the witch's. Yet, she describes herself as "an older woman" whom Rapunzel "went to live in a tower with" (52). Nevertheless, this is not the story of herself and her husband. Theirs is also the subversion of another fairy tale, "The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich," – in which, a prince is cursed to become a frog until a woman accepts him as her husband – because the princess says, "[o]h well, the first time I kissed him he turned into a frog. There he is, just by your foot. His name is Anton" (52). The sixth princess's narrative is about her realization, upon seeing a stag, which reminds her of her past, "when [she] had been free to fly, long ago, before this gracious landing and a houseful of things" (53), that marriage is an entrapment and eventual loss of her freedom. The seventh princess's husband turns out to be a woman with whom she "lived alone [for eighteen years] in a windy castle [where they] saw no one but each other" (54). When people realize this, the princess kills her "with a single blow to the head" (54), and then comes to live with her sisters. The eighth princess kills her husband by poisoning him through some poisonous draught she has obtained from a door-to-door salesman. The ninth princess's husband chains her, and calls her "his falcon" (56). He treats her as if she were dangerous, and according to her, she "was not of these things, but [she] became them" (56). The tenth princess' husband falls in love with another woman, but refuses to leave the house, arguing that "he couldn't be expected to make himself homeless because he was in love" (58). Thus, she leaves the house and joins her sisters. The eleventh princess's husband asks her to kill him, and she does. When their stories are all told, Jordan realizes that there have been only eleven stories, and he asks about the whereabouts of their twelfth sister. The sisters say that

their youngest sister has never married let alone joined them, and that her name is Fortunata.

In fact, Fortunata is the impetus behind Jordan's quest and fantastic journeys. At the very beginning of the novel, Jordan claims that "[e]very journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are the journeys I wish to record. Not the ones I made, but the ones I might have made, or perhaps did make in some other space and time" (9-10). Thus, Jordan embraces a plurality of worlds, time, and space in which the possibilities are endless, realities plural. That is why he meticulously narrates his imagined journeys, since they provide him with the chance to escape into the realm of fantasy. In other words, these journeys are the means by which Jordan can experience the plurality as he also mentions in the novel: "[t]o escape from the weight of the world, I leave my body where it is, in conversation or at dinner, and walk through a series of winding streets to a house standing back from the road" (17). From then on, he depicts what his imagination leads him (and the reader) into. The first journey he makes takes him to a city in which the words uttered by people create "a thick cloud over the city, which every so often must be thoroughly cleansed of too much language" (17).

In the "city of words," Jordan comes across a family who hold a "strange custom:" "[n]ot one of them would allow their feet to touch the floor. Open the doors of the hall and you will see, not floors, but bottomless pits" (20). It is in this city that he encounters a girl who is a dancer. Then, Jordan makes frequent visits to "fantastic" places in the hopes that he would see this dancer again.

The third place he goes to is a brothel. There, Jordan cross-dresses in order to be allowed to enter the brothel. He keeps asking about the dancer but "[t]hey know nothing of the dancer" (30). The prostitutes are confined to their houses; they are not allowed to leave the place. And, Jordan asks, "[h]ow could they live without space?" (30). Here, then, the space is the issue he meditates upon. Moreover, this visit makes fundamental pondering upon the use of language, especially the difference between the female and male use of language. Jordan realizes that "they [women] were communicating without

words […] women have a private language. A language not dependent on the constructions of men but structured by signs and expressions, and that uses ordinary words as code-words meaning something other" (30-1). He faints only to wake up in another city.

The next place he visits provides Jordan with a rewriting of the Rapunzel story. There are also references to Artemis, Orpheus, and Sappho. Finally, on one of the voyages with John Tradescant, Jordan ends up in a city where "the inhabitants have reconciled two discordant desires: to remain in one place and to leave it behind forever" (43). It is in this city that he finds the "heroines" of the story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses.

Jordan's journeys can be read as a problematization of realistic accounts of travel writing. His account of his journeys is in tune with the paradoxical nature of postmodern realism. While the journeys are indeed fantastical, the way they are narrated seems rather realistic: Jordan retains a certain sense of time, place, and character in his narrative. However, this sense of time, place, and character is slightly different from the ones found in realist texts. The places Jordan visits seem to be governed by different rules of physics; their realities do not match up with the one the readers can relate to. He enters into a new domain of reality without completely leaving the one he shares with the reader, which is rendered possible by the employment of postmodern realism. Thus, all these journeys culminate in an ontological problem. In his seminal work *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale draws the distinction between modernism and postmodernism in terms of a difference in the dominant[28] on which they rely. McHale argues that while the dominant of modernist fiction is "*epistemological*" (9), the dominant of postmodernist fiction is "*ontological*" (10) (emphasis in the original).[29] The ontological dominant that McHale observes in postmodern novels is concerned with the existence of the world, or worlds in the plural. He further suggests that the ontological dominant in postmodern fiction results in the rendition of questions such as "What is a world?; what happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?" (10). Moreover, he contends that the ontological dominant is "anarchism, the refusal either to accept or

to reject any of a plurality of available ontological orders. This is precisely the postmodernist condition: an anarchic landscape of worlds in the plural" (37). So, postmodern novels, in McHale's words, are "fictions *about* the order of things, discourses which reflect upon the worlds of discourse" (164). In this respect, these novels have a tendency to view reality as something constructed, the result of which is the creation of alternate realities. Likewise, in *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson depicts *a* world as opposed to *the* world. This is most clearly voiced in Jordan's words as follows: "I don't know if other worlds exist in space or time. Perhaps this is the only one and the rest is just imaginings. Either way it doesn't matter. We have to protect both possibilities. They seem to be interdependent" (128). In fact, there is a plurality of worlds in the novel in which all possibilities are rendered available and all versions are likewise rendered equally valid. This is exemplified in the novel through the stories of eleven princesses, through the journeys Jordan undertakes, and through the retold account of the Civil War by the Dog Woman. The ontological dominant is even more evident when the intense stress on temporality is taken into consideration. This temporality is almost an obsession in the novel. It can be observed in the use of two distinct time-frames, namely, the seventeenth-century and modern-day England. These two blend into each other, creating a multiplicity of time-planes without necessarily de-validating each other as well as without any "rational" continuation. The passage from one to the other is indicated by a mere "Some Years Later," although this passage clearly begs a definition. The lapse to the contemporary times is indicated by this phrase, which is used both as an intertextual reference to Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse,* and to the subjective perception and treatment of time. Not only the passing of time as a chronological order, but also the concept of time as an important ingredient of humankind's understanding of life as it is, is problematized in the extract about the language of the Hopi tribe: "[t]he Hopi, an Indian tribe, have a language as sophisticated as ours, but no tenses for past, present and future. The division does not exist. What does this say about time?" (8). As such, the Hopi language does not have any inflections or grammatical construction that indicates a sense of time. Yet, temporality is almost always considered in relation to space. This idea is enhanced in the novel in the second extract given at the beginning of the novel: "[m]atter, that thing is the most solid and the well-known, which you are holding in your hands and which makes up your body, is

now known to be mostly empty space. Empty space and points of light. What does this say about the reality of the world" (8). With its focus on "poetic textuality," and its postmodern representation of the seventeenth century, *Sexing the Cherry,* as Clingham argues, is "neither a conventional mimesis […] nor is it a replication of the realist effect of classic al nineteenth- and twentieth-century histories" (68):

> Nor (even) does it adhere to the identifiable blending of "fact" and "fiction" in such recent historical novels about the long eighteenth century as Rose Tremain's *Restoration,* Eva Figes's *The Tree of Knowledge,* Peter Ackroyd's *Milton in America,* Susan Sontag's *The Volcano Lover,* or Frances Sherwood's *Vindication: A Novel.* Rather, *Sexing the Cherry* is a "repetition" in a very particular sense, a movement that generates and is generated by a form of memory, retrospection, that seeks to incorporate into narrative the relation between an origin and an ending in such a way as to endow what happens in between with specifically historical significance. (68-9)

It is this "very particular sense of repetition" that gives Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* its unique postmodern realist quality. It is a repetition with a critical distance, making use of the past as the canvas, yet coloring it with contemporary concerns. Thus, it is not a mere repetition but a reworking of the past as a writing material and turning it into something both strangely familiar and at the same time significantly different. Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* is a historiographic metafiction which revisits seventeenth-century England through the narratives of Jordan and the Dog Woman, and while doing that, it also ponders on the questions of identity, memory, language, gender, and reality. All of these are realized through a combination of realism and postmodernism. Grice and Woods argue that "Winterson's fiction such as *The Passion, Sexing the Cherry*, and *Guy Symmetries* are novels that no longer seek to render the world, but to *make* one from language: fiction is no longer mimetic, but constructive" (31). In order to construct it as such, it seeks to deconstruct the previous modes of writing. Likewise, Umberto Eco suggests, in *Postscript to The Name of the Rose,* that "[t]he postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot be really destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited, but with irony, not innocently" (67). Through the narratives of Jordan and the Dog Woman, as well as their contemporary counterparts, the reader is invited to a

reconstruction of the past. Yet, this past is one that is textualized; it is a mediated reality. As such, *Sexing the Cherry* forges a bridge between the past and the present using language as its tool, acknowledging its shortcomings and limitations; but it also opens up new directions, which is rendered possible by the merging of postmodern and realist techniques.

CHAPTER II

AUTHORIAL OWNERSHIP AND REWRITING: ALASDAIR GRAY'S *POOR THINGS*[30]

> Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
> To mold me Man? Did I solicit thee
> From darkness to promote me
> (John Milton, *Paradise Lost* Book X, lines 743-5)

In his "Personal Curriculum Vitae," Alasdair Gray defines himself as "a self-employed verbal and pictorial artist" (38). Stephen Bernstein, one of the most noted critics of Alasdair Gray, cites him as "one of the most important living writers in English" (17). An accomplished artist, playwright, literary critic, political polemist, editor, and poet, Gray's entrance into the literary scene as a novelist, however, is rather late. It was in 1981, when he was forty seven years old that his first novel *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* was published. It is this highly-acclaimed and widely-read novel which opened the path for Gray, and earned him a preeminent and secure place as a novelist within literature written in English.

Gray's other novels[31] are *1982 Janine* (1984), *Something Leather* (1990), *Poor Things: Episodes from the Early Life of a Scottish Public Health Officer* (1991), *A History Maker* (1994), and *Old Men in Love* (2007). His novellas are *The Fall of Kevin Walker: A Fable of the Sixties* (1985), and *McGrotty and Ludmilla* (1990). His short stories are collected under the titles of *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* (1983), *Lean Tales* (1985), *Ten Tales Tall and True* (1993), *Mavis Belfrage* (1996), and *The Ends of Our Tethers: 13 Sorry Stories* (2003). Gray has two poetry books entitled *Old Negatives: Four Verse Sequences* (1989), and *Sixteen Occasional Poems: 1990-2000* (2000). He is also the

author of three plays, namely, *Dialogue* (1971), *Working Legs: A Two-Act Play for Disabled Performers* (1997), and *Fleck* (2008). In 2009, he published *A Gray Play Book* which includes his plays staged between 1956 and 2009. His non-fictional works include *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland: Independence* (1992), *A Short Survey of Classical Scottish Writing* (2001), and *How We Should Rule Ourselves* (2005). He is also the editor of *The Book of Prefaces* (2000). His latest book to date is a non-fictional work entitled *A Life in Pictures* (2009).

Gray's first novel *Lanark* won a Scottish Arts Council Award, Saltire Society Book of the Year Award, and it received a great deal of attention both nationally and internationally. As Gavin Miller contends, "*Lanark*'s literary impact was due largely to its transplantation of a local setting into a contemporary form and style that had not previously been attempted in Scottish writing" ("Alasdair"). *Lanark* can be seen as a greatly influential book which had "an extraordinary impact upon British literature and revealed a dam burst of new writing from authors such as James Kelman, Janice Galloway, Tom Leonard, and Liz Lochhead" (Miller, *Alasdair* 9), and also an exemplary book to understand the technical and thematic concerns of Gray as a novelist. Set in the fictional city of Unthank and the fictionalized version of the city of Glasgow, *Lanark* comprises of four books, which, in a rather unconventional way, are arranged as Book 3, Book 1, Book 2, and Book 4. Organized in this non-chronological way, it tells the interwoven stories of Lanark and Duncan Thaw, alternating between a realistic narrative and a fantastical account.

In addition to the intertextual nature of *Lanark,* since it openly acknowledges these intertextual references as "plagiarisms" under the title "Index of Plagiarisms,"[32] many critics agree that *Lanark's* importance within contemporary fiction comes from the fact that it concentrates on the idea of the author, and that it disrupts the author's position as the ultimate logos. For example, Gavin Miller states that "*Lanark* subverts the myth of artist or writer as an extraordinary, heroic outsider" ("Alasdair"). Instead, the author becomes an integral part of the narrative, which is most evident in the section entitled "Epilogue:"

> "I am your author."
> Lanark stared at him. The author said, "Please don't feel embarrassed. This isn't an unprecedented situation. Vonnegut has it in *Breakfast of Champions* and Jehovah in the books of Job and Jonah."
> "Are you pretending to be God?"
> "Not nowadays. I used to be part of him, though. Yes, I am part of a part which was once the whole. But I went bad and was excreted. If I can get well I may be allowed home before I die, so I continually plunge my beak into my rotten liver and swallow and excrete it. But it grows again. Creation festers in me. I am excreting you and your world at the present moment. This arse-wipe" – he stirred the papers on the bed – "is part of the process." (481)

Thus, *Lanark* stands out as a typical metafictional text in which the textuality of the text is made evident through its laying bare of the formal qualities of fiction writing as part of the narrative, which can be observed at the beginning of Nastler's conversation with Lanark:

> "I will start," said the conjurer, "by explaining the physics of the world you live in. Everything you have experienced and are experiencing, from your first glimpse of the Elite café to the metal of that spoon in your fingers the taste of the soup in your mouth is made of one thing." "Atoms," said Lanark. "No. Print. Some worlds are made of atoms but yours is made of tiny marks marching in neat lines, like armies of insects, across pages and pages and pages of white paper." (485)

As such, *Lanark* points at the constructed nature of fictional worlds, and it does so by making the characters aware of the fictionality of the world they inhabit. Moreover, it notes the plurality of worlds by drawing a distinction between the world made of atoms and the world made of print, all of which situate *Lanark* firmly within the postmodern tradition. Allan Massie contends that "*Lanark* is a novel of remarkable structural ambition, playful in a post-modernist mode; yet its peculiar strength derives from its close relation to everyday life in Glasgow. Without this anchor it would float into self-indulgent limbo" (27). In other words, the narrative of *Lanark* is firmly tied to the everyday realities of Glasgow such as the weather, the industrial life and its repercussions, and a sense of ex-centricity stemming from the political as well as cultural relationship between England and Scotland.

Although not as internationally acclaimed as *Lanark,* the same experimental and innovative style can be found in *Poor Things*, albeit in a slightly different mode. *Poor Things* is Gray's fourth novel and the winner of Whitbread Prize for Best Novel as well as *The Guardian* Fiction Prize. It is also a playful postmodern text, yet it is also rooted in realist conventions. In a similar mode to *Lanark,* the authorial position is subjected to the contestation of various characters within the novel as well as a deliberate refusal of giving the sole ownership of the book to the author in *Poor Things.* This can be observed in the novel's rewriting of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* in the authorial intrusions throughout the novel, and in the use of both realist and postmodern modes of writing in the text. As such, *Poor Things* constitutes one of the best examples of postmodern realism. According to Stephen Bernstein,

> The power of *Poor Things* derives from the reality/fantasy mixture of its narratives and from the variety of its concerns, as it draws Gray's characteristic preoccupations together into a new departure for his prose. Like his other novels, *Poor Things* addresses questions of power, sexuality, duality, and perspective, while as a thoroughgoing historical novel this "Scottish socialist's love letter to the Victorian period" fully explores an interest in the nineteenth century that Gray had earlier exhibited only piecemeal. (109)

Poor Things is a rich novel as it engages itself with a variety of topics from gender issues to politics, from questions of reality to authorial authority. Because Alasdair Gray is an active participant and voice in the political climate related especially to the relationship between Scotland and England, his work is very much informed by his political views. Moreover, several critics have already noted and focused on this political edge in Gray's fiction.[33] The inscription of the political into the fictional underlines how Gray's work should be considered within the conceptual framework of postmodern realism. It features predominantly here as Gray uses Scotland as the setting of the novel. Cristie March argues that

> The term parochial speaks to the troubling positioning of Scotland within an international matrix and points to the inefficiency of defining terms like marginal, minority, parochial, regional, and even national and postcolonial in relation to the Scottish situation. Scotland is all and none of those terms, existing instead in the liminal spaces between them. This "a-positioning" complicates our very sense of these terms. (344)

This definition of Scotland, in fact, overlaps with what postmodern realism aims to capture: a mode of narrative which mingles realist conventions with postmodern elements. Thus, Scotland provides that perfect canvas to play within the conventions of literary realism, and it enables Gray to go beyond the restrains of such conventions as well. Donald Kaczvisnky argues that "*Poor Things* presents a postmodern metanarrative that explores the notion of selfhood" (775). Yet, the novel goes beyond this, and it dwells on a number of other issues, especially those related to the formal qualities of the novel genre, i.e. the representation of reality, the problematics of authorship and story-telling. It is about creation, – artistic and literal – rewriting, and *experimenting* with the technical possibilities which the novel genre offers. It is in this context that *Poor Things* should be considered within postmodern realism which is most evident in this novel in its employment of rewriting as a strategy that problematizes the notion of authenticity and the representation of reality, and in its use of visual aids such as insertion of different typography, etchings, and drawings, which enhance the idea of constructedness of the written world. Hence, realism always intertwines with metafiction to create the distinct postmodern realist approach in the novel.

The title page of the book, for example, reveals that *Poor Things* is the autobiographical work of a Scottish public health officer called Archibald McCandless, and that it is edited by Alasdair Gray. Although not available in the 1992 hardcover edition, in the 2002 paperback edition of the book, this title page is followed by "a page of quotations from fictional reviews such as the one from the *Shiberreen Eagle*" (Bentley 44). The same incident is also noted by Simon Malpas who suggests that "[n]othing in this book is as it seems: the reviews printed before the title page are a mixture of largely positive quotations from 'real' papers such as *The Scotsman, The Independent* and *The Sunday Telegraph,* and rather damning ones from a number of strange fictitious publications including *Private Nose* and *Times Literary Implement*" (23-4). Moreover, the biographical information on Alasdair Gray – that he is "a fat, balding, asthmatic, married pedestrian who lives by writing and designing things," which is also available in the 2002 paperback edition, "comically disrupts the conventional way of presenting

the author to the reading public" (Bentley 44). Thus, the blurring of fact and fiction begins even before the reader reads the very first page of the novel, and any possibility of a trustworthy narrator is disrupted from the very beginning. This disruption is also noted by Simon Malpas as follows:

> We are never certain what to take as true or untrue, as the seeming plausibility of Victoria's narrative is continually challenged by the fact that Archibald's is so much more interesting and enticing and has the support of the novel's narrator who, traditionally, might be expected to be at least vaguely trustworthy. Even the reviews printed before the title page produce a bizarre movement between the "real world" and its fictional counterpart that unsettles any firm or fixed boundaries one might wish to erect between the two. (24-5)

In addition to the defamiliarization of the notions of authorship and reliable narrators, the novel is nurtured by several different literary and non-literary texts all of which underscore that originality and authenticity have become problematic issues. It would be useful to give a brief summary of the plot before commencing on a discussion on the ways *Poor Things* thematizes and problematizes these issues.

Subtitled as "Episodes from the Early Life of Archibald McCandless M.D. Scottish Public Health Officer," *Poor Things* is divided into four sections: (1) Alasdair Gray's Introduction, (2) Archibald McCandless' book, (3) Victoria McCandless' letter, and (4) Gray's notes on both McCandless' book and Victoria's letter. Moreover, these sections contain within themselves various references to and commentaries on other texts. Therefore, it is a multilayered novel, and each layer brings forth a different and often confusing angle to the storyline. In her article entitled "Bella and the Beast (and a Few Dragons, too): Alasdair Gray and the Social Resistance of the Grotesque," Cristie March suggests that

> Gray presents *Poor Things* as a manuscript written by Archibald McCandless, accompanied by a postscripted letter from his wife and Gray's own "research" on the authenticity of McCandless's narrative. In the manuscript, McCandless provides an "eyewitness" account of the strange birth and life of his wife, Bella Baxter, explaining the scientific experimentation that resulted in her creation of subsequently informed her actions during her lifetime. Bella's postscript dismisses McCandless's story as pure fantasy and provides a more rational

explanation of her life, but the "evidence" Gray provides supports McCandless's account and discredits hers, leaving the text unresolved. (338)

In the section entitled "Introduction," the novel's "real" author Alasdair Gray casts himself as the "editor" of the book, and he provides a detailed account of how he has come into possession of Archibald McCandless' book and Victoria McCandless' letter. Archibald McCandless' book follows this introduction, and Gray claims that he has made almost no alterations in the "original" text. With this "original" text, the reader is invited into the "authentic" account of McCandless, which narrates how Archibald McCandless, a man of poor origins, has ended up at the Medical School as a student, and how he has become friends with Godwin Baxter, the son of a prominent doctor, who is an outcast due to his almost grotesque appearance and his weird voice. Through his friendship with Baxter, McCandless meets Victoria Baxter, also known as Bella, who, according to Godwin Baxter, is a unique human being because she is a creation of Baxter through scientific experimentation. Baxter gives an account of how he has found a dead woman in the morgue who was eight-months pregnant, and how he has revived her back by changing the brain of her baby with that of the mother so that the mother could live. The result is Bella Baxter, who looks like a woman in her twenties with the brain and thought-process of a new-born baby. McCandless is fascinated with this woman, and so is Bella with McCandless. They are engaged, much to the chagrin of Baxter. Before the marriage takes place, however, Bella elopes with Baxter's lawyer, a man called Duncan Wedderburn. She sends letters home, giving a detailed account of her adventures in many cities such as Odessa, Alexandria, Gibraltar, and Paris. These adventures are important both on a technical and thematic level in that she meets several different people some of whom are fictive while others are historical, real characters, thus blurring the line between the real and the fictive. The narrative alternates between letters, diaries, and prosaic narrations, which are all put together by Archibald McCandless in his autobiographical book. The narrative of the letters is frequently disrupted with commentaries by Baxter and McCandless. In addition, these letters function as a means to display the progress of Bella's brain since her writing style and format improve by each letter sent home. Bella's speech becomes more refined in parallel to the improvement of her brain age. Whereas she speaks "a broken, childlike

form of English" (Kaczvinksy 784) at the beginning of her existence as Bella Baxter, her speech becomes more sophisticated as she matures. McCandless' first encounter with Bella provides the reader with the opportunity to experience her peculiar language in which, as Kaczvinsky notes, "polysyllabic words are split into morphemes, creating strange words or familiar words that are out of context (784). The first words uttered by Bella are both strangely familiar and out of context. In her first meeting with McCandless, she says "Hell low God win, hell low new man" (29). Moreover, her first note to McCandless consists only of consonants all of which are capitalized:[34]

> DR CNDL,
> Y WNT GT MCH FRM M THS WY. WRDS DNT SM RL 2 M WHN NT SPKN
> R HRD. YR LTTRS R VRY LK THR MNS LV LTTRS, SPCLLY DNCN
> WDDRBRNS.
> YRS FTHFLL
> BLL BXTR. (56)

Although her first letter is almost gauche, she uses blank verse in her letter sent from Odessa, imitating the style of Shakespeare, but she decides to stop using this style saying: *"I will not write like Shakespeare anymore. It slows me down, especially now I am trying to spell words in the long way most people do"* (115). The way she conducts her letters, then, are pointers of her brain's progress into maturity since she produces more and more complex letters as time passes.

When she finally comes back, she is ready to marry McCandless. However, on their wedding day, Bella's former husband shows up, reclaiming his wife. Bella's past before she becomes Bella Baxter is thus revealed. It turns out that she is the wife of General Sir Aubrey de la Pole Blessington. The General explains that Victoria suffers from erotomania. He also adds that she has agreed to have clitesectomy, yet has escaped at the last minute, and that she has tried to commit suicide because she is, allegedly, mentally deranged. This account of events is refuted by Godwin Baxter who gives a detailed report on the events that have led to Bella's attempted suicide at the banks of the river. Listening to both accounts, Bella decides to stay with Baxter and McCandless, both because she is repulsed with the story of her treatment in the hands of Blessington

and because she remembers Blessington from her brothel days in Paris, a memory which reveals that Blessington has a poor sexual performance. Blessington leaves Bella with Baxter, and he shoots himself two days later. In the end, McCandless and Bella finally get married, Godwin Baxter dies, leaving a will that would enable the couple to live without any financial difficulties, and Archibald McCandless ends his narrative claiming that everything he narrated is true although he believes that science and his wife are not yet ready to believe so:

> This record of our early struggles is dedicated to my wife, though I dare not show it to her since it tells of things neither she nor medical science dare yet believe. But scientific progress accelerates from year to year. In a short time the discovery may be made which Sir Colin Baxter communicated only to his son, and which will prove the factual ground of all I have written here. (244)

This manuscript "was later published in only one copy, but never distributed, and is discovered by the book's narrator, 'Alasdair Gray'" (Malpas 23). It is immediately followed by Victoria McCandless's letter written for her great grandchild. While McCandless claims that his book is an autobiography which depicts his life with Bella and Godwin Baxter, Bella claims that the book is full of lies and delusions, and her letter tries to undermine the truth-claims of McCandless' book. In her letter, Bella gives her own account of their past and her relationship with Godwin Baxter and Archibald McCandless, refuting her husband's claims of her being an unnatural product of the scientific experiments of Godwin Baxter.

The last section of the book is entitled "Notes Critical and Historical." It is comprised of Alasdair Gray's explanatory remarks on the references in Archibald McCandless' book as well as in Victoria McCandless' letter. There are also photographs, drawings, and paintings, complete with commentary notes by Gray the editor. Thus, this section is full of references, both written and visual, which are both fictional and factual. Deciding which is which is rather confusing since they are elaborately and deliberately mingled.

Poor Things offers a journey to the nineteenth-century Scotland and Europe, but this journey is not presented as a slice of life. Rather, it is cut short by interruptions and

commentaries, and the reader is constantly made aware of the problematic nature of representation as well as of autobiographical writing in portraying an objective account of life. All these render *Poor Things* a postmodern realist text. In this novel, postmodern realism is achieved especially through a rewriting of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as well as through an explicitly problematized authorial authority both in the case of the "real" author who poses as a "mere" editor, and in the case of the characters in the novel who assume the role of an author in several incidents. Rewriting seemingly creates a nineteenth-century reality, but it is a fake one, which is mingled with factual additions. Moreover, the constant presence of multiple authors flaunts the authorial position.

To discuss *Poor Things* within the conceptual framework of postmodernism has a lot to offer in spite of Gray's rejection of being labeled as a postmodern writer. Gray's main objection to this labeling lies in the risk that such categorizations disregard the more complex nature and context of his writing. Gray says that "critics – however friendly – who are so interested in what is sometimes called my *ludic* writing […] forget half my writing is not like that" (qtd. in Bernstein 29). This does not, of course, make redundant any possible discussion of Gray's work in general, and *Poor Things* in particular, in relation to postmodernism and postmodern conceptualization and problematization of realism. Various critics have noted that Gray's fiction overlaps with the technical and thematic concerns of postmodern writing. Gavin Miller, for example, suggests that "[t]he appearance of the author as a character, an analogy between the creation of the fictional worlds and the 'construction' of our everyday reality, and similar self-reflexive devices tend to occur in most 'postmodern' writing. Certainly they can be found in Gray's work" ("Alasdair"). In a similar fashion, Alison Lumsden argues that

> While Gray himself rejects the application of this term [postmodern] to his own work, it seems clear that not only the strategies used in his novels, but also the issues which are raised within them, can be seen to be broadly in tune with those fictional developments which have appeared in the past twenty years and which have been described as postmodernity. (119)

Therefore, Gray's reluctance in associating himself with postmodernism does not obliterate the fact that his fiction is embedded in the technical and thematic issues raised

in postmodern writing. In order to understand Gray's stance within postmodern writing, it may be helpful to clarify its basic concerns. In Linda Hutcheon's words,

> Postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) at once use and abuse, install and destabilize convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical and ironic re-reading of the art of the past. In implicitly contesting in this way such concepts such as aesthetic originality and textual closure, postmodernist art offers a new model for mapping the borderland between art and the world, a model that works from a position within both and yet not totally within either, a model that is profoundly implicated in, yet still capable of criticizing, that which it seeks to describe. (*A Poetics* 23)

Thus, the strategies employed by postmodern texts include parody, irony, an installment of the past within the present and vice versa, to point at the problematic relationship between the two, and making visible the overlapping or clashing domains occupied by art and life. Gray's novel operates in several ways which put him in direct contact with the concerns voiced by Hutcheon. It is an ironic re-reading of the past since although Bella and McCandless talk about the same set of events, the conclusions they draw out of this past and the way they perceive of the events differ drastically from one another. Moreover, its acts of rewriting, both through a reworking of *Frankenstein* and through the meticulously juxtaposed narratives of the characters, almost all of whom assume the authorial position, problematizes closure. The postponed closure marks the problematization of the triangular relationship among the text, the author, and the reader. Jerry Varsava remarks that such an act is an intrinsic quality in postmodernism. He maintains that postmodernism's "ongoing attempt to destroy the paradigms of fiction, its own included, destabilizes the once fixed relationship between *reader* and *word,* between *text* and *world*" (17-8). Gray's novel is a very explicit elucidator of such claim in that the once stable relationship between the authority of the author and the observant/passive position of the reader is turned into a continuous game of chess in *Poor Things* where any stable and secure positioning is rendered impossible.

All these enable a reading of *Poor Things* within the conceptual framework of historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafictions contest the reality claims of any historical narrative by exposing the formal qualities of these texts while at the same

time questioning the possibility of accessing the past through other means than the textualized remains of that very past. In order to do that, these novels draw from real events or people within the fictional worlds they create. They rewrite the past to point at the constructed nature of any narrative including the historical ones. Hutcheon contends that "[p]ostmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (*A Poetics* 110). Thus, these novels disrupt the seemingly unproblematic understanding of the past as a tangible concept, and they reveal that any conclusive remark about the past is problematic since the past is accessible only through the texts written about it. Moreover, the past is known not only by the officially documented data but it also comes in the form of literary works, an argument which is voiced in the letter Bella sends from Odessa. In this letter, Bella mentions a Russian man she befriends who argues that "*a nation is only as old as its literature*" (115). He continues to explain how Pushkin made Russia a distinct nation:

> *"Our literature began with Pushkin, a contemporary of your Walter Scott," he told me. "Before Pushkin Russia was not a true nation, it was an administered region. Our aristocracy spoke French, our bureaucracy was Prussian, and the only true Russians – the peasants – were despised by the rulers and bureaucracy alike. Then Pushkin learned the folk-tales from his nursemaid, a woman of the people. His novellas and poems made us proud of our language and aware of our tragic past – our peculiar present – our enigmatic future. He made Russia a state of mind – made it real.* (115-6)

Thus, literature functions as a way of learning the past as well as constructing it. If the past is tangible and accessible only through its textualized versions, then textuality itself becomes constitutive of the past. Philip Hobsbaum suggests that *Poor Things* is

> slanted in an idiosyncratic mode, partly derived from *The Master of Ballantrae.* What appears to be the basic narrative is given to the reader in a tone so pitched as to suggest that its speaker is an authoritative narrator in the book. The reader is told of this character's parentage, his life at university, his poverty, what he sees as his manly independence, and his friendship with Godwin Baxter. This impression of authenticity is initially confirmed by the method through which (imitating Stevenson) Alasdair Gray claims to be no more than the editor of these memoirs, in fact composed by a deceased public health officer. ("Unreliable")

Evidently, the authenticity of McCandless' account is asserted by this very act of relating his history as well as story (i.e. his childhood, his family background, his early struggles, etc.) to the reader, because by means of these the reader is drawn into a realistically portrayed world. Yet, the ontological certainty of this world is constantly undermined by the editorial remarks of Gray as well as by the claims of Bella Baxter's last letter written for her future great-grandchild.

It is indeed true that McCandless' history is told, yet, it is told with an ironic edge. In *Poor Things,* McCandless' text can be seen as a repetition of the past; only this time it is an ironic repetition, one that is aware of the impossibility of such an act. This impossibility, though, is not evident within the body text of McCandless' account. It is evident in the way Bella Baxter refutes the authenticity of McCandless' narrative in her letter, and in the way Alasdair Gray the editor comments on both texts both in his Introduction and in the section entitled "Notes Historical and Critical." Thus, *Poor Things* becomes a re-visiting of the past. Yet it is an ironic re-visiting, not a naïve one. This ironic edge is rendered visible in the inevitably representational nature of any historical account. As Henry Giroux argues, "it is not that there is a world outside, 'out there,' which exists free of the discourses of representation" (59). What is "out there" is, in part, constituted by how it is represented. In her letter to Baxter, Bella points at this as follows: "*I studied* Punch *again and wondered why the well-dressed English people in the pictures were handsomer and less comic than anyone else, unless they were newly rich"* (128). While it attests to the idea that representation is problematic, it also point at the fact that reality is a construct as well. It is clearly manifested in the dialogue between McCandless and Baxter where they discuss Bella's mental state:

> Her worst fault," I said (Baxter at once looked indignant) "is her infantile sense of time and space. She feels short intervals are huge, yet thinks she can grasp all the things she wants at once, no matter how far they are from her and each other. She talked as if her engagement to marry me and her elopement with Wedderburn were simultaneous. I had no heart to tell her time and space forbids it. I did not even explain that the moral law forbids it.
> Baxter was halfway through explaining that our ideas of time, space and morality were convenient habits, not natural laws, when I yawned in his face. (70)

Their discussion is crucial since it brings out the fact that Baxter and McCandless represent two different attitudes; while Baxter acknowledges the conventionality of the seemingly natural, McCandless assumes a cliché realist stance. This rendition is extensively voiced in historiographic metafictions through their problematization of the historical as well as the real within their fictional frames.

Because historiographic metafictions like *Poor Things* question the reliability of historical narratives to represent the past accurately, access to the past as a thoroughly problematic issue becomes an indispensible part of these works. *Poor Things* is a Historiographic metafiction with its emphasis on "the complexity of history and the subjective and constructivist elements involved in representation, which is ultimately influenced by present concerns and interests" (Böhnke 215). This is more openly reinforced in the Introduction of the novel where Gray the editor embarks upon an intellectual debate with Michael Donnelly over the nature of McCandless' text:

> I fear Michael Donnelly and I disagree about this book. He thinks it is a blackly humorous fiction into which some real experiences and historical facts have been cunningly woven, a book like Scott's *Old Mortality* and Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner.* I think it like Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson;* a loving portrait of an astonishingly good, stout, intelligent, eccentric man recorded by a friend with a good memory for dialogue. Like Boswell, the self-effacing McCandless makes his narrative a host to letters by others who show his subject from a different angle, and ends by revealing a whole society. I also told Donnelly that I had written enough fiction to know history when I read it. He said he had written enough history to recognize fiction. (xi)[35]

The tension between fact and fiction, history and story is maintained and reinforced by the presence of the editor. The debate is on whether McCandless' text is a historical document or a fictional account, and this is laid bare by the editor Alasdair Gray. As suggested by Johanna Tiitinen, "by confusing our traditional view of history and fiction, Gray demonstrates how, ultimately, the only thing that sets history and fiction apart is their truth claim" (227). As such, Gray exposes the comparison between history and fiction, rendering both as narratives that employ the same writing strategies. History writing is similar to fiction writing, because both use emplotment to convey their message. In spite of this similarity, however, the former is always accepted as a

conveyor of the real while the latter is not. The distinction is further problematized when one takes into consideration the realist novel (especially of the nineteenth century) which claims to present a truthful portrayal of life as it is. The truth-claims of such novels align them with historiography, since history writing is also thought to be realistic and truthful. As Hayden White points out, whatever had made history as the more favored one due to its realist/truthful nature, does not hold true anymore, or it is not as clear-cut as it was thought to be, because history and fiction rely on the same technical device, namely, narrative. He further argues that "the history that is the subject of all […] learning is indissociable from our discourse about it; this discourse must be written before it can be digested as history; and this experience, therefore, can be as various as the different kinds of discourse met with in the history of writing itself" (*Figural* 1). Therefore, before anything else, history is a written account of the past; hence it is subject to the discursive nature of writing itself. Such an argument renders the distinction between history and fiction highly problematic.

Poor Things also focuses on this problematic distinction by its overt Victorian setting. According to Philip Hobsbaum,

> *Poor Things* A [McCandless' text] is a piece of science fiction ingeniously set in the Victorian era. In deed, its imitation of Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, George du Maurier, Bram Stoker and Rider Haggard (of which the book itself takes note), and its persistent echoing of Stevenson, McCandless' narrative could almost be called a Victorian fantasy in its own right. ("Unreliable")

So, *Poor Things* not only uses a distinctively Victorian setting but it also draws upon famous Victorian texts, thereby presenting an all-round Victorian picture. Likewise, Dietmar Böhnke suggests that "Gray can be seen as using the Victorian setting as a convenient background for his own contemporary concerns, investigating the past to illuminate the present" (204). The personal histories of Bella, Archibald and Godwin are interwoven with a thoroughly Victorian background both through references to nineteenth-century texts such as *Wuthering Heights* and Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* and through the socio-political issues and debates of the age such as the marriage law (*PT*

67), the exclusion of women from medical practice (*PT* 66), and the rapid change in social structure due to technological and scientific developments (*PT* 68).

In addition to the explicitly Victorian references within the body text of McCandless' book, there are rather bold claims as to the existence of an almost science-fictional creation of Bella Baxter in the hands of Godwin Baxter in the Introduction by Alasdair Gray, the editor: "[t]hose who examine the proofs given at the end of this introduction will not doubt that in the final week of February 1881, at Park Circus, Glasgow, a surgical genius used human remains to create a twenty-five-year-old woman" (vii). Here, Gray turns the fictive into the real with his claims of authenticity. A similar attitude can be observed in his introduction of Bella Baxter in which he supports his claims by means of referring to the research of Michael Donnelly: "Michael saw the name of the first woman doctor to graduate from Glasgow University, a name only known to historians of the suffragette movement nowadays, though she had once written a Fabian pamphlet on public health" (viii). In fact, the real historical data suggests that it was Marion Gilchrist (1864-1952) who gained a medical degree from the Glasgow University, not Victoria Baxter.[36] This blending of fact and fiction continues in the body text of McCandless' narrative, too: "Baxter told us there where only four women doctors in Britain just now, all with degrees from foreign universities, but the Enabling Bill of 1876[37] and the work of Sophia Jex-Blake[38] had resulted in Dublin University opening its doors to women medical students and Scottish universities must soon do the same" (197).

The Victorian background is also presented in Bella's letter to Baxter in which Mr. Astley, who is one of the many lively characters Bella meets during her journey with Wedderburn, assumes the role of a historian and provides a condensed history of (colonial) Britain for Bella. His comments on history are noteworthy especially because they reveal history as a grand narrative written by the victors:

> HISTORY – "*Big nations are created by successful plundering raids, and since most history is written by friends of the conquerors history usually suggests that the plundered were improved by their loss and should be grateful for it. Plundering happens inside countries too. King Henry the Eight plundered the English monasteries, the only institution in those days which provided hospitals,*

schools and shelter for the poor. English historians agree King Henry was greedy, hasty and violent, but did a lot of good. They belonged to a class which was enriched by the church lands." (157)

Such an understanding of history – history as a biased or subjective documentation of the past due to the fact that it is written by the victors, or from the viewpoint of the victorious – does not necessarily deem history as less important or less relevant. A similar argument is made by Böhnke who suggests that "the complicated nature of history/historiography does not mean that it is rendered superfluous or meaningless. On the contrary, it is necessary today more than ever, but it has to be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be constantly questioned and revised to prevent its instrumentalization by the powerful of society against the 'poor things'" (216). What should be kept in mind about history is that it is but a politically-charged narrative, instead of an objective or unbiased representation.

Indeed, history is highly important for the characters in the novel. It functions as a way of maintaining a bridge between the past and the present. Godwin Baxter warns Bella to remember every experience from her past, even when they are negative or painful to do so: "[f]orget nothing… if you cannot" (262). Likewise, as Böhnke suggests, "[t]o 'remember' history, but 'with intelligent interest' in this sense seems to be, for Gray at least, the middle way between ideological instrumentalization of history and unabashed relativism and constructivism" (216).

This remembrance of history is done on two levels. First of all, the novel concentrates on the personal histories of the characters, and secondly, it interweaves the nineteenth century into these histories. Indeed, as Rennison suggests, "*Poor Things* mingles pastiche of Victorian popular fiction – there are echoes of other writers beyond the obvious parallels with Mary Shelley and Robert Louis Stevenson and McCandless admits to having 'raved in the language of novels I knew to be trash, and only read to relax before sleeping' – with twentieth-century satire" (64). In doing that, *Poor Things* borrows heavily from literary texts of the past, which is most evident in its thematic and

technical use of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.* It should be said that *Poor Things* is both a rewriting of and a departure from *Frankenstein*:

> Set in the nineteenth-century Scotland, *Poor Things* is a parodic rewriting of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which the male monster is replaced by a sexually voracious woman created by a doctor, Godwin Bysshe Baxter, who places the brain of a fetus within the body of its drowned mother to save the lives of both. Baxter, whose full name evokes both Mary Shelley's father, William Godwin, and her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, is himself a strangely inhuman, mechanical presence, and with his huge size, high-pitched voice, bizarre eating habits and needs for sustaining medicines is much more the monster than she. What seems to be the central narrative of the novel charts their relationship through to her marriage and his death. (Malpas 23)

The book draws not only thematically but technically from Frankenstein. On a more crucial note, its very construction can be compared to that of the monster's in that "[t]his manner of 'construction' can thus be extended to encompass the book itself, stitched together in the Frankenstein-method from fact, history and literature: the remnants of 'dead' texts and tales" (Phillip 26). It should be noted that although *Poor Things* rewrites *Frankenstein,* it "writes back to rather than imitates" (Procter "Alasdair") Mary Shelley's novel. It uses the thematic concept of "creating" a "monster," but the "monstrosity" of Bella lies not in her physical distortion but the overabundance of her physical beauty. While the monster of Victor Frankenstein is a nameless creature, Bella, by contrast, is both given shelter and name, thus acquiring a proper place in humanity. Yet, her gender and unconventional ways cause her to be considered abnormal in the very least. Thus, Gray's exposition of *Frankenstein* is a thematic subversion. More importantly for a discussion of postmodern realism, Gray does not only borrow thematically from *Frankenstein* but also makes allusions to the people who are important figures in Mary Shelley's personal life. Godwin Bysshe is a combination of her father's name – William Godwin – and her husband's name – Percy Bysshe Shelley. Moreover, Baxter's name is used as an explicit allusion to God in the novel; Bella Baxter constantly shortens Godwin's name to God, thus alluding to the similarity of his status next to God on her part, while at the same time acknowledging that he is not God:

> "Forgive me Bella, forgive me for making you like this."

> She opened her eyes and said faintly, "What's that supposed to mean? You aren't our father which art in heaven, God." (52)

Interestingly, though, Duncan Wedderburn refers to Godwin Baxter as Lucifer: "[*l*]*ittle did I know that in THIS melodrama I would play the part of the innocent, trusting Gretchen, that your overwhelming niece was cast as Faust, and that YOU! YES, YOU, Godwin Bysshe Baxter, are SATAN Himself!"* (78), because he thinks that his misadventure with Bella is a terrible plot of his. There is even a chapter entitled "God Answers" in which it is, in fact, Bella who does the explanation and replying instead of God(win).

According to Kaczvinsky, "Gray's point, in both his documentary evidence and his visual artistry, is not to provide, as in the eighteenth-century novel, verisimilitude, but, by applying them to an outrageous tale like the creation of a female Frankenstein […] an odd conjoining of romance and realism, fiction and fact" (792). The act of implanting the brain of Bella's baby into her skull does not merely signify an à-la *Frankenstein* gothic element. It also disrupts the natural order of things, because where the mother should be the central figure, the baby assumes the position of authority; where the mother should be the source of life, the baby becomes the riding force. The mother is turned into a mere vessel, while the baby (or rather her brain) assumes the central position/authority. Cristie March suggests that "[t]his transplantation creates a confounding of upper and lower strata – the contents of the womb transferred to the skull" (338). More importantly, this transplantation points at a subversion of the conventional order of things, which can be taken as a symbolic act how Gray also subverts several conventions of novel writing throughout *Poor Things.*

Using Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a point of departure as well as a point of reference, then, Gray writes what one can call an "inbred" novel in which several allusions to well-known texts and personae are present. The inclusion of real-life people within the novel is another postmodern rendition of problematic realism. *Poor Things* rests on the tension between what is fact and what is fiction, both on a metaphorical and a literal level. Gray further complicates the issue with his claims of originality and

authenticity of the accounts of such characters both in the Introduction and the Notes, and within the so-called autobiographical account of Archibald McCandless. *Poor Things,* then, promotes a thematization of the "dubious" position of the author as the owner of his book, thus contesting aesthetic originality and textual closure all at once. In this respect, the novel, as Rennison contends, "takes the form of a spoof memoir complete with scholarly annotations by its supposed editor, Alasdair Gray himself" (63). The "editorial" intrusions both at the beginning and at the end of the book function as a catalyst for providing an air of documentary to the text while a close examination reveals that this is a fake documentary.

In the section entitled "Notes Critical and Historical," Gray provides fake documents and references for the dates and personae in McCandless' account. Ian Phillip suggests that "Gray's familiar mix of close-up realist detail, opinionated polemic, and wildly creative fiction are intermingled to such a degree within these notes as to render what should be a clarifying appendix all the more baffling" (24). Thus, instead of being clarifying and explanatory, these notes further complicate the text.

The biographical background of Godwin Baxter and Sir Colin Baxter, for example, is said to be supported via Gervaise Thring's *The Royal Doctors*, yet there is, in fact, no such book in existence or no such author:

> In his history *The Royal Doctors* (published by McMillan, 1963) Gervaise Thring gives most space to Godwin's progenitor, Sir Colin Baxter, but says: "Between 1864 and 1869 his less well-known yet equally gifted son was attendant consultant during the delivery of three princes and a princess royal, and probably saved the life of the Duke of Clarence. For reasons perhaps connected with his precarious health Godwin Baxter withdrew into private life and died in obscurity a few years later. (279)

These fictional texts are interwoven with references to real historical figures such as Jean Martin Charcot (1825-1893), who is famous for his application of "the method of observation and methodical description borrowed from neurology" (Degroseiller, "Jean-Martin") to hysteria. There are also maps, drawings, and portraits of various sorts, some of which are real, and some of which are fabricated. The drawing on King Prempeh's

humiliation in this section, for example, is taken from the "29th February 1896 issue of *The Graphic*" (O'Connor, "The Dash"), while Gray cites his source for the drawing, the claimed relationship between the life of General Blessington and the story relayed in its caption is purely fabricated.

In a similar fashion, the opening of the Introduction provides a detailed account of how Alasdair Gray has got into possession of McCandless' text, as well as a detailed list of "proofs" as to the accountability of this text. Throughout pages x-xi, Gray narrates how he has come to know Michael Donnelly, and how he ended up being the editor of this book. He also talks about the alterations he has made in the book. It turns out that during the 70s, Michael Donnelly discovers the book "during the period of wholesale restructuring of huge parts of the city" (Böhnke 211). He gives his findings to Gray, and Gray starts working on the "history" behind the texts. Then, he gives a thorough list of "proofs" that support the plausibility of McCandless' account. The proofs provided in the Introduction include a mixture of fictionalized real-life characters and documented fictional data. The Elspeth King mentioned in the Introduction, for example, is not a fictive character but a real curator and a friend of Alasdair Gray's. Her short biography is as follows:

> MA FMA was born in Fife, graduated in medieval history from the University of St Andrews and is a museum curator to trade. From 1974-1991, she was curator of the People's Palace in Glasgow. When Director of Dunfermline Heritage Trust, 1991-1994, she created Abbot House, now a main heritage and cultural centre in Fife. Since 1994, she has been Director of the Stirling Art Gallery and Museum. (Moores 240)

Likewise, Michael Donnelly, who is said to be King's helper in the Introduction, is also Gray's real-life friend. Both Elspeth King and Michael Donnelly serve to create an air of authenticity to the novel and legitimacy to the found text of Archibald McCandless. Moreover, Gray reinforces the air of authenticity by adding allegedly documentary evidence that he has supposedly gathered from several institutions such as Glasgow University or the Scottish National Library; thus the text has, as Kaczvinsky notes, the "look of a well-researched historical document – factual, unadorned, precise in its details" (792):

> After six months of research among the archives of Glasgow University, the Mitchell Library's Old Glasgow Room, the Scottish National Library, Register House in Edinburgh, Somerset House in London and the National Newspaper Archive of the British Library at Colindale I have collected enough material evidence to prove the McCandless story a complete tissue of facts. (xii)

Then, Gray provides a whole documentary with dates and "facts," imitating the style of a chronicle. He uses actual dates complete with short historical accounts related to those dates. For example, he describes minutely the recovery of the body of a pregnant woman from the river as follows: "18 FEBRUARY, 1881: The body of a pregnant woman is recovered from the Clyde. The police surgeon, Godwin Baxter (whose home is 18 Park Circus) certifies death by drowning, and describes her as 'about 25 years old, 5 feet 10 ¾ inches tall, dark brown curling hair, blue eyes, fair complexion and hand unused to rough work; well dressed'" (xii). These "facts" are backed up by the account of McCandless, which overlaps with Gray's findings. While there is nothing to alarm the reader in relation to the accountability of this data, what happened in June, 29 in 1882 is definitely refuted in Bella's letter to her great-grand child. Gray the editor claims that "[a]t sunset an extraordinary noise was heard throughout most of the Clyde basin, and though widely discussed in the local press during the following fortnight, no satisfactory explanation was ever founded for it" (xii). This incident refers to Baxter's experimental creation of Bella, locating it within an exact duration so as to increase the plausibility of the account. Yet, after reading Bella's letter, it is almost impossible to distinguish what is real and what is fictive in this section.

Interestingly, Gray dismisses any question of authenticity of the account of the found text or the credibility of the data within it by saying that the trust of his reader is enough for him to publish the piece even against the suggestions and objections of Michael Donnely: "Michael Donnelly has told me he would find the above evidence more convincing if I had obtained official copies of the marriage and death certificates and photocopies of the newspaper reports, but if my readers trust me I do not care what an "expert" thinks" (xiii-xiv). However, this trust is not easy to give because the book is deliberately confusing. Böhnke argues that "Gray's appeal for the trust of his readers is

of course also ironic in light of the fact that the (hi)story that follows is far from convincing and coherent. It consists of a cacophony of different and differing voices telling their personal versions of a story which is itself truly bizarre and begs belief" (192). There is not only a single, unifying voice that narrates the story but also there is a deliberate mixture of the fake and the real, the fictive and the genuine.

Poor Things is nurtured by various different writing styles and genres from science fiction to gothic, from fairy tale to travel writing. This overabundance of stylistic differences is one of the reasons that gives the novel its uniqueness. Yet, the most overtly laid bare issue in the novel is the stance of the author, or rather, the plurality of authors and authorial positions.

As a postmodern realist text, *Poor Things* is a combination of contesting narratives. It is a text, in Richard Todd's words, "uttered by different voices whose authority cannot be determined, so that they resonate against each other internally, perpetually, and inconclusively" (130). The most overt problematic concerning the position of the author can be observed in the act of Alasdair Gray's situating himself as the editor of the book. It is important to note that Gray's insistence on his being the editor, not the author, is not necessarily a new strategy of writing. Literary history is full of author's claiming to be the editors of their own texts. This can be observed, for example, in the Editorial Notes, the Prefaces, and the Prologues in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders,* and Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*.[39] Gray claims to have "found" the text of Archibald McCandless and Victoria's letter. Found texts and merely "transmitting" them to the reading public has, again, a prevalent and long-established tradition in the history of the novel genre.[40] However, rather than using it as a frame to tell his story, "Gray underscores how texts, like memory, can be lost through the accidents of history or the willful disregard of the power structure" (Kaczvinsky 797) by structuring the novel within the frame of a lost and found text. Moreover, Gray goes one step further, and he adds his own commentary at the end of the book in the section entitled "Notes Critical and Historical" as well as in the Introduction: "[t]he doctor who wrote this account of his early experiences died in 1911, and readers who know nothing about the daringly experimental history of Scottish medicine will perhaps mistake it for a

grotesque fiction" (vii). He also comments on the peculiarity of Victoria McCandless' letter: "[t]he accompanying letter was even more perplexing. It was from Victoria McCandless, M. D., widow of the author, telling the descendant who never existed that the book was full of lies" (ix). In addition to adding his comments and passing judgment on the text, Alasdair Gray numbers the Introduction with Roman numerals, setting it apart from the rest of the novel and giving, thus, an air of authenticity to the Introduction. In the section entitled "Notes Critical and Historical," Gray seems to be favoring and siding with McCandless's account, and he does it by providing fake documents, and creating an illusion of scientific or objective ground for the story of McCandless, which, ironically, is the account that sounds the most fantastical and improbable:

> Dr. Victoria McCandless was found dead of a cerebral stroke on 3rd December 1946. Reckoning from the birth of her brain in the Humane Society mortuary on Glasgow Green, 18th February 1880, she was exactly sixty-six years, forty weeks, and four days old. Reckoning from the birth of her body in a Manchester slum in 1854, she was ninety-two. (317)

The same favoring can be found in the Introduction in which Gray argues, concerning the letter of Bella Baxter, that "we can easily see that it is the letter of a disturbed woman who wants to hide the truth about her start in life" (xi). Thus, Gray the editor evidently sides with McCandless' account while dismissing Bella's letter. This can be taken as a sign of siding with the fantastical as opposed to the more realistically plausible of the two accounts. It can even be related to the very meaning of the word "editor" which comes from the word "to edit" meaning "to select, to correct, and to arrange." Thus, the narratives that comprise the body text of *Poor Things* are edited, which suggests that reality of what happened in the lives of Bella, Baxter, and McCandless come to the reader in a corrected, selected, and arranged mode. The texts are not left to speak for themselves, but the editor cuts in to give proof to the accountability of them or their lack.

Not only the author but also the characters assume the role of an editor; they, too, comment on or criticize the written texts or one another: Bella's letters from Odessa and

Gibraltar are read and commented upon by Baxter and McCandless, Wedderburn's letter was examined by Baxter, McCandless' so-called autobiography is assessed and refuted by Bella, and Bella's letter to her great grandchild is evaluated by Alasdair Gray the editor. These acts can be considered what Linda Hutcheon calls "narcissistic narratives." The text closes upon itself in the way the images reflected indefinitely by the mirrors put against each other. All sections of *Poor Things,* including the Introduction and the "Notes Critical and Historical" by Alasdair Gray, echo one another. *Poor Things,* as such, uses the *mise-en-abyme* technique. According to Brian McHale, "*mise-en-abyme,* wherever it occurs, disturbs the orderly hierarchy of ontological level (worlds within worlds), in effect *short-circulating* the ontological structure, and thus foregrounding it" (14). The existence of clashing narratives within the same body of writing attests to this. The world created by McCandless is disrupted by the presence of Bella's letter since it claims to deduce a different story from the same set of events. In addition, the presence of an editor who liberally comments on and provides documents for the narrative of McCandless and for the authenticity of the existence of the characters further reinforces the ontological uncertainty.

Simon Malpas argues that "*Poor Things* is irreducibly plural, made up as it is of a range of competing voices and styles, and fragmentary in that these voices do not form a coherent whole but continually contradict and undermine each other" (24). Godwin retells the extraordinary circumstances that resulted in the creation of Bella, and he adds that believing in this story is up to McCandless: "[b]ut you need not believe this if it disturbs you" (42). This is an example of one of the many instances in which one character either questions or tries to justify the validity of a narrated event within the novel. Thus, *Poor Things* is both a self-conscious and a self-reflexive novel.

Malpas further suggests that "the conflict between the fantastical story told by McCandless and his wife's far more mundane account of the same events presented through the lens of nineteenth-century medicine, generates a range of questions about what is real and what might really be going on" (24). The intertextual and pla(y)giarist nature of McCandless' text is not only pointed out by Alasdair Gray the editor but also

by Bella Baxter who accuses the text of being a dreadful combination of the texts of the Victorian age:

> You, dear reader, have now two accounts to choose between and there can be no doubt which is most probable. My second husband's story positively stinks of all that was morbid in that most morbid of centuries, the nineteenth. He has made a sufficiently strange story stranger still by stirring into it episodes and phrases to be found in Hoggs' Suicide's grave with additional ghouleries from the works of Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. What morbid Victorian fantasy has he NOT filched from? I find traces of The Coming Race, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Dracula, Trilby, Rider Haggard's She, The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes, and, alas, Alice Through the Looking-Glass; a gloomier book than the sunlit Alice in Wonderland. He has even plagiarized work by two very dear friends: G.B. Shaw's Pygmalion and the scientific romances of Herbert George Wells. (272-3)

Bella not only makes reference to the prominent nineteenth-century authors and texts, she also claims to be friends with two of them. By doing so, she contributes to the confusion of fact and fiction. As such, the text turns the factual into fictional and the fictional into factual.

Another example with regards to the self-conscious and self-reflexive mode of the novel can be observed in the intrusive voices who almost constantly interrupt the narrative with their commentary on the nature of these accounts. Throughout his letter, for example, Wedderburn tries to justify his truth-claims by drawing a meticulous parallelism between Biblical prophecies and the life of Bella and Baxter. (*PT* 95-7). "Modern facts" are backed up by references to historically accurate data and personae such as Adam Smith, William Thomson, and Queen Elizabeth. Baxter comments on the claims of Wedderburn, passing judgment on them. His distinctive voice is distinguishable from the main body of the letter due to the use of a different typography. In an interview, Gray himself comments on his preference for various different typographies in his novels:

> I use a variety of typefaces where this makes the story clearer. Thus in *Poor Things* the letters of Bella and Wedderburn are printed in italic, a type based on handwriting rather than Roman chiseling. In *1892 Janine* – an interior monologue novel – the speaker has a nervous breakdown conveyed by three columns of different typefaces on the same pages, each a stream of thought or feelings at war with the rest. I do not know how else I could have done it. Since a lot of people

buy these books I think they give more pleasure than pain. (Axelrod, "A Conversation with Alasdair Gray")

Furthermore, the novel is full of drawings which promote the mismatching of the factual with the fictional. Although drawn by Gray himself, for example, the portraits in the novel are attributed to William Strang (1859-1921).[41] In order to reinforce the idea, the portraits have the initials "W.S." at the bottom-left, and sometimes at the bottom right. The other medical illustrations that can be found in McCandless' book are attributed to McCandless, though they are, again, drawn by Gray himself. Additionally, the air of authenticity is maintained by the reference to the famous anatomy book, *Gray's Anatomy*:

> I have illustrated the chapter notes with some nineteenth-century engravings, but it was McCandless who filled spaces in his books with illustrations from the first edition of *Gray's Anatomy*: probably because he and his friend Baxter learned the kindly art of healing from it. The grotesque design opposite is by Strang, and was stamped in silver upon the batters of the original volume. (xiv)

Thus, there is a caricaturization of the drawings found in the original *Gray's Anatomy,* since these drawings, too, are made by Alasdair Gray. In an interview, Gray explains that these portraits are based on the faces of people around him, and, in the case of Jean Martin Charcot, on Montesquieu:

> MA: On whom did you base your illustrations in *Poor Things?* Jean Martin Charcot appears to look a lot like Montesquieu. Were there models for these?
> AG: Charcot was indeed based on Boldini's portrait of Montesquieu. The portrait of McCandless was taken from Paul Currie, of Baxter from Bernard MacLaverty, of Bella from Moray McCalhine. The first two are friends, the third a friend and wife. […] The face of de la Pole Blessington and Blaydon Hattersley were inventions. (Axelrod, "A Conversation with Alasdair Gray")

As these examples also indicate, *Poor Things* presents itself as a blending of fact and fiction, not only in the written text but also in the graphics, drawings, and etchings added by Alasdair Gray. Gray re-creates a nineteenth-century reality by freely inserting

references to people who actually lived during those times and also by alluding to famous literary texts of the time within his fictional world. However, the presence of both the Introduction and the Notes Critical and Historical, disrupts the seamlessness of this construct. According to Rhind, "*Poor Things* flaunts its own textuality in multiple inter-related ways, foregrounding its status as both narrative and artifact. As part of this, it also highlights its sources, both the texts – real or fictitious – assumed within its diegetic reality and the real-world texts – historical or fictional – which Gray utilizes in its composition" (172). Thus, through the meta-commentaries, he exhibits a confusion of the ontological certainty the reader may get from the nineteenth-century atmosphere. All these are indicators of what postmodern realist texts do: there is a deliberate rootedness in the realist effect while this is exposed by the existence of clashing ontological levels, as well as by the novel's reconstruction of a world of conflicting narratives. Gray's novel goes then, beyond a mere rewriting and posits itself as a postmodern realist text, in its combination of realist conventions, such as attention to detail, thorough descriptions and characterization with overt postmodern techniques such as self-reflexivity, irony, and parody.

CHAPTER III

LOST IN THE LABYRINTHS OF HISTORY: PETER ACKROYD'S *THE PLATO PAPERS: A PROPHECY*[42]

> "It is impossible to recover our past. It is a labor in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of out intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object give us) which we do not suspect." (Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* 34)

One of the most prolific authors of contemporary British literature, Peter Ackroyd was born in London in 1949. Upon graduating from Yale University, he started working as the literary editor of *The Spectator* magazine. However, it was his collection of poems published under the title *Ouch* in 1971 that marks the beginning of his literary career. His other poetry books are *London Lickpenny* (1973), *Country Life* (1978), and *The Diversion of Purley and Other Poems* (1987). Yet, Ackroyd is more famously known as a biographer, novelist, critic, and historian. His career as a fiction writer started in 1982 with the publication of *The Great Fire of London.* His other novels[43] are *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1983), *Hawksmoor* (1985), *Chatterton* (1987), *First Light* (1989), *English Music* (1992), *The House of Doctor Dee* (1993), *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* (1994), *Milton in America* (1996), *The Plato Papers: A Novel* (1999), *The Clerkenwell Tales* (2003), *The Lambs of London* (2004), *The Fall of Troy* (2006), *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein: A Novel* (2008), and his last novel to date is *The Canterbury Tales: A Retelling* (2009).

Ackroyd is also noted for his non-fictional works, which fall under three basic categories, namely, criticism, history, and biography. *Notes for a New Culture* (1976, reprinted in 1993) and *The Collection: Journalism, Reviews, Essays, Short Stories,*

Lectures (2001) are both works of criticism. His historical research covers a wide range in terms of subject-matter; he published *Dressing Up: Transvestism and Drag: The History of an Obsession* in 1979. This is followed by *London: The Biography* (2000), *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (2002), *Illustrated London* (2002), *Escapes from Earth: Voyages through Time* (2003), *In the Beginning: Voyages through Time* (2003), *Cities of Blood: Voyages through Time* (2004), *Thames: Sacred River* (2007), *The English Ghost: Spectres Through Time* (2010), and *London Under: The Secret History Beneath* (2011). Another mode of writing Ackroyd engages in is biography. His biographies are written in the postmodern mode, combining fictional and factual data. His first piece was *Ezra Pound and his World* (1980). He has also written *T.S. Eliot* (1984), *Dickens* (1990), *Introduction to Dickens* (1991), *Blake* (1995), *The Life of Thomas More* (1998), *Chaucer: Brief Lives* (2004), *Shakespeare: The Biography* (2005), *Poe: A Life Cut Short* (2008), and *Newton: Brief Lives* (2008). He also wrote a play called *The Mystery of Charles Dickens*, which had its opening night on April 25, 2002.[44]

Thus, Ackroyd is a rather versatile figure, having written works in various different genres. He is considered to be the Charles Dickens of his age both due to his prolific amount of writing and due to his treatment and choice of subject matter. Allan Massie, for example, points out that Ackroyd

> has the same sense of strange poetry of life, the same relish in human behavior, the same awareness that comedy derives from the point of view, and he has learned from him [Dickens] how to give authenticity and vitality to a novel by placing naturalistic, even dull, characters, conceived and displayed as grotesque, who press in on the central characters and then pull away from them in a joyous celebration of human variety. (53)

Ackroyd himself acknowledges his fascination with Dickens, which is evident both in the fact that Ackroyd wrote a biography of Dickens and a play named after him, and due to his own association of himself with the Cockney[45] tradition, which Ackroyd sees as manifest in Dickens.[46] Massie maintains that Ackroyd's "work is marked by an extreme artificiality. It is always at some remove from life, and he never leaves the reader in any doubt that he is reading a novel" (52). Thus, Ackroyd tends to combine fact with fiction,

but he also makes his readers alert to the fact that they are within the realm of fiction. Moreover, as Philip Tew and Rod Mengham note, "[a] striking feature of Ackroyd's fiction is the preponderance of characters whose lives are dominated by some professional, ritual, artistic, mystical or other activities related to the past" (57). In this sense, it can be suggested that a good amount of Ackroyd's characters display an open engagement with the past. As Aleid Fokkema puts it, "Ackroyd is one of those postmodernists who, confronting history, has 'a desire to show the real'" (170). She continues to argue that

> A point is made about reality: the (fictional) universe has no rational basis. Ackroyd's characters are intensely involved with human responses to a world that cannot be understood. These responses are rarely rational, let alone well-balanced or "responsible." Thus, giving a voice to many a disturbed mind, Ackroyd is an advocate of the irrational. (170)

Ackroyd himself refuses such labeling claiming that postmodern novelists create "a very deliberate rhetoric which is supposed to replace the conventional pieties of realistic narrative but [they] succeed only in murdering them" (*Collection* 12). However, his novels also share a common ground with the very postmodern novelists he condemns, especially in terms of their problematization of the past. David Leon Higdon contends that "Ackroyd rejects being called either an historical novelist or a postmodernist, preferring to identify his work with what he calls 'English music' and the Cockney visionary traditions, a stance which marks him as both" (217). He further argues that

> When he began to write novels himself, he started within the bounds of realistic narrative; however, his novels increasingly exploited the full range of postmodern techniques, turning to anti-realism, grounding themselves in a range of structural play, steeping themselves in layers of intertextuality, foregrounding their fictionality, and fully exploiting historical discontinuities, pastiche and parody, and especially featuring types of impersonation he had theorized earlier in his history of drag and transvestism. (217)

In this way Ackroyd incorporates both postmodern and realist techniques without subsuming one to the other. This is what makes him distinctly a postmodern realist writer. He specifically uses the style of historical narratives, chronicles, and historical

documents in combination with metafictional mode of writing. Thus, intertextuality, parody, pastiche and ex-centricity are devices that he frequently employs in his novels.[47] This results in an uneasy mixing and blending of fact and fiction, blurring their boundaries. This type of writing indicates the significance of "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (Montrose 20),[48] which for Ackroyd is crucial in his writing because his works display an overt engagement with history as "material existence" and as "textual meditation," as well as with fiction as a historically embedded cultural artifact. As the postmodern philosopher of history Hayden White suggests, "[r]eaders of histories and novels can hardly fail to be struck by the similarities. There are many histories that could pass for novels, and many novels that could pass for histories. […] Viewed simply as verbal artifacts, histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another" (*Tropics* 121). Ackroyd's novels not only problematize the line between history writing and fiction, but they also rely heavily on literary history. His novels and his biographies, therefore, draw upon "English history of literature, art and music," as Jan Schnitker and Rudolf Freiburg have also stated:

> The borderline between fact and fiction is wrapped in London fog not only in his fictional biographies but also in his novels. But that is not the only reason why one is tempted to label Ackroyd as "postmodernist." His novels echo well-known books from the past and *English Music* can partly be read as a short English history of literature, art and music. Even his own characters and themes from previous novels reappear in later works. (8)

Thus, not only does Ackroyd borrow from the tradition he is nurtured by, but he also freely pla(y)garizes[49] his own work. This act should be taken as a means of foregrounding the fictionality of fiction as well as the interconnectedness of each and every work. According to Mark Currie, in postmodern fiction there is a "deep involvement with its own past, the constant dialogue with its own conventions, which projects any self-analysis backwards in time. Novels which reflect upon themselves in the postmodern age act in a sense as commentaries on their antecedents" (1). Ackroyd's novels also reflect this awareness in that most of them are concerned with depicting the inscription of the past into the present, and vice versa. Furthermore, the strong tie with tradition also indicates a continual relation with the realist conventions which marks Ackroyd's writing as a postmodern realist one.

Among Ackroyd's novels, *Hawksmoor* and *Chatterton* have attracted quite a few critical attention due to their multiplicity of narrative levels, historical and literary references, and their obviously postmodern structures. *The Plato Papers,* on the other hand, has received mixed reactions from critics. Nick Rennison, for example, suggests that "*The Plato Papers* is, by some way, Ackroyd's oddest novel, if indeed it is best described as a novel at all. Half-fable, half-treatise, it seems much more a vehicle for Ackroyd's ideas about aesthetics and the relationship between science and religion than it does an attempt at sustaining a convincing narrative" (4). Speaking of *The Plato Papers,* Eric Korn also contends that "in this brief and entertaining fantasy, Peter Ackroyd toys with topics – the omnipresence of the past, the arbitrariness of historicism – which underpin both his biographies and his fictions, never far apart. But it is a sinewless skeleton, and will not stand alone" (21). *The Plato Papers* is Ackroyd's tenth and the shortest novel, and unlike *Chatterton* or *Hawksmoor,* it is not one of Ackroyd's most critically acclaimed novels. However, it does provide a good conceptual framework to discuss the manifestation of postmodern realism in terms of its use of postmodern parody, intertextual references as well as its realist epistemology as Plato strives to tell the story of London's past with confidence. His oratory as such, however, turns into a subversive imitation of historiography. In this regard, one of the best examples of postmodern realism is manifest in *The Plato Papers* in the form of a hybrid narrative that incorporates the past and the present modes of writing, i.e. Socratic dialogue and postmodern parody. *The Plato* Papers is in fact a typical historiographic metafiction in the way it erases the line between historical and fictional narratives. As Linda Hutcheon contends, historiographic metafictions problematize the distinction between story-telling and historical narrative. She maintains that "both fiction and history actually refer the first level to other texts: we know the past only through its textualized remains" (*A Poetics* 119). *The Plato Papers* uses the textualized remains of the past such as the remnants of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species,* Edgar Allen Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," Sigmund Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious,* and others. This is how Plato gains access to the past, and it is the constituent of the novel's engagement with historiography. Yet, this past he narrates is misguided and incomplete due to the fractured material he relies on. But more

importantly, it is his misinterpretation of this material that results in a misreading of the past. These misreadings constitute the novel's parodic dimension.

Comprising of fifty five chapters dispersed rather uneconomically into less than two hundred pages, the novel takes place in London,[50] in an imaginary distant future, 3700 A.D., in which there are figures from literary texts and mythology such as Orpheus, Thanatos, Chronos, and Oedipus, historical people such as Nell Gwyn, Charles Darwin, Edgar Allen Poe, T.S. Eliot, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud, concepts and objects such as the internet, string theory, wormhole theory, word processor, x-ray, stopwatch, and remote control that are familiar to the contemporary reader. Instead of being a technologically-advanced and ultra-scientific projection of the world as one might expect from a novel which uses the future as its setting, *The Plato Papers* is rather devolutionary, since the city depicted in the novel resembles that of an ancient Greek city although the layers of the city that are revealed through the excavations are part of London, past and present. The representation of London is not limited to the present-day, but it goes back well into the past, excavating both the actual and the imagined historical and literary heritage of the city. The novel is narrated in the form of Socratic dialogues where Plato, as the major character, provides a "detailed history" of London in *The Plato Papers,* making references to real historians and literary personae. He argues that Geoffrey de Monmouth's[51] historical account provides a very-well grounded data in understanding the past while the records of Macaulay[52] and Trevelyan[53] are less trustworthy as they are written more recently: "[f]rom the writings of that great scholar and historian Geoffrey of Monmouth they learned that London had been founded by Brutus of Troy at the time when 'the Ark of the Covenant was taken by the Philistines.' Other writers of record have been discovered – the names of Macaulay and Trevelyan are among them – but they are of a later date and therefore less reliable" (68). Since Plato deems Monmouth to be a more reliable source, he bases his knowledge of London unto his accounts. For this reason, his so-called historical account is a combination of myth, epic, and history:

> [a]fter the fall of Troy, Brutus was greeted in vision by the goddess Diana; she commanded him to sail to an island beyond the setting of his sun, and establish a city which would become the wonder of the world. This island was known as Albion and after Brutus had landed upon its white shore he encountered a race of

> giants whom eventually he overcame in battle. After his victory Brutus established the city of New Troy, later known as Lud's Town or London, and bequeathed to it a code of spiritual law which continued through the reigns of Lear, Cordelia and Lud himself. (68)

It is ironical that Plato prefers Monmouth's historical account over that of Macaulay's or Trevelyan's, since his account creates an epic-like narrative of glorification of the English people, compared to the more level-headed historical writings of Macaulay and Trevelyan.

Because the novel presents itself as a piece of historical document, it opens with a chronological listing of the ages. Yet, they are named differently from what one may see in a history book, and the last two refer to two ages that are not even real (they cover a time in the imagined future for the contemporary reader):

> c. 3500 BC – c. 300 BC: The Age of Orpheus
> c. 300 BC – c. AD 1500: The Age of the Apostles
> c. AD 1500 – c. AD 2300: The Age of Mouldwarp
> c. AD 2300 – c. AD 3400: The Age of Witspell
> c. AD. 3700: The Present. (n.p.)

Though named peculiarly, the names of the ages are suggestive for an informed reader: the Age of Orpheus refers to the classical age, and the Age of the Apostles refers to the Middle Ages. The Age of Mouldwarp starts circa the Renaissance and moves well into an imagined date in the future. The Age of Witspell does not correspond to any of the historical moments known to the audience as it is a fictional one. The Age of Witspell is defined as an era where "human light began to appear upon the earth" (66). This is the age where the "realities" of previous ages coexist with the present one. Thus, the Age of Witspell is marked with a collision of worlds, beliefs, and rituals in which the old and the new create a multilayered texture of reality.

In addition to being suggestive, their names are crucial in understanding how these ages are envisioned: the classical age is represented by Orpheus because he is famous for his journey to the underworld, thus indicating a parallel between his experience and that of

Plato's. The Middle Ages is named as the Age of the Apostles because it refers to the transition from polytheist belief systems to a monotheist one, heralded and endorsed by the presence of earthly men who are supposedly dedicated to one, single creator. The name of the Age of Mouldwarp is a reference to the literal meaning of "warp," indicating that this age could be considered as a time warp in which the ties with the sacred are severed. The Age of Witspell is an era where two different modes exist simultaneously: reason (wit) is intermingled with the supernatural (spell). In the novel, these ages are narrated in Chapters 16, 17, 19, and 21, respectively, in which myth becomes history, metaphor becomes literal. When Plato gives an account of the myth of Orpheus, for example, myth, fact and fiction fuse into one another as Plato combines the elements of the mythical story with the archeological excavations ongoing in his time: "He [Orpheus] was about to enter [a cavern], when a ferocious three-headed dog came towards him out of the darkness. (The bones of the grotesque animal have indeed been found near the site of the ruined city)" (52). He makes the assumption that this particular myth, which he takes to be "a central and genuine event," is crucial to understand the ancient history:

> It is in many respects a poignant story, but there is no reason to doubt its general truth. Although certain detailed have yet to be authenticated, the existence of Hades and Mount Olympus, as well as the star cluster of Lyra, has already been proven. In the sad fate of Orpheus, then, we have a central and genuine event of ancient history. You may now enter the observation chamber, where the three-headed dog has been reconstructed, before I begin a brief exequy on the second age of the earth. (54)

The second age is the Middle Ages which Plato considers to be "an age of suffering and lamentation, when the earth itself was considered to be evil and all those upon it were condemned sinners" (55). Just like he does with the previous one, Plato is certain of the truth-value of his knowledge of this age. He argues that the Age of the Apostles is marked by the presence of one intimidating god and people's miserable existence under the dictates of the apostles: "[t]his god, according to the testimony of the apostles, had already consigned some of its creatures to everlasting torment in a region known as hell; its location has not yet been found, but we believe it to lie in a territory adjacent to

Hades. We are certain, however, that the religion of the apostles was indeed one of blood and sorrow" (56).

Plato's account of the Age of Mouldwarp also highlights his misguided knowledge of the past. For Plato, the Age of Mouldwarp is marked by catastrophic events which eventually lead to the downfall of this era and the beginning of a new one:

> The last centuries of Mouldwarp furnish perhaps the most solemn and awful scenes in the entire history of the earth. Who can properly depict, for example, the despair engendered by the cult of webs and nets which spread among the people in these final years? They seem to have worn these dismal garments as a form of enslavement as well as worship, as if their own darkness might thereby be covered and concealed. They had inherited the superstition of progress from their credulous ancestors but in their extremity they had no notion of what, if anything, they were progressing towards. Nothing could have prepared them, however, for the horror of the end. (59-60)

What Plato names as a cult in fact refers to the internet and the World Wide Web, which indeed has become an indispensable part of contemporary life. Plato considers these as tools of enslavement. He also comments on the Big Bang in his definition of "opening night," contending that it is "a reference to the creation myth of Mouldwarp, in which the universe is believed to have emerged from darkness and chaos" (25). *The Plato Papers* is, therefore, concerned with the idea of science and scientific development though Ackroyd does not acknowledge this novel as a work of science fiction. He contends that "I do not call it [*The Plato Papers*] science fiction. For one thing, there is very little science within it. It is for me a way of recognizing the present through the medium of an inconceivably remote time" (qtd. in Lewis 109). It is indeed true that *The Plato Papers* is not in the same league with the novels of Asimov, H.G. Wells, or Jules Verne, but it does focus on certain scientific concepts and the idea of progress, evident in Plato's narrative on the Age of Mouldwarp. Here, Plato tries to explain such scientific theories as "the Big Bang," "chaos theory," "wormhole theory," and "superstrings;" and he makes references to the cosmological concepts of the white dwarf, the brown dwarf, black hole, and dark matter, yet his explanations are a combination of fact and fiction, creating a comic blurring of these two: "*The people of Mouldwarp did not know why they believed in science. They knew only that it was*

absurd not to believe. And their science worked in their dimensions! They could move
quickly from place to place, converse with one another over long distances, and see one
another in different regions of the earth" (157).

All these readings of the past ages constitute the very basis of Plato's oratories. Plato is
the orator in this imaginary, archaic-looking futuristic world; his job is to enlighten his
citizens about the "ancient" civilizations that have walked the Earth before them. He
fulfills his duty through a meticulous yet misguided reading of the past by interpreting
the remains of the texts such as Darwin's *The Origin of Species,* Poe's "The Fall of the
House of Usher," and Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* from those
civilizations, as well as by putting together a dictionary of "ancient" terms which is
instrumental in shedding light onto the past where he defines the concepts such as
"wisdom teeth," "transcendence," "time bomb," and "second in command." Thus, in
addition to using textual data to understand the past ages, Plato writes a dictionary
through which he tries to expand his citizens' understanding of the past civilizations and
their lives. However, this dictionary is full of misinterpretations. For example, he
defines *"words-worth"* as follows:

> *words-worth:* the patronymic writers who had earned their high position. In a
> similar context, we have Chatter-ton. Many Mouldwarp writers were compared to
> inorganic substances, such as Ore-well, Cole-ridge and Gold-smith. Some writers
> were considered sacred, as in Pope and Priestley. Some were feared as Wilde or
> Savage while others were celebrated for their mournful or querulous style, among
> them Graves, Bellow and Frost. Unfortunately, no specimens of their work have
> survived. (34)

Words he defines are not limited only with literary history and culture, but they also
include concepts from contemporary daily life, such as "brainstorming," "CD," and
"GMT." He defines "CD" as "an abbreviation of 'cold dirge,' a form of music designed
to calm or deaden human faculties" (16), and "rock music" as "the sound of old stones"
(33). Moreover, his definition of these concepts are markers of Plato's envisioning of
the past, which indicates how revoking the past based on limited knowledge can result
in a peculiar and hilarious misunderstanding.

The definitions he provides are neither accurate nor correct; they are playful and funny misunderstandings. Yet, it does not mean that these definitions are there simply for the sake of amusing the reader. His misreadings should be considered within the framework of what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction," which she states, "does not deny the *existence* of the past; it does question whether we can ever *know* that past other than through its textualized remains" (*A Poetics* 20). In fact, Peter Ackroyd problematizes the possibility of a direct access to the past, through Plato's misinformed readings. In one of his oratories, Plato openly acknowledges this dilemma: "[n]o history of Mouldwarp had mentioned this, which serves to emphasize that our knowledge of the past is conjectural at best" (92). His distress over the "blindness" of his fellow citizens is more pronounced in the dialogue between Plato and the members of the jury:

> Have you ever considered that our lives are a form of dream and that it is time to awake? What if we are being dreamed by the people of Mouldwarp? And what if we were dreaming them? What if the divine human had never woken and all the ages were part of the fabric of his sleep?
> *This is foolishness, Plato. Enough. We know that we exist. We know our history. We are not the figments of anyone's imagination.* (154)

This is in fact what actually happens; Peter Ackroyd, being a part of "the Age of Mouldwarp," "dreams" Plato and his world. The fictionality of the characters in the novel is reinforced by their refusal to see themselves as "the figments of anyone's imagination" when in fact they all exist within the realm of fiction. As such, *The Plato Papers* draws attention to its being a construct, both because of the self-conscious efforts of the characters to posit their ontological position and because of the construction of a past based on misreadings of the present-day concepts as if they were past relics.

Plato's comic yet factually erroneous remarks both in his dictionary and his oratories are balanced with his contemplations in the dialogues between himself and his "soul" in which Plato questions the accuracy of his findings and interpretation about the past by asking whether he is correct in his assumptions:

> *Plato:* What if the past is all invention or legend?

> *Soul:* It is unlikely.
> *Plato:* Let me put it differently, then. What if my interpretation of the books is false or misguided?
> *Soul:* Who would ever know? (64)

Thus, these dialogues display how unsure an authority Plato feels himself to be in his search for meaning in the past although he does not waver from his authorial position during his orations. However, his conceptualization of the past is shattered when he visits the present-day London in a dream-vision. There, he realizes that the assumption he has made about the past is inaccurate and wrong, and that the people of Mouldwarp in fact exist simultaneously with his reality. Plato returns to his own world, warning the people about how mistaken he was. He repeatedly pleads his case to his audience and the jury saying that he is telling the truth: "I am simply telling the truth" (111), "Again I ask you: how could I have invented such a reality" (114), "I am telling you these things without wishing to disturb you. I intend to hide nothing of the truth from you, revealing both good and evil so that you can decide for yourselves whether I have visited a real city" (117). Margret Champion Gunnarsdottir suggests that "Plato's message to his own contemporary audience is transformed from essentialist certainty to a promotion of self-doubt and new kind of skeptical vision" (23), which eventually leads to his trial since he is accused of corrupting the minds of the youth with lies and fables:

> *In your statement of exculpation to us, you have insisted that this world still exists in some dark cavern beneath our city. You have described it in such vivid detail that some of us long to visit.*
> (Laughter)
> Yes. We do exist above them. We are, to them, no more than ghosts of light.
> *You were in a drunken stupor and dreamed all of this.*
> May I be allowed to continue? Their city is sunk within a cave and their sky is the roof of that dark chamber. I will debate with you on the merits of two realities existing simultaneously, and together we may decide that all versions and visions of the world may coexist eternally. (126)

Plato tries to convince the judges that their reality as well as the history they have believed to have happened is false. He pleads the judges "*to see the world in different ways*" (165). The judges clear him of all charges, saying that he "suffered some fevered dream or hallucination while [he] lay among [his] papers" (167). Seeing that his views

are dismissed as hallucinations, Plato decides to leave the city for good, condemning himself to perpetual exile. The novel closes with a brief note in the form of a paragraph which sums up what happens after Plato leaves the city:

> So Plato left the city and was never seen again. There are many who say that he travelled to other cities where he continued his orations. Some are convinced that there was indeed a cave beneath the earth and that Plato returned there unknown and unseen by the people of Mouldwarp. Sidonia and Ornatus believe that he simply entered another dream. (173)

The book does not have a narrator; the events are told in the form of dialogues, oratories, or extracts, as is the case with the sections related to Plato's dictionary. The only incident of the presence of a narrator in *The Plato Papers* is in the last paragraph, which explains that Plato leaves the city and the inhabitants of his world do not see him again.

Although the novel takes place in a distant future, and presents a utopian vision of that future, it also creates a representation of today's world as well as of the past in a way which disrupts the ontological certainties of both. The characters and the depiction of setting resemble not a futuristic but a very ancient city, one that can be associated with the Greek cities of the antiquity. However, the calendar immediately dislocates a sense of familiarity since it points at 3700 A.D. Moreover, Ackroyd employs a variety of techniques and genres in *The Plato Papers,* several of which are associated with the writings of the classical age along with various others. Lindsey Van Tine suggests that "*The Plato Papers* [is] an amalgam of several different genres-philosophical dialogue, satire, admonitory parable, and science fiction-that lives up to its prophetic claims" ("Allegory"). The use of Socratic dialogue is noteworthy since the historical Socrates is the teacher of the historical Plato, and the knowledge about Socrates comes mostly from the writings of the historical Plato[54] since Socrates himself did not leave any written work of his own. In this sense, Ackroyd's re-contextualization is double-encoded. Barry Lewis, for instance, contends that

> The form of much of *The Plato Papers* mimics the conventions of Socratic dialogue. Many of the fragments deal with the reactions of Plato's friends and

followers to his talks and lectures. The participants in these exchanges (Sparkler, Madrigal, Ornatus, Myander) act as a chorus as they comment upon Plato's increasingly outré ideas. A further small group of sections shows encounters between Plato and Sidonia, a close female companion. (109-10)

The Plato Papers imitates the conventions of ancient Greek writing, the most notable of which is the Socratic dialogue. While Socrates is a prominent figure in Western philosophy, any information about him and his writing comes from secondary sources, namely, from the writings of Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes. Bertrand Russell argues that "it is very hard to judge how Plato means to portray the historical Socrates, and how far he intends the person called 'Socrates' in his dialogues to be merely the mouthpiece of his own opinions" (90). Plato provides a detailed account of Socrates in his *Apology, Phaedo,* and *Symposium,* and he uses Socratic dialogue in his *Charmides, Lysis, Laches,* and *Crito.* Russell maintains that "[t]he Platonic Socrates consistently maintains that he knows nothing, and is only wiser than the others in knowing that he knows nothing; but he does not think knowledge unattainable. On the contrary, he thinks the search for knowledge of the utmost importance" (97). Xenophon's *Symposium* also focuses on Socrates' life, his teachings, his trial, and his eventual execution.

In a typical Socratic dialogue, "Socrates finds himself in a conversation with somebody who has some pretensions to knowledge, and cross-examines him in this supposed knowledge" (Griffith 14). In *The Plato Papers,* however, the reader does not encounter Socrates as a character. It is Plato who enacts this role in the novel. As such, Ackroyd reverses the roles of Plato and Socrates. The historical incident of Socrates' trial is attributed to Plato in the novel, who, in the end, faces a similar fate.

The Plato Papers contemplates the questions of the knowability of the past and building an identity based on one's knowledge of the past. While doing that, the text becomes a collage of other texts; familiar figures make appearance, and fact and fiction crash into one another. Yet, the novel also retains a certain sense of reality, it is very much grounded and depended on the tradition that it borrows from, such as retaining a realist sense of storytelling, setting, and character, and thus attempting to create a realist effect.

These are the pointers of the fact that this novel is a postmodern realist one. When it rewrites the past, the present, and the future, however, it relies on unreliable sources, pointing, therefore, the illusion such an effect produces. Thus, as Greg Clingham points out, "the relationship between texts and the real world (whether past or present) is made highly problematic" (Introduction 11).

In fact, postmodern realist texts have two concerns: they focus on the referential aspects of language, and they question to what extent the texts correspond to the real world in their representation. Likewise, Paul Smethurst suggests that the postmodern exploration of the past is not driven by an urge to use it as a means of providing an explanation to the present:

> The postmodern explores the past, not to find meaning for the present and guides to the future, but to trouble the present with conflicting evidence about the content and form of the past. As to the content of the past, the postmodern regards it as continuing to exist in the present and it cannot therefore be regarded as closed and finalized. As regards the form of the past, here the postmodern questions the very concept of linearity by which the past stays behind the present and the future remains ahead. (*Postmodern Chronotope* 216)

Therefore, postmodernism shows that the assumed distinction between the past and the present, the present and the future is a contested issue. In *The Plato Papers,* the past and the future are constantly re-written in the present.

As Nick Rennison suggests, "[p]ast influences present but the present also works retrospectively to influence the past" (3). Plato also points at this interconnectedness in the novel: "Have you noticed how before and after have become strangely mingled?" (21). The incorporation of the past and the present (as well as the future), the before and the after can be explained by what Smethurst defines as "postmodern chronotope." According to him, "a chronotope is a time-space in which the conscious mind frames and organizes the real, but it can also be the time-space where it disorganizes and re-presents the real" (*Postmodern Chronotope* 5). He maintains that

> In postmodern novelistic chronotopes, history slips its anchor, the fixed pole moves, and the backcloth shifts, and so the play of representation extends from

the fictional into the historical. Furthermore, in the postmodern novelistic chronotope, the loss of privilege suffered in the historical dimension is also felt in the geographical plane, where space and place cannot always be relied upon to determine exactly where we are. (*Postmodern Chronotope* 5-6)

Therefore, the fictional and the historical domains fuse into one another in such a way that their ontological borders become problematic issues. This fusion basically rests on the paradox endorsed by postmodern fiction. In *The Plato Papers,* the real and the fictive, as well as the fictional and the historical are wrapped together, which can be observed in the subversive/unconventional use of both the space and the time. John Brannigan argues that "[t]ime in *The Plato Papers* is neither linear nor cyclical, but interchronistic, in which past, present and future are constantly relocated in relation to each other" (70). In the novel, in his defense against the accusations, Plato posits that it is definitely possible for alternate realities to exist at the same time. He maintains that the judges should open their minds to other possibilities than the one they already have: "*I am simply asking you to question and, perhaps, to see the world in different ways.* […] *I know that other ages, like that of Mouldwarp, refused to countenance or understand any reality but their own. This is why they perished. If we do not learn to doubt, then perhaps our own age will die*" (165).

As such, *The Plato Papers* displays a temporal displacement in order to dismantle the conventional conceptualizations of time and reality. This dismantling is done by imitating the stylistics of chronicles, evident especially in the quotations provided at the very first pages of the novel. While Plato narrates the past in his oratories, the events leading to "The Present" are also given in the form of quotations before the opening of the novel. Listed in chronological order, these quotations, the earliest of which dates back in 2030, are fictive, written by fictional figures, and are from fictional sources. The novel also parodies the critical comments which can usually be found on the jackets or the opening pages of a book. In *The Plato Papers,* there are made-up commentaries added by Ackroyd himself which function as a means of problematizing the concept of authenticity. The dates and the narratives here are compatible with Plato's oratory on the events of those times. For example, Plato depicts the Age of Witspell as a time of transition in which the "ancient" rituals and beliefs of the Age of Mouldwarp have

started to give way to the world as Plato and his contemporaries know it, yet it is also a time where "the fabric of the old reality had dissolved or, rather, it had become interwoven with so many others that it could rarely be glimpsed" (67). The reference to Myander's *History* (2310), a fictive figure who is Plato's contemporary in the novel, also indicates a similar story:

> Myander, a Londoner, wrote the history of a changing world, beginning at the moment of transition, believing that it would mark a great epoch, one more worthy of relation than any that had come before. This belief was not without its grounds. The world of science had collapsed, but the divine consciousness of humanity had not asserted itself. All the labors of Myander lay in recording the manifest signs of dismay and wonder. Since the events of distant antiquity, even those immediately preceding the great change, cannot clearly be understood she believed it her duty to enquire carefully into immediate circumstances. (n.p)

Thus, the quotations given at the beginning of the book seem to be supporting the events Plato voices in his orators. Moreover, the last one of these is indeed on Plato, written by an anonymous author in 3705:

> It is sometimes considered wayward or importunate to paint a portrait of one man, yet we know from the pictures of parishioners lit upon the Wall of our great and glorious city that a single feature or glance may embody a fateful moment or an eventful transaction. So I intend to conjure up a likeness of Plato, the great orator of London, in a similar fashion. I will practice the art of selection, like the displays of our actors continually before us, some events will be presented on a grand scale and others diminished. The conventions of spherical drama will be preserved from the beginning to the end; the revelations and lamentations, for example, will be in strict keeping with each other. By these means we may see his unhappily brief life as a continual search after truth. But it will also be my duty faithfully to record Plato's final days in the city and to ascertain how a cruel superstition exercised boundless dominion over the most elevated and benevolent mind. (n.p.)

This quotation, like the other extracts given at the very beginning of the novel, functions like a foreshadowing of the events that are depicted in *The Plato Papers.* Indeed, Plato is accused of "corrupting the young by spinning lies and fables;" he is put to trial and is found guilty. However, Plato's oratory speeches aim to inform his audience, not to

corrupt them. In fact, they are the only source of information about the past. For instance, Plato gives a speech about newspapers:

> *Plato:* […] We believe that there were also 'papers' which chronicled all the worst incidents of the period and were distributed without charge to the populace.
> *Sidonia:* Did everybody read this thing called papers?
> *Plato:* It is hard to be sure. Of course no one derived any knowledge or wisdom from the activity. Difficult as it for us to understand, they simply seemed to amuse themselves by reading about the misfortunes of others. This was the essential piece of information. (23)[55]

While the audience finds Plato's speeches engaging and informative, they also seem to be baffled with the way of life and the belief system of their ancestors:

> *Sidonia:* It was all very interesting. There was a period when our ancestors believed that they inhabited a world which revolved around a sun.
> *Sparkler:* Can it be true?
> *Sidonia:* Oh yes. They had been told that they lived upon a spherical planet, moving through some kind of infinite space. (4)

Here, Sparkler's question serves a double purpose: he may be asking whether what their ancestors believed could be true or whether they could be this "naïve" to believe in such "nonsense." Their questioning does not go unnoticed by Plato himself, but he assures himself – in one of his dialogues with his soul – that he fulfills his duty: "As long as I study and interpret the past, they are able to ignore it. I give them certainty and that is enough" (57). However, his audience is not without any doubt about the truth-value of his words:

> *Sparkler:* […] I never know when Plato is telling the truth.
> *Sidonia:* That is what he enjoys. The game. That is why he is an orator. (5)

In spite of their "alleged" doubt, the audience continues to be present at the oratories. A great deal of Plato's oratory is based on the remnants of "ancient" texts. Plato's first oratory, for example, is on "Charles Dickens" whom Plato uses to elucidate the imagination of Mouldwarp. However, what Plato thinks as Charles Dickens' work is, in

fact, written by Charles Darwin, and more importantly, it is definitely not a fictional work but a scientific inquiry on the nature of the species, and how they have become what they are. Plato claims that "[t]he novel is entitled *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, by Charles D-"(6-7). Plato's misrecognition is a result of the fact that "[t]he rest of the name [of the author] has been gauged out by some crude tool, and the phrase 'Vile stuff!' written in a dye-based substance" (7). Plato further comments that "[c]learly the reader did not approve of the fiction! Perhaps it was too melodramatic, or romantic, for her refined taste! Despite this erasure, we have no cause to doubt that this novel was composed by the author of *Great Expectations* and *Hard Times*" (7). He thinks *On the Origin of Species* is a satirical work:

> The subtitle of the novel itself suggests one of the subjects of his satire – 'The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life' refers to the Mouldwarp delusion that all human beings could be classified in terms of 'race,' 'gender' or 'class.' We will find interesting evidence of this in the anecdotes of a comedian, Brother Marx, of whom I will speak at a later date. (8)

Mistaking Darwin's inquiry for a fictional novel as well as mistaking Karl Marx for a comedian during his speech, Plato assumes that Darwin's text provides an insight to the mindset of the people of Mouldwarp. Like his reading of Charles Darwin's book, Plato's reading of Sigmund Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* is misguided, since he regards Freud's text as a comic book and the name Freud as a "stage character" for a comedian:

> The meaning of 'unconscious' is by no means clear, but it may be related to the idea of drunkenness, which even in our own time is the object of laughter. The joke book itself is the work of a clown or buffoon who was billed as Sigmund Freud – no doubt pronounced 'Fraud' to add piquancy to his stage character. In this volume he has compiled examples of what he calls 'significant nonsense,' with comic routines concerning people who forget names or misread words, who use the wrong set of keys or knock over pots of black dye. […] But the most hilarious examples of Freudian repartee took place when his partner, Oedipus, appeared on the stage. This 'fall guy' or 'straight man' may have been some relic of the old pantomimic tradition, since he wore loose white robes and displayed that glum expression characteristic of the pantaloon. (74-5)

These misreadings alone prove *The Plato Papers* to be a postmodern parodic work. Parody has a rather crucial place in postmodern writing. Linda Hutcheon argues that "parody – often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality – is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders" (*The Politics* 93). She further suggests that postmodern parody is "a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations" (*The Politics* 90). Focusing on the limitations of past forms, postmodern parody is a mode of imitation in a subversive form. It functions as a self-conscious interrogation of the conventions of writing and narrative techniques. It is "both deconstructively critical and constructively creative" (Hutcheon, *The Politics* 98). It is also retrospective in that it makes use of already existing conventions, thoughts, and texts as its material with the intention of drawing attention to their limitations in terms of form and content. Hutcheon further suggests that "parody is a perfect postmodern form, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (*A Poetics* 11). The etymological formation of the word "parody," i.e. it is a combination of the prefix "para-" and the word "ode," is highly crucial in underlying the importance of parody as a device in postmodern literature. Seymour Chatman suggests that "[p]arody is at once ridicule and homage. Indeed, the term's ambivalence is built into its very etymology, since para- can mean either 'against' or 'alongside of'" (33). Because of this, it marks an always already paradoxical stance. The recognition of parody requires a familiarity with the target text; if the audience or the reader is not familiar with it, then the message is lost. David Roberts contends that "the affinity of parody and postmodernism lies in their common strategy of revision, a rereading of the authorized texts which turns all texts into pre-texts" (183). In the novel, literary texts, historical events and figures, and cultural artifacts are all parodically recycled in such a way that they become a means for evoking the past and the present in the future, or rather in Plato's futuristic world. As such, Ackroyd constructs a postmodern world in which the old certainties are parodied, disrupted and subverted.

The use of postmodern parody is most evident in the novel in the way Ackroyd re-conceptualizes the historical Plato. Barry Lewis notes that the main character in *The*

Plato Papers and the historically recorded Plato are both similar to and different from each other:

> The central character, Plato, is not to be confused with the philosopher from classical antiquity – although the two share much in common. They both believe in the existence of a realm beyond the senses and encourage epistemological doubt about the world they live in. the London of A.D. 3700 echoes that of fifth-century Athens, and the citizens of both locales spend much of their time in metaphysical discussion and rapt contemplation. Ackroyd's Plato also has clear affinities with the original Plato's mouthpiece, Socrates. They are both physically unattractive and profess that their wisdom lies in the acknowledgement that they know nothing. (109)

It is interesting to see that Ackroyd seems to affirm real Plato's contention that poetry leads to false understandings of the world, because Plato of the novel bases his knowledge of the past on fictional texts, and thus makes funny misreadings of the past. However, what is actually criticized here are the methodologies followed by historians and archeologists as Plato makes extensive use of those methods in his research. In other words, reading the past from the present may lead to misunderstandings, as it has been repeatedly shown in *The Plato Papers.*

The fictional Plato in the novel becomes the victim of what the real Plato warns people against in his *Republic:* the potential danger of fiction. Indeed, Plato's continual misreading of the past is based on the remains of fictional works or on the works he assumes to be fictional. In this sense, while "The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allen Poe is considered to be the historical account of the people of the time, Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* is mistaken to be a comic novel. Chapter 11, for example, focuses on American history, and it does so through a hilarious misreading of the findings in a sealed casket, which bears the inscription of "E. A. Poe. American. 1809-1849" on its side, and inside the casket, there is a text called "Tales and Histories:"

> The eminence and status of the author are not in doubt. The name, for example, was not difficult to interpret: Poe is an abbreviation of Poet, and by common consent the rest was deciphered: E.A.Poe = Eminent American Poet. It seems clear enough that the writers of America enjoyed a blessed anonymity, even in

the Age of Mouldwarp. The word 'poet' is known to all of us, but as there are no chants or hymns in 'Tales and Histories' we believe the term was applied indiscriminately to all writers of that civilization. This particular text has been preserved because of its historical content, not because it was the material for song and dance. (38)

Whatever Plato deciphers from Poe's "Tales and Histories," he takes them to be the "real" history of America, mistaking the gothic setting of "The Fall of the House of Usher" for an accurate description of the architectural style of the time, referring, for example to the "libraries and galleries, chambers of antique painting and long corridors leading in serpentine fashion to great bolted doors" (39). He also mistakes the depiction of characters in this story for a clear depiction of the facial, physical, and psychological countenance of the American people, suggesting that "[t]he Americans had countenances, with thin lips and large eyes; their hair was generally long and silken" (40). Thus, Plato's misreadings cover almost everything related to the past. As this last comic example indicates, narratives of the past do not always provide the historian with accurate understanding of the past reality. In Plato's case, confusing fact with fiction is especially highlighted in the novel to create a postmodern parody of the attempts to revoke the past in the present.

Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers* has not been counted among his best literary achievements due to its comparatively short length, which several critics have argued, does not do justice to its subject matter and result in a shallow treatment of the material. However, a closer look proves this novel to be noteworthy of an in-depth analysis within the context of postmodern realism. The disruption of the chronological order, the treatment of ex-centric concepts, objects, and events as the central points in deciphering the past, and the parodic reversal of the positions of the historically recorded figures attest to the postmodern dimension of the novel. The fact that *The Plato Papers* also retains the urge to tell a story, and to tell it as convincingly as possible, as one can observe in the way Plato of the novel relates his research to his citizens during his oratories, draws attention to the realist dimension. However, what makes *The Plato Papers* unique is the way it combines these two dimensions, thereby creating a postmodern realist text in which the postmodern and the realist modes of writing mingle in productive ways.

CONCLUSION

The novel genre has always been associated with realism in Britain, which came to be regarded as its resident convention. This connection, however, becomes a problematic issue when one considers the postmodern dimension of contemporary British fiction.[56] Does this mean that contemporary fiction has moved completely away from the conventional understanding of the novel? Its problematic relationship with realism may seem to suggest an affirmative answer, yet this supposed deviation from realism does not necessarily mean the downfall of the novel genre. While it is true that realist conventions are challenged within postmodern fiction, the authors still work within their limits, as their challenge is always from within those conventions. Evidently, realism within contemporary fiction is not altogether discarded, but put in brackets; therefore, it is present, yet problematically so. In this respect, this study has posited that "postmodern realism" is the most appropriate name to define this new mode of writing in which the realist meets the postmodern in such a way so as to construe a new tendency within contemporary British fiction. Postmodern realism is a mode of writing that does not disregard the already-existing realist mode. Yet, it is also a mode installed and subverted, used and abused, and also nurtured by the technical and thematic concerns of postmodernism.

Although postmodernism and realism have often been thought as antithetical as they represent two different modes of writing, the British experience tells otherwise. The fundamental dichotomy between realism and postmodernism becomes effectively bridged in their radical integration. In this respect, one can state that contemporary British fiction tends towards a healthy combination of these two modes, and shows that British postmodernism has never been truly anti-realist in its critique of conventions. It should be noted, however, that postmodern realism subverts these conventions in such a way so as to highlight their limitations, concerning the fact that reality can never be accurately represented in language.

As indicated by Douwe Fokkema, the works of many contemporary British authors have a double-encoded nature because they are both informed by such postmodern devices as intertextuality, metafictional self-reflexivity, self-consciousness, and discontinuity, and by realist concerns such as discernable plot structures, attention to detail, and situating characters in historical and social contexts. Therefore, these authors do not only write within postmodern literature, but they also take into consideration the characteristics that are associated with realism. Moreover, according to Fokkema,

> Their work [works of Salman Rushdie, Martin Amis, Angela Carter, D.M. Thomas, Alasdair Gray, Peter Ackroyd] shares a preoccupation with historiography, language and the body of texts, the absence of origins, the issues of representation, and the plurality of worlds. Their names figure in studies on postmodern literature. They are being canonized as representing a new generation of British postmodernism. (168)

Fokkema maintains that "the rejection of postmodernism in general by some academics in Britain has no real influence on the reception of British postmodern novels by the reading public, because *in these novels international postmodern conventions are combined with native literary traditions*" (168) (emphasis mine). In fact, these traditions have never been entirely abandoned in the novel genre's transition into more experimental forms, even in the heyday of modernism in Britain.

Brian Richardson, for example, suggests that "British fiction has often been thought of as somewhat anomalous since modernism has never fully displaced realism the way it did in France and much of the rest of the Continent" (293). The same argument holds true for the relationship between postmodernism and British fiction: postmodernism in British fiction has never fully replaced realism as it did in the case of American or Continental European fiction. Rather, British fiction has remained tied to its realist roots. This does not, of course, mean that recent theoretical developments or literary trends bear no mark on the fiction writing in Britain. However, one should note that since British fiction is marked with a visible combination of the traditional and the contemporary, the result should be called "postmodern realism." Richardson further contends that

> One could read some prominent contemporary works (John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* Muriel Spark's *Not to Disturb,* Fay Weldon's *The Cloning of Joanna May,* Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot,* Lawrence Norfolk's *Lempriere's Dictionary*) as ingenious attempts to conjoin the otherwise opposed poetics of realism and postmodernism. Indeed, the creation of such a "postmodern realism" may turn out to be substantial and distinctively British contribution to the development of fiction. (299)

Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer provide a similar viewpoint, arguing that "the attempt to mediate between the traditional realism and humanism of the nineteenth-century novel and the epistemological problems of fiction in our time has been of considerable importance in English fiction, and given it something of a distinctive character" (11). Comparing realism and postmodern realism, Amy J. Elias argues that

> the dominant of traditional Realism can be seen as mimesis with an epistemological dominant. Traditional Realism tries to duplicate the world and docket society in order to juxtapose and evaluate its conflicting values, and to mimic character in order to fathom it. On the other hand, postmodern Realism might be understood as *mimesis* with an ontological dominant. In postmodern Realism, the world has become textualized. Postmodern Realism records the multiple worlds/texts within contemporary culture and recognizes the *inability* to evaluate society's conflicting values; it mimics the multiple selves of characters (more accurately, the self as subject within a textualized culture) and recognizes the problem of articulating an essential Self in this social context. Both of these definitions and limitations are realistic, postmodern Realism is true to the new definitions of self and society in a postmodern culture. (12)

Thus, postmodern realism as a concept is neither false nor oxymoronic but necessary in contemporary fictions, because the authors play within a crisis of representation, acknowledging its shortcomings while at the same time employing a realist mode in a subversive and playful manner. As such, they re-appropriate the preconceived notions about the novel genre and its relation to the real world. Postmodern novels, therefore, oscillate between realism as a literary convention and its subversion. In this respect, any critique of realism is spoken from within postmodernism itself, when the postmodern novel becomes predominantly self-reflexive rather than a reflective mode of narrative. The realist conventions include particularity of time and place, an omniscient narrator,

seamlessness, i.e. an illusion of realism as realist effect, a realistic setting and a linear narrative structure. The realist component of the novels that are examined in this dissertation grounds them in story-telling conventions, provides a plausible narrative, and makes them particularly appealing to readers from different walks of life. While these characteristics of realist fictions have been used and installed, they are simultaneously subverted and challenged in postmodern realist novels, such as the ones analyzed in previous chapters.

Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry,* Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things,* and Peter Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers* carry both the postmodern and the realist strategies of writing. They significantly exemplify the various different uses of postmodern realism. Although written by different authors, these novels share certain similarities which make them crucial to the discussion of postmodern realism. Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry,* for example, incorporates multiple narratives/points of view as well as two different timelines which fuse into one another through the overlapping narratives of the characters. Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* mimics a nineteenth-century novel by way of drawing upon famous nineteenth-century texts as well as by its overt nineteenth-century setting. Yet, the ontological certainty of this world is repeatedly disrupted by the presence of multiple and contesting narrators, and by the editorial remarks and notes incorporated into the novel by Alasdair Gray. Peter Ackroyd's *The Plato Papers* combines various writing strategies such as the Socratic dialogue, postmodern parody, chronicles, and intertextuality, and it problematizes the accuracy of the representations of history. Alongside their extensive use of postmodern devices such as self-reflexivity, intertextuality, parody and pastiche, these novels' realist dimension is also highlighted. For example, particularity of place as one of the most evident qualities of realist fictions is present in them all. The characters are located within a discernable place in all of them to which the readers can relate. But it must not be forgotten that a realist sense of place is also problematized and questioned. In *Sexing the Cherry,* for example, corporeal experience of place is rendered problematic, especially in the fantastic journeys of Jordan, which indeed turn into a self-journey. In *Poor Things,* each place visited by Bella Baxter helps her build up a sense of identity, thereby becoming a

pointer of her self-journey. In *The Plato Papers,* underneath the utopian portrayal of the city Plato lives in, a portrayal of the city of London is given which serves as a tapestry through which readers observe Plato's self-journey as he sets out to dismantle the secrets of the city one by one. In these novels, therefore, particularity of place is retained, but it is also presented in a highly textualized form.

Along with the particularity of place, particularity of time is also used in these three novels. The events take place in a time that is recognizable for the reader, which reinforces the reality effect. *Sexing the Cherry, Poor Things,* and *The Plato Papers* maintain a specific timeline, but they also underline the fictionality of this time within their narratives. The most overt problematization of the concept of time is in *Sexing the Cherry* where Jordan's fantastic journeys and his contemplations about time, reality, and memory disrupt the conventional perception of time. *Poor Things* seems to present the least problematic conceptualization of time, yet one can see that it still foregrounds how time is perceived in various different ways as it can be discerned in Bella's letters. *The Plato Papers* is located in a clearly defined timeline, 3700 A.D., yet the narrative makes it rather difficult to believe since the past constantly leaks into the future date, which is in fact marked as the present. Therefore, the particularity of time can still be traced in these novels, but they become pointers of the problematic nature of the perception and depiction of time rather than a marker of a realistically drawn world in the narrative structures of these novels.

Another realist dimension in the three novels is the use of a linear narrative structure. Similar to the treatment of place and time, the linear structure is constantly disrupted, for example, it is done so by the installment of thought-provoking contemplations in *Sexing the Cherry.* Although *Poor Things* provides a seemingly linear narrative structure when the accounts of each narrator are taken into consideration separately, the whole text underlines a problematics of such linearity when they are read as a whole. *The Plato Papers* presents a thoroughly fractured narrative, as the chapters do not follow a consistent order. The disruption of the linear narrative in these novels foregrounds the problematics of time as a linear concept. Moreover, it underlines multiplicity of the ways reality can be relayed, told, and narrated.

All these novels also prioritize how a story is told over what is told, foregrounding the constructedness of fiction. In this respect, how a story is told becomes a highly crucial component of the story itself. The examples of this contention can be seen in *Sexing the Cherry* in the way the twelve dancing princesses retell their stories, which is in a dire clash with the version one can encounter in fairy tale books. In *Poor Things,* the presence of two contesting stories point to the ways the same set of events can be told from different perspectives. In *The Plato Papers,* it is achieved through Plato's oratories, as these oratories make references to various concepts and texts, placing them within new contexts. Indeed, these novels, as Elrud Ibsch contends, "turn their epistemological position into artistic device, i.e., they make use of radical subversion of 'factual' truth; which results in the violation of temporal, spatial or causal constraints of their narratives" (256).

The use of an omniscient, god-like narrator is another realist convention which all three novels present as a highly problematized issue. *Sexing the Cherry* is told through the alternating narratives of Jordan and the Dog Woman (and their twentieth-century counterparts). *Poor Things* also has a first-person narrative technique in which Archibald McCandless and Bella Baxter alternately tell their stories in the form of letters and autobiographical writing. Their narratives are framed by the editorial and explanatory remarks of Alasdair Gray, who poses as the editor of these texts. *The Plato Papers* does not even have a narrator; the reader is presented with a series of notes, contemplations and dialogues by Plato without the palpable presence of a narrator. The authorial position attributed to the omniscient narrator, then, is undermined in these novels which lay bare the idea that the process of storytelling is never monolithic, but is always open to many permutations. As such, these novels turn into one of the many possible accounts of the stories they tell. Moreover, in these novels the notion of authenticity and authority become problematic issues within a postmodern process of writing in which multiple narrators compete for a privileged position.

In all three of these novels, historical narrative and a problematization of history writing (in both senses of the word "history") is foregrounded as an integral and crucial part of

the main narrative. This deep engagement with history is a direct result of the urge to undermine the preconceived superiority of historical narratives over fictional ones in representing the past, and the need to show how historical accounts usually disregard the marginal in their portrayal of the past. As such, these texts locate the marginal into the central position, creating an ex-centric narrative. In its portrayal of the seventeenth century, *Sexing the Cherry* focuses on the lives and adventures of a female dog breeder from the lower strata of society and her adopted son instead of depicting the lives of the king and the historically documented people of the time. Indeed, these historical figures are put into the narrative only as minor characters or references, not as central figures. In *Poor Things,* nineteenth-century Scotland is recreated in the accounts of Archibald McCandless and Bella Baxter. Although this novel makes references to real places and events, the central characters are fictional and definitely not related to any of the actual historical data. Yet, it is insistently put forth in the novel that these accounts are authentic and compatible with the historically documented data. *The Plato Papers* documents the past through erroneous readings of that past. Because the past is accessible through its textualized remains, and because the past is read and interpreted from the present, any accurate representation of the past is presented in *The Plato Papers* as a thoroughly problematic issue. As such, instead of offering closure, the past and history become fluid in these novels; they are open to re-appropriation as well as rewriting in the present.

When history becomes a problematized issue, it also has serious implications in the way characters are depicted in the novels. The characters in *Sexing the Cherry, Poor Things,* and *The Plato Papers* are placed within a social and historical context. But, they also point to the idea that there is no fixed, knowable identity outside of the discourses made about those identities. In *Sexing the Cherry,* the two main characters are situated in the historical framework of seventeenth-century England, but this setting is deliberately marginalized with Jordan's fantastic accounts. Similarly, McCandless, Bella and Baxter are situated in a discernible Victorian setting, the reliability of which is disrupted through the documentation provided by the editor, thus making it wholly fictive. Plato, too, in *The Plato Papers,* appears to be both real and fictive as this novel also reveals fact as fiction, or vice versa.

The chosen novels of Jeanette Winterson, Peter Ackroyd and Alasdair Gray also share a concern of how empirical reality can or cannot be represented in fiction. There is a tendency to think of contemporary British fiction within the cluster of postmodern techniques, but most studies disregard the realist component accompanying these postmodern characteristics. These novels embody the postmodern critique of realism both through a subversion of it as a convention and insertion of it as an indispensable part of the novel genre in British fiction. They do not abandon the realistic mode; on the contrary, they reinforce the realist conventions in their obviously postmodern texts, but in an overtly displayed subversive mode of writing, typical of postmodern novels. Thse novels subvert the novelistic conventions, which have almost always been associated with realism. This provides the postmodern component. They are also very much informed by the socio-historical context they are situated in. Therefore, they "reflect" the "reality" of the postmodern world. In this sense, what has been *formal realism* in the eighteenth century, social realism in the nineteenth century, and psychological realism during the first half of the twentieth century becomes "postmodern realism" in today's British literary scene. Thus, although postmodernism is often regarded as a flight from realism, realism in British postmodern fiction as a mode of writing is still present, albeit in a contested, problematized, and re-appropriated way.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

(1)   Deviations from the realist mode can be observed in earlier fiction as well; *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne in the eighteenth century, for example, and the modernist fiction in the first quarter of the twentieth century attest to this. However, since the 1960s, "experimentalism" has become the dominant mode in fiction writing.

(2) In *The Rise of the Novel,* Ian Watt defines formal realism as a distinctive characteristic of the novels of the eighteenth century, which differentiates these novels from the other prose fiction of the earlier centuries:

> Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise that Defoe and Richardson accepted very literally, but which is implicit in the novel form in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its readers with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms. (32)

(3) In his *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* Pierre Bourdieu uses the term doxa to denote "what is taken for granted in any particular society."(166). According to Bourdieu, doxa makes "the natural and the social world appear as self evident" (164). According to Roland Barthes, doxa is "[p]ublic Opiniton, the mind of the majority, petit bourgeois" (47). In this respect, doxa becomes "that which has been assimilated by majority culture and has been given the appearance of Nature" (Allen 93). Doxa means "the official and unacknowledged systems of meaning (and representation), by which we know our culture and ourselves" (Natoli 299).

(4) In shaping the ideology of the Enlightenment and modernity, Empiricism and Positivism come to the fore. Auguste Comte, who is the father of Positivism argues that "[t]he principle of the theory is that, in coordinating the primary functions of Humanity, Positivism places the Idealities of the poet midway between the Ideas of the philosopher and the Realities of the statesman" (5-6). In his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* John Locke who initiated Empiricism contends that "all knowledge is founded on and ultimately derives itself from sense, or something analogous to it, which may be called sensation" (39). Thus, Locke places senses and sensory experience as the ultimate source for human knowledge.

(5) Although there is still a debate as to which novel is the first one written in history, it is generally agreed that the birth of the novel in English literature dates back to the eighteenth century. Without a doubt, prose fiction was written even before the

eighteenth century. Thus, for some critics Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* can be classified as the first novel. However, if novel is to be defined as a genre in which a realistic mode of writing is adopted rather than an allegorical or fantastic one, and which, as a genre, is the product of certain social, historical, economic, or even political changes in the social structure; then, this claim becomes insufficient. Ian Watt calls *Robinson Crusoe* as the first novel in the sense that it is understood today. However, recent studies in the novel genre, especially the ones that have a feminist perspective, show that Watt's argument is rather male-centered, and that it is a stance that ignores the earlier works by women writers. Recent theorists, such as Dale Spender, take female authors into consideration and thus claim Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* to be the first novel. Yet, for several critics, *Oroonoko* is disqualified as the first novel because of its length, which actually renders this work a novella instead. To sum up, it can be suggested that the canonical theory takes Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as the first novel. There is also a tendency to consider *Arcadia* or other romances as first examples of the novel genre. Nevertheless, what is relevant and crucial to the argument maintained in this study, as far as the discussion on the manifestations of postmodern realism is concerned, is that the novel came into being with a very strong tie to realism. And the beginning of that tie is most evident in the novels produced in the eighteenth-century England.

Thus, realism, which, within a literary-historical context "goes back to an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century focus on plot- and character-driven narratives in which psychologically believable individuals function in familiar, everyday worlds rather than in fantastic or allegorical ones" (Seabayer 23), appears as an explicitly suitable mode of writing that stands up as a solution to the problem presented by the idea of the self, which is considered as a coherent, unified, stable entity.

(6) As several critics, such as Ian Watt, Arnold Kettle, Michael McKeon, Mikhail Bakhtin, and George Lukacs, have proposed, the emergence of the novel coincides with specific paradigm shifts that took place in Western society which most overtly made their impact visible in the eighteenth century. They have argued that the novel is a most suitable form of writing that can meet the demands of the new social order. According to Ian Watt, for example,

> The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individual and innovating reorientation. Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency in their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the major test or truth: the plots of classical and renaissance epic, for example, were based on past history or fable, and the merits of the author's treatment were judged largely according to a view of literary decorum derived from the accepted models in the genre. This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience – individual experience which is always unique and therefore new. The novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel, and it is therefore well named. (13)

For Ian Watt, novel as a genre came into being due to several socio-historical changes that England had undergone. One of these is the rise of the middle class, which, in fact, resulted in the rise of a new consciousness. The change in the social structure – new economy, new demands – also necessitated new forms of writing, hence the novel. Not only the rise of the middle class but also technological developments (i.e. better printing techniques) have an impact in the emergence of the novel since these technological developments meant new and improved means of communication.

(7) This is not to say, of course, that such qualities are exclusive to the nineteenth-century fiction. Realistic elements are present in earlier texts such as Homer's *The Iliad,* Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales,* or Chretien de Troyes' *Yvain.* Yet, a systematic focus on the depiction of contemporary society in minute details and the place of the individual in such a context is a quality that is attributed to the nineteenth-century fiction.

(8) Christopher B. Kulp argues that in naïve realism, "when a person *S* sees a tree, what *S* sees – the object of *S*'s visual perception – is a material object, a tree, which exists independently of *S*'s perceptual act. Naïve realism is a realist theory of perception in that it is committed to the "reality" of material objects. Material objects, as a class of mind-independent entities, are accorded positive ontological status" (1). In this view, there is a perceptible world which is out there, existing independently of human perception. He further argues that "naïve realism is realist because it holds that propositions that assert a relationship between perceivers and material objects (as objects of perception) are true or false, and what makes such propositions true or false is the way the world is" (2).

(9) A detailed discussion of the history of the use of the term "postmodern can be found in *The Postmodern Turn, Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*. Eds. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner. Ohio: Ohio UP, 1987.

(10) International Style in architecture refers to the general movement that was dominant from the 1920s to the 1940s. Informed by the Bauhaus ecole, it is characterized by "a stark simplicity and functionalism, a definite break with historically based, decorative styles" (Silverman et.al 35).

(11) See Footnote 3.

(12) For a comparative list of the critics and thinkers who are either for or against postmodernism, see Margaret Rose. *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-modern*.

(13) A detailed discussion of "Historiographic metafiction" can be found in the following chapters of this dissertation.

(14) Indeed, *Adam Bede* can even be considered as a guideline for a writer who wants to produce works in the realist mode. See George Eliot. *Adam Bede*. Chapter 17.

CHAPTER I

(15) *Written on the Body* is the story of an unnamed narrator recalling a love affair s/he had with a married woman called Louise, and it "focuses on the nature of physical passion and the meaning of desire, and it includes both straightforward narrative and prose poems in which the narrator honors Louise" (Stade et al 574).
Art and Lies has three loosely connected plot-lines, concentrating on Handel, Sappho, and Picasso.
Gut Symmetries relates the "sometimes grim, sometimes fantastical aspects of a love triangle in which a husband and a wife conduct separate affairs with a woman" (Stade et al 574).
Winterson's next novel, *The Power Book,* focuses on a writer who creates, in the form of e-mails, identities for his/her costumers upon request.
Weight is the rewriting of the Atlas myth in which Atlas is given a chance to tell his story from his own perspective.
Organized in four sections, namely, Planet Blue, Easter Island, Post-3 War, and Wreck City, *The Stone Gods* is a "digressive, intermittently philosophical piece of science fiction based upon a love story between a woman and a female robot finds an authentic heart" (Adams, "Stranger").

(16) After reading the review, Winterson and her partner at the time went to Gerrard's house and practically yelled at Gerrard in front of her guests. Not surprisingly, this incident hit the media, and was very influential in the negative portrayal of Winterson throughout the 90s.

(17) Apart from *The Stone Gods,* Winterson's latest novels are all cited within children's literature.

(18) Interestingly, while Jordan of the twentieth century is defined through his physical features, the description of the nameless female scientist is a mental one. On a similar note, the situation is reverse in the seventeenth-century story line.

(19) Double-coding is a term coined by Charles Jencks, and it refers to the double nature of referentiality which can be observed in postmodernism. Postmodern use of double coding enables one "to read the present in the past as much as the past in the present" (Jencks 340). Jencks maintains that: "[p]ost Modernism includes a variety of approaches which depart from the paternalism and utopianism of its predecessor, but they all have a double-coded language – one part Modern and part something else. The reason for this double-sided language is technological and semiotic: the architects seek to use a current technology, but also communicate with a particular public" (345). Although Jencks uses "double coding" within the framework of postmodern architecture, it can also be extended into other fields, and especially to literature in postmodernism.

(20) In Book IX of *Poetics,* Aristotle draws a distinction between the poet and the historian arguing that "[t]he true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular" (17).

(21) The mummy mentioned here is given to Thomas Bushell.

(22) The same argument is carried out in Winterson's *Art Object* as follows:

> There will be a moment (though of course it won't be a moment) when we will know (though knowing will no longer be separate from being) that we are a part of all we have met and that all we have met was already a part of us […] And so we cannot move back and forth in time, but we can experience it in a different way. If all time is eternally present, there is no reason why we should not step out of one present and into another. (99-100)

(23) When he put forth the idea of *le temps* and *la durée,* this idea had been appropriated into the novel genre by the modernist authors, examples of which can be found in Joyce's *Ulysses,* and *The Portrait of the Artists as a Young Man,* and Virgina Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway, To the Lighthouse,* and *The Waves.* For a more detailed discussion, see Randall Stevenson. *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction.* Lexington: The UP of Kentucky, 1992.

(24) The fact that both postmodernism and modernism make use of fragmented time in their narratives does not nullify their inherent difference. Postmodernism is usually compared to modernism in that both rely on similar techniques such as intertextuality, irony, ambiguity, fragmentation, an emphasis on subjectivity, and problematic authorship. The difference between the two lies in their attitude towards their subject matter: modernists consider the fragmented nature as something lamentable and tragic and they try to bring order to this through art; on the other hand, postmodernists take a celebratory and playful position in the face of this fragmentation, arguing that what the artist can do is not to try to bring order to this chaos but to play within it.

(25) *Mise-en-abyme*, as a term, "stretches back to mirror tricks in the painting of Renaissance and to *trompe l'oeil* techniques – [and] also indicates the compounded images of literary referentiality" (Dipple 9). Therefore, it is one of the techniques which most effectively lay bare the constructedness of literary texts by showing how they close up unto themselves and unto their literary worlds through a perpetual multiplication of the narrative lines. Moreover, as Brian McHale contends, "*Mise-en-abyme,* wherever it occurs, disturbs the orderly hierarchy of ontological levels (worlds within worlds), in effect, *short-circuiting* the ontological structure, and thus foregrounding it" (14). Thus, it is a mode that enables the writers to portray proliferation of worlds, perceptions, representations as opposed to a singular, monolithic world.

(26) The Brother Grimm version of the fairy tale can be found in Appendix A.

(27) They are portrayed either as being engaged in homosexual relationships which end up badly, not because they have a problem themselves but because the society does not give them room for existence, or as being trapped in a loveless and a lifeless marriage in which the only way out is death, both literal and metaphorical. Yet, the novel does not present a bleak viewpoint as it eventually provides a happy ending for the princesses.

(28) The definition of dominant comes from Roman Jakobson. He defines it as "the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure" (106).

(29) The epistemological dominant in the modernist novel arises from a concern for the knowability of the world, and how this can or cannot be represented within the novel genre. In order to elucidate this idea, modernist novels engage techniques such as stream of consciousness, irony, subjective narrators, and so on. Steven Connor explains the use of such techniques as follows:

> plurality of techniques in the modernist novel is induced by anxieties about what can be truthfully known, understood and communicated about the world. The dominating concerns of the modernist novel are, therefore, with the limits and possibilities of individual consciousness, or the difficult relationships between separate subjectivities. (130)

CHAPTER II

(30) In addition to the title, the cover page of the book includes a slogan-like phrase. Although it has been attributed to his own creativity, "Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation," as Alasdair Gray himself says, is not his own formulation: "The editor of the Sunday Herald and Alex Salmond were wrong to call me author of the slogan 'Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation.' I found it in a long poem by the Canadian author, Dennis Leigh. I read it in the late '70s and put it on the cover of a novel in 1984. It is inspiring but not boastful" ("Work"). A similar explanation is provided on the copyright page of *Poor Things* in which it is stated that*:* "[t]he epigraph on the covers is from a poem by Denis Leigh" (n.p.).

(31) Alasdair Gray provides a synopsis for *1982 Janine* at the cover page of the book*:* "This already dated novel is set inside the head of an aging, divorced, alcoholic, insomniac supervisor of security installations who is tippling in the bedroom of a small Scottish hotel. Though full of depressing memories and propaganda for the Conservative Party it is mainly a sadomasochistic fetishistic fantasy" (n.p.).
Something Leather is a combination of pieces from Gray's earlier works loosely put together.

A History Maker takes place in a distant future where the concept of history is almost non-existent, and the world it portrays requires no work from the people that inhabit this world, since everything is done by power plants with never-ending sources of energy.
Old Men in Love, as James Purdon contends, is a "posthumous collection of writings by failed Glaswegian author John Tunnock, comprising fragments of a novel trilogy, prologues, and selected diary entries. These, edited by Gray, are now published with an introduction by Tunnock's distant cousin, Lady Sara Sim-Jaegar, and a review by critic Sidney Workman" ("Don't Play the Joker").

(32) Integrated into the body text in the form of marginal columns and footnotes, the index, as explained in "footnote 6" of the novel, "proves that *Lanark* is erected upon an infantile foundation of Victorian nursery tales, though the final shape derives from English language fiction printed between the 40's and 60's of the present century. […] Having said this, one is compelled to ask why the 'conjurer' introduces an apology for his work with a tedious and brief history of world literature, as though summarizing a great tradition which culminates in himself!" (489-90).

(33) For a more detailed discussion, see, for example, Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn, eds. *The Arts of Alasdair Gray.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1991.

(34) Throughout the chapter, the quotations are given as they appear in the novel, i.e. capitalized, italic, etc.

(35) According to Cairns Craig, "James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), with its conflicting double narrative and its self-reflexive inclusion of the author in his own novel, is only the most remarkable example of a kind of prescient postmodernism in Scottish writing" (230).

(36) For more detailed biographical information on her, see "Biography of Marion Gilchrist." <http://www.universitystory.gla.ac.uk/biography/?id=WH0226&type=P>.

(37) It is also called the Medical Act which aimed to enable "Examining Bodies to treat their charters and statutes as not being limited to one sex, but as applying to both" (qtd. in Witz 90). For a more detailed discussion of the challenges women faced and the legal moves on behalf of them, see Anne Witz. *Professions and Patriarchy.* London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

(38) Sophia Jex-Blake (1840-1912) is one of the first female medical doctors in England who opened the way for the acceptance of women into the profession: "[b]etween 1869 and 1873 a group of women led by Sophia Jex-Blake struggled to receive medical education and presented themselves for medical degrees at the University of Edinburgh" (Witz 86). For a more detailed discussion of Jex-Blake's struggles, see Anne Witz. *Professions and Patriarchy.* London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

(39) Daniel Defoe, in the Preface to *Robinson Crusoe,* states that "If ever the story of any private man's adventures in the world were worth making public, and were

acceptable when published, the editor of this account thinks that this will be so" (7). Thus, he openly casts himself as the editor of the text rather than the author. Likewise, the title of his other novel, *Moll Flanders,* is followed by an explanatory remark which is as follows: "Moll Flanders, Who was born in Newgate, and during a life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own brother) Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest and died in Penitent, Written from her own Memorandums" (n.p.). As such, it marks the novel as a collection of the memoirs of the main character rather than a work of fiction.

Defoe's contemporary Samuel Richardson also casts himself as the editor rather than the author of *Pamela* by saying that "*IF these, (embellished with a great Variety of entertaining Incidents) be laudable or worth Recommendations of any Work, the Editor of the following Letters, which have their Foundation in* Truth *and* Nature*, ventures to assert, that all these desirable Ends are obtained in these Sheets*" (n.p.).

(40) Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is one such example: "I chanced to lay my hand on a small package, carefully done up in a piece of ancient yellow parchment" (25). A similar opening can be found in Orhan Pamuk's *The White Castle:* "I found this manuscript in 1982 in that forgotten 'archive' attached to the governor's office in Gebze that I used to rummage through for a week each summer, at the bottom of a dusty chest stuffed to overflowing with imperial decrees, title deeds, court registers and tax rolls" (1). The same opening technique also marks Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto:* "The following work was found in the library of an ancient catholic family in the north of England. It was printed at Naples, in the black letter, in the year 1529" (5).

(41) William Strang is a Scottish painter. His brief biography is as follows:

> Following a brief apprenticeship with a shipbuilding firm in Clydesdale, he entered the Slade School of Art (1876) where he adhered to the uncompromising realism advocated by his teacher Alphonse Legros. After completing his studies at the Slade (1880), Strang became Legros's assistant in the printmaking class for a year. For the next 20 years he worked primarily as an etcher. His etchings include landscapes in the tradition of Rembrandt, pastoral themes indebted to Giorgione and macabre genre subjects, marked by a sense of tension and suspended animation. He also etched 150 portraits of leading artistic and literary figures. The commitment to realism and psychological intensity that characterizes the best of Strang's etched work is also evident in the paintings that dominated the latter half of his career. The influence of the Belgian and French Symbolists' work and Strang's growing confidence in the handling of color combined in his mature style with a linear clarity and schematic coloring that is best seen in such works as *Bank Holiday* (1912; London, Tate). His oil portraits, for example Vita Sackville-West as *Lady In a Red Hat* (1918; Glasgow, A.G. & Mus.), are strikingly potent images of their time. An important collection of Strang's graphic work is in the Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow. (Goodchild, "William Strang")

CHAPTER III

(42) In the US publication of the novel, the subtitle is "A Prophecy" while in the UK publication it is "A Novel."

(43) *The Great Fire of London* is a rewriting of Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* in which a director called Stephen Spender tries to make a movie out of Dickens' novel.

The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde revolves around the last days of Oscar Wilde in Paris where he contemplates on life.

Set in two different timelines, *Hawksmoor* is a postmodern detective story in which architecture, history and the city of London all mingle with each other through the lives of the architect Nicholas Dyer of the eighteenth century and the detective Nicholas Hawksmoor of the twentieth century.

Chatterton is a novel about a man named Charles Wychwood who discovers an old manuscript written supposedly by the eighteenth-century poet Thomas Chatterton. The novel dwells on the issues of fact and fiction, truth and lies, and reality and mystery.

First Light is the story of events set into motion after a discovery was made about the Neolithic age near Dorset.

English Music is a novel about Tim Harcombe's life along with references to many literary and historical figures such as Dickens, Blake, and Winston Churchill.

The House of Doctor Dee tells the intersecting stories of Matthew Palmer of the twentieth century and John Dee of the sixteenth century, after Palmer inherits a house in Clarkenwell.

Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem takes place in the nineteenth-century London where the real and the imaginary collides into each other.

Milton in America concentrates on John Milton's life after he flees to America due to his political and religious views.

The Clarkenwell Tales is a collection of interconnected stories told by various characters. The setting is fourteenth-century London, and Ackroyd mimics the style of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales.*

The Lambs of London is the story of Mary and Charles Lamb, and the interesting turn their lives take after Charles purchases a book written allegedly by Shakespeare.

The Fall of Troy tells the story of a German archeologist called Heinrich Obermann and his Greek wife and fellow archeologist Sophia Chrysanthis, both of whom are fictionalized versions of Heinrich Schliemann – the archeologist who worked in the archeological excavations of the city of Troy – and his second wife Sophia Engastromenos, in their search for truth and meaning during the excavations of the cite of Troy. Their lives intermingle with the storyline of *Iliad.*

The Case of Victor Frankenstein: A Novel is a re-interpretation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in which the friendship between Victor Frankenstein, a science student, and the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley results in the creation of the monster.

(44) Ackroyd has one published short story entitled "The Plantation House" (1991) in *New Statesman and Society Christmas Supplement.*

(45) In his interview with Anne Schütze Göttingen, Ackroyd defines the Cockney visionary as "a certain kind of Cockney tradition which combines farce, pathos and melodrama. It is like the Pantomime tradition. It is the old London tradition of the more popular theater" (12).

(46) Dickens is a frequent character in Ackroyd's novels as well. Ackroyd's first novel, for example, is based on Dickens' *Little Dorrit; English Music* and *Dan Leno* also have references to Dickens.

(47) Ex-centricity is about locating the marginal into the central position. Hutcheon contends that postmodern rests on the idea that "the centre no longer completely holds" (*A Poetics* 12). In the absence of a monolithic centre, marginal, previously suppressed or ignored voices take precedence, and postmodernism offers "multiple, provisional alternatives to traditional, fixed, unitary concepts in the full knowledge of (even exploiting) the continuing appeal of those very concepts" (*A Poetics* 60). Ackroyd takes historically non-significant events or concepts as pointers of history in *The Plato Papers*, i.e. the concepts he defines in his dictionary, his eagerness to explain a past age through the incomplete pieces from fictional texts such as "The Fall of the House of Usher" attest to this.
Parody is a subversive imitation of past conventions. Pastiche, on the other hand, is a non-subversive imitation. A more detailed discussion of these concepts can be found in the following pages of the chapter.

(48) Montrose formulates "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" as follows:

> By the *historicity of texts,* I mean to suggest the cultural specifty, the social embedment, of all modes of writing- also the texts in which we study them. By the *textuality of history,* I mean to suggest firstly, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question- traces whose survival we cannot assume to be merely contingent but must rather presume to be at least partially consequent upon complex and subtle social processes of preservation and effacement; and secondly, that those textual traces are themselves subject to subsequent textual mediations when they are construed as the "documents" upon which historians ground their own texts, called "histories." (20)

(49) Pla(y)giarism is a term coined by Raymond Federman. In his *Critifiction,* Federman argues that writing is both playful and plagiaristic in the sense that it involves both a creative process – hence, the playfulness – and a certain reliance and repetition of past works – hence, plagiarism:

plagiarism is the basis for all works of art, except, of course, the first one, which is unknown. Plagiarism, as we all know, and as defined by the most basic dictionary, is the act of copying or imitating the language, ideas, and thoughts of another (thinker, artist, author) and passing off the same as one's original work. […] The text which I am in the process of writing does indeed fall into the category of pure pla[y]giarism (with a Y because I am also playing here), for I do not know any more where my own thoughts originated, and where these thoughts began to merge with those of others, where my own language began and where it converged with that of others within the dialogue all of us entertain within ourselves, and with others. Therefore, I shall not reveal my sources because they are now lost in this discourse, and because there are no sacred sources for thinking and writing. (52)

(50) Nick Rennison contends that

Peter Ackroyd's writings – as novelist, poet, biographer, historian and critic – have been enormously diverse but two subjects have dominated his work in all fields. One is the city of his birth – London. The other is his sense of the connection – numerous and unashamedly mystical – between past and present, and his sense that our reality is but one of the myriad realities which fiction can explore. (2)

London is very much like a character in Ackroyd's novels, both providing a background to the storyline and serving as a catalyst to frame the story in a lively vision of London, as can be seen in *Hawksmoor, Chatterton, Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem, The Clarkenwell Tales, The Lambs of London,* and *The Plato Papers.*

(51) In the Editorial Preface to Monmouth's *The British History,* the editor notes that

We do not insert the BRITISH HISTORY in our series of Early English Records as a work containing an authentic narrative, nor do we wish to compare Geoffrey of Monmouth to Bede in point of veracity. But the fact of his having supplied our early poets so large a portion of their subjects, and the universal belief which at one time prevailed as to the authenticity of his history, make it in every respect a question whether he ought not to be preserved, whilst the ample allusions, and if we may use the expression, the groundwork, on which many of the facts are based, enabled us indubitably to introduce him into our series as an addition (though secondary in value) to materials which our readers will find not to be inexhaustible, respecting our early history. (xvii-xviii)

 Ironically, Plato of the novel bases his discussion of the past unto this account although it is considered to be valuable not because of its authenticity or close attention to historical accuracy but because of its inspirational role.

(52) Lord Thomas Babbington Macaulay (1800-1859) is a British poet, historian, and politician. He is the author of *The History of England* (1848).

(53) George Macaulay Trevelyan (1876-1962) is an English historian, who is also the grand-nephew of Lord Thomas Babbington Macaulay.

(54) Along with Plato, the playwright Aristophanes and Socrates' contemporary Xenophon also contribute to an insightful understanding of Socrates.

(55) Although mentioned in a tongue-in-cheek manner, there is a severe critique of contemporary society, not only in this quotation but throughout *The Plato Papers.*

CONCLUSION

(56) Here, "fiction" is used as a generic term to refer to novels, because the term "fiction" is most frequently associated with novels. See William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman. *A Handbook to Literature.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995 (p 212).

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APPENDIX A

The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes

Once upon a time there was a king who had twelve daughters, one more beautiful than the next. They slept together in a large room, where their beds stood side by side, and in the evening when they went to sleep, the king shut and locked the door. However, when he opened it in the morning, he would see that their shoes were worn out from dancing, and nobody could discover how this kept happening. Finally, the king had it proclaimed that whoever could find out where his daughters danced during the night could choose one of them for his wife and be king after his death. But anyone who cam and failed to uncover everything after three days and nights would lose his life.

Not long after this proclamation a prince came and offered to undertake the venture. He was well received, and in the evening he was conducted to a room adjoining the bedchamber of the king's daughters. His bed was set up there, and he was told to watch and find out where they went dancing. And, just to make sure they could not do anything in secret or go out anywhere else, the door of their room that led to his was kept open. Still, the prince's eyes became as heavy as lead, and he fell asleep. When he awoke the next morning, all twelve of them had been to a dance, for their shoes were standing there with holes in their soles. The same thing happened the second and third night, and his head was cut off without mercy. After that there were many who came to try their luck, but they were all destined to leave their lives behind them.

Now, it happened that a poor soldier, who had been wounded and could no longer serve in the army, headed toward the city where the king lived. Along the way, he met an old woman, who asked him where he was going.

'I really don't know myself,' he said, and added jokingly, 'but I'd certainly liked to find out   where the king's daughters go dancing and where they wear out their shoes so I could become king.'

'That's not so difficult,' said the old woman. 'Just don't drink the wine that's brought to you in the evening, and then pretend that you've fallen asleep.' Then she gave him a little cloak and said, 'When you put this cloak on, you'll be invisible, and you'll be able to follow all twelve of them.'

After receiving such good advice, the soldier now became serious about the entire matter and plucked up his courage to present himself in front of the king as a suitor. He was welcomed just as cordially as the others had been and was given royal garments to put on. In the evening, at bedtime, he was led to the antechamber, and as he was preparing to go to bed the oldest daughter brought him a beaker of wine, but he had tied a sponge underneath his chin and let the wine run into it and did not drink a single drop. Then he lay down, and after lying there a little while, he began to snore as if in a very deep sleep.

When the princesses heard his snoring, they laughed, and the oldest said, 'He too could have done better things with his life.' After this they stood up, opened the closets, chests, and boxes, and took out splendid clothes. They groomed themselves in from of their mirrors and hurried about, eager to attend the dance. But the youngest said, 'I don't know. You're all happy, yet I have a strange feeling. I'm sure that something bad is going to happen to us.'

'You're a silly goose,' said the oldest. 'You're always afraid. Have you forgotten how many princes have already tried in vain? I didn't really need to give the soldier a sleeping potion. The lout would never have awakened even without it.'

When they were all ready, they first took a look at the soldier, but he had shut his eyes tight, and since he neither moved nor stirred, they thought they were definitely safe. So the oldest went to her bed and knocked on it. Immediately it sank into the ground, and

they climbed down through the opening, one after another, with the oldest in the lead. The soldier, who had seen everything, did not hesitate long. He put on his little cloak and climbed down after the youngest. Halfway down the stairs he stepped on her dress slightly, causing her to become terrified and cry out, 'What's that? Who's holding my dress?'

'Don't be so stupid,' said the oldest. 'You've just caught it in a hook.'

They went all the way down, and when they were at the bottom, they stood in the middle of a marvelous avenue of trees whose leaves were all made of silver and glittered and glimmered. You'd better take a piece of evidence with you, the soldier thought, and broke off a branch, but the tree cracked and made a tremendous sound. Again the youngest called out, 'Something's wrong! Didn't you hear the noise?'

But the oldest said, 'That was just a burst of joy because we'll soon be setting our princess free.'

Then they came to another avenue of trees, where all the leaves are made of gold, and finally to one where all the leaves were made of pure diamond. The soldier broke off branches from each kind, and each time there was such a cracking sound that the youngest sister was terrified. But the oldest maintained that they were just bursts of joy. They went on and came to a large lake with twelve boats on it, and in each boat sat a handsome prince. They had been waiting for the twelve princesses, and each one took a princess in his boat, while the soldier went aboard with the youngest princess. Then her princes said, 'I don't understand it, but the boat is much heavier today. I'll have to row with all my might to get it moving.'

'It's probably due to the hot weather,' said the youngest. 'I feel quite hot too.'

On the other side of the lake stood a beautiful, brightly lit palace, and sounds of merry music with drums and trumpets could be heard from it. They rowed over there, entered

the palace, and each prince danced with his sweetheart. The invisible soldier danced along as well, and whenever a princess went to drink a beaker of wine, he would drain it dry before it could reach her lips. The youngest was terribly concerned with this too, but the oldest continued to soothe her. They danced until three in the morning, when all the shoes were worn through and they had to stop. The princes rowed them back across the lake, and this time the soldier sat in the first boat with the oldest sister. The princesses took leave of their princes on the bank and promised to return the following night. When they reached the stairs, the soldier ran ahead of them and got into bed, and by the time the twelve princesses came tripping slowly and wearily up the stairs, he was again snoring so loudly that they could all hear it, and they said, 'We don't have to worry about him.' Then they took off their beautiful clothes, put them away, placed the worn-out shoes under their beds, and lay down to sleep.

The next morning the soldier decided not to say anything but rather to follow and observe their strange life for the next two nights. Everything happened just as it had on the first night: they danced each time until their shoes fell apart. However, the third time he took a beaker with him for evidence. When the time came for him to give his answer, he took along the three branches and beaker and went before the king. The twelve princesses stood behind the door and listened to what he said. When the king asked, 'Where did my daughters spend the night?' he answered, 'With twelve princes in an underground palace.' Then he reported what had taken place and produced the evidence. The king summoned his daughters and asked them whether the soldier had told the truth. When they saw that they had been exposed and that denying would not help, they had to confess everything. Then the king asked which princess he would like for his wife.

'I'm no longer so young,' he answered, 'so I'll take the oldest.'

The wedding was held that same day, and the king promised to make him his successor to the kingdom after his death. The princes, however, were compelled to remain under a curse for as many nights as they had danced with the princesses.

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