

Ultimately, the study concludes that DeLillo repositions the assassin as a textual site where history, narrative, ideology, and identity intersect in an endless process of interpretation.

Keywords: *Libra*, Don DeLillo, historiographic metafiction, postmodernism, identity fragmentation, narrative construction, conspiracy, media representation, historical interpretation.

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين التاريخ والهوية والسرد في رواية *Libra* للكاتب Don DeLillo من خلال تحليل تمثيل لي هارفي أوزوالد بوصفه بناءً نصيًا وتاريخيًا وليس شخصية تاريخية ثابتة. وتجادل الدراسة بأن الرواية لا تكتفي بإعادة بناء اغتيال الرئيس جون ف. كينيدي بوصفه حدثًا تاريخيًا، بل تعمل على فحص الكيفية التي تُنتج بها الحقيقة التاريخية وتُروى وتُفسر. يحول ديليلو شخصية القاتل من ذات تاريخية مفردة إلى شبكة معقدة من السرديات التي تتشكل عبر الأيديولوجيا والخطاب الإعلامي ونظريات المؤامرة والتمثيل السياسي.

ومن خلال التحليل النصي الدقيق، توضح الدراسة أن هوية أوزوالد تظل مفككة وتخضع باستمرار لإعادة البناء عبر السرديات المتنافسة والتفسيرات التاريخية المختلفة. وتعتمد الدراسة على منظور ما بعد الحداثة والمنهج الميتاتاريخي لتوضيح كيفية قيام الرواية بزعة الحدود الفاصلة بين الحقيقة والخيال، وتقديم التاريخ بوصفه عملية خطابية بدلاً من كونه حقيقة موضوعية ثابتة. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن ديليلو يعيد تقديم القاتل بوصفه فضاءً نصيًا تتقاطع فيه عناصر التاريخ والسرد والأيديولوجيا والهوية ضمن عملية لا تنتهي من التأويل وإعادة التفسير.

The Assassin as Text: History, Identity, and Narrative in Don DeLillo's *Libra*

Mohammed Abdul Hussein Munir

Open Education College

ma76rti@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between history, identity, and narrative in Don DeLillo's *Libra* through analyzing the representation of Lee Harvey Oswald as a textual and historical construct rather than a fixed historical figure. The study argues that the novel does not merely reconstruct the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as a historical event but critically investigates the processes through which historical truth is produced, narrated, and interpreted. DeLillo transforms the assassin from a singular historical subject into a complex network of narratives shaped by ideology, media discourse, conspiracy, and political representation. Through close textual analysis, the study demonstrates that Oswald's identity remains fragmented and continuously reconstructed through competing narratives and historical interpretations. The paper adopts a postmodern and metahistorical approach to show how *Libra* destabilizes the boundaries between fact and fiction and presents history as a discursive process rather than an objective reality.

Rather, it looks at the creation of historical meaning through disjointed narratives, political debates, media images, and uncertainty of interpretation. DeLillo's idea of history is not the fixed reality but an ideological and interpretive field of conflict, according to Simons (2022).

The novel itself becomes an Oswald who is fragmented, a figure who becomes his identity through the ideological struggles, political manipulations, media circulation and social alienation. DeLillo does not depict the assassin as a one-dimensional person, but, instead, reconstructs him as a site of discursive formation that brings together multiple stories. Postmodern critics contend that the postmodern novel often disrupts the unity of the character, with the characters being products of the various social and historical discourses (Hutcheon & O'Flynn, 2021). This is the approach of this narrative and *Libra* reveals the malleability of historical facts and the entanglement of narrative construction and history.

In this study, the relationship between history, identity, and narrative is explored as DeLillo has reconceived the Kennedy assassination as a text rather than an event. The paper proposes that the novel is a postmodern metahistorical approach, which exposes the historical facts' uncertainties and puts the assassin in a

الكلمات المفتاحية: Don DeLillo ، الميتاسرد التاريخي، ما بعد الحداثة، تشظي الهوية، بناء السرد، المؤامرة، التمثيل الإعلامي، التأويل التاريخي.

1. Introduction

The contemporary American novel more and more challenges the prevailing notions of historical fact, narrative authority, and stable identity. The postmodern literature often explores the ways that history is created by discourse, ideology, models of representation through media, and competing points of view and interpretations, not through objective documentation. In recent literary scholarship, postmodern historical fiction is defined as a reconstruction of history, yet at the same time it challenges the credibility of the official narrative and historical representation (Matthews 2021). As a writer working in this context, Don DeLillo is certainly a player in the game, for his fiction has often grappled with the connection between politics, media, violence, and historical consciousness in contemporary American society.

Libra is one of DeLillo's most significant postmodern novels, which explores the assassination of President John F. Kennedy from a fictional reconstruction of Lee Harvey Oswald's life and the conspiracy surrounding the assassination. But the novel does not try to give a definitive explanation of the event.

credibility. These debates were further fueled by the Warren Commission Report, many Americans felt the commission was wrong to come to the conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone gunman. Thus, the assassination became a continuing cultural event, not simply a closed historical event, which was repeated in television broadcasts, in the newspaper, in a documentary, in photographs and in public debate.

This uncertainty affected postmodern fiction, as postmodern writers more and more examined the connection between the construction of the narrative and the representation of history. Postmodern novels did not view history as a linear series of events, but rather as something constructed through the use of discourse, ideology and interpretation. This literary trend is echoed in DeLillo's *Libra*, which as much as anything else reconstructs the Kennedy assassination and raises a doubt about definitive historical truth. It's a novel that continually illustrates that historical meaning is created through contestation, not fact. Modernist critics have attempted to account for postmodern fiction by describing it as a system of texts, made up of disjointed fragments and shifting viewpoints, that represent historical events. In *Libra*, the assassination is exactly such a system, each attempt to explain the incident results in more ambiguity and other

position of textuality and multiple narration.

2. Historical and Cultural Context

Libra was born in a postmodern literary and cultural context of profound mistrust of official histories, institutional power, and political authority. Postmodern American literature in the second half of the twentieth century increasingly overturned the idea that history can be an objective and (more or less) transparent picture of real events. The question of whether one could ever separate historical events from ideology, discourse, media representation, and the interpretation of narrative was raised by writers and critics. In the postmodern period, historical fiction emerged as an alternative mode to the conventional historical novel that emerged from the belief in grand narratives and the greater questioning of the authority of institutions that traditionally had held the power to define historical truth (Elias, 2021). In this intellectual environment, novelists gradually started to hybridise the genres of fiction and history to reveal the textual and constructed construction of history. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 created one of the most symbolically charged occurrences in recent American culture, by raising and sustaining the uncertainty, the conspiracy, the conflicting interpretations of political power and institutional

United States. DeLillo makes Oswald a broken character trying to make sense of the world with a revolutionary ideology and historical relevance, yet without being able to connect with either capitalist America or Soviet communism. The Cold War also engendered a culture of surveillance and political opacity which plays a crucial role in *Libra*. Within the novel, intelligence services, political groups and military agencies employ covert activities and limited information, adding to its atmosphere of paranoia and uncertainty. DeLillo's postmodern crisis of representation of history is also evident in the way he provides multiple conflicting versions of the assassination without selecting a single authoritative one. The novel's temporality, the changes of viewpoint, and the contradictory evidence, all contribute to this fragility in the novel's narrative structure. The CIA historian trying to piece together the assassination, Nicholas Branch, is drowning in documents, and in the uncertainty of interpretation, a reflection of the inability to reach the full truth of history in postmodern culture. In the end, the historical and cultural setting of *Libra* is indicative of larger shifts of thought in postmodernism, media culture, Cold War paranoia, and the loss of faith in institutional authority. The novel is a fragmented discourse, a multiple text, in which the process of reconstructing

interpretations. Media culture also affected the novel's culture of the novel, as people's understanding of the present and past has been influenced more and more by the media over the past few years, such as newspapers, television, documentaries, archives and political discourse, rather than by real experience. The assassination of Kennedy marked one of the first historical events in the world that was experienced through the mass media technology, as the televised images of the assassination, funeral procession, Oswald's arrest, his murder by Jack Ruby were constantly circulating in public memory. The media saturated world of DeLillo's novel is infused into the novel itself; history is never divorced from photographs, TV broadcasts, surveillance files, or media narratives.

The novel's ideological and psychological aspects were also influenced by the 'Cold War' setting. American culture was influenced by the political tensions between the USA and the USSR via surveillance, anti-communist ideology, political paranoia and institutional secrecy. Cold War America fostered a spirit of fear and uncertainty, leading to distrust of the government and political institutions. This is part of a larger apprehension of national identity, ideological uncertainty and political geopolitical isolation that drove Oswald's shifting between the Soviet Union and the

is a document of objectivity and transparency. Rather, *Libra* offers a text and interpretation-based approach to history, which is constructed through the processes of selection of narrative and discourse and ideology. Through the novel's postmodern narrative strategies, DeLillo questions the separation of the "history and literature, fact and fiction, life and art, reality and imagination" (Rossi, 2008).

The challenge of the official political narratives and of the traditional historiography is also highlighted in recent scholarship. According to Avksentieva (2025) DeLillo's fiction is a postmodernist expression of a skepticism toward historical objectivity and a revelation of the unachievable totality of history. The study distinguishes between the Kennedy assassination as a "first postmodern event" due to its existence in the circulation of narratives, media images, and differing interpretations rather than historical fact. The study also sheds light on the way DeLillo's novels can be read as "literary laboratories" that explore the difficulty of representing history in late twentieth-century American culture (Avksentieva, 2025).

Another relevant field of scholarship is the novel's disjointed narrative form. DeLillo's critics often point to the variety of perspectives through which he tells a story, to the use of multiple time shifts

history is not objective reality but an ideological struggle, which is itself mediated as much as it is political, as well as represented.

3. Literature Review

In Critical Scholarship on *Libra*, the relationship between ideas of history, identity, conspiracy, textuality, and narrative fragmentation are explored at length. The novel received a lot of academic interest after its publication in 1988, due to the postmodern reconstruction of the assassination of President Kennedy and the questioning of official historical accounts. The assassination is always the subject of criticism because DeLillo turns it into a process broken up into its components, an ideology, a media image, and multiple interpretations. As existing scholarship has shown, *Libra* is a pivotal work in postmodern American historical fiction that challenges the very precarious nature of historical truth and reveals the processes by which historical meaning is constructed.

The postmodern treatment of history and historiography has been one of the most significant themes of past criticism of the novel. The interpretations of the scholars question the traditional view of history as a factual and unbiased document. The scholars debate whether DeLillo is rejecting the traditional idea that history

of Lee Harvey Oswald's identity. The general consensus of the scholars is that DeLillo frames Oswald as a "textual construct" rather than a "stable historical subject," influenced by "political ideology, media discourse, and social alienation." The novel is concerned with the "relationship between place and self-identification," Chang states (2017), and the novel depicts Oswald as a man who constantly oscillates between the United States and the Soviet Union, individual identity and political ideology, family alienation and social instability. By drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome, Chang proposes that the web of interpretations and intersections of history and identity in *Libra* does not form coherent structures, but rather expands through non-linear connections. The study suggests that Oswald's identity is "provisional and unstable" due to its formation from the fluid ideological and historical relationship (Chang, 2017).

Subjectivity and identity fragmentation are also discussed by Rossi (2008) who sees identity as a construction of the narrative and the use of textuality, ideology, and representation, instead of as an essential selfhood. Her analysis reveals how Oswald's identity is constructed by the media, political imagination and social enactment. Oswald is not a unified subject but a figure created by multiple discourses and

and to his use of disjointed storylines to highlight the fluidity of truth and interpretation. According to Kolkman (2015), *Libra* is a complex narrative that revolves around Lee Harvey Oswald, CIA conspirators and retired intelligence analyst trying to piece together the assassination. The study reveals that these intertwining stories create tension and create the sense of a lack of coherence and history as readers get conflicting information and perspectives (Kolkman, 2015).

The position of Nicholas Branch has also been richly explored by scholars, as that of the over-informed postmodern historian, who is besieged by interpretative doubt. According to Rossi (2008), the failure of Branch to give a coherent account of the assassination represents the breakdown of historical certainty in postmodern culture. The archive of documents, photographs, testimonies and conflicting narrative stories catches Branch in a continuous loop of documents. The lack of a clear historical significance in *Libra* suggests a patchwork of historical "truths" and their ongoing postponement in the face of the multiplicity of texts. Critics thus read Branch as a metafictional character who symbolically embodies the fictional nature of history.

Another prevailing criticism to be found in earlier reviews is about the building up

inextricably linked with the media spectacle and the public fantasy. Additionally, Gharti emphasises the importance of media culture in motivating Oswald, as the novel depicts the assassination as a link to the celebrity culture, media publicity and public visibility, rather than simply a political ideology (Gharti 2016).

Media representation and visual culture form another important area of scholarship on *Libra*. Another vital field of *Libra* research is media representation and visual culture. DeLillo's exploration of the history of images and the circulation of media is often subject to critical analysis. Bizzini says DeLillo not only rewrites history, but "the images that have helped to shape the American consciousness" about Kennedy's assassination and Oswald's public image. Based on Fredric Jameson's theories of postmodern visual culture, the novel condemns the "society of the spectacle" in which historical experience is mediated by images, media narratives, and visual simulations, Bizzini explains. The study reveals how the focus on representation, as opposed to actual experience, is a feature of modern American culture.

The connection of fiction and history has also been examined in the form of historiographic metafiction. According to Xia (2023), DeLillo "fictionalizes history" by using the "subjunctive

ideologies. This reading follows closely with the postmodern conception of identity, which is seen as socially constructed and discursive, not naturally fixed.

There are a number of other studies that highlight the significance of the conspiracy in the novel. Some critics contend that conspiracy, in *Libra*, is both a political theme and a structural principle to the text itself. DeLillo sows "conspiracy and contingency" together and illustrates how historical events find their way into the world through "unstable interactions" of political systems, individual actions, and chance. (Chang 2017) It is the study's thesis that *Libra* does not recognise simple causal explanations; it suggests that history is an unruly rhizomic process, one that diverges, multiplies and is unpredictable. Conspiracy is then a device for the novel to reveal the precariousness of historical explanation.

Likewise, Gharti (2016) states that there is a need to fictionalize the assassination "from the perspective of narrative possibilities" and not be driven by factual history. Gharti suggests that DeLillo portrays the assassination in three ways: through a subjective interpretation, media influence, and ideology. The study argues that the novel is a re-writing of historical reality in the form of a discursive construction, the political events are

While much has been written on the subject, there are still a number of research gaps. Most of the literature treats postmodern historiography, conspiracy theory or media culture individually and does not discuss all three together. Other critics focus more on the historical or political aspects of the novel, and less on the ways in which Oswald is a product of the differing narratives and interpretive systems that create him as a text. In addition, while historiographic metafiction and fragmentation are often discussed, few studies examine DeLillo's reconstruction of the assassin as a space where the facts of history, ideology, media discourse, and textuality continuously converge. The current study adds to the existing scholarship by incorporating postmodern historiography, identity theory, and narrative analysis to analyze the way *Libra* constructs Lee Harvey Oswald as a metahistorical and textual construct. DeLillo makes the assassin a discursive space, influenced by narrative multiplicity, ideational conflict, and interpretive instability, the research claims. In this way, the study shows the instability of historical fact and points to the endless processes of the production of history and identity through narrative.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a postmodern theoretical framework that integrates

mood," which renders history as an "interpretive possibility" and a "narrative potentiality." For Xia, the destabilisation of "ironclad facts" is achieved by DeLillo's use of history invented through alternatives and narrative speculation. It considers *Libra* a historiographic metafiction, in which the novel constructs as well as challenges historical reality using self-reflective narrative techniques (Xia, 2023). Xia believes that DeLillo's story is a show that fiction doesn't just replicate history, but helps people to experience it differently.

Scholarship in the last decade has also focused on the material and physical aspects of the materiality of DeLillo's fiction. In *DeLillo*, Harding (2021) maintains that the concept of "unruly bodies" – bodies in a state of fragmentation, instability, bodily fluids, violence, and physical transgression – is ten times repeated in the book as a means of expressing the American cultural anxieties that the author consistently states. While Harding's study focuses on DeLillo's oeuvre, her study of *Libra* highlights the way in which historical trauma is made into a physical spectacle through bodily violence during the assassination scene. The assassination is no longer a political affair, but an actual explosion of blood, flesh and splintered bodies that unsettles identity, embodiment, and history (Harding 2021).

attempt to piece together a stable historical truth, the rebuilding of history by the analyst Nicholas Branch is emblematic of the difficulty of accessing history. The difficulty of accessing history is symbolized by the reconstruction of history attempted by the CIA's analyst Nicholas Branch, who is unable to cope with the conflicting testimony, the broken archives, and the never-ending interpretations.

The second theoretical underpinnings of this study are the identity theory. An assumption of contemporary identity theorists is that identity is not stable, natural, or coherent. In contrast, identification comes from discourse, ideology, representation and social interaction. Stuart Hall (1990) suggests that the concept of identity does not exist as an "already existing thing" but as a "production" that is continually being created in the process of representation. The postmodern view of identity is more relevant to *Libra* because Lee Harvey Oswald seems to be less a historical figure and more a fragmentary textual entity, ideologized, politically fantasized, mediated and alienated. Oswald's identity is constructed in a fluid and dynamic relationship between political systems, historical narratives and ideological struggles, as described by Chang (2017). Oswald tries again and again to create meaning and historical importance by

historiographic metafiction, identity theory, and narrative theory in order to examine the relationship between history, identity, and textuality in *Libra*. The framework is suitable since the novel is questioning the notions of objective history, fixed identity and clear representation. DeLillo's reconstruction of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy is not a representational history, but rather a "disjointed textual process" defined by ideology, media discourse, political interpretation, and competing narratives. Historiographic metafiction, as Hutcheon (1988) describes it, reconstructs and simultaneously interrogates the historical reality by revealing the text- and ideology-making processes of the historical narrative. Historical truth, then, becomes linked with the construction and representation of narratives. In a similar sentiment, Rossi (2008) believes that postmodernists challenge the Enlightenment concept of objective history, and treat it as a product of discourse and interpretation. The postmodern historical fiction is also defined by Avksentieva (2025) as destabilising historiography by emphasising on the fragmentation and subjectivity of interpretation of the past. DeLillo employs this postmodern approach in *Libra*, where he weaves together historical facts, fictional reconstructions, speculative narration and conflicting points of view. In the CIA's

narrative and to ensure that there can be no definitive reading. Kolkman (2015) notes several overlapping stories of Oswald, CIA planners and Nicholas Branch that create suspense and multiple interpretations within the novel. Chang (2017) also claims that DeLillo sees history as more of a "rhizomatic" process of fragmentation, divergence, and multiplicity rather than linear causality. Narrative theory also examines the link between narration and institutional power, as the political, intelligence, media, and conspiracy narratives all vie for control of public narratives concerning the assassination. Historiographic metafiction, identity theory and narrative theory, thus, offer a holistic theoretical basis for the study of how *Libra* constructs its assassin, an ideological, discursively mediated, multiply narrated historical figure.

5. History as Narrative Construction

A major issue in *Libra* is the uncertainty of historical reality as well as the building of the historical narrative. DeLillo doesn't give history a clean bill of health, but a processive account which is mediated by ideology, institutional power, the media, and the interpretation of narratives. The novel tackles the problem of historical meaning through the use of fragmented forms and competing explanations, convincing the reader that the meaning of history is created in texts and not

means of revolutionary ideology and political performance, but never achieves a secure, stable sense of self, because he is perpetually caught up in public narratives and the ideological representations. Rossi (2008) also states that for DeLillo identity is not a psychological category but a construction of text, of narratives, that is generated through the circulation of media and ideological discourse. Media culture amplifies this fragmentation, rendering Oswald to be more of a newspaper reading, television watching, surveillance watching, political speaking and showing phenomenon than a real individual.

The third theoretical perspective used in this study is the narrative theory which describes the process of how meaning comes from the structures of stories, how it is understood based on the interpretation, and how it is organized. Hayden White (1973) contends that historical accounts are not about the way things are, but rather a way of presenting an idea about them. Narrative is then at the heart of the process of historical knowledge construction. This view is particularly significant in *Libra* due to the novel's structure that is built around the various overlapping stories that vie for control of the assassination. DeLillo deliberately breaks the flow of conventional narrative, causality and perspective to create instability in the

television and political discourse. The retired CIA analyst who is tasked with reconstructing the assassination, Nicholas Branch, is a symbolic figure for the postmodern historian in the face of too much information and interpretive uncertainty. However, due to the current state of the evidence, it is impossible to formulate a definitive explanation for the assassination at this time, so Branch has been unable to do so. Branch's lack of historical meaning relates to the postmodern collapse of historical certainty, according to Rossi (2008).

The novel's disjointed form contributes to this fluidness of historical significance. DeLillo doesn't tell a story in a linear fashion, but rather weaves together the multiple narratives of Oswald, the intelligence community, the conspiracy, and the media coverage of the story. According to Martín-Salván (2025) the novel utilizes "converging narratives" that approach the historical event in the centre without leading to a complete coherence or closure. Martin-Salván argues that DeLillo's disjointed story challenges conventional views on the concepts of sequence, causality, and historical explanation. The reader is thus presented with several unstable viewpoints about the assassination instead of a single truth.

DeLillo also undermines the sense of historical certainty by means of the

necessarily known with certainty. The assassination of President John F. Kennedy is not a historical "factual" event but is rather a "narrative site" that is continually "constructed," "represented," and "interpreted" through time.

Metahistory, as it is called in the postmodern theoretical lexicon, undermines the relationship between history and fiction, revealing the textual and ideological processes by which historical narratives are created. Hutcheon (1988) states that historiographic metafiction not only recreates history, but also challenges the idea of objective historical truth. The theoretical approach is necessary to the understanding of *Libra* because DeLillo has fused recorded history with reconstruction and speculation, with the goal of disrupting the establishment history narrative. The novel questions the authority of history as a fact-based metanarrative, and foregrounds the subjective nature of historical interpretation, explained by Mohamed (2016). Mohamed tells us that fiction can convey historical meaning with the same authority as institutional historiography is able to do.

The novel is full of the notion of textuality as the basis of knowledge. Historical reality is not accessible in *Libra*: it is only accessible through surveillance reports, testimony, photographs, archives,

a continuously reconstructable network of narratives and representations. History thus turns into a mobile textual arena, in which certainty gives way to ambiguity and never ending interpretation.

6. Oswald and Fragmented Identity

Libra's historical figure and textual construct is Lee Harvey Oswald. But DeLillo refuses to make Oswald a "psychologically coherent subject" deliberately. Rather, Oswald is a dislocated, volatile, and ever-reshaped ideology, media, political imagination, and social estrangement. His identity is shaped and emerges as conflictual, and as an act of ideology. The novel thus embodies postmodern ideas of identity, where subjectivity is socially and discursively produced and not fixed.

Postmodern identity theorists state that identity is never solid nor complete, but is always constructed through discourse, ideology and representation. The term identity should not be taken as an "already accomplished fact", but as a process of production within representation as Stuart Hall (1990) explains. This vision is a crucial part of the understanding of Oswald in Libra, as he ceaselessly struggles for identity and historical meaning in the framework of his political ideology and revolutionary fantasy.

connection between conspiracy and contingency. The novel is constantly moving from one type of conspiracy, coincidence, randomness and political manipulation to another, but without ever reaching a definite conclusion. For Wöll (2022), Libra's narrative strategies and its disruptions of historical truth and narrative cohesion are contradictory. Wöll argues that DeLillo's reconstruction of the assassination is an event that disrupted American faith in "historical clarity," because it brought into question the very nature of causation.

Media representation is also deeply involved in the narration of history in the novel. In DeLillo's view, historical awareness is a product of television, newspapers, photography and visual reproduction. Mirabile (2012) describes DeLillo's biography-construction of Oswald by the animation of the film, the images of the pictures, and the images of the television. Mirabile argues that the assassination is, essentially, mediated with spectacle and visual circulation and that one cannot distinguish between representation and reality.

Finally, Libra offers a textual and interpretive approach to history, which is ideologically, discursively, institutionally, and multiply constructed. DeLillo's historiographic metafiction and multiple, often disjointed, narrative structure make the Kennedy assassination

imagination. DeLillo thus turns Oswald into a figure of the text, a figure that is the product of discourse and representation.

The fragmentation is accentuated by media culture. The image of the "society of the spectacle" in which people live more and more in an image-driven and representational world, is a theme Bizzini challenges in his critique of DeLillo. In *Libra*, Oswald is constantly connected to images, political debates, and an appeal to mass visibility. Through the various media of television broadcasting, photos, government documents, and ideologies, his identity is continually reproduced. The mediation and fragmentation of historical subjectivity is thus effected by representation.

The novel also depicts Oswald as caught between the ordinary and the celebrity. Mirabile (2012) argues that DeLillo makes Oswald both anonymous and spectacular, a man whose fame is created by the mass media and by historical violence. In this way, Oswald signifies the postmodern merging of the private and public identities. He just wants to be recognized and he wants to have some meaning in history, and he becomes a media construct of national consciousness.

In the end, DeLillo describes Oswald as not a historical artifact, but a "textual artifact" molded by ideology, media

Chang (2017) suggests that the novel's Oswalds are constantly negotiated between political worlds, histories, and ideology. Oswald is not an individual, he lives in a "rhizomatic" network of evolving positions of ideology and possibilities of narrative, says Chang. His transnational travels between the USA and USSR are symptomatic of the Cold War fear of national identity, ideology and political excommunication.

Oswald tries to build himself over and over again in an ideological performance. He looks for meaning in Marxism, revolutionary politics, public visibility and historical significance. However, he cannot be reconciled to any political system he comes across. In this regard, Mirabile (2012) describes Oswald as an icon of modern alienation whose identity is formed by the circulation of the media, performative identity, and transnational displacement. For Mirabile, Oswald's identity is speeded up by its evolving performances, which render it unstable.

Rossi (2008) also states that DeLillo's conception of identity is not a psychological one, but instead a construction of the narrative, influenced by ideology, media representation and textuality. Oswald emerges as a symbolic construct of the competing narratives, not as individuality. His identity is formed by reports from surveillance, newspapers, ideological discourses, and public

hard to explain in *Libra*. Without truth there is no end to the speculation and multiplication of narratives.

In an effort to illustrate how historical events are the result of “unstable interactions” between political systems, institutional operations and “accidental circumstances,” Chang (2017) claims that DeLillo interweaves “conspiracy and contingency.” *Libra* is not the first to claim that it denies linear causality; it is instead a “rhizomatic” process, as per Chang, that is divergent and multiplicative. However, conspiracy then becomes precarious as each explanation creates further uncertainties and contradictions.

Wöll (2022) also describes the novel as situating its readers in the “no-man's-land of contingency and conspiracy” for which there is no clear answer provided. DeLillo portrays the assassination as a historical occurrence that shattered American faith in anything that was stable and coherent. Throughout the novel, official government accounts, conspiracy theories, interpretations of the media, and public speculation vie for final truth. Historical meaning is thus always subject to change.

This multiplicity of interpretation is further supported by *Libra*'s disjointed plot. DeLillo introduces a number of parallel narratives that weave through

representation, political rhetoric, and historical narrative. His ambiguous identity fits into the postmodern concerns with subjectivity, representation, and the problem of the self and its connection to history. In Oswald's fragmentation, *Libra* shows that identity is a narrative process and not a coherent reality.

7. Conspiracy and Narrative Multiplicity

Conspiracy is one of the key structural and thematic elements of *Libra*. Conspiracy is not only political blackmail, but a story to deal with historical ambiguity and a lack of interpretive certainty, DeLillo suggests. The novel illustrates the formation of “conspiracy” from the need to make sense of the disjointed reality of history. But DeLillo at the same time undermines conspiracy with contradiction, coincidence, randomness, and narrative ambiguity. Conspiracy is thus the political instrument and the form of the novel.

Conspiracy theories are, according to postmodern critics, a symptom of cultural fears of institutional power, hidden power, and historical instability. Conspiracy theories are explanatory systems that seek to “make sense” of chaotic historical events, as described by Dentith (2021). Conspiracy is the very reason that the Kennedy assassination is

spectacle, as Mirabile (2012) states. Historical reality is then always a representation of reality, and a reproduction of the narrative.

Finally, in *Libra*, conspiracy exists as political discourse, cultural dread and as a story. In DeLillo's world, history offers infinite possibilities for interpretation because there are no monolithic truths in the complex system of media representation, institutional opacity, and ideological controversy. The novel's multiple narrators and shifts of interpretation open up the impossibility of any definitive explanation of history.

8. The Assassin as Text

The most important thing about *Libra* is that it has made the assassin a textual person no longer a fixed historical person. DeLillo does not portray Lee Harvey Oswald merely as the man responsible for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In its place, the novel re-imagines him as a discursive and symbolic portal through which history, ideology, media representation, narrative multiplicity, and public imagination continuously engage one another. Oswald is therefore not a historical subject per se, but one that is created by language, representation and interpretation. Postmodern theorists have claimed that both identity and historical reality are created discursively and not as facts. In

Oswald, the CIA agents, the anti-Castro rebels, the activities of intelligence agents, and the general tone of the press. In the novel's "converging narratives," Martín-Salván (2025) writes, the narratives approach a common historical turning point without meeting or being fully harnessed to a narrative end or closure. The reader is thus confronted with several conflicting accounts of the assassination, not with explanation.

Another aspect of the novel that is in keeping with postmodern scepticism towards institutional authority is the conspiracy. Governments, intelligence agencies, and political organizations conduct themselves in secret, in spy, and secret missions. DeLillo makes the institutional power seem deeply interwoven with the manipulation of stories and information control. In the historiographic metafiction, history is revealed as an ideological process of selection and narration (Mohamed 2016). In *Libra*, the extent of the conspiracy exposes the fragility of the truth of the institution itself: narratives merge with speculation and fiction.

This narrative multiplicity is further intensified through media representation in which the different interpretations are broadcasted via television, journalism and public discourse. DeLillo's politics becomes cinematographic and televisual, making political violence a media

modern historical consciousness as being bound up in images, spectacle and visual reproduction. Bizzini suggests that DeLillo is criticizing the “society of the spectacle” in which history is now being lived, not in reality, but in terms of mediated images. Oswald is built out of photographs, television appearances, government records, and public discussion. Oswald is not a historical presence, but is constructed instead. The violence is then, in turn, represented in text and reproduced symbolically in the flow of media. The violence is then, in turn, represented in text and reproduced symbolically in the flow of media. The novel further illustrates the ways in which the public image of Oswald is continually reframed by the official version, conspiracy theories, political ideologies, and media interpretation, all seeking to determine the historical value of the assassin. According to Mohamed (2016), historiographic metafiction combines both the real and fictional characters to reveal the problematic nature of historical truth. DeLillo is thus both re-constructing Oswald as a historical element and as a fictional construct within the unstable narrative systems. Mirabile (2012) also believes that DeLillo depicts Oswald as anonymous and spectacular in the way he is made famous through media dissemination and collective memory. Similarly, Wilkins (2022) says the Kennedy assassination is a “generational

the context of historiographic metafiction, Hutcheon (1988) states that it is important to highlight the textuality of history, that is, the way in which the meaning is created in the process of narration. DeLillo uses this approach to make Oswald a symbolic figure defined by conflicting narratives and ideas. Libra breaks down the lines between fact and fiction, life and art, reality and imagination, as Rossi (2008) claims in his postmodernist approach to the narrative structure. Oswald is not defined psychologically, but through newspapers, surveillance reports, political rhetoric, television broadcasts and conspiracy theories. The assassin thus is a product of representation and the text itself. DeLillo also builds Oswald by means of cinematic montage, visual reproduction and media circulation, as Mirabile (2012) explains: "Mirabile (2012) attributes this to DeLillo's reconstruction of Oswald via cinematic montage, visual reproduction and media circulation, which simultaneously makes him a historical subject, a media spectacle, and a cultural icon. His image flies through transnational spaces via journalism, photography, television, and political discourse until his identity becomes indistinguishable from it.

Media culture is a major part of the transformation of the assassin into text as a central part of DeLillo's depiction of

historiographic metafiction, as explained by Mohamed (2016), foregrounds the construction of history, which is not an objective record, but history processes as an ideological and textual construction process. It also showed that Lee Harvey Oswald is a disarticulated textual form that is ideologized, politically fantasized, mediated, and narratized. Chang (2017), in his turn, suggests that identity in *Libra* is a result of chaotic crossovers within the political, historical and ideological realms, and Rossi (2008) states that DeLillo portrays identity as a textual process that is constructed through discursive and representational processes.

The analysis also uncovered the fact that conspiracy is always present in the context of political logic, cultural anxiety and narrative structure in *Libra*. Coincidence, contradiction, contingency, and narrative ambiguity are all aspects of deLillo's constant undermining of explanatory systems, making historical interpretation unclear. Wöll (2022) suggests that the novel situates readers in the no-man's land of contingency versus conspiracy, but leaves them unable to find a satisfactory resolution. This instability is exacerbated by the presence of the media: the assassination lives on in the TV reportage, in photographs, in the newspaper, in films. The assassination of Oswald becomes a transnational and mediated history through the re-

ghost," that is reproduced and replayed again and again on television, media, in conspiracy theories and in cultural memory. Oswald thus lives on, not as a historical entity, but as a repetition of text and as a symbolization of a circulation. In conclusion, *Libra* constructs the assassin as a fractured textual entity fabricated through narration, ideology, media representation and historical interpretation. In this postmodern recreation, DeLillo reveals the fragility of historical fact and shows how identity and history are created and reconstructed throughout endless acts of text production and interpretation.

9. Conclusion

The aim of this study is to investigate the interconnection between history and identity in *Libra* and to establish that the novel is more than just a historical fact, but is a process of reconstruction and interpretation. DeLillo's disjointed narrative forms, historiographic metafiction, media representation, and postmodern historical revisionism help to disrupt official historical interpretation and reveal the mechanisms of discourse production, circulation, and contestation. The analysis showed that history in *Libra* is not merely objective fact, but rather a history that comes into being through archives, surveillance reports, photographs, conspiracy narratives, and through media discourse. The term

DeLillo's *Libra* (Master's thesis). Tribhuvan University.

Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, culture, difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.

Harding, R. A. (2021). *Unruly bodies in the fiction of Don DeLillo* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Sussex.

Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A poetics of postmodernism: History, theory, fiction*. Routledge.

Hutcheon, L., & O'Flynn, S. (2021). *A theory of adaptation* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Kolkman, M. (2015). *Suspense in Don DeLillo's Libra* (Bachelor's thesis). Utrecht University.

Kolkman, M. (2015). *Suspense in Don DeLillo's Libra* (Bachelor's thesis). Utrecht University.

Martín-Salván, P. (2025). The possibility of convergence: A study of narrative structure in Don DeLillo's fiction. *Narrative*, 33(1), 68–89.

Matthews, S. (2021). Postmodern American fiction and historical representation. Cambridge University Press.

Meretoja, H. (2021). *Narrative ethics and the possibilities of meaning*. Oxford University Press.

Mirabile, M. (2012). Transnational Oswald: Relocating Don DeLillo's *Libra*. *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*, 12(1), 1–11.

Mohamed, F. H. A. G. (2016). Historicizing fiction/fictionalizing history in Don DeLillo's historiographic metafiction: *Libra*. *Philobiblon*, 21(2), 806–811.

Moran, J. (2022). Interdisciplinarity and postmodern historiography in contemporary fiction. Bloomsbury Academic.

Osteen, M. (2021). *Don DeLillo and the ethics of narrative form*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Rossi, M. I. (2008). *Constructing the meanings of history, identity, and reality in Don DeLillo's*

construction of the figure of Oswald via media spectacle and visual circulation as argued by Mirabile (2012). DeLillo consequently makes the assassin a space of text, a space of history, ideology, identity, narrative and representation that intermingles constantly. *Libra* takes a historiographic metafictional approach to the subject, employing multiple voices and pieces of narrative to suggest history as a fluid network of discourses, interpretations and representations, and shows how historical truth is always reframed in the process of being narrated, interpreted and represented.

References

Avksentieva, H. A. (2025). Postmodern vision of history in the novels of Don DeLillo. *Lviv Philological Journal*, 17(1), 5–11.

Birke, D. (2023). *Narrative circulation and mediated memory in contemporary American fiction*. Routledge.

Bizzini, S. C. (2000). Resisting the postmodern historical vision: Imag(in)ing history in Don DeLillo's *Libra*. *European Journal of American Culture*, 19(2), 45–57.

Chang, C. M. (2017). "[A] real defector posing as a false defector posing as a real defector": The historical narrative in Don DeLillo's *Libra*. *The Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture*, 11(1), 57–88.

Dentith, M. R. X. (2021). *The philosophy of conspiracy theories*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Elias, A. (2021). *Metahistorical fiction and the politics of representation*. Edinburgh University Press.

Gharti, T. (2016). *Fictionalization of Kennedy's assassination: A New Historicist reading of Don*

Libra and Mao II (Master's thesis). University of Oslo.

Rossi, M. I. (2008). *Constructing the meanings of history, identity, and reality in Don DeLillo's Libra and Mao II* (Master's thesis). University of Oslo.

Rossi, M. I. (2008). *Constructing the meanings of history, identity, and reality in Don DeLillo's Libra and Mao II* (Master's thesis). University of Oslo.

Simons, O. (2022). *Narrating history in postmodern American literature*. Routledge.

White, H. (1973). *Metahistory: The historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wilkins, D. (2022). *Forms of retreat and return in the novels of Don DeLillo* (Master's thesis). University of Birmingham.

Wöll, S. (2022). Kennedicide in the "heartland of the real": Conspiracy, coincidence, and narrative instability in Don DeLillo's *Libra*. *New Academia: An International Journal of English Language, Literature and Literary Theory*, 11(1), 1–17.

Woodward, K. (2021). *Identity and difference in contemporary culture* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Xia, K. (2023). DeLillo's *Libra* and the subjunctive mood as fictionalization. *Journal of Foreign Languages and Cultures*, 7(2), 117–133.