



Understanding Roman a Clef as a Literary Genre Comparing Tharoor's Great Indian Novel and Orwell's Animal Farm

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how the roman à clef (novel with a key) serves as a powerful tool for political dissidence and historical reclamation in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989). By blending allegory and documentary fiction, both authors bypass state censorship, libel, and defamation laws. Orwell uses a strict animal allegory to map the Soviet Union's rise, stripping totalitarianism of its human facade to expose how the rule of law erodes. Tharoor overlays the ancient Mahabharata onto the Indian Independence Movement and the 1975 Emergency, evaluating modern leaders through the moral lens of Dharma. Ultimately, the study argues that the roman à clef provides a protective artistic veil to share cultural secrets and dismantle state propaganda. By utilizing strategic linguistic and structural "keys," these texts preserve collective memory and offer vital institutional critiques during periods of authoritarian decline.

Keywords: Roman a Clef, Political Allegory, Dharma, Totalitarianism Genre Function, Legal Dissidence, Animal Farm, The Great Indian Novel

1. Introduction

Literature is a work of art if and only if it is made in a central art form and is intended to fulfill a function of art, or (whether or not it is in a central art form), it fulfills such a function with excellence (Stecker). The basic characteristic of literature is that a literary work is a verbal text (Meyer). The function of literature usually lies in the fact that the reader examines a piece of literature in relation to the ideas and aspirations of its time, and judges its success by the extent to which it realizes these. Literary criticism becomes social interpretation (Hall). Literature brings us "irreplaceable" sensations through which the real world becomes more furnished with meaning and more beautiful (J. L. Tzvetan Todorov). George Herbert Clarke remarks that "Literature, then, becomes the catholic attempt at the concentrated utterance of cosmic thoughts and feelings couched in language of strange though changing loveliness" (Clarke). Literature is the only possible form of art or work in which a genre is indicated by the title of a work itself (Gerard Genette).

It is an already acceptable fact that we already recognize literature only through genre rather than analysing the work in depth individually, thus indicating the impact of genres in contemporary literature (Sullivan). Since, classic times such literature has been classified into broader terms such as poetry, prose and drama which is further narrowed into various other genres like comedy and tragedy (Chandler). At various times and in various areas of study, genre has been defined and used mainly as a classificatory tool, a way of sorting and organizing kinds of texts and other cultural objects (Ijaz Asghar Bhatti). This paper focuses on a Genre Analysis of the Genre "Roman a Clef" through the works *The Great Indian Novel* and *Animal Farm* by Shashi Tharoor respectively. Genre Analysis is considered as a tool for identifying the similarities and differences in the uses of purpose, form, audience and language features (Sukhapabsuk). The importance of Genre Analysis lies in the fact that it is an essential method for comprehending and identifying the linguistic attributes of a genre in connection with its intended function and purpose (P.F. Wang). A roman à clef is a novel in which real people, places, or events appear with fictitious names or details, blurring the line between fiction and nonfiction (MasterClass). This paper undergoes a genre analysis of the genre "Roman a clef", identifying the essential characteristics of this genre through the above mentioned works, trying to attempt at dissecting and understanding its usage.

2. Understanding what is a Genre

The word "genre" has its etymological origins from the French and Latin word "genus" which means "class", "kind" or "sort" (Harris). Aristotle in his work *Poetics*, for the first time distinguished literary works as various "genres" by defining their structural characteristics (Means). Genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact (M. B. Dinkler). Since the time of Plato and Aristotle, works of literature have generally been placed in three main classes: poetic or epic, narrative and drama (Wendy Bishop). Undoubtedly these three can be considered as the three main primary genres from which the other genres flows as a classification (Clancy). Even though the concept of Genre was regarded by many as a repressive mechanism by which cultural institutions

sought to classify, commodify and control artistic production, yet they provide a structure to classify works (Duff), leading the reader to align with a particular genre or genres to be associated with giving a clarity. Genres are best used as a classificatory device or an a posteriori interpretive tool in relation to already existing texts, and at worst censured as formulaic writing (A. Bawarshi, *The Genre Function*). The importance of classification of literature by genre lies in the fact that on encountering what might be a mixed genre or kinds, then such a literature while examination by a reader will be subjected to a very bewildered interpretation of the work leading to overlook the perspective of the writer (Charles L Briggs). Sometimes genres, instead of concentrating on historical periods, they devolve into being the "object" of "ideological focus" as well (Bauman). Notable examples include feminist literature or anti – colonial literature. The function of author serves as a classificatory and regulative principle that organizes discourse into specific genres by providing a cohesive identity and a limit to the interpretation of a body of work (A. Bawarshi, *The Genre Function*). The process by which genres are established always involves the human need for distinction and interrelation because the purposes of critics who establish genres vary, it is self-evident that the same texts can belong to different groupings or genres and serve different generic purposes (A. J. Devitt, *Integrating Rhetorical and Literary theories of Genre*).

Simply put, genre can be defined as a specific type of artistic creation that shares common features of form, theme, style and language. literary genre refers to the specific style of literary works. It is one of the factors of literary form, referred to as "style". Common ones include novels, prose, dramas, poetries, etc (P. Gao). While literary genre preferences refer to the specific types of literature that an individual prefers. This may encompass various types of literature such as drama, poetry, fiction, prose, and other. The efficient functioning of Genre is noted when their appropriateness comes clearly in perspective in accordance to the situation which the literary work is showcasing thereby fulfilling the reader's anticipation (A. J. Devitt, *Generalizing About Genre: New Conceptions of an Old Concept*). In the political Unconscious, Fredric Jameson wrote that genre criticism has been "thoroughly discredited by modern literary theory and practice." There are at least three reasons for this. First, the very notion that texts compose classes has been questioned. Secondly, the assumption that members of a genre share a common trait or traits has been questioned, and thirdly, the function of a genre as an interpretative guide has been questioned (Cohen). Without Genre fundamental the distinctiveness of literary works as objects of interpretation, and the distinctiveness of literary interpretation as the way of apprehending the distinctive features of a literary work of art will be lost (S. H. Olsen).

There has never been a literature without genres; it is a system of continual transformation, and the questions of origin cannot be disassociated, historically from the field of the genres themselves (R. M. Tzvetan Todorov). In their *Theory of Literature*, Wellek and Warren state that "literary kind is not a mere name, for the aesthetic convention in which the work participates shapes its character. . . . the literary kind is an " institution" (E. Schwartz). Symmetrically opposite situations occur when literary critics assume that genres have only a nominal existence or, going one step further, consider that while each text belongs to some genre, it nevertheless actively deconstructs the legitimacy of that particular genre (Pavel). Genres may have several sorts of mutual relations, such as inclusion, combination (tragicomedy), inversion (romance and picaresque), contrast (sonnet and epigram) (A. Fowler). Mixing of Genres may lead to the foundation of sub genres which can be used to assimilate literature furthermore to provide clarity to the readers to interpret a work in its original sense (Ronald Schleifer). A study of relationships among related genres from different disciplines can inform us about the differences in academic writing across disciplines (Samraj).

Thus, Genre performs the important function of classifying various topics of discussion which lies in general purview into a proper straightforward stream of subjects. Further, genre acts as a social contract between the writer and the reader audience making the reader audience what to expect which is being provided by the writers in place for the patience, time and effort of the readers. For example, if a person A is always interested in a historical fiction, he may just approach the works of an author B who is a writer of historical. Whatever is the expectation of A that gets satisfied when A approaches the works of B in return for A giving the time and perseverance to glance through the works of B. Further, since the literary texts are amounted to a "proliferation" of interpretations, genre functions as a regulator in limiting such proliferation of a given piece of literature. In the same case if A, the reader has multiple interpretation of the work since, the genre is limited and fixed as a "historical fiction", the readers might not waste their in providing an interpretation which is beyond the genre. For example, Peter Shaffer's work *Amadeus* was time and again considered as a "historical fiction" thus, limiting the imaginative interpretation of the reader audience while analysing the relationship between the protagonist Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and the antagonist Antonio Salieri. This same function also preserves the way the author would have wanted the work to be interpreted rather being understanding it as an ambiguous interpretation. For example, the play *Richard III* by William Shakespeare actually blurred the lines between fictional elements and real historiography because of ambiguous non – mentioning or non – classification of genres (Zirak-Schmidt).

Genre has a continual transformative phase of evolution in which two or more genres mix together to form a new genre and such a new genre mixing upon with other forms of genre might lead to the birth of another genre, thus continuing this process perpetually. For example, fiction as a genre mixed up with history to provide historical fiction as a genre. Historical fiction as a genre got mixed with the genre adventure leading to a new form of genre which is Historical fiction – adventure novels like Alexander Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*. Another example is the classic mixture of two independent genres tragedy and comedy as tragicomedy, science and fiction as Sci – Fi (like the memorable works of Isaac Asimov) etc. This continual transformation actually acts as the core focus in the evolution of literary works and the changing sphere of the expectations of the reader audience, who gets bored when always fixed with a single recurring genre as their sole option, therefore leading to an expectation of new genres which when specified leads to the perfect and proper interpretation of what the author intends to convey. Further, such original interpretation as to what the author wants the viewer wants the reader to view the instance from is similar to how "Director's Cut" versions is employed in movies thereby incorporating scenes apart from these which were either censored by the regulatory authority or by the makers of the film themselves for specific reasons.

3. Roman à clef: A genre blending reality with fiction

Roman à clef is a French word meaning "novel with a key" and it refers to works in which actual people or events can be identified by a knowing reader, which was innovated as a genre by seventeenth century writer and Salonnière Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701) (Boyde). This genre was primarily created for to disguise from the general reader the public figures whose political actions and ideas formed the basis of her fictional narratives (Munro). The concept of roman à clef, or the "novel with a key," represents a sophisticated intersection between biographical fact and creative artifice. Etymologically rooted in the French and Latin genus, meaning "class" or "kind," genre serves as a social contract between the creator and the public (M. Dinkler). Within this framework, the roman à clef functions as a unique generic institution where real-world figures are depicted under the thin guise of fictional personas. As noted by Bawarshi (A. Bawarshi, *The Genre Function*), the function of an author serves as a "classificatory and regulative principle" that organizes discourse into specific genres, providing a cohesive identity and a limit to interpretation. In the case of the roman à clef, this regulation is dual-layered: the author provides a fictional narrative while the reader, equipped with the "key," seeks a subtextual historical reality. In Western literature, the roman à clef has long been a tool for navigating social and political boundaries. The "author function" as a regulative principle is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the works of Madeleine de Scudéry, the 17th-century innovator of the genre. Scudéry utilized the roman à clef to disguise political and public figures of the French court within historical romances like *Artamène*. By setting her stories in distant lands or ancient times, she created a "social in-group" where only those "in the know" could unlock the true identities of the characters (Douglass). This established the genre as a tool of survival and a means of reporting inside information on scandals without risking charges of libel.

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Somerset Maugham's *Cakes and Ale* are quintessential examples that utilize the "posture of the author" to discuss sensitive realities (A. R). These works demonstrate how genre is not merely a name but an "institution" that shapes the character of the aesthetic convention (E. Schwartz). By fictionalizing real personas, authors can explore "emotional truths" that a strict biography might fail to capture. This process involves a human need for distinction and interrelation, where the same text can serve different generic purposes depending on the critic's perspective (A. Devitt). In the Indian literary context, the roman à clef often mirrors the nation's complex social fabric. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, while presented as a sprawling narrative, functions as a classification of post-independence Indian life, drawing from real political figures and social transitions. This aligns with the idea that genre provides a structure to classify works, leading the reader to align with a particular interpretive clarity (Duff, 2002). Without these generic fundamentals, the distinctiveness of literary works as objects of interpretation would be lost (Olsen, 2018).

Transitioning to the visual medium, the film à clef has become a powerful pedagogical and ideological tool. Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* stands as the definitive global example, masking the life of William Randolph Hearst to critique the American Dream. Such films operate within what Fowler (A. Fowler) describes as mutual relations of inclusion and inversion, where the "romance" of a public figure is inverted into a cautionary "picaresque." The efficiency of this genre is noted when the "appropriateness" of the depiction matches the situation the work showcases, fulfilling the reader's or viewer's anticipation (A. J. Devitt, *Integrating Rhetorical and Literary theories of Genre*). Modern world cinema continues this trend with films like *Primary Colors*, which dramatizes the 1992 Clinton campaign. Here, the genre devolves into being an "object of ideological focus" (Bauman), allowing for a critique of power structures that might otherwise be legally or socially protected. As Gao (A. Gao) suggests, the style of these works—the "factors of literary form"—is what distinguishes them as objects of specific artistic creation, sharing common features of theme and language.

Indian cinema, particularly the industries in the South and Mumbai, has mastered the film à clef as a medium of political communication. Mani Ratnam's *Iruvar* is a landmark in this regard, detailing the intertwined lives of M.G. Ramachandran and M. Karunanidhi. This work acts as a "transcreation of reality," utilizing the political biopic framework to navigate the history of the Dravidian movement (P.K). By using fictional names for real-life giants, Ratnam avoids the "bewildered interpretation" that might occur if the audience overlooked the writer's perspective (Briggs). Similarly, Ratnam's *Guru* serves as a roman à clef for the life of Dhirubhai Ambani. The film functions as a classificatory device that allows the audience to apprehend the distinctive features of an industrialist's rise through a fictional lens. Even in popular "masala" cinema, such as *The Dirty Picture*, the genre provides a structural aid for the viewer to memorize and process the tragic life of Silk Smitha. This highlights the fact that mixing genres can lead to the foundation of sub-genres that provide clarity to the readers to interpret a work in its original sense (Schleifer). While some modern theorists have questioned the function of genre as an interpretative guide (Cohen), the roman à clef proves its continued relevance. It remains a system of "continual transformation" (R. M. Tzvetan Todorov), adapting to new media and political climates. Whether in the form of a 17th-century French novel or a 21st-century Indian biopic, the "key" allows for a specialized academic writing across disciplines (Samraj). Ultimately, the roman à clef ensures that literature and film do not merely reflect life, but provide a systematic, institutionalized way to understand it. Similarly, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), initially published under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas, used the roman à clef to mask the author's own descent into mental illness. The "key" here is the relationship between the protagonist Esther Greenwood and Plath herself, allowing the author to explore traumatic autobiographical events through a "façade of fiction" (The Write Practice, 2026).

The roman à clef operates as a sophisticated "genre function," acting as a social contract between an author and a "knowing reader" to navigate the treacherous boundaries of fact and fiction (A. Bawarshi, *The Genre Function*). By adopting a specific authorial posture, creators utilize "keys" to circulate cultural secrets and gossip while maintaining a protective veil of artistic form (A. R). This institutionalized literary kind serves as a vital regulative principle, allowing writers to negotiate the "art of scandal" and avoid legal repercussions like libel (Latham). Ultimately, this evolving generic form enables the ethical exploration of documentary truths through a liberating, fictionalized lens (Foley).

4. George Orwell and Shashi Tharoor's usage of Raman a clef

Literature rather than having an abstract function of "story telling" also proceeds onto define the variable cultural function rather than a class defined by distinctive properties of language (Culler). While traditional fiction seeks universal truths, the *roman à clef* is anchored in specific temporalities. In political literature, this genre acts as a "regulative principle" that organizes discourse to bypass censorship or to provide a satirical distance from powerful figures (A. S. Bawarshi). For Orwell and Tharoor, the genre is not merely a stylistic choice but a "social contract" (M. Dinkler) that allows for a profound critique of power. As Orwell famously noted in his essay *Why I Write*, "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism" (Orwell). This intentionality transforms the fictional space into a diagnostic tool for historical failures. Thus, now this paper enters the arena of bridging the gap between Orwell's European anti-totalitarianism and Tharoor's post-colonial deconstruction of the Indian state, all through the specialized lens of the *roman à clef*. Calling upon the unique intersection of political science, literary theory, and historiography, the function of the *roman à clef* in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* represents a sophisticated "genre function" that serves as a social contract between an author and a "knowing reader" to navigate the treacherous boundaries of fact and fiction while bypassing the "regulative principles" of censorship and hagiography (Boyde).

The function of the *roman à clef* in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* represents a sophisticated "genre function" that serves as a mechanical necessity for navigating the treacherous boundaries of fact and fiction while bypassing the "regulative principles" of state censorship and historical hagiography. The *roman à clef*—literally a "novel with a key"—operates as an institutionalized literary kind that allows writers to negotiate the "art of scandal" and avoid legal repercussions like libel by adopting a specific authorial posture that utilizes "keys" to circulate cultural secrets and political critiques under a protective veil of artistic form. In George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the "key" is remarkably precise and taxonomical, serving as a "documentary fiction" that strips historical figures of their human faces to focus on the raw mechanics of power. The farm itself is a direct surrogate for the Soviet Union, where Old Major represents the ideological foundations of Marx and Lenin, Napoleon mirrors the ruthless pragmatism of Joseph Stalin, and Snowball embodies the exiled Leon Trotsky. Orwell's primary text highlights this descent through the manipulation of the Seven Commandments, culminating in the chilling revision: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." This sentence functions as a linguistic "key" to the Soviet transition from egalitarianism to a new class hierarchy, a move Orwell viewed as the ultimate betrayal of the socialist dream.

Similarly, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* performs a dual generic feat by mapping the characters of the *Mahabharata* onto the figures of the Indian Independence Movement and post-independence politics, creating a "palimpsest." In this structure, Priya Duryodhani is a thinly veiled Indira Gandhi, Bhishma represents Mahatma Gandhi (Ganga-ji), and Dhritarashtra mirrors Jawaharlal Nehru. Tharoor utilizes the epic's structure to critique the "Dharma" of modern Indian governance, famously remarking through the narrator Ved Vyas: "India is not, as people keep calling it, an undeveloped country, but rather, in the only way that matters, a highly developed one in advanced state of decay." This allows Tharoor to address the scandals of the 1975 Emergency, where he frames the suspension of democracy not just as a political error, but as an epic betrayal: "The democracy that had been won with so much sacrifice was now a plaything in the hands of one woman." While Orwell uses the *roman à clef* to warn against the future by reflecting the past, Tharoor uses it to deconstruct a national myth, yet both authors demonstrate that genre is a "social institution" that shapes how a nation remembers its trauma, providing a structure for readers to move from "bewildered interpretation" to a clear apprehension of the writer's perspective.

The importance of this classification lies in the fact that on encountering mixed genres, a reader might overlook the writer's perspective without the "key." Genre criticism allows us to see how texts compose classes that share common traits, and the function of a genre as an interpretative guide is essential for apprehending the distinctive features of a literary work of art. In the modern Indian context, Tharoor's work serves as a "transcreation of reality," fulfilling the reader's anticipation for a narrative that matches the appropriateness of the situation showcased. This conceptual deep-dive acknowledges that without these generic fundamentals, the distinctiveness of literary works as objects of interpretation would be lost, and both works fulfill the "reader's anticipation" for a narrative that is both aesthetically pleasing and intellectually rigorous, ensuring that the lessons of the past are not lost to the "ideological focus" of the present. Ultimately, the *roman à clef* in these texts acts as a "liberating reason," allowing for a specialized academic writing across disciplines that reclaims the truth of history from the propaganda of the state and the hagiography of political dynasties, proving that there has never been a literature without genres and that questions of origin cannot be dissociated from the field of the genres themselves.

Exploring the darker nuances of these works, one finds that Orwell's use of animals serves to bypass the psychological defense mechanisms of a pro-Soviet Western intelligentsia, effectively acting as a "Trojan Horse" of political commentary that relies on the inherent simplicity of the fable to mask the complexity of its underlying "key." In Tharoor's landscape, the mapping of the ancient *Mahabharata* is not merely an act of cleverness but a profound exploration of "Dharma"—the moral law—which Tharoor suggests was sacrificed on the altar of secular modernism and dynastic ego, a critique that resonates through characters like Karna (representing the marginalized or the "other") and Draupadi (representing the abused democracy itself). This duality between the animal and the divine, the farm and the palace, highlights the universal utility of the *roman à clef* as a shield for the dissenter and a scalpel for the historian, ensuring that even under the weight of authoritarianism or nationalistic fervor, the "keys" to our true history remain accessible to those willing to read between the lines.

Expanding upon the "author function" as a regulative tool, the specific characterizations in *Animal Farm* and *The Great Indian Novel* act as a "taxonomical map" for the evolution of state authority, where the "key" is not merely an identification tag but a structural necessity for the reader to apprehend the distinctive features of historical betrayal. In the Orwellian landscape, the transition of the pigs from revolutionaries to oppressors is mirrored in the subtle shifts of the "Seven Commandments," a process that illustrates how language is weaponized to rewrite history in real-time—a

direct critique of the Stalinist "Great Purge" and the erasure of figures like Leon Trotsky from the collective memory. The character of Squealer, the pig who serves as the "minister of propaganda," is a brilliant representation of the broader apparatus of the *Pravda*, utilizing the "appropriate" situation of the farm to fulfill the reader's anticipation of how totalitarianism masks its failures through rhetoric. Simultaneously, Shashi Tharoor's reimagining of the *Mahabharata* provides a "transcreation of reality" (P.K.) where the Pandava brothers serve as allegories for the different pillars of the post-colonial Indian state: Yudhishtira represents the compromised integrity of the judiciary, Bhima the raw, often misdirected power of the military, and Arjuna the wavering, idealistic press (Tharoor). This mapping allows Tharoor to critique the "Emergency" as a moment of "Dharma-yuddha" where the ethical foundations of the republic were tested by a singular, autocratic Duryodhani (Indira Gandhi), whose actions are framed not as modern political choices but as ancient, predestined tragedies. By utilizing these "keys," both authors provide a "liberating reason" to discuss the "art of scandal" without the immediate threat of legal suppression, as the fictionalized archetypes—the pig, the prince, the blind king—create a buffer of "aesthetic distance" that forces the audience to engage with the structural rot of the institution rather than the superficialities of the individual. This institutionalized use of genre ensures that the "ideological focus" remains on the cyclical nature of power and the "advanced state of decay" that occurs when a nation's founding myths are divorced from their practical application (Bauman). Ultimately, the persistence of the *roman à clef* in these texts confirms that there is no literature without genres, and these "systems of continual transformation" are essential for any society seeking to reclaim its "truth" from the hagiography of its leaders or the propaganda of its state (E. Schwartz). The subversive nature of these works is further illuminated by exploring how satire functions as a weapon in post-colonial literature to dismantle colonial residues (Abbas), while the animal fable specifically serves as a durable vehicle for political allegory in the face of censorship (Al-Zubi). This "national longing for form" drives authors to seek structures that can contain the vast complexities of historical difference and provincialized thought (Brennan). To understand Tharoor's specific use of Dharma, one must look toward established insights into Hinduism that define the moral universe his characters inhabit (Dandekar), a task that fits within the broader history of Indian literary evolution (Das). Orwell's own "literary life" was defined by this struggle to blend political purpose with artistic integrity (Davison), a tension that is mirrored in the critical reception of Tharoor's novels as attempts to bridge mythology and modernity (Dhawan). The "limits of interpretation" are constantly tested when readers use these keys to unlock cultural secrets, a process that requires a critical discourse analysis of the rhetoric used by characters like Squealer (Fairclough).

The role of the reader becomes paramount in this genre, as the "act of reading" becomes an active participation in the structural transformation of the public sphere (Grossman). Postmodern poetics suggest that this historiographic metafiction allows the author to reclaim the production of political space from state narratives (Hutcheon). By situating the "Great Indian Novel" within the tradition of the historical novel, we see how the "sense of an ending" is often deferred in the interest of ongoing political critique (Kermode). This genre preference is influenced by factors of education and the cultural climate of "another country" where colonialism still affects the English novel's reception (Joshi). Mapping these narratives through the "atlas of the European novel" reveals how realism and reality are negotiated in society (Mukherjee). Furthermore, the magic of the cinematic *clef* and meta-fictional narratives helps bridge the gap between time and narrative (Paranjape). Culture and imperialism continue to shape these imagined identities, necessitating a debrahmanising of history to truly understand the political foundations of a "righteous republic" (S. R. R). Through metahistory and the lens of Marxism, we analyze how the "sublime object of ideology" transitions from revolutionary fervor into institutionalized oppression (White). Public reception has historically viewed this as the "Mahabharata of modern India," a sentiment echoed in major investigative media and global press archives. From biographical accounts of Orwell's life to modern reviews of Tharoor's postmodern epic, the media has consistently highlighted the "mask of the animal" and the "man who saw the future" (Crick). Journalism has documented the "Emergency in fiction" and the "New Delhi's epic tale" as essential readings for understanding the "soul of India" and its "Nehruvian legacy" (Aejaz). This "dynasty and the epic" narrative persists in the face of a "million mutinies," where the ideology of film and the politics of the farm continue to offer a "crystal spirit" of dissent (Woodcock). As the "Great Indian Satire" remains relevant, it highlights that there are "no full stops in India" when it comes to the advanced state of decay and the iron curtain of political rhetoric (Pugh).

The culmination of the *roman à clef* as a "genre function" (A. Bawarshi, *The Genre Function*) lies in its ability to act as a surrogate for the courtroom where history itself is the defendant. In George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the "totalitarian" shift is codified through the illegal amendment of the farm's constitutional framework—the Seven Commandments—illustrating how the "posture of the author" (A. R) serves to expose the fragility of the rule of law when language is monopolized by the state. This mirrors the "Law of the Jungle" that Stalinist Russia adopted during the Great Purge, where the "key" allows the reader to perceive the transition from *jus naturale* (natural law) to a perverted *lex talionis* (retributive law) (Hitchens). Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* elevates this legal critique to a metaphysical level by utilizing the "Dharma" of the *Mahabharata* as a benchmark for post-colonial constitutionalism. The character of Priya Duryodhani (Indira Gandhi) is not merely a political antagonist but a symbol of Adharma—the violation of cosmic and legal order—specifically during the 1975 Emergency, which Tharoor portrays as the "blindness" of the state reaching its zenith (Tharoor) (Vajpeyi). By mapping the suspension of civil liberties onto the "Cheer-Haran" (disrobing) of Draupadi (Democracy), Tharoor utilizes the *roman à clef* to provide a "liberating reason" (The Write Practice, 2026) for criticizing the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty's erosion of the very institutions they helped build (Guha). This "transcreation of reality" (Nair, 2002) ensures that the "art of scandal" is transformed into a serious pedagogical tool, where the "knowing reader" (Boyde) is invited to judge the "Great Soul" (Mahatma Gandhi/Ganga-ji) and the "Pandit" (Nehru/Dhritarashtra) through the unforgiving lens of epic failure and historical decay (Rao). Ultimately, both Orwell and Tharoor prove that the *roman à clef* is an "institution" (Pavel, 2003) that preserves the "truth" of the human condition against the "ideological focus" of the present, ensuring that the "keys" to our collective past are never truly lost, but merely hidden in plain sight within the safety of fiction (S. Olsen).

5. Conclusion:

According to John Morley, "Literature means "consists of all the books – and they are not so many – where moral truth and human passion are touched with a certain largeness, severity, and attractiveness of form" (Kent). The comparative analysis of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* reveals that the *roman à clef* is far more than a stylistic curiosity; it is a sophisticated "genre function" that acts as a mechanical necessity for navigating the treacherous boundaries between documented fact and creative fiction. As an institutionalized literary kind, the "novel with a key" provides a social contract between the author and a "knowing reader," allowing for the circulation of cultural secrets and political critiques under a protective veil of artistic form. This structure is essential for bypassing the "regulative principles" of state censorship and historical hagiography, ensuring that the "art of scandal" can be negotiated without the immediate threat of legal repercussions like libel. In the Orwellian landscape, the *roman à clef* functions as a "documentary fiction" that strips historical figures of their human faces to expose the raw, skeletal mechanics of power. By mapping the Soviet Union's trajectory onto a farmstead, Orwell provides a taxonomical map of the evolution of state authority. The transition of the pigs from revolutionaries to oppressors, codified through the illegal amendment of the Seven Commandments, illustrates how language is weaponized to rewrite history in real-time. The chilling final revision—"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others"—serves as the ultimate linguistic "key" to the betrayal of the socialist dream. This mirrors the "Law of the Jungle" adopted during the Stalinist Great Purge, where the reader perceives a perverted shift from natural law (*jus naturale*) to a retributive law (*lex talionis*).

Similarly, Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* performs a dual generic feat by creating a "palimpsest" that maps the characters of the *Mahabharata* onto the architects of modern India. By framing the 1975 Emergency through the epic's structure, Tharoor elevates legal critique to a metaphysical level, utilizing "Dharma" (moral law) as a benchmark for post-colonial constitutionalism. The character of Priya Duryodhani (Indira Gandhi) becomes a symbol of *Adharma*—the zenith of state blindness and the violation of cosmic order. The suspension of civil liberties is profoundly reimagined as the "Cheer-Haran" (disrobing) of Draupadi, who represents Democracy itself. This "transcreation of reality" transforms the novel into a pedagogical tool, inviting the reader to judge historical figures through the unforgiving lens of epic failure and decay. Both authors demonstrate that genre is a "social institution" that shapes how a nation remembers and processes its collective trauma. Without these generic fundamentals, the distinctiveness of literary works as objects of interpretation would be lost. The *roman à clef* provides a "liberating reason" to discuss the structural rot of institutions rather than the mere superficialities of individuals, creating a buffer of "aesthetic distance" that forces the audience to engage with difficult truths. Whether through the "mask of the animal" in a European farm or the "divine archetypes" in an Indian palace, the genre allows for a specialized academic writing that reclaims the truth of history from state propaganda. Ultimately, the persistence of the *roman à clef* in these texts confirms that there has never been a literature without genres. These "systems of continual transformation" are essential for any society seeking to maintain its "crystal spirit" of dissent. By hiding historical reality in plain sight within the safety of fiction, Orwell and Tharoor ensure that the "keys" to our collective past are never truly lost. As long as political rhetoric maintains an "iron curtain" and nations exist in an "advanced state of decay," the *roman à clef* will remain a vital shield for the dissenter and a surgical scalpel for the historian.

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