

CHAPTER – IV

THE VOLCANO LOVER- Inquiry into the Documented Past

There on the mountain, characters were ideas and ideas were passion, exactly as I'd always felt-and exactly as they are depicted in *The Volcano Lover*.

Susan Sontag

For centuries, the sociologists, the novelists and the philosophers have understood and described passions in many different ways. Different stories have been written to explain passion and its purpose. According to Denis de Rougemont, the Swiss historian and literary critic (1906-1985), to have passion is to suffer. In “passion we no longer bother which suffers”, but only of what is thrilling. Philosophers and sociologists have tried to solve the mystery of passion in their own ways but literature has provided the most accurate record of human passion. Be it Victor Hugo’s novels and short fiction or Shakespeare’s plays, they are the most comprehensive record of passion that the humans possess. In *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Hamlet*, the dangerous passion did cost humans their life. Literature produced in the past centuries did not prefer passion as it brought chaos in life and as well as in society. The representation of passion in postmodern literature has undergone a tremendous change. The focus has shifted from a firm reality, a definite past, a universal truth to virtual reality, various subjective histories and multiple truths. There have been many contradictory statements regarding this. Postmodern literature like magical realism has also remained a difficult term to define. Various theorists have described postmodern literature in their own ways. Linda Hutcheon for example describes postmodernism as the age of “deconstruction, pluralism: postmodern society concerns for the multiplicity, a dispersion of truth (s)” (Poetics, 75). In the past, history was also considered as collection of facts but now the representation of history is questioned. History has been replaced by multiple histories and concepts like unreal, fictional, pastiche, etc. have emerged from it. The postmodernist writer has turned to the past for a variety of reasons. Susan Sontag, the author of this project has also returned to past with a new sensibility. She thinks of the past as a launching pad

for the explorations of human character. This project takes into consideration the next novel by Susan Sontag, *The Volcano Lover*. The present chapter aims to analyze passion, representation of past in her postmodern novel, *The Volcano Lover*. While analyzing all this I intend to measure the techniques and strategies employed by Susan Sontag, which classify the novel as a fine example of magical realism and historiographic metafiction. First, I take into consideration the plot summary of the novel.

Susan Sontag published *The Volcano Lover*, a historical romance in 1992. *The Volcano Lover*, her third work of fiction is a mild cerebral aphrodisiac. It is the sort of book that Sontag would probably call determinedly middlebrow. Her publisher eager to start a buzz compared it to “postmodern potboilers of Umberto Eco and A.S. Byatt”. *The Volcano Lover* was published twenty-five years after the publication of her second novel *Death Kit*. With the publication of this historical novel, Susan Sontag surprised many of her critics. Prior to the publication of *The Volcano Lover* she had been very busy writing essays in which she discussed and favored experimental form of fiction. *The Volcano Lover* was a surprise. A historical novel by Susan Sontag and moreover a historical novel that declared itself to be a romance surprised many readers since this was hardly the genre or the subject matter readily associated with Susan Sontag. However, Susan Sontag engaged the reader in the passion she described – turbulent passions surrounding art, love and revolution.

The novel set in revolution threatened late-eighteenth century Naples and subtitled “A Romance” casts a net of passions: A British envoy’s for Vesuvius, his first wife Catherine’s for him, his own for his second wife Emma, and finally Emma’s for Admiral Nelson. Crisscrossing this net of passion are other passions: the collecting envoy’s love of art; the starving mob’s for butchery; and that of Scarpia’s (queen’s confidant) for power. Susan Sontag calls it a “romance” and is intrepid enough to describe the first kiss between Nelson and Emma, “the fat lady and the short man with one arm.” Fission of ecstasy comes across; the scene works. So does the pathos of the completely familiar saga. The novel is set for the most part in Naples, in the shadow of Vesuvius. Its main characters are the Cavaliere, a British diplomat, “The volcano lover” of the title, his beautiful second wife Emma, and the “Hero”, a visiting admiral who becomes the lover of his wife.

The novel begins with a prologue set in the spring of 1992 in Manhattan. The narrator describes herself as dressed in jeans and silk blouse and tennis shoes. She is standing at the entrance to a flea market pondering over her passion for collecting and buying artifacts. The prologue invites us to accompany the author on a visit to the flea market of history: “Why enter? What do you expect to see? I’m seeing. I’m checking on what’s in the world” (3). At this point, we meet the “Cavaliere” and his nephew Charles. In fact, the two men (who are not identified yet, Sir William Hamilton and his nephew Charles Greville) are discussing a work of art, *Venus Disarming Cupid*. The narrator discusses Sir Hamilton’s passion for volcanoes and at the same time talks about the way the volcano’s shape and actions are reminiscent of human features and passions. The novel is divided in four parts. Part one of the novel describes Sir William Hamilton or “the Cavaliere” as Sontag dubs him. As the British envoy from 1764 to 1800 to the court of Naples, the Cavaliere divides his time between, attending upon the outrageously uncouth Bourbon King and attending to his own special passions: collecting antique vases and other objects d’ art and exploring the famous, still active Volcano of Mt. Vesuvius. The focus in Sontag’s telling of the story firmly remains on the Cavaliere, Sir William Hamilton, the diplomat and esthete who is remembered, now, as one of history’s most famous cuckold. He is melancholic, analytic, solitary and detached. He has found escape from that melancholia in an astonishing array of enthusiasm: for politics, science, literature and art. He is very fond of his wife, Catherine, a fine pianist. Collecting is his way of uniting the world, of making sense of it. His wife Catherine has asthma and cannot accompany him on his Vesuvius expeditions. Nevertheless, she finds company in William Beckford, the second cousin of the Cavaliere. Both of them read Goethe’s *Sorrow of Young Werther* together. Both of them share their feelings. They become like an operatic couple, vibrating together. When Beckford goes away, he does not forget writing letters to Catherine that make her more passionate. The Cavaliere’s passion for volcanoes intensifies and Catherine’s health deteriorates. While narrating all this, the narrator speaks to herself as much as to the readers. In a metafictional mode, she directly addresses the readers and shifts the narrative mode:

Collections Unite, Collections isolate.

They unite those who love the same thing. (But no one loves the same as I do; enough.) They isolate from those who don't share the passion. (Alas, almost everyone).

Then I'll try not to talk about what interests me most. I'll talk about what interests you.

But this will remind me, often, of what Can't share with you.

Oh, listen. Don't you see. Don't you see how beautiful it is (29).

Sontag carefully positions herself much closer to the Cavaliere whom she describes as a sophisticated diplomat who gets on well with the King of Naples and his wife. The King is described as "fat fat" voluptuous, who takes great delight in consuming mountains of food. On being asked, the Cavaliere has to accompany the king even to the toilet. He works as a courtier for the king. The readers are informed about the role of a courtier by the author as "someone who repeats back to you the last word or words that you've said" (34). The Cavaliere has very refined tastes, but he tolerates the King's celebration of animal massacres, vulgar conversations, the intrigues of Salons and the court. He is happy that his wife has somebody to talk to, someone to be sensitive within William Beckford. William's letters to Catherine speak of future but Catherine's physical condition was such that she could just think of her past not any future. Part one of the novel ends with Catherine's death. The Cavaliere shared his grief with his nephew Charles.

Part 2 begins with an image of the erupting Vesuvius. The Cavaliere returns to England with Catherine's body. He also brings with him one of his finest collections, a vase, which he has to sell to clear his debts. He receives Emma, a young woman who has been sent to him by Charles, his nephew. Although Emma does not know it, the cynical Charles has "sold" her to his uncle in return for an indefinite loan to pay off his debts. Therefore, the old man "collected" the young woman and added "this beauty" to his collection. The woman is in love with Charles but Charles does not intend to marry her. The Cavaliere finds her "exuberant, charming". Although she is not in love with this "distinguished older man", yet she responds to his kindness and his eagerness to teach. The Cavaliere makes progress in coming closer to Emma by

tutoring her in the ways of court and by encouraging her aesthetic side by employing “singing teacher”, her drawing teacher, her Italian teacher, her piano teacher. A natural student, she soon became “fluent in Italian-- speaking it better than the Cavaliere did”. He then added lessons in French, which he spoke well, “with an English drawl” (133).

Emma becomes adept at reenacting classic stories and scenes, entrancing no less than the visiting poet Goethe does. The Cavaliere thinks of Emma as “the most valuable passion”. Emma started displacing the volcano. She becomes firstly, the Cavaliere’s work of art, his lover and finally his wife. She is happy to play Galatea to his Pygmalion until she meets Lord Nelson, England’s most famous naval hero. Nelson, always referred to as the “hero” by the novelist comes across as a kind of latter-day Mark Antony, a man promoted by history but beguiled and nearly undone by a beautiful woman. Nelson is described as a person who “wanted to deserve praise, to be decorated, remembered, to figure in history books. He saw himself in history painting, as a portrait bust, a statue on a pedestal, or even atop a high column in a public square. The “hero” who has turned back the Napoleonic tide endears himself to both the Cavaliere and Emma when he visits Naples. The hero has been blinded in the battle but he remains brave and resolute. Naples faces a revolution. The hero returns to crush it and deals harshly with the revolutionaries. He orders summary executions and reestablishes order. The Cavaliere remains devoted to both Emma and Nelson in this scandalous love triangle. In the age of French revolution, passions ran high like volcanoes. While Vesuvius and Etna flamed and smoked, the members of the love-triangle also burst. The Cavaliere ponders over his lost treasures of the volcano and of his lost world. His wife Emma and the hero interlaced in another bed, thinking of each other in the fullness of satisfied desire. During the narration of this complete story, it is the omniscient voice of the novelist in the form of the narrator that recounts, comments, and embroiders on the situations. However, on some occasions, she allows the characters to speak to readers directly but for the most part; it is Susan Sontag’s verdicts and summations, observations and pronouncements in the voice of the narrator that we encounter in the novel. It is a voice that allows Sontag to muse at length on such disparate matters as the psychology of collecting and the dangerous allure of volcanoes. We are given some charmingly acute cameos of such historical figures as Goethe and the King and Queen of Naples, Nelson or the “hero” as Sontag

calls him. The “hero” first helped the King and Queen of Naples to escape from local republicans and then used the might of his fleet to block the short-lived Neapolitan Republic. The British establishment disapproved of Nelson’s antics off Naples because naval officers were not expected to involve themselves in the politics of foreign states. However, in truth, it is not Nelson’s motions that interest the novelist Sontag, but his victims and in particular, a woman called, Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel. Sontag makes this woman the subject of the last part of the novel. Nelson, being smitten with Emma refuses to leave Naples. Then the Cavaliere is called back to England in disgrace. However, the hero “survives” the scandal.

Part three of the novel begins with the Cavaliere’s dying monologue. He thinks about his life in Naples, his first wife Catherine and his image of himself as the older Pliny who also fell in love with volcanoes. He also recalls his devotion to art. The Cavaliere also misses Charles whom he wants to be around him. The Cavaliere dies thinking, “I have had happy life.” The Cavaliere wishes to be remembered for volcanoes after his death. The last part of the novel turns the narrative in a new direction. Sontag abandons naturalism and four women in succession address us from beyond the grave. This is a fully self-conscious scheme to shift the book into a different mode. Sontag offers a new perspective, in a way involved, in a way detached also. *The Volcano Lover* ends with four posthumous monologues, spoken by four women. They are Sir William Hamilton’s first wife, Catherine; Emma’s mother; Emma herself and Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel, the liberal aristocrat and poet who edited a republican paper in Naples and was hanged for it. The first monologue by Catherine is reflection by her on her own life. She remembers the Cavaliere’s devotion to her and the realization that she herself also cannot exclude him from her own thoughts. She feels she cannot speak of herself “without speaking of him”. Even when she does not mention him, “he is present by omission”. It is her monologue through, which we come to know so much about the life of Cavalier. The Cavaliere was the fourth son of a Scottish nobleman, and his posting at the court of the repulsive King Ferdinand of Naples and his clever Queen Maria Carolina, placed him very much in the outer circle of British diplomacy. Catherine is also contented that Hamilton married Emma after her death. Nevertheless, she is also happy with whatever her husband gave to her in her life.

The second monologue is by Mary Cadogan, the mother of Emma. She explains her devotion to her daughter. She saw her daughter through her early vicissitudes as an unmarried mother and a London call girl, when the young man whom she loved, deserted her. To get rid of her, he posted her to Naples as a mistress for his widowed uncle, Sir William Hamilton. Mrs. Cadogan was an uneducated woman with a rackets past. Unlike Emma, she did not attempt to improve herself. Therefore, she lived in her daughter's shadow, sitting at the back of the audience, when Emma sang or performed her "attitudes". People thought she was a paid companion or a poor relation, and from that position, she dispensed administration and comfort until she died. In fact, Mrs. Cadogan is Sontag's most successful creation. Sontag brings vividly to life, the garrulous old woman, disillusioned but warmhearted; with rough peasant wisdom. She is made to use the rural eighteenth century vernacular. A generous woman, she finds the "hero", irresistible.

The third voice to speak to us from beyond the grave is of Emma herself. She speaks in the tone of twentieth century sensibility. In her monologue, she in fact defends her "magic" that attracted so many men to her. Sontag seems to approve of her actions. Sontag presents her as a generous spirit, as a victim of various injustices inflicted upon females in a male society. Emma is stricken at how her life changed after the death of the "hero". She recounts her last days and her indifferent attitude towards her daughter as:

There was no one but a child to tend to an ill-smelling, weeping, snoring, dying woman, no one but she to empty bedpans and wash out the sheets. I was quite cruel to her and she was very dutiful (409).

She also remembers and regrets the incident when her daughter kept on insisting about knowing her real mother but she did not disclose it rather kept on telling her, "Your mother... is an unfortunate woman who wishes to remain unnamed. I shall not betray her trust" (410).

Sontag gives the last word to Eleonora de Fonseca Pimentel, one of the members of the band of brave, gifted, and truly cultivated Neapolitan Patriots, who was condemned to death by Nelson. She was a poet and a journalist, who was hanged for her role in the Neapolitan revolution. A lot of executions and tortures take place in the novel. Through the voice of Eleonora, Sontag lets us know what it is like to be

hanged in public, “Then it was my turn – it was exactly as I had imagined it” (416.) Eleonora in her monologue denounces the privileged members of Neapolitan society, condemns the hero, the Cavaliere, and calls them as “an upper class dilettante” and his wife “nullity”. She concludes with the comment. “They thought they were civilized. They were despicable. Damn them all” (419). It is Fonseca who seems most closely identified with Sontag herself as we are told that she is the woman who “talks like a woman of my class”.

Thus, Susan Sontag has created an intensely self-reflexive work. The novelist has narrated history in such a way that history is fictionalized with personal rethinking. The novel provides a sweeping look at Italian society between 1764-1800 with which the author contrasts contemporary culture and highlights the timeless repetition of human folly and foibles. The narrator’s self-reflexivity places the work in between fiction and history. Moreover, the stress in the narrative is on human conditions, on history, on politics of the nation in a fictional mode. Self-reflexivity, functionality and history make the novel a good example of historiographic metafiction. As historiographic metafiction installs and then blurs the line between fiction and history, in the same way, Sontag’s re-telling of the story of the Hamilton – Nelson triangle as a historical novel yields a perfect example of the kind of self-reflexive postmodern novel that Linda Hutcheon has dubbed as historiographic metafiction. Not only does it exhibit self-reflexivity but it also encourages us to indulge in a nostalgic longing and an imaginary return to a world that is past. *The Volcano Lover* is not only a wonderful fusion of fact and fiction, concrete and conceptual but also contains escalating events as happening in a magically realist text. The novel combines magical realism with historical fiction. The characters are real historical figures. There are also guest appearances of poets like Goethe. The author herself is in love with her subject and her characters. She is also in love with literary devices such as prologues, monologues, metaphors, aphorisms etc. The novel also contains vivid descriptions, images, and escalating events happened in the history. Thus, the novel is a fine example of magical realism and historiographic metafiction. In this chapter, I aim to analyze the strategies and features employed by Susan Sontag, which put the novel in the category of magical realism and historiographic metafiction. The present section of the chapter aims to analyze *The Volcano Lover* as a magical real text.

The novel is in fact a magic realist love story. The novelist has mixed the magical and the mundane in an overall context of realistic setting. To prove my point, I put forward the argument that *The Volcano Lover* narrates the fabulous adventures of the “the Volcano Lover” of the title i.e. Hamilton. Though in historical legend he is little more than a famous cuckold, for Sontag he is a character of more interest, a man who “thought of himself as – no, was an envoy of decorum and reason”(56). in a world of uncontrolled passions. This has been done intentionally by Sontag to perform “narrative trickery”. As elaborated by Richard Todd in an essay, “Narrative trickery and performative Historiography: Fictional representation of National Identity in Graham Swift, Peter Carey, Mordecai Richler” magical realism performs narrative trickery to transgress the well-known facts of history to create an alternate history. Collected in the landmark publication by Faris, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, the essay gives an illustrative insight on narrative trickery:

Narrators of magic realism play confidence tricks on their readers, disavowing the more straightforward claim of the mimetic naturalist realist that what she or he is narrating actually happened in a heterocosmic world related to the one we know by analogy. Instead, the magic realist narrator distorts the very idea of analogy and operates syncretically, asking the reader to believe, for instance that the natural order of things can be subverted in the world of her or his fiction: hence the emphasis on extraordinary longevity..., events that are not to be met in (Todd, 305).

Susan Sontag has incorporated this feature of magical realism very skillfully. Hamilton has been presented as a character who responds to life as a spectacle. He is a “fastidious spectator” interested in everything. He “lives in a place – that for sheer volume of curiosities – historical, natural, and social – could hardly be surpassed” (20). Sontag was in fact attracted to Hamilton’s avidity for art and collecting that is why she recalled and represented the sensational love story of the eighteenth century. In *The Volcano Lover*, the subversion of the natural order of things is to be found in the alternative historiography that transgresses the various given facts of history. Hamilton, who is a renowned collector and “Connoisseur of ruins”, has been presented as a character that has distinctly aesthetic taste for disaster. In the character

of Hamilton, Sontag has combined various features and perspectives prevalent in her other writings. He is an aesthete, melancholic, the tourist, the collector and Connoisseur of ruins. In her famous essay “Under the Sign of Saturn” also, Sontag comments on this feature of modernism that reinvents “the baroque cult of ruins; to perceive that the nihilistic energies of the modern era can make everything a ruin or fragment—and therefore collectible” (120). In another well-known essay “On Photography”, she remarks that, Photography “extends the eighteenth century literati’s discovery of the beauty of ruins into a genuinely popular taste” (79). Thus in the novel Sontag is like a photographer who is always keen in appropriating the world in images. That is why we have the images in the beginning of each chapter, which are like the Cavaliere’s immense art collection. As Sontag has long been fascinated and appalled by “aesthetic sensibility”, the novel *The Volcano Lover* also helped her to explore the historical roots of the “aesthetic sensibility”. The novel exhibits the aesthetic view of life, which is nevertheless attached to the world of politics and history. Hamilton is after all the British ambassador living in Naples. Hamilton watches, studies and climbs the Volcanoes. He is in fascination with Mount Vesuvius. Hamilton takes pleasure in its dangerous instability. For him the volcano was a “stimulus for contemplation”. He is reminded of human body on seeing a volcano:

It’s the mouth of a volcano. Yes, mouth; and lava tongue. A body, a monstrous living body, both male and female. It emits, ejects. It is also an interior, an abyss. Something alive, that can die. Something inert that becomes agitated, now and then, Existing only intermittently” (5).

Even the observatory that he had built in his mansion depicts his fascination for volcanoes. The observatory has been built in such a way that Hamilton could have uninterrupted view of volcano:

And he has multiplied the view he commands – installed in the middle of it, as on a cliff or in a camera obscura. The Cavaliere has covered the other half of the room with mirrors, in which were reflected, at sunset, the ghost of Capri opposite, and at night, the bay marbled with moonlight and, sometimes, a full moon that seemed to emerge from the crater of the volcano (74).

Thus, we have the Cavaliere who has fascination for the destructive volcano and at the same time interested in collecting and preserving the beautiful objects of art. In a skilful and artistic way, Sontag has contrasted between two grand passions of the Cavaliere. To one side is his love for calmness and frailty of manufactured treasures, whereas to the other side is depicted his love for unpredictability and chaotic forcefulness of nature. Volcanoes look better from a safe distance but the Cavaliere's boundless curiosity drives him to venture up the mountain repeatedly. Therefore, the novel contains all the "possibilities of story telling which always hover between the opposing poles of verisimilitude and myth, factuality and fabulation, realism and romance" (Faris, 311).

The combination of history with selective magical details moves the text beyond the realm of realism and naturalism. As Frederic Jameson has also elaborated this aspect putting forward the argument that, "the threefold imperatives of authorial depersonalization, unity of point of view, and restriction to scenic representation," are often disrupted. The disruptive tendency together with magical rewriting of history moves it closer to contemporaneous theories of history, and hence moves it closer to fiction, which allows a greater space to the imagination of the historian to view an inaccessible past.

Presented in a skillful manner, the text like a magical realist text contains an "irreducible element" of magic, something we can not explain according to the laws of the universe as we know them"(Faris, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, 167). The Cavaliere's love for ruins is one such element, which cannot be explained. Moreover, the detailed descriptions detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world. These realistic descriptions create a fictional world that resembles the one we live in. In many instances by extensive use of detail, the events are described as happening in a real world. On the one hand, the attention to the sensory details in this transformation represents a continuation, a renewal of the realistic tradition while on the other hand, like in a magical realist fiction, in addition to historical events, the extraordinary events (like Hamilton's love for volcanoes, the

King's vulgarity, the slaughtering of animals, the destruction during the revolution) are described as commonplace events. The magical nature of these details is a clear departure from realism. This perspective questions the mimetic quality of the presentation and signals that this might be imaginary. An exemplary expression of this is narrated to us when the Cavaliere accompanies the king even to his toilet, enjoys the animal massacres with him and offers his hand to the king for licking. The Cavaliere tolerates all these even without a flicker though his own tastes are very refined and rational. The court celebrations are described as:

Certain Court celebrations included the building in front of the royal palace of an artificial mountain festooned with meat, game, cakes and fruit, whose dismantling by the ravenous mob, unleashed by a salvo of cannon, was applauded by the overfed from balconies (20).

The Cavaliere does not question the illogical butchering and massacre of animals. His daily hunting of hundreds of animals who are dragged and thrown in the streets to rot does not upset him. He does not question the vulgarity of the king who keeps his wife chronically pregnant though he has his children numbering in teens. Therefore, in *The Volcano Lover*, we witness an idiosyncratic recreation of historical events but the events are firmly grounded in historical reality also. The novel is impressive and at times enchanting like a magical real text. There are events in the novel when the novelist forgets about the broad facts of history and lets her imagination have full and formidable play. The most interesting creations regarding this are the fortuneteller and the Cavaliere's pet monkey named "Jack" whom the Cavaliere describes to Charles as more intelligent than most of the people. He finds his movements "more genteel" and his manners "more fastidious".

No doubt, the novel is about the well-known historical events but Sontag did not want to write a "you are there" historical novel so she allowed her imagination to play. Sontag has presented her characters in a style. They may be the well-known figures from history but Sontag names them with intimacy. Hamilton is called the "Cavaliere" the name he acquired while he was posted in Naples and Emma is the "Cavaliere's" wife and Nelson is of course referred to with an ironical tone as "hero". This has been done as a theatrical device. To Sontag these characters are like the

actors of a myth. Sontag researched a lot before writing about this historical romance. Sontag told her interviewer Ron Grossman that in order to write about how the aristocrats of the eighteenth century travelled, she had to read “four scholarly treatises on 18th century carriages”. The numerous quotes from the original letters of Hamilton, his wives, and the gruesome detail with which she writes about the terror of 1799 are exemplary proof of her research. Sontag wanted the novel to be historically accurate and dense with historical detail but at the same time, she also wanted the narrator to adopt a contemporary voice to bridge the distance between past and future. Thus in *The Volcano Lover*, we experience the closeness or near merging of the two worlds of factual and fictional. “The magical realist vision exists at the intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions” (Faris, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, 172).

Another merging of the two realms that takes place in the novel is between the world of living and dead. There are also fluid boundaries between the worlds of the living and dead in the novel. The boundaries are traced but only to be crossed. If fiction is exhausted in this world, then perhaps this text creates another world at the end of the novel so that it continues life beyond the grave. The four monologues by four women from the grave are most revealing in this direction. Emma’s defense of her “magic” which attracted so many men to her and as well, reminiscences of Fonseca are in the style of an operatic epilogue. In her book, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic*, Amaryll Chanady explains this feature of magical realism in detail. She elaborates that two conflicting but autonomously coherent perspectives, one based on an “enlightened” and rational view of reality, and the other based on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of the everyday world characterize magical realism. Thus, the central concept of magical realism in literature is its insistence on the co-existence of the magic and the real. This feature also differentiates magical realism from fantasy. While in fantasy, the narrator does away with the physical world and narrates the events, which are absurd but the narrator of magical realism, accepts most or all of the realistic conventions of fiction but in addition introduces "something else," something that is not realistic, into the text.

Thus, Magical realism in *The Volcano Lover* is neither fantasy nor the empirical reality but linked with the "real" world, "firmly grounded in recognizable reality through social, historical and political references". Adding further effect to this is the narrator's objective tone. While we are startled at the extraordinary events being narrated, the characters and the narrator make us believe that the events narrated are actual. The characters themselves embody specific temperaments and ideas, which are difficult to reconcile. Passions erupt like the volcano in the scandalous love triangle. The marriage of the English ambassador with a woman of shady reputation is the outline story of the novel. Moreover, Emma becomes the wife of a man old enough to be his grandfather. Smitten with love the hero refuses an order from England to leave Naples. Naples faces revolution. The corrupt Neapolitan regime crumbles after an assault by Napoleon's forces. Thus, a perfect dispassionate narrator maintains clearly an objective tone while describing all these escalating events, the romantic excess, melancholia, exuberance, revolution and destruction, which happened in the eighteenth century.

The novelist also makes strong use of imagery to create a magical effect. The mountain and the volcanoes are part of the novelist's use of imagery in *The Volcano Lover*. The image of volcano represents love in one way with its clichéd images of hot red clefts and smoldering fires. The observant Cavaliere records facts of its behaviour and its history. The volcano "grumbled, rattled and hissed". Susan Sontag herself likes to describe its eruptions in terms of "mushrooming" clouds in our own persuasive image of cataclysm. She declares, "Even in the most pacified souls the volcano inspires the lust to see destructiveness" (32). It is also a symbol for the fascination of violence and defiance and is thus associated with revolution. Susan Sontag elaborates the fascination for volcanoes as:

Maybe it is not the destructiveness of the Volcano that pleases more, though everyone loves a conflagration, but its defiance of the law of gravity to which every inorganic mass is subject. What pleases first at the sight of the plant world is its vertical upward direction. That is why we love trees. Perhaps we attend to a Volcano for its elevation, like ballet. How high the molten rocks soar, how far above the mushrooming cloud (32).

The whole narrative is written with the extensive use of images and exclusive sensory details. These vivid images and details help us to imagine and visualize the locations and the events that happened in the history long ago. The Cavaliere lived in a place, which was “bigger than Rome”, had “the best ices, the merriest loafers”. Located on the Italian Peninsula, “its incomparable bay was home to freakish fish” (20). Moreover the king who earned the nickname of “king Big Nose” because of his “long bulbous nose” was drawn by “hot smells”, “peppery food, barely dead animals, a yielding moist woman”. While describing the feasting outside the palace Sontag is at her best employing the details that can affect anybody’s senses:

It would be hard to say which of one’s sensory organ were being more forcefully assaulted: one’s nose, by the smell of blood and the excrement of the terrified animals; one’s ears, by the cries of the animals being slaughtered and the screams of people falling or being pushed from some part of the mountain; or one’s eyes, by the sight of the poor beasts thrashing about in their agony or of some wretch who, brought to frenzy by all these sensations..., had plunged it into his neighbor’s neck (41).

The whole novel is narrated to us in the stench and shadow of death. Some extra ordinary events are described as real and ordinary. In fact, Magical realism in fiction does not come from describing the extra ordinary as spectacular but also from describing how the ordinary can also be spectacular. An early example of this is the King’s construction of an artificial mountain, laden with food, for his starving people. The food mountain that is 40 feet high with live animals “tethered” to it was torn apart and bloodily eaten by the crowd that is “loosed” on it. People came with “long knives inside their shirts for the killing and maiming needed to get a small ration of bread” (20). The feasting by the king, which was a normal affair for the king, is all described in a spectacular way.

The novel is a heroic fable, containing fabulous persons and things. The novel depicts life and manners in as natural a way as to deceive us into a persuasion, that all is real and probable. The novel injects a further note of magical effect with the help of

a fortuneteller appearing in an otherwise realistic setting. The Cavaliere visits the famous sibyl Efrosina Pumo. Though the Cavaliere visits her secretly for her prediction on eruptions, yet Efrosina foretells him something else. The events like the fortuneteller's telling of future described with factuality are like those that correspond to ordinary common-sense empirical reality. She tells the Cavaliere that the future is like a hole. "When you fall in it, you cannot be sure how far you will go" Efrosina who kept on amusing and challenging the Cavaliere is described by the narrator as:

She spoke oracularly of her powers. She proclaimed her dual citizenship in the past and the future. The future exists in the past, she said. The future, as she described it seemed to be the present gone awry (58).

The novel also makes use of the folk lore. William tells Catherine that the origin of the Neapolitan sites is the unhappy love stories. We are told that these places underwent a metamorphosis because of "unhappy or frustrated love". The local folk lore behind the volcano on Mount Vesuvius is also narrated to us. Vesuvius a young man fell in love with a lovely nymph. The nymph scorched by his attentions jumped into the sea and thus transformed into the island Capri. Vesuvius became mad and became a mountain. Since then Vesuvius continues emitting fire and Capri lies in the water in full view of him but beyond his reach. The line between folklore and historical fact is as blurry as that between the real world and the magical. Wendy Faris says it best in her book, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*, stating that magical realism often invokes a type of "defocalized narrative":

[. . .] pre-Enlightenment traditions, including myths, ghosts, and journeys to the lands of the dead...[these narratives] visit dead civilizations in order to bring back a communal voice of indeterminate origin but possessing creative authority, with which it revivifies the narrative discourse of realism (Faris, 80).

The insight by Faris suggests that magical realist works evoke folk lore, legends and spirits, residues of an unresolved past, in an effort to instigate written discourse that bring them out of the world of the dead and into a realistic light. Faris states simply that the main purpose of this reintroduction of the spirit body is “to use the past to reorient that future”. The novel combines the historical reality with imagination, supernatural, myth and the folk lore to explore our relationship with the outside world (our culture and other cultures), faith, politics and history. Isabelle Blonde also describes this aspect:

Magic realism is a literary device or a way of seeing in which there is space for the invisible forces that move the world: dreams, legends, myths, emotion, passion, history. All these forces find a place in the absurd, unexplainable aspects of magic realism.... It is the capacity to see and write about all dimensions of reality (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*, 54)

Thus, Sontag is explicitly concerned with preserving and re- presenting history. Magical realism in fact presumes that the individual requires a bond with the traditions and faith of the community, that she/he is historically constructed and connected (Foreman, 286). By incorporating myth, folk legend, Sontag seems to suggest that myth, folk lore or legends are also a type of historical reality. They play a role in the people’s perception of history and should therefore be taken into writing accounts of history.

In *The Volcano Lover*, the women become the site of history that survives and so nurtures the present. The novel is narrated to us by a woman and ends with the point of view of Eleonora denouncing the protagonists. Sontag combines the magical realism with the political realities of the times. The horrifying human violence that erupted in Naples takes its toll on the Cavaliere’s friends also, who are executed. However, he feels helpless and decides to “Be calm. You cannot help. It is not in your hands” (297). His indifferent attitude is clearly visible but it also shows his identification with the older world full of passions and collections. He wants a perfect and rational world around him where thoughts govern action and individuals govern

the mass. Except the Cavaliere, the other voices allowed to speak to us are mainly of women. The four monologues at the end are an illustrative example of this. Sontag admitted in one of her interviews that what these women had in common was their awareness that this world is run by men. She conceded to Mary Ann Grossman that, “Part of this story is about what it’s like to be a woman. I’m saying it’s complicated...Society gives woman all sorts of contradictory messages, and so do your own standards and temperaments; be good, be wild, be safe, be bold, have fun; be serious”(Rollyson, *Reading Susan Sontag*, 161). We also have the echoes of Sontag’s argument in the novel when the narrator tells us, “Women are trained to be marginal or supporting players in that world, as in many others. To compete for approbation-not to compete as such” (138). Thus the novel while in addition to the exotic setting, not only embraces the well-known historical personalities of Nelson, Beckford, Lady Hamilton, Scarpia and so on, but it also bridges the powerful story of the political upheaval. Baron Vitellio Scarpia has been presented as “an exceptionally cruel man” (265). The Queen had given him the charge of suppressing republican opposition in Naples earlier also and he had pursued the task with zeal. Scarpia has been presented as:

He was glad to concur in the Queen’s view that every aristocrat was probably harboring revolutionary sympathies; a Sicilian himself, and only recently ennobled, he hated the old Neapolitan aristocracy. And of course not only aristocrats but also theologians, chemists, poets, lawyers, scholars, musicians, doctors, indeed anyone, including priests and monks, who possessed more than two or more books, were also suspect. Scarpia estimated there to be at least fifty thousand real or potential enemies of the monarchy, about a tenth of the city’s population (265).

Incorporating history, myth, romance and magical realism, Sontag has created a text which has allowed us a better understanding of the past and thus to a more fruitful reckoning with the present and future. The novel is historiographic metafiction as it shares the characteristics associated with metafiction and it takes history as its subject. Various theorists have given their opinions on how an author should combine elements of history and literature. In the present era, it is greatly influenced by Linda

Hutcheon's term "historiographic metafiction". She acknowledges that postmodern writing whether of history or literature has textualized history by accepting that "both history and fiction are discourses". The past indeed existed, by 'whom' and 'how' that past is recounted is a different matter. Thus, the writer of today is entitled to use the texts of history in a selective and personal fashion to construct his/her own plots. These plots, which at the same time question and exploit knowledge of the historical past, are "historiographic metafiction".

In the present case also, Susan Sontag has combined historical content and metafictional mode of writing to form a writing, which in the words of Patricia Waugh "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (*Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, 2). Metafiction is in fact a fiction writing that deals playfully and periodically with the nature of fiction, the techniques, conventions and role of the author. Here Sontag's most impressive achievement is the way she places events in context: from the intimate drama of a love affair to the world shaking crisis of humans and history.

The novel creates fictional space around the real historical figures and events. The novelist uses various narrative strategies to create a metafictional and magically realist text. The novel appeals to the magic realist tradition in its form, style and tone and at the same time exhibits the metafictional use of the narrator's voice. The narrator commands the reader to leave the twenty-first century perspective to adopt an attitude that enables him/her to develop a realistic picture of the eighteenth century. This section of the chapter aims to describe the features, which put the novel in the category of "historiographic metafiction". The novel is grounded in actualities but Sontag has imaginatively expanded upon history to create a fictional – historical space. *The Volcano Lover* is fact and fiction, history and romance. Sontag has employed romance in a more popular sense i.e. a record of high passion. The magic contests in *The Volcano Lover* but it contests from within a realistically rendered historical fiction and of realistically conceived characters. *The Volcano Lover* contains Susan Sontag's postmodernism, her old guard historicism, her fierce intellectualism and her equally fiery romanticism. As Linda Hutcheon remarks:

Postmodern fiction suggests that to rewrite or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological” (Hutcheon, 209)

Thus, by presenting the novel with historical detail, Sontag manages to suggest a different historical reality. To accomplish this re-presentation of the past, historiographic metafiction, “plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record”. Certain known historical details are “deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error” (Hutcheon, 294). Moreover, Hutcheon’s further saying that one of the features of historiographic metafiction is being “the double awareness of both fictiveness and basis in real”, it is worth examining whether the novel *The Volcano Lover* fits into the category of historiographic metafiction. To be able to answer the above questions one has to first, focus on which part of the novel are historical and which are fictional.

The novel is based on the actual events that happened in the history of Italy. The novel begins in the year 1772. Based on the lives of Sir William Hamilton, his celebrated wife Emma, and Lord Nelson, the novel depicts a very important period in the history of France and of Europe. The novel is significant not only because it describes the socio- political atmosphere but in terms of the cultural manifestations also. The love affair of Emma Hamilton and the great British Admiral Horatio Nelson was a scandal of its times. This love affair has been a source for novelists, dramatists and filmmakers. There have been many well known re-presentations of this story like Terence Ratigan’s play *A Bequest to the nation* and many informal parodies as well which made the love story, the subject of after dinner charades and tableau vivants. However, in attempting a fresh look at this famous love story in *The Volcano Lover*, Sontag has been resourceful.

The novel is not simply a collector’s cabinet designed to show off its author’s erudition or wit. It is not simply a retelling of the well-known story but at the same time, it gains importance from the point of stretching the boundaries of the traditional novel. Sontag has endowed the novel with a firm moral and political view also. She has put a story within a story. She has told the love story of Emma Hamilton and Lord Nelson combining with the horrifying story of the destiny of Neapolitan

Republicans opposed to Nelson's friends and the King and Queen of Naples. While telling this, Sontag has put the follies of lovers into a historical perspective. Sontag also combats the reader's sense of over familiarity by never referring to the characters by their all too-well known names. Therefore, Hamilton becomes "the Cavaliere" Emma "the Cavaliere's Wife", Nelson the 'hero'. In the same vein, Goethe who makes a cameo appearance visiting Naples in the course of his famous 'Italian journey' is identified simply as "the poet"(143).

This story was the subject of a movie also. Released under the title *That Hamilton Woman*, starring Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, the movie also retold the story of the triangle. As movies have always been Sontag's passion, so *That Hamilton Woman* is sure to have caught Sontag's eye. Sontag conceded this to Christopher Lydon, her interviewer that a friend had sent her a copy of the movie a year after she started writing the novel. However, the movie romanticized the protagonists as tragically doomed lovers whereas *The Volcano Lover* forces the reader to acknowledge their role in the politics of their time. No doubt, the novel is influenced by film techniques. Both William Hamilton and the novelist exact the very art they adore. Sir William Hamilton in the film is the entire piece, whether he is discovering on art, women or politics. In fact, *The Volcano Lover* can be read as a gloss on Sir William Hamilton's hymn to art in the movie *That Hamilton Woman*. In the novel, Sontag has kept her focus on William. He is more fortunate as compared to the movie. Like Sir William, Sontag herself has been a collector and connoisseur. Sontag has discussed it in her books earlier also about what the business of collecting means. In *The Volcano Lover*, her discussions on it are very sharp. William Hamilton or the Cavaliere as Sontag calls him is a fellow of Royal Society. He was a collector of art, objects, connoisseur of ruins. Sontag suggests that collecting art objects were his defenses against official neglect, the limits of his first wife. Sontag claims that her characters are the doubles of the 'real' historical figures. Thus, they are the fictional creations on whose behalf she has taken liberties that seemed appropriate to their natures. Yet Sontag has followed the recent biographies of Nelson and Emma very closely. Sontag lets her imagination flow slightly in her acute characterization of William about whom, little is known. The novel should not be read only for its retelling of a relationship between two men and a woman but for the snippets, it contains of Sontag herself also. There are the brilliant plays on words like, "The sleep of reason engenders mothers", "Odors focus, distract", "A world of odors

is ungovernable-one does not dominate an odor, it dominates you”, “Every collector is potentially a thief”. The examples are not few but many when we are introduced to Sontag`s ideas in the form of snippets.

The importance of *The Volcano Lover* derives in larger part, from the way it directly addresses Sontag`s straddlings of dimension between modernism and postmodernism. The adaptations of cinematic techniques as well as moral elements categorize the novel as a kind of self-reflexive postmodern. The desire to possess the beautiful that both Sontag and Hamilton have, connects them to the world, but it also alienates them from it. *The Volcano Lover* is studded with the parabolic passages that evoke the melancholy of being unable to collect the world, to hold its attention. In a metafictional mode, Sontag expresses herself, “Collecting expresses a free –floating desire that attaches and re-attaches itself---it is a succession of desires. The collector is in the grip not of what is collected but of collecting (24). This is voice of the narrator in *The Volcano Lover* who speaks to herself as much as to the readers. So the artist, the aesthete, the collector become estranged from the world by the very process of attempting to bring it together. The novelist does this all in a way as to include the argument about art and life.

At the same time, dubbing the novel a historical novel and as well a romance recycles a narrative form whose representation of an ideological world in which “all the arts and adornments of language are used to embellish the narrative”(Scholes and Kellogg, *The Nature Of Narrative*). Scholes tells about a fiction created by an author for aesthetic ends. The novel has a narrative perfectly suited to the modernist in her, who favored the priority of form over content. Susan Sontag has built *The Volcano Lover* on romance conventions. Such doubleness resembles allegory. Allegory defines the moment when one text is read through the lens of others. Thus by allying *The Volcano Lover* with previous texts in their genres and by fusing conventional and postmodern narrative strategies, Sontag has produced a metafictional text. Sontag employs intertextual references, violates the narrative levels and uses unconventional and experimental techniques. Sontag has used two important texts in narrating the folklore behind the Mount Vesuvius. Firstly, it refers to the Ovidian tales in *Metamorphoses* of men pursuing women in which the female are transformed into inanimate objects, be it tree, plant or river. Secondly, it also refers to the famous poem by Keats, “Grecian Urn”, which also depicts the effects of metamorphoses. By doing so, Sontag presents a social consciousness that the Neapolitans tried to humanize

these inanimate entities through personification. They gave the mountain a male and Capri a female face.

Another dramatic use of the intertext in *The Volcano Lover* is that of *The Very Comical lament of Pyramus and Thisbe* an interlude written by Sontag herself. We are very familiar with the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe through Shakespear`s *A Mid Summer Night`s Dream*. We are presented with the mount of Vesuvius, which always “burn and burns”. Thus, we are told about its destructive and tragic nature but the Cavaliere the lover is presented as a bit foolish and comical figure who is in love with its destructive nature. Thus, this combination of the tragic and comic also reflects the drama of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. *The Very Comical lament of Pyramus and Thisbe* was written in reference to the wall at Berlin. Moreover, *The Volcano Lover* was also written in Berlin when the great wall came down. Sontag admitted this in one of her interviews that this helped her to imagine the past intensely.

The next point of my argument in this study is the use of narrative self in the novel. Two decades ago inquiry into the narrative played but a minor role in scholarly deliberation. The relationship between narrative analysis and historiography was little explored. The term “narrative” had hardly entered the vocabulary of literary critics. Today the study of narrative concatenates humanities and the social sciences; and issues raised by such studies for our understanding of history is profound. Moreover, there are many approaches towards narrative – realist, phenomenological, cognitive, textual, etc. My purpose here is not to analyze all these approaches but to explore a single orientation i.e. self-referential narrative used in *The Volcano Lover*, which categorises it as historiographic metafiction. This study investigates how art, truth and politics are tightly integrated in the novel. I will focus on the manner in which the novel uses a future perspective to tint the point of view in narration with a built in self- consciousness in the narrator who narrates it. This is symptomatic of the postmodern way of representing the past as Linda Hutcheon says:

If the past is only known to us today through its textualized traces (which like all texts, are always open to interpretation) then the writing of both history and historiographic metafiction becomes a form of complex intertextual cross referencing that operates within (and does not deny) its unavoidably discursive context. (Hutcheon, *A poetics of Postmodernism*, 81)

Since Sontag was retelling an already known story, she did not write it in a mimetic fashion as this would not have been a convincing form of representation. That is why, she has used a form of postmodernism, reinventing the story that was already embedded in the public's consciousness. Sontag does it in a very self-conscious way. She does this by addressing the readers directly or indirectly so that they can compare the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. Thus, the intrusions by the novelist suggest that somebody other than a person from eighteenth century is describing the events and facts:

You can't have everything, someone has said, where would you put it?
A very modern jape: something one might say now, when the world feels congested, when space is shrinking, when the telluric forces are gathering strength. Not likely to have been uttered in the Cavaliere's time (73).

These strategies employed by Sontag help us to work out the specific elements of complicity and critique. Sontag brings the distinctions between fictional time (1776) and real time (1998) which is the year in which *The Volcano Lover* is written. She also manipulates the narrative with letters, witty comments, deliberate tense shifts and that often in a mid sentence. Moreover, she adds the italics when she feels like to give the emphasis, "Catherine does not think he will ever become devout and he did not".

Hamilton is better known for the affair that his second wife Emma had with Admiral Nelson. However, unlike some of the most famous narratives on the topic that limited themselves to the love story which scandalized society, Sontag has written the story from Hamilton's perspective dwelling upon the aftermath of the French Revolution, particularly the spread of the Jacobean ideals to the Kingdom of Naples and the two Sicilies. Against this historical context and very much against her own theory of fiction in her essay *Against Interpretation*, *The Volcano Lover* becomes the discursive space in which she discusses social and cultural concerns while reconsidering her own aesthetic views through her criticism of the Aesthete i.e. Lord Hamilton. However, despite her renewed interest in historical matters, Sontag does

not follow the realistic historical genre in which facts are presented as absolute and objective. Rather rendering of the Hamilton tale is truly historiographic metafiction which foregrounds both the story being told as well as the narrative techniques being employed. From a postmodern stand and in accordance with historiographic metafiction, Sontag rescues a marginal peripheral figure of cultural history and places him under the spot light. She deconstructs the way in which Hamilton has been textualized “as a famous cuckold” and significantly reconstructs him as a man from a centric culture in a peripheral one, patron of the arts and above all, an aesthete and collector.

The novel begins with a prologue, and then the first chapter is in the third person narration, where characters embody encoded historical forces, but it again shifts to the direct intercession of first person monologue of a female voice. The novel closes with the monologue of Eleonora de Fonseca who tells us the story of these well-known aristocrats from a different point of view. For Sir William she feels that he was just ‘an upper – class dilettante’ and in the last paragraph she stakes her claim for a female revolutionary spirit. Here Sontag inverts the pattern. The character talks about the novelist who has created her. Admitting that, it was difficult to be a woman, she expresses concern and sympathy for Sontag, “Thus do all women including the author of this book (419). No doubt, it is a moment of solidarity between female character and female author but Sontag’s intrusion also suggests what we are reading is a fictional work.

When the novelist chooses to get inside her characters, she does it easefully and evocatively. She engenders the story with digressions. The reader is not allowed to forget the author for more than a page or two. She elbows her way back in – expatiating, explaining, editorializing and philosophizing. When the revolution forces the courtiers to leave Naples for Palermo, we get on excursus on “the south of the south”. “Every culture has its southernness – people who work as little as they can, preferring to dance, drink, sing, brawl, and kill their unfaithful spouses”, she begins and before we know it, “Hanoi has Saigon, Sao Paulo has Rio, Delhi has Calcutta,

Ronnie has Naples and Palermo”. The novel is full of narratorial opinions about one thing or another but most notably about collecting. The narrator’s remarks on the subject are of Sontag, the essayist but it also reminds us of digressive and discursive side of eighteenth century fiction. Sontag thus also tells the readers how historical fictions are created. The narratorial verdicts on the protagonists are not few but many. An anecdote illustrating the queen’s vindictiveness concludes: “Nothing is more hateful than revenge”. A few pages later there is a lecture on mercy: “Mercy is what takes us beyond nature, beyond our natures, which are always stocked with cruel feelings – Nothing is admirable than mercy” (234).

Sontag integrates pastiche of styles, point of views and generic forms like that of romantic fiction into the novel blending these popular genres with the telling of famous tale in order to create an ironic perspective. Sontag explained in one of her interviews that the genesis of the novel occurred at a rare bookshop in London. There she saw the engravings of Mount Vesuvius that had been commissioned by Sir William Hamilton for a privately printed book. Justifying the labelling of the novel as a romance, she told her interviewer Leslie Garis that:

In order to find the courage to write this book, it helped me to find a label that allowed me to go over the top... The word “romance” was like a smile. Also, the novel becomes such a self-conscious enterprise for people who read a lot. You want to do something that takes into account all the options you have in fiction. Yet you don’t want to be writing *about* fiction but making fiction. So I sprang myself from fictional self-consciousness by saying, it’s a novel – it’s more than a novel – it’s a romance!. And I fell into the book like *Alice in Wonderland* (Garis, *New York Times Magazine*, August 2, 1992, 21-23).

The novel’s subtitle – A Romance – points to its architectural relations with the genre of the romance and guides the reader into the reception and interpretation of the novel as a romance. However, the metatextual layer testifies the novel being a postmodern double-coded text: it is both the imitation of the romance and historical novel as well as their critical reconsideration and reappraisal from the perspective of

the contemporary context. The novelist resorts to parody, pastiche, the narrative shifts, intertextuality, multiple voices, fragmentation and impersonation in creating a well-knit piece of historiographic metafiction.

The four monologues at the end of the novel not only have the effect of a long shot or fade in a film but they are also the multiple voices integrated by the novelist to narrate multiple truth(s) of the history. All four are posthumous, in the style of an operatic epilogue. Women voice all the monologues. The monologue by Fonseca is the one which provides the damning and dramatic judgments on characters and events of the narrative. Fonseca is the one who seems closely identified with Sontag herself. Fonseca who gave herself once to the cause of revolution, voices a condemnation of the wealthy and refined few who ruled the world. Fonseca may be intended as a deliberate contrast to Emma. Unlike Emma, she committed her passions to literary and political realms. Contrasted implicitly with Emma is the character of Fonseca:

I was earnest, I was ecstatic, I did not understand cynicism, I wanted things to be better for more than a few. I was willing to give up my privileges. I was not nostalgic about the past. I believed in the future. I sang my song and my throat was cut. I saw beauty and my eyes were put out. Perhaps I was naïve. But I did not give myself to infatuation. I did not drown in the love of a single person. (418)

The blunt verdicts by the narrator connect herself explicitly with Sontag. Here she identifies herself with Fonseca, which would seem to demand that we identify the chaos of the Napoleonic wars with the tumult of Vietnam era, revolutionary France with Soviet Union, the Neapolitan Republic with North Vietnam and the British Empire with the United States. In fact, Sontag cannot be identified with any one character. Her identification and self-projection are split between several characters. Sontag identifies as strongly with Hamilton's connoisseurship and melancholy as she does with Fonseca's political zeal and intellectual ardency. What are the readers to think of a "civilized" Cavaliere who allows some of his own friends and fellow naturalists to perish? Moreover, what about the warm-hearted ever-sympathetic Emma, who cannot be bothered to think of anyone beyond her immediate circle? Sontag's penetrating insightful portrayal of these privileged people and their times are a devastating illustration of how seemingly minor moral blindness can lead to major moral catalyst.

Closely related to the concept of history is the concept of man. Through the meditation on man, his nature and fate, Sontag has found a connection between history and truth. One of the ideological constructions that emerge in the novel is the relationship between the centrics and the eccentrics in eighteenth century Europe. In accordance with Hutcheon's words that the past is explained for what is more powerful in the present, Sontag also calls William Hamilton as "Cavaliere" while attempting to mix the fictional with historical and also from the perspective of his British, centric acquaintances after his return from Naples. The novel also satirizes the way in which the culturally biased English regard the European as both the other and the poor. The Cavaliere on the other hand, is keen on making it clear that he still belongs among his acquaintances. This is put forward through his many letters. The Cavaliere feels that: "This place has not changed me, I have the same home-bred superiorities; I have not gone native" (67). The theme of the ex-centrics is duly pursued throughout the narrative as the majority of the novel takes place in Naples. The city is described as "bigger than Rome, it was the wealthiest as well as the most populous city on the Italian Peninsula and after Paris, the second largest city on the European Continent" (20). However, the Cavaliere feels that, "I must be patient...I am among Savages" (51).

Thus, voice has been at the heart of Susan Sontag's work, her own distinctive voice as an essayist and the assumption of different voices when she composes fiction. She has created a novel, which according to Hutcheon, is not only self-reflective but also both re-introduces historical context into metafiction and problematizes the entire question of historical knowledge (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 285-286). Historiographic metafiction bridges the fissure between historical and fictional works by recombining the two genres. They employ "a questioning stance through their common use of conventions of narrative, of reference, of the inscribing of subjectivity...and even of their implication in ideology" (Hutcheon, 286). *The Volcano Lover* comprises magical realism, metafiction and historiographic metafiction in its representation of the all too famous story of the Emma, Hamilton and Nelson triangle.