

NARRATING THE WOUND: POSTMODERN FORMAL STRATEGIES AS POSTCOLONIAL EPISTEMOLOGY IN NADEEM ASLAM'S THE BLIND MAN'S GARDEN: A HUTCHEONIAN ANALYSIS OF HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on Nadeem Aslam's famous novel The Blind Man's Garden and the theoretical approach of historiographic metafiction, and as elaborated in a prominent way in A Poetics of Postmodernism and The Politics of Postmodernism by Linda Hutcheon. Hutcheon sees historiographic metafiction in postmodern novels that were highly self-reflexive, but simultaneously claimed past events to question the nature of all historical knowledge. This article argues that this is an interesting and sustained example of Hutcheon's paradigm the concept of multiple modes of narration, temporal distance, meta-fictional reflexivity, and intertextual architecture which collectively attempts to "problematicise" the notion of history into 'the postmodern problematic of history' through the very formal strains of the novel genre that is novel. Based on careful textual analysis that attends to passages and page-by-page mapping, the article shows each Hutcheonian formal device operating as an independent epistemological device, providing a way to know the post-colonial trauma that linear realist narration does not. Finally, it suggests that The Blind Man's Garden is one of the most thoroughly realized South Asian anglophone South-east Asian fantasies of modern-day "Hutcheonian" historiographic metafiction.

Keywords: *Historiographic Metafiction, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, Narrative Fragmentation, Intertextuality, Self-Reflexivity, Wound Epistemology.*

1. Introduction: The Problem of Knowing the Postcolonial Wound

Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) is set in the violent crucible of post-9/11 Pakistan and Afghanistan, a world in which the American War on Terror, Pakistani military complicity, and Taliban brutality converge to shatter individual lives, family structures, and communal identities. But the story of Nadeem Aslam's novel is not one of journalistic realism or political documentary. It, it says in this article, is a piece of what Linda Hutcheon (1988) describes as 'historiographic metafiction': of 'fiction that is, intestine self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages' (p. 5). It poses, therefore, the pressing issue which serves as the impetus for this study: How does a novel differentiate out and help readers dig out wounds left by the history of post-colonialism?

A thematic question should not only be epistemological, but it must essentially be epistemological. The signifier to this article is that none of Nadeem Aslam's narrative strategies, such as fragmentation, was applied to the temporal dislocation, formal self-reflexivity, and intertextuality, of an implicit political message. They, in turn, are not, however, the means through which the novel makes producers of knowledge about post-colonial violence. Epistemology is Form in *The Blind Man's Garden*. The text's formal structure instead of describing the wound, acts it out.

The conceptual approach and the analytical term for such an argument are best recorded in Linda Hutcheon's two books, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989). Whereas more general postcolonial discourses tend to be geared toward interpretation more concerned with "who speaks" (or does not speak) and "who is silenced," and with the ideologies reinforced or challenged, Hutcheon's work emphasizes form

as the locus of political and epistemological action. Historiographic metafiction is, for Hutcheon, not just a statement that history is contested but a statement, in the form of its own conscious, fractured and intertextual construction, of the construction of historical knowledge, its naturalisation and its inevitability. This demonstration is a political slogan: it undoes the histories of empire that've been written in authority; it makes them not clear, but rather constructed. The main idea in this formal argument will be followed along the novel's plot. Two step brothers, the idealistic medical student Jeo and the streetwise, man ex-combatant Mikal, are forced on the run in Pakistan's town of Heer when they travel under cover to Afghanistan helping wounded civilians in the wake of the American invasion. Left behind is their father, Rohan, a retired school teacher with a splendid garden, and a school for the poor and hungry — who, for his part, is growing increasingly blind and grieved. Jeo is accompanied in his home by his wife, Naheed, and his mother, Tara (in the main through Rohan's recollections), who are rookies but are firmly established within the domestic space in which war poses an inexorable counterpoint. In the lives of these and countless other characters — Taliban commanders, American soldiers, Pakistani intelligence agents and village survivors. Nadeem Aslam builds a panorama, a multiple perspective history of a non-panoramic, single perspective history.

The organization of this article is similar to the one used in Hutcheon's theoretical framework. Section Two thoroughly explores Hutcheon's idea of historiographic metafiction and its significance to post-colonial fiction. In Sections Three, Four, Five, and Six, there are lengthy close readings of the four main formal strategies that Hutcheonian embodies: narrative fragmentation, temporal dislocation, metafictional self-reflexivity, and intertextuality. In Section Seven, these analyses are put together and the novel is placed in the debates of modern postmodern postcolonial form.

2. Linda Hutcheon's Historiographic Metafiction: A Theoretical Account

2.1 Defining Historiographic Metafiction

The idea of historiographic metafiction was developed over a series of key publications published by Linda Hutcheon in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, she characterizes historiographic metafiction as those 'well known and popular novels which are intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also claim to historical events and personages' (p. 5). Intertextuality (mapping connections to pre-existing discourse and texts), the key formal features of this mode draw on engagement with a prior discourse or text, self-reflexivity (the implicit reflection of text as a construction phenomenon), the recursive questioning of the interaction of fact and fiction in the construction of historical knowledge, and evaluation is what defines it. It is defined through evaluation, is characterized by engagement with a prior discourse or text (intertextuality), and by the self-reflection of the text as a constructed phenomenon (self-reflexivity) and by a sustained interrogation of the interaction of fact and fiction in the construction of historical knowledge.

Notably, Hutcheon sets apart the work of historians from naive historical fiction, in which the past is retrievable and even representable by realistic conventions, and from the purely solipsistic postmodern self-reference which gives up on the project of historical engagement. Historiographic metafiction, which is simultaneously enacting and mocking the conventions of historical fiction and realist narration, is in a paradoxical middle ground: 'installs and then subverts' (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 11) them. Subversion of installation embodies this post-modern approach to political engagement that Hutcheon also terms 'complicitous critique' (1989, p. 2).

Hutcheon takes this over to the terrain of political critique in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) where he argues that the 'formal strategies' of historiographic

metafiction represent a form of political intervention, a form of 'political fiction' which is an

examination of whether we can ever know the past other than through textualized remains. Hutcheon's epistemological scepticism is not, however, a political despair. Rather, it is a requirement for any political action that truly affects the world, because it de-authenticates the history of acting elites and settler/colonial dominant cultures historianational regimes which empower local, institutional, and national elites who in turn upheld and protect existing power structures.

2.2 Hutcheon and Postcolonial Literature

Hutcheon's framework was formulated in the context of a largely Euro-American literary canon, and critics have observed the complexities of negotiating her historical account of postmodern politics and the particularities of postcolonial literary production. Mishra and Hodge (1991) influentially suggested that postcolonial writing is fundamentally different from Euro-American postmodernism in its attitude to history, affective of Euro-American postmodernism in aesthetics, but urgent to post colonialism in recover the suppressed histories (p. 399). It is a tension acknowledged by Linda Hutcheon herself in her essay 'Postcolonial Postmodern' from 2002, in which she says that the former 'does not map neatly onto postcolonial experience', but adds that "souvenirisms do remain analytically productive in this posture" (p. 8) when transferred into postcolonial contexts.

Like many of his predecessors, including Boehmer (2005), Huggan (2001), and Ahmad (2008), this article believes that this paradox, and the opposition it generates, can be both productive and not paralyzing; it believes that the framework expounded by Hutcheonian is the most suitable, because the language of a postmodern writer such as Nadeem Aslam – for whom experimental style is an integral force – cannot be separated from his political implication in a postcolonial vein. The fragmentation, the temporal dislocation, the self-reflexivity and the intertextuality are not aesthetic games with themselves but means of dis-ordering the official narrative of the War on Terror and of revitalizing the voices, memories and experiences of the victims of such war. In Hutcheonian historiographic metafiction, the intelligence of the 'installing & subverting' logic quite dovetails onto the double motion of the novel Nadeem Aslam inhabits as a form of western war narrative to discover its ideological contents from within.

3. Narrative Fragmentation: Installing and Subverting the War Narrative

3.1 Hutcheon on Fragmentation and the Refusal of Totality

Among the defining formal elements of historiographic metafiction, as Hutcheon (1988) sees them is its rejection of what he calls 'the totalizing impulse of traditional historical fiction', defined as the 'drive to provide a complete, coherent, and authoritative presentation of historical events from a fixed historical perspective or point of view' (p. 63). But this all-inclusive tendency is more than aesthetic, it is ideological, and the near ascetic simplicity of the dominant culture's perspective posits one partial truth as the universal truth, which conceals other truths, writes Hutcheon. Fragmentation, which he intentionally termed disruptiveness of narrative, serves as the main formal means to counteract this totalizing ideology, being Hutcheon's primary strategy. The disruption of narrative is what he means by fragmentation and is his main device to resist this ideology of totalization.

In productive fragmentation, Hutcheon (1988) is very clear about what it does accomplish: it de-centers the subject (p. 11) meaning that what is taken for granted as universal historical perspective now turns out to be an ideology in cover. It is the 'centre', the totalising narrative of which is destabilised, that is, specifically political; in the postcolonial context, to be sure, the centre that is destroyed – in the case of *The Blind Man's Garden*, the American military-mail communication machine that constructs and circulates the War on Terror narrative.

3.2 Fragmentation in *The Blind Man's Garden*

Fragmentation operates in Nadeem Aslam's novel at several levels; perspectival, structural and typographical. The perspectival level of the story begs not to be assimilated to one consciousness. Rohan's grief-laden introspection coalesces with Mikal's pragmatism, Naheed's housewife's sorrow, and even the alien, bureau-cretic mind of American military drilling officers, all without the help of any connecting phrases. The formal (the only authorizeable "view") of this quick jumping between perspectives embodies the conceptual (the status cannot be accorded to an "authoritative view" of one) that Hutcheon theorises.

The political aspect of this perspectival division is most visible. The typical blind man-Mandalay image depicts the arrest and internment of Mikal by Americans in the "Blind Man's Garden" (2013). This is a catalogue of Mikal's frenzied mind and the dispassionate minds of the captors, and the choices shift back and forth, never solidifying:

He was aware that somewhere above him the stars existed. That somewhere a garden was still growing. But here, there was only this room and what was being done to him in it, the world contracted to these four walls, to these hands, to this electricity. (p. 147)

The juxtaposition of cosmic scale (stars, garden) with the claustrophobic specificity of the torture chamber (these four walls, this electricity) is not merely a rhetorical contrast. It introduces 'Hutcheonian' fragmentation on the novel's sentence level: the world of the novel fractures into irreconcilable registers – vast and intimate, natural and political, beautiful and brutal – that cannot be brought together in a coherent whole. This is, according to Hutcheon (1988), the formal 'denial of the coherence of a single, unified, stable meaning' (p. 7) that represents historiographic metafiction's attack on authoritative historical narrative.

Nadeem Aslam encroaches on the linear flow of events in the novel through breaks between the chronological sections and tonal shifts. One "lyrical description" scene will be followed abruptly by a "violence scene" without any warning. Nadeem Aslam writes: 'In the early morning, when Rohan was working in his garden, he saw the first signs that spring was upon him, the almond trees beginning to bloom with white flowers; it gave him a temporary happiness' (p. 67). The term 'fragile' is threatening as are two pages later the attendants at Jeo's disappearance in the same garden. What the novel calls the 'structural fragmentation' (the suddenness of the interruption of beauty by violence) is not a flaw in the novel, but is, in fact, a formal argument: in the novel's postcolonial world, beauty and violence aren't in sequence, but in one and the same moment, and any narration of the two as separate is false or dissimulates the lived reality that it claims to describe.

This is supplemented by typographical fragmentation. The loose transitions, lazily unresolved plot lines and signifiers, and the generous handling of blank space, all evoke the 'gaps and holes in the narrative', as Hutcheon (1988) puts it (p. 143). Where the narrator's expectation of coherence fails and where the narrator's investment of the narrative in terms of ideology becomes apparent. These gaps do not imply a failure of representation but, in Hutcheon's terms, the 'most honest representation possible', as they recognise that there is no complete story of postcolonial violence.

4. Temporal Dislocation: Questioning the Chronology of Imperial Progress

4.1 Hutcheon on Time and the Critique of Historical Linearity

In particular, Hutcheon's narrative of historiographic metafiction gives special weight to its disruption of historical temporality. Conventional historical fiction is involved in her 'ideology of progress' (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 88), she argues, which presumes that history unfolds in a purposed, progressive trajectory moving from past to present to future—and that this progression is also the progression of improvement, rationalisation, and civilisation. The digital/historical temporality of coloniality, by which Hutcheon means the temporal form of

the empire discourse, imposes upon these alternate forms of time—the cyclical, the repetitive, the suspended—as "backward alternatives. For Hutcheon (1989), the temporality that is more at odds with the chronology of most readers' personal experience is formal criticism of this ideological temporality: 'by doing anything and everything to avoid the comforts of chronological sequence, postmodern fiction exposes the fact that all temporal ordering is an imposition, a narrative choice with ideological consequences' (p. 74). Disrupting progressive time is not just some formal playful silliness, it's a challenge to the temporal ideology that undergirds imperial history of necessity and inevitable progress.

4.2 Temporal Dislocation in *The Blind Man's Garden*

The use of time in Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* is one of the most sophisticated in his formal practice, and is a perfect illustration of the temporal politics of historiographic metafiction narrated by Hutcheon. It essentially follows an unusual form, switching back and forth among the immediate post-9/11 present, a past in which Rohan recalls his wife Tara and the founding of the school she established, and various proleptic snapshots of events the characters cannot imagine will eventually come to pass.

The most sustained temporally dislocated use of the element is in Rohan's memories of his late wife, Tara, which is most obviously reflected as a politically charged politically progressive tempora dislocated use of the element. Part of this memory is presented with unclear temporal cues, sometimes grammatically presented as if in the present:

She had said that every moment contained all moments, that the present was not a knife's edge separating past from future but a lake in which all time existed simultaneously. He tended the garden now as though she might return tomorrow, as though grief had suspended the distinction between what was and what might still be. (Aslam, N. 2013, p. 43)

The idea in this passage that 'every moment contained all moments' is actually a philosophical principle from the formal works of Hutcheon - the denial of linear chronological and other forms of 'immanence' in favor of a 'temporality' that admits past and present to occupy the same space. Nadeem Aslam is not just portraying a character's time, rather, how the novel temporally structures Nadeem's own time. This can be termed 'mise en abyme' – as Hutcheon (1988) puts it: a 'reflection' upon the texts own 'formal strategies' (p. 54).

Proleptic dislocation works just as well. As Jao prepares to depart Afghanistan, the story briefly switches gears to the future, in which his departure has already been permanent: In the months that followed, Naheed would sometimes enter the room where he had slept and press her face against the pillow, breathing in what remained of him there, the scent growing fainter each week until she could no longer be certain whether she was remembering or imagining. (Aslam, N., 2013, p. 91)

This proleptic flash is not just a foreshadowing, but a rearrangement of the way the reader reads the preceding narrative as a whole. This is a present negation of each of Jao's moments. Demontaged to the core by its storytelling's 'temporality of the progressive' (the characters prepare for war, go into it, and then it finishes with a 'results and outcome'), the reader can not find 'horizon of the end' as war's ending in some ideal sense. This is, in essence, Hutcheon's (1989) description of the critique of ideology by historiographic metafiction, which is 'the demonstration that the ending of the narrative is "always already" known, always already constructed', (p. 75).

The political presence of this critique of time is made clear in *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) in which the rapid obliteration of the American presence is depicted. One might think that the temporal asymmetry of this situation would be felt in the temporal readings that have been given to the destruction of an Afghan village over a number of generations by bombs, however the temporal asymmetry has been felt in terms that directly challenge the progressive temporality of the War on Terror narrative, namely this:

Everything that had taken years to build—the schoolroom, the fruit trees, the archive of books kept dry through decades of effort—was erased in moments. The Americans called it precision. The village had another word for it, a word that meant the end of time. (p. 201)

The contrast between the Americans' 'precision' and the commotion and slovenly mechanization of the 'end of time' means that this is a Hutcheonian move of installing and subverting: the installation of a language of imperial progress ('precision') is undermined by the juxtaposition with an alternative temporality of those victims upon whom the precision is met. The village itself is busily emphasizing its anti-progressive jargon, 'the end of time' and not 'a moment in an ongoing sequence'.

5. Metafictional Self-Reflexivity: The Ethics of Representation

5.1 Hutcheon on Self-Reflexivity and the Politics of Form

The self-reflexivity of historiographic metafiction, then, is not a depending on politics, but 'only a deeper engagement in politics' (120) because 'it reveals the political stakes of all representation, including the representation of history. Historiographic metafiction reveals the artificial processes of historiographic representation, and exposes the ideology inherent in it. The question 'Who narrates?' becomes always the question 'Who has the power to narrate?', meaning who has the right to view the history, that is, to have it count as knowledge.

Hutcheon (1989) describes several particular devices as mechanisms through which the texts become self-reflexive: texts are foregrounded in the narrative; its narrators are self-conscious; it includes the acknowledgement of the writer's own limitations and partiality; it embeds texts within texts, in his sense of 'embedded narratives'; it explicit thematises the relationship between the fiction and the history. The techniques each of these utilize has been applied on a selective basis with definite political effect in *The Blind Man's Garden*.

5.2 Self-Reflexivity in *The Blind Man's Garden*

In *The Blind Man's Garden*, the most ubiquitous sort of self-reflexivity is what one could describe as the 'archive motif' – the sustained theme of books, manuscripts, libraries, reading and writing as regions of knowledge, as centres of power. The moral world of the novel can be traced back to Rohan's school and its library. The material centre of the novel's moral world is its school and its library. The library is not just an anthology of texts but an epistemological new order based on a patience of the sort that builds texts rather than a violent certainty of the sort that wields military force.

This destruction of the archive is, for this reason, the novel's most self-reflexive moment. *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013) describes the burning of the library in the school in terms that make it possible to see a connection between the destruction of the library and the destruction of thoughts.

The books burned for three days. Rohan stood at the window and watched the smoke rising from what had been the library, understanding that the fire was not destroying paper and ink but the very possibility of a certain kind of thought, a certain kind of knowing—the kind that required slowness, that accumulated meaning over years, that could hold contradictions without resolving them. (p. 178)

This is the kind of metafictional, or meta-narrative, section that Hutcheon is referring to: In this case, the politics of representation is thematized through insistent engagement with it within the narrative itself. The 'kind of knowing' that the library represents invites the slow and the accumulating, contains the possibility of contradictions without working them out, is exactly the kind of knowing that is enacted in the formal strategies of the novel. The novel might be seen as a *mise en abyme* of the library, as both are multi-voiced, temporally layered, contradiction sustaining archives which are liable to totalitarian certainty. The destruction of the library also thematises the conditions in which a novel has to be written and read, the

conditions in which Nadeem Aslam's novel was written, the conditions on which a novel lives or is erased: dangerous, partial, threatening to be engulfed.

The other key event of self-reflexivity is when Rohan reads a work on theology composed by his highly respected father who is an expert on Islamic law. Rohan is looking in his father's text for some guidance to his current ethical dilemma, but he discovers only that the text is inadequate:

The words were his father's but the world they described had ceased to exist. He read them looking for a grammar that might apply to now, and found only the ghost of a grammar, the outline of a language whose referents had been destroyed. He closed the book and sat in the silence of its insufficiency. (Aslam, N., 2013, p. 254)

This is a neat double move with the Hutcheonian technique. It bears on the limits of inherited textual authority; no text is, however, completely sufficient for an unprecedented (or at least not yet heretofore anticipated) historical event; at the same time it reflects on the reader's act of reading the novel we carry in our hands. Sure, aren't we looking for a grammar in text; a grammar that would be accessible for today? But are we not also at the risk of discovering only 'the ghost of a grammar'? The self-reflexiveness of this novel is an ethical gesture as it refuses to give the apparent stabilization of a text that would deceive the reader into believing it has solved the experience it symbolizes, insisting instead on the "pure space" that exists between language and the violence it is seeking to name.

Hutcheon (1988) claims the defining feature of the political honesty of a historiographic metafiction is its refusal of resolution—that is, its refusal to resolve the contradictions it sets up, takes on and presents the reader with, 'and which will keep alive the possibility of any resolution' (p. 142). This is what it will mean if moments are novel, if the burning library is deserted forever and impossible to see from its blind tender's backfield, if the father's text fails to do the work of suture.

6. Intertextuality: The Postcolonial Archive Against Imperial Monologue

6.1 Hutcheon on Intertextuality and the Contestation of History

There, Hutcheon (1988) says, the strategy that is most relevant to the contestation of historical knowledge is that of historiographic metafiction: 'historiographic metafiction incorporates the traces of the past (literary, historical, philosophical) in such a way that history itself is always already a textual construct, a history of whose texts are preserved, cited, and authorised (p. 125). Historiographic metafiction involves placing the archive of culture within her own that is also made of such covered material: it thus recognizes the power of the inherited discourses but in turn also highlights the selectivity and thus the ideological investment of the archive. Who chooses what is intertextually cited is a political question because this 'legitimizes' some traditions of knowledge and 'marginalises' others.

In terms of intertextual operation in historiographic metafiction, Hutcheon (1989) identifies two types: one is parodic intertextuality which uses other texts in order to reveal and challenge their underlying ideologies and another is recuperative intertextuality, which involves the use of other marginalised or suppressed texts to reclaim their legitimacy and authority (p. 94). In *The Blind Man's Garden* both modes operate, and in interdependent fashion with the political engagements of postcoloniality that are signified throughout the novel.

6.2 Recuperative Intertextuality: Urdu Poetry and Islamic Tradition

Classical Urdu poetry, particularly ghazals and lyrics of Mirza Ghalib, Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Mir Taqi Mir, are the most sustained and politically significant intertextual elements in the novel *The Blind Man's Garden*. The references form the type of intertextuality which Hutcheon (1989) calls recuperative, as he juxtaposes Urdu poetic tradition with an English-language novel to make a literary archive that has been marginalized by the dominance of

English-language cultural dissemination visible. In Naheed's lament for Jeo's disappearance, the grievance is shrouded in the implicit reference to a ghazal characteristic, the melding of an erotic desire and existential despair.

She said his name as one says the name of God, knowing it will not be answered but unable to stop, the repetition itself becoming a form of presence, the sound of the name outlasting the one who bore it. (Aslam, N., 2013, p. 134)

The addressed present tense is repeated and not answered here not because it is explicitly cited, but because it offers a formal logic for the ghazal's addressed present tense: Consider Naheed's grief as an act of reenacting this structural logic of unanswerable address. Then, it is intertextuality in form and not content, and it is more powerful politically for being embedded than being displayed. Nadee, Aslam's novels do not offer pornography of Urdu poetry to Western readers but he is using the Urdu poetic logic as a structure of the novel itself and providing it as a prism for the description of reality, rather than as a backdrop to liven the narrative.

When a Pakistani schoolteacher is threatened with prison for his dissent, he recites the words of poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz in an explicit mode from his "Speak" (Bol, 1941):

'Speak,' the teacher said quietly, as though to himself, reciting the words of Faiz: 'for your lips are still free, your tongue is still your own, your strong body is still yours—speak, your life is still your own.' He said the words in Urdu, then translated them, as though the act of translation were itself a form of resistance. (Aslam, N., 2013, p. 222)

It is highly intertextual, in that Hutcheon is quoting a text (Faiz's poem) that was also generated in a context of state censorship, and the quotation is utilized in a context widely shaped by post-9/11 Pakistan in conditions of political repression that are similar. The temporal fold mediated by the citation, is a formal argument and the present moment of oppression is not a novel emergency but rather an extension of previous colonial and nationalist oppressions. The relationship between one text and another, of which intertextuality is an important aspect, is precisely what Hutcheon (1988) describes 'as putting the present in the past and denaturalising the present's claim to novelty and inevitability' (p. 130).

Recuperative intertextuality extends to the novel's presentation of Islamic texts as well. Mentioning from the Quran and the Hadith is never routine, rather it is used when there is a moral dilemma and is always an arena of contestation over meaning. When a Taliban is paraphrasing Quranic teachings using Quranic language, Rohan silently remembers another tradition of the Quranic interpretation that comes to a differing conclusion (Aslam, N., 2013, p. 189). It is therefore declared, as Hutchekanı claims, that the Quran is an intertextual battleground, a text that isn't fixed but rather prone to contestation; it's a place of struggle with which to interpret rather than of a single authority.

6.3 Parodic Intertextuality: Western Literary and Military Discourse

Parodic intertextuality is another form of intertextuality that Nadeem Aslam brings to work in relation to the improvised and political discourse of the west, alongside this recuperative intertextuality. Thus, parodic intertextuality is the other type of intertextuality brought to work alongside this recuperative one in relation to western literary and political discourse deconstructed by Nadeem Aslam. The novel's articulation with Romanticism, such as Keats's depiction of beauty in nature as a form of consolation for human miseries is an example of a parodic mode.

There was a nightingale in the mulberry tree, singing as though beauty were still possible, as though it had not heard the news from the world outside this garden. Rohan listened to it and thought of all the poets who had found in such a sound a reason for consolation, and wondered if they had ever listened while a war was being fought within earshot. (Aslam, N., 2013, p. 289)

The description of the refuge of Keats's Ode to a Nightingale, which finds a refuge from “weary” and “fever” and “frets” of human suffering in the song of the bird, is parodic in Hutcheon's exact sense: it posits the Romantic situation and then undermines its foundations by exposing its contours of possibility. Keats' nightingale might have been able to console the poet because he was not paying attention, and a war was being conducted, right outside his window. The notions of natural consolation exist in a Romantic setting in which being intimate with nature and comforting means being distant from violence at the social and political level. Natural consolation requires a distance from violence at the social and political level which is not found in subjects of postcolonial war. Nadeem Aslam uses Keats to argue out the limits of his consolation; consolation is what is exposed as Nadeem argues the tradition of the West against itself from the inside.

Parodic intertextual treatment is also applied to military and media discourse. The military's jargon, reality willfully turned away from by the language of its briefings: precision, collateral damage, surgical strikes will temporarily do not scan the novel, only to vividly reflect the bodies and destroyed lives that these phrases clean off the screen while sanitizing. The communique has stated that the strike hit its intended target and that there were “few civilian casualties” in the aforementioned novel. Minimal. Rohan scanned the newspaper and thought it was a word he didn't know, one he never wanted to' (p. 237). The intertextual and parodic relationship, in this place, is achieved by the juxtaposition of military euphemism and individual human response, the communicative approach towards the communique and individual reception, particularly from Rohan, who acts as a voice of alienation and grieving.

7. Wound Epistemology: Synthesis and Significance

The four Hutcheonian formal strategies that were examined in the previous pages – fragmentation, temporal dislocation, metafictional self-reflexivity and intertextuality all come together in *The Blind Man's Garden* to produce the knowing of, as well as from, the wounds of postcolonial violence, what this article designated “wound epistemology”. This synthesis has to be accompanied by short theoretical elaboration.

The greatest political goal of historiographic metafiction is epistemological, according to Hutcheon (1988): epistemological because it generates a new understanding of history: an understanding that is constructed, partial, or ideologically motivated and interested (p. 92). This new mode of knowledge doesn't just offer a critical examination of what is already known, it is the establishment of a new epistemological stance from which the violence, selectivity and partiality of dominant historical narratives become evident. In postcolonial fiction, this other epistemological stance is developed in the formal experience of fragmentation, dislocation, self-reflexivity and intertextuality: the reader who masters the formal complexity of the novel is not only familiar with the postcolonial experience of violence, but knows it differently, as shaped by the formal experience of rupture, disorientation, and contradiction.

Hinduism has a variant of this as viewed in a figurative context, as seen in *The Blind Man's Garden*, where the garden of the title and its blind tinker is its most concentrated figure. Beyond its annual construction, the garden of many decades, nurtured with patient knowledge of soil, season and species, represents a way of knowing that is the exact opposite of that of the imperial military force, which knows its way in an instant, in possession, and in intentional destruction. Rohan's eyes close, but his understanding of the garden doesn't close; it becomes more intimate, more particular, deeper:

He moved through it in darkness, his hands remembering what his eyes could no longer confirm, knowing each plant and tree by touch, by scent, by the particular quality of stillness that surrounded it. He had tended it for so long that the garden had become a form of knowledge rather than merely its object, he did not know about the garden; he knew through it. (Aslam,

N., 2013, p. 360). This is one of the most philosophically important passages in the novel, bearing the most richly concentrated form of wound epistemology. He didn't know about that garden; he knew through it, this is the difference between knowing-about (propositional, distanced, objective), and knowing-through (embodied, particular, relational), the difference between the mainstream epistemology of imperial power and the alternative epistemology that Nadeem Aslam's formal strategies offer. The Blind Man's Garden is a mini historiographic Hutcheon that at once presents and exceeds the possibilities of sighted historiographic verbiage; a place of self-reflexive, intertextual, fragmentary and temporally complex knowledge – a place that makes visible what has been hidden from sight.

In recent studies on Nadeem Aslam, emphasis is beginning to shift towards the value of this formal accomplishment. Yousaf (2020) claims that while Nadeem Aslam's novels share many features of postcolonial realism, this form of authorship is consistently 'more sophisticated than likewise more straightforwardly realist postcolonial writing' (p. 134). Chambers (2011) mentions how intertextual practice in the work of Nadeem Aslam 'helps to generate dialogue between literary traditions' thus it constitutes 'a kind of political argument' (p. 87). This essay has tried to theory-ladenly spell out these observations in the light of Hutcheon's use of the 'installing-and-subverting' logic of historiographic metafiction, showing how what Yousaf decries as 'formal sophistication,' and what Chambers labels as 'dialogue between traditions' are specific instances of this.

8. Conclusion: The Garden as Hutcheonian Text

This article has argued, through sustained close readings of *The Blind Man's Garden* guided by Linda Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction, that Nadeem Aslam's formal strategies constitute a rigorous and politically purposive epistemological project. Fragmentation in narrative seeks to disembark the totalising authority of the imperial war narrative. In Temporal dislocation, the reflection of the chronological narrative of the War on Terror, displaces the linear time logic typically attributed to it and allows the reader to see it for what it is: an ideology imposed on history. Metafictional self-reflexivity makes the constructed, partial, and loaded aspects of all representation, including this novel's, salient. The imperial archive is challenged by intertextuality, which recuperates or parodies the literary and cultural traditions that were previously suppressed in an effort to make them lawful, and also reveals ideological investments of dominant Western discourses.

These strategies in concert create what the article has described as a wound epistemology, a way of knowing the violence of settler colonialism, a way of knowing that becomes a formal experience of rupture, disorientation and contradiction. This epistemology not only won't heal the scars or wounds that it exposes; it lives with them; it demands that the reader lives with them as well. In the words of Hutcheon, it is an 'eyeworker,' a remarkable postmodern-postcolonial-political gesture that 'bust[s] the reader open to the ideological implications that underlie every representation' (224).

As a conclusion, *The Blind Man's Garden* is one of the most accomplished examples of the historiographic metafiction of the Hutcheonian novel in South Asia today. Its achievement is not only thematic; the compassionate, outraged witness to an awful moment in history; not only epistemological, through its construction of a method of knowing that is appropriate to the wounds it has to narrate; not even only formal: first, there is a method of constructing a way of knowing that is adequate to an awful historical moment; formally, there is a method of constructing a way of knowing that is adequate to a way of knowing that is adequate to an awful historical moment. Future studies in this field might productively explore other novels by Nadeem Aslam (*The Wasted Vigil* (2008), *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), etc.) to either broaden or deepen the discussion about whether the wound epistemology seen in these novels could be taken as a recognizable and continuous formal enterprise or whether it is

revised as the historical and political concerns of Nadeem Aslam shift. This kind of work would further shed a light on the particular contribution of the fiction of South Asian diasporas to the global endeavor of historiographic metafiction, a theory and problematic which remained urgent and has been since Hutcheon.

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