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“Lahore ka ek Vaqī‘a”: A Rhetorical Study With Particular Reference to Truth, Historicity and Belief*

The gigantic Bran leads the Britons war against the Irish, over whom the victory is won only after the magic cauldron of rebirth, which the Irish possess, has been destroyed. Bran, wounded in the foot (like Bron the Fisher King in Arthurian romance), commands his head to be cut off by the seven survivors of the battle. They bury the head at the White Mount in London in order to protect the kingdom, while they spend seven years feasting at Harlech, and eighty years at Gwales in Penvro, the severed head remains undecayed, as good a companion as it ever was.

(Willis 1996, 188)

THIS IS A PORTION of the story of the “Wondrous Head.” Nobody would question the veracity or logic of this narrative, probably no one has ever thought of doing so. Myths are myths per se, taken for granted. It has been accepted that real-life yardsticks of veracity and logic are irrelevant for myths. Alas! Such leeway is not available to the genre of fiction. In fact, syntactically “myth” is bracketed with “reality” as antonymous to each other. In the same way, “fact” is antonymous to “fiction.” The analogy ends here. Mythological narratives have never been a topic for serious critical analysis or interpretation. They have never been subjected to analysis with ruthless interpretive tools.

In its creative journey, the genre of fiction, more often than not, hits various roadblocks and speed-breakers. Sometimes it is the temporality of the state of affairs, sometimes it is “suspension of disbelief,” sometimes it is history and sometimes the ubiquitous “truth.” Can fiction not be treated

* A translation of the story, “Lāhaur kā ēk Vāqī‘a,” discussed in this article, appears elsewhere in this issue. —*Editor*

as fiction per se, like myths? If not, then can there not be unquestionable fiction-specific truths and beliefs that have to be taken into account at the time of analysis/interpretation? Should the research methodology applicable to history be ignored even for fiction that claims to be “historical”?

All such questions can be dealt with theoretically, and in fact they have been. But the moot question is: “Can such questions be tackled successfully in fiction itself?”

“Lāhaur kā ēk Vāqī‘a” (“An Incident in Lahore”)—hereinafter referred to as “LKEV”—is a short story, written by noted Urdu critic Shamsu‘r-Raḥmān Fārūqī, which does endeavor to deal with such questions in the story itself.

It may be interesting here to point out that, generally, all such theoretical journeys end at 221B Baker Street, London, the fictional residence of Sherlock Holmes. It is easy to pick a famous fictional character and raise a theoretical edifice regarding the “truth,” “historicity,” “temporality,” “logic,” etc., of fiction. It is difficult for theoreticians, or for that matter a critic, to create fiction that addresses such issues in an applied fashion. And it is even more difficult to present fiction, which in itself is a creative marvel, that deals with such issues. Fārūqī has chosen the more difficult path in “LKEV.” This apart, he has also introduced an “implied critic” into the text itself. The “implied critic” here is not like the “implied author” who is a voiceless entity. The “implied critic” is a participant in intratextual communications; he has a voice, sometimes a bit too loud.

“LKEV” is fiction per se. It is, simultaneously, metafiction and a frame-narrative (i.e., a story within a story). It is a unique frame-narrative, wherein the frame is as important, if not more important, than the narrative within. In frame-narratives, as a rule, the frame is considered to be just a starter; the main menu is entirely different and considered to be more important. After all, who cares about the frame of *The Arabian Nights*? “LKEV” is like metafiction as well. It is the story of a person telling a story. It is like metafiction, but is not metafiction per se. Metafiction generally deals with the how and what of fiction, not with the why or what for of it. In “LKEV,” the why or what for is as important as the how and what. In a true sense, “LKEV” is applied metafiction. It is not merely a creative indulgence. It is fiction with an agenda, a unique and declared agenda. The agenda is unique because it is declared outside the narrative and outside the frame. The “real author” declares in the preface to the

collection of stories in which “LKEV” appears that the story is a direct replica of a dream: frame by frame and sequence by sequence, a verbatim recollection. The first-person narrator reiterates this at the end of the narrative.

The why or what for of “LKEV” makes it an ideal subject for discussing the rhetoric of fiction. “Implied author” is a concept (not the sole concept) around which the rhetoric of fiction is centered. It is indeed a very difficult proposition, but, nevertheless, it is not beyond comprehension and application. Wayne C. Booth, the proponent theoretician of the rhetoric of fiction, has made his intentions very clear. His choice was normative poetics, which he called the rhetoric of fiction. Unlike his predecessors in the Chicago School, who were totally against a historical and biographical approach in dealing with a text, Booth conceded that a literary text is a form of communication between the author and the reader. But the author and the reader, in his context and perspective, were text-centric and text-specific and did not exist outside that domain. When all was said and done, international fallacy could not be abandoned totally by Booth. Although he always maintained that the interpretation of texts is the result of “intrinsic” textual observation but was indebted to extensive use of external sources, he nevertheless acquired the reputation of being a covert or overt intentionalist.

Now, within the aforementioned theoretical framework, when one makes an attempt to address the various issues raised in “LKEV,” all of a sudden the vague and complicated question of the “implied author” presents itself clearly, with all its contours, in its applied domain. The interpretation of the text of “LKEV” begins outside the text itself. The extratextual sources are mentioned in the preface to the collection of stories. As mentioned earlier, the “real author,” Shamsu’r-Rahmān Fārūqī, declares that the latter part of the story is a word-for-word representation of a dream. The question arises whether this declaration is textually and temporally true per se or whether it should be constructed with a hidden prefix. A “prefix” is very relevant here. Juan Herrero mentioned this in his article “Fiction, Exclusion, Truth” (n.d., 1), a commentary on David Lewis’s essay “Truth in Fiction.”

Any description-sentence about a fictional character must be seen as an abbreviation of a longer sentence containing the operator In such-and-such fiction, For instance, the sentence Holmes lived in Baker Street really means: In the Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes lived in Baker Street. This prefixed operator is tremendously important, because: a) All these sentences, without the prefixed operator neither explicitly present or tac-

itly understood, are denotationless; b) only if the sentence is taken as prefixed is [it] capable of truth and falsity. [...]

[...] sentences of literary criticism [...] are denotationless, because they contain a descriptive sentence about a fictional character, but they do not share the prefixed operator. The conclusion is obvious: the sentences of literary criticism are not capable of truth and falsity.

(*ibid.*, 1-2)

The “implied author” of “LKEV” is a unique theoretical entity because at the very outset this author steps beyond the textual boundary. It is immaterial whether the assertion of the “real author” that the latter part of the story is an exact representation of a dream is true or not. It is also immaterial whether the “real author actually had such a dream or not. At a later stage of the story, when the frame outside the main-menu narrative is the focus, the first-person narrator, in response to the “implied critic,” states that he has vowed to write a true autobiography. The “implied critic” raises a question: “Are you writing your autobiography or a dream-sequence blended with concocted events?” The first-person narrator replies: “Events can mean a real-life event, a dream or even death.”

There are many other objections from the “implied critic” who is the narratee to the first-person narrator. One of the objections is: “You have not written a single word that might constitute an event” and “I am raising such issues only because you asked me to look at your story as a hostile critic.”

Obviously this is a dialogue between an “implied critic” and an “implied author.” The critic is “implied” because he is text-specific (i.e., he is speaking from within). The author is “implied” because he is silent, it is the first-person narrator who is speaking on his behalf *inside the text*. The narrative within the frame (i.e., the main-menu narrative) provides the issues to be debated in the frame, outside the main-menu narrative. The “implied author” is a fictional persona with dual residency. He is a resident of the main-menu narrative as well as of the frame. The “implied author” repeatedly reiterates the stand taken by the “real author” in the preface of the story collection of which “LKEV” is a part. (Although there is one point on which the “implied author” and the “real author” take contradictory stands which will be discussed later.) As already stated, it is immaterial whether the narrative is really a dream-sequence or not. The “real author” may be untrustworthy in this regard. What he wants is a debate regarding “real-life truth” versus “truth in fiction,” “history as recorded and chronicled” versus “history as narrated in fiction,” “suspension of disbelief,” and so on. This is the “meaning within a meaning” which is

the crux of the narrative.

What happens is that the “implied critic” is thoroughly confused and the “implied author” is so engrossed in his theoretical domain that he does not listen to the logic of the “implied critic” (i.e., “He is treating the text like an enemy”). The first-person narrator repeatedly asserts that it is *his* biography (which may be a fictional piece) and so long as the events narrated by him are not controverted or contradicted by himself, the “truth” or “falsity” thereof cannot be questioned. The “implied critic” is an ordinary critic. He loses sight of the fact that the narrative is the “implied author’s” biography and starts treating the narrative within as a well-researched, correctly-recorded and chronologically-documented piece of a real-life story. However, the finer points pertaining to “real-life truth” versus “truth in fiction,” “history as recorded and chronicled” versus “history as narrated in fiction,” “suspension of disbelief,” and so on will be discussed later. Here the focus is on the various aspects of the rhetoric of fiction with particular reference to “LKEV.”

The point of view in “LKEV” is filtered through a first-person narrator and it is a very slippery path. The chances of a great fall are quite possible, but the “real author” is a very clever storyteller. He never ventures inside the thought process of any other character of the narrative within the frame, much less the sole character outside the main narrative. There is only one occasion when the first-person narrator nearly slips, but he controls himself. This is when he encounters an elderly lady in the house where he takes shelter. At the outset, the first-person narrator thinks she is the owner of the house. Later, he discusses, or at least he thinks, the lady in question is a sort of head governess. The shift in perception is not because of some intrinsic thought process in the lady, but rather because of extrinsic behavioral patterns which culminate in her addressing the narrator as “*tum*” (somewhat derogatory), and not as “*āp*” (somewhat, respectful). The first-person narrator is neither able, nor does he try, to describe the mental faculty or thought process of the lady in question.

The first-person narrator acts as a perfect spokesman for the “implied author.” He himself raises questions regarding the veracity of illogical events. Some examples include: “Am I dreaming?” and “Perhaps my right brain, in charge of the cognitive faculty, was not working.” Or, “I was walking like an ant. How could I see buildings standing furlongs away from me?” and “I was trying to tell my story in a faltering voice and even I was finding it difficult to believe.”

Obviously these instances are just illustrative and not exhaustive. There are other instances as well. During the time of the story (1937) no

self-ignition cars were available in Lahore. The first-person narrator claims to be a railway engineer in Lahore, but the company for which he claims to work was based in Calcutta. The first-person narrator keeps repeating that during the so-called events (the “implied critic” calls them non-events) his “reptilian brain” was active and his faculty of logical understanding was somewhat blurred. Obviously events that supposedly took place during an absence of understanding and reasoning will have hallucinatory features. Through the mouth of the first-person narrator, the “implied author” keeps reiterating this point, but the “implied critic” is hell-bent on using a temporal yardstick. It would be wrong to say there is no communication between the “implied author” and the “implied reader.” There is indeed communication, albeit indirect and silent. It is true that an “implied reader” discovers an “implied author” through the norms and values of the text. In most cases, the norms and values of the text emanate from the fictional descriptions and utterances of a third-person narrator (omniscient or otherwise), in some cases from a first-person narrator, and, in the rarest of rare cases, from a second-person narrator. In this case, it is the first-person narrator who is weaving the normative framework—both from inside the main-menu narrative and from the frame as well.

The reliability of the first-person narrator is an issue which should not be left unaddressed. The “real author” as well as the “implied author” have repeatedly taken the stand that the real-life touchstones and yardsticks are irrelevant with regard to “events,” or for that matter “non-events,” in fiction. More so when such reported events are mostly part of a dream or reportedly took place when the cognitive faculty of the first-person narrator was somewhat blurred and his “reptilian brain” was active (i.e., when a person is under mental distress owing to sexual urges, hunger, violence, danger, threat, etc.). These states give rise to a unique situation when the static (i.e., descriptive) facts and event-specific facts in the narrative are farther from the real-life possibilities but are in consonance with the goal (either explicit or implied) of the narrative, and if the first-person narrator underlines this distance his reliability is enhanced.

Since the above-mentioned criteria are fulfilled, the reliability of the first-person narrator is enhanced and thus the narrative can be termed “rhetorically more correct.” As already noted elsewhere, there are numerous such instances. Some of them are as follows: the sudden disappearance of the car for no apparent reason, the passage of time from morning to evening with very few time-consuming events, and the sudden arrival of a whirlwind inside the house and its turning into a ghost.

An additional rhetorical aspect, which is quite unique in “LKEV,” is the blatant intrusion of the “real author” into the text. This has been done in order to bolster the viewpoint of the “implied author” who is speaking through the first-person narrator.

More often than not the narrator, in order to be more reliable, is overwhelmed by the temporal illogic of the events. In such cases the “implied author” cannot come to his rescue because, by definition, he is silent. This is the situation in the “LKEV” narrative where the “real author” intrudes, using brackets to allow for his unexpected (though not unwarranted) entry into the text. There are two occasions when the “real author” talks about the “reptilian brain” being active when the narrated events reportedly took place. On one occasion the “real author” intrudes without the pretentious brackets. Namely, when he starts talking about reasons and causes—the difference between them and their real-life applications. The narrative itself becomes unique. It is a frame narrative in which the “real author” is residing outside the outer-frame yet intrudes right into the core of narrative inside the frame. He replaces the first-person narrator and occupies a unique position as the sole spokesman for the “implied author.” After all, the “implied author” is a voiceless entity.

It happens but rarely in narratives that authorship becomes like a coin, on one side is the voiceless “implied author” and on the other the “real author” who can speak. Zero-distance authorship is an ideal situation and, therefore, very rare in fiction.

Truth in Fiction

The debatable “truth in fiction” appears to be the cardinal point of “LKEV,” if not the sole point. The argument between the first-person narrator of the events and the “implied critic” is centered around the veracity of the facts and incidents in the narrative. The “implied critic” keeps picking holes. The first-person narrator does not try, even remotely, to plug the holes, he simply justifies them. The “implied critic” talks like a record keeper and the first-person narrator speaks like a creative soul. The first-person narrator is very clear in his mind that he is narrating a fictitious sequence of events and facts, and he has an additional weapon in that these narrated events and facts pertain to a period when his cognitive faculty was somewhat blurred. The “implied critic” mistakes the narrator for a historiographer.

The “implied author” is a proponent of the absoluteness of fictional

truth. When the narrator says, “All stories are true! All stories are true!” what he actually means is “All stories are *absolutely* true.” So the “implied author,” ably supported by the “real author” has taken a stand.

Other issues are also involved. Such issues need to be addressed in connection with the text of “LKEV,” within the theoretical frame of these issues within boundaries to minimize the chances of digression. The questions of “truth in fiction,” the “historicity of fiction,” and “suspension of disbelief” must be tackled in order to delineate the theoretical stands taken in the text of “LKEV.” It is imperative to analyze the overall theoretical frameworks of “truth in fiction” and “suspension of disbelief” and to judge the acceptability of the stand taken by the “implied author” (supported by the “real author”) with particular reference to the text. The reasons are numerous and include: the differences of opinion between the “implied critic” and the first-person narrator, the question of underlying premises common to both, and whether the issues in question are based on the intrinsic norms of the text or on extraneous considerations.

The larger issues involved require theoretical frameworks to determine whether the “implied critic” or the first-person narrator is more reliable. Though the stands taken by them are confined to the text, nevertheless, it may be interesting to look at how much support each gets from outside the confines of the text. Such an approach is essential in order to ascertain whether “LKEV” can be converted into a reference-case to discuss “truth in fiction,” the “historicity of fiction” and “suspension of disbelief” using the tools of the “rhetoric of fiction.” Prima facie, these three concepts are synonymous, but on closer inspection they are different. Without going into minute details, the most fundamental differences are: “truth in fiction” talks in absolute terms, either a fictional fact is true or it is false. There cannot be a position where a fictional fact is partly true or partly false. The “historicity of fiction” is a relative concept. It deals with the “how far” of deviations. “Suspension of disbelief” is also a relative concept, but it deals with the “how long” of suspension, which is a category of deviation.

Although, perhaps, Wayne C. Booth would not agree, there is no harm in examining the possibility of the first-person narrator or the “implied critic” getting support from outside the text. After all, when something from outside hits the text like a hurricane, can the text afford to ignore imperiling its very existence? If such outside support fortifies the intrinsic normative structure, it should be welcomed. The reason is obvious. In the first instance, the reliability of the first-person narrator would be enhanced and might acquire universality and be of referential value. If

not, then the reliability of the first-person narrator would remain text-specific. If the “real author” takes similar stands (through the narrators and fictional descriptions), the “implied author” would be part of a grand scheme and the “real author” and the “implied author” might sustain the reliability of the narrators in different texts. If the “implied authors” in different texts take conflicting stands, the “real authors” would be like a genus giving birth to different and conflicting species.

“LKEV” is one story in a collection of five, and in all five stories the stands taken by the “implied authors,” manifested through the first-person narrators, are identical. (It is worthwhile here to emphasize that in all five stories the point of view is filtered through first-person narrators.) The “implied author” of “LKEV” is part of the grand scheme of the “real author” (i.e., the personal stand of Fārūqī) regarding “truth in fiction,” the “historicity of fiction” and “suspension of disbelief.”

Outside support for the first-person narrator comes from numerous quarters, but outside support for the “implied critic” is very limited. The matrix below places the differences between the first-person narrator and the “implied critic” in a proper context and perspective.

Stand Taken by the “Implied Critic”	Stand Taken by the First-Person Narrator
“What rubbish have you written? Are you writing your autobiography or a dream sequence blended with concocted events?”	“I have vowed not to write even a single word that is untrue.”
“Of course one cannot remember minor details but here it is a question of major details.”	“There is a minor difference in names.”
“If, however, you’re writing Amir Hamza’s story, it’s a different matter.”	“In my view there cannot be a more authentic historical narrative than Amir Hamza’s story.”
“I am debating because you asked me to insure that not a single bit of wrong information is mentioned in the story.”	“It’s true, but since you could not find a single bit of wrong information you started leveling unfounded allegations.”
“You have not written a single word that might constitute an event.”	“Shut up, do you know that an event can mean a real event, a dream or even death?”
“Now you should admit that you’ve introduced a story into your autobiography.”	“All stories are true.”

As mentioned earlier, these are some of the apparent deviations and there are others as well.

The “implied critic” embedded in the story is an ordinary critic, a street-critic so to speak. He is not aware of the theoretical tenets pertaining to the larger issues involved. Fiction is not a journalistic endeavor intended for updating information. The world of fiction is inhabited by fictional beings who may or may not come from the temporal world. The world of fiction is confined within the cranium of the author. The linguistic act that makes something fiction and someone a fictional character is a rhetorical act and not a grammatical, lexical, logical or historiographic act because no one conveys the idea that the narrative in question is a statement of temporal reality.

“LKEV” was written in Urdu and the “implied author,” the “real author,” and the “implied critic” are representatives of the Urdu milieu. But where the debate between the “implied critic” and the first-person narrator starts, the similarity ends. For a theoretical framework one might consider that in this particular instance the “implied author,” the “real author,” and the first-person narrator are all rolled into one (except on one point which will be discussed later). In other words, the distance between them is minimal. It cannot be zero because that would be a case of ideal fiction, which is theoretically possible but practically impossible. Without jargonizing the matter, one might say that the distance is minimal because the “implied author,” the “real author,” and the first-person narrator share the same values and norms regarding “truth in fiction,” “suspension of disbelief,” and the “historicity of narrated facts” with reference to the text (i.e., “LKEV”). The “implied critic” offers the lone dissenting voice.

In “LKEV” the “implied author” tells the story (through the first-person narrator who is a voiceless entity) as known facts, and it is the “implied author’s” belief that counts regarding what is “truth” in (this particular) fiction. In “LKEV” the stand taken by the “implied author,” the “real author” and the first-person narrator is diagonally opposite to the concept of “truth in fiction” as enunciated by David Lewis, who proposes the following truth conditions:

“In fiction x, p” is true if p is true in all the worlds in which the fiction actually denoted by x is told as known fact[s] that are closest to the collective belief worlds of the community in which the fiction originates.

(qtd. in Bonomi and Zucchi 2003, 13)

The proposition raises more questions than it answers. It immediately

snatches “truth in fiction” from the text and hands it over to the community. The “real author” (and in this case the “implied author” as well) may be a member the community, but may not share the communal belief. The case of “LKEV” is unique. The question of “truth in fiction” is discussed inside the text, not outside of it as a question of the community. Obviously the community cannot and should not dictate the terms of reference for creative pursuits. In the case of “LKEV,” as it should be, the matter has been dealt with as intrinsic to the text.

In “LKEV” the noted Urdu poet Muḥammad Iqbāl resides on McLeod Road and there in nothing in the text to suggest that this address disturbs the intrinsic logic of the narrative. In fact, it strengthens the intrinsic logic since the “implied author,” the “real author,” and the first-person narrator repeatedly stress that even a non-event is an event, a dream is an event, death is an event, and events are events as they are narrated or recalled rather than as they should be in actual life.

So what if a sequence of events that should have taken two hours to complete, took the whole day. So what if the specific and to-the-point details are recollected and narrated when the first-person narrator’s cognitive faculty was reportedly (if not actually) blurred.

Never mind David Lewis (1983), whose concept of “truth in fiction” has baffled authors, critics and philosophers alike. The stand taken by the “implied critic” in “LKEV” is so superficial that it defies even the yardstick of David Lewis who talks about the collective-belief of the world in which fiction originates. There are various points where the “implied critic” tries to be a bit too specific. For example, pointing out that Iqbāl resided on Muir Road, not McLeod Road, in Lahore, that Iqbāl had already developed a husky voice at the time in question, and that bands of Kanjars were operating in Lahore at the time but not near Iqbāl’s residence.

Such specific details cannot and should not be a part of collective-belief. A scholar in the community in which the fiction has originated may be aware of such details, but not the community at large, who may know of Iqbāl as a great Urdu poet who resided in Lahore but not know about Muir Road, Iqbāl’s husky voice, the exact location of gangs of petty thieves, and so on. Such questions cannot be raised even when one is following the tenets of David Lewis regarding “truth in fiction.”

The basic concept of David Lewis itself is flawed in many respects. The collective-belief shared by the community remains outside the text, not inside. So the touchstone for “truth in fiction” remains outside the text, which renders the intratextual communications and situations absolutely meaningless and irrelevant. Suppose the collective-belief shared by the

community in which a work of fiction has originated is that the earth is round, but the society inside the fictional text believes that the earth is flat. The characters in the work of fiction venture out to sea in a boat and fall off the flat earth. Which collective-belief should prevail: the intratextual or extratextual? The beauty of “LKEV” is that it attempts to arrive at a concept of “truth in fiction” which is text-specific, which can be isolated without any reference to the world outside the text. A discerning reader will realize that he or she is reading and enjoying “LKEV” as a work of fiction *per se* before the appearance of the “implied critic” who tries to drag the audience outside the text. An ordinary reader might get caught in the tug-of-war between the “implied author” and the “implied critic,” but a discerning reader will be standing with the “implied author”; one might call him the “implied reader.”

The “implied author,” it appears, is keen on placing his own understanding of “truth in fiction” on the record. What he is aiming at is not an irreducible definition, but rather, a loosely described concept. The “implied reader” has to infer it from the text of the story.

The “implied author” of “LKEV” is trying to arrive at a compromise formula between Lewis’s concept of “truth in fiction” and Meinong’s philosophy of “truth.” However, the problem with Meinong’s philosophy of “truth” is that it is not fiction-specific, it involves “truth” in general, while the aim of David Lewis is to provide a useful definition of “truth” in fictional contexts. There must be a criterion to define “truth” and “falsity” in fiction that is different from the criteria applied in real-life situations because fiction and reality are confined within different boundaries. Within the domain of fiction, Lewis creates a hierarchy of “truths.” Sherlock Holmes, according to Lewis, is more real than Phantom, Batman, Spiderman or superheroes, because Holmes is a flesh-and-blood character like real persons in the real world. Meinong, on the other hand, seems to take fictional, and other nonexistent objects, quite seriously as objects of philosophical study. He regards such things as the Fountain of Youth, the Golden Mountain, and the Round Square as genuine objects, despite their nonexistence or lack of being. For him, obviously, real-life touchstones are of no use.

The first-person narrator of “LKEV” is a liberal and conscious proponent of the notion that “All stories are true.” The narrator is liberal because he himself tries to explain the illogical nature of the events by saying, for example, his cognitive faculty was blurred, there was a very long time interval between the occurrence of the narrated events and their being recollected, and that he could remember the doctor who treated his in-

jured palm even after the lapse of so many years.

The narrator is not trying to justify the events and characters being related, as Bertrand Russell would have him do. (Incidentally Bertrand Russell was one of the greatest followers of the Meinongian philosophy of “truth.”) The narrator is arguing with the “implied critic.” He is not claiming that such and such events took place because he thought so, or that such and such characters, with all their core and peripheral attributes, existed because he thought so. He is not presenting characters and events like the Fountain of Youth, the Golden Mountain or the Round Square. He is simply claiming that the intrinsic fictional logic of “LKEV” justifies the events and characters within the story: Iqbāl resided at McLeod Road, not Muir Road; his voice was clear and husky at that particular point in time; self-ignited automobile engines were available; the Munīr Niyāzī couplet was composed by Kabīr, and so on. After all, such deviations are taking place in one possible world, a fictional world, not in a real-life world. The illogic of the real-world can be logic in a possible world.

David Lewis would like to purge all such inconsistencies. For him truth and consistency are two supreme values; anything is allowed in order to achieve them. Even losing the entire text one is trying to analyze. Meinong prefers to ignore the word inconsistency altogether.

Through the voice of the first-person narrator, the “implied author” of “LKEV” exhorts the reader to search for the logic of “truth in fiction” inside the work itself, not outside; the “real author” supports the “implied author” from outside the text and an intelligent reader (the “implied reader”) discovers this.

The “implied author” of “LKEV” is continually focusing on the fact that the first-person narrator was somewhat confused when the narrated events reportedly took place. At one point the narrator says three things about the color of his clothes: 1) “My clothes appeared to be yellow. God knows why.” 2) “My clothes became more yellowish” and 3) “Were my clothes actually yellow?” The actual color of the clothes is immaterial. What is material is the confusion in the mind of the narrator as regards the color at that point in time. Such confusion is a justification for the inconsistencies pointed out by the “implied critic.” David Lewis, perhaps, would not accept such justifications; Meinong, perhaps, would consider the offer of such justifications absolutely unwarranted. According to the “implied author,” the acceptability would lie somewhere between these two conflicting stands.

Historicity

... unlike history that is foisted on a person as an alien force, the history told in a novel is borne from human freedom, his deep personal creativity and his choice and is a sort of revenge against history.

Milan Kundera (In Ishkhanyan 2006, 1)

There is only one real-life character in “LKEV,” Muḥammad Iqbāl, the legendary Urdu poet. Most of the objections raised regarding historicity are centered on his being a real-life person. The “implied critic” tries to banish the fictional Iqbāl from the text and seeks to replace him with the real-life Iqbāl, conveniently forgetting the fact that “LKEV” is a story, not a chronologically recorded history of events and characters. The world of “LKEV” is one possible world, and not a historical world. “LKEV” is not even an attempt to fictionalize the life and time of Iqbāl. It is not a historical treatise on Iqbāl. Iqbāl comes into the narrative fleetingly, like a puff of air. It is the story of the first-person narrator. The purpose of history and the purpose of historical fiction are different. The purpose of history is to narrate events, along with their causes and the reasons for them, as accurately as possible. While the purpose of historical fiction is to enable the reader, through the perspective of the characters, to feel as if he or she were present during the events being depicted. Such a goal requires some modifications in the events and facts.

If a narrative is not even historical fiction, modifications may be alterations under certain circumstances. In the case of “LKEV,” the “implied author” is trying to establish the stretchable nature of fictional events and characters even when some of the narrated events and characters are the subject-matter of real-life history. All the major events and characters in the narrative are outside the precincts of Iqbāl’s bungalow. Iqbāl is a doyen of Urdu literature. If the narrative-time spent on him is just a fraction of the overall discourse-time, there must be a grand design behind it. And the design, it appears, is to present an “applied poetics of fiction,” with special reference to “truth in fiction,” the “historicity of fiction” and “suspension of disbelief.”

The “implied author,” obviously, is aware of the historical aberrations in the narrative. One can easily deduce from the narrative framework that the aberrations are deliberate and have been placed in the narrative for a purpose. Had they not been there, there would not have been an “implied critic,” a friend of the first-person narrator, to question them. After all, the “implied critic” is also a character of the narrative.

It is also a fact that the questions raised by the critic are relevant, from the historical point of view. There is a heated argument between the narrator and the “implied critic” regarding the glaring aberrations. The narrator is not justifying the aberrations from a historical perspective, his perspective is fictional. The “implied critic” is questioning the aberrations from a historical perspective, although he does, occasionally, sound like David Lewis: “Of course one cannot remember minor details, but here it is a question of major details.”

According to the “implied critic,” the major details relate to both facts and anachronisms: a Munīr Niyāzī couplet attributed to Kabīr, the lack of discussion about Iqbāl’s husky voice, the absence of Iqbāl’s friends in the vicinity of his home, no such thing as self-starting cars, cars with advanced gear systems, or Ambassador model cars in Lahore in 1937, and no Lahore-based railway companies at that time. There are so many historical aberrations, but all such anachronisms and aberrations are part of the grand design to present an “applied poetics.”

When an author writes a story, he or she tries to make a time and place come alive for readers, so they feel as if they stand in the midst of what is happening. Sometimes it requires alterations in the events and characters if they are historical in nature and often authors make a note of this at the beginning or end of the story. “LKEV” is different. The “real author” has introduced an “implied critic” instead. This “implied critic” is not a voiceless entity like the “implied author.” As already noted, he has a rather loud, albeit misplaced voice.

In the category of historicity, aberrations relating to facts are not relevant for discussion, but anachronistic aberrations are. Someone once asked Sir Steven Runciman if he ever thought of writing a historical novel. “Oh yes,” he replied, “he wanted deeply to do so in order to ‘say what I know to be true but cannot prove’” (qtd. in Rainbolt [n.d.], 2).

In the collection of short stories that includes “LKEV,” all the other stories also relate to the doyens of Urdu poetry, such as Mīr, Ghālib, Muṣṣḥafī, etc. Their lives and times have been detailed as fiction, not history. In “LKEV” the “real author” obviously has a purpose and that is to set down a theoretical framework through which the short stories other than “LKEV” should be read and appreciated. If someone would have asked him about fictionalizing the life and time of Mīr, Ghālib, Muṣṣḥafī, etc., he would have replied, “What I know to be true but cannot prove.”

The point being stressed is that the category to which a narrative belongs determines what the touchstone of “truth” will be. The touchstone is different for different categories. In the concluding paragraphs of

“LKEV” the “implied author” has already summed up his stand (through the first-person narrator). The “implied author” cannot take contradictory stands in the same narrative as this might lead to rhetorical anarchy. His stand is that “All stories are true.”

The “real author” is very clever. He has an “implied critic” introduced into the story by converting a simple narrative into a frame narrative. The “implied critic” raises questions that could have been raised by extratextual ordinary critics, and this applies not only to “LKEV” but also to all the other stories in the collection of which it is a part. After the introduction of the “implied critic,” the distance between the “real author” and the “implied author” becomes stark and well demarcated. Though Wayne C. Booth would find a narrative rhetorically more correct if the distance between the “real author” and “implied author” were minimal, “LKEV” is, nevertheless, a unique case. It underlines the hypothesis that, under special circumstances, the rhetorical correctness of a narrative may be the function of a greater distance between the “real author” and the “implied author.” In this case, the “implied author” considers the “truth” in the narrative to be “truth” per se. The “real author” wants a debate on that. Here the “real author” spoils the plan of the “implied author.” The “implied author” may be correct. On the surface he is, but neither he, nor for that matter any one else, can stop such debates despite all theoretical moorings. The literary world is never short of ordinary critics.

The “real author” is a very clever theoretician. He has deliberately chosen first-person narration to confuse ordinary critics and readers alike. Had it been a case of third-person omniscient narration, the omniscience of it would have precluded factual and anachronistic aberrations since an omniscient narrator is required to know everything. If the point of view is filtered through omniscient narration, it allows the “real author” to take as much liberty as he wishes because in such a case “truth and historicity” are confined to someone’s personal point of view, not to a universal point of view. On the other hand, a single individual may have many shortcomings. His knowledge may be limited or terminologically inexact; his perspective may be narrow. In such a case, historicity will be a matter of someone’s personal knowledge and perception, and such a perception may differ from or be contradictory to universal (omniscient) knowledge and perception. In such cases, even though the “collective beliefs” of the society in which the fiction has originated would not approve of such contradictions and violations, they would not be a violation of the tenets pertaining to the “truth and historicity” of fiction since it would be a narrative-specific case.

Elizabeth Crook prescribes that first-person narration in historical fiction should be subjected to closer scrutiny. She writes: "... be sure to give a credible reason why your character needs to tell his story and why he deserves an audience" (2006, 2).

In "LKEV," the "real author" wants a debate. The point of view is filtered through a first-person narrator. Obviously in such a situation the demand for "truth and historicity" will be minimal. Ordinary critics and readers may not understand and appreciate this nuance.

If historical fiction is historical *per se*, then the narrator has a choice whether to apply a fictional extension, which should not violate the core historical tenets, though peripheral violation may be permissible. However, "LKEV" is not historical fiction *per se*. The scope of fictional is here available to the maximum extent, and in this core the scope of the fictional extension becomes almost unlimited in the event related by the first-person narrator because omniscient truth and objectivity is the first casualty in such cases. Nevertheless a semblance of balance is needed and that is why the "implied critic" has sneaked in. Whether the "implied author" likes the "implied critic" or not, whether the "real author" supports him or not, no one can stop the critic from raising questions, and this is the most important point. Such a possibility will prevent the "implied author" from going astray, whether in historical fiction or a story with a single historical character as in "LKEV."

Suspension of Disbelief

The question of "suspension of disbelief," though similar to "truth in fiction" and "historicity," is not exactly the same. "Suspension of disbelief" was originally conceived to be a license specific to poetry. S. T. Coleridge called it a "willing suspension of disbelief," which constitutes poetic faith (qtd. in Jackson 1985, 314). His extended aim was in reference to a reader's response to poetry, but it is now generally accepted that Coleridge summarized most of the human experience of art in general and fiction in particular, whether one is talking about a Spielberg movie, a Stephen King novel or a video game. Poetry can afford to have a license such as simile and metaphor and can indulge in exaggeration without raising an eyebrow. Such a license is not available to fiction as such.

Now with particular reference to "LKEV," many say that "suspension of disbelief" is a choice and not a compulsion because it is prefixed by the word "willing." What if one is not willing? This willingness emanates from

the basic aim of reading (or viewing in the case of a film), which is entertainment, enjoyment, or pleasure. What if the aim of reading is criticism? This is the question the “real author” has tried to answer.

Despite all theoretical brakes, such questions are bound to be asked. Then what is the way out? The way out is that the deviation demanding “suspension of disbelief” should not be ridiculous, outrageous or even awkward. An author cannot depict a snowstorm in the Sahara desert or a sandstorm in Antarctica unless and until there is an intrinsic logic for such deviations in the text of the story. Now, there are two questions: whether such intrinsic logic is discernible or not and whether we agree to it or not. After all, willingness is a precedent condition for “suspension of disbelief.”

The “implied critic” of the first-person narrator in “LKEV” is not willing, although the intrinsic logic is very discernible—such as the narrated events having taken place while the first-person narrator was either discerning or his cognitive faculty was blurred and he admitted that fact. Despite such an admission, the “implied critic” is not prepared to accept the deviation. He focuses on minor details although he himself says, “Of course one cannot remember minor details, but here it is a question of major details.” But what the “implied critic” has objected to are not major details at all:

Major Details	Minor Details (Deviations)
Availability of motor cars in 1937	Car brands and starting devices
Iqbāl lived in Lahore	The actual location of Iqbāl’s bungalow (i.e., Muir Road)
Criminal-minded individuals in Lahore	The exact location of such individuals
A relevant couplet	The actual composer
Iqbāl could speak	Iqbāl’s husky voice

Despite the fact that the deviations are neither ridiculous, outrageous nor awkward, the “implied critic” is not ready to accept them. The “real author” has foreseen the possibility of such questions and that is why he did not conclude the story with the advent of a whirlwind. Despite all the theoretical fortifications, the “implied author” is vulnerable. “Suspension of disbelief” has to be voluntary and the “implied critic” is not willing. The first-person narrator has no other option but to cry inconsolably. He is correct, but not convincing to all. No one can stop a person from raising such questions.

But why is this “implied critic” a gentleman! Why should he be where he is? While “suspension of disbelief” is required for creative pursuits, too much suspension would lead to ridiculous outcomes. This problem has got to be minimized. Self-monitoring is a way out. The “implied critic” has been introduced by the “real author” so that the “implied author” does not go astray. “Suspension of disbelief” is a license for entertainment and enjoyment. It is not a universal rule for creativity. It cannot be imposed on an unwilling critic. □

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