

**Historiographic Metafiction
or
Lying with the Truth**

by

Barry S. Pomeroy

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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**I dedicate this work to those
(and they have been named)
that have upheld and supported and thus eased,
through this what has sometimes seemed
a lengthy way.
And as for the others who kept me on the run,
they have been mentioned also.**

Abstract

In this project I ground my reading of historiographic metafiction in a series of postmodern texts which work out of and subvert traditional notions of historical writing. I use Linda Hutcheon's construction of this postmodern genre to investigate the particular literary and historical strategies these texts use and abuse in order to write an alternative history. Beginning by reviewing the theory surrounding historical fiction as well as historiography, I investigate the specific textual strategies that historiographic genres—such as the postmodern novel, the Canadian long poem, the short story and to some extent, the film genre—use to present their self-reflexive interaction between history and fiction.

I open my discussion by analyzing those texts which both posit the necessity of history and investigate it as a verifiable discourse. I next discuss historical coding by looking at legitimizing historiographical strategies postmodern historical texts use: “found” texts, comic book covers and newspaper articles, the public archive and major players in historical events. Historiographic metafiction overturns these discourses by the use of anachronism and the deliberate falsification of an accepted historical version. I examine the gradually revealed multiple truth which is left to the reader's interpretation and the construction of history as myth, as well as the problematic narrative voices—such as the so-called

unreliable narrator and the use of the lyric “I” in the contemporary long poem. In some incarnations a historian figure directly criticizes/enacts how events become facts. Still other postmodern re-visionings of the historical past are politicized retellings which question the official historical version of particular historical events or people.

Arguing for the deliberately political and even polemical nature of historiographic metafiction, I focus upon these specific literary strategies in order to argue that historiographic metafiction uses these strategies in an attempt to recover, re-examine, mythologize and narrate the assorted discourses we call history. I argue that historiographic metafiction creates a previously nonexistent historical space which writes both people and events into a traditional history from which they have been deliberately—and with political motive—excluded.

I would like to thank each of my committee members for their guidance, assistance and contributions. Dr. David Arnason, who is one of those rare professors who has kept up with current trends in literary study and is therefore a godsend to the graduate student, Dr. Dennis Cooley for his devotion to careful reading, Dr. Dawn McCance for the usefulness of her written commentary, and Dr. John Moss, who brought a cultured dismay to a considerable task.

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Introduction ~ Historiographic Metafiction or, Lying with the Truth

*You may not be interested in history, but
History is interested in you.*

Leon Trotsky

Throughout his major work, Rudy Wiebe has been interested, almost preoccupied, with the origin of cultural predispositions toward actions or attitudes. Although his *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *The Scorched-Wood People* hint that these predispositions are rooted in cultural traditions or history,¹ it is *A Discovery of Strangers* that more explicitly states that history/story necessarily construct present notions of reality. By having Keskarrah (*Discovery's* meditative central character who observes white culture as an outsider) muse on what relationship a culture's story of origin (what we might call history) has to the driving forces of contemporaneous culture, Rudy Wiebe argues that the type of story which is accepted as truth informs a culture's relationship with the world:

“She [Eve] happens out of his rib while he's sleeping, but when he wakes up and there she is, his rib a woman out of his sleep, she doesn't help him at all, she eats this one berry . . . and then she gives it to him to eat and that makes everything in the world go completely crazy. . . . Aren't there plenty of smaller berries for the man to eat? . . .

The Whitemud story,” he says, “is not happy . . . Stories are like ropes, they pull you to incomprehensible places. . . . a story can tangle you up so badly you start to think different.” (124-7)

¹ *Big Bear's* oral culture and animistic outlook are contrasted with the white government's static prose and mechanistic and mercantile interactions with the natural world while *Scorched* has Riel—as both a representative of the Métis and a recorder of his people's history—place his people inside white historical tradition in order to write them into white existence.

Since white culture sees its symbolic origin in the tearing of a rib from Adam and the apple in terms of property, they see birth as a violent act and the world as a place in which your achievements are torn from another. Thomas King's writing of Eden in "One Good Story That One" similarly explains white consumerism, misogyny, and notions of property. King has his native storyteller compare white culture's acquisitiveness to the casual brutality of God's selfishness over apples and the garden. To this end, King compares his God to Harley James, a drunk white man who physically abuses his wife. Conceptualizations such as these, which question the link between cultural truth and cultural practice, inform not only Wiebe's *Big Bear*, *Scorched-Wood People*, and *Discovery*, but also, I would argue, lie at the heart of a genre of postmodern historical fiction that Linda Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction.

Hutcheon uses the term historiographic metafiction in order to make the idiosyncratic texts which both write history and attempt to foreground/problematize the implications of historical construction cohere in a manageable critical bundle. She theorizes that many postmodern texts, such as Wiebe's, "are intensely self-reflexive [and] also both re-introduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge ("Pastime," 285). Hutcheon distinguishes historiographic metafiction from uninformed historiography and unproblematic historical fiction by situating this postmodern genre as a writing of history which foregrounds the constructedness of its own enterprise. This kind of novel, she reminds us, "forces us to recall that history and fiction are themselves historical terms and their definitions and interrelations are historically

determined and vary with time” (Ibid. 286). Jorge Luis Borges’ “Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” provides a useful model of the implications of historical textual control and the impossibility of verifying history. In this text, a secret society’s falsified encyclopaedia of a non-existent world (*First Encyclopaedia of Tlōn*) gradually begins to overtake the ‘real’ version. This “entirely hypothetical world [which] describes a coherent alternative to this world complete in every aspect from its algebra to its fire” is a version, the reader inevitably realizes, that exists only in the textualized past (Currie 166). Although traditional history codes its narrative as truth by inscribing itself into a scientific data-examining discourse, it is a methodology (and this drastically undermines its claim of empirical validity) which paradoxically relies upon the problematic textual citation of “memories, reports, published writings, archives, [and] monuments” (LaCapra 128). A close examination of history’s source in text² uncovers this discourse’s suspect ideological transformation of interpreted events into verifiable ‘facts’: “historiography and fiction . . . *constitute* their objects of attention; in other words, they decide which events become facts” (Hutcheon, “Past Time” 71). Historiographic metafiction disrupts the truth/falsity³ binary which occupies so much of traditional historiography (by employing postmodernism’s multiple ‘truth’ and a semiotic conceptualization of relative value ideologically assigned by the historically specific cultural moment), as well as attempts to constitute the historical past. Historiographic metafiction acknowledges and attempts to appropriate the political force that coding gives traditional

² .” . . language itself is so unstable, so capable of distortion, that history itself, when the medium is language, is untrustworthy” (Rose, “Hawthorne’s” 291).

³ A presumption which arises out of the “assumption that fiction is an antonym of reality” (Iser, *Act of Reading* 53).

historical technique. By citing periodic literature, archives, government documents, and the cohesive and consistently referring diary, the historical text (such as Kogawa's *Obasan* and Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*) deliberately inscribes itself into pre-existent cultural structures in order to draw attention to the textual and fictional status of all historical 'truths'.

Playful and *writerly* texts, historiographic metafiction work to foreground biased textual implications by exposing the inherently ideological and arbitrary nature of historiographic codes. Historiographic metafiction is, however, paradoxically reliant upon the codes that history and fiction share, such as the unidentifiable voice implied by historical objectivity (the omniscient narrator), the causal linking of otherwise random events (plot), the use of textual artifacts in an attempt to mimic as well as question historical verifiability (Realism's detail) and the use of temporal markers in order to position the speaker. Historiographic metafiction works within these codes to both present and deflate the ideology they support.

The intersection of history and literature that historiographic metafiction implies, I would argue, is a singular contribution to an effort to politicize and problematize our interpretations of the textual past. Arising out of the analysis of theorists like Hayden White and Michel Foucault, this questioning of the nature and influence of history enables, by using fiction, both a self-reflexive re-examination of historical tenets as well as a playful reconstruction of alternative historical versions which the official version has deliberately forgotten.

Hutcheon's formulation of historiographic metafiction is her effort to come to terms with these seriously playful literary constructions. As I imply above, however, her

conceptualization is not without its historical antecedents. Examinations of the genre of historical fiction have influenced and continue to inform Hutcheon's enterprise. Such theoretical formulations as Lukács' notion of the protagonist as type and focus upon the historicity of the historical novel, David Cowart's four types of postmodern historical novels, and Brian McHale's examination of ontological boundaries, as well as the historical theory offered by such texts as R. G. Collingwood's *The Idea of History* and Hayden White's writing of narrative as a historiographic/literary meta-code are the foundation of Hutcheon's theorizing. By investigating these critical formulations as well as closely examining Hutcheon's own analysis of historiographic metafiction, and framing my analysis by a detailed look at the specific literary strategies historiographic metafictional texts employ, I hope to make decisive statements about the effect and the machinery of historiographic metafiction's literary strategies, as well as examine the purpose such textual choices imply.

Historically-Grounded Historiographic Metafiction

The disciplines of history and literature have, like many other fields of critical inquiry, since the advent of Saussurian and Peircian semiotics, been re-evaluating the premises of their enterprise. The threadbare 'truth' offered by linguistics, that language, the basis of our only knowable reality, is founded upon an arbitrary and essentially meaningless relationship between the signifier and the signified, has caused both fields to examine anew the textual coding that historical and literary texts employ.

Writing after one of the momentous historical events of our century, the apocalyptic years of World War I, the philosopher/historian R. G. Collingwood roots his genealogical study of historiography in the ancient debate between Herodotus (who is interested more in a history of events) and Thucydides (who analysed the laws which order these events)⁴ in an attempt to describe a development of historiography. Following the evolution of historical writing (by use of an unproblematic progress narrative), Collingwood's study traces historiography from the multiple narrative of Herodotus to Livy, to the Renaissance and Enlightenment historiographers, and the "single history" of Hegel and Marx (123). Collingwood does not merely catalogue the change in the philosophical underpinnings of historiography, however. Instead of merely working within what he condescendingly defines as a "common-sense theory" of historiography,⁵ he challenges and problematizes the premises of each historiographical system (234). Collingwood begins an investigation of history's problematic faith in its own veracity by citing examples such as Kant's claim that history uses "the language of metaphor," and

⁴ While this debate between Herodotus, whose "work is at pains, at every point in the presentation of his narrative, to preserve the traces of his process of enquiry . . . [by] incorporat[ing] indications of its own limitations as 'truth-telling,'" and Thucydides, who "systematically covers the traces of his own investigations and presents the reader instead with narrative as a transparent medium for incorporating the events of the past 'as they happened'" is useful rhetorically, it is worth remembering that recent scholarship questions its validity (Gould 110-1). See Sir John Arthur Evans' "Father of History or Father of Lies, the Reputation of Herodotus" and Mabel Lang's *Herodotean Narrative and Discourse*.

⁵ "This doctrine implies that historical truth, so far as it is at all accessible to the historian, is accessible to him [her] only because it exists ready made in the ready-made statements of his [her] authorities. These statements are to him [her] a sacred text, whose value depends wholly on the unbrokenness of the tradition they represent. He [She] must therefore on no account tamper with them. He [She] must not mutilate them; he [she] must not add to them; and, above all, he [she] must not contradict them. . . . For him [her], on the theory, what his [her] authorities tell him [her] is the truth, the whole accessible truth, and nothing but the truth" (235).

Wilhelm Dilthey's question of "how the historian actually performs the work of coming to know the past, starting as he does simply from documents and data which do not by themselves reveal it" (95 and 172). Far from offering such pleasing narratives as Benedetto Croce's dictum of art, which paraphrases Aristotle,⁶ "art in general, in the wide sense, represents or narrates the possible; history represents or narrates that which really happened," Collingwood compares the similarities of historians and the novelist (192):

Each of them makes it his [her] business to construct a picture which is partly a narrative of events, partly a description of situations, exhibition of motives, analysis of characters. Each aims at making his [her] picture a coherent whole, where every character and every situation is so bound up with the rest that this character in this situation cannot but act this way, and we cannot imagine him [her] as acting otherwise. The novel and the history must make sense; nothing is admissible in either except what is necessary and the judge of this necessity is in both cases the imagination. Both the novel and history are self-explanatory, self-justifying, the product of an autonomous or self-authorizing activity; and in both cases this activity is the *a priori* imagination. (245-6)

This way of understanding history (similar to the thrust of Hayden White's notion of narrativization many years later) stresses the importance of what Collingwood calls the constructive imagination (which he sees as a Kantian *a priori* structure) which orders the otherwise random facts that make up historical events. As Nietzsche suggests, "there are no facts in themselves, for a fact to exist, we must first introduce meaning" (in Barthes "Historical Discourse" 153). By use of "interpolation," Collingwood argues, the historian,

⁶ ". . . it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen . . . the poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. . . . The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen" (Aristotle's *Poetics* in Fleishman 7).

like Iser's reader, "concretizes"⁷ the gaps between historical events and thus makes the narrative "without which we would have no history at all" (241).

It is worthwhile here to follow the implications that Iser's model has for Collingwood's notion of the constructive imagination. For the reader/historian to fully actualize the historical text, this 'concretization' must eliminate textual 'indeterminacy' and permit the consistency building which is essential for meaning-making. The reader/historian does this by filling in gaps, occupying vacancies, connecting segments, and negating the given according to textually encoded instructions which can be culturally agreed upon. Textual indeterminacies spur the historian to abolish them, to 'normalize' them into some firm structure of sense. Iser's reader seeks to reduce the polysemic quality of the text by basing the intentional object's simulation (which we may think of as the historical text) upon the 'determinantness' of 'real' objects. Collingwood does not carry his understanding of the historian's process of narrativization to Iser's logical conclusion. He does allow, however, what he calls the "critical historian" to tamper, presumably in a responsible fashion, with facts in that s/he selects what s/he thinks are important and to omit what does not add to narrative understanding or what they read as being due to "misinformation" (245).

Before he is drawn into making even more daring statements about historical truth, however, Collingwood lapses into an implicit positive empiricist faith that facts are knowable. His historian organizes, for the sake of comprehension, the facts in accordance

⁷ Iser's reader uses a textual framework or 'schemata' as basic directions to fill or 'actualize' the gaps or 'places of indeterminacy' in the text, thus creating a coherent and unified understanding (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 77). See Wolfgang Iser's "Interaction between Text and Reader" and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*.

to well known and understandable narratives. The similarity of the historian's action to the manipulation of detail by the novelist is inescapable, however:

Where they do differ is that the historian's picture is meant to be true. The novelist has a single task only: to construct a coherent picture, one that makes sense. The historian has a double task: he has both to do this, and to construct a picture of things as they really were and of events as they really happened. (245-6).

Collingwood distinction between the novelist and the historian is one that later theorists would not make. He claims that in this procedure of "scissors and paste," the historian must take into account evidence or detail about which the novelist does not have to worry (281). For Collingwood's historian picks and chooses from the evidence, or the contingencies of events, in order to incorporate those elements which make the most sense in terms of his/her project. So both historian and novelist are subject to the demands of narrative, Collingwood would argue, but the historian must write coherent narrative around unavoidable historical details while the novelist is subject to the demands of narrative only.⁸ Collingwood further shores up this narrative hole in scientific history's defence by presenting three rules which guide the historian's craft and to which, he would claim, the novelist is not subject. The historian's image of the past "must be localized in space and time," "history must be consistent with itself" and "the historian's picture stands

⁸ In fact, it would be thirty years before another historian/philosopher, W. B. Gallie would venture exactly the opposite opinion: "Ultimately the historian draws or receives his material from the memories, stories and legends and records of the people or civilization from which he is writing his history. Similarly, to be sure, a novelist or poet may receive his [her] materials from national or personal memory or myth or record. But the novelist or poet will not attempt to improve upon his [her] received material in the way that the historian does, viz. by deriving from them a truer or intellectually more acceptable version of some part or aspect of the human past" (in Fleishman 10).

in a peculiar relation to something called evidence” (246). Collingwood’s novelist, presumably, is subject to nothing except the roving of his/her constructive imagination.

While Collingwood’s analysis might seem to end up in an excessively simplistic comprehension of history and narrative, his three rules are a useful summary of traditional historiographical expectations against and within which historiographic metafiction works. For example, the obsession that Elsa Morante’s *History, a Novel* has with dates and historical fact foregrounds how little traditional or official history tells of the bulk of history’s story (a bulk foregrounded for the reader by the time spent following the travails of one family during the war). Likewise, history’s inability to be consistent with even its own report is foregrounded by both Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* and John Fowles’ *A Maggot*. Both texts posit a problematic investigative narrator who uncovers endless discourse instead of an eventual truth. Collingwood’s “peculiar” relationship between the historiographical text and evidence is similarly flaunted by Daphne Marlatt’s *Ana Historic* in which Ana’s recovery from the forgetful chauvinistic historical record is almost total. *Ana Historic* foregrounds the minimal presence of women in official record in order to work against history’s ideologically created silence. Citing the brief entrance of a woman into Vancouver’s public record, Marlatt writes history’s unsaid: “by 1873 she is there, named in the pages of history as ‘Mrs. Richards, a young and pretty widow’ who fills the suddenly vacated post of school teacher” (21). Deliberately foregrounding *Mrs. Richards*’ lack of name, as well as definitions of self by other, Marlatt’s text does not attempt to mine official documents in order to construct a past, but rather reveals the absence which is woman in traditional historiography by self-consciously creating both name and life for this unsung

woman. Postmodern historiographic metafiction works within, by either tacitly accepting or self-reflexively undermining, these historiographical conventions in order to foreground the constructed nature of the conventions themselves as ontological objects of inquiry.

In “Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument” Louis Mink picks up on Collingwood’s comparison between fiction and history. He argues that narrative is “a primary and irreducible form of human comprehension” used by history as a transparent entity to organize historical truth (186). He claims that common-sense historiography, like that which Collingwood defines, works out of presuppositions from Universal History which presume that history relates an actual story. Mink questions the naturalized nature of these presuppositions by asking, and here he quotes Kant, how we discover, in the plethora of detail, “a single central subject or theme in the unfolding of the plot of history” (190). He asks how it is, in both fiction and history, that narrative detects the ‘evidence’ in its selection of events. Taking this analysis one step further, Mink also questions the seeming consensus which defines the historical event. He suggests that narrative organizes its selection of events, and that an event is an abstraction from narrative. Mink contrasts the faith of an objective history that presupposes “that past actuality is an untold story and that there is a right way to tell it,” with the “conceptual discomfort” history experiences when it encounters alternative versions (a discomfort history ignores by its facile categorization of subjective and objective truth) (196). This discomfort, he assures us, is not shared by fiction. Although Mink’s more esoteric questioning of historical events and Hegelian themes are not themselves useful to this study, his general arguments do build upon Collingwood’s discussion by further defining the narrative basis of historical truth

and by problematizing the machinery behind the selection of evidence. They point to a more global historical questioning which is not undermined by an attachment to positive empiricism.

Hayden White's examination of history similarly questions the epistemological status of historical knowledge and the role of narrative in historical presentation. He argues that "history remains in the state of conceptual anarchy," that narrative is a meta-code which informs both fiction and historiography, and that the historical text shares many of its codes with the literary artifact (*Metahistory* 13). Citing Lévi-Strauss, White agrees with arguments like Mink's by positing "the centrality of narrativity to the production of cultural life in all its forms" ("Question" 112). He claims that historians select and organize historical information in specific patterns in order to make their rendering more understandable to "an audience of a particular kind" and insists that the idea that you have found coherence in the historical record implies a desire for a kind of formal coherence. (*Metahistory*, 5). By ignoring the performative nature of narrative, traditional historiography leaves out the basis of what transforms mere chronicle to narrative historiography:

. . . in this process of literalization, what gets left out is precisely those elements of figuration, tropes and figures of thought, as the rhetoricians call them, without which the narrativization of real events, the transformation of chronicle into a story, could never be effected. . . . To leave this figurative element out of consideration in the analysis of a narrative is not only to miss its aspect as allegory; it is also to miss the performance in language by which a chronicle is transformed in a narrative. ("Question" 125)

Historians find data, organize, and construct it along the narrative lines of what White calls emplotment: “Providing the ‘meaning’ of a story by identifying the *kind of story* that has been told is called explanation by emplotment” (*Metahistory* 7):

Histories . . . combine a certain amount of “data,” theoretical concepts for “explaining” these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past. In addition, I maintain, they contain a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic, in nature, and which serves as the precritically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively “historical” explanation should be. (*Metahistory* ix)

White uses Northrop Frye’s four archetypal categories of plot to argue that history is cast in particular literary modes. This “essentially *poetic* act” is one in which the historian “*prefigures* the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which he will bring to bear the specific theories he [she] will use to explain ‘what was *really* happening’ in it” (*Metahistory* x). In White’s Romance, the hero overcomes his/her world; in his Satire, the audience is a victim of the fates; Comedy allows its characters a temporary triumph; and Tragedy allows the audience to gain consciousness. Both the novelist and the historian share this emplotment of subject matter, its strategies of exclusion, and demand for emphasis. White says that the plausibility of history is dependent on the historian’s skill in matching up a set plot structure with a series of facts rather than the coherence the facts themselves possess.

Both for history and fiction, facts are constituted by the questions we ask, and are carved up and selected always by a manifest aim or latent motive (*Tropics* 43). White would disagree with the freedom that Collingwood allows his *a priori* “constructive

imagination.”⁹ He would instead argue that this imagination is bound and ordered in accordance to the rules of narrative, even as it is subject to the subjectivity of the particular historian and the “irreducible ideological component in every historical account of reality” (*Metahistory* 21).

Michel Foucault, whose paradigm has politicized and historicized the notions of the discursive text in such provocative and politically meaningful ways, also describes the ideological power of language and knowledge in society: “Foucault is seen as providing a call to or model for historical and political criticism that would relate texts to historically-defined forces” (Culler, *Framing* 62). Foucault’s methodology, by refusing to accept traditional distinctions between literature and non-literature, subverts notions of literature’s distinctive qualities by calling for a literary criticism which is aware of both history and literature’s provisional and changing character. Foucault’s heavily problematized notion of an author function as a guarantor of meaning,¹⁰ can only work (that is make meaning) within societal conventions: “. . . he [she] can only write poetry, or history, or criticism only within the context of a system of enabling conventions which constitute and delimit the varieties of discourse” (Ibid. 30).

⁹ “. . . the phrase historical imagination not only contains a contradiction in terms, it constitutes the fundamental barrier to any attempt by men [women] in the present to close realistically with the most pressing spiritual problems” (*Tropics* 39).

¹⁰ “The author is not an indefinite source of significations which precede the works, he [she] is a certain principle by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction . . . The author is . . . the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning” (Foucault, “What is an Author?” 32).

Foucault claims that institutions construct themselves through discursive practices by building the rules and systems that make possible certain structures and significations, and thus enabling certain types of knowledge. Utilizing a concept of the 'episteme,' the epistemological paradigm governing what it is that is considered truth or knowledge at a given time, this methodology argues both that "reality is socially constructed" and that a combination of discourses, assumptions and values distinguish historical power (Wuthnow 133). Foucault's "Excerpts from *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*" envisions power as a site, upon which numerous discourses (not through reasoned action but rather a strategical sense) sort through a dynamic equilibrium of power relations. Different forms of discourse are regulated by an array of institutional constraints, and the links between power and knowledge characterize the 'disciplinary' character of all modern political organizations and institutional practices. Institutions such as Law join in the production of knowledge of a particular field to exercise power in society as a whole. As social relationships change, however, power constantly renews itself through the discourse of truth:

There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 93)

The notion of hierarchical power has little to do with Foucault's model. He postulates a network of relationships which ties ruler and ruled together, for there is no exterior of power. Operating in a vast web of specific conflicts, power regulates the language and comprehension of the speaker's self. Foucault's genealogical interpretation examines how we place our subjectivity in relation to knowledge and how we place the power relations of our subjectivity

in relation to the general field of power (through which we constitute ourselves). This placement of the text and subject in history is not a conventional understanding of history, however:

Foucault performs the same *renversement* in relation to the accepted modes of historical analysis: those which describe history in terms of continuities, like tradition, influence or the genetic origin and development of phenomena, and those which describe it in terms of continuous teleologies like evolution or the progress of man [humanity] towards some future golden age; those which give history an anthropological subject, describing it in terms of human intentionality Foucault treats history as a series of specific and concrete but changing events which occur by chance and exist with their own interrelationships. (Bannet 102)

This theoretical stance approaches history by foregrounding the way in which both the production and consumption of the historical text take place within a restrictive discourse.

The implications this linguistic analysis of power has for the subject in history are far-ranging. In an examination of the prison system, for example, Foucault proposes in “Discipline and Punish” that power reaches past the limits of law and repression to actually produce the individual as a subject in, as well as subject to, the disciplinary mechanisms of the state. Problematizing notions of individual specificity and unity, and positioning him/her in language as “reduced . . . to a grammatical function,” Foucault’s paradigm

demonstrates how . . . man himself [humanity] becomes an irrationality in a special sense, a structure that dramatizes the normally unthinkable relationship between the diversities of knowledge. No longer a coherent *cogito*, man [humanity] now inhabits the interstices, “the vacant interstellar spaces,” not as an object, still less as a subject; rather man [humanity] is the *structure*, or the generality of relationships between those words and ideas we call the human (Said, “ABECEDARIUM” 350, 348)

By positioning the subject within the interstices of text (an argument which inevitably foregrounds the socially valorized discourse of historical text), Foucault's notion of historical power is much more extreme than White's. Foucault's reasoning directly combats White's vague statements concerning ideological constructions of the state by investigating this conjunction of textual historical truth and power. Foucault's concepts not only empower historical truth but point out the ways in which discourses such as historiographic metafiction overturn that truth. Read through Foucault's theorizing, historiographic metafiction is (in Guattari and Deleuze's terms) a minor literature or an "unsaid" of historical practice, which works to subvert dominant historiographical assumptions and practice. For example, momentarily ignoring the more humorous Foucauldian implications a graduate dissertation imply, a Foucauldian reading of this project would problematize the narrative of influence which my argument, for the sake of a White-type coherence, creates. Using militaristic terms like "combat" and "overturns," my argument attempts to assert its truth value by reference to extant historiographical codes which valorize a narrative of progression.

This cursory examination of the knotty question of historical veracity positions the argument that informs the postmodern historical novel. Working out of a wish to re-examine and, in some cases, rationalize, the truth practice of their enterprise, modern historians (although typically much more concerned with literary technique) offer many valuable notions to literary theorists' investigation of fictional historical texts. Although the focus of these historians is principally to question the specific strategies narrative offers history and the types of narrative which history's rhetorical stances imply, as well as

how narrative not only delivers but constructs meaning, their theories were picked up by literary theorists with an entirely different agenda.

Building the Narrative of Historiographic Metafiction

A contemporary of Collingwood, Georg Lukács is the first theorist to seriously consider, both from a historical and literary position, the historical novel. Although predating White, and working out of a primarily Marxist cultural materialist aesthetic, Lukács also argues that history is a set of meaningless facts about the past which the historian, in an effort to generate meaning, wraps in narrative. In his analysis of textual historicity, Lukács claims that novels are historical if they deliver a sense to the reader that history impacts upon the present and if the author is informed by his/her own historical time. The historicity of the historical novel rests in the author's realization that his/her existence is historically conditioned, and his/her vision that history is something that deeply affects his/her everyday life: the author's discovery "on an aesthetic level that history is a process in which the past acts as the necessary precondition for the present" (Shaw 27). The author must create a sense of

a felt relationship to the present [by] bringing the past to life as the prehistory of the present, in giving poetic life to those historical, social and human forces which, in the course of a long evolution, have made our present-day life what it is and as we experience it. (Lukács 53)

Since the historical novel does not worry about historical faithfulness in the same sense as history, its only purpose is to deliver what Lukács calls historical faithfulness: it

must render with accuracy the past. To do this, however, the novel must deliver more than just the trappings of history. Traditional history's use of markers like dates and historical personages (we may also include the historical novel's use of realistic detail) gives its account a patina of veracity (what Barthes calls the reality effect) and hides the seams which expose it as artifact. The historical novel enacts the historical process by presenting a microcosm which generalizes and concentrates "the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age" (Lukács 19).

Lukács locates this use of historicity as originating in the specific techniques used by Scott (although this was more in relation to Scott's particular historical time, after the French Revolution, rather than to the writer's particular genius) (Lukács 73). Scott's "great art consists precisely in individualizing his historical heroes in such a way that certain, purely individual traits of character, quite peculiar to them, are brought into a very complex, very live relationship with the age in which they live, with the movement which they represent and endeavor to lead to victory" (47):

History for Scott means in a very primary and direct way: the fortunes of the people. His first concern is the life of the people in a given historical period; only then does he embody a popular destiny in an historical figure and show how such events are connected with the problems of the present. The process is an organic one. He writes *from* the people, not *for* the people; he writes from their experiences, from their soul. (283)

Scott's enlivening of characters in a historical way works almost allegorically; for his principle characters, subject to what Harry Shaw calls "Lukácsian typicality," are heroes of the average (101): "The typical man of an age is one whose life is shaped by world

historical figures and other influences in a way that epitomizes the processes of change going forward in the society as a whole” (Fleishman 11). The protagonist is a type, a kind of everyperson, who stands in the place of the individual, or more generally, the culture of a particular and concrete historical period: “‘typical’ characters who concentrate within themselves all levels of human existence” (Shaw 33).¹¹ Although Scott usually relegates historical personages to secondary roles in his novels, when his narrative does focus upon them, they become representative historical periods or movements. In his prefaces for the Waverley novels, Scott ventures a description of his construction of character which agrees with Lukács’:

Considering the disadvantages inseparable from this part of my subject, I must be understood to have resolved to avoid them as much as possible, by throwing the force of my narrative upon the characters and passions of the actors;—those passions common to men [people] in all stages of society, and which have alike agitated the human heart . . . Some favorable opportunities of contrast have been afforded me by the state of society in the northern part of the island at the period of my history, and may serve at once to vary and to illustrate the moral lessons, which I would willingly consider as the most important part of my plan . . . (Scott 10)

The bulk of Lukács’ analysis of textual historicity consists of this interpretation of typical characters and a novel’s evocation of a particular historical period. The levelling nature of his Marxist aesthetic (that the particular text must have a generalized relevance for both its audience and its subject matter, and a sense of the author’s ethical responsibility), is a theoretical predilection that does not speak to postmodern technique,

¹¹ It is worth noting that Lukács claims that Balzac as well writes out of a sense of historicity. Also evocative of a historical period, Balzac, however, uses exaggerations of characters to foreground the fundamental conflicts in a particular historical time.

however. Lukács' theory does not explain the postmodern function of eccentric character types in postmodern historical fiction or historiographic metafiction's construction of 'false' histories. Nevertheless, Lukács' valorization of historical novels begins the analysis of the historical novel and sets the tone for later work.

Working largely out of a New Critical theoretical position, later theorists usually began with Lukács' definitions of novelistic historicity. Until the advent of the postmodern historical novel, the study of the historical novel advanced very little. Avrom Fleishman, in his survey of the English historical novel from Scott to Conrad, foregrounds this lack of advancement by his very inauspicious definition of the genre:

. . . most novels set in the past—beyond an arbitrary number of years, say 40-60 (two generations)—are liable to be considered historical. . . . Regarding substance . . . the plot must include a number of "historical" events, particularly those in the public sphere (war, politics, economic change, etc.), mingled with and affecting the personal fortunes of the characters. . . . when the novel's characters live in the same world with historical persons, we have a historical novel (3-4).

Fleishman demands that the historical novel be "an imaginative portrayal of history, that is, of past states of affairs affecting human experience. The historical novelist provokes or conveys, by imaginative sympathy, the *sentiment de l'existence*, the feeling of how it was to be alive in another age" (4). The similarity between Fleishman's and Lukács' analysis leads inevitably to the same conclusion: "What makes the historical novel historical is the active presence of a concept of history as a shaping force—acting not only upon the characters in the novel but on the author and readers outside it" (15).

Shaw's analysis is not much more illuminating:

Though many kinds of novels may incorporate a sense of history, in historical novels history is, as the Russian Formalists would put it,

“foregrounded.” . . . their events, characters, settings, and language to be historical in one or both of two ways. They may represent societies, modes of speech, or events that in very fact existed in the past, in which case their probability points outward from the work to the world it represents; or they may promote some sort of historical effect within the work, such as providing an entry for the reader into the past. (21)

Arising out of these different formulations of the historical novel, Linda Hutcheon’s examination of historiographic metafiction is at once more broad-ranging and more vague. Her construction of historiographic metafiction is in many ways a synthesis of the debate between history and fiction that I have outlined above. Her argument touts the subversion of a traditional faith in historical veracity, but does not closely examine, like David Cowart’s study, specific texts in an effort to make sense of historiographic metafiction’s subversion. As well, as I have implied above, the historiographic poetic text is, in Hutcheon’s, as well as other studies of the postmodern historical novel, notable by its absence. The contemporary Canadian historical long poem, although seemingly limited to few texts, provides many examples of works which, in Brian McHale’s terms, rewrite and question the ontological past as well as provide a rewriting of the provisionality of first-person narration in the historiographical text. In my study I will attempt to broaden this approach as well to close the artificial gap between the theoretical text and the novel. Although theorists such as Hutcheon and McHale argue that historiographic metafiction works through, and out of, the same critical surround as that of theory, they nonetheless preserve an artificial boundary between disciplines. I would overturn that unexamined presupposition by using historiographic metafiction to read theory every bit as much as theory reads fiction.

Like White, Hutcheon would claim that history's inability to verify its claim of objective interpretation, coupled with the recognition of history's dependence upon a narrative means of representation (which severs its desired link with the hard sciences), frees history from the singular narrative. By questioning dominant discourse, modern historiography undermines the unconvincing claim of objective representation and enables the construction of alternative narratives. The indeterminacy which alternative or multiple histories represent helps to create the site upon which the cross-pollination between history and fiction (historiographic metafiction) occurs.

The multiple narrative which is liberated by this multivocal voice foregrounds the ideological implications behind truth production and political practice by working against the singular history: Hegelian and Marxist views of history as they are taught in the established education system (Collingwood 123). David Cowart would also argue (comparably to Lukács' sense of authorial ethical responsibility), that the postmodern historical novel's questioning of history arises out of a contemporaneous apocalyptic feeling:

. . . only since 1945 have we known precisely the shape that apocalypse would take. We look to history now to provide clues for understanding, gauging, addressing the more absolute instability of our nuclear present. . . . a number of these artists . . . define their enterprise as genuinely crucial to the continued viability of the present. (29-30)

He divides the historical novel into four categories: the novel which examines "what was" (constructions of the past which he would identify as Barth's *Sot Weed Factor*), and what "will be" (constructions of possible futures based on the past such as Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*). Cowart also examines "turning point" novels (texts which try to examine and locate particular times in which the change happened, renaissance novels,

such as Coover's *Public Burning*), as well as texts which "mirror the past" such as Eco's *Name of the Rose* (which take our present and project it into the past). Undermining the hold that dominant discourse has upon historical representation, historiographic metafiction's polyphonic voice compares its alternative reading(s) of history to the official version offered by the politically sanctioned document. As a discussion which theorizes about repressed or ignored history, historiographic metafiction foregrounds its awareness of the arbitrary nature of its own narrative choice, and, by association, all historical selection of narrative.

Brian McHale claims that the traditional historical novel can only go so far in its violation of ontological boundaries and reader credulity. He argues that the modern historical novel involves a violation of ontological boundaries, in which familiar facts are contradicted, and textual techniques are foregrounded in order to show the seams of the device. Using the term "realemes" in order to describe the repertoires of traditional historical fiction, McHale accuses traditional historical novels of having a set repertoire. They do not contradict the official record (thus fulfilling Collingwood's third criteria of the historical novel) and only embellish the known story or manipulate the historical narrative by using "dark areas," or what is not known or recorded in the official record (which is mainly limited to the internal life of a novelist's characters). Traditional historical fiction also does not contradict the cultural norms of its period. And so, working within the constructions of Realism, the traditional historical novel's created cultural *Weltanschauung* cannot challenge that of the 'real' world. This constraint avoids either the intellectual anachronism which we see at work in Eco's *Name of the Rose*—so that William speaks like Wittgenstein and Fowles' French Lieutenant's Woman acts and thinks

like a Twentieth-century woman—or those of the fantastic, like the midnight children of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* who are gifted with magical powers. The postmodern historical novel, McHale tells us, also chafes under the restriction of remaining within the logic or physics of 'reality': "historical fictions must be *realistic* fictions; a fantastic historical fiction is an anomaly" (88).

McHale argues that postmodern historiographic metafiction works within and against these constraints in order to parody classical historical fiction:

Post-modernist fiction, by contrast, seeks to foreground this seam [between historical reality and fiction] by making the transition from one realm to the other as jarring as possible. This it does by violating the constraints on "classic" historical fiction: by visibly contradicting the public record of "official" history; by flaunting anachronisms; and by integrating history and the fantastic. Apocryphal history, creative anachronism, historical fantasy—these are the typical strategies of the post-modernist revisionist historical novel. (90)

Historiographic metafiction violates the "dark areas" in order to give an alternative version which not only questions the original or accepted version but also causes a questioning of the official version. This "creative anachronism" is the insertion into the historical past of technological devices of our present which work to flout the ontological security of the realistic novel. Historiographic metafiction's creative anachronism uses both technology and beliefs, knowledge and attitudes from the present in the novelistic past, in order to foreground for the reader their seduction into the narrative. By blatantly repudiating the official version, the postmodern historical novel offers an apocryphal history that causes a sort of ontological flicker and, McHale claims, transgresses this boundary "between the real and the fictional" (90).

Historiographic metafiction is not a discourse which merely myopically examines its own practice, but rather one which uses these pre-existent powerful historical and political codes to foreground contemporary ideological practice. By politicizing the process of selection and interpretation of evidence and examining the ideological practice which would construct events in discourse as ‘facts,’ this genre foregrounds the inability to validate any truth claim and, more significantly, “question[s] whose truth gets told” (Hutcheon, “Past Time” 71). By arguing that “every representation has specifiable ideological implications,” historiographic metafiction’s examination of political hegemony inevitably politicizes its discourse and provides an alternative voice for the marginalized group which (in Guattari and Deleuze’s terms) is inscribed into majority culture (White, *Tropics* 69). This reading of the historical past as purposely constituted and ideologically controlled situates history within the discourse of power relations:

Historiographic metafiction shows fiction to be historically conditioned and history to be discursively structured, and in the process manages to broaden the debate about the ideological implications of the Foucauldian conjunction of power and knowledge—for readers and for history itself as a discipline. (Hutcheon, “Past Time” 68)

Historiographic metafiction ironically examines the ideology inherent in the interpretation of ‘evidence’ by employing the “paratextual conventions of historiography”: the archive and other textual sources such as newspapers (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 123). This is brilliantly illuminated by the closing section of Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale*, in which academic ‘authorities’ debate the validity of Offred’s experience. Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* similarly places the historical document at the mercy of its interpreter. Historiographic

metafiction's paradoxical dependence upon and ability to utilize that which it contests enables the narrative to use its position within historical discourse to access the reader's notion of 'valid' history, what Hutcheon calls "the stories of kings, wars, and ministerial intrigues," in order to present a minor history ("Postmodern Problematizing" 373). As Atwood's text asserts, dominant history's interpretation of textual sources commonly ignores, or at best transforms and sanitizes, marginal history. But in novels like *Big Bear* and *Scorched-Wood People*, Wiebe foregrounds and utilizes traditional history's focus on war, victory,¹² and the central character (whose relation to reigning political and ethical values is suspect) in order to relate an officially silenced and ignored story. Texts like Winterson's *The Passion* exploit traditional historical codes in order to explore a history suppressed by that same historiography. For instance, Winterson makes a leading character of *The Passion* a peasant soldier/cook in Napoleon's army who reports and comments upon that war without vested interest (instead of the more conventional choice of Napoleon). Texts like Kogawa's *Obasan* link this textual coding to an agreed-upon historical event (the "final solution to the Japanese problem") in order to encourage a reader's comparison of official history and *Obasan's* alternative (Kogawa, "Japanese Canadian Dilemma" 55).

McHale claims that the postmodern historical novel is revisionist in two ways. It not only revises the historical record (by either supplanting or displacing), and transforms the set repertoire of fiction, but, more significantly for historiography itself, it attempts to "redress the balance of the historical record by writing histories of the excluded, those relegated permanently to history's dark areas" (McHale 90).

¹² The cliché that history is written by the victorious betrays public acknowledgment of political practice.

Historiographic metafiction is a theoretical position which engages the text with its political surround by rejecting the traditional dislocation of the text with the world. This genre also deliberately rejects (and this is overwhelmingly visible in Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Kingston's *China Men*, Kogawa's *Obasan*, Marlatt's *Ana Historic* and Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *The Scorched-Wood People*) a history which allows dominant cultural practice to remain in power.

If all historiographic metafiction offered was an alternative to dominant discourse (which contemporary historiography considers) but similarly inscribed within historical codes, its project would be of limited political power, however. The historiography of the Japanese Canadian's internment, for example, could have easily been produced by recourse to the vehicular archive material upon which *Obasan* is based,¹³ but such a production would neglect what its *metafictional* aspect brings to the inscription of a historical event. A writing of history which offers itself as an alternative, yet accepts and thereby tacitly supports the conventions of historical objectivity and representation, only undermines the validity of the choice it offers. The implications of historiography's alternative would remain hidden and rhetorically unsubstantiated by the use of such an incongruous textual form.

Historical construction is not a project which historiographic metafiction takes on without being self-reflexively aware of the ramifications; this genre potently questions historically coded narrative by marrying its self-referentiality to its notion of history as construct. Containing its own self-reflexive reference to narrative creation ("you can sift your memories . . . Come up with a single strand and call it truth" and "*You know you change the*

¹³ "Emily's letters of protest to the Canadian government are based in the real letters of Muriel Kitagawa, a Japanese Canadian activist" (Cheung 131, n6).

story’), postmodern novels such as Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms* deliberately foreground textual process at the expense of the traditional and ideological narrative control (93 and 220). This metafictional impulse informs history by problematizing historiographic metafiction’s textual construction.

Historiographic metafiction’s self-conscious violation of reader expectations (such as the use of conventional narrative as well as historical markers to deliberately install and undermine such structures as causal linkage, narrative continuity, cohesion, and most significantly, closure)¹⁴ encourages the reader to question the construction of historical truth.¹⁵ Historiographic metafiction uses codes which identify a text as historical discourse (such as Bowering’s use of the historical figure John A. MacDonald) only to undermine that fixity with a radical indeterminacy.¹⁶ This disruption of classical fiction’s mimetic impulse foregrounds the ideology inherent in any desire to transparently represent and interpret. Overt metafictionality works against *readerly* clarity to reveal a text’s (and by association, history’s) inability to check its own discourse against its non-existent and ideologically constructed referent or transcendental verisimilitude. Historiographic metafiction discusses the nature of fact and the transmission of fact, and discards the naive and transparent representation of truth. By installing and blurring the line between history and fiction, a distinction which is itself a historical construct, this postmodern genre questions the support such notions of clarity and truth gain

¹⁴ Because “end implies a structuring process that imparts meaning as well as order” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 62).

¹⁵ History “is a human activity that gains its meaning from its awareness of itself as a human construct” (Turner 96).

¹⁶ MacDonald and Evangeline (Longfellow’s character) engage in a lurid and historically impossible cross-country affair which emphasizes the blatant and deliberate fictionality of Bowering’s *A Short Sad Book*.

from active political and ideological sources. By re-introducing historical context into metafiction and problematizing the question of the construction of historical knowledge, historiographic metafiction problematizes story creation and challenges the ideology which allows vested interests to control story. Historiographic metafiction's *writerly* text undermines narrative and historical truth, resists the closed reading which is the 'objective' historical account, and allows the reader to evaluate the implications of the experience of truth creation.

This writing of history, which works within and subverts historiography by drawing attention to its use of historical code and technique, does not (as I imply above) become merely a writing exercise, however. By situating the alternative truth within the discourse of the major, by comparing the story of the peripheral to that of the centre, by writing the history which is suppressed by dominant discourse and problematizing that writing, historiographic metafiction politicizes both its entire enterprise and the writing of narrative in general. Naipaul's description of bribery and the government document in *The Bend in the River*, for instance, supports Hutcheon's theorizing by graphically depicting the shortcomings of text-based information sources:

There was a *ritual* I went through whenever I had to clear a difficult consignment through the customs. I filled in the declaration form, folded it over five hundred francs, and handed it to the official in charge. . . . Neither he nor I would refer to the bank notes. We would talk only about the details on the declaration form, which, correctly filled, correctly approved, would remain as proof of both of our correctness. Yet what had lain at the heart of the transaction would be passed over in silence, and would leave no trace in the records. (*Bend* 124) (my emphasis)

The "ritual . . . heart of the transaction," which is the bribe, and the unequal power relations between the two men which make both the bribe and its concealment necessary, leaves no

public and textually-accessible record. Salim's account of his bribe is not a mere addition to the recorded story, but is radically different in kind; the inclusion of this suppressed history requires a fundamental readjustment of the 'original' truth. The "correct" version, which is the government form, is deliberately folded over (in the sense of both concealing and encompassing) the insurgent text.

Although Salim's bribe is positioned as historically inaccessible (thereby symbolizing history's central weakness), the disclosure of the secret narrative which 'full' meaning requires is both recorded and divulged by the fictional apparatus. Ignoring for the moment the irony that my academic prose claims to discuss what the historical process cannot, what these examples do reveal is the capacity of fictional codes to express a discourse of 'truth' unavailable to historiography. Naipaul's text foregrounds history's inability to encompass, as well as fiction's own capacity to relate, what Hutcheon vaguely calls the "universal" meanings of "what could or might happen" (*Poetics* 106).

Naipaul's examination of the totalizing mandate and textual dependence of traditional history culminates in the desperate figure of Raymond. Raymond attempts to assimilate the information that history has sanctioned as legitimate (the newspaper and the archive), but cannot allow the 'real' story which is found in the unconfirmed opinion, emotive response, superstition, and symbolic value, to enter his work.¹⁷ Raymond's faith in the necessity of prose narrative's linkage and cohesion¹⁸ renders him incapable of dealing with the inevitable gaps in

¹⁷ It is worth noting that Raymond's connection to the Big Man, who attempts to establish himself as a transcendental signifier guaranteeing cultural meaning, gives Raymond ideological reasons to be historiographically conservative.

¹⁸ ". . . the most difficult thing in prose narrative is linking one thing with the other. The link might just be a sentence, or even a word. It sums up what has gone before and prepares one for what is to come" (*Bend* 136).

either the newspaper or archive's historical account. Incredulous at Raymond's naiveté, Salim tells us that "newspapers . . . left out a lot of important things—often essential things—that local people would know and gossip about" (*Bend* 181):

But Raymond wasn't interested in that side. He didn't give the impression that he had talked to any of the people involved, though many would have been alive when he wrote. He stuck with the newspapers; he seemed to want to show that he had read them all and had worked out the precise political shade to each. His subject was an event in Africa, but he might have been writing about Europe or a place he had never been. (*Ibid.*)

Raymond's obsessively 'fair' consideration of textual remains loses the indeterminate story capable of discussing the significance of the "African mystery" with the people of the culture (*Bend* 135). Salim metafictionally claims that even in his historyless family, indeterminate stories contain more meaning than Raymond's archive:

. . . among trading families like ours, there were still vague stories—so vague that they didn't feel real—of European priests buying slaves cheap from the caravans before they got to the depots on the coast. The Africans (and this was the point of the stories) had been scared out of their skins: they thought the missionaries were buying them in order to eat them. (*Ibid.*)

The "five minutes' talk with someone like Metty," which Salim suggests, would not alleviate Raymond's blindness, however, for it is integral to the historical project (*Ibid.* 182). The rich garden of fiction (to use Indar's figure) must be stamped out to give validity to the remaining meaningless, desiccated history (*Ibid.* 112-3). The narrative plenitude of oral culture's vibrant and evolving story and the open system of the *writerly* text is not a bare ground which encourages either the growth of a singular history or the homogenized orderliness of the Domain. Raymond's account neglects that because significance is created in reference to extant

human meaning instead of established institutional codes, it is subject to contingency and process. Raymond's limited historical analysis (which "gives no reason and looks for none") is incapable of integrating the "point" which gives the slave stories meaning, and which is central to Salim's 'vague' stories (*Bend* 182).

The historiographic metafictional project receives both its coding as secret and a story's cultural reference from the same fiction which gave a "point" to Metty's story about the revolution. This "fictive corporality" that the reader creates from the *writerly* narrative operates on an entirely different level of discourse than historical "abstractions" (Hutcheon, "Postmodern Problematizing" 368):

. . . literature is not a discourse that can or must be false . . . it is a discourse that, precisely, cannot be subjected to the test of truth; is neither true nor false, to raise this question has no meaning: this is what defines its very status as "fiction." (Todorov 18)

Even a theoretically involved and critically self-reflexive historiography¹⁹ written from different points of view which problematize their fact selection, collection and narrativization,²⁰ cannot replace this ability of the fictional narrative. Historiographic metafiction does not confirm the explanatory nature of either a master history, which is the majority history, or a problematizing of history which leads to a more clear, moral, historical construction. This postmodern genre rather nullifies traditional history's authenticity and leaves the self-conscious reader incorporated into and manipulated by codes which retain a contingent fictional and symbolic value. Rather than confirming a more complete and didactic truth in archive and story, historiographic metafiction questions all truth construction by engaging the reader in the

¹⁹ What LaCapra calls a "cognitively responsible historiography" (378).

²⁰ Admittedly, an impossibly perfect historiography.

creation of an alternative history out of the *writerly* text. This capacity of fiction to more than merely supplement, but rather to recreate historical narrative, is only cursorily dealt with by Hutcheon's theorizing, however. Placing a great deal of emphasis on a self-problematizing historiography, Hutcheon makes only oblique references to what benefit fiction brings to historiographic metafiction's political enterprise: "historiography and fiction are seen as sharing the same act of refiguration, of reshaping our experience of time through plot configurations; they are complementary activities" ("Postmodern Problematizing" 379). Hutcheon implies that fiction allows transfiguration of facts, but only within the discourse of historical code and the placement of the narrator.²¹ She foregrounds historiography's inability to relate the provisional cornucopia which is history's many alternatives, but neglects to specify fiction's singular ability to construct and rewrite the very historiography it presents.

Historiographic metafiction's advantage over even the most informed historiography, and perhaps Hutcheon's silence on this suggests the obvious nature of this observation, is its accompanying fiction. This involves not merely the relation of detail which simulates a reality (either Barthes' *readerliness* or Baudrillard's hyperreal)²² or an innocent reader identifying with a narrator, but is a history constructed from political, historical and narrative codes and emotional referents. These textual markers enable the reader's engagement with the text and encourage participation in historical construction by recourse to the seemingly extraneous material which history not only neglects, but fiction (significantly) codes as neglected. A

²¹ Historiographic metafiction's narrators intentionally contaminate "the historical with didactic and situational discursive statements: objectivity, neutrality, impersonality, and transparency of representation" (Hutcheon, "Postmodern Problematizing" 370).

²² Although Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* is a metafiction which openly theorizes by exposing the hyperreal.

problematizing of the process of construction, which Hutcheon describes at length, alerts the reader to the arbitrariness of narrative selection, the employment of narrative and historical coding, and the surety of textual construction. It is fiction, however, that allows a disclosure which positions itself as undisclosed, and therefore truthful. Historiographic metafiction is not the conflict between a truth and historical discourse that historiography imagines, but rather a distinction between a ‘revealed’ archive and a story which “enabl[es] conditions of possibility of sense-making” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 121).

The quintessentially historiographic metafictional text stands “at the intersection of history, politics, and literature” (Rose, “Politics into Art” 220). Its political nature exists in the tension between its use of the fictional code’s “lyric intensity” and its attempt to deliberately recover and renew the “documentary realism” of the vault, or archive (Brydon 466). This text inscribes itself into historical discourse, as well as problematizes and politicizes²³ its inclusion, by mimicking the historical artifact. It also uses fictional markers which both install and undermine its inscription into the discourse of truth. Historiographic metafiction demands that these two contemporaneous historiographies mutually support one another: the private, provisional and individual history which does not immobilize,²⁴ and the public ‘valid’ history of the document sanctioned by the ideological apparatus of traditional historiography.

²³ Rose suggests a postmodern “assumption that experiencing ‘real’ human suffering, even indirectly, as when human experience is enacted in language, will radicalize the . . . reader” (“Politics into Art” 216).

²⁴ “Some people . . . are so busy seeing all sides of every issue that they neutralize concern and prevent necessary action. There’s no strength in seeing all sides unless you can act where real measurable injustice exists. A lot of academic talk just immobilizes the oppressed and maintains oppressors in their positions of power” (*Obasan* 35).

As I briefly discuss above, Hutcheon's formulation of historiographic metafiction, although limited to fiction, and rather vague about the actual literary strategies involved in its subversion of dominant history, is a position that does point toward the intentions of the postmodern historical novel. Hutcheon identifies historiographic metafiction's subversion of dominant fictional practice by outlining both its theoretical link to contemporary historical thought, as well as its politicizing of its own project. These texts' focus upon the people left out of official history, and the construction of an alternative historical record is very different in quality from Scott's representative every-people, who, according to Lukács, promote the cause of the proletariat. For Hutcheon, McHale, Cowart, and especially the historian turned literary critic, Dominick LaCapra, the unproblematized gulf that separates the deliberate reasoning of literary theory and the fictional, as well as the narrator of the lyric from the novel, is a reasoning that could use explication. Beginning with a postmodern faith in the necessity of, or desire for, history, my study uses Hutcheon's term "historiographic metafiction" in an effort to investigate the "misinformation" upon which the eccentricities, elisions, and contingencies of a variety of textual forms problematize their provisional yet political project.

Chapter 1 ~ The Terror of History's Lack

What experience and history teach is this: that people and governments never learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it. Hegel

Momentarily putting aside an inquiry into historical veracity and the legitimizing uses of historical sources, I would like to begin this investigation of text by probing the question of what I call historical necessity. The fear of history's lack of efficacy that Hegel light-heartedly denounces is a philosophical interrogation that obscures postmodernism's profound faith in text. Informed by semiotics, postmodern theorizing valorizes the linguistic basis of reality, and thereby tacitly accepts the premise that a historical meaning-making system, or a story of origin, necessarily constructs culture. As Hegel's statement suggests, this is a theoretical predilection of some antiquity. Perhaps because history can only be transmitted by document (unless, like Herodotus, we wish to return to a historical past less than a few generations old), this valorization of the textual document allows it to possess a weighty and almost unexamined metaphysics of presence. The conundrum of Hegel's claim speaks to this problematic prioritizing of text, just as Kant's excessive rationality offers proof of history's necessity:

Kant has here achieved the remarkable feat of showing why there should be such a thing as history; it is, he shows, because man [humanity] is a rational being, and the full development of his [her] potentialities therefore requires a historical process. (Collingwood 98)

Lest an examination of Kant and Hegel's pseudo-psychological statements lapse into either complacent truism or facile ridicule, I would like to root them in a movement defined by those Twentieth-century novels which both fortify and question the necessity of text. Since textual instances of an entirely textless culture are understandably non-existent (except perhaps the *writerly* nature of Venus figurines, or a concentration of cave bear skulls in a Neolithic cave), I have decided to focus on those works which foreground historical lack by relating both a loss of history and an urgency with which the characters attempt to fill that absence.

If Lacan is correct, the driving force behind desire is an unidentifiable lack (caused by a forgotten rupture with the Real), which the subject fills by colluding with the ultimately unsatisfactory chimera of the linguistic register (the Symbolic). To be in culture, in this sense, is to be sundered from and seeking a return to the Real through a meaningless fictive and historical discourse. Within these textual instances of the Symbolic, historical necessity can be located by this excessive desire for story. Perhaps understandably, the novels that do the most to investigate this emphasis on text do not posit a world without history, but rather the terror of history's lack.

As I suggest above, this valorization of text is not entirely a Post-structuralist concern. H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*²⁵ presents a futuristic society in which current bourgeoisie/proletariat struggles have been carried to their ominous Darwinian conclusion. The Time Traveller, having journeyed some eight hundred thousand years into this

²⁵ Wells' *War in the Air* similarly constructs the profound loss which is the absence of text (274).

deteriorating future, waxes poetic about the profound loss to (and of) humanity which the waste of a library represents:

The brown and charred rags that hung from the sides of it, I presently recognized as the decaying vestiges of books. They had long since dropped to pieces, and every semblance of print had left them. But here and there were warped boards and cracked metallic clasps that told the tale well enough. Had I been a literary man I might, perhaps, have moralized upon the futility of all ambition. But as it was, the thing that struck me with keenest force was the enormous waste of labour to which this sombre wilderness of rotting paper testified. (Wells, *Time Machine* 83)

To be unable to interpret this “wilderness” (and the diction here is significant) is for the Time Traveller tantamount to being inhuman:

I thought, rather foolishly, that Weena might help me to interpret this, but I only learned that the bare idea of writing had never entered her head. She always seemed to me, I fancy, more human than she was, perhaps because her affection was so human. (Ibid. 79-80)

This relation of humanity to text points to more than a casual aversion to an unexamined life; Weena’s lack of humanity in this case is, quite literally, directly related to her—and by extension, her culture’s—inability to read.

Although Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* do not construct a world without media, they similarly privilege text (perhaps a natural impulse for writers) by portraying a government that suppresses the people’s attempt to preserve so-called “dangerous and potentially subversive” books (Huxley 145). In Bradbury’s futuristic vision, a culture of censorship²⁶ employs firemen to destroy

²⁶ Lest this usage be misunderstood, it is not salacious material such as pornography, nor even political tracts that are the perceived problem, but rather texts which do not “agree with each other” and which promote “solitary amusement” (Bradbury 48 and Huxley 133). A similar society is constructed by Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale*. All books that are “dangerous in the hands of the multitudes” are burned (166). For this repressive culture,

“dangerous” books and praises the easily understandable message of television at the expense of the tenuous truths of literature:

“Give the people contests they win by remembering the words to more popular songs. . . . Don’t give them slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy.” (*Fahrenheit 451* 67)

Bradbury’s text does more than express nostalgia (Lacan’s term for a mourning of a lost object) for an irretrievable textualized past, however. The lulling, deadening and ultimately soulless message the Seashell radio or TV walls deliver,²⁷ is contrasted with the overwhelming importance his novel gives to text. *Fahrenheit 451* argues that the “passivity of the subject in mass culture” can only be confronted by books, these “repositories of . . . the novel’s utopian past,” which for Bradbury’s text, symbolize positive “critical autonomy and freedom” (Touponce 83-4).

Both Bradbury and Huxley locate the textual importance, however, in the quality of a text that would evoke a reader’s response. The Savage’s text (*Shakespeare’s Complete Works*), for example, is “magic”:

What did the words exactly mean? He only half knew. But their magic was strong and went on rumbling in his head, and somehow it was as though he had never really hated Popé before; never really hated him because he had never been able to say how much he hated him. But now he had these

intent on suppressing not only its origin but also women’s independence, these texts include the vacuous few that *Fahrenheit 451* and *Brave New World’s* societies would allow, and consist of women’s magazines such as *Vogue*.

²⁷ This is foregrounded by how Montag’s wife “is near suicide from a drug overdose and is listening only to the noise of an electronic Seashell,” even though she pleads satisfaction with the vicarious life she lives through her TV family (Touponce 83). Also, it is worthwhile noting that the general suicide rate has risen sharply—enough to require a door-to-door stomach pumping service—since the advent of cultural homogenization (Bradbury 29).

words . . . These words and the strange, strange story out of which they were taken (he couldn't make head nor tail of it, but it was wonderful, wonderful all the same)—they gave him a reason for hating Popé; and they made his hatred more real; they even made Popé himself more real. (Huxley 109)

Likewise, the scene in which Montag unplugs the television walls in order to read Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" to Mildred's friends shows "Bradbury's confidence in the power of literature to bring neglected states of mind to light, to convert passive knowledge into active" . . . as long as we remember one poem from the repertoire of mankind's [humanity's] greatest poetry, the effects of habituation which threaten to devour . . . will find it more difficult to settle in . . . (Touponce 105). The significant choice of "Dover Beach," with its existential portrayal of the modern wasteland in which "ignorant armies clash by night," evokes in Montag's audience a sense of profound loss (Bradbury 98). Because of the emotional and artistic poverty of their lives, however, these people cannot—like Montag²⁸ or the characters of "Dover Beach"—call upon love as a transcendent explanatory force or, like Huxley's Savage, use literature to make their world seem "more real."

Orwell's *1984* extends this valorization of text into an almost postmodern questioning of textual sources. Orwell's "tragic sense of history's vulnerability to manipulation in an unscrupulous future" is foregrounded by the employment of a narrator who is implicated in his government's production of truth (Cowart 80). Since revising historical documents for the Ministry of Truth is Winston Smith's vocation, he is in the unique position of being able to view both the destruction and creation of the historical

²⁸ For it is Montag's love of Clarisse that inspires his conversion.

text. Employed in the Sisyphean task of rewriting newspapers in accordance with the latest party demands for a politically congruent historical narrative, Smith becomes increasingly aware that history is a construct subject to political exigency:²⁹

. . . it appeared from the *Times* of the seventeenth of March that Big Brother, in his speech of the previous day, had predicted that the South Indian front would remain quiet but that a Eurasian offensive would shortly be launched in North Africa. As it happened, the Eurasian Higher Command had launched its offensive in South India and left North Africa alone. It was therefore necessary to rewrite a paragraph of Big Brother's speech in such a way as to make him predict the thing that had actually happened. (Orwell 27)

In 1984 this revisionist history is so widespread that it affects all textual media which are perceived as dangerous to the state:

As soon as all the corrections that happened to be necessary in any particular number of the *Times* had been assembled and collated, that number would be reprinted, the original copy destroyed, and the corrected copy placed on the files in its stead. This process was applied . . . to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound tracks, cartoons, photographs—to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance. Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up to date. . . . All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary. In no case would it have been possible, once the deed was done, to prove that any falsification had taken place. (Ibid. 28)

To obscure the history of the party by entirely rewriting a newspaper article, Smith creates a patriotic state hero. This act of textual fabrication leads Smith to ponder not only the implications of his actions but the validity of textualized history in general.³⁰ This Comrade

²⁹ The Firemen's code in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* contains a similar erroneous claim that it was established in 1790 by Benjamin Franklin (45).

³⁰ This suspicion of the public media is echoed by Orwell's more realistic *Homage to Catalonia*: "The chief importance of the affair [a media report of a battle] was that it taught me to read the war news within the papers with a more disbelieving eye" (44).

Ogilivy, as Smith notes, “who had never existed in the present, now existed in the past, and when once the act of forgery was forgotten, he would exist just as authentically, and upon the same evidence, as Charlemagne or Julius Caesar” (Orwell 33). The only authentic reminder Smith’s society has of its historical past is the half-remembered rhymes of its quickly decaying oral culture. Limericks such as “*Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St. Clement’s*” preserve a sense of London’s geography that the government text has long since virtually destroyed.

Orwell’s text postulates more than a manipulation of the textualized past, however. Orwell’s totalitarian regime, in an effort to “narrow the range of thought,” also constructs a language which makes “thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it” (Orwell 36). By devolving language into simple and strictly-defined components, the founders of Newspeak intend, and Post-structuralists would agree it is possible,³¹ to control even the possibility of non-sanctioned thought.

For Cowart, the “true horror” of the text “lies less in that regime’s power to dictate an official version of history than in its power to destroy and counterfeit history’s very sources, so that informed descriptions of the past become impossible to produce at the same time that imaginary versions of the past approach infinity” (21). I would argue that horror is also expressed by the paranoid subject position that this totalitarian regime forces upon Smith. The power that this government holds over its people very nearly absolute. It controls the historical past, the linguistic present, and puts its citizenry into

³¹ This Post-structuralist semiotic argument is familiar: if language constructs culture and informs the parameters of thought, then a linguistic limitation limits what can be thought in that language.

positions within a structure uncannily similar to Foucault's panopticon. Smith finds that what life he makes for himself, short-lived though it is, must occupy the interstices of culture. His glass paperweight and diary (both objects from a former age) symbolize the paucity of his present existence and what culture as a whole has lost. Once even these objects disappear, "like the ant" these people will not be able to see the linear history of which they are part. When the historical past is destroyed, there will not exist "and never again could exist, any standard against which it [truth/memory] could be tested" (Orwell 63). Once the "[t]he past was erased, the erasure was forgotten" and "if all others accept the lie which the party imposed—if all records told the same tale—then the lie passed into history and became truth": 'Who controls the past,' ran the party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.'" (Orwell 51 and 25).

Situated as subject to state control, Smith gradually begins to work upon his own revolutionary unsaid. Contrary to legal strictures, he begins to keep a diary, in which he records thoughts forbidden to him by the party. The degenerate slogans which begin this diary tellingly correspond to his position in the culture, however. This regime's oppressive power speaks not only through its official history, but also through its citizens' failed attempt to write even their own personal history:

When there were no external records that you could refer to, even the outline of your own life lost its sharpness. You remembered huge events which had quite probably not happened, you remembered the detail of incidents without being able to recapture their atmosphere, and there were long blank periods to which you could assign nothing. (Orwell 23)

Since the historical records of a better time are destroyed, all Smith has left is his almost visceral intuition of a better past: "the mute protest in your own bones, the instinctive

feeling that the conditions you lived in were intolerable and that at some other time they must have been different” (Ibid. 50).

Even through Orwell’s text concentrates upon the flavourless nature of a society which manipulates even the paltry texts that it allows to be read, its argument attributes an overwhelmingly importance to text. Both rebellion and the official state history are textualized, and Smith’s diary enables him to record his subversive thoughts. His most memorable day is when he comes to possess incontrovertible proof that what the party claimed to be true was in fact a lie; and this textual instance, coupled with the dreary monotony of his colourless existence, inspires him to recover/create, like Bradbury’s Faber or Huxley’s John the Savage, some kind of meaning out of text.

As my concentration upon these futuristic examples implies, attempts to write a textless society have only been achieved³² by futuristic science fiction or fantasy texts. The presence of text in our culture is so ubiquitous that imagining its absence requires an equally fantastic remove from the mundane. Alternative readings of textless societies are limited to novels like William Golding’s *The Inheritors*, whose characters’ Neolithic interactions with a more technologically advanced group are paradoxically wrapped in the transparent Realism of an accomplished stylist. This reach into the fantastic past, however, cannot write both the importance of text and the profound loss which is its absence.

History, according to Kant, “terminates in the present not in the future,” and the historian’s task is to relate its past to the present instead of engaging in flights of prophetic fancy (Collingwood 104). The most significant of these fancies are found in texts which

³² Like Orwell’s Ministry of Truth, the definitiveness of statements like these contain their own answer.

posit “what will be” (to use Cowart’s terms) on the basis of past events: contemporaneous post-apocalyptic science fiction (77). Texts like Russell Hoban’s *Riddley Walker*, Walter Miller’s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* and Margaret Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale*, paradoxically manage to express the necessity of history (in textual terms) to culture as well as present significant philosophical claims about a “tragically irrecoverable past” (Cowart 81).

The Tragically Irrecoverable Future

Set two thousand years hence in a futuristic post-nuclear “Inland” (England), Hoban’s *Riddley Walker* presents a group of people that have been essentially stripped of culture. Surrounded by the remains of a civilization which indicates both their former triumphant and ultimately destructive past, as well as their present inferiority, these people cling to an Iron Age technology by virtue of scavenged metal left from the pre-war “Bad Time.” The text’s plot centres around a largely politically-driven attempt to manufacture social control by rediscovering gunpowder. The interested political parties believe that this control over technology will “break them thru the barren year” into some sort of material prosperity (Hoban 84). The text opens with the narrator, Riddley Walker—a significantly named village shaman and one of the few literate members of his society—killing the last wild boar. This action metaphorically prefigures the end of a hunting and gathering society. Surrounded by packs of wild dogs which attack and devour people who wander outside the confines of their villages, these “new clear” “soar vivers” have gathered

together in “forms” (farms) and “fentses” (gated villages). Life for these survivors is, as Cowart remarks, Hobbesian: “nasty, poor, brutish and short” (86). Adulthood commences at twelve and many die before their thirties.

The cultural life of these people is not much richer. The myths and stories which drive this culture are the bare bones of a belief system. The cultural loss that these people sense is symbolized by the refrain “boats in the ayr & picters on the win,” which runs throughout the text (Hoban 30). Poignantly, this reference to loss is not even understood by the people that sound its absence, for all notion of the airplane and the television have disappeared. All that remains of the past is this resilient linguistic signifier, stripped of its signified.

Riddley’s culture’s belief in a thanos-like death force is similarly rewritten onto the inverted fertility figure, Aunty: “a kind of degenerate triple goddess of night, birth, and especially death” (Cowart 86):

Every body knows Aunty. Stoa boans and iron tits and teef be tvean her legs plus she has a iron willy for the ladys it gets red hot. When your time comes you have to do the juicy with her like it or not. She rides a girt big rat with red eyes it can see in the dark and it can smel whos ready for Aunty. (Hoban 91)

Aunty embodies both an acknowledged death force and an explanatory myth of death. Other than the vividness of Aunty’s description, rooted in an universal fear, however, this mythical force shows no real cultural influence in the society’s stories.

In fact, many of this society’s oral texts possess at most a transitory meaning. The arbitrary way in which these stories get applied can be seen by the naming of “Hogmans II.” This deceptively simple story has two versions. The first version, wrapped in the

overdetermined language of myth, portrays a hero outsmarting Aunty (this “bloak” climbs on top of her to “do the juicy”), while the other version is much more mundane:

“Be that realy how that place got its name?”

He said, “No not realy. There use to be a fents there it ben Hogmans Kil Fents befor it be come Hagemans II.”

I said, “Why wer it callit Hogmans Kil?”

He said “Bloak namit Hogman he wer the Big Man they use to make pots there. Hogmans Killen wer what it wer but every body callit Hogmans Kil.”

I said, “Howd it get to be Hagemans II tho?”

He said, “Hogman had a fight with his wife and she kilt him.”

I said, “Of that musve ben why they callit Hogmans Kil then.”

He said, “No it ben callit Hogmans Kil befor she done him in. After she done it they callit Hagemans II. Becaws she ben a rough and ugly old woman and it come to il he marrit her.”

I said, “The whered the other story come from? The 1 of the bloak as got on top of Aunty.”

He said, “It come in to my mynd.”

I said, “You mean you made it up.” (Hoban 93)

History in this text is both a made history, or artifact of the imagination, and a remembered, and to some degree, linear history. Hagemans II’s name drives a mythological as well as a more traditional history tale.

This interplay supports Cowart’s reading that the text is involved in exploring the dichotomy between a linear and cyclic history. He argues that since Riddley can understand both notions of history, he mediates between linear history and the more “primitive” notion of time. Certainly Riddley reads both versions of historical time in the incidents that open the text. His coming of age and killing of the dog pack leader is read in archetypal terms—“the far come close took by the littl come big”—as well as placed in the context of the society’s collective and linear historical past (Hoban 14).

Cowart takes this application of historical theorizing from Mircea Eliade's anthropological examination of so-called primitive societies. Eliade's theorizing presumes that western culture works out of a linear understanding of historical time and that "primitive cultures" use a more mythical system of recurrence. Eliade argues that a linear consciousness of historical time grew out of, and is a direct descendant of, the older more primordial cosmological/non-sequential time. Historical/modern time, as an end-dependent system, posits an original beginning which is built upon cumulatively by succeeding events. This notion stands in distinct contrast to the views of archaic society which bases its notion of renewal upon the solar day and the lunar month, and thus includes renewal within its concept of end (Eliade 86).

The process of mythological repetition which Mircea Eliade discusses in *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History* writes cosmological time, a constantly rejuvenating system, as using a repetition of the original cosmological event to renew existence. Clearly the original event (creation), such as the myth of genesis, cannot, by definition be repeated endlessly, but Eliade's conception of the cosmological mind combats 'end' by employing 'sympathetic'³³ ritual. Eliade argues that the archaic mind uses the necessarily symbolic activity of ritual to renew/re-create the cycle of existence by tying mundane existence to a transcendental action or object. As a result, mythic objects or actions do not have an intrinsic value, but rather acquire value because they participate in a reality which transcends them, either by re-enacting the original "archetype"³⁴ or by

³³ Used in the sense of 'magical' correlation, like that between the objects of sympathetic magic.

³⁴ Used in Eliade's sense of "exemplary model" (Eliade xv).

positioning themselves as centre and allying themselves with transcendental notions of centredness. For daily existence to become reality to the archaic mind, an event must be associated with cosmological reality, or myth. This mythological positioning of culture reiterates and affirms for the listener the necessarily cyclic and deliberate nature of time and reality.

Eliade theorizes a 'popular' mind which cannot remember the events of the past without transfiguring them into mythological "categories" or "archetypes." He argues that both out of an urge to give meaning to otherwise meaningless contingency and to escape the fear of history (which is ultimately a fear of the end), the archaic mind lives "in a plenitude of the present with just a trace of history" (Eliade 43 and 76). This is not to say that the archaic mind has transcended the desire for meaning, however. Rather, meaning does not reside in history's accumulation and codification of events, but in an event's relationship to a transcendental reality: "the formulation of an archaic myth betrays at least the desire for meaning" and the urge to give cosmological meaning to meaningless contingency is the archaic mind's purposeful transposition of meaning upon reality" (Eliade 147). By such mythological associations, those who are seemingly independent of history's causality, construct reality. In correspondence to the archaic's mind most fervent wish, events are not the responsibility of the principal actor in any ordinary way, we are relieved to note, but are rather the result of a cosmological relationship which gives meaning to contingency:

How justify, for example, the fact that southeastern Europe had to suffer for centuries . . . for the sole reason that it happened to be on the road of the Asiatic invaders and later the neighbour of the Ottoman Empire? . . . how can man [humanity] tolerate the catastrophes and horrors of history . .

. if beyond them he [she] can glimpse no sign, no transhistorical meaning . .
 . (Eliade 151)

Cowart applies Eliade's reading to *Riddley Walker* in order to argue that just such a disjunction creates the "dialectic in terms of which Hoban examines 'the terror of history'—Mircea Eliade's phrase for the suspicion or conviction that history answers to no transcendent rationale" (83). Riddley spends the text looking for an explanation that can balance these historical structures, primarily by using his culture's versions of the *Eusa Story*.

Although these explanatory stories of Aunty and the naming of Hogmans II (with their antithetical understandings of history) to some degree illustrate their world, as a culture, Riddley's people are reliant upon only one cohesive explanatory myth: the *Eusa Story*. The differing incarnations of this myth in the culture are extremely suspect, however. It is complete in at least three versions and is both gospel and a myth of religious significance as well as political propaganda.

The *Eusa Story* originates in the only text that has survived the "universal decay," and is itself merely "a scriptural annotation of the legend St. Eustace based upon a fifteenth-century wall painting of the subject" (Wells, *Time Machine* 84 and Swanson 207). Because of the obscurity of its specialized language, this grossly misunderstood text is at the mercy of its interpreters, and becomes for these illiterate people a myth of origin. Used as a travelling puppet show by the "Pry Mincer" (Prime Minister) to preserve and exercise political hegemony, it is therefore deliberately changed, like Smith's newspapers, in accordance to prevailing political need. The story's enactment is followed by a "tel," in

which the “connexion man” (Riddley himself) interprets the tale in terms of culturally-understood historical patterns.

As a tangential aside, it is worthwhile to look at the effect of inserting this “scriptural annotation” into the colloquial idiom of Hoban’s text. For its audience, this incorporation of a contemporary prose description into the difficult *langue*³⁵ of the text, performs a double function. In a very real and visceral fashion, the reader is confronted by the true import of “Of what we ben! And what we come to!” (Hoban 100). For this description of the St. Eustace painting, which is so meaningful to the reader, is, because cut off from an explanatory textual surround which would give meaning to the painting’s description, incomprehensible to Riddley’s culture. The abrupt change in prose style, which the placement of this description enacts, evokes a sense of *readerly* loss as well as stresses the necessity of a mediating textual surround for the construction of meaning. For, without the structure supplied by other texts, in the web of discourse which constructs meaning, the description of the St. Eustace painting is unintelligible. The juxtaposition of these two very different prose styles defamiliarizes complacent readers by reminding them of the fragility of their culture’s seemingly solid transcendental truths.

The extended attention that Goodparley, the significantly named³⁶ “Pry Mincer,” devotes to this text is notable in at least two ways. Goodparley’s groping for meaning

³⁵ The *langue*, “an abstract social object,” is the linguistic system maintained by the social group and operates as a “hoard deposited by the practice of speech in speakers who belong to the same community, a grammatical system which, to all intents and purposes, exists in the mind of each speaker,” while the *parole* is the instances of actual speech (Harris 49 and Saussure in Culler, *Saussure* 40).

³⁶ Certainly the ability to produce good *parley*, or appealing speech, is one we ascribe to politicians.

foregrounds the significance of a dearth of cultural texts, as well as expresses the political intent behind the act of historical manipulation. As *1984* and *Brave New World*³⁷ suggest, political power interprets textual truths in order to further its own goals, and Goodparley's interpretation is no different. Goodparley interprets this description's signifiers, torn from the moorings of their signifieds, as "an identification of certain images as symbols of a special trinity comprising the ingredients of gunpowder—sulphur, saltpetre, charcoal" (Swanson 207).

The suspect nature of this reading, however credible it is to Riddley (in part because Goodparley stays within his culture's repertoires of interpretation), is exposed by Goodparley's wish to return to social power by dint of force.³⁸ Goodparley believes that the rediscovery of the "1-big-1" (atomic weaponry) or even the "1-little-1" (gunpowder) will be a move toward a rediscovery of all the pre-"Bad Time" technological secrets of "what we ben" (Hoban 100). His culture's curious correlation between political power and religious significance³⁹ is significantly underscored by his confusion of one the "greedy mints" (ingredients) of gunpowder with "*Saul and Peter*" (saltpeter), [which] in his odd way manages to mingle the science of munitions with New Testament dignitaries" (Porter 460).

³⁷ The censorship movement of Huxley's *Brave New World* ensures the preservation of "the present social order" by excluding such "pornographic" subversive works (Huxley 145 and 189).

³⁸ The significance of this mis-take for the interpretation of history in general is significant. Goodparley reads his own desires into the now meaningless text just as the historian finds the answers to the questions for which they search. "For history, facts are constituted by the questions we ask and are carved up and selected always by a manifest or latent motive or aim" (White, *Tropics* 43).

³⁹ A confusion that the *Eusa Story* capitalizes upon politically as well as installs.

For Riddley's people, however, the *Eusa Story* works out of their preconceived feelings of guilt, for their folk tales reiterate their responsibility for the "Bad Time." "With a mythic and allegorical undercurrent," these stories inform how Riddley's people live their lives (Scheick 67): "persons continually comment on themselves and on events as archetypal reflections of the *Eusa Story* or of the other, complementary fables whereby this race hands on its collective wisdom from generation to generation" (Coward 91).⁴⁰ Although the text of this *Eusa Story* is stable and codified, in the sense of being a written artifact, because the signifying system that could explain it to its readers is gone, it has become unstable. If the reader evokes Eliade's cyclic history then the *Eusa* story's ritual telling is significantly occupied by an exchange of ritualistic phrases of renewal, and these ritualistic phrases carry its cultural meaning for this illiterate culture. Both scapegoating and claiming responsibility, this replay of Mr. Clevver's⁴¹ hunger for power and the collusion of science becomes responsible for the "Bad Time."

These textual instances of the *Eusa Story* become, Riddley suggests, as omnipresent and explanatory as the ubiquitous historical text: "Words in the air print foot steps on the ground for us to put our feet in to" (Hoban 121). The tracks that his culture has inherited are not so easily followed, however.

As the use of dialect I have quoted above suggests, *Riddley Walker's* main questioning of text is on the level of a language which "slows us to the pace of an oral culture, defamiliarizing the act of reading itself so that this process too becomes an

⁴⁰ Eliade would call these rituals of renewal in which the Archaic mind rejuvenates itself by a participation in and a reiteration of its myths of origin.

⁴¹ A figure who is both Satan and the immoral intellect.

unriddling” (Schwenger 254). Although concerning loss, this linguistic play paradoxically does not enact loss. Riddley acknowledges both the pun and the loss that the use of language represents: “Words! Theywl move things you know theywl do things. Theywl fetch. Put a name to some thing and youre beckoning” (Hoban 122).

This contradictory power to “fetch” can be seen in the preservative nature of the tellingly significant children’s rhyme “fools circel 9wys.” This song is not merely a simple children’s rhyme. The lyric is also a mnemonic device that enables memorization of geographical detail, the key to the Pry Mincer’s treatment of the Eusa people (those that survive from the “puter leat” or computer elite of the technological age) as well as the path that Riddley must walk in his search for cultural meaning. Like the itemized list of churches in 1984’s children’s song, this riddle points to a knowledge which, although its textual form has been lost to the culture, is preserved orally. The transformations that an oral culture works upon its texts are, as Lorna Elswint, the “tel woman” and the oldest in Riddley’s social group claims, profound and uncertain:

“Nor there aint never ben no strait story I ever heard. Bint no writing for 100s and 100s of years til it begun agen not you wunt never get a strait story past down by mouf over that long. Onlyes writing I know of is the *Eusa Story* which that aint nothing strait but at leas its stayed the same. All them other storys tol by mouf they ben put to an took from and changit so much thru the years theyre all bits and blips and all mixt up” (Hoban 20)

As Swanson notes, the transfigured oral riddle of “fools circel 9wys” (that Riddley must solve) symbolizes the text’s message, albeit indirectly: “a riddle, as a misleading question which seems to invite one response when in fact it calls for a quite different response” (Swanson 206). The more than double duty that this rhyme is called upon to assume is

common both to the transformation of story and language that this culture uses, as a society without a long tradition of written text, in an attempt to make meaning of its experience.

Although seemingly a debased colloquial English, which shows the modifications that the intervening years without printed text have wrought, Riddley's language contains an oral link to a forgotten history. Just as "fools circel 9wys" has geographical and political meaning, and the "chard coal berners" rhyme contains the recipe for gunpowder, in the interstices of the oral text's wordplay and mis-takes, the fragments of cultural understanding have been preserved. Although Scheick claims that "in the post-holocaust world fiction preserves some truths, although these truths might remain elusive," I would argue that it is the language itself of *Riddley Walker*, that contains the meaning of this culture, even as it remains inaccessible to its speaker (68). Without the texts which constitute the body of culture and which work to solidify language against the changes the centuries work upon it, Riddley's language has only a tangential relationship to its original meaning. Because Riddley's dialect, like the interpretation of the *Eusa Story*, is set free from the moorings of its signification, it has evolved to contain the multiple meanings required in this culture poor in historical texts.

Terms like "soar viviers," "party cools," and "many cools," as well as the many examples quoted above, simultaneously deliver to the reader the word's archaic and present meaning, as well as a sense of cultural loss. Not accidentally, most of these terms are scientific. Terms like "spare the mending and tryl narrer" carry both their archaic

meaning of “to experiment”⁴² and to use “trial and error,” but they also contain for the defamiliarized reader an indication of lost technological science that their present more phonetic sounds suggest: try never (Hoban 119).

In “this story, language, it would seem, knows more than its users,” and performs an action similar to what happens in LaCapra’s expanded use of text (Porter 457):

“Text” derives from *texere*, to weave or compose, and in its expanded usage it designates a texture or network of relations interwoven with the problem of language. Its critical role is to problematize conventional distinctions and hierarchies, such as that which presents the text as a simple document or index of a more basic, if not absolute, ground, reality, or context. (*Rethinking* 19)

Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* reminds the reader as well of text’s tactile quality:

“. . . do you know why books such as this are so important? Because they have quality. And what does the word quality mean? To me it means texture. This book has *pores*. It has features. This book can go under a microscope. You’d find life under the glass, streaming past in infinite profusion.” (97)

This visceral tactility is written both by the prescription of the circle that Riddley must walk (“fools circel 9wys”), as well as by the defamiliarization the reader is subject to when encountering the inventiveness of Riddley’s debased dialect.

As I suggest above, this use of language and the *Eusa Story*’s transformation writes an indebtedness of present text to past text which implies a notion of cultural origin: “Some kynd of thing it aint us but yet its in us. Its looking out thru our eye hoals”

⁴² Porter’s extremely intuitive examination of *Riddley Walker*’s language traces these “meaningful mistakes”: “‘experiment’ is a positive term in the current order of discourse, a neutral word free of ethical or political connotations. In its mutated form, however, where its meaning is doubled, the word acquires a guilty conscience, as it were. The moral of the pun is straightforward—nothing has been spared by nuclear science. In a world poisoned by plutonium 239, with a half-life of twenty-four thousand years, there simply is no mending. (459).

(Hoban 6). The force that “thinks us, but it dont think like us” is the textualized (however loosely that term is applied) culture into which the subject is hailed⁴³ (Ibid. 7). Although this “horror” may be even more profound than Eliade’s fear of eternal recurrence (“our woal life is an idear we dint think of nor we dont know what it is. What a way to live”) Riddley’s narrative wish is to uncover this “horror” (Hoban 7):

. . . the horrer in every thing. The horrer waiting. I dont know how to say it. Like say you myt get cut bad and all on a suddn there you are with your leg opent up and youre looking at the mussl fat and boan of it. You all ways knowit what wer unner the skin only you dont want to see that bloody meat and boan. (Ibid. 153)

Because Riddley’s debased language is not a strictly controlled Newspeak, his “genuinely poetic idiom” is able to express the inexpressible terror of cultural subjection (Coward 88). Riddley’s *langue* symbolizes what it is to be beyond the cultural “fents,” when it installs the importance of the textual artifact.

Even if the reader ignores Riddley’s attempt to write “all this down” and thereby codify both his society’s stories and his own part in a linear historical progression, *Riddley Walker* represents an installation of text’s importance more profound in its way than any self-proclaimed valorization (Hoban 7). The stripping of text from Riddley’s culture only makes more poignant how dependent the survivors are upon their textualized remains. A one-page art history description becomes, by the severe myopia of desire, a myth stretched to the breaking point⁴⁴ in its effort to contain the people’s societal need.

⁴³ In Louis Althusser’s sense of interpellation (174).

⁴⁴ Indeed, as Porter suggests, both the symbol of the atom/Adam (the tearing in two of the “the littl Shynin Man the Addom”) and the “fission” of language in this text represents an intensely creative destruction of public text (466).

Even in, and perhaps especially in, this largely illiterate society, stories, “tels” (prophesies/interpretations), and the performative nature of the text’s linguistic “fission,” construct profound and necessary ways of knowing (Porter 459).

In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Walter Miller attempts, in some ways, a more ambitious historical project. Miller abandons the coherence that the first-person narrator offers Hoban, and instead uses an omniscient narrator whose vision covers a span of three thousand years or more. Miller also attempts to stabilize the novel by positing the continuity of the Catholic church and, as Cowart suggests, using a disembodied notion of historicity as its thematic cohesion. Ultimately, however, this text envisions, like Hoban, the aftermath of an apocalyptic nuclear destruction (82). Perhaps inadvertently valorizing the Catholic church for its tenacity in the face of a historyless anti-intellectual movement, the Simplification, *Canticle* reaches across centuries in order to envision, Eliade-like, both a cyclical and linear interpretation of history.

The broadly cyclical nature of the text is evident in Miller’s repetition of the Flame Deluge, as well as in the progressive stages of the new society’s growth. After a lengthy Dark Ages, the new society follows a “compulsion to repeat”⁴⁵ the great periods of western history, so that its Renaissance is followed by an industrial period and then an electronic age. This cycle, in keeping with Eliade’s paradigm, culminates in another Flame Deluge which, we are assured, will lead to yet another Dark Age.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Significantly, Freud wrote about this “compulsion to repeat” after witnessing the horror of the First World War (Marx 35).

⁴⁶ The only mitigating factor in this interpretation is the desperate hope of those monks who escaped into the barren stretches of space, to carry away from this urge to repeat, the texts, and therefore the culture of humankind.

Through this repetitive cyclical history, Miller's text follows the history of a Christian order of monks founded by Leibowitz, a nuclear technician who guiltily feels at least partially responsible for the Flame Deluge. The abbey that Leibowitz's order founds attempts to preserve, by memorization (an act reminiscent of what happens in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*), enclosing in hermetically sealed barrels, or painfully transcribing by hand, the books which have survived the Flame Deluge. Since the Flame Deluge was followed by an outraged citizenry who destroyed all texts, teachers, and knowledge they could locate in a "Great Simplification," text is in short supply. The remains of written culture in the Abbey's Memorabilia are therefore necessarily incomplete and in some instances almost incoherent. Sharing with Hoban's text a lack of textual surround, these unsigned signifiers are faithfully copied and interpreted long after any understanding of their "true" import has been forgotten. In fact, one of the most moving portrayals of this loss describes a monk painfully working fifteen years to transcribe and illuminate, after the fashion of Eleventh century monks, a blueprint of a bomb shelter that he believes to be a holy artifact. As Manganiello notes, since "the 'Memorabilia' records historical trivialities such as the gold tooth of Emily that later becomes important evidence in the canonization process of her husband Leibowitz," the texts preserved as sacred are not necessarily the most appropriate (160). This rewriting of how we assign textual meaning is implicit in the record that preserves the knowledge of Emily Leibowitz's gold tooth, an act which exposes that what drives the Abbey's monks is their notion of textual primacy:

The traces of a long-past nuclear war are read—or misread—in an effort to decipher its nature. . . . This happened for instance in Walter Miller's *Canticle for Leibowitz*, where a grocery list and a circuit diagram belonging to an obscure scientist become objects of veneration charged with complex and mysterious significance. (Schwenger 254)

The reader of Miller's text is placed in the awkward subject position offered by the monastic order, even as he reflects on the implications of preserving the scientific (a word which this text, like Hoban's, associates with destruction) Memorabilia:

When we sit with Brother Francis Gerard outside Leibowitz Abbey, we are ready to assume the robes of the monastic order, but, having already lived them as part of the social and intellectual history of the West, we are also prepared to assume a critical, historical awareness of their development and decline. (Hanzo 138)

Since readers can envision both a cyclical and linear history, they note the inherent implications of the abbey's urge to grasp and venerate, the texts of a dying culture. Because the monks keep these texts safe, they actively contribute to the cycle of repetitive history. Dedicating their lives to the scattered and almost meaningless Memorabilia, the monks of the Leibowitz Abbey inadvertently and ironically cause the next Flame Deluge by maintaining those very records, an action that leads to the development of the new science. Like Hoban in *Riddley Walker*, Miller uses the recording of linear time, coupled with a recurrent result, to interrogate the basis of history on at least two levels. He asks if a cyclic understanding of history is a prescription for future historical development rather than merely a method of understanding recurrence:

“Is the species congenitally insane?”

“Listen, are we helpless? Are we doomed to do it again and again and again? Have we no choice but to play the Phoenix in an unending sequence of rise and fall? Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Carthage, Rome, the Empires of Charlemagne and the Turk. Ground to dust and plowed with salt. Spain, France, Britain, America—burned into the oblivion of the centuries. And again and again and again.

“*Are we doomed to it, Lord, chained to the pendulum of our own mad clockwork, helpless to halt its swing?*” (Miller 286)

Miller's questioning of history is not just about the inevitable nature of apocalypse, however; he also raises doubts about the status of document by constructing a debate in which two ideologically opposed characters ask if texts can record historical truth. Because "mankind [humankind] had burned its institutional memories and condemned itself to cultural amnesia more than a millennium ago," the past cannot be known with any accuracy (Miller 228). The history of Leibowitz and the Flame Deluge, which is cast in a heavily allusive prose reminiscent of the Christian bible, foregrounds some of *Canticle's* questioning by being the cause of Thon Taddeo and Abbot Apollo's discussion:

"You reject all history, then, as myth?" A flame edged out from the spark.

"Not 'reject.' But it must be questioned. Who wrote your histories?"

"The monastic Orders, of course. During the darkest centuries, there was no one else to record them." He transferred flame to wick.

"There! You have it. And during the time of the anti-popes, how many schismatic orders were fabricating their own versions of things, and passing off their own versions as the work of earlier men? You can't know, you can't *really* know. . . ."

"If you doubt it, why bother studying the Leibowitzian documents?"

"Because doubt is not a denial. Doubt is a powerful tool, and it should be applied to history." (Ibid. 140)

This interrogation of historical textual sources is contrasted with a claim that empiricism is more objective. Thon Taddeo posits that so-called objective history, with its installation of primary text, can be based upon more dependable sources than documents in the Abbey's library. For example, the men that Taddeo brings with him make a careful examination of the Abbey in an attempt to investigate its history. Doubtful of the textual document, in the form of architectural plans and Abbey documents which keep track of construction, these

men attempt to prove the age of the Abbey by the “objective” means of measuring wear in a doorstep. The primacy these texts appear to have, however, blinds their reader to their similar status as document.

Miller’s investigation of both text and artifact is also problematized by the more mythological intrusions into the text’s historical framework: the two-headed Mrs. Grales (a biblically significant name)⁴⁷ and the incarnation of the Wandering Jew. Symbolically, Mrs. Grales other head, Rachel, who wakes after the second nuclear conflagration, is representative of human innocence; and Benjamin, the Wandering Jew, whom the text claims is over three thousand years old, is a device which both questions and gives coherence to historical events.

Miller’s interrogation of history employs more profound devices than this, however. His most damning questioning of history is the significance his characters gleefully attribute to the textual artifact. Even ignoring the importance of text defined by a plot which centres around textual hoarding and preservation and the industrial age’s dependence upon these textual sources, Miller invites the reader to consider a more abstract valorization of text.

Instead of creating a culture with a dearth of texts and a subsequent obsession with one of them, as *Riddley Walker*, for instance, does, *Canticle* posits a culture whose obsession is patterned around multiple texts as artifact. This veneration of text represents more than a signifier turned loose from its signifying system and subsequently freely

⁴⁷ “The heads have been understood to express symbolically the spiritual conditions of human history: sin and grace. Her Rachel head, reborn after the atomic blast . . . is therefore a symbol of redeemed humanity” (Manganiello 166).

interpreted. The illumination of texts, the sacred quality of Leibowitzian relics, and the feeling on the behalf of the Abbey's librarian that texts are to be preserved rather than read,⁴⁸ suggests that text is valorized in and of itself.

Although other texts which I include in this study do not indulge in this method it is worth noting that this valorization of text is not unique to *Canticle*. The ill-defined cultural position that our texts occupy is dependent upon more than their interaction with the reader. In the cloistered surround of English literature, for instance, Shakespeare occupies a position which cannot be explained by Bradbury's fireman reading "Dover Beach." Although Bradbury's fireman attempts to express the importance of text by reading to his wife and neighbours, his understanding is defined by the artifact's cultural importance or relevance. A student in the academic system of English Literature Studies (a discipline which compares favourably with the surround of the monks in Leibowitz Abbey), however, works to both install and support notions of canon in western culture. In the arbitrary system of canon, an original, or even an ill-favoured copy, of a Shakespearean play possesses a status which is difficult to define. The notion of text as holy artifact that *Canticle* examines, and English Studies installs as canon, makes an argument that is closer to the indefinable value that Smith in Orwell's *1984* ascribes to both his paperweight and diary. These physical artifacts evoke an emotive cultural attachment which has little to do with a text's utilitarian value to a culture.

⁴⁸ "To Brother Librarian, whose task in life was the preservation of books, the principal reason for the existence of books was that they might be preserved perpetually. Usage was secondary, and to be avoided it threatened longevity" (Miller 212).

Riddley's culture, for all its "primitive" nature, does not indulge in this worship of textual artifact. The *Eusa Story* text, as well as the picture of Grenvine, are not venerated for their own sake, but rather for how they relate to and inform the viewer's world. Even the "fissional sekerts" that Granser the "chard coal berner" must utter over his creation of gunpowder are read as being exactly that: professional secrets.

Canticle's characters have lost their access to the textualized past in an entirely different way from *Riddley Walker's*, however. The texts that represent their past still exist, to some extent, but as in the case of "fools circel 9wys" and the *Eusa Story*, these inheritors have lost the interpretative tools which would allow them to make sense. More ominously, the monk's promotion of these meaningless signifiers negates the possibility of their textual recovery. Like Lacan's subject, the reader is sundered from the Real by his/her misplaced desire for the illusory control offered by the Symbolic, and these monks are no different.

This statement is of course not entirely accurate in all cases, for Brother Kornhoer, who creates electricity by theorizing on the basis of old diagrams and Thon Taddeo's theories, does employ these texts in ways which they were meant to be used. But for the majority of these monks, the veneration of these textual objects (and this is the point of Miller's tale) accords them value held for holy relics in the monasteries and churches of medieval Europe. Because their analysis stops at the level of the signifier, these monks take part in a linear sequence of history but, with a few exceptions, they are unconscious of the process in which they are involved.

Riddley Walker offers a sharply different construction of textual significance. As an artifact, the text of the *Eusa Story*, in and of itself, means nothing to Riddley, for he is searching for what the world has to tell him. *Riddley Walker* is a text that, instead of exploiting the cloistered prioritization of *Canticle*, searches for a meaningful, if provisional, textual truth. This truth, significantly, is not found in the veneration of artifact but rather in the act of searching:

“Riddley there aint nothing what *aint* a tel for you. The wind in the nite the dus on the road even the leases stoan you kick a long in front of you. Even the shadder of that leases stoan roaling on or stanning stil its all telling.”
(Hoban 7)

Riddley and Lorna’s world may be charged with a mythological significance, but because in their world particular artifacts are not endowed with the type of sacredness that those in Miller’s novel would allow, *Riddley Walker*’s characters have a much better chance of locating an explanatory signified.

Margaret Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale* also interrogates contemporary notions of history,⁴⁹ including the reception of a historical text. Unlike Miller, however, Atwood questions the process of historical understanding rather than the status of the textual artifact itself. Atwood’s text is set in a near future, which we are encouraged to believe is always hovering on a chauvinist Christian horizon. A significant portion of the former United States has been usurped by a group of increasingly sterile Caucasian men who enforce rule by fanatical reference to an extant Christianity. This group annuls most marriages and seizes women in order to use them as surrogate mothers for the rich,

⁴⁹ “History, notoriously, is ‘his story’ not ‘her story,’ and Atwood’s future history takes this maxim into consideration even as it patiently rehearses a woman’s historical testimony” (Cowart 119).

powerful, and childless. These handmaids are stripped of name and virtually all power, and significance, except in terms of their own proven fertility.⁵⁰

Significantly, all of these women, so positioned, are denied access to text. As Susan Wood argues, Atwood's text compares to Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* in its foregrounding of print medium (136). Atwood's writing of a deliberately controlling culture of censorship goes much further politically, however. Not only are women denied books, but all forms of independent media have been banned. The Gilead regime fortifies its control over women by making sure that "the only voices and words left are those of the ones in power" (Atwood, "An End to Audience" in Wood 138). What texts they do have access to, in the form of tapes, have been carefully modified:

For lunch it was the Beatitudes. Blessed be this, blessed be that. They played it from a disc, the voice was a man's. *Blessed be the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed be the merciful. Blessed are the meek. Blessed be the silent.* I knew they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out too, but there was no way of checking. (Atwood 99-100)

Because shop signs would offer too tantalizing a glimpse of textualized knowledge, even their former names are replaced by iconic signifiers which symbolize their contents.

Atwood's text—or perhaps since her text is split into two parts, we may say texts—interrogates what has become official as well as creates an alternative history. The body of her text is in the form of a personal first-person narrative by a handmaid, Offred,

⁵⁰ "Employing this form of enslavement, the men of Gilead use pictographs and visual signs as a means of documenting their claims to ownership and power: 'He [the Commander] slips around my wrist a tag, purple, on an elastic band, like the tags for airport luggage. "If anyone asks you, say you are an evening rental"' (Klarer 137).

who occupies the traditional position of a woman in history.⁵¹ Offred's tale is taped upon cassettes at some time after her escape from the Gilead empire; and since this empire survived for some years after her escape, she encrypts her historical record and protects proper names by the use of pseudonyms. Because her narrative lacks the historiographical codes of time, social locale, and important names, the reader of Atwood's text must focus upon the provisional story of its narrator. This focus is shared by the academic interpreters of Offred's diary and thus overturns a reading which demands a more academic version of that narrator's placement in a historical time and place.

The narrator's placement, and the text's subsequent placement as historical artifact is exactly what concerns the short second part of Atwood's text. These "Historical Notes on *The Handmaid's Tale*" represent the proceedings of a conference set in the year 2195, whose topic is the study of Gilead society.⁵² Roughly two hundred years after the recording of Offred's narrative, her transcription has been unearthed by an academic community eager to "call Eurydice forth from the world of the dead [and] *make* her answer" (Atwood 324) (my emphasis). As this quotation suggests, the male proclivity for control, which erupted into the horrors of Gilead society, is alive and well in the notions that govern this academic conference.⁵³ Beginning the conference with a chorus of sexist

⁵¹ Atwood's text argues that, typically, women are written out of history, and for evidence of that we need look no further than the focus of those futuristic male-authored texts I have evaluated above.

⁵² Admittedly, these notes "provide certain details that are not made explicit in the narrative" (Deer 226).

⁵³ Atwood foregrounds the chauvinism of Pieixoto's textual position, "As we know from the study of history, no new system can impose itself upon a previous one without incorporating many of the elements to be found in the latter" (Atwood 317).

jokes,⁵⁴ the keynote speaker's address—pompously entitled, “Problems in Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*”—is mainly concerned with the legitimacy of Offred's “item—I hesitate to use the word *document*” (Atwood 313). As an aside, it is no accident that Offred's tale shares its name with Atwood's text, for this foregrounds how both texts are subject to the same treatment in the chauvinist academic environment.

The treatment of Offred's tale reveals that this type of historical investigation puts particular demands upon its historical text. The many times that Offred's text has been edited and modified foregrounds how far it is removed from the original: “the narrative we read is a reconstruction, an approximation, subject to numerous interventions, all of which undermine the voice(s) of authority and the validity of interpretation” (Kauffman 224). Offred's cassettes have been organized (for the unlabeled tapes have been placed in a chronological order), transcribed, and edited: “owing to the difficulties posed by accent, obscure referents, and archaisms—we had to make some decisions as to the nature of the material we had thus so laboriously acquired” (Atwood 314). This academic questioning foregrounds a reluctance of the academics to engage the political implications of Offred's tale.

Perhaps the most damning way in which these academics expose their predilections, comes with the ease, not to say satisfaction, with which they caution about “passing moral judgment upon the Gileadeans”⁵⁵ (Atwood 314):

⁵⁴ . . . the archaic vulgar signification of the word *tail*; that being, to some extent, the bone, as it were, of contention, in that phase of Gileadean society of which our saga treats” (Atwood 313). “‘The Underground Femaleroad,’ since dubbed by some of our historical wags ‘The Underground Frailroad’” (Ibid. 313).

⁵⁵ For those conversant with contemporary anthropological ethnographies as well as international policy, this caution will sound familiar.

Surely we have learned by now that such judgements are of necessity culture-specific. Also, Gileadean society was under a good deal of pressure, demographic and otherwise, and was subject to factors from which we ourselves are happily more free. Our job is not to censure but to understand. (*Applause*) (Ibid. 315)

As Dominick Grace notes,

Pieixoto couples his apparent abdication of judgment with an excuse for the Gileadeans' behaviour, an excuse completely unnecessary if all we are concerned with is the facts, and not judgment. Once cannot excuse Gilead without at least implicitly judging it. Pieixoto's is not a reliable voice. (490)

Atwood's text argues that a wish to suspend judgment is also by its nature culture-specific. Both the statement about cultural-specificity, as well as the wish to find a legitimate text, is a culturally-specific and politically charged action. Certainly the lack of censure that Pieixoto's paper extends to Gileadean society has not been generously extended to Offred's tale.

The attempt on the part of Atwood's academics to follow the legitimizing traces of Offred's tale will sound familiar to the contemporary academic. Beginning, in a logical fashion, from the location of the foot locker in which the tapes were found to the names that Offred employs in her text, Pieixoto admits that these trails led nowhere. Pieixoto focuses instead upon the public record, which has been destroyed by Gilead's many purges and significantly leads exactly where former histories have led, to the *men* in charge. The implicit chauvinism which dictates Pieixoto's neglect of Offred's narrative (a stance which is chillingly similar to a Gileadean world-view) draws Pieixoto to similar historical conclusions.

A deliberate irony underscores this section of Atwood's text. Atwood not only postulates the continuance of chauvinist ways of thinking, but also foregrounds the barren and ultimately contradictory nature of Pieixoto's trail: "at the same time that his [Pieixoto's] talk increasingly renders the handmaid's diary an irrelevant curiosity, the historical information warns the reader of the plausibility and immediate relevance of the story" (Murphy 34). The attempt to ferret out the identity of Offred's Commander is foiled by a lack of historical record. Ironically, these same historians who have heaped ridicule upon Offred's tale are now dependent upon it for their research.

The fact that Offred's cassettes are one of the few documents that survive from this Gileadean society, confronts its researchers, and Atwood's text argues, all researchers after the textualized past, with a difficult choice. They must either negate the legitimacy of Offred's story, or reform their notion of what constitutes a legitimate source. The choice the academics in the novel make, that Offred's tale contains very little "real" historical information, is ironically undercut by the ease with which they promote legitimate textual sources which, as they themselves freely admit, are lacking in verifiability. A printout from the Commander's computer would be, by their own admission, inadequate, since "the Gileadean regime was in the habit of wiping its own computers and destroying printouts after various purges and internal upheavals" (Atwood 316). Because they have a slavish devotion to their contradictory notion of what makes textual validity, these researchers come to the ironic conclusion that they know almost nothing about Offred's life:

But what else do we know about her, apart from her age, some physical characteristics that could be anyone's and her place of residence? Not very much. . . . She does not see fit to supply us with her original name, and indeed all official records of it would have been destroyed upon her entry into the Rachel and Leah Re-education Centre. "Offred" gives us no clue,

since, like “Ofglen” and “Ofwarren,” it was a patronymic, composed of the possessive preposition and the first name of the gentleman in question. (Atwood 318)

What these academics neglect to reflect upon, and Atwood’s text calls upon the reader to consider, is that the names (read also place, date and existence) of women in the male-dominated textual world have, historically, always been deleted. The name “Offred,” which indicates “of” a particular owner, is in one sense no different than any change of name a woman might assume after marriage. Both noticing and pondering this type of detail would demand a politicized interaction which these scholars cannot admit.

Pieixoto’s lack of respect for Offred’s text is exposed textually by his reference to the Commander as “the gentleman in question” (Ibid. 318). Offred is not accorded a similar dignity (to say the least), and Pieixoto’s effort to minimize and ignore Offred’s ponderous contribution best expresses his political predilections. For the reader of Atwood’s novel, the text’s intentional political purpose is easier to discern, since *The Handmaid’s Tale* prioritizes Offred’s story by sheer bulk and rhetorical power. The “not very much” that Pieixoto claims to know about Offred, seeks to negate the cassette tapes as document. Pieixoto only has interest in what information, strictly defined by his criteria, he can extract. Furthermore, his extraction is understood only in terms of his definition of a valid source. His lack of faith in Offred’s cassettes reveals—and Atwood would argue—Pieixoto’s assumptions about the historiographical enterprise: a document without publicly substantiated names, places and printouts is an illegitimate source. Likewise, and this notion is even more interesting in terms of Atwood’s historiographic project, it is the female personal narrative of daily life (unconnected to the great movements of “legitimate”

history that have long defined historical investigation) that is most firmly rejected that very practice. Paradoxically, a legitimate source is defined by publicly-sanctioned textual sources such as Limpkin's diary⁵⁶ (a much more 'useful' document—in Pieixoto's terms—in terms of traditional historiographical techniques) and the narrative of old white men in power.

This examination of the legitimacy of Offred's tapes shows the Gilead society's belief in an objective historical empiricism. Just as Thon Taddeo's men measure the wear in a doorstep in an attempt to ascertain the age of the Abbey in Miller's *Canticle*, so do these academics favour a more *concrete* source. Ironically, however, Offred's cassettes fit Pieixoto's notion of legitimate source much more than his other documents. His confusion is understandable, for since Offred's tale is recorded on cassette, he positions it as an oral document. Although it resembles an oral document—a type of free-floating signifying system which, like *Riddley Walker's* oral stories, is an anathema to historical verifiability—unlike an oral story, it is fixed in magnetic medium. Even this one instance shows how Atwood's text foregrounds Pieixoto's unfounded and ludicrous academic suspicion of Offred's cassette format.

It is telling in Atwood's text that the principal examination of history (Pieixoto's analysis), which for my purposes is so crucial, takes place immediately after the body of the text. This structural decision enables the reader to compare Offred's transcribed story to Pieixoto's examination. Atwood's inversion of typical historiography exposes the irony in the conference's ostensible wish to uncover the "truth" of the Gilead regime. The

⁵⁶ Which, since it is written entirely in cipher, has undergone as much editing as Offred's text.

official story ignores and marginalizes the long and powerful personal narrative to which Atwood gives so much textual space. Even though this personal narrative is the only version the historiographers possess, instead of redefining their strictly defined notion of history, they merely lament that Offred's cassettes ignores their focus on "important" facts. The chorus of sexist jokes which begin the conference's keynote address show that the resilience of the interpretative framework which informed the Gilead political and social system has survived unchanged and thrives in this new academic environment.

As I have attempted to argue by using these futuristic novels, both text and the systems which validate their meaning are mute without each other. Texts such as *Riddley Walker*, *Canticle for Leibowitz* and *The Handmaid's Tale* foreground both the central question with which I began this chapter, the necessity of text to culture, as well as question how notions of legitimate historical codes inform the understanding and positioning of textual sources. The St. Eustace manuscript in *Riddley Walker*, the transcription of a barely understood blueprint in *Canticle*, and the blinding nature of the myopic interpretative strategies in *Handmaid's Tale*, are all devices which interrogate a cultural valorization of text.

As Goodparley's description of the *Eusa Story* and his subsequent interpretations suggest, readings of text are always politically motivated and, at the same time, at the mercy of textual codes. The final section of Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* argues that not understanding this influence leaves us at the mercy of those codes and strategies that texts use in order to install themselves as accurate and originary for historical purposes. My survey, which examines the installation of text as prioritized in postmodern work, indicates

that not only is the historical text shot through with shifting sites of hegemonic power, but it is subject to particular, and therefore, analyzable, codes. Lest, as the Yoruba proverb states, “the name given to a child become natural to it,” an investigation of these legitimizing strategies is necessary in order to codify the ways in which power is experienced and exercised.

Chapter 2 ~ Machinery in the Factory of Truth

History is all the remains that have come down to us from the past, studied with all the critical and interpretative power that the present can bring to the past.

Frederick Turner

An investigation into the machinery which evokes, installs and orchestrates a sense of historical veracity must necessarily begin with an analysis of the strategies that texts use in order to legitimize themselves as historical truth. Historiographic metafiction interrogate these strategies by incorporating the “textualized remains” of historical documents, constructing and thus foregrounding the so-called major players in historical events, as well as deliberately inserting anachronistic material into an otherwise coherent historical narrative (Hutcheon, “Pastime” 298). This textualized history, which consists of “memories, reports, published writings, archives, monuments, and so forth,” performs a paradoxical and, Hutcheon would say, typically postmodern function (LaCapra, *History and Criticism* 128). The special status an archive possesses, by virtue of its association with traditional historiography, is drawn upon and questioned by a repositioning of archival material. Similarly, historiographic metafiction’s writing of those figures who traditionally belong to official history, both evokes and, depending on the way in which these figures are positioned, interrogates history’s dependence upon their naming. Perhaps the most telling way that historiographic metafiction subverts historical coding comes in

the use of anachronism. Suspending the reader's interpretation at the level of signifying strategy, historiographic metafiction that use anachronistic detail rely upon the reader's tacit acceptance of a congruent history in order to problematize those naturalized assumptions:

. . . the documentary novel, accordingly, is a species of fiction distinctly characterized by its adherence to referential strategies associated with nonfictional modes of discourse but also demanding to be read within a fictional Gestalt familiar to contemporaneous readers. (Foley 41)

This noting of historiographical codes, and the *readerly* assumptions such codes employ, draws attention to their implicit support of historical discourse.

These stock historical techniques gain their efficacy by means of naturalized assumptions that inform historical discourse. For example, the distinction between historical discourse and other types of discourse hinges on historiography's problematic valorization of fact: "It turns out that the only feature which distinguishes historical discourse from other kinds is a paradox: the 'fact' can only exist linguistically, as a term in a discourse, yet we behave as if it were a simple reproduction of something on another place of existence altogether, some extra-structural 'reality'" (Barthes 153). The widespread tendency to fetishize the construction of fact inspires much of the Post-structuralist objection to such discourse:

The possibility of representing the development of certain cultures in a specifically historical kind of discourse is based on the circumstance that these cultures produced, preserved, and used a certain kind of record, written records. (White, "Question of Narrative" 55)

The dubious installation of a 'real' referent encourages Post-structuralist scholars to interrogate the consecration of so-called fact or datum. This factual information "is only

accessible to us today in textualized form: documents, eye-witness accounts, archives. The past is archeologized but its reservoir of available materials is acknowledged as textualized” (Hutcheon, “Postmodern Problematizing” 371).

The questioning, by Hutcheon and others, of history’s reliance upon text, and historiographic metafiction’s subsequent use of that historiographical strategy, is informed by a semiotic examination of history as a signifying discourse. For to grant historical discourse truth value on the basis of a notion of ordinary text⁵⁷ is to ignore the very real way in which its codes⁵⁸ signify in relation to a discursive surround. Both history and fiction are “linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent, either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality” (Hutcheon “Pastime” 285). A Post-structuralist investigation of historical discourse argues that both “history and fiction are cultural signification systems” which rely upon pre-existent and codified signifiers, such as footnotes, in order to validate their discourse (Hutcheon “Pastime” 292). Post-structuralism’s reading of text, fact and evidence argues that evidence “signifies within a system of signs” that the historian constructs as historiography (Gossman 32). The signifying discourse of history is supported by this artificially inflated status of historical evidence. Traditional historiography interprets

⁵⁷ For events are configured into facts by being related to “conceptual matrices within which they have to be imbedded if they are to count as facts” (Hutcheon, “Pastime” 302).

⁵⁸ “Factual and fictive discourses are not immutable essences but are historically varying types of writing, signaled by, and embodied in, changing literary conventions and generated by the changing structures of historically specific relations of production and intercourse” (Foley 27).

particular types of documents to represent discrete events of the past and ignores that “a fact is any kind of event whatsoever; one may be completely ignorant of its causes and relations” (Gossman 15). Marc Bloch’s lengthy chapter in *The Historian’s Craft* upon the nature and transmission of evidence expresses this historiographical wish to shore up the status of historical evidence. Bloch’s claims that evidence is a construct defined by historical discourse, and it is therefore subject to specific internal rules that do not bear external inquiry.

Post-structuralism investigates why the historian desires to promote ‘fact’ in historical discourse: “What is the ontological nature of historical documents? Are they a stand-in for the past? The trace? What is meant—in ideological terms—by our ‘natural’ understanding of historical explanation” (Hutcheon, “Postmodern Problematizing” 371). Similarly, Barthes claims that the status of evidence that history encourages, works out of a primitive metaphysics of presence in the same way as a photograph might. He calls this evocation of a supposed reality the *reality effect*: “objective history reality is always an unformulated meaning sheltering behind the apparent omnipotence of the referent” (Barthes 154):

Our whole civilization is drawn to the reality effect, as witness the development of genres like the realist novel, the diary, the documentary, the *fait divers*, the historical museum, the exhibition of ancient objects and above all the massive development of photography, which differs from drawing only in conveying the additional meaning that the event portrayed *really* happened. (Barthes 154)

Cloaking its questionable signifying strength in this discourse of the 'real,' the reality effect derives its actual strength from unexamined notions of ordinary fact, which arise out of, Lévi-Strauss argues, a desire for a visceral contact with the past.

Lévi-Strauss' ethnographic model theorizes about the privileging of 'fact' in historical discourse by comparing western culture's notion of archive to the respect that the Australian Aranda accord their churinga:

. . . the churinga are stone or wooden objects, roughly oval in shape with pointed or rounded ends, often engraved with symbolic signs, sometimes just pieces of wood or unworked pebbles. Whatever its appearance, each churinga represents the physical body of a definite ancestor and generation after generation it is formally conferred on the living person believed to be this ancestor's reincarnation. (238)

Since these objects represent a connection to history or ancestry quite apart from their appearance, the churinga's surface design has little to do with the object's cultural meaning. The value accorded individual churinga is not related to either its decoration or material of composition. The visual difference between the churinga is inconsequential, Lévi-Strauss argues, because objects receive their value in relation to cultural meaning-making systems: "a document does not become sacred by virtue of bearing a stamp which has prestige . . . it bears the stamp because it has first been acknowledged to be sacred" (239).

Lévi-Strauss uses this example of the churinga to argue that "we set such great store by our archives" because "they put us in contact with pure historicity" (Lévi-Strauss

241 and 242). Our archives allow us an intimacy⁵⁹ with what, in diachronic terms, we might call an irrecoverable past:

The churinga are hidden in piles in natural caves, far from frequented ways. Periodically they are taken out to be inspected and handled, and on these occasions they are always polished, greased and coloured, and prayers and incantations are addressed to them. Their role and the treatment accorded to them thus have striking analogies with the documentary archives which we secrete in strongboxes or entrust to the safe-keeping of solicitors and which we inspect from time to time with the care due to sacred things, to repair them if necessary or to commit them to smarter dossiers. On these occasions we too are prone to recite great myths recalled to us by the contemplation of the torn and yellowed pages: the deeds and achievements of our ancestors, the history of our homes from the time they were built or first acquired. (Ibid. 238)

This reading of the status of archive in historical discourse represents the “embodied essence of the event” and compares favourably to Miller’s writing of the *Memorabilia* in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, which, as I argue above, treats archived texts as holy relics (Ibid.). By constructing a hypothetical situation strikingly similar to *Canticle*, Lévi-Strauss anticipates (in order to gauge the archive’s significance) the reaction of western culture if it were to lose its archive: “They need only all have been published, for our knowledge and condition to be totally unaffected were a cataclysm to destroy the originals. We should, however, feel this loss as an irreparable injury that strikes to the core of our being” (Lévi-Strauss 242). Since our churinga, the archive, provides “palpable proofs of mythical times,” our past “would be deprived of what one is inclined to call its diachronic flavour” if we were to lose its material texts (Ibid. 242).

⁵⁹ In Lacanian terms, this “intimacy” expresses a desire for the ‘real’ misplaced upon the signifier.

Historiographic metafiction uses this fear of loss, and the corresponding desire for a 'real' artifact, to expose our dependence on historical codes. Historiographic metafiction mixes our churinga (or archives) with a blatant fictionalizing/poeticizing in order to parody conventional ways of legitimizing history. This strategy calls attention to the status of evidence and the trust in presence that 'history' commonly evokes. In a typically postmodern move, historiographic metafiction attempts, by use of a number of historical conventions, to overturn and deflate the power of this hard-won legitimization. Such an ironic examination of the ideology inherent in the construction of 'evidence' is brilliantly illuminated by the preface of Mandel's *Out of Place*, which foregrounds Ann and Eli Mandel's self-reflexive re-constitution of archival information:

What pages we were not reading or sorting served for mattresses, sheets, and head rests. When we decided a page was insignificant for our purposes or saw it was blank we placed it in a pile to use for wiping ourselves or for after love. (7)

Momentarily ignoring the comic nature of this deflation of the archive's status, what this example expresses is the arbitrary force of selection that lies behind archival work. The lack of significance a page has for the Mandel's purposes, and such purposes are deliberately unstated, directly relates to its obscure disposal. The reader becomes aware upon an initial reading of Mandel's preface that he/she does not know who "our" refers to, what "our purposes" are, and if the soiled pages were preserved for future archival work.

Using any "signifying practice it can find operative in a society," historiographic metafiction acknowledges and attempts to appropriate the political force that coding gives traditional history in order to expose the arbitrary nature of its power (Onega, "British Historiographic Metafiction" 16). By citing periodic literature (Cooley's *Bloody Jack*),

interviews (Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*), letters (Mandel's *Out of Place*), archives (Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*), government documents (Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*), and the diary (Kogawa's *Obasan*), the historical text deliberately inscribes itself into pre-existent cultural structures in order to draw attention to the textual and fictional status of all historical 'truths'.

A Postmodern Use for Textualized Remains

As the above list of historiographies suggests, a great many texts which interrogate history incorporate archival materials into their literary project. This use of content is not meant to merely evoke, in the vague fashion of Scott's *Waverley* novels, a historical time period, however. For postmodernists, a return to history has meant a return to the archive in order to unearth the accretions of the past. This gesture attempts to "create, or steal, or by stealing create, new signs out of the languages of other forms—as the collage was stolen from the visual arts" (Davey 192).

This use of archive is found in three major different configurations.⁶⁰ Many, mainly poetic, texts expose the indebtedness of their project by supplying explanatory prefaces, afterwords, appendices, or acknowledgements that clearly delineate their sources. Other postmodern writings of history foreground the derivative nature of their historiographical

⁶⁰ My focus must, for the present, ignore those texts which thematicize the recovery and subsequent problematization of history, such as Kogawa's *Obasan*, Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Bowering's *Burning Water*, Coover's *The Public Burning*, Findley's *Famous Last Words*, Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *The Scorched-Wood People*, and Kroetsch's *Badlands*. I will later explore how such texts thematicize unreferenced historical investigation for explicit rhetorical purposes.

project by foregrounding their use of “paratextual conventions,”⁶¹ photographs, and ‘found texts’. Finally, some postmodern writings of history are implicitly derivative—in the sense that their subject material is based upon research in official archives—although this derivative nature is not acknowledged by the use of paratextual historical conventions within the text. Of course, these arbitrary boundaries are in flux, for, as the example of Mandel’s *Out of Place* suggests, texts may employ a positioning and self-reflexive preface, footnotes, as well as unreferenced intertextual signifiers.

The use that Mandel’s *Out of Place*, as well as Ondaatje’s *Collected Works* and Cooley’s *Bloody Jack* makes of prefatory material foregrounds their texts’ dependence on sources as well as legitimizes their projects. Many of these texts use this explanatory paratextual material in order to reference, in the manner of a bibliography, the texts from which they have quoted or borrowed. In many cases this material is not in the least problematized. For example, Kroetsch’s *The Ledger* calls upon the legitimacy of the archive by an afterword which states that

The ledger pages at the front of the book are reproduced from the original ledger kept by the poet’s ancestors for their sawmill in Carrick township, Bruce County. The township maps, which show the location of the mill just north of Belmore, come from the *Illustrated Atlas of the County of Bruce* (1880); and the map at the end of the book is a detail from Upper Canada (1800). (unnumbered)

⁶¹ Historiographic metafiction uses “the paratextual conventions of historiography (especially footnotes) to both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations” (Hutcheon, “Pastime” 302). These strategies may also include parenthetical referencing in the body of the text, endnotes and bibliographical citations.

Although the self-reflexive character of *The Ledger* belies the straightforward nature of this afterword, Kroetsch here unabashedly calls upon the discourse of the real that Barthes examines in “Historical Discourse.” The discussion of ‘place’ that informs Kroetsch’s *Seed Catalogue* is in *The Ledger* evoked in all its poetic specificity. The dated texts, maps and specific diction, such as “original” and “ancestors,” call upon *readerly* notions of historical discourse:

Kroetsch’s own fragmentary, juxtapositional method of composition in poems like *The Ledger* or *Seed Catalogue* (or, indeed, in ‘critical’ works like ‘For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem’ and *Labyrinths of Voice*), in which portions of found documents participate in a collage effect, encourages a sense of the writer as an archaeological finder and provisional interpreter of fragmentary evidence, rather than the creative originator (or ‘author’) of a literary work, or the recuperative, totalizing agent Foucault labels the ‘historian’. (Jones 9-10)

Mandel’s *Out of Place* similarly locates place in a landscape populated by signifiers which belong to specific discourses and are dependent upon the interpreting subject. In this text, the discourses of the automobile, literature, geography and the Christian bible, construct both the poetic and the ‘real’ landscape:

roads lead here there
on the prairie Ann holds the Pinto
along great swoops of highway down
from Lloydminster past Batouche
rebellion Rudy’s book researched
prophetic voices as a guide

in Huxley’s version time curves
upon itself

cities of the mescal dream

turned biblical jewelled palaces
palaces of John in Revelation

Blake’s engraving the drunkenness

of Smart's madness prophecy
(15)

Metafictionally foregrounding the prairie landscape's human and textual constructedness, and its existence in discursive structures rather than in a transcendental verisimilitude, Mandel's description reveals how even the search for home (a desire so naturalized that it seems universal) is suspended in discourse.

Although this type of unreferenced intertext informs many attempts in the postmodern long poem to recover a historical moment, other texts are much more specific concerning their sources. Marlatt's *Steveston* uses a final section entitled "Notes on Poems" to relate particular poems to selections from which the quoted material was taken. Cooley's "Sources" cites the intertexts that have informed *Bloody Jack*. Similarly, the dedication/acknowledgement of Johnston's *Colony of Unrequited Dreams* announces the "special debt" he owes to books "consulted" even as it offers the standard trappings of such acknowledgements: the expression of gratitude to scholars and editors (unnumbered).⁶² Invoking the trappings of academic work, these fictionalized accounts use the afterword for two purposes. Their citation of sources legitimizes their project as well as calls attention to the convention itself of validating a writing by reference to another text.

Many postmodern writings of history also use parenthetical referencing, footnotes and endnotes in order to mimic historical codes. This use of paratextual conventions has the same substantiating impulse as an unproblematized afterword. Perhaps the most

⁶² As well, Johnston includes in the page containing publication information a parody of the standard disclaimer: "This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, with the exception of the public and historical ones, is entirely coincidental."

extreme forms this impulse to foreground historical discourse takes are texts like Gutteridge's *Riel*, which uses standard academic endnotes, and Sproxton's *Headframe*, which has a bibliography in MLA format. The use of parenthetical referencing spliced into the text itself, such as Kroetsch's *Ledger*, which quotes *The Canada Gazette*⁶³ and Sproxton's *Headframe*, which uses a "Summary Report, 1930" from the "Canada Department of Mines," similarly emphasizes the dependence historical discourse has on specific strategies (35). Kogawa's *Obasan* employs such markers as historical dates, newspapers, archives, and allusions to legislation, to both perpetuate these *readerly* notions of 'valid' history and to question official truth. Specific paratextual references, such as the dated chapter introductions, "Until May 1943" or "1945. Lethbridge, Alberta," as well as allusions to the contemporary politics and journalism, "the Under-Secretary of State from External Affairs, Norman Roberts, said" and "the *Vancouver Daily Province* reported," inscribe *Obasan* into given notions of historical discourse (*Obasan* 138, 190 and 184).

This tendency of *Obasan* to refer to external texts culminates in the last section which is incorporated into the text as though it were an afterword. The placement enables the 'afterword' to ironically comment⁶⁴ upon the preceding text. This final section⁶⁵ details both the immoral and, according to Canadian law and international precedent, illegal nature of the Japanese repatriation and internment. Positioned as a 'real' document, this

⁶³ ". . . as specified in *The Canada Gazette*, August 17, 1854" (B-2).

⁶⁴ "Subtext is used as a set of images to which the main text will react" (Davey 190).

⁶⁵ "EXCERPT FROM THE MEMORANDUM SENT BY THE CO-OPERATIVE Committee on Japanese Canadians to the House and the Senate of Canada, April 1946" (190).

“EXCERPT” provides an official voice, external to Naomi and Aunt Emily’s provisional first-person narration, which speaks against the actions of the Canadian government.

Quite apart from the way that ‘found’ texts are positioned, by authors such as Mandel and Gutteridge, their insertion into a poetic/fictional form also problematizes historical/academic conventions by direct statements which question the use, and by extension, all such use, of these conventions. For instance, the standard academic endnotes of Gutteridge’s *Riel* are overturned by endnote 7 which reveals that “This passage is fictitious” (unnumbered). Likewise, Mandel’s *Out of Place* uses a footnote to evoke Huxley’s *Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*, although this note is related to no particular place in the passage that it purports to explain (15). In his *Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, Ondaatje’s similarly states, after his brief academic afterword entitled “Credits,” that he has “edited, rephrased, and slightly reworked the originals” (108). And although the last section of Sproxton’s *Headframe* (“Tailings”)⁶⁶ consists of a bibliography written in standard MLA format, Sproxton self-reflexively warns that although “quotations have been borrowed” they have also been “sometimes modified” (133).

By using quotation from newspapers, telegrams, and government documents in *Obasan*, Kogawa foregrounds the suspect paucity of the official record, and by including these documents within either Naomi or Aunt Emily’s own idiosyncratic archive/diary,

⁶⁶ A diction which suggests, as suits the thematic content of the work, both the leftovers from mining, as well as storytelling. Thus it is no accident that “Tailings” is found at the end of the text and occupies a placement which combines with the import of its name to undermine the importance that traditional academic discourse accords the bibliography.

reveals the arbitrary nature of their selection. By citing⁶⁷ and then contextualizing an article from the *Vancouver Daily Province*, which reports on “indifferent” Japanese being repatriated, Aunt Emily questions the ideological nature of the written record’s fixity:

Six hundred and seventy solemn-faced Japanese . . . sailed out of Vancouver Friday night bound for the “land of the rising sun.” . . . There were few smiling faces among the boatload. Solemnness was written in their faces; only indifference they showed. (185)

This document is immediately interpreted for the reader by Aunt Emily’s deliberately individualized voice: “Who knows how or why they decided to leave? Some Issei without their children around couldn’t read and simply signed because they were urged to” (Ibid.). With “a power greater than that of discursive argument,” Kogawa “counters historical manipulation of facts with novelistic record” (Willis 249 and Cheung 154). In opposition to the social memory, she offers Naomi’s personal memorial, in an attempt to make a political difference which is reliant upon cultural meaning rather than the supposed objectivity of the historical account. Although traditional historiography has left no record of buildings destroyed and overwritten⁶⁸ by language, just as the Japanese internment leaves little trace in government records, the objectivity of this historical account is challenged by *Obasan*’s words which “aim for the heart” (*Obasan* 40).

Texts such as Gutteridge’s *Borderlands* and *Coppermine* and Robert’s *S’Ney’Mos* also perform this questioning by using historical markers (“*Prince of Wales Fort, 1768*”) to both mimic and undermine traditional historical narrative (*Coppermine* 1). This mimicry

⁶⁷ Kogawa also undermines the newspaper’s message by including the syntactical error: “only indifference they showed.”

⁶⁸ Government authorities gave Japanese concentration camps names which hid their function, like Sick Bay and Hastings Park.

is deliberately political. Because of the qualitative difference between the prose styles in Gutteridge's texts—the italicized expositional prose which parodies historical objectivity, Matonabee's mythic⁶⁹ poetic diction, and Hearne's judgmental and bureaucratic prose—the reader is encouraged to draw his/her own conclusions. The reader accustomed to rely upon the implicit reading assumptions of historical discourse must struggle to make a coherent narrative from the mutually exclusive voices which refuse to coalesce into historical singularity.

Gutteridge's exposure of the impossibility of that coherence in *Borderlands*, which confronts white and Native discourse, problematizes not only the "telling" of this specific historical circumstance, but the historiographical project in general. In *Borderlands*, the evaluative nature of the plain prose discourse (associated with the journals of the different white voices) is contrasted with the poetic nature of Maquina's words. Maquina was an almost undocumented Native who, with obscure motivation, killed a number of white explorers. The explanatory and italicized prose with which Gutteridge introduces some of *Coppermine's* individual poems, has in *Borderlands* been replaced with prefatory remarks. This preface does little to allay the reader's wish for historical accuracy, however. Gutteridge openly and self-reflexively admits that many details are unknown and, as we learn from his text, unknowable: "Maquina was captured but released unharmed and unpunished. We have no account of his life thereafter" (i). As a discussion which theorizes about repressed or ignored history, *Borderlands* foregrounds its awareness of the arbitrary nature of its own narrative choice, and, by association, all historical selection of narrative.

⁶⁹ In terms of the tetra-linguistic model used by Guattari and Deleuze (23).

Gutteridge's preface makes us constantly aware that *Borderlands* is mediated, selected, and is thus ruled by some controlling vision.

As I argue above, this process of comparing multiple voices in the Canadian long poem is further enhanced by the incorporation of found items (which Jones calls "documentary-collage")⁷⁰ into the body of the text. In fact, as Cooley suggests, *Headframe*'s inclusion of a number of different textual types is a strategy which problematizes the reader's notion of the cohesive archive:

A strange book this *Headframe*. What are we to make of all these entries, so varied in form and purpose? There are songs, documents, reminiscences, lists, jokes, tall tales, numbers and names, speculations, definitions, comments on the text (sometimes in the forms of marginal glosses, more often in parenthetical asides). There are newspaper reports, pieces of literary criticism, anecdotes, journal entries, primitive film scripts, title pages from other books, snatches from popular songs (most of them from the mid-1950s to the late 1950s). There are extracts lifted from other literature, too, echoes from many other writers. ("Notes on Birk Sproxtton's *Headframe*" 148)

Cooley's own *Bloody Jack* is an equally eclectic mixture of 'found' textual remains. This device works to subvert the traditional format of the long poem and call attention to the implications in the recovery of history:

. . . the text's cover . . . categorizes [*Bloody Jack*] generically as "a book." A quick flip through its pages reveals the necessity of such a general term, for it contains a wide sampling of genres of both poetry and prose (both what we would recognize as fiction and non-fiction) as well as a musical score, a budget report, and a number of items that defy easy categorization. Examples of these "hybrid" items are "the yard" (4-6) and "cunning linguist" (77-87) which slip back and forth between poetry and prose, "Criminal Life" (98) which could be read as a poem or as a title page in the

⁷⁰ "I want to read 'documentary' not simply as a term of reference that may be used unequivocally to categorize and label literary works, but as itself situated at the intersection of the various voices/texts that have been drawn into discussion on the very issue of reference . . ." (Godard 5).

nineteenth-century novel style, and “IOU (Laws Line of Credit)” (185) which appears to be a picture made out of letters. (D’Aoust 132-3)

A literary strategy which dictates the inclusion of these heterogeneous texts, both installs and questions the veracity of historical representation:

Collage suspends sequential narrative, works to contain time within a spatial structure. The juxtaposition of text within a subtext invites the comparison of past and present. Contemporary long poems have created new narrative structures by combining these systems, like Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* which is both a sequence of Billy’s life and a collage of his ‘collected works’ . . . or Marlatt’s *Steveston* which collages perspectives of Steveston, relates its history, and plays its narratives against the subtext of the Kwakiutl Winter Ceremonial. (Davey, “Recontextualization” 186)

Friesen’s self-consciously ambiguous prefatory claim that “all the characters in this text are *surely* fictional” (my emphasis)⁷¹ is problematized and foregrounded by his legitimizing textual strategy. In *The Shunning*, Friesen’s insertion of a handwritten⁷² death certificate evokes the metaphysics of presence that Lévi-Strauss associates with originary documents (92). Texts such as Kroetsch’s *Seed Catalogue*, Cooley’s *Bloody Jack*, and Mandel’s *Out of Place* are sprinkled with these legitimizing ‘real’ texts. Official sounding letters from graveyard maintenance committees and fans, quotes from historical texts, as well as historiographic apparatus, such as footnotes, all work to both foreground and evoke our faith in the historical document.⁷³

⁷¹ Friesen’s use of “surely” already undermines his statement.

⁷² Curiously, in *Fielding*, Cooley rejects this metaphysics in his father’s death certificate by presenting it as typed and unsigned (235).

⁷³ This mixture of truth discourse and postmodern self-reflexivity makes the reader ask “to what discursive context could this language belong” (Hutcheon, “Pastime” 299).

Texts like Marlatt's *Steveston* and Whyte's *Homage, Henry Kelsey* use multimedia to achieve a similar polyphonic and 'realistic' effect. The reproductions of Dennis Burton's paintings (his "immediate two week response to the work") in *Homage* inform and speak to the poem's poetic interpretation and Robert's photos in Marlatt's *Steveston* are a "single narrative told in two distinct modes that converse" (*Homage* 80 and *Steveston* 92).

The use of graphical images in a historical text has two results. The paintings which comment, frame, and to some extent inform, *Homage*, have the effect of constructing an extratextual layering. Unlike the photos that many of these texts use, however, *Homage*'s photos do not signify place as well. Most of the texts in this study use photos, and this deliberate choice provides an ironic comment on the evocation of the 'real' to which the text refers.⁷⁴ This evocation of a 'real' can be heavily problematized, however. For example, *Collected Works* includes undefined pictures of western-style housing, which we are encouraged to accept as period pieces, but it also contains a comic book cover,⁷⁵ and photographs of Ondaatje as a child in a cowboy suit. This intrusion of the author into the work indicates the possibly suspect nature of whatever authorial intention lies behind this book. The reader is encouraged to suspect the author's tendency, at least in childhood, to over-mythologize the western genre. *Collected Works* asks the reader to consider how mythological an entire text can become when subject to an arbitrary controlling historical vision.

⁷⁴ In fact, Sontag calls photographs "maps of the real" because a photograph is "a material vestige of its subject" (in Marlatt, *Steveston* 93).

⁷⁵ "The Comic book legend is real" (Ondaatje unnumbered).

The texts which less overtly call upon official archives, which less openly relate their narrative to specific historical events, do not necessarily contain photographs, paratextual conventions, or a manner of referencing which calls attention to the way in which their project supplants historical truth. These texts include Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *The Scorched-Wood People*, Kogawa's *Obasan* and Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*. John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* is taken in part from the "raw historical record of the Archives of Maryland" and Marlatt's *Steveston* from the Provincial Archives of British Columbia⁷⁶ (Onega, "British Historiographic Metafiction" 15). Bowering's *Burning Water* works out of Vancouver's journal in order to resist the historical record:

For example, Bowering works entire sections of George Vancouver's *A Voyage of Discovery* into the textual fabric of *Burning Water*, but this does not stop him from playing fast and furious with the known 'facts' of Vancouver's voyage (and, in general his life—and death). (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 68)

Likewise, Monkman reveals that Cohen's use of the historical Iroquois saint, Catherine Tekakwitha, in *Beautiful Losers* is entirely dependent on an unreferenced source:

An investigation of Cohen's sources indicates that almost all of the details in Catherine's life are taken from Edouard Lecompte's *Une Vierge Catherine Tekakwitha: Le Lis description bords de la Mohawk et du St-Laurent* (1656-1680). Through quotation, translation and paraphrase, Cohen provides a full historical background for Catherine as seen by a Jesuit Priest in 1927. The picture described on the first page of the novel matches detail by detail the portrait of Catherine which serves as frontpiece to Lecompte's book. Quotations ascribed to Fathers Cholonec, Chauchetière, and Remy are also restricted to citations appearing in his volume. (in Scobie 115)

⁷⁶ *Steveston* "mixes poetry, transcribed interviews, and photographs" (Jones 28).

Similarly, *Obasan's* reliance upon the Kitagawa archive material (and subsequent decisions to write in a fictional, albeit historically coded, fashion) is significant in terms of its recovery of a 'lost' history.

In both *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *The Scorched-Wood People*, Wiebe strives for an interpretation which pays close attention to historical detail. In *Big Bear*, Wiebe attempts to follow even the very words used in the court records of Big Bear's trial, as well as other transcripts of public record. As Wiebe himself tells the reader, "The courtroom scene . . . is taken straight out of the actual report except for details, shaping and cutting things out" (Wiebe, "Translating Life" 129). Likewise, in his *Scorched-Wood People* Wiebe assures the reader that he, "carefully follows the contours of historical fact" in its sympathetic writing of the Riel rebellion (Ibid. 391). Wiebe's 'reading' or re-writing of specific historical events, his rescue of vision "from the oblivion of the past," has a specific polemical and political mandate which is best served by not using specific referencing conventions (Redekop 69). For example, rooting the work in specific texts, such as the court records of Big Bear's trial, would limit Wiebe's desire to explore Native oral culture. In *Big Bear*, "the fixed permanence and arid factuality of written treatises and of newspapers (not to mention the aptly named Scriptures) of the white world are pitted against the oral, unrecorded, and thus undefendable discourse of the Indian world" (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 70). Wiebe is a 'maker' who tries "to get at the truth of things" by theorizing about the modification of the historical record, and by working at the level of human meaning, instead of sterile, concrete fact (Wiebe, "Unearthing" 237):

The maker selects and orders the event pattern in such a way that the impression of recognizable life is felt, an *impression* (not real life itself) that may be more powerful and incisive than if we had actually lived through the event . . . (Wiebe, *The Story-Makers* xxii-xxiii)

Wiebe does not have a dogmatic attitude toward scholarly fact—"unless they are very carefully handled, facts are the invariable tyrants of story" (Wiebe, "On the Trail of Big Bear" 132-3). His modification of fact is controlled and deliberate:

. . . you need the facts so that you can make something out of them. . . . The fact is always in the past, but a fiction is what you make of it. And you have to have a certain amount of facts to make a fiction out of them. (Wiebe, "Where the Voice" 152)

Wiebe's modification of factual record⁷⁷ is not merely fanciful. Wiebe uses a studied revision of factual record for the particular purpose of uncovering "a human truth larger than any individual" (Wiebe, *The Story-Makers* xxiii):

. . . if you can with skill shape facts and events to show the human meanings behind them (events taken by themselves in the order in which they happen very rarely show deeper human meaning), you have truly memorable story. . . . How much you mix actual fact and fancy is not so important as that the story as a whole move us to understand 'what happened' in a profounder human way. (Ibid. xiii-xiv)

By deliberately flaunting historical conventions, writers such as Wiebe deeply problematize the traditional reader's understanding of the purpose of fact and evidence in the meaning-making process. The finely tuned and naturalized assumptions which mediate historical 'truth' are both installed and called upon as well as entirely overthrown by this subversion of traditional historical narrative. The fragile medium of history, dependent

⁷⁷ Detailed in Keith's "From Document to Art: Wiebe's Historical Short Stories and Their Sources" and especially Bailey's "Imaginative and Historical Truth in Wiebe's *The Mad Trapper*."

upon the even more fragile medium of a language exposed by disruptions, is held in place only by the reader's thinly veiled collusion. By confronting that complicity with these subversive techniques, historiographic metafiction both de-naturalizes and foregrounds the type of ideological collusion that is necessary to maintain dominant ideologies.

Playing with the Historical Stage

Another major discursive structure that supports history's attempt to appear legitimate is its attention to the so-called "major players" of official history (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 69). History's concentration upon particular figures represents a fraction of the past's rich social surround, as well as an impossible attempt to concentrate the grid of power relations upon a problematic monolithic structure. I would instead like to focus upon how postmodern historical texts use this ubiquitous figure in order to evoke and problematize traditional historiography.

An important⁷⁸ Canadian author who has theorized about this recovery of major players in history is Rudy Wiebe. Through texts like *Alberta: a Celebration*, a work in which Wiebe explores through text and photography his Canadian heritage, Wiebe attempts to foreground the people of Canada who have traditionally been neglected by historical discourse. As he says, "I think very strongly that there have been great men and great women in our history and we should hear about them too" (Wiebe, "Where the

⁷⁸ A word use which risks invoking a similar notion of central characters in Canadian literature.

Voice” 127). Through declarations such as “We’re an arctic nation and we should tell more stories about that,” Wiebe positions himself primarily as a writer of Canadian history (*Daily Gleaner* 9). This nationalist concern⁷⁹ reveals Wiebe’s personal commitment to historical portrayal. Wiebe considers the rendering of history to be an important responsibility and his fictional/historical “mediation” or “particular recreation” has a specific psychological mandate (Wiebe, “Translating Life” 129). Wiebe argues that it is in the process of story that our humanity is both released and understood:

All people have history. The stories we tell of our past are by no means merely words: they are meaning and life to us as *people*, as a *particular* people; the stories are there, and if we do not know of them we are simply, like animals, memory ignorant, and the less are we people. (Wiebe, “On the Trail of Big Bear” 134)

Wiebe has faith that “human beings are much more self-conscious than . . . an animal that has no memory, no race memory except in the genes somewhere” (Wiebe, “Where the Voice” 150). This belief inspires Wiebe’s expectation—like Iser’s faith in defamiliarization—that people want their fundamental beliefs challenged every bit as much as they want them reiterated through historical narrative. This does not mean that Wiebe is concerned with a didactic form of historical propaganda, however. In an effort to maintain some form of historical objectivity, he tells a “story from many different angles . . . forcing the reader to do the interpreting . . . [by] bringing these many elements together” (Wiebe, “Looking at Our Particular World” 7). Speaking specifically of *Big Bear*, Wiebe affirms that

. . . these (seeming) documents placed side-by-side allow the reader to make various personal interpretations. And this of course makes for difficult reading. Many readers find the book difficult because they must

⁷⁹ Revealed by Wiebe’s wish to “. . . touch this land with words” (Wiebe in Kertzer xxiii).

participate so much in the reading, to bring so much of their own understanding to it. (Wiebe, "On Looking at Our Particular World" 7)

Wiebe is writing a form of reader interaction into his multiple stories and regards "the actual stuff from history from a slightly different angle [uncovers] so many different stories there than the standard ones we have been given" (Wiebe, "Where is the Voice" 154).

Perhaps Wiebe's most vivid writing of historical personages is his recovery of Big Bear, Riel and the so-called Mad Trapper. Although the case of the Mad Trapper is significantly different, in that typically Wiebe's characters are figures ignored by white history,⁸⁰ *The Mad Trapper* still represents an attempt to recover the major players in the historical events of Canada's past. One of the clearest ways to see Wiebe's manipulation of the past is his modification of the 'factual' RCMP record in *The Mad Trapper*. Wiebe's decisive construction of the event of Millen's death on the Porcupine river weeks later than the date of his actual death when Johnson is trapped against a cliff is a move which shows his rejection of a slavish devotion to historical fact, as well as implies a particular novelistic intention:

In actuality, Millen was shot dead by Johnson on 29 January 1932. Wiebe substitutes a fictional Paul Thompson on that occasion and has Millen survive until 17 February when he can come face to face with Johnson at the climax. (Keith, Rev. of *The Mad Trapper* 102)

Wiebe deliberately and falsely extended the life of Millen (in order to present an uncomplicated narrative structure) in part so that the novel's audience would not have to focus upon another lead character. Moreover, this novelistic move makes Millen and

⁸⁰ I will take up the political and ideological implications of Wiebe's attempt to write a neglected people into history below.

Johnson's "relationship central, for in no other way could Wiebe have opened up the human possibilities of the Trapper's story or shown so plainly both the necessity for and the precariousness of language as communication" (Howells 306).

Fulfilling Wiebe's belief that "any work of art worthy the name . . . bears within itself its reason for existence and its own justification," *The Mad Trapper* is much more complex than this confirmation of its novelistic status would seem to imply (Wiebe, "An Author Speaks" 64). Wiebe's evocative and popular history—which is at least partially oriented to an audience of the northern adventure—investigates common notions of history and the relationship between language and truth.

In tacit support of Wiebe's reading of his own texts, Umberto Eco theorizes that in the act of writing the author conceives of the 'ideal' reader as playing an indirect and collaborative role in the writing of the text in so far as he/she is implicated in the direction of the textual strategy. The author plans allusions and intertext to take the reader outside the text into his/her interpersonal and world experience, and plays against the reader's cultural understanding of historical details and conventions.

Texts such as Findley's *Famous Last Words* more directly draw upon the major characters from western cultural/historical tradition. Like Bowering's *Short Sad Book*, which calls John A. MacDonald forth from the historical record to rollick across Canada with Longfellow's Evangeline, *Famous'* narrator (Hugh Selwyn Mauberly), who is only historical in a literary sense, tells of meeting "known historical personages"⁸¹ (Hutcheon,

⁸¹ These "somewhat fictive versions of known historical personages (Pound, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, von Ribbentrop, Schellenberg, Hess, Lindenberg, Sir Harry Oakes)" are historical characters themselves, although rooted in the historical record, who are continually in flux (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 68).

The Canadian Postmodern 68). Like Mauberly himself, these characters modify their ever-plastic history to suit their new vision of themselves:

Wallis told the story of her life and left out China. I was very hurt. Then the Duke told the story of his life and left out having abdicated. Wallis was very pleased. Nonetheless these stories told the temper of our times and the motto we had adopted: *the truth is in our hands now*. (*Famous* 177).

Not only does this re-writing of the characters of historical discourse allow texts like Findley's *Famous Last Words* and Bowering's *Burning Water* to evoke a particular time period, but these characters become the backdrop for a re-visioning of history. As in *Collected Works*, where Ondaatje "uses historical characters but surrounds them with inventions of his own and with 'facts [which are] expanded or polished to suit the truth of fiction,'" these writings of historical personages are radical revisionings of their official antecedents (Hochbruck 450).

Many of these recastings of historically famous people are political in intent. For example, George Bowering's *Burning Water* uses the character of George Vancouver as well as Quadra in order to evoke a particular time period in west coast exploration. Bowering "works entire sections of George Vancouver's *A Voyage of Discovery* into the textual fabric of *Burning Water*" (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 68). He also uses what is not known about Vancouver's personality in order to write his character into history. Even while he installs that historical figure, however, Bowering deflates that writing by his focus upon idiosyncratic and very probably⁸² inaccurate historical details. For example, his Vancouver says that he had had very friendly intercourse with Don

⁸² One of the advantages of McHale's dark areas strategy is that any surety about this aspect of Vancouver's past is negated.

Quadra in order to construct, apparently from whole cloth, Vancouver's ongoing homosexual desire for Quadra.⁸³

Bowering's metaphorical examination of white/Native interaction is much more blatantly dramatic. Constructing a situation similar to the first contact between the Norse explorers in *The Vinland Sagas* and the Skraelings,⁸⁴ Bowering has the white explorers land on the coast only to shoot and attempt to kill a Native man escaping into the forest. They immediately appoint a sailor to pursue, with murderous intent, the wounded Native. When the sailor does not return after a short time, they investigate, only to find that the sailor is anally raping the dying Native man. This horrifying scene, and the casual nonchalance with which Captain Vancouver deals with the matter, becomes in Bowering's text, a telling symbol of white/Native interaction. Although the repugnant details of this scene are of doubtful accuracy, they metaphorically parallel the intent that lies behind the Norse/Native confrontation a millennia earlier. Bowering's sweeping metaphorical readings of historical events and personages questions how historical events are related to present politicized readings of the past, as well as creates a new history for his texts' audience.

⁸³ "Ian McLaren has suggested to me that Bowering has amusingly generated a homosexual relationship between Vancouver and Don Quadra out of mere innuendo in Vancouver's description of their brief contact as 'very friendly intercourse'" (Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* 76, n24). Also, Vancouver, however imaginatively, says to Quadra, "Give us a little hug, now" (*Burning* 29).

⁸⁴ The Icelandic encounter with Skraelings (which is a Norse term meaning, "miserable wretches") tells much about Norse expectations upon encountering another people. Upon seeing east-coast Natives sheltering under a boat they immediately kill them, for according to Icelandic culture, they must be outlaws exiled from their people for a heinous crime.

For the American public, Coover's resurrection of the once high-profile Rosenberg execution—and lurid rewriting of Nixon and Uncle Sam—is one the most important instances of a historical work which concentrates upon major political and social characters. Using a literary strategy which relates to McHale's theorizing about the dark areas of the historical record, Coover gives the reader “a grotesque version of Richard Nixon,”⁸⁵ a Nixon the American public never met but a figure which they suspect exists in all politicians, as narrator through a seemingly endless and paranoid internal dialogue (Goetsch 477). Coover highlights the conniving and short-sighted nature of Nixon's political manoeuvring by recounting the years previous to Nixon's scandalous presidency. Although the historical events of Watergate inevitably hover behind Coover's text, *Public Burning's* intent is to expose McCarthy-era xenophobia. The temper of the times were such that an obscure Marxist Jewish couple, who were held to be responsible for the delivery of hitherto secret atomic bomb technology to the Soviet Union, were summarily executed.

Coover upstages his representation of Nixon by incorporating, and making into characters, such fantastical elements as advertizing's Betty Crocker, Marxism's spectre (the Phantom), and TIME, the National Poet Laureate. The construction of these idols of the mass media, with all of their ideological baggage, becomes for Coover a way of examining America's mass culture. In Coover's retelling, Betty Crocker has been, and

⁸⁵ “Sometimes the manipulation of historical personages is so blatant and in conflict with known fact that the reader is forced to ask the reason behind [it]” (Hutcheon, “Pastime” 295).

remains, an icon of the female position in pop-culture's family values,⁸⁶ while TIME is the mass media's conservative voice. The Phantom represents "all that is xenophobically un-American" (Fogel 191). This figure is not only a deliberate echo of the *Communist Manifesto's* spectre, but as the name implies, also represents the insubstantial nature of America's (Uncle Sam's) fear of the Red Menace. This mixture of 'realistic' and fantastic elements, Fogel argues, is "meant to elucidate the sensibility of a nation which responded to the Rosenbergs in as rabid a manner as it did" (190).

Coover's writing of the symbolic figure of Uncle Sam is much more complex, for he does not merely construct and thereby support a notion of a prime mover of 1950s America. As "the quintessential pioneering up-beat American," Uncle Sam becomes a mythological and ideological force behind the presidency, as well as America's faith in a kind of homespun wisdom (Fogel 191). Crass and carelessly brutal, Uncle Sam, who is both Uncle 'Same', thereby symbolizing the urge for conformity, and the acronym U. S., becomes an ideological stand-in for America's schizophrenic value system. By animating Uncle Sam and relating him to Dwight Eisenhower, Coover argues that this parochial feature of American ideology informs presidential power, regardless of who may move into that signifying position. Believing both that the Phantom is a real threat and that that threat is very probably non-existent, Uncle Sam represents the hypocritical cross-purposes of the American political and justice system:

"Rig a prosecution?" Uncle Sam laughed sourly. I knew better, of course, I was being a fool. "Hell, *all* courtroom testimony about the past is ipso facto and teetotaciosuly a baldface lie, ain't that so? Moonshine! Chicanery! The ole gum game! Like history itself—all more or less bunk . .

⁸⁶ "Nobody knows better than Betty Crocker the importance of proper timing in laying a good table" (Coover 460).

. the fatal slantindicular futility of Fact! Appearances, my boy, appearances! Practical politics consists in ignorin' facts! *Opinion* ultimately governs the world!"

." . . the past is a bucket of cold ashes: rake through it and all you'll get is dirty! A lousy situation, but dese, as the man says, *are de conditions dat prevail!*" (86)

For Coover, this "desputt humbuggery" (a word which evokes the words "desperate" and "despot") drives the American political machine, and his metafictional devices are a way of drawing reader attention to ideological forces that inform the official version of history. As McHale suggests, the "integration of the historical and the fantastic, especially its integration within single characters, exacerbates the ontological hesitation which is the principle of all fantastic fiction, for here the hesitation is not between the supernatural and the *realistic* but between the supernatural and the historically *real*" (95).

Coover also incorporates events that blatantly contradict the public record. Nixon's seduction of Ethel Rosenberg just prior to her execution, and the placement of that execution in Times Square instead of Sing Sing, are events which are constructed in order to defamiliarize the complacent reader familiar with the official version. Perhaps the most shocking defamiliarization that takes place in Coover's text is Uncle Sam's rape of Nixon at the end of the novel. Assuring Nixon that this is how the presidency is passed on, Uncle Sam's symbolic gesture ironically becomes for the reader a literal translation of how American ideology does violence to its primary signifier, the president, and by extension to its citizens.

Coover's text stands in vivid contrast to Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*. Doctorow's text focuses upon Daniel, Doctorow's constructed child of the Rosenbergs—

whom he significantly calls the Isaacson's. In conflict with the broad canvas of Coover's text, Doctorow's strategy focuses attention upon the minor characters in the historical narrative, and in that way is similar to Lukács' notion of an ideal historical narrative, in which he claims that Walter Scott's novels best evoke the historical past by using the major characters of history only as a narrative backdrop to a particular time. Doctorow's focus upon this constructed son of the Rosenbergs who, after a generation has passed, searches for the 'meaning' behind his parent's execution, and attempts to examine the effect that a historical event has upon the present as well as thematicize the search for historical truth: "the specific dramatic interest I had was solely in terms of what happens when all the antagonistic force of society is brought to bear and focused on one or possibly two individuals, what kind of anthropological ritual is that?" (Doctorow in Reitz 224).

Like *The Book of Daniel*, most postmodern historiographic metafiction do not concentrate upon major historical players. In many traditional historical novels, "the real figures of the past are deployed to validate or authenticate the fictional world by their presence, as if to hide the joins between fiction and history in a formal, ontological sleight of hand" (Hutcheon, "Pastime" 295). While traditional historical novels keep major players in a Lukácsian background which only exists in order to indicate a particular time period, "the metafictional self-reflexivity of postmodern novels prevents any such subterfuge, and poses the ontological join as a problem" (Hutcheon, "Pastime" 295).

Historiographic metafiction evoke major figures of historical discourse in order to deflate the legitimacy that this signifying structure offers historical discourse. As well, this

strategy offers to the defamiliarized reader a site where present and past discourses can clash. Postmodern historiographic metafiction evokes and contradicts the historical record's version of historical personages⁸⁷ in order to cause what McHale calls "ontological flicker":

This "flickering" effect intervenes between the text-continuum (the language and style of the text) and the reader's reconstruction of its world. I have treated this ontological perspectivism as a separate dimension in effect straddling the dimensions of text-continuum and reconstructed world, and for want of a better term have labelled it the dimension of "construction"—a term appropriately ambiguous between the *process* of construction and its *product*, the thing constructed. (McHale 39)

In historiographic metafiction, modifications of the past, such as anachronistic revisionings of historical persons, are not limited to offering radical insight into historical characters. The postmodern use of anachronism is a self-reflexive device which inevitably makes particular demands of its reader.

An Anachronistic Past

Postmodern fictions upset the carefully constructed historical stage by inserting anachronistic elements which contradict the received record. This effort stands in contrast to evoking—like Lukács' description of Scott's novels—a particular time period, and making it internally consistent. This defamiliarization has the effect of jarring the readers out of their *readerly* acceptance of that constructed stage's 'reality'. Findley's *Famous*

⁸⁷ . . . certain known 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, "Pastime" 294).

Last Words uses literary characters in a novel coded as historical, and Coover uses ideological constructions of American culture—Uncle Sam and Betty Crocker—as anachronistic devices which draw the reader’s attention to the text’s constructedness. Likewise, in *French Lieutenant’s Woman*, Fowles attributes his protagonist, Sarah, with “the attitudes and psychology of a modern, that is, late-twentieth-century, woman” (McHale 93). Similarly, Ana, in Marlatt’s *Ana Historic*, and Caprice in Bowering’s *Caprice* are credited with the ability to reject the traditional female roles of their own contemporary society.

Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, “a historical novel with an extraordinary density of twentieth-century referents,” also constructs a hero—William of Baskerville—who is “essentially unmedieval” (Cowart 196). Eco makes William a semiotician who self-reflexively realizes that “books speak of books” and discourses on the nature of signs (286): “If the print exists, there must have existed something whose print it is,” this print is an “impression . . . left in our mind; it is the print of an idea . . . sign of a sign” (Eco 317 and 289). Eco’s examination of semiotics in this novel also works on the level of plot. William posits an arcane explanation for the murder in the abbey, only to discover that that explanation, which *had* no basis in ‘reality,’ is taken up by Jorge, the arch-villain, as the methodology of his subterfuge. William’s supposition comes to Jorge’s attention and thus becomes constructed into ‘reality’.⁸⁸ When William discovers his mistake, Cowart reports,

⁸⁸ . . . the murderer appears to be sending tantalizing messages to the detective, based on the Apocalypse . . . As it happens, the first death was a suicide, but William misinterpreted it, and this in turn gave the murderer his cue. There is a parallel here with Borges’s “death and the Compass,” where the hidden murderer scripts the deaths, knowing that only his enemy the detective will be subtle enough to misinterpret them and thus bring about his

he has “at last achieve[d] the full insight of twentieth-century semiotics” (211): “The order that our mind imagines is like a net, or like a ladder, built to attain something. But afterward you must throw the ladder away, because you discover that, even as it was useful, it was meaningless” (Eco 492).

The use of anachronism in postmodern historiographic metafiction is not limited to the construction of character and philosophical systems, however. For instance, Bowering’s narrator in *Burning Water* anachronistically comments that “in the eighteenth-century they were fond of Latinate abstractions” (101). Bowering also uses two Native men in a mentor/student relationship as a rhetorical device to explore the obscure purposes of the white explorers. These two Natives’ discussion of their geographical locale is extremely anachronistic: “In the winter it rains all the time, but we always say that at least you don’t have to shovel it” (141).

The point of these anachronistic devices is to attempt to draw the reader’s attention to what is hidden by the transparent nature of *readerly* codes. This exposure of a “basic deconstructive contention” points to the “advisability of seeing everyday reality as a construction similar to that of fiction, and as such, similarly ‘written’ and ‘writable’ (Onega, “British Historiographic Metafiction” 96).

One of historiographic metafiction’s major examples of use of a narrator as a defamiliarizing device occurs in Fowles’ *French Lieutenant’s Woman*. Its controlling narrator never lets the reader of the text “ignore the lessons of the past about the past”

own death. William is spared this fate, but as he admits to the murderer at the end, it was false reasoning that led him to the true murderer” (Palmer 72).

(Hutcheon, “postmodern problematizing” 366). Onega claims Fowles’ “real aim” in *French Lieutenant’s Woman*

was not so much to write a Victorian novel out of time, but rather, in line with contemporary metafictional practice, to build an illusion only to destroy it, to show us its provisionality, its intrinsic fictional character, thus making us reflect on the Victorian literary conventions of realism and recognize it for what it is: a provisional frame created by the combined work of the author and the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ of the reader. (“British Historiographic Metafiction” 95).

The self-reflexive intrusive narrator of *French Lieutenant’s Woman* is “primarily aimed at undermining the traditional division between fiction and reality and at enhancing the constructedness of the eternal as well as of the fictional ontologies” (Onega, “Self, World and Art” 43):

Though the narrator reminds us throughout the opening chapters of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* that the Victorian world of which he speaks is being framed . . . by a modern perspective—through references, for example to Hitler and McLuhan and Proust, it is not until chapter thirteen that he explicitly destroys the verisimilitude, the reality, of his Victorian story. (Lorsch 146)

This use of the overtly controlling narrator may not seem much different from a modernist narrator. The distinction between them lies, however, in how Fowles’ narrator incorporates the *readerly* present in order to inform the past. The use of *writerly* codes makes *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*’s reader constantly aware that the present construction of the past—constructed by both the reader and the writer—is a rule-governed action that relies on specific strategies. McHale suggests that these strategies gain their effectiveness by recourse to the narrator’s supporting prose:

. . . the Cobb at Lyme is compared to a Henry Moore sculpture, a servant’s dandyish taste to that of a 1960s mod; the landscape near nineteenth-

century Lyme is described anachronistically as viewed from the air; a Victorian evening at home is characterized in terms of the absence of cinema and television . . . (93)

French Lieutenant's Woman's intrusive narrator “palimpsestically writes the second ending over the first,” in order to demonstrate the “lengths to which we will go in exchanging our freedom to discriminate for passive reliance on the authority of the text, on the narrative voice” (Tarbox 100 and Lorsch 147).

Texts like Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada* accomplish their anachronistic defamiliarization by different means. By flagrantly inserting instances of present technology into the impossible past, Reed diverts reader attention from the textual signified to the constructing nature of the signifier. The nineteenth-century story of civil war America, which includes Abraham Lincoln as its president, also—the reader is invited to accept—includes Twentieth-century technology. Master Swille is encouraged by his slave Robin to “helicopter up to Richmond” and picks up the telephone to call General Lee (Reed 22 and 30). Robin also travels all over the south “in an airplane” to bring Swille “two gallons of slave women’s milk each morning” (34-5 and 102). When Lincoln is shot while watching a play which includes a scene featuring a television, “A reporter has a microphone in Mary Todd’s face” (103). Many of these trappings of the Twentieth-century are found in Reed’s text. Union and Confederate bands play on the local radio, Lincoln’s wife looks like a “laundromat attendant,” and a gentleman might be seen “smoking a seegar and driving a carriage which featured factory climate-control air conditioning, vinyl top, AM/FM stereo radio, full leather interior, power-lock doors, six-way power seat, power windows, white-wall wheels, door-edge guards, bumper impact

strips, rear defroster and soft-ray glass” (87, 26 and 36). This carnival of Twentieth-century imagery poignantly recalls both the advancement in technology that coexisted with pre-civil war American slavery and the gulf that lies between America’s current technological expertise and the unjust nature of its society. As this politicized reading suggests, Reed’s text is not simply attempting—as is *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*—to deflect attention from transparent textual codes. The political impulse in Bowering’s *Burning Water*, which inspires Bowering’s construction of the brutal rape of a dying Native, informs Reed’s writing of the antecedents of American slavery. Reed’s text discomforts the commodious notion that slavery was the product of a semi-barbaric and distant past by making readers aware that their complacent desire for an orderly and transparent historical narrative suits, informs and constructs a political status quo. Any sense of *readerly* comfort—for the reader of Reed’s text—is tantamount to complicity with slavery and racism.

This analysis of historiographic metafiction suggests that Reed’s effort would be meaningless without a classical text to work against. Reed’s anachronism gains its efficacy by mimicking a textual tradition which is complicitous with politically questionable codes.

Texts like *Obasan* and *Big Bear*, *Scorched Wood People*, *Headframe*, *Collected Works*, *Bloody Jack*, use the seemingly extraneous material which traditional history omits to give their texts this *readerly* validity of the classical text. These texts also simultaneously open their novels to a *writerly* engagement with historical systems of value. Historiographic metafiction’s paradoxical dependence upon, and ability to utilize that which it contests, enables the narrative to operate within historical discourse and so to

access the reader's notion of 'valid' history. The ideological support that such conventions enjoy in our culture, belies the constructed nature of the historical record: "The record, what's that? Posterity, that makes sinners of wise men and saints out of fools. We pay our clerks to write it, pay them according to the need. Ours is spiritual, theirs material" (Scott 181).⁸⁹

Historiographic metafiction directly confronts "the past of history for it uses and abuses these intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions" (Hutcheon "Pastime" 298). This confrontation is orchestrated so that the reader of the postmodern text, upon encountering the devices of historical prose—especially markers of scholarly work (footnotes, endnotes, parenthetical referencing, explanatory prefatory material and afterwords) and the construction of historical figures—inevitably sets these stock devices against the defamiliarizing strategies that postmodern texts employ. This comparison, which leads to the destruction of the *readerly* illusion, encourages the reader's appreciation of the constructed nature of the postmodern textual reality—and by extension—all textualized reality. Iser's useful model of the reading process defines how *writerly* defamiliarization leads to reader comprehension:

At first the inconsistency of the stylistic patterns and structures impels the reader to formulate illusions, because only by joining things together can he [she] comprehend an unfamiliar experience. But even while he [she] is in the process of linking things up, he [she] is bringing into being all the other possibilities of the text that defy integration; and these in turn proceed to overshadow the consistency he [she] had begun to establish, so that in the process of illusion-forming the reader also creates the latent destruction of those very illusions. He [she] will begin to distrust the convenient patterns he [she] has been building and will eventually himself [herself] perceive that they are nothing but the instruments he [she] uses to grasp and pare down

⁸⁹ Significantly, Bruno's analysis of the historical record from Scott's *Antichthon* is an aside, and leaves no mark on the historical record.

the mass of detail. Now the very fact that it is he [she] who produces and destroys the illusions makes it impossible for him [her] to stand aside and view 'reality' from a distance—the only reality for him [her] to view is the one he [she] is creating. . . . interpretation is a form of refuge seeking—an effort to reclaim the ground which has been cut from under their feet. (Iser, *The Implied Reader* 233)

Just as my corrective and conventional⁹⁰ use of bracketed pronouns disrupts the implicit sexism of Iser's text, historiographic metafiction's politically charged engagement with its textual surround deliberately contaminates traditional "historical assumptions with didactic and situational elements" (Hutcheon, "Postmodern Problematizing" 370). This contamination is performed in order to foreground and then reject historiography's infatuation with objectivity.

Historiographic metafiction's ability to revel in the multiple narrative reveals, by the ab/use of historical legitimizing strategies, that its political efficacy exists in the dynamic equilibrium between two ways of knowing/believing. These are a traditional historiography indebted to a questionable archive, and the indeterminate story, which is an evolving narrative. The multivocality exposed by the ironic use of these textual strategies leads to a problematic construction of multiple truths. The positive empiricist desire to cling to a singular and monolithic construction (which we may think of as an unproblematized history) is in direct conflict with historiographic metafiction's multiple versions of events. These multiple versions, and the different plots in which they are configured, inform an entire movement in historiographic metafiction. This is a movement away from the unself-reflexive historiography of the past and toward the "cognitively

⁹⁰ In the sense that I use the standard format of square brackets [] to signify changes I have made to Iser's quote.

responsible historiography” (a movement we may associate with LaCapra, White and Mink) of the present (LaCapra, *History and Criticism* 378).

Chapter 3 ~ History's Many Truths or, the Many Skins of Barthes' Onion

*People read what news they wanted to and
each accordingly built his [her] own
rathouse of history's rags and straws.*

Thomas Pynchon

The legitimizing intent which lies behind the *readerly* use of historical codes reveals that "history", as it has been commonly practiced, has the effect of constructing multiple versions of events. As well, the *readerly* assumptions that underlie the use of footnotes in what is ostensibly a literary text, by contrasting academic with literary discourse, foreground how academic discourse, on some level, draws upon the reader's faith in its veracity. Historiographic metafiction's use of these paratextual strategies, instead of promoting a search for a singular truth, has the effect of writing a multiple history.

Texts such as Fowles' *A Maggot*, or Thomas Pynchon's *V* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, attempt to enact the implications inherent in this search for meaning by building this search, and its implied result, into the plot of the text. Pynchon's texts use the search for an originary or transcendental meaning in order to expose the dubious narrative desire such a quest implies. Since the desire for truth that Pynchon's quest narratives enact is frustrated by the endless folds of meaning his textual investigations uncover, the ultimate goal of such texts becomes a questioning of historical possibility.

Other texts (such as Jack Hodgins' *The Invention of the World*, Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, Geoffrey Ursell's *Perdue, or How the West was Lost*, and Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*) combat this problematic construction of truth by a writing of history as myth. Such texts as use mythological writings of historical figures, or mythological explanations of events, in order to underscore the deliberately constructed nature of historical fact, the narrative basis of history, and the impact such myths⁹¹ have upon culture.

A movement that equally mythologizes its version of history, while not directly working out of myth, is a personal history which is given a broad-ranging political or mythological importance. This personalization of history attempts to "render inextricable the public and historical and the private and biographical" (Hutcheon, "Postmodern Problematizing" 372). In this version of historical writing, texts such as Elsa Morante's *History a Novel*, Kogawa's *Obasan*, Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry* and John Irving's *Setting Free the Bears* compare the sterile frigidity of the official record to a humanized and provisional narrative. By using techniques which juxtapose the official history with the personal, these postmodern writers make their accounts of past events relevant to their personal narrative without valourizing either reading. These postmodern historical narratives use the self-aggrandising and provisional nature of the personal private history, and the politically questionable quality of the official record, to undermine attempts to install either version as a verifiable discourse.

⁹¹ Like Jean François Lyotard's notion of master narratives, these texts argue that grand explanatory myths construct and inform our cultural understanding.

One of the most enduring metaphors for Post-structuralist truth is Barthes' onion. Barthes uses this resonant metaphor to describe Post-structuralist discourse's lack of a transcendental signifier. Because the common garden onion (and its commonality is significant) consists entirely of layers, it does not contain an essential and verifiable core. This search for a transcendental explanatory centre is eternally frustrated by a quest which peels back each version only to reveal another equally valid layer.⁹²

This exposure of truth(s) is, not coincidentally, associated above all with the detective genre. For example, Fowles' *A Maggot*, a self-proclaimed partial work,⁹³ uses its central investigator (Ayscough), a detective investigating a murder, to examine the implications of a search for truth. Fowles' text argues that such quests inevitably confront the impossibility of ever confirming a certainty of knowledge. Accordingly, Ayscough's investigation is complicated by several textual factors. The man whose disappearance and possible murder that he is ostensibly investigating⁹⁴ (whom the text cryptically refers to as Mr. B.) is engaged in an arcane metaphysical investigation that he himself only partially understands. Since the purposes of Mr. B's obscure investigation are, he thinks, best kept to himself, he hides his actions by engaging actors who play the particular roles demanded

⁹² "Barthes' analysis does not move towards the discovery of secret meanings: a work is like an onion, Barthes writes, 'a construction of layers (or levels, or systems), whose body contains, finally, no heart, no kernel, no secret, no irreducible principle, nothing except the infinity of its own envelopes'" (Culler, *Roland Barthes* 82).

⁹³ "A Maggot is the larval stage of a winged creature; as is the written text, at least in the writer's hope. . . . What follows may seem like a historical novel; but it is not. It is maggot" (Fowles' Prologue).

⁹⁴ Curiously, Ayscough himself is hiding at least one major concern of his investigations, for he is overly keen as well to ferret out any information which may lead to a confirmation of Mr. B's sexual orientation.

in parts of his entourage. Further complicating Ayscough's job, these actors present false names and identities to Mr. B., which are then overlaid by the pseudo-personalities he asks them to assume while they are travelling with him. Mr. B's companions employ this duplicity to protect themselves from Mr. B., as much as to aid in his project, as the reader sees, later in the novel, as to protect themselves from the results of Ayscough's examination.

Ayscough's investigation, then, is an attempt to uncover the different incarnations of their names/identities, as well as the part they played in their interactions with Mr. B. Because of the possible outcome of the murder investigation, these duplicitous actors are loathe to divulge, under fear of legal threat, the part(s) they actually did play in Mr. B's company. Even when Ayscough exposes their 'true' nature—as much as that is possible—the wildly differing opinions they have (David Jones believes that Mr. B disappeared as a result of a satanic ritual, while Rebecca Lee believes that he was visited by an angel who spirited him away into a type of paradise) multiplies the singular truth for which Ayscough wishes. Although studies of the accuracy of witnesses' testimony has long since made their unreliability a truism, it is texts such as Fowles' that investigate the implications a lack of certainty has for historical inquiry. By comparing Ayscough's task with the historian's, the reader inevitably makes connections between the questionable access we have to a verifiable historical truth and the provisional truths we clasp to our desperate breasts.

Pynchon's historiographic metafictional novels construct a situation similar to Fowles' *A Maggot*, *V* and *The Crying of Lot 49*. They all examine the construction of historical truth by positing a character who peels back shifting clues while searching for an

elusive, particular, and largely provisional truth. Like the hypothesised peeler of Barthes' onion, these searchers share with Ayscough the suspicion that the "truth" for which they search cannot be found. By using narrative strategies which endlessly defer history's explanatory signified, Pynchon foregrounds the assumptions which underlie more simplistic notions of historical truth.

On the surface, Pynchon's *V* is a series of disconnected narratives roughly stitched together by the recurrence, in different incarnations, of its major characters. Its plot is given an arbitrary ending by the meeting of its central characters who attempt to access the novel's main obsession: the identity of V. Structurally, the search narrative is split between the Benny Profane sections—which are vaguely reminiscent of the 1950s decadence we associate with Kerouac's *On the Road*—and Herbert Stencil's⁹⁵ attempt to follow upon an obscure reference his father's notebooks make to V.⁹⁶ As Eddins suggests, Stencil and Profane represent antithetical notions of history (55). Profane, by his own admission, is a lackadaisical schlemiel, who drifts into the accidental events that form his life. By contrast, for Stencil, "any cluster of phenomena can be a conspiracy" (Pynchon, *V* 154). Stencil's obsession with V "generates a paranoid theory that seemingly random events are actually parts of a malevolent conspiracy over which V. presides" (Newman 36). Similar to the protagonist of *Gravity's Rainbow*, Tyrone Slothrop—whose

⁹⁵ A name rich in its associations, Stencil outlines his culture: "Stencil . . . had left pieces of himself—and V.—all over the western world. V. By this time V. was a remarkably scattered concept" (Pynchon, *V* 389).

⁹⁶ A multiple narrative, *V* also has major sections dedicated to the Godolphin spy plot to uncover Vhessiu and Mistral's diary entries which recount the bombing of Malta in the Second World War.

connection to V2 rockets is questionable⁹⁷—Stencil's motivations and methods are ineffective and historically unsound:

Stencil is a clownish, rather ineffectual character given to severe doubts about the ultimate significance of his search for V.; . . . he relies upon obscure jottings in his diplomat-father's diary, a few bizarre relics, and hearsay for history data; and he synthesizes these data into a coherent narrative through a process of "impersonation and dream." (Eddins 55)

Like Burlingame, in his genealogical search in Barth's *The Sot-weed Factor*, Stencil is on a quest of origin. But even though the reference to V is from his father, V's possible antecedent is so obscure that Stencil does not know if it refers to a person, concept, or place:

'there is more behind and inside V. Than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she. God grant that I may never be called upon to write the answer, either here or in any official report' (Pynchon, *V* 53)

Since Stencil's father's journal makes it impossible to relate V to anything in particular, Stencil arbitrarily follows every 'clue'. He pursues such leads as the existence of Vhessiu, a possibly imaginary country (which concerns much of the spy sub-plot) uncovered by one of the characters, the spy Godolphin, and the rat Veronica who wishes to be a nun and is loved by Father Fairing, the mad priest who lives below the surface of the city in the sewers. Stencil is similarly excited by the names of Victoria, a British woman who was entangled briefly with Godolphin's plot, and Von Sloth, a German woman at least

⁹⁷ Slothrop's early behaviorist conditioning makes him sexually attracted to a particular polymer which is used in the V2 rocket. Metafictionally, Slothrop's conditioning is an intertextual nod to Behaviorist discourse, a theorizing which mechanizes human behaviour. Skinner's use of a skinner box on his daughter as well as the story of little Albert who was trained to be terrified of white mice, curiously are the intertexts which confirm for the reader the possibility that Slothrop's conditioning is insane enough to be 'realistic'.

partially, the reader discovers, constructed by machinery and possibly related to the Bad Priest who is dissembled by children at the novel's end.

The 'real' identity of V, the reader discovers, is difficult to ascertain. V coalesces, if at all, into a metaphorical examination of an Eliot-like Wasteland, a society which is increasingly obsessed with the mechanical and inanimate. As many critics have noted, Stencil acts as a stand-in for Henry Adams, from *The Education of Henry Adams*. Like Adams, Stencil continually refers to himself in the third person and this "forcible dislocation of personality" questions his own identity: "Stencil appears as only one among a repertoire of identities" (Pynchon, *V* 62).⁹⁸ Stencil's search for V is both a narrativization of Adams' theorizing of the distinction between the life-giving virgin and the death-dealing machine, and an attempt to achieve self-identity. The character V's gradual transformation (and by extension all depersonalisation experienced by those caught in the machine of an impersonal culture) into the inanimate is the opposite of the virgin in Adams' virgin/dynamo binary. Our society's myopic fascination with machinery is given form by this multiple V. As well, like a reverse Madonna, V's "incarnations occur at various trouble spots in modern history" (Newman 35):

Whether the Fashoda crisis of 1898 in Cairo, the riots at the Venezuelan embassy in Florence in 1899, Paris on the eve of World War I in 1913, German-occupied Southwest Africa in 1922, or Malta during the Second World War and the Suez crisis, V.'s natural habitat is "the state of siege." (Ibid.)

⁹⁸ "Adams decided to have the autobiographical subject of his book appear in two different narrative roles: presenting the autobiographical protagonist as narrator and character, as subject and as object of history, he intends to serve as a 'manikin' to demonstrate the new forces of history and at the same time conduct the experiment himself" (Griem 120).

Although Stencil's paranoid association with disparate elements seems to give cohesiveness to the obscure and endlessly slippery signifier V, this effect is granted more by his act of will than any coherence the events intrinsically possess. Benny Profane's yo-yoing across the globe and in the New York subway system, and *V*'s significantly disordered sense of time, represent more accurately what is involved in the attempt to make meaning out of arbitrary historical events.

Like Weissman's search for a message in random atmospheric noise, Stencil's investigation of V, after much liberal interpretation, reveals an essentially meaningless history. There may be more "inside and behind" the obscure letter V than any of us might have suspected, but Stencil's paranoid ability to "make sense" of otherwise discontinuous events is what brings V into being. The "something buried in the son that needs a mystery, any sense of pursuit to keep active a borderline metabolism," drives Stencil to "stencilize"—or put his arbitrary interpretation upon—his surroundings (Pynchon, *V* 386). Ultimately, Stencil's need for this search is insatiable. This desire leads Stencil to Stockholm in search for another incarnation of V. He leaves to pursue "one Mme. Viola, oneiromancer and hypnotist, who passed though Valetta in 1944" just as he is getting to the point at which seminal V stories converge (Pynchon, *V* 451). Exposing the implications that lie behind the historian's endless quest for truth, Pynchon preserves Stencil's determination by not allowing him to uncover V's significance.

Essentially, *V* is a text which argues that "no Situation [has] any objective reality: it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment" (Pynchon, *V* 189). The reader seems destined to make a choice between an egomaniacal

admission of complicity in historical construction—”[i]f it were only a hallucination, it was not what I saw or believed I saw that in the end is important. It is what I thought. What truth I came to”—and giving Profane’s answer—“haven’t you learned?” “No,” he said, “offhand I’d say I haven’t learned a goddamn thing” (Pynchon, *V* 206 and 454). This false binary, however inviting, is ultimately unsatisfying to the reader. Stencil’s investigative inquiry merely decorates the past in order to ignore the implications of artifice for the present. In *V*, the historian, like Stencil on his mad and arbitrary quest, becomes “a peasant with all his uptorn roots showing, alone on a sea at nightfall, painting the side of a sinking ship” (Pynchon, *V* 460).

Although complicated by a series of self-undermining techniques, *The Crying of Lot 49* at first reading seems to provide a more straightforward examination of Pynchon’s reading of historical veracity than *V*. In *Crying*, the reader, subject to the ministrations of a limited omniscient narrative mode instead of multiple narrators, follows the adventures of a significantly named Oedipa Maas.⁹⁹ Living in the soulless and deadening surround of southern California, Oedipa is called upon to disentangle the estate of her deceased ex-

⁹⁹ The reader of *Crying* must be careful of leaping at too quick an interpretation of Pynchon’s names. Foregrounding the traditional fascination searchers for textual meaning have with names, Pynchon constructs names which playfully undermine their seeming intent. The radio station that at which Oedipa’s husband works is called KCUF, which reversed spells FUCK, Manny di Presso’s name defines his mental state as Manic Depressive, and Inverarity is the inverse of a rarity, for he is the embodiment of capitalist conformity: “noting how wild and improbable—or downright crude and silly—many of Pynchon’s ‘names’ are, he is probably undermining and mocking the very act of naming” (Tanner 60). “‘Character’ and identity are not stable in his fiction and the wild names he gives his ‘characters’, which seem either to signify too much (Oedipus and Newton indeed!) or too little (like comic-strip figures), are a gesture against the tyranny of naming itself’ (Ibid.).

lover, Pierce Inverarity. Inverarity only appears in this novel as a multitude of voices.¹⁰⁰ His vast holdings, which seem to include all of California, are likewise constructed by layers of cultural detritus, and serve as an indication that modern America is a world of simulacra generated by market demand for appearances rather than the inherent qualities of things:

Fangoso Lagoons, a new housing development . . . was to be laced with canals with private landings for power boats, a floating social hall in the middle of an artificial lake, at the bottom of which lay restored galleons, imported from the Bahamas; Atlantean fragments of columns and friezes from the Canaries; real human skeletons from Italy; giant clam shells from Indonesia—all for the entertainment of scuba enthusiasts. (Pynchon, *Crying* 31)

In this debased America, these “human skeletons” (which are actually the bones of GIs purchased through Mafia connections from a forgotten WW II battle site) have figuratively come home to be used as filters for cigarettes and fodder for scuba enthusiasts. The fear of this empty world of signifiers which Fangoso Lagoons exemplifies, fuels the American cultural nightmare. This nightmare is symbolized by the dreams of Oedipa’s husband (Mucho Maas). Mucho views, with a growing feeling of desperation,¹⁰¹ the meaningless existence of those who exchange used cars at his previous job in a car lot. These disenfranchised Americans bring in derelict cars, which are extensions of their own failures, in order to buy more of the same meaningless trash. While buying, they stand in the glow of the blinking sign (National Automobile Dealer’s Association), the acronym of

¹⁰⁰ “Pierce is not an original person but a cultural simulacrum, an extension of culture” (Berressem 89).

¹⁰¹ This malaise can be extended, as Thoreau does, to the entire population: “The mass of men [women] lead lives of quiet desperation” (8).

which ominously spells NADA, the Spanish word for nothing. Mucho is constantly woken from these nightmares by his fear of what the creaking decrepitude of the sign signifies.

Living up to her name, Oedipa's "impulse to read from the semiotics of her world" rejects Mucho's NADA version of the world (Madsen 54). Her personal predilection to see the world in terms of a puzzle that can be unravelled enables her to read the urban sprawl of southern California as if it were printed circuitry. For Oedipa, this obscure design seems to have "no limit to what [it] could have told her" (Pynchon, *Crying* 24). She reads in its "patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate" (Ibid.). Although *Crying's* detective style plot has as its driving force Oedipa's wish to discover a hidden meaning, this meaning "becomes increasingly unclear as the novel progresses" (Newman 68). The lack of verifiability suggested by the various sources that Oedipa examines only leads her deeper into her paranoid world of investigation.¹⁰²

Oedipa's proclivity for investigation and sensitivity to hidden meanings as well as her rejection of Mucho's NADA, encourages her to try and make meaning from the demands of Inverarity's will. Its reference to a set of obscure stamps, leads Oedipa on a self-appointed investigation of the shadowy world of conspiracy, intrigue and, finally, the granting of an arbitrary meaning to what is possibly transitory coincidence.

Inverarity's stamps alert Oedipa to the possible existence of a secret mail system which operates in parallel to the officially sanctioned US Post. While this alternative mail

¹⁰² In fact, as Tanner suggests, *Crying* is a reverse detective story, for instead of a story in which "you start with a mystery and move towards a final clarification . . . in Pynchon's novel we move from a state of degree-zero mystery—just a quotidian mixture of an average Californian day—to a condition of increasing mystery and dubiety" (56).

system seems at first to be a minor organization, it soon seems to implicate everything Oedipa sees. Oedipa begins to realize that her ability to “project a world” may mean that this conspiracy really exists because (as White suggests) we construct our answers out of the “types of questions we ask” (Pynchon, *Crying* 82 and *Tropics* 43). This suspicion leads Oedipa to wonder “whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself” (Pynchon, *Crying* 95).

Ignoring these nagging questions by throwing herself into the quest, Oedipa chases many false leads only to find them tangentially related to her central preoccupation with what is “really” going on. This investigation of a “multiplication of ‘realities’” contains the largely coincidental and contingent information that leads Oedipa to the W.A.S.T.E.¹⁰³ mail system (Madsen 54). Interestingly, the mail that is sent using this underground service is trivial at best. For instance, although the Yoyodyne chapter keeps its alternative system in operation by demanding that all members send at least one letter a week, most of these letters say very little of real import:

*Dear Mike, it said, how are you? Just thought I'd drop you a note.
How's your book coming? Guess that's all for now. See you at The Scope.
“That's how it is,” Fallopian confessed bitterly, “most of the time.”
(Pynchon, *Crying* 53)*

The messages themselves, however, are not crucial to the mail service's existence. By making the accumulation of information directly correlated to societal entropy, Pynchon questions the accumulation of information (that exercises like this thesis imply)

¹⁰³ An acronym to which at least one explanation is offered: We Await Silent Tristero's Empire.

which our culture encourages and worships. Pynchon also posits a way out of this alienating dilemma. When we first meet Oedipa she is almost subsumed by her debased information culture. She is rescued, however, and so is the reader, by way of the text, by her ability—to use Inverarity’s phrase—to “keep the ball bouncing” (Pynchon, *Crying* 179). This will to avoid entropy enables Oedipa to use unlikely sources (such as Randolph Driblette’s interpretation of a bowdlerized version of a Jacobean play, *The Courtier’s Tragedy*) to investigate W.A.S.T.E.’s connection to Tristero, an adversarial mail delivery system extending back into thirteenth century Europe. Unable to ascertain whether this system is still in operation—or more generally—unable to ascertain a ‘real’ history, and haunted, like her husband, by a fear of NADA, Oedipa is faced with a choice which resembles that of contemporary historiographers’. She can either give up her search, like Driblette, her husband Mucho, Roseman her lawyer, and her psychiatrist Doctor Hilarius, or she can “cherish” her obsessions. The choice that these men make, to relinquish the historiographical “white man’s obsession to know,” is not inviting, however (Wiebe, “On Being Motionless” 12).

Driblette, the director, seems to reject any notion that the ‘real’ or transcendental referent can be located in the phenomenological world. Instead, he concentrates upon building an “invisible field” surrounding a play, the image of which he creates by manipulating simulacra (Pynchon, *Crying* 152). Driblette is not tempted, as is Jesús Arrabal, by the simulacra’s resemblance to a wished-for reality, or like Mucho who attempts to construct reality by building upon drug-intuited resemblances. Rather, he is seduced by the production of simulacra. Denying the validity of text—“the words, who cares? They’re rote noises to hold

line bashes with, to get past the bone barriers around an actor's memory" —Driblette is nonetheless attracted by the most seductive of texts: the humanistic 'I' (Pynchon, *Crying* 79).¹⁰⁴

"You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth. Wharfinger supplied words and a yarn. I gave them life. That's it." (80)

Driblette posits a faith in a stable and coherent ego in order to cope with his phenomenological reality of textual chaos. This faith is clearly not sufficient, however, for, by the end of the text, Driblette suicidally dribbles into the Pacific Ocean.

Oedipa's DJ husband has been so co-opted by the media and social system in which he lives (as well as by his use of Dr. Hilarius' LSD) that his ability to distinguish meaning out of his culture has entirely degraded. By the end of the novel he has fine-tuned his appreciation of meaningless noise. Mucho has found a way to make his reality coalesce out of the disordered world of images. Assuming a strangely peaceful affect at his reporting of Hilarius' hostage-taking, Mucho becomes able to distinguish between different notes in a commercial jingle. Mucho ignores the importance of difference in his phenomenological world—in much the same way that chemists ignore reaction time in chemical equations to

¹⁰⁴ Conversely, Post-structuralist thought works out of "a sustained denial of the fiction that the subject is anything other than a creation of human consciousness and human language. The older and too easy conception of the subject as whole, unified, and spiritual ("a single enormous network") is understood by Barthes to be grounded not in Nature or in Divinity but rather in a historically constructed idea, a metaphor that we have forgotten *is* a metaphor" (Jay 176-5).

make their mathematical conclusions come out 'correctly'. Mucho is thereby able to envision significance in the similarities of images across time in order to create a type of consensus.

Mucho's creative and drug-induced imposition upon the phenomenological world is very similar to the action of Maxwell's Demon: a device which creates energy by sorting molecules on the basis of their heat value.¹⁰⁵ In much the same way that a reader makes meaning, Mucho filters and keeps track of, even creates those molecules which have more energy. He trades his intellectual energy for that information in an effort to create mental tranquillity. By sorting words on the basis of their auditory similarity, Mucho has found a place from which to deal with the multiple nature of audio images. His understanding of this strategy is so certain that he mispronounces Oedipa's name (Edna Mosh) and is confidently assured that its similarity to the audio image captured by the tape recorder will conform it to its simulacra double. Mucho's strategy for coping with the hyperreal of America is to seek order by relating one image to another and ignoring any search for a posited base reality.

Oedipa's lawyer Roseman's similar confusion of media and 'reality' becomes evident in his plan to mount a case (*The Profession v. Perry Mason*) against a fictional television character who plays a lawyer. Oedipa's psychiatrist Dr. Hilarius, though use of his own self-prescribed LSD, copes with meaninglessness by entering a world of paranoid delusion. In this fantastic world he is pursued by Israeli fanatics for crimes of his past¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ As well as the gloss on *Education of Henry Adams* that *V* provides, in this image of Maxwell's demon Pynchon draws heavily upon Adams: "Next to the images of the comet, the magnet and the dynamo, the imaginary demon sorting the atoms thus became the crucial figure for Adams' mind: as a figure for the act of thinking itself, it provides the illusion of an anti-entropic power working through 'broad and lofty generalization'" (Griem 124).

¹⁰⁶ The most questionable of which is making faces in order to drive holocaust victims insane: "'There is a face,' Hilarius said, 'that I can make. One you haven't seen; no one in

that neither the reader nor Oedipa can confirm. Although he is tortured by his mad fantasy, however, Hilarius does recognize the necessity of Oedipa's invigorating vision in their world. When Oedipa meets with him, seeking release from her fantasy, Hilarius demands that she "cherish it!" (138):

"What else do any of you have? Hold it tightly by its tentacle, don't let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you. Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be." (Ibid.)

To avoid cultural entropy, Oedipa must, like Maxwell's demon, "keep the ball bouncing" by choosing which clues she supposes to have more value. In sorting these clues she runs the perpetual motion machine of culture—to use Pynchon's figure—and though she may not uncover anything, she does at least "continue to be."

Unlike the bouncing ball image suggests, however, Oedipa's search is not exactly active. For example, Oedipa reasons that one way to test her suspicion that the W.A.S.T.E. mail system may not be ubiquitous is to drift. And so, in San Francisco, a city far enough from Inverarity's influence as to be unaffected by his legacy, Oedipa wanders aimlessly. While drifting (much like Benny Profane's yo-yoing), she accumulates more and more evidence of an underground movement of people who deliberately choose to opt out of the official mail system. This barrage of largely coincidental information does not prove or disprove Oedipa's growing suspicions, however.

this country has. I have only made it once in my life, and perhaps today in central Europe there still lives, in whatever vegetable ruin, the young man who saw it . . . Hopelessly insane" (*Crying* 135).

As the end of the novel approaches, Oedipa fully embraces her quest as an alternative to the soul-deadening nature of mainstream American life. When she confronts her stamp collector consultant Genghis Cohen—brought in to evaluate the stamps from the estate—he tells her that a bidder has expressed interest in the auction lot 49 (the Tristero forgeries). Suspecting that this person will be able to answer her questions, Oedipa sits down as the novel closes to attend the bidding on lot 49. Playfully foregrounding the metafictional nature of his narrative, Pynchon ends the text's search for truth with the text's title. This action foregrounds how controlling the reader's own quest for truth has been. The novel, since the narrative closes before the bidding has begun and before the Tristero representative has been revealed, does not reveal whether Oedipa's suspicion and hope are resolved or satisfied.

The implications which Oedipa and Stencil's search for meaning has for historical investigation are far-reaching and profound. The discovery which Oedipa makes—that “behind the hieroglyphic streets there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only the earth”—informs a philosophical questioning of history that drives Pynchon's texts (*Crying* 181). Pynchon's text fluctuates between the two poles of a binary America, one illuminated by a “pulsing stelliferous Meaning,” the other by the NADA the car lot sign suggests (*Crying* 82). Like Oedipa's image of history as a decaying and malevolent stripper, the faintly ominous suggestion that any meaningless collection of detail will coalesce into a singular and meaningful fact, is undermined by the vested interest a paranoid has in his/her answer. Stencil's search for the meaning of the letter V—which is a signifier with the potential for thousands of different incarnations—foregrounds the

arbitrary nature of this procedure. Although Oedipa and Stencil's paranoia can uncover many layers of historical inquiry, and like Maxwell's demon, even employ some sort of selection process, the guarantor of meaning for which they search, the "Word" (or in Stencil's case, the letter) is missing. Oedipa begins to wonder "if the gemlike 'clues' were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night" (Pynchon, *Crying* 118). She realizes that this word, in its different incarnations, protects us from being lost:

The saint whose water can light lamps, the clairvoyant whose lapse in recall is the breath of God, the true paranoid for whom all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself, the dreamer whose puns probe ancient fetid shafts and tunnels of truth all act in the same special relevance to the word, or whatever it is the word is there, buffering, to protect us from. The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost. (Ibid. 129)

Using Oedipa's paranoia to suggest a radical phenomenology of experience,¹⁰⁷ Pynchon deflates the surety of the singular text. This device of paranoia also leaves the potential historical investigator "outside, lost," and sifting through the debris of historical investigation. Accepting "randomness, contingency, and uncertainty, as part of the very nature of things," both Stencil and Oedipa must "face the possibility that their suspicions are not true" (Wilde in Eddins 91 and Eddins 93). Their search is not necessarily rewarded by a truth unalloyed by their own desires.

¹⁰⁷ Phenomenologists, such as Husserl posit that the objective world is situated in the consciousness of the subject and claims that "all our considerations begin with the fact of our experience and of the world experienced in it" (Husserl 52). Informing his notion of the subject by Post-structuralism, Pynchon would take this hypothesis to task. Pynchon's radicalizing of phenomenology reads this Cartesian experiential world also as a construction of the fantasizing 'self'.

Mythological History

History is probably our myth. It combines what can be thought, the 'unthinkable,' and the origin, in conformity with the way in which a society can understand its own working. Michel de Certeau

The impulse to problematize historical constructions by revealing the arbitrary and self-interested will to uncover a particular history shares its questioning with mythological writings of history. Fludernik cites such changes as “the disappearance of causality and teleology in the realm of fiction” in order to argue that the gradual erosion of historical verities inspires “the reinvention of myth as a viable attitude in relation to the past” (94):

Indeed, the explicit rejection of the Western humanist and technological tradition is here being carried out in fictional terms, feeding not merely from a political 60s culture mentality but also from the more intellectual attitudes of anti-colonialism and anti-logocentrism. This resurrection of the fabulous, the mythic and the occult parallels the writings of the so-called Magic realists which are precisely of a postcolonial provenance. Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, like Pynchon’s scenarios, has a nightmarish quality of chaos, but this resistance to order and rationality is more than offset by the imaginative exuberance and playfulness of the exercise (a feature prevalent in the Latin American novel) and by the reinvention of the mythic. (Ibid.)

Texts such as Jack Hodgins’ *The Invention of the World*, Leonard Cohen’s *Beautiful Losers*, and Geoffrey Ursell’s *Perdue, or How the West was Lost* mythologize historical personages. These texts also use explanatory myths in order to foreground the similarity between ‘factual’ accounts and the mythological narratives which inform

western culture. These myths, evident even in simple instances as the Horatio Alger American Dream or the Prince Charming Fairy Tale, still continue to inform our cultural lives. White, citing Lévi-Strauss, would relate contemporaneous historiography to myths of this type:

The kind of knowledge which the so-called historical method was supposed to provide, that is to say, 'historical knowledge', was, in Lévi-Strauss' view, hardly distinguishable from the mythic lore of 'savage' communities. Indeed, historiography—by which Lévi-Strauss understood traditional, 'narrative' historiography—was nothing but the myth of Western and especially modern, bourgeois, industrial, and imperialistic societies. The substance of this myth consisted in the mistaking of a method of representation, narrative, for a content, that is, the notion of a humanity uniquely identified with those societies capable of believing that they had *lived* the kinds of stories that Western historians had *told* about them. (White, "Question of Narrative" 111-2)

The distinction that Lévi-Strauss is reluctant to make between the "mythic lore of 'savage' communities" and "traditional, 'narrative' historiography" exposes that this seemingly 'natural' binary structure, when closely examined, collapses into constructions of mythological verisimilitude:

History is not an objective empirical datum; it is a myth. Myth is no fiction, but a reality; it is, however, one of a different order from that of the so-called objective empirical fact. The myth is the story preserved in popular memory of a past event and transcends the limits of the external objective world, revealing an ideal world . . . (Berdyayev in Manganiello 159)

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes examines the urge to naturalize which lies behind the 'ideal' world created by historiography:

. . . the ideological burden of history is aggravated by its closeness to what Barthes calls contemporary myth. Myth in Barthes' sense, is a secondary system of signs which uses elements already invested with meaning within a prior semiological system (ordinary language): these elements become

signifiers or forms in relation to the *signifiés*, or ideological concepts, with which the mythological discourse connects them. (Gossman 33)

Barthes claims that the apparent naturalized nature of myth¹⁰⁸ is evoked by myth's ability to nullify the signifier's contingent values and particularity: "the mythological writing of a set of signifiers empties the natural signifier of meaning, for it represents a static meaning" (*Mythologies* 127-8). Barthes argues that "the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.) are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth" (*Ibid.* 123). This reduction of these forms to a "pure signifying function" does not add to signification's arbitrariness, however, for myth, by its 'nature,' cannot collapse signification's multiplicity into its intended signified: "the signified is changed into gestures" and "the knowledge contained in a mythical concept is confused, made of yielding, shapeless associations" (*Ibid.* 129). Barthes argues that "in general myth likes to work with poor, incomplete images" in order to naturalize a history "experienced as innocent speech" (*Mythologies* 137-8 and 142):

What constitutes myth as myth, according to Barthes, is precisely its avoidance of this alternative: the relation between signifier and concept is presented as unmotivated, in some way natural. . . . mythical discourse never admits that it does, or that the signifiers are arbitrarily and not naturally linked to the *signifiés*. (Gossman 33)

Although myth is supplied its validity and quotidian detail by a historical reality—however that is configured or used—"what myth gives in return is a *natural* image of this reality"

¹⁰⁸ "Mythology can only have a historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 118).

(*Mythologies* 155). Myth “abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences” and “it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves” (Ibid. 156).

This configuring of history into simple forms which, like classical mythology, are “literally false but reveal[] a deeper symbolic truth” expresses a wish for the end of history (Labanyi 5). As Eliade’s model of eternal recurrence suggests, the “basic human need” that myth fulfils is to present an “original state of existence prior to civilization” (Vickery ix and Labanyi 6). This state is unalloyed by a questioning of the construction of historical truth. Constructed by the “debris of culture” then, myth creates a timeless present in which the reader’s disbelief and urge to question historical truth is suspended (Labanyi 22).

In fact, Barthes suggests that myth’s ability to establish itself as primordial essence is so tenacious that even later contradictory versions cannot overturn mythological truth: “myth essentially aims at causing an immediate impression—it does not matter if one is later allowed to see through the myth, its action is assumed to be stronger than the rational explanations which may later belie it” (Barthes, *Mythologies* 141). In postmodern writings of mythological history as well, the reader’s willing suspension of disbelief encourages him/her to gladly embrace the story. His/her active questioning of the story’s obvious fabulation is subsumed by the power of mythological explanations of events, however. The reader’s attempt to reconcile this “richer alternative to realistic rationalism” with his/her wholehearted acceptance of the tale and paranoid suspicion of what is an apparent lie, is the result of a deliberate historiographic metafictional strategy (Onega, “British

Historiographic Metafiction” 102). Postmodern historiographies simultaneously defamiliarize the reader and allow him/her to “recover[] a people’s lost identity” (Ibid.). Postmodern texts which mythologize both establish a cyclical notion of history, as Eliade’s eternal return suggests, as well as try to write a specific event’s particularity into public consciousness. Generally, this paradoxical project is achieved by what New Criticism would denigrate as textual inconsistency. For, in historiographic metafiction, the meticulous attention paid to detail is combined with attempts to write a mythological sense of origin.

This mythologizing of history can be found in two major incarnations. Some texts incorporate elements of the fantastic and mythological into their otherwise realistic (which Collingwood associates with Realism’s use of detail) and historical (because they examine a historical event) accounts. Others use an unreliable narrator to foreground the idiosyncratic mythologizing individuals are liable to attach to their understanding of historical events.

At the risk of reaffirming yet another myth of origin, many of these postmodern writings can trace their lineage to Gabriel García Márquez’s use of the fantastic in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In this chronicle of the founding of the Macondo colony, García Márquez incorporates many fantastical instances. For example, a plague of forgetfulness that overtakes everyone in a village which is later subjected to a four year rainfall, a tale of a true love is accompanied by clouds of yellow butterflies, and a massacre of thousands by banana plantation owners is concealed and forgotten. García Márquez even metafictionally ends his text with the reading of “Melquíades’ parchment on which

the whole story has been foretold” (Bell 196). This version of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, upon being completed, disintegrates with the colony. This citation of the fantastic in the novel both positions it as a dream-like history more true in a mythological sense than in fact as well as speaks to the invigorating ability of this type of historicizing. García Márquez’s “highly seductive fiction [is] designed to incorporate, rather than just expose, the seductive power of myth” (Bell 195). In García Márquez’s “overt and ludic resistance to analytic closure,” the reader recognizes “that history and fiction cannot be separated, and bringing this mythic recognition to consciousness, rather than seeking a positivistic denial of it, is the truly liberating act” (Ibid. 196-7). By constructing Macondo in all of Realism’s detail as well as writing a myth of origin, García Márquez is both able to draw upon myth’s “deeper symbolic truth” and to make a situation in which the reader is encouraged to question writings of origin as mythologically suspect.

The popularity of García Márquez’s text rests upon his use of a set of techniques which have come to be called Magic Realism. His work has informed a generation of writers who wish to recover, replenish, and make legendary the past. Writers with styles as diverse as Wiebe (who writes a self-admitted moralistic fiction)¹⁰⁹ and Hodgins (whose picaresque fictions of the Canadian west are extreme Bakhtinian feasts) incorporate intertextual echoes of García Márquez’s text into their own works. For example, Wiebe’s *Scorched-Wood People* frames his comparison of Riel’s preparation for his execution and present actions by a retrospective narrative voice which ironically comments on the

¹⁰⁹ “The moral teaching certainly relates to man [humanity], but the precise comment on justice is not stated. The mind must infer it” (Wiebe, *The Story-Makers* xix).

present action).¹¹⁰ Hodgins uses a year of mist (similar to García Márquez's plague of forgetfulness) to explain his characters' growing fear.

Leonard Cohen's simultaneous incorporation and refusal of myth concerns itself with the present day use of the authoritatively fantastic by the catholic church. In *Beautiful Losers*, Cohen develops a character, Catherine Tekakwitha, who was a 'real' saint canonized by the catholic church, in order to validate his text through use of the catholic tradition as well as question the operations of that tradition. The church's institutionalized, perhaps archaic, sanction of miracle in daily life as proof of sainthood¹¹¹ deliberately affirms a mythological version of history. Cohen's resurrection of Saint Tekakwitha draws upon this liturgical history to and this notion of sainthood, or the achievement of a "remote human possibility," informs his use of the fantastic in the text (Cohen 95). Under the auspices of this notion of miracle, the ability of the Danish vibrator to take on a life of its own is no more fantastic than the fact that Tekakwitha, who was native, turned white after her death. Since catholic liturgy has been replaced by media, Cohen argues that a comic book Charles Axis' veneration by the public is equal to Tekakwitha's stature in the church.

Cohen's valourization of popular culture in his novel culminates in his creation of a saint from his constipated academic narrator. As the novel closes, this saviour figure is

¹¹⁰ Wiebe's opening line "Sixteen years later Louis Riel would be dressing himself again, just as carefully" evokes García Márquez's: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice" (*Scorched-Wood People* 10 and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* 1).

¹¹¹ "I love the Jesuits because they saw miracles. Homage to the Jesuit who has done much to conquer the frontier between the natural and the supernatural" (Cohen 99).

drawn toward and into the crowd in an orgiastic revolutionary release. A blend of F and the text's nameless narrator, this figure's "remarkable performance" is one which the omniscient narrator tantalizingly does "not intend to describe" (Scobie 123 and Cohen 241). When, in the next sentence, this inconsistent omniscient voice does favour the reader with a description, it is an incoherent mix of disintegration and integration:

His presence was like the shape of an hourglass, strongest where it was smallest. And that point where he was most absent, that's when the gasps started, because the future streams through that point, going both ways. (Cohen 241)

Cohen deliberately places this fantastic miracle, which is a vision of *communitas* within the range of human possibility, in downtown Montreal. This placement enables Cohen to draw upon the established discourse of catholic sainthood and its association with the fantastic, in order to bring a mythological magic to the mundane. Cohen links his saint to "losers" (particularly the revolutionary elements in contemporary Quebec) who endlessly rise against their oppressors and, more generally, to all carnivalistic urges. Catherine Tekakwitha, who becomes a saint in the alienating and racist system of catholic hagiography, shows the losers' ability to transcend mundane reality. For Cohen, this ability to transcend 'reality' is tantamount to achieving sainthood. A saint is someone who can relinquish the urge to control and categorize, in order to, like Pynchon's Oedipa, drift:

A saint is someone who has achieved a remote human possibility. It is impossible to say what that possibility is. I think it has something to do with the energy of love. Contact with this energy results in the exercise of a kind of balance in the chaos of existence. A saint does not dissolve the chaos; if he [she] did the world would have changed long ago. I do not think that a saint dissolves the chaos even for himself [herself], for there is something arrogant and warlike in the notion of a man [woman] setting the universe in order. It is a kind of balance that is his [her] glory. He [she] rides the drifts like an escaped ski. His [her] course is the caress of the hill.

His [her] track is a drawing of the snow in a moment of its particular arrangement with wind and rock. (Cohen 95)

In Cohen's incarnation, sainthood is synonymous with a "drawing of the snow" (itself a temporary medium), a motion which is in accordance with contingent forces. His nameless narrator's achievement of saintliness is measured by his ability to relinquish his wish to totalize his understanding of Catherine Tekakwitha.¹¹² Cohen metaphorically confronts such endeavours as well as mythologizes the historiographer's blind urge to search. The nameless narrator must, like a modern historian, accept his balance in changing events of historical contingency and realize that the attempt to comprehend a long-dead Iroquois saint is a mystical impossibility.

Instead of taking to task the catholic tradition, Jack Hodgins' *The Invention of the World* uses Irish mythology in order to ground his history in the shallow soil of Vancouver Island. He both makes reference to literary texts and enacts a generalized historical scepticism. Hodgins' text does more than merely follow the contemporary adventures of his larger-than-life Menippean characters. He also details the attempt, by one of the principle narrators, Strabo Becker,¹¹³ to uncover accurate information about the establishment of Donal Keneally's commune, the House of Revelations. I would like momentarily to ignore the implications that Becker's investigation (or more precisely, the

¹¹² The text begins with a debased representation of the historiographer's wish to close with a historical figure: "I want to know what goes on under that rosy blanket. Do I have any right?" (Cohen 3).

¹¹³ Strabo Becker's name incorporates the names of two historians. The Greek Strabo, a geographer and historian (about 64 BC - about 24 AD), who wrote a 17 volume book entitled *Geographia*, for which he gathered his information largely from his extensive trips. Carl Becker, as Hutcheon notes, was a turn of the century historian who began to question historical truth ("Pastime" 302).

strategy of using an amateur historian as an information source) has for the possibility of historical accuracy. For, since Strabo relates some of the narrative through his collected interviews and documents in a section of the novel appropriately called “Scrapbook,”¹¹⁴ it is problematic historiographically. Instead, I would like to more closely investigate the way in which Hodgins’ text both constructs and reaffirms the efficacy of a fantastical history.

Hodgins represents the shallowness of Vancouver Island’s historical soil by Wade Powers’ phoney fort. This constructed artifact, with its slogan “step into history,” is representative of history for both the tourists and the reader of this novel:

. . . “it’s not real at all.” . . . “I mean it’s a phoney. There never was a fort here, not on this part of the island, no Indian wars or anything. I built this thing by copying a picture in a book.”

“But the people think . . . “

“They read the little brochure that tells them it’s a replica and still they think it’s genuine. Like magic, it fools them.” (Hodgins 202)

The fort represents a simulacra history which sells, not coincidentally, on the basis of its substantiated textuality. This fort offers a contrast to Becker’s questionable and entirely forgotten history of the House of Revelations colony. The tenuous nature of Becker’s history is foregrounded by how even the participants in the Colony have forgotten the events that dictated their stay on the island. In fact, the extremely inconsistent stories that Becker’s interviews reveal exposes the impossibility of arriving at a true or at least singular version:

The story of the mythical origin of Donal Keneally related by Becker, who draws on various Irish, classical and Biblical myths, is more than dubious,

¹¹⁴ I will examine historiographic metafiction’s problematic construction of historians, including Becker, more fully below.

and the facts cannot easily be divorced from legend, fantasy and fabrication are hinted at not only through the use of hyperbole and playful allusions on the part the narrative voice. (Zacharasiewicz 467)

Hodgins “sceptical attitude towards historical documents” and “strong sense of the elusiveness and contingency of the historical subject matter,” is partially carried by the garrulous person of Julius Champney, who is a former prairie city planner and map-maker (Ibid. 466). Julius understands the traditional record-making system well enough to realize its faults:

Nor was there anything in official records to indicate that they said anything at all, or if they did, said anything that could be understood by the white men who were witnesses. At any rate, Julius Champney had no desire to consult documents, there was no reason to believe them any more reliable than himself. (Hodgins 315)

Hodgins does not just attempt to question historiography, however. He also roots his sceptical examination of historical truth as it aligns itself with mythological notions of origin. Hodgins’ text does more than incorporate, in the person of Becker, an examination of contemporary historiography. His tale is also “deeply imbued with Irish myths and legends and teems with references to Cuchulain and *The Cattle Raid of Cooley* and other Irish tales” (Zacharasiewicz 469). This eruption of the fantastic—and its subsequent positioning as historical—is principally associated with the semi-mythical Donal Keneally (whose mythological past is in strong contrast to Wade Powers’ phoney fort and Becker’s acquisitiveness).¹¹⁵ The reader of Hodgins’ text finds it difficult to distinguish between a ‘real’ history dependent upon the faultiness of memory and record (which includes

¹¹⁵ Hodgins draws upon this contrast in order to maximize the impact, as Barthes suggests, of the mythological history.

Becker's record keeping and the reminiscences of those he interviews), and Keneally's megalomaniac urge to paint himself in the vivid colours of a saviour.

Reaching back to a mythologized Ireland, Hodgins' tale of Keneally's and the Colony of Revelations' origin begins with the prophesy that a woman's "child would be fathered by a bull-god from the sky" (Hodgins 93). Like García Márquez, Hodgins' couches his characters' versions of events in tenuous conditional statements: "For the rest of her life she would insist that . . . " and "it is said" (Ibid. 95 and 96). As well, his folk tale of origin includes a visionary crone, a limbless magician, and a child (Donal Keneally) conceived by a union between a bull and his human mother. Keneally is born out of a crack in the earth which, after his mother's labour, swallows her. Keneally is a fantastic, brilliant, brutal, and wayward child, who makes a double to do his farm chores and, as prophesied, sets up the House of Revelations Colony.

The dubious nature of the sources of Keneally's story of origin is foregrounded in a number of ways. For example, the tale that Donal Keneally is conceived by the union of a "bull and his mother" comes from his surrogate mother, who is an insane crone (Hodgins 95). Likewise, Lily Carruthers—who is subject to visionary fits—is the only witness who tells the story of Keneally's massive tunnelling and subsequent disappearance below the house. As well, the relationship that these mythological narratives have to easily identifiable literary texts does not support the veracity of Keneally's mythological past. For instance, Hodgins' description of the Irish people's reaction to Keneally's mother sounds suspiciously similar to Yeats' "Phases of the Moon": "Countrymen, frightened by the wild look in her eyes, waved her on, kept her moving" (Hodgins 94). This obvious

echo of Yeats' "When the moon's full those creatures of the full Are met on the waste hills by countrymen Who shudder and hurry by" reveals a possible literary origin for the story (Yeats 82).

The distinction between this 'real' history and the dubious nature of its mythological antecedents does not remain comfortably in the past, however. Instead of setting a mythical past against a realistic present, Hodgins' *Invention*, the reader begins to realize, also tries on larger-than-life characters who live in a semi-mythological present.

The eruption into the text of contemporary events which compare to Keneally's extreme behaviour, confirms that the mythological past was not buried with Keneally when he disappeared underground, but rather continues to inform the novel's present. The urge to mythologize that constructs the contemporary understanding of Keneally persists in Hodgins' literally larger-than-life characters who live in Keneally's Colony of Truth, where they are fulfilling their historical legacy.

Although some of these events can be ascribed to untutored country behaviour, such as Dan Holland's jousting with his truck, other overblown metaphorical extravagances, such as the ubiquitous presence of Horseman, Wade Powers' *doppelganger*, construct a very different present in the novel. The cryptic figure of Horseman is not explained in the novel and the reaction of the characters toward him only confirms his mythological status.

The wedding feast for Maggie Kyle and Wade Powers that ends the novel relates to both the Keneally story and the appearance of Horseman. Although Hodgins here calls upon a traditional narrative closure through a gathering of the community, he

problematizes the easy conclusion of that gesture by depicting the wedding feast as erupting into a fantastic Bakhtinian carnival. The feast culminates in a massive brawl in which the loggers, beaten back by the townspeople's vitriolic "insults, like hand grenades, which exploded in the air above the loggers' heads,"¹¹⁶ and the loggers retaliate by taking their chain-saws to the wedding hall (Hodgins 449). The wedding building is sliced up into fantastic shapes, in a carnivalistic excess that even inspires the return of Keneally:

. . . this one little bushy man, hiding under the bar-table, was the only person to see the ghost of Keneally move palely through the crowd, dragging three chained wives behind him, and then dance, to the terrible music, with each of them in turn . . . (Hodgins 450)¹¹⁷

The wedding ends with a "huge pile of gifts stacked ceiling-high on a table at the back of the stage" which, upon being itemized, resembles Borges' list,¹¹⁸ a fantastic mixture of the probable and the impossible (Hodgins 450):

There were pillows and sheets, she said, blankets and lamps and tablecloths and ashtrays, there were toaster and irons and mixers and blenders, plates and cups and bowls . . . road maps, garden rakes, a side of beef, a pound of coffee, a book of matches, a tin of peaches, a promise of peace. A painting.

¹¹⁶ The bizarre nature of these insults is instructive: "They flung elaborate comparisons and dire predictions, they tossed innuendoes and shreds of gossip and unsavory speculations about the manner of their opponent's births. They raised their prices, they canceled appointments, they cut off supplies" (Hodgins 449). Resembling a Rabelaisian list, the carnivalesque excess of these insults both enhances and undermines their intent.

¹¹⁷ Significantly, in terms of Hodgins' historiographic project, only this man is witness to this fantastic event.

¹¹⁸ Foucault, in *The Order of Things*, relates the power of Borges' list to break "up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things": "This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (of) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in this present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies'" (xv) (3). I reproduce this list in order to compare it to the "wild profusion" that Hodgins offers in his list of wedding gifts.

A shrub. A bird cage. . . . Junk mail. Bad television programmes. Tax notices. Insurance premiums. Advertising. The French language. Surprises. Suspicions. Celebrations. Revelations. Meditations. . . . Hollow promises. Special deliveries. Television commercials. Disapproval. Free samples. Hope. The bomb. Crime. Ecology. Faith. Charity. Life. Truth. Grief. Despair. Tantrums. Psychology. (Hodgins 454)

Even this encyclopaedic sample of Hodgins' list by no means exhausts its plenitude.

Hodgins' text closes, in what would be an appropriate gesture for a traditional novel, with the last appearance of Horseman. Just as everyone admits that Horseman is identical to Powers, however, he disappears again—after driving the new couple to their home—without the kind of explanation which is necessary for a traditional novel's closure.

Although Hodgins' *Invention* begins in a tame enough manner, and thus encourages the reader to believe that his writing of the mythological is limited to the distant past, the novelistic excess that closes the text exposes quite a different version of history. Not only, as I suggest above, does the ghost of Keneally (which can be read symbolically as his historical presence) still inform the novelistic present, but the novel's culmination in this excessive display confirms for the reader the inadequacy of traditional historiographical technique. This attempt to recover the past (through the straw man of Becker) is written into the vividness of mythological explanations of historical events. Not coincidentally, the history that these island people remember is that of Keneally's Colony. The traditional history, which is the abortive attempt to reconcile different versions of the historical past (represented by Becker's attempt to collate his rat's nest of clippings and interviews) is, by contrast, all but meaningless.

Geoffrey Ursell's *Perdue, or How the West was Lost* is a novel which also expresses its preoccupation with origin through allusions to genesis myths. Ursell's writing of the prairie is, as his title suggests, more politicized in nature than Hodgins', however. Unlike *Invention*, Ursell uses the Christian genesis to rewrite the settlement of the prairie—and by extension all colonial enterprises—into an orgy of greed and disrespect that resembles that of García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The scepticism that Julius expresses about trial records in *Invention* is, in *Perdue*, intensified (Hodgins 315). To make a politicized reading of these historical events, Ursell calls upon the condensing effect that Barthes suggests myth has upon historical events. His individual characters become archetypal characters who represent a limited range of human possibility and he collapses specific historical events, such as massacres, into exaggerated mythological events.

Perdue's characters are representative archetypes who keep the text from collapsing into the particularity of a specific historiography. As Barthes suggests, characters such as these are signifiers emptied of their value as signifiers and instead contain only vague references to set conceptual figures. The giant, and, later, his son who resembles him, symbolically represent the masses (similar to Orwell's use of Boxer in *Animal Farm*). Similarly, the dwarf¹¹⁹ represents corporate interests and the alienation of a mechanized existence in the post-industrial age.¹²⁰ Perdue's father, Sir, whose name is reduced to a title and whose speech, like Coover's Uncle Sam, is limited to meaningless

¹¹⁹ The dwarf is also associated with "business" and "machinery."

¹²⁰ The physical stature of Ursell's characters, like that in folk tales, betrays their moral stature. The dwarf is ethically misshapen, while the Giant is goodness personified.

clichés and empty expressions,¹²¹ stands for all mindlessly wealthy landowners. Likewise, the faceless masses who harvest Sir's grain represent all impoverished immigrants.

Ursell writes the conquest of the prairie in similarly broad strokes. The slaughter of the buffalo, which actually took place over a generation, Ursell collapses into a single amorphous event. By means of hyperbole, Ursell makes this representative slaughter blot the plain with blood which, with a metaphorical appropriateness, enriches the soil for white cereal crops:

By afternoon the entire plain was covered in blood, a lake of blood that lapped at the foundations of the house and barn and woodpile, circled them, flowed ponderously towards the river. (10)

By the light of the blood-red sunrise, the land was revealed, free of life, and ready—after the passage of the coming winter—to be farmed. (Ibid. 11)

This instance comes to represent all slaughters as well as more effectively portrays the ecological and ethical implications of this catastrophic event.

Although the fabulation of *Perdue* is evident in its use of archetypal figures/situations, it is not a signifying system emptied of political meaning, however. Just as Barthes cites the example of the Black man saluting the French tricolour as an example of French imperialist propaganda (Barthes, *Mythologies* 134), the different characters and events in *Perdue* symbolize events in the history of the settlement of the plains. Although Ursell exaggerates the coldness and amount of snow of *Perdue*'s first winter (in a move

¹²¹ ““Tell you what, though. Good fellows and all. Speak to them for you. Yes, no trouble too much for this magnificent proposal. Put in a good word. Get a good price. For you fellas, bandy-bandy-raggers, do my best! Swear! Old soldiers never die. All the troop. Charge! Clear the way! Tally-ho!!” (Ursell 43).

which is similar to pioneers' exaggeration of their privations) in much the same way as he portrays the buffalo slaughter, this does not detract from the text's political impact.

By collapsing mercantile interest into one person (just as Coover's text captures the spirit of homespun wisdom of America by using Uncle Sam) and the labour of the people into a hardworking giant, Ursell is able to metaphorically investigate the way in which corporate interests have, through various chicaneries, stripped the profit from the people who actually have done the work of settling the plain. Much like today, the dwarf and Sir's business enterprises make money from selling and re-selling prairie land through a variety of hidden corporations. Similarly, Ursell's portrayal of the massacre of whole nations of natives is written as one monstrous slaughter which still continues. Governmental interests, written into the person of the governor, become a man who turns "to his easel to record the sight" of massacred natives "lying tossed in every conceivable position" (Ursell 39 and 38).

The most complex incarnations of *Perdue's* symbolic tapestry are the characters of Perdue and the native girl he lives with in the garden. Sir's son, Perdue, rejects his father's world of destruction and also provides a link to the native girl whose parents Sir has indirectly killed. The female native operates as a signature of the massacre: "She was the love child. The child conceived on that night of the flood of death. The child through whose destiny this event might be comprehended and dealt with" (Ursell 85). The killing of her parents, which is written as the "completion of the slaughter of the past," releases the child into Perdue's custody (Ibid.).

This edenic couple live, appropriately enough, in a stone house built by the giant surrounded by a magical garden separate from the world. Although in the outside world many years pass—of which this couple gets brief glimpses—the garden (which metaphorically stands for a lost paradise) only experiences the seasons of a single year. In this timeless “promised land right here on earth” this couple watch the World Wars¹²² and Hiroshima¹²³ and finally bring a rejuvenation of time by their fertility and release of the workers—in the form of the original giant’s son—from the tyranny of their meaningless labour in the dwarf’s potash mine (Ursell 132).

As this description of the text makes evident, Ursell has relinquished all notion of historical accuracy when creating his mythological history. Unlike Hodgins, Ursell has no realistic touchstone in his novel so that the reader may naturalize its mythological action. Instead, the novel is unrelievedly written in an over-determined prose which allows no “objective” view of its action. The most mythological of all of the texts in this study, Ursell’s *Perdue* takes specific instances and places and conflates them until they represent mythologically all places and events. The blood which stains the land as a result of the massacre of both natives and buffalo becomes the oil the dwarf wishes to acquire. This urgency for blood is associated with the dark *thantos*-like figure (“He-Who-Lives-Alone”) who wants to kill the native girl (Ursell 164). Ursell’s couple become love personified, the

¹²² “The stench of exploding shells, of the lingering poisons of the clouds, of the bloated meat of the horses, of the rotting slop of bodies that had been men” (Ursell 112).

¹²³ “And there was *light!* The sun fallen to earth! The sun smashing down! Light touched the people out in the streets. Their bodies puffed up, flesh cooking, falling off bones, bones seared to powder. Light touched the buildings, blew them apart, burned them to ash” (Ursell 148).

potash mine out of which they rescue the giant's son—through metonymy—becomes the blood of the earth, and their Eden figures as both a lost possibility and earth's forgotten paradise.

Moreover, positioning Perdue as witness to the actual historical events enables Ursell to avoid a peculiarly human failing. Because the human life-span is limited to approximately seventy years, the foreshortened view of a typical participant (we may think here of Hodgins' characters who live in the House of Revelations Colony) allows him/her to ignore the events which occur outside his/her memory. Perdue, and through his perception, the reader, is granted no such luxury. In fact, Perdue is witness to every major historical slaughter and depravity, and his ubiquitous presence at these events disallows the reader's lack of participation.

Hodgins' *The Invention of the World*, Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, and Ursell's *Perdue, or How the West was Lost* use established traditions of mythological writing in order to expose and capitalize upon the arbitrary and provisional primacy of mythological systems. These attempts to both incorporate and undermine traditional uses of myth are central to the postmodern historiographical project. Historiographic metafictional writing would argue that only by exposing the provisional nature of myth's persuasiveness can the role of myth as a driving force of history¹²⁴ be named and de-centred. Only by using myth to enhance their narratives' effectiveness, can these texts explore myth's seductive ability to entrench itself as a valid discourse and reinvent historical events in a vivid and politically effective way.

¹²⁴ See Hayden White's "Question of Narrative" for an examination of Lévi-Strauss' theorizing about history and myth (111-2).

Personalized History

“Look at you,” said Domino, “a young man brought up by a priest and a pious mother. A young man who can’t pick up a musket to shoot a rabbit. What makes you think you can see anything clearly? What gives you the right to make a notebook and shake it at me in thirty years, if we’re still alive, and say you’ve got the truth?”

Jeanette Winterson

As I have argued above, some postmodern questionings of the past rely upon mythological devices to interrogate historical truth. The provisional and personal history which drives the narrative of many such texts, though not directly mythological, nevertheless equally mythologizes its versions of history. This incarnation of historical writing includes such texts as Elsa Morante’s *History a Novel*, Winterson’s *The Passion* and *Sexing the Cherry*, Kogawa’s *Obasan*, and John Irving’s *Setting Free the Bears*. These texts work within “the history of private life” in order to compare a fact-based and narrative-based historiography: “to elevate ‘private experience to public consciousness’ in postmodern historiographic metafiction is not to expand the subject; it is to render inextricable the public and historical and the private and biographical” (Fludernik 93 and Hutcheon, “Postmodern Problematizing” 372). This strategy juxtaposes a private history against a public record in order to expose the gaps in the public record’s account.

Morante’s *History a Novel* attempts its interrogation of public or official history by incorporating, and comparing by their placement, the texts of official history and those of

a family endeavouring to survive the war. The very typicality of this family, and the mundane and quotidian nature of their experience, is central to the point of Morante's tale. Constructing an ordinariness raised to perfection (similar to that which Lukács identifies in Scott), Morante's typical family becomes generalized to include all families of the forgotten poor or oppressed who do not comprehend their historical surround. Morante suspects, with her minor character Gunther, that "the war was a vague algebra, thought up by the General Staff, which had nothing to do with him" (Morante 15). Morante's *History* effectively investigates historiography by not only showing but also enacting how marginalized people get written out of history. She interpolates text that resembles traditional historiography alongside those that depict a family drama. This pairing provides an ironic comment upon a traditional historiography which excludes the majority of its victims. This rhetorical device attempts to convince the reader that historiography is a narrative—however couched in traditional objectivity—which ignores, or at best marginalizes and sanitizes most of the story.

The statistics and dates which inform traditional historiography, excised from their typical setting in a historical work, prove in Morante's texts to be woefully lacking in their comprehension and inclusion of the very people they purport to write about. The chapter titles, for example, are simply years: "19 . . . 1941" (Morante ix). Those chapters which relate more public or official concerns are subdivided into months and are occupied with what Hutcheon calls traditional historiography's "stories of kings, wars, and ministerial intrigues" ("Postmodern Problematizing" 373):

FEBRUARY-APRIL

After new ordinances of the Italian police, the Fascists, assisted by local informers, proceed to seek out and arrest Jews who eluded the previous German round-ups.

In Rome, in reprisal for a partisan attack on an SS patrol (32 killed), the German Command orders the massacre of 335 Italian civilians, whose bodies are flung into a cave (the Fosse Ardeatine).

The potential of the Red Army steadily grows, through the increased efficiency of the USSR war industry and shipments of Allied material. Engaged all along the front in a series of attacks (Stalin's ten offensives), the Soviet troops advance victoriously westward, reaching the Czechoslovakian border to the south. (Morante 251)

As this typical example indicates, official history ignores the people who are involved in the events that its purportedly reports. Its remote and ultimately meaningless detail leaves out the narrative of the people who make up history. By using both a provisional narrative and the vehicular prose of official history, Morante's text compares this traditional notion of history¹²⁵ with a fictionalized narrative.¹²⁶ As I suggest above, however, Morante does not question the official version by ignoring its codification as truth. In a much more effective move, Morante's text "addresses political issues through its interrogations of the writings of both literature and history, and thus places the burden of responsibility for understanding on the reader" by interpolating descriptions of events which closely resemble traditional historiography into her personal narrative of a particular family (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 221). This juxtaposition leads the reader to compare the two kinds of discourse.

Morante's provisional history of war, which, contrary to the version offered by the public media, is a history of war avoidance. The reader learns from Morante's text (as well

¹²⁵ A history that "relies on the validation of historical evidence, which interacts with the argumentative presentation of explanatory theses" (Fludernik 89).

¹²⁶ Which "concentrates on individual human experience even if that experience is viewed from the perspective of the general, philosophical vantage point and constitutes an analysis of the human predicament" (Fludernik 89).

as Farley Mowat's *And No Birds Sang*, which traces a soldier's attempts to avoid war-time battles rather than immersing himself in them), that the official narrative (or any other historical event), contradicts what is actually experienced by those involved. In fact, the participant's limited understanding of what is happening in the larger world is emphasized by Morante's use of Vilma, a mad woman who (much like Lear's Fool) realizes what is 'really' going on in the concentration camps:

She told, for example, how in all of conquered Europe, these days, in houses where they still suspected the concealed presence of some Jew, the windows and doors were walled up, then the houses were pulverised with some special gases called *cyclones*. And in the countryside and the forests of Poland, from all the trees hung men, women, and children, even tiny babies: not only Jews, but gypsies, and Communists, and *Polandese*, and *fighters* . . . And in all the stations where the train passed, you could see skeletons at work on the tracks, skeletons *that had only their eyes* . . . (Morante 79)

Vilma's version of atrocities—not constrained or constructed by the official terms—although considerably questionable (*cyclones?*), manages to relate a truth that the other characters, regardless of how 'well-informed' they are, cannot access. By bringing into play the two types of language which construct her text, Morante is able to call upon the reader's faith in the veracity of what she calls the "official terms" of wartime propaganda¹²⁷ and on the sympathy we accord the private personal narrative—which she prioritizes by its sheer volume. Although the official version hides the atrocities behind its abstract prose, Vilma's unimaginable version reconfirms Morante's suspicion—and

¹²⁷ Such as "*evacuation, internment, extraordinary pacification action, final solution*" (Morante 79). It is worth noting that Morante's use of these terms is not coincidental, for these words hid what we later came to call atrocities.

through her text, the reader's—that history is ordered by the “well-known immobile principle of historical dynamics: power to some, servitude to others” (Morante 3).

Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* also positions her characters in the throes of a scarcely understood historical activity. Through the voices of Dog Woman and her adopted son, Jordan, Winterson relates the period of the Interregnum (1649-1660). In a fantastic world which includes twelve folktale princesses, a Swiftian floating island, and a city subject to fatal plagues of love, Dog Woman and Jordan navigate with only a faint idea of the political events that led to the execution of King Charles and the installation of Cromwell's interim government:

At first the Civil war hardly touched us. Opinions were high, and there were those like Preacher Scroggs and Neighbour Firebrace who would have taken any opportunity to feel themselves above the common crowd. But it was a quiet enough affair, local battles and the Roundhead mob sometimes descending on a lordly house and claiming it for themselves in the name of God. There was no real feeling that the King would not win as he had always won, as kings have always won, whomever they fight. (Winterson, *Sexing* 63)

Both Dog Woman and Jordan believe in the divine right of kings and are fully aware that the Puritan rule in Cromwell's England would lead to a reduction in their livelihood (raising fighting dogs for competition) as well as a “closing up every place of distraction” (Ibid. 63). This awareness is what drives their political activity, for Dog Woman plays a part in the internecine battles that rage around them. Interpreting the scripture rather literally, she acts upon the biblical phrase “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” by forcibly removing eyes and teeth from recalcitrant puritans (Winterson, *Sexing* 84).

The lack of awareness of historical events on the part of Winterson's characters¹²⁸ does not mean their inaction, however. Although the distant political events of the interregnum scarcely touch the characters, they link their ethical duty to an acknowledgement of their particular place in history rather than to a nebulous notion of full historical knowledge. Their approach is positioned by Winterson's text as equally valid, and particularly in the case of Dog Woman and Jordan, much more valid, than any well-informed opinion based upon historical 'fact.' Even though Winterson presents semi-mythological characters who react to contemporary political realities in definitive ways, her text shares with Morante's a vision of characters swept up in the events which define their lives and over which they have no control. In this way *Sexing* differs from traditional historiographies.

Likewise, in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*, the historical events of the Napoleonic wars are related through a first-person narrator Henri¹²⁹ and concern the powerless many whose lives are directly affected by the conflict. Through constant movement, we follow the characters in the aftermath of revolution and ongoing war. The novel begins in an ever-moving soldier's camp, then continues in the destroyed countryside of Russia,

¹²⁸ In the case of *Sexing the Cherry* the effect of a contemporaneous political climate upon its people is expressed by the connection Dog Woman and Jordan share with a modern environmentalist (who wishes to "burn down the factory") and Nicholas Jordan (who is also a sailor) (142). By magically linking these heroes of the past and present Winterson argues, through her characters caught in the interstices of historical events, for political involvement. In this way Winterson's argument is very different from Morante's, who decides against granting her characters political efficacy in order to show how negligible a human life is to the rush of historical events.

¹²⁹ Only late in the narration do we find out that Henri is retrospectively writing (and rewriting), like Günter Grass' Oskar, from the confines of San Servolo, Venice's lunatic asylum.

and ends (when we do find ourselves in one place) in the ever-changing city of Venice. Winterson places her characters in a fragmented world in which their 'success' (a move which we may read as a sense of momentary stability paradoxically located within a fluctuating postmodern world) depends upon the ability of their philosophical systems to deal with the multiple nature of their environment. The coping strategies of her characters include both an attempt to impose a totalizing master narrative upon reality's multiplicity (which we may read as reactionary empiricism), and an acceptance of—and delight in—'reality's' plurality.

Winterson's account also differs from traditional ways of portraying the personal account of historical events in that she allows us, through Henri, to meet and therefore judge Napoleon. The figure of Napoleon in this text is an example of how heedless is the hand that orchestrates the lives of the powerless. Napoleon's attempt to control the world, as every postmodern would suspect, is thwarted by a fluid world, which in this text is symbolized by the instability of Venice.

Like Pynchon's searchers, Stencil and Oedipa, Napoleon wants to incorporate the world into a singular experience. Napoleon is much less self-aware than Pynchon's characters, however. His wish to consolidate multiple narratives into a single explanatory narrative has been written into the text by the description of what we may call obsession. The text's figure for this type of obsession (which explains Napoleon's passion for mastery) is what results from trying to close with the "secret panel" (Winterson, *Passion* 148). Singular (because each person may possess only one) and multiple (because it is different for each), the "secret panel" is the place where we hide that most special treasure. As the gambler from Villanelle's casino exhibits (who gambled the single treasure of his life and lost), risking this treasure in an attempt

to control it, is to risk his fate: dismemberment (Winterson, *Passion* 148). To place this metaphor within postmodern ideology, the reader might infer that the risk of following any integrating ideology is, paradoxically, to risk disintegration. If we are to read passion as an ordering impulse, then the attempt to make order in this world permits, or more strongly, encourages, disorder.

Napoleon's "secret panel" is his wish to consolidate the chaos of his world into one interpretable narrative. Having inherited the fragmented world of post-revolutionary France, Napoleon wishes to structure it, with the eventual goal of rationalizing all of reality. According to Henri,¹³⁰ Napoleon himself has a firm belief in his inherent ability to structure: "He believed that he was centre of the world and for a long time there was nothing to change him from this belief" (Winterson, *Passion* 20). Napoleon's all-devouring hunger is symbolized by two images of his appetite, which expose the danger inherent in the historiographical meaning-making enterprise. The firm belief in one myth, by definition, excludes other possibilities. While Henri is a servant of Napoleon, he relates an image of Napoleon devouring an entire chicken:

He hardly ever asks me to carve now. As soon as I'm gone he'll lift the lid and pick it up and push it into his mouth. He wishes his whole face were mouth to cram a whole bird. (Winterson, *Passion* 6)

That Napoleon's appetite extends to the entire world is shown by a paired scene in which Napoleon is surprised by Henri sitting alone with a globe:

When I go in, he's sitting alone with a globe in front of him. He doesn't notice me, he goes on turning the globe round and round, holding it tenderly

¹³⁰ Although our mad narrator has freely admitted that he "created Napoleon," and his narration is continually undermined by his ambiguous refrain, "I'm telling you stories. Trust me," he nonetheless is our only source of information (Winterson, *Passion* 7).

with both hands as if it were a breast. I give a short cough and he looks up suddenly with fear in his face. (Ibid. 5)

Napoleon's voracious wish to totalize the world symbolically exposes empiricism's fatal flaw. Every choice from the cornucopia of the world must, by the definition of the word 'choice,' exclude.

Moreover, Winterson's text, however much Napoleon would like to make the world cohesive and singular, is itself impossibly multiple. Napoleon's inability to close with any type of verifiable truth is represented by the disordered and chaotic nature of Venice. In this mythological past, Venice becomes a fabled place¹³¹ in which the wish to create order (or impose a master narrative) stands out as a deliberate choice. The Venice of the text is a living labyrinth, built on flux, water, and swamp. Though all of Europe is in chaos, Venice is an extreme, almost parodic, emblem, for the postmodern world:

The city I come from is a changeable city. It is not always the same size. Streets appear and disappear overnight, new waterways force themselves over dry land. There are days when you cannot walk from one end to the other, so far is the journey, and there are days when a stroll will take you round your kingdom like a tin-pot Prince. (Winterson, *Passion* 159)

Like the magical churches which overtake Napoleon's regimental pines in the public garden,¹³² Venice overwhelms attempts to 'rationalize' its multiple nature. The price of Henri's attempt to make sense of this multiplicity is his sanity, and leads to his institutionalization.

¹³¹ Just as the slipperiness of time in *Sexing the Cherry* allows the creation of a circumstance in which people from other times and tales may meet, in *The Passion*, Winterson foregrounds the impossibility of cohesiveness by using the fluid nature of Venice.

¹³² "The only rational place is the public garden and even there, on a foggy night, four sepulchral churches rise up and swamp the regimental pines" (Winterson, *Passion* 186).

In *The Passion*, Winterson argues that passion (and here we might read Napoleon's chimerical desire for the singular narrative) "is sweeter split strand by strand. Divided and re-divided like mercury and then gathered up only at the last moment" (Winterson, *Passion* 96). To accept passion in this text is to relinquish the desire to control the contingencies of history. As in Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, this can only be achieved (and in Winterson's text even Napoleon does not have, significantly, a privileged position) by an acknowledgement of the world's multiplicity.

In Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, Naomi is similarly subject to the whims of historical circumstance. By comparison to the megalomania of Saleem in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Oskar in Grass' *Tin Drum*, who believe (however mistakenly) that they orchestrate the historical events which surround them, Naomi is in quite a different position. Instead of an egomaniacal adult, Naomi is a child subject to xenophobic forces she cannot control or understand. *Obasan* is a *Bildungsroman*, and is structured as a young girl's memoir or diary, a strategy which evokes readers' expectations of a first-person narrative. This expectation of a discourse of truth¹³³ also allows the delivery and interpretation of otherwise disconnected material. Kogawa uses this "different verbal medium altogether" to relate Naomi's childhood response to the historical situation (Cheung 139). As well, Kogawa incorporates into her text Aunt Emily's gradually evolving historical and journalistic account of the burgeoning racism which culminates in the Japanese internment. This doubled diary enables the "reluctant" narrator/historian, Naomi, to have the emotive response of both a child who misunderstands,¹³⁴ to relate the desperation of an adult who was involved in the historical

¹³³ Significantly, diaries are sanctioned by law and judged as admissible evidence in court.

¹³⁴ Children's lack of comprehension of an event they recount is fictionally coded as truth.

circumstance, and to be an evaluative adult interpreting the text (Rose, “Politics into Art” 220).¹³⁵ Naomi’s delivery of truth discourse is augmented by her collusion with the reader, however, which operates out of a metaphysics of presence in the same way as do her textual descriptions of photographs. Kogawa’s fictional strategy writes the reader into a scene in which he/she shares Naomi’s private account. For example, the reader is present at the unfolding of a story so concealed that it cannot even be reported to Naomi’s mother (Old Man Gower’s sexual abuse). This presence reinforces the implicit suggestion of textual veracity which is inherent in the diary format. It also links, as Rose points out, the powerful metaphor of rape with the internment (“Politics into Art” 222).

Grandma Kato letter best expresses this use of the first-person narrative as questionable disclosure as well as shows the evocative capability of fiction to elicit emotive response. The entire text—operating out of the movement to full knowledge like the detective story or “quest narrative”—builds toward the opening of this letter (Howells 475). The letter that Grandma Kato sends home—ostensibly to lighten her psychological burden—metafictionally exposes the reader’s lack of information (for Grandma Kato does not mention her own injuries). As well, both the letter’s materiality and inaccessibility codes it as an other concealed from the reader which symbolically (that is fictionally) corresponds with history’s masking of the Japanese internment. Written in Japanese characters, and therefore inaccessible to Naomi and the reader, Grandma Kato’s “thin blue-lined” letter both comes to the reader and Naomi very late in the narrative sequence (*Obasan* 234). Also, it is translated and re-interpreted in Naomi’s words. Metafictionally relating a historical event interpreted by Grandma Kato, translated by Sensai,

¹³⁵ Like much metafiction, such as Kroetsch’s *Badlands* and Bowering’s *Harry’s Fragments*, the reader’s simultaneous construction of the narrative corresponds with Naomi’s discovery.

edited and reinterpreted¹³⁶ by Naomi, this letter assumes the collective voice of an oppressed community. This confirmation that there is no verifiable reading enables the reader to fully engage with the fiction without searching for truth. The reader's inclusion in this community encourages her/him to commiserate with the poetic outpouring which is Naomi's (and, since this information has been hidden and teasingly foreshadowed, the reader's) reaction to a truth finally revealed. The imagery of loss in the novel is bound together with the emotive and symbolic force which foregrounds historiography's serious lack (for the discourse of traditional history does not allow overdetermined language) of a structural mechanism which can relate this type of information. The limits of the archive's partial truth, "the brief emotionless statement that Grandma Kato, her niece's daughter, and my mother are the only ones in the immediate family to have survived," is exposed by this "outpouring" (*Obasan* 234).

Although much has been written about silence in *Obasan*,¹³⁷ the overdetermined eloquence of this crucial scene exposes what traditional historiography cannot convey. Relying both upon the narrative desire for closure and the full and complete knowledge that the detective genre requires, Kato's letter violates "Anglo-American generic and historiographic conventions by effacing the boundaries between private and public history and between fact and fiction" (Cheung 170). The letter inscribes its individual and provisional truth upon an event that the text's reading public knows only through official report. By coding itself as

¹³⁶ Naomi's description of inadequate textual control is an anathema to history, but is read as spontaneous presence in fiction: "Grandma's letter becomes increasingly chaotic, the details interspersed without chronological consistency" (*Obasan* 236).

¹³⁷ Notably King-kok Cheung's text *Articulate Silences*, Arnold Davidson's "Writing Against the Silence: Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*," Gayle Fujita's "'To Attend the Sound of Stone': The Sensibility of Silence in *Obasan*," and Lynn Thiesmeyer's "Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*: Unsilencing the Silence of America's Concentration Camps."

historiography, and relating the nuclear bombing of the Japanese, Grandma Kato's letter uses overdetermined linguistic markers to hail the reader into a paradoxically fictional discourse of truth.

As the example of the letter suggests, *Obasan's* use of the seemingly extraneous material which traditional history omits, gives it the *readerly* validity of the classical text and simultaneously opens the novel to a *writerly* engagement with historical systems of value. Kogawa's use of the Kitagawa archive material and subsequent choice to write in a fictional—albeit historically coded—fashion, becomes significant in light of an examination of historiography. *Obasan* does more than merely appeal to and problematize narrative and historical codes which a reader recognizes as construct, but also appeals to narrative conventions or codes in order to incise a message which is historiographically impossible. The historiographic project receives both its coding as secret and a story's cultural reference from fiction. This “fictive corporeality” that the reader creates from the *writerly* narrative operates on an entirely different level of discourse than historical “abstractions” (Hutcheon, “Postmodern Problematizing” 368).

Siegfried's (Siggy's) highly idiosyncratic history of World War II, in John Irving's *Setting Free the Bears*, is foregrounded in the text as a historiography whose provisionality cannot be accepted by the academic tradition. The middle section of Irving's text, entitled “The Notebook,” which contains both “The highly selective autobiography of Siegfried Javotnik” and Siggy's “Zoo Watch Record,” is constructed, like Morante's *History*, of two “interleaf[ed]” texts (Irving 217). This construct, and its narrator's self-

reflexive commentary, works to question both traditional historical content as well as valorizes and undermines Siggy's personal version of historical events.

Like Demeter in Kroetsch's *Studhorse Man*, Irving's narrator Hannes Graff relates, selects and interprets his version of "The Notebook" from the comfort of a bathtub. He foregrounds his process by his position as Siggy's primary reader: "Because, I felt, it was almost impossible to endure either the verbosity of Siggy's souped-up history or the fanaticism of his frothing zoo watches—if you were to read them whole. At least, it was for me; I found myself skipping back and forth" (Irving 217). Graff's laborious effort to steam open the pages of "The Notebook" as well as his intentional modification of the received text, calls attention to the mediating effect of Graff's voice as well as positions the reader's entrance to Siggy's history. The historical text's incorporation into this dual text is Siggy's thesis, which is, as its title indicates, "The highly selective autobiography of Siegfried Javotnik." Siggy's academic work is an attempt to write a family pre-history¹³⁸ which takes place during the Second World War and is flawed, according to his academic supervisor, Ficht, by the selectivity of its focus:

This thesis was to be my HIGHLY SELECTIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY, as I thought it was well enough detailed, and even creative. But this Ficht was furious. He said it was a decidedly biased and incomplete picture of history, and flippant besides—there were no footnotes. . . . The previous Fichtstein was enraged that I should be so pretentious as to dash through the war with so little mention of the Jews. I tried to explain that he should really look at my autobiography as what is loosely called fiction—a novel, say. Because its not intended to be *real* history. And I added, besides, that I thought the Doktor was making a rather Russian-American value judgement by claiming that no picture of atrocity can be complete without the millions of Jews. Numbers again, you see. Ficht, or Fichtstein, seemed to miss my point altogether, but I confess, statistics have a way of getting the best of you. (210)

¹³⁸ "I can say: all *anyone* has is a pre-history" (Irving 91).

Siggy deliberately excludes reference to the holocaust in his highly provisional historical record in order to write a present tense historical narrative. His family's version of events, since they were in Kaprun (a village in rural Austria) during the occupation, contains no reference to the holocaust. Like Morante's family, Siggy's tale traces instead the effect of the war upon a particular group of people connected by circumstance and caught up by their surrounding historical events. Unlike the traditional approach that Ficht would promote, Siggy's "souped-up" history makes no claim to accuracy. In fact, the idiosyncratic nature of his narrative is exposed by particular devices. For instance, Siggy focuses upon the chance relationship which his father (spiritually rather than biologically) Zahn may have had to a man who freed the zoo animals in Vienna on the night of the German invasion. The details that he draws upon to link these two men are so tenuous and contaminated by an emotional investment in its outcome that his entire project is suspect. Likewise, Siggy's version of Austria's invasion is read through the personal voice of his grandfather. Disgusted by the cowardice of Austria's interim Chancellor, Seyss-Inquart, who wakes Hitler in order to extract a promise not to invade, Siggy's grandfather says, "Wake up any man at two-thirty in the morning . . . even a reasonable man—and see what you get" (Irving 128).

The historical events of World War II in this novel are interpreted through its many narrative levels. For instance, Ernst Watzek-Trummer, "Historian without equal," has related his received version of events to Siggy and Siggy's subsequent version is

modified by Graff as well as Siggy's reading of provisional interpretations of history's participants (Irving 280).

The problematic search that this text posits for a source text is best expressed by the structural decision that Irving makes to have Graff interpolate Siggy's history and zoo watch record. The comparison of these texts that this juxtaposition forces foregrounds the highly provisional and idiosyncratic nature of Siggy's historical claim. Both of these are records, but as Hannes metafictionally claims, these accounts are so verbose and fanatical that if he did not intermingle them in this fashion, no one would read them. Although both texts are supported, like traditional historiography, by Siggy's meticulous and almost fanatical devotion to names and dates, the zoo watch's unfounded conjecture makes the reader question the accuracy of his account. The combination of this punctiliousness and questionable veracity leads to a questioning of Siggy's more historical account. Siggy's fanatical mingling of fact and fiction symbolically culminates in his certainty that he has heard the zoo watchman's name, O. Schrutt, before:

This watchman is O. Schrutt.

Strange, but that's a name I've used before; I've had a O. Schrutt on my lips before. . . . And I also believe I've used this name in one fiction or another. That's it, I'm sure; I've made up an O. Schrutt before. (Irving 127)

Even when Siggy realizes that he recognizes the name from its chance use in his own history, this fact does not shake Siggy's conviction that Schrutt shares a past with the fictional character, however:

Curious that my invented O. Schrutt should be a bit character. A walk-on part, an alphabetized member of Vienna's Nazi youth. It's very curious, isn't it?

Just imagine: if my invented O. Schrutt had lived through all the walk-on parts I anticipated him to play, what would that O. Schrutt be

doing now? What more perfect thing could he be than this second-shift nightwatchman at the Hietzinger Zoo? (Irving 132)

Siggy's certainty of Schrutts' placement in the war, for instance, he freely admits to be based upon his creation of Schrutts as "a bit actor" in his family record.

Structurally, through Irving's self-reflexive use of sections such as "The Notebook" and its complementary "P.S." (which relates Graff's reaction to Siggy's text), and by Siggy's problematic contamination of fact with fiction, Irving is able to write a Kerouac-type novel which makes significant claims about historical veracity. By examining the potential signifying strength the holocaust gives historical texts, Irving questions, like Morante, the accuracy of a history which dwells upon "numbers" to the exclusion of those tragically involved. Irving argues, like many postmodern novelists, that historiographic metafiction represents "what fiction at its very best can do in the historical realm, joining hands with the best of historiography in an evocation of lived human experience resurrected from the past" (Fludernik 100).

Although the mythological and personal histories I have examined approach their project in different ways, they all compare the sterile frigidity of the official record to a humanized and provisional narrative. By using techniques which juxtapose these two writings of history, postmodern historiographies attempt to make a factual account of past events relevant to a personal narrative without valourizing either reading. Historiographic metafiction constructs history as a revelation of various truths, writes history as myth, and gives personal history the importance of the political. This type of historical narrative uses the self-aggrandising and provisional nature (*Obasan's* diary and Siggy's family history) of the personal private history to undermine the attempt to install either version as a

verifiable discourse. The politically questionable quality of the official record (Morante's examination of traditional historiography) as well as the urge to mythologically construct the historical past (Hodgins' *The Invention of the World* and Ursell's *Perdue*) likewise interrogate traditional historiography. Postmodern historiographies suggest that "We were like those that dream and pass through life as a series of shadows" (Winterson, *Sexing* 95). Instead of confirming, like an empiricist account, that life is a fixed dream, such writings of history would problematize even that questionable statement by self-reflexively stating: "And so what we have told you is true, although it is not" (Ibid.).

Chapter 4 ~ History's Poetic Narrators

We cannot tell a story that leaves us outside, and when I say we, I include you. But in order to include you, I feel that I cannot spend these pages saying I to a second person. Therefore let us say he, and stand together looking at them. George Bowering

As an argument which traces mythological readings of historical events implies, the effect a mediating voice has upon historical narration is profound. The implications exposed by the provisional nature of the historical narrative suggest that 'factual' historiographies not only ignore events in their urgency to close with a singular history, but also that the objective voice that narrates and interprets historical events is an extremely suspect construction. The ways in which postmodern historiographies have problematized the historical voice, and the strategies such texts have chosen to employ in their attempt to parody and incorporate that voice's power into their narrative, reveals much about the questionable accuracy of the historical account. In any literary or historical work, the reader is subject to the information delivered by the text. Historiographic metafiction examines this construct by foregrounding the narrator in the telling of story: "the historical text . . . is thus 'no longer the mode of reporting 'reality' in a way that would be transparent and non-problematic. It is thought of as a construct and presented as such" (Carrard in Jones 8). In a search for narrative meaning, the reader finds himself/herself confounded by the shifting narrators who intentionally contaminate "the historical with didactic and situational discursive statements: objectivity, neutrality,

impersonality, and transparency of representation” (Hutcheon, “Postmodern Problematizing” 370).

Although literary criticism does examine the effect of the so-called unreliable narrator in the delivery of textual information and the transparency of the omniscient narrator structure, this analysis is not often turned to historiography. Typically, the historiographical text’s mask of objectivity hides the voice which mediates historical information. The transparent omniscient voice of the traditional historical account evokes the same sense of objectivity as that of the literary text. But this structural decision has, because the historical account is coded as ‘true,’ ideological and political implications which are often unexamined. The narrators of historiographic metafiction, by contrast, are self-reflexive structures which intensely problematize the notion of a mediated clarity.

The use of a first-person narrator, for example, is a strategy which makes the reader’s sole entrance into the narrative dependent upon a singular problematic voice. The effect of this upon the reader of a historiographical text is to encourage an interrogation of the reading of history that this voice provides, and by extension all mediated versions of history. As well, this device draws attention to the voice behind traditional historiography.¹³⁹ One of the clearest examinations of the problematization of the first-person historical narrator is found in contemporary poetry. This genre (which includes such texts as Mandel’s *Out of Place*, Kroetsch’s *Seed Catalogue*, Ondaatje’s *Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and Marlatt’s *Steveston*), uses the coding of the lyric ‘I’ established

¹³⁹ For example, my omniscient narrative voice, which makes such statements about effects upon a reader, attempts, by recourse to traditional academic coding, to install a similar faith in its objectivity and authoritative grounding.

by the Romantic tradition, to simultaneously install and problematize a sense of historical primacy and truth. This questioning of the narrator is not limited to poetry, however. Prose works such as Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Grass' *The Tin Drum*, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, and Findley's *Famous Last Words*, also use the traditional first-person narrator. These texts construct a ruling narrative voice only to self-reflexively undermine that construction by either problematizing statements ("I'm telling you stories. Trust me") or by the fantastic nature of their claims ("to understand me, you'll have to swallow the world") (Winterson, *Passion* 7 and Rushdie 383). The provisional nature of the first-person narrator is further interrogated by historiographic metafiction's construction of a stand-in for a historian. Texts such as Hodgins' *Invention of the World*, Swift's *Waterland*, Kroetsch's *Badlands*, and Rees' *Beneath the Faceless Mountain* use historian figures to investigate the way in which traditional historiography gathers, selects, and collates data. The questionable principles which guide these historians' research is also foregrounded by their textual positioning.

The Historical 'I'

*If they have lied about me, they have lied
about everything. Anonymous*

Although there are many strategies which foreground the dubious nature of the mediated text, literature's first-person narrator is still one of the most effective ways to call attention to the literary codes that undermine history's attempt to install itself as a verifiable discourse:

A special case for this ‘filling-in’, and one more directly a matter for the literary critic, is that where the author seeks to stand aside from his own discourse by systematically omitting any direct allusion to the originator of the text: the history seems to write itself. This approach is very widely used, since it fits the so-called ‘objective’ mode of historical discourse, in which the historian never appears himself [herself]. What really happens is that the author discards the human persona but replaces it by an ‘objective’ one; the authorial subject is as evident as ever, but it has become an objective subject. (Barthes, “Historical Discourse” 148-9).

The first-person narration makes use of the slippery nature of the shifter¹⁴⁰ pronoun ‘I’ whose different incarnations are subject to the contingency of its grammatical placement. The objective voice of traditional historiography (which incidentally, Herodotus does not use),¹⁴¹ is transformed into the ‘I of enunciation’. This transformation foregrounds the subject’s inevitably provisional nature: “Linguistically, the author is nothing but the one who writes, just a I is nothing but the one who says I” (Barthes in “The Death of the Author” 51):

What I write about myself is never *the last word*: the more “sincere” I am, the more interpretable I am, under the eye of other examples than those old authors, who believed they were required to submit themselves to but one law: *authenticity*. . . my texts are disjointed. . . the latter is nothing but a *further text*. . . *text upon text*, which never illuminates anything. (Barthes in Jay 176)

Postmodern works would do more than just problematize this construction of a narrator and its subsequent reception, however. Following Post-structuralist practice, the

¹⁴⁰ Pronouns which change their meaning, depending upon their placement in a grammatical structure.

¹⁴¹ Significantly, the ‘father of history,’ Herodotus, avoids this self-undermining strategy and employs instead a kind of first-person narrator (Gould 110-1). Although used in many postmodern works, this positioning of the narrator as one person speaking from one point in time to another, is ancient. And, as with all inherited structures, it has inherited problematic implications.

postmodern attempt to write a narrating subject also relies upon a notion of the subject as a discursive construct. Post-structuralist practice operates out of “a sustained denial of the fiction that the subject is anything other than a creation of human consciousness and human language” (Jay 176-5). This conceptualization allows the postmodern work to self-reflexively work within this discourse of the ‘self’. Postmodern attempts to write the subject are self-reflexive and paradoxical attempts to produce, and rely upon the reader’s faith in, a unified notion of self “within a changing epistemology of the subject” (Ibid. 21). Although both fiction and poetry use the easily invalidated problematic personal ‘I,’ the postmodern historical long poem, because of the inherent nature¹⁴² of its “unmappable form,” is able to use the lyric ‘I’ (Kramer 102):

The ‘law’ of the long poem as a ‘new’ genre is its lawlessness. Its ungrammaticality results in the thematization of its formal elements and in its treatment as formal elements of its major themes, namely locality, the self, and the idea of discourse. (Kamboureli xiv)

Theorists of fictionalized historical construction follow the lead of Post-structuralist practice and are reluctant to examine the recent poetry’s writing of history. But its use of the lyric ‘I’¹⁴³ and other inherent technical differences enables such works to critically analyze their own historiography. The “long poem of images, having no order of ideas to sustain it, gravitates to the personal, the image immediate to one’s own experience” (Dudek in Mandel, *Family Romance* 224). This genre therefore radically

¹⁴² “The long poem, says Smaro Kamboureli, occurs outside of the law of genre; the long poem is unlocalizable and indeterminate in its positioning of the self” (Kramer 102).

¹⁴³ The “epic and lyric are deemed to be mouthpieces for a monologic subject—whether authorial or characterological—which is disguised to itself by the single-mindedness (single-voicedness) of its representations” (Singer 72-3).

undermines the monolithic historical objectivity of traditional historiography as well as problematizes Post-structuralist practice's myopic concentration upon postmodern fiction.¹⁴⁴ The long poem tries "to find alternatives to the larger narratives within which writing seems to exist, the political/ national/ historical/psychological (& so on) frames within which it is (will be?) read" (BP Nichol in *Ibid.*).

An adaptation of a theorizing of historiographic metafiction to the long poem's "dialectic of objective fact and subjective feeling," reception of poetic conventions, and finally its self-conscious linguistic manipulation, reveals how this 'genre' type thoroughly deconstructs any notion of either historical or linguistic veracity (Scobie, *Signature* 120). The contemporary long poem also foregrounds aspects of 'truth' construction in history, which fiction¹⁴⁵ cannot.

Although historiographic metafiction's questioning of truth subverts any possible linguistic or historical veracity, as Lukács inadvertently implies in his valourization of the epic and drama, the lyric inevitably deals with different material than more 'factualized' accounts:

Both tragedy and the great epic—epic and novel—present the objective *outer* world; they present the inner life of man [woman] only insofar as his [her] feelings and thoughts manifest themselves in deeds and actions, in a visible interaction with objective, outer reality. This is the

¹⁴⁴ "The lyric embedded in the long poem is not a poem that 'does not provide an explanation, judgment or narrative' (Hardy 2); this is the lyric that reached its apotheosis during the hey-day of the New Criticism. Rather, it is a lyric fracturing its 'wholeness,' parodying its own lyrical impulse; it functions more as a trope than as a genre" (Kamboureli 64).

¹⁴⁵ Or modernist poetic attempts, such as William's *Paterson*, Marriott's *The Wind Our Enemy*, and Livesay's *Documentaries*.

decisive dividing line between epic and drama, on the one hand, and lyric, on the other. (Lukács 90)

The distinction that Lukács makes (and the discussion of the lyric which, significantly, hides within it) between the lyric and the epic or drama hinges on the action that more objective accounts are presumed to contain. Presumably, the lyric is concerned with the *inner* world as, with no relationship to deeds or actions, it manifests itself in invisible interaction. In her study of what she calls documentary collage, Jones similarly argues that “the documentary poet in Livesay’s terms, is a reader of the historical record who inserts into that genre the ‘subjective’ perspective of the lyric poet” (Jones 6):

The ‘documentary,’ therefore, paradoxically reminds readers both of the ‘factuality’ of history and of the construction of that factuality through the collection and interpretations of textual or materially ‘documentary’ evidence. This is evidence whose ‘sources’ cannot be objective; they are, inevitably, positioned subjects whose particular positioning needs to be taken into (the historical) account. This is not a subjectivity that can be simply opposed to an unimpeachable non-relative ‘objective’ perspective, but an undermining of the very opposition between subjectivity and objectivity. (Jones 8)

Modern poetry is still read as lyric poetry, since it operates out of a discourse established in the Romantic tradition. When the lyric voice attempts to write history, however, the clash of the two discursive structures (the lyric ‘I’ and the absent and objective voice of traditional history) results in a discursive rupture or discontinuity similar to that seen in historiographic metafiction. The reading subject struggles with its notion of historical conventions which demands his/her removal from traditional historical discourse

(a vain attempt to mimic objectivity)¹⁴⁶ and the deliberately foregrounded “I of enunciation” integral to the lyric.¹⁴⁷ The reading subject must choose (if this choice must be seen in terms of an either/or fallacy) between refusing the poetic tradition and reading the deliberately provisional and specific lyric voice as the voice of authority, or becoming incorporated into the lyric tradition and rejecting the stance of objective history. Jones would suggest that

The ‘documentary,’ then, as I interpret Livesay’s argument, may be situated in a dialectic not simply between two forms of writing (factual and poetic), but between two conventions of reading: the ‘objective’ or ‘literal’ reading of a document and its ‘subjective’ interpretations *as poetry*. . . . Her critical move makes poetic meaning a function of reception, an ‘incidental’ social act rather than strictly the product of the ‘original’ writer’s ‘literary intention.’ (7)

This subversion of subjectivity which engages the postmodern poem is also, Davey notes in “Recontextualization in the Long Poem,” related to a “larger question of the relationship between poetry and truth” (123). The long poem calls upon coding which associates it with a “concept of ‘poetic’ or metaphorical truth” (Ibid.). Like mythological writings of history, “the poem need not be specifically true to fact but merely ‘stand for’ a class of truths, or represent in evocative detail the ‘essence’ of an historical event” (Ibid. 124). Davey relates the strategy of these particular texts to those that “attempt to evoke the kernel of the historic source rather than replicate its particulars” (Ibid. 124). His analysis is useful in that he points to a way in which poetry is traditionally read and

¹⁴⁶ “Here the ‘facts’ only seem to be speaking, alone, exclusive, ‘objective.’ They would be dumb, without the narrator, who makes them speak” (Droysen in Jauss 54).

¹⁴⁷ “Who is this *I* infesting my poems? Is it I hiding behind the Trump type on the page of the book you are reading? Is it a photograph of me on the cover of *Wilson’s Bowl*? Is it I? *I* said, *I* say, *I* am saying” (Webb in Kamboureli 147).

understood. Poetry is presumed to relate esoteric symbolic and general truths rather than, like prose, relate factual and codifiable information.

The contemporary postmodern long poem utilizes both of these traditional ways in which poetry is coded. Postmodern poetry makes historiographical statements as well as problematizes that statement's source through an investigation of its speaker's status as subject. Instead of attempting to present a type of historical objectivity or innocence, these postmodern poetic texts foreground their guilt in order to draw attention to the implications behind a wish to seem objective:

The problem for the writer of the contemporary long poem is to honour our disbelief in belief—that is, to recognize and explore our distrust of system, of grid, of monisms, of cosmologies perhaps, certainly of inherited story—and at the same time write a long work that has some kind of (under erasure) unity. (Kroetsch in Kambourelis 78)

For example, near the end of a text which consists of “a series of dramatic monologues, prose fragments, and lyrics” explicitly about Billy the Kid, Ondaatje, without situating the picture, inserts a photograph of himself as a child in a cowboy suit (Kambourelis 189). This textual intrusion unbalances the opening page's lack of photograph¹⁴⁸ (for the line, “I send you a picture of Billy,” as well as the blank frame suggest Billy's absence in both the text and in history) (Ondaatje, *Collected* 5). As well, the small picture of himself as a child¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ “Ondaatje's opening device foregrounds a beginning that is both there and not there. . . . It [the empty picture frame] suggests that Billy lies outside the poem, cannot be contained in a single frame. He evades the poem as he will evade all the attempts to capture him, in fact or word. The discourse of this emptiness has no precise subject or origin; it becomes the discourse of language itself, a discourse that speaks hesitancy” (Kambourelis 184-5).

¹⁴⁹ “It is a picture of Ondaatje himself. Billy the Kid has become Mike the Kid” (Kambourelis 201).

(in a frame which is much larger than the photo itself) graphically undermines the importance of the author and foregrounds the author's 'guilt'. Ondaatje foregrounds, at the expense of the historiographer's traditional, belaboured, and questionable innocence, that he cannot presume an objective approach to his material. Part of the purpose of exposing the indissoluble and inextricable connection of a writer and his/her subject matter, and postmodern poetry is uniquely suited to this, is to question the ideological stance of objectivity which informs much of historiography.

Like Ondaatje's *Collected Works*, Birk Sproxton's *Headframe* is a series of stories in different voices, and the reader of *Headframe* cannot avoid the effect of a narrating presence. Sproxton frames his text's narrative by writing a first-person narrator into his introductory and closing poems. The text begins with the humorous meta-textual statement, ". . . I know it is time to finish off, button up,/ and get out. Time to find a place to be in,/ a place/ to begin" and ends with the plaint "I want to tell" (Sproxton 3 and 115). Not satisfied with these vague references to an enunciating 'I,' Sproxton also foregrounds his presence in Flin Flon's geographical local as author by using direct meta-textual references to himself as the producer of the text:

: Medical books say that gall stones may be related to diet but I know better. I swallowed them with the air I breathe. But I think they're gone now so I don't dream about them anymore though I still have rocks in my name (gall in my book). (117)

The reader of Sproxton's text is reminded that this text, although it seems to relate multiple narratives which describe the physical and social surround, is a mediated transcription/creation.

Even in Robert Kroetsch's *Ledger*, where the intrusion of the first-person narrator is kept to a minimum, the author/narrator's presence as constructor/finder is written into the text as the one who locates textual information: "the poet: by accident/finding in the torn ledger" and "EVERYTHING I WRITE/ I SAID, IS A SEARCH" (Kroetsch a).

Although this minimal presence is felt in *Ledger*, Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* is a text which examines at length the connection between place, or "dream of origins" and the lyric voice (Kroetsch in Ondaatje, *Long Poem* 311). Kroetsch's attempt to "write the poems of the imagined real place" is a poem obsessed with origins: "*How do you grow a prairie town? . . . How do you grow a poet?*" (Kroetsch in Ondaatje, *Long Poem* 311 and Kroetsch, *Seed* 11). *Seed Catalogue* is concerned with "excavating an apparently unadorned historical fact" (Kramer 104). As well, Kroetsch's text foregrounds the construction of self as a cohesive device in the various incarnations of the refrain "I was sitting on the horse./ The horse was standing still./ I fell off" which writes the personal voice into the text (*Seed* 13). The narrator's self-conscious concern with self is extended, by the refrain "*How do you grow a poet?*," to a questioning of what it means, ostensibly for the speaker/author, to be a poet (*Seed* 15, 16, 17, and 20). The effect of this questioning, however, is to collapse the narrator with the author. The "ten related lyrics" in the "Spending the Morning on the Beach" section of *Seed Catalogue*, which makes up roughly half of the text, codes itself, like Henry Adams' *Education*, as an autobiographical sketch written in the third person. This section is equally concerned with the construction of the writer.¹⁵⁰ But its inclusion persuades the reader that the first-person narrator of the

¹⁵⁰ The poetic refrain "realizing the poem" that begins every poem in this section foregrounds its obsession with poetic construction (*Seed* 33-43).

first section of the text has switched narrative strategies and is now hiding his concern with the artist/artistry that lies behind a third person narrator. This section focuses upon creating a notion of presence through the stability of self implied by the protagonist's rapid trip through Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand.

In *Steveston*, Daphne Marlatt "posits herself as an archaeologist" using first-person narration—which the reader is encouraged to collapse with authorial presence—as a cohesive structural device (Kamboureli 121). As well, this is an attempt to write a personal response (which she does in her afterword: "On Distance and Identity: Ten Years Later") to the place and history of the Steveston her work attempts to evoke. The quality of this interpretative "collaboration, the other half being Robert Minden's photographs" is—and this is foregrounded for the reader by multiple narrative intrusions—directly related to the mediating quality of its narrator(s) (Marlatt in Ondaatje, *Long Poem* 317):

What the camera sees & what the word says are both aspects of a vision that is larger than either or even both of us because it is a vision of that interpenetration of us & the world Steveston came to be for is, with its people, its streets, its docks & rivers & earth spaces—particulars each of us, ourselves particular, came to meet. (Marlatt in Ondaatje, *Long Poem* 318)

"Working in a collaborative relationship with person and event," Marlatt writes Steveston's 'reality' by incorporating photos of people and specific geographical features (Davey in Ondaatje, *Long Poem* 21). Marlatt's captions include dates and descriptions that, like the poems that use historical dates, relate to a particular aspects of Steveston:

. . . a geography that actively contextualizes the individual life with landmarks that extend in space (as in land and sea forms) or time (as in plant life or river flow); a geography that depicts the self as part of something vaster and more hopeful than itself, something which grows and surprises . . . (Ibid. 22).

The use of techniques which seem to locate place “on the ground where the poet walks” mimics traditional historiography’s objective reality (Kambourelis 122). This could, if Marlatt did not constantly remind the reader of her presence, easily obscure its mediation by a narrator. Marlatt foregrounds this reality’s dependence upon a narrator’s mediation by, like Kroetsch in *Seed Catalogue*, placing herself in the text as an interpreting voice: “I listened to the life stories there & the man or woman I saw at the end of each story was very much the shape of it—both the result & shaper of, in the telling” (Marlatt in Ondaatje, *Long Poem* 317). By relating such conversations as her emotional responses to the fisherman’s sexism, Marlatt writes a responding self in the text:

“Those springs are for the bells? When you get a bite?”

He’s leaning against the sawhorse wondering what I want. “Yeah, sure, you married?”

“No.”

“Hippie?”

“No. Why?”

“Why not? Hippie’s okay. Take me, I work hard & then go home to the same old pork chop every night, you know what I mean? But you, you have variety. . . .” (*Steveston* 38)

The disjunctive nature of their dialogue—which enacts the gulf of understanding that must be crossed in order to discover the ‘heart’ of Steveston—paradoxically, has the effect of creating a hyper-reality. This hyper-reality is a combination of a conversational ‘real’ and the foregrounded imaginative perception of the first-person narrator: “Even when the

poet's eye sees the past of the town imaginatively, the details of the recording process render imagination as real as reality itself" (Kambourelis 120). The reader is encouraged, by recourse to a metaphysics of presence that conversational codes evoke, to simultaneously believe both in Steveston's reality as well as question how Marlatt's narrator could remember an unrecorded conversation.

Perhaps the most vivid rendering of the self in a text which attempts to recover a history is Eli Mandel's *Out of Place*. Mandel takes "the need to chart what is around us," as well as the ethnic ground which is the Jewish origin of the Hoffer colony, and writes the place and its vault, as well as himself into a history that is his position on the Saskatchewan prairie (Ondaatje, *Long Poem* 16). Containing its own self-reflexive reference to narrative creation, "the nature of fiction / supposes our presence," Mandel's *Out of Place* deliberately foregrounds textual process at the expense of the traditional and ideological narrative control (i). In *Out of Place*, "portions of found documents participate in a collage effect" and this effect "encourages a sense of the writer as an archaeological finder and provisional interpreter of fragmentary evidence, rather than the creative originator (or 'author') of a literary work, or the recuperative, totalizing agent Foucault labels the 'historian'" (Jones 9-10).

This metafictional impulse informs the construction of history by encouraging the reader to problematize the textual construction which is the poetic past. This structuring of historiography's delivery offers itself as an alternative writing of history. Philippe Carrard calls this "'the voice of the new history,' which 'does not want to go on pretending: pretending that documents are objective givens and that the historical text . . .

can unfold itself, ‘naturally’ without someone doing the unfolding” (Carrard in Jones 8). *Out of Place* suggests that in this “geography of the west,” “self and its locality are text informing concerns,” and only by a deliberate recovery which is necessarily dependent upon a particular person, can it be recovered (Mandel 37 and Kamboureli 126).

Mandel foregrounds his “personalized vision of this journey” by using an entire section devoted to love poems (the highly lyrical “A Suite for Anne”) as well as the insertion of four photos which place him as author on this poetically created prairie: “she photographs me/walking away/along a curving path” (Kamboureli 145 and Mandel 13). By “foreground[ing] himself as a questor who is a poet,” Mandel writes himself into existence every bit as much as he creates the Jewish presence in the text (Kamboureli 137). The text’s “The Double” section, which concerns the incidence of the double in western culture, further acts to reinforce the authorial/narrator presence in the text by its theorizing about writing and self. The doubling and trebling that the Cartesian ego undergoes in this genealogy of the subject underscores a self’s constructedness which deliberately rejects historiographical coding.

As well, Mandel exposes his multiple speaker’s refusal of a ‘complete’ version, “I knew the grain elevator was to the right but refused to lean forward to see, leaving the framed picture intact” (Mandel Preface). By this gesture Mandel foregrounds the deliberate confusion between the text’s author and speaker that we see in the texts of Marlatt and Sproxton. Mandel also includes a letter addressed to a “Professor Mandel,” which corrects his naming of the Hoffer colony. Mandel uses this letter to foreground his mediating presence in the writing of place’s particularity by asking, through poems such as

“sonnenfeld,” what Mrs. N. Feldman’s letter can “possibly mean” (*Out of Place* 36-7). Because the narrator, which this letter encourages us to collapse with Mandel as author, “can’t see her in the picture,” he implies that she is wrong (*Ibid.* 37).

This confusion between narrator and author that we find in *Out of Place*, *Seed Catalogue*, and *Steveston* is not accidental. These postmodern texts deliberately contaminate their narration with suspect authorial intrusion in order to call into question their own narrative strategies as well as problematize the arbitrary process whereby history gets written. As well, the wavering postmodern subject, put to the task of constructing a poetic, and therefore already suspect and provisional historiography, writes an inevitably unverifiable history. The increasingly jaded reader of these texts realizes that even postmodern poetry’s wish to project the metaphorical truth Davey talks about in “Recontextualization” is discomforted by this mixture of provisionality. By incorporating document into his text,¹⁵¹ as well as references to the broader media,¹⁵² Mandel positions himself as both a traditional historiographer as well as mythologizer. Incorporating intertextual references as a kind of shorthand, Mandel hails his reader into both their internalized and naturalized textual codes, and a willing collusion with the disruption he is trying to bring about as a result of a juxtaposition between the intentional fallacy and subjective ‘reality’.

¹⁵¹ In the form of the letters about the maintenance of the graveyard as well as quotes from documents in the archive.

¹⁵² References to the discourse of car (a pinto), book of Revelations, and academic documentation (in the form of footnotes).

Of course postmodern poetic technique is not just limited to problematizations of the narrator. Postmodern poetry marries the self-referentiality of its narrators to its notion of history as construct through the use of subversive techniques, like that which Cooley calls “lines that defy left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading” (“Line Breaks” 154). Texts such as Whyte’s *Homage, Henry Kelsey* create concrete-style word structures which expose the strategies which inform the reading process, as well as provide the reader with radically different narratives depending upon choice of reading strategy. As well as contaminating (sometimes even eroding his own syntax) excerpts of Kelsey’s historical text with his own, Whyte uses what he refers to as the “*technopaegnia of Open Spaces*”¹⁵³ as a method to provide a framework against which *Kelsey* is mis/read (81):

Mind is
wide and trackless
overwhelms
us
despairing

prairie
earth and air
inculcate
a calculus of
moving (Ibid. 26)

If the reader reads this text as if it was a newspaper, he/she finds in the left column an abstract and personal lyric, while the right column is descriptive. The collusion of the two, symbolically enacts Whyte’s particular, and the postmodern poem’s more general, historiographic project. By blending landscape, Kelsey’s text and Whyte’s lyric, the poem provides the reader with another reading of the poem/place as well as history. By locating the poetic ‘truth’ in a kind of phenomenological “hold the mind takes on these things,”

¹⁵³ Whyte tells us that he “would, like the jeweler of [the medieval *Pearl*] poem, put his poem into a new setting (81).

historiographic poetic texts rely upon the reader to complete the discursive schemata offered by formalist reading assumptions (Arnason 282).

Ondaatje's *Billy* problematizes, and this is the point of Ondaatje's text, our access to the 'real' Billy, and Kroetsch's changeable narrator structure makes closing with either the constructions of self his text offers or his recreated prairie past impossible. Marlatt's questionable and questioning presence in *Steveston* belies the positioning of the text's photographs and their explanatory captions. Mandel's insertion of self, through his structural intrusions (such as "Suite for Anne" and the use of photographs), constructs himself on the plain every bit as much as he constructs a historical notion of place. This writing of self as a discursive structure in these postmodern poetic attempts to write a past and foregrounds the inevitable constructedness of our (which is all historiographical attempts to construct) notion of self. This is not an attempt to answer, what Mazoff calls "Northrop Frye's haunting question, 'Where is here?' (or as some might say, 'Who is us?')," but rather putting that question aside postmodern poetry would ask how 'us' is created and how a description constructed out of this problematic structure informs both readings of self and place (3).

Rather than a confirmation of a more complete and didactic truth of both archive and story, the postmodern poem has ramifications for all truth construction by engaging the reader's creation of an alternative history out of its *writerly* text. This capacity of the long poem more than merely supplements, but rather recreates the historical. These techniques foreground history's inability to encompass, as well as fiction's own capacity to relate, what Hutcheon vaguely calls the "universal" meanings of "what could or might

happen”¹⁵⁴ (*Poetics* 106). The long poem inscribes itself into historical discourse, as well as problematizes and politicizes its inclusion, by mimicking the historical artifact.¹⁵⁵ As well, the long poem uses poetic/lyric markers which install and undermine its inscription into ‘truth’ discourse. The long poem becomes a medium which traditional historiography cannot assimilate. It disrupts the boundaries of prose/poetry (*Ana Historic* and *Steveston*), dislocates reading conventions (*Homage*, *Henry Kelsey* and *Seed Catalogue*), and makes a *readerly* understanding of its historiography impossible. Attempting “to *enact* historical experience” by revelling in its multiple narrative, poetry’s political efficacy works out of a confrontation between the two ways of knowing/believing which are the stability and comfort of the incisive government document and archival academic reconstruction, and the ambiguity that postmodernism reads as inherent in any language act. The long poem’s ability to perform this Foucauldian balancing act enables it to accomplish what Davey sees as its “central task”: “to drive right past St As IS into new territory, into new languages, into surprise” (*Surviving the Paraphrase* 192).

¹⁵⁴ A distant echo of Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

¹⁵⁵ We may think of Friesen’s photos and death certificate, Mandel’s letters, and Ondaatje’s newspaper interview.

Chapter 5 ~ History's Fictional Narrators

A novelistic writing of the first-person narrator is at first glance a structure which is much more easily normalized. Historiographic metafiction works out of a problematized subject similar to the subject in postmodern poetry, but employ that varying subject to foreground the reader's controlled entrance into the text. Poetic discourse can allow the 'I' to fluctuate wildly—the subject in *Headframe* and *Seed Catalogue*—but this disruption of the subject, in the prose narrative, is foregrounded by the contamination of story's varying source. Inspired by *readerly* conventions, the reader confronts the self constructed by such texts as Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in a way that problematizes those conventions as well as the narrator structure. Although not a postmodern work, Stein's text neatly elucidates the problematic narrator of the postmodern text. The reader of this 'autobiography'—which is ostensibly about Toklas but more explicitly concerns Stein herself—does not become aware until the closing sentences that this text innocently received as an autobiography has been written by Stein rather than by Toklas. Although this fact provides an explanation for the text's primary focus upon Stein, this disruption of the autobiographical convention works to focus attention upon the construction of the self as well as autobiography in general.

In historiographic metafiction, the stable narrator can be manipulated in a number of ways in order to foreground itself as a construct. This manipulation gives the effect, as Singer argues, of multiple voices:

Voice, the dominant metaphor for the totalizing power of the novelistic form, is the genre's locus of subjectivity. But as such it is uniquely problematic, since novelistic voice is inherently and notoriously multiple:

no *one* speaks in the novel. In its ineluctable multiplicity, novelistic voice subverts the unitary imperative of the very metaphor of human speech which otherwise endows its rhetorical aptitude. Novelistic voice is the annunciation of an intertextuality that shatters the subject that speaks of it.
(72)

This manipulation of voice has proved to be particularly useful for historiographic metafiction. Texts such as Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, Findley's *Famous Last Words*, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Grass' *Tin Drum* use a highly suspect and fluctuating narrator. This foregrounds history's dependence, as I suggest above in the context of poetry, upon the flimsy construct of the self which is the postmodern subject. These works become texts as much about the narrator device as about historical construction. Inevitably, of course, the constructions of self and historical narration are tied to one other. However much traditional historiography would deny it, these texts argue that historiography is supported and maintained by an impossibly inconsistent self and would foreground that self's influence upon the history it mediates. Perhaps this subject's construction of the past is most easily seen, like that of Stein's, through an autobiographical attempt to write the self. "The autobiographical memoir has a long history in fiction as a form of asserting the primacy of individual experience," but Clark Blaise's *I Had A Father: A Postmodern Autobiography* foregrounds the uncertain nature of the self by exposing his person as construct: "My problem, if you haven't guessed it yet, is that I am a meta-self at times, a construct of pieces adding up to a self, even to the person writing this" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 162 and Blaise 45):

I want always to change, to rewrite my codes, to alter everything about myself. Passports, accent, schools, hometowns. . . . Each move is like an affair, a change of air, a lightness of step, a clean slate, and a fresh start. I

am not an exile forced to change residences as a matter of survival; I'm more a barnacle hitching a ride. (Blaise 49)

The postmodern narrator would foreground his/her inability to close with even their personal past and thereby enacts an intentional distancing of the historical past:

Did my childhood happen? I must believe it did, but I don't have any proof. My mother says that it did, but she is a fantasist, a liar and a murderer, though none of that would stop me loving her. I remember things, but I too am a fantasist and a liar, though I have not killed anyone yet. . . . I will have to assume that I had a childhood, but I cannot assume to have had the one I remember. (Winterson, *Sexing* 92)

The way in which this changeable postmodern subject usually gets written into historiographic metafiction is as an overtly controlling narrator, whose suspect nature is exposed by a disruption of *readerly* conventions and by the fantastic nature of that narrator's claims. These narrators relate a history of which, like Morante's protagonists, they are a part, and commonly operate as a form of apostrophic address (the 'dear reader' so common in Victorian literature) which makes a narrator of overt authorial intrusion.

Not coincidentally, many of these novels deal with historical events which have been subject to questionable reporting, such as war. For example, like the use of Henri in Winterson's *The Passion*, Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* investigates the conditions of war by employing the perception of a first-person narrator, Billy Pilgrim. Given an allegorical name which betrays his everyman status, Billy reports the horror of the Dresden firestorm with the foreshortened view of a limited life experience. The firestorm, in Billy's experience, becomes a grotesquely surrealistic vision of a city completely destroyed and human beings, transformed by the conflagration, in the form of giant charred grasshoppers. By hiding behind Billy's narration, Vonnegut's text ambiguously offers at least two mutually exclusive

ways in which Billy may be relating the horror of war. He is either living on an alien planet with a beautiful female film star, or through the agency of a more likely post-war shell-shock, he has retreated into the safe world of fantasy.

In *Famous Last Words*, Findley's narrator similarly offers a questionable version of the second World War. Using a character taken from Ezra Pound, Findley has Hugh Selwyn Mauberly relate his suspect and self-undermining version of events by scraping his story onto the walls of a hotel which is shortly doomed to be demolished. Findley foregrounds the questionable nature of his narrator's versions of events partly by this juxtaposition of permanence and transience. Although incising his story into the plaster of a wall may seem to Mauberly to be a permanent gesture, its inevitable transience is foregrounded by the hotel's fate. The text of Mauberly's inscription is equally problematic. The reader is encouraged to believe that this version of events that Mauberly is recording is a mere transcription of his journal. But, like many of the records of the Second World War, his notebooks have too been lost—or more accurately—to prevent his story falling into other hands, he has burned them. This finalizing gesture is, paradoxically, entirely undone by Mauberly's transcription on the hotel wall—literalizing the cliché “writing on the wall”—and possible re-editing of what these books may have contained. Because the original record has been lost, the reader, represented by the literal-minded Freyberg and a more susceptible Quinn, has no way of verifying Mauberly's version. Although Mauberly would self-reflexively relate the questionable nature of his, and thereby all, fabrications, to the effect of the war, “*the truth is in our hands now*,” Findley would broaden Mauberly's reasoning about truth's recording to include all attempts to record an accurate history (*Famous* 177). Historical writing, as Findley

foregrounds through the suspect nature of Mauberly's version, is a truth that is written into being:

By the end of the afternoon, the shape—whatever it was—can barely be remembered. No one can be made to state it was absolutely thus and so. Nothing can be conjured of its size. In the end the sighting is rejected, becoming something only dimly thought on: dreadful and unreal. (Findley 395).

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which is ostensibly a text about the independence of India, is another text that uses a first-person narrator to relate historical events. Unlike Vonnegut and Findley's retrospective narration, however, Rushdie foregrounds how the version offered the reader by his narrator Saleem Sinai, is not fixed in any real sense. Because Saleem's personalized version of history is delivered orally to his demanding listener, Padima, it is inevitably a text in process.

The validity of Saleem's narrative is also undermined by the fantastic nature of his personal and historical claims. Saleem "tells us that he personally caused things like the death of Nehru or the language riots in India" (Hutcheon, "Postmodern Problematizing" 372). Because his birth took place on the midnight of India's independence, he claims he is both "mysteriously handcuffed to history"—specifically India's history¹⁵⁶—and has been granted magical powers (Rushdie 9). Rushdie symbolizes Saleem's relationship to India by grafting that figurative relationship literally upon Saleem's body. For example, through metonymical associations such as the disfiguring birthmarks on Saleem's face which strikingly resemble a map of India, "Rushdie foregrounds the metaphor of the body politic

¹⁵⁶ Saleem's egocentric claim is substantiated by the letter received from Prime Minister Nehru upon the occasion of his birth: "*We shall be watching your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own*" (*Midnight's Children* 167).

and critiques the notion of the nation as having some kind of organic coherence. Saleem's body is nothing is not grotesque. Parts are lost as the plot proceeds, and by the end he sees cracks appearing all over his body" (Mee 153). In this "world pervaded by miracles," Saleem shares his powers with the other children who were born on independence night, but most notably he shares them with his dispossessed—since they were swapped at birth¹⁵⁷—brother Shiva (McHale 77). While Saleem's gift is that he can telepathically communicate with all the other children and he is able therefore to bring these children into contact with one another (a symbolic writing of the wish for India's unification), Shiva's power lies in his capacity for destruction. The midnight children also share Saleem's relationship to India's body politic. Their inextricable link to their country's well-being is symbolically represented by their enactment of India's high infant mortality. This demographic statistic is represented by the contrast between the midnight children's live births—1001—and its surviving members by the time of Saleem's contact—581. Similarly, the differing social economic and ethnic backgrounds of the children, causes them to experience the same petty jealousies and prejudices of their parents, and thus foreshadows the eventual partitioning of India:

Children, however, magical, are not immune to their parents; and as the prejudices and world-views of adults began to take over their minds, I found children from Maharashtra loathing Gujaratis, and fair-skinned northerners reviling Dravidian 'blackies'; there were religious rivalries; and class entered our councils. The rich children turned up their noses at being in such lowly company; Brahmins began to feel uneasy at permitting even their thoughts to touch the thoughts of the untouchables; while, among the low-born, the pressure of poverty and Communism were becoming evident

¹⁵⁷ In an attempt to equalize the contingency of economic injustice, his nurse switches high-born Shiva with low-born Saleem. As Kane notes, this switch both problematizes India's political genealogy, since Saleem represents India, as well as highlights Saleem's suspect connection to *his* family (95).

. . . In this way the Midnight Children's Conference fulfilled the prophecy of the Prime Minister and became, in truth, a mirror of the nation. (*Midnight's Children* 254-5)

Although Saleem informs his version of India entirely by the situation of these magical children, he assumes the credit, because of his gift, for India's subsequent political and social changes. This "account of India's development (as well as his own) strains our sense of credulity," however, and requires the reader to

believe, among other things, that Saleem was responsible for the language riots that occurred in the 1950s, that he played a pivotal role in the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, and that in 1975, Indira Gandhi imprisoned political opponents and suspended democratic rights during her self-proclaimed "Emergency" in direct response to the activities of Saleem and his Conference of Midnight Children . . . (Price 91)

Regardless of Saleem's claims, his power over historical events is dramatically undercut by his passive role in historical events. As the contingent nature of his birth suggests, Saleem is rather acted upon by historical events than acting. Examples such as his movement of salt shakers and pitchers in order to plan out battles (in "Movements performed by pepperpots") represent his signifying relationship to reality. He does not actually have a part in these battles—unless we consider his brief stint on the dog patrol—and the major events of his life (his replacement with Shiva, the growth and wane of his telepathic powers, his magical birth, and his amnesiac resemblance to the Buddha) are all events which evade his control. His telepathic powers come about as a result of having snorted a pyjama string while hiding in a washing chest and the family spittoon that comes crashing down upon his head causes his amnesia. The language riots that Saleem attributes to his own actions, are actually caused by him crashing his bicycle into a protest march

while showing off for his childhood love, Evie Burns. Even Saleem's eventual incarceration by Indira Gandhi (or in traditional historiographical terms, "Indira Gandhi's declaration of the State of Emergency in 1976") was inspired, Saleem claims, by a wish "to flush out the midnight children and expunge their powers" (McHale 89). Saleem's version of "the historical Sanjay Gandhi replicates or clones himself many times over, his features appearing on every one of the Sanjay Youth volunteers" (McHale 95). Beyond these megalomaniac versions of historical events, however, even mundane historical 'facts' are modified by Saleem's interpretative short-sightedness:

In writing about historical events, both the emplotting historian and the novelist are usually considered as working within certain constraints—those of chronology, for instance. But what happens when postmodern fiction 'de-doxifies' even such obvious and 'natural' constraints, when *Midnight's Children's* narrator notices an error in chronology in his narrative, but then decides, 'in my India, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time?' (Hutcheon, *Politics* 68)

Rushdie has Saleem directly associate his tendency to fabulate with the control of his narration over the story:

Does one error invalidate the entire fabric? Am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning, that I'm prepared to distort everything—to re-write the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role? Today, in my confusion, I can't judge. I'll have to leave it to others. (*Midnight's Children* 166)

The judgement offered by these "others" is no more valid than Saleem's version, however. His comparison of his version with the facts offered by the media causes both himself and the reader to question "If it happened, what were the motives? Again, a rash of possible explanations" (*Midnight's Children* 339):

And on the radio, what destruction, what mayhem! In the first five days of the war Voice of Pakistan announced the destruction of more aircraft that India had ever possessed; in eight days, All-India Radio massacred the Pakistan Army down to, and considerably beyond, the last man. (Ibid. 339)

For Rushdie, Saleem's suggestion that the media tends to fictionalize extends outside *Midnight's Children* to include contemporaneous Indian news reporting:

The 'State Truth' about the war in Bangladesh . . . is that no atrocities were committed by the Pakistani army in what was then [East Pakistan] . . . And the official version of the Emergency in India . . . expressed by Mrs. Ghandi in a . . . BBC interview . . . [was] that there were [no] forced sterilizations, this was all false. Nothing of this type had ever occurred. The interviewer, Mr. Robert Kee, did not probe this statement at all. Instead, he told Mrs. Ghandi and the *Panorama* audience that she had proved, many times over, her right to be called a democrat. So literature can, and perhaps must, give lie to official facts. (Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands" in Iftekharkuddin 420).

The impossibility of locating a 'true' version leads both Saleem and Rushdie—like Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia*—to conclude that his version of events is as equally valid as the official version: ". . . to simplify matters, I present two of my own: the war happened because I dreamed Kashmir into the fantasies of our rulers; furthermore, I remained impure, and the war was to separate me from my sins" (*Midnight's Children* 339).

Ironically, in a text in which "both the male subject and history are simultaneously decentered, along with the narrative itself," it is Saleem's unreliability,¹⁵⁸ as the examination above suggests, that causes the reader—trapped by Saleem's narrative point

¹⁵⁸ Saleem's unreliability is further complicated by the interference offered by his relationship with his significantly illiterate muse Padma the dung lotus. Padma influences the outcome of Saleem's story by her responses to the oral version: "What happened to the plumpie?" Padma asks, crossly. 'You don't mean you aren't going to tell?'" (*Midnight's Children* 64).

of view—to question this doubling of historical versions (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 161). The problematic statements of Saleem as well as the overdetermined nature of his metaphorical flights of fancy—such as is evident in his historical theory, the “chutnification of history, the grand hope of the pickling of time”—question, since this story is wholly related by Saleem, both history and history telling (*Midnight's Children* 459). The blatant self-serving inaccuracies which plague Saleem’s account and his ironic castigation of official historiography’s biases cause a confusion between these differing versions. As well, “Saleem’s subjective realities often take on the hue of real probabilities as they coincide and mingle with linear historical events” (Iftekharukddin 419).

In *Midnight's Children*, “The text’s self-reflexivity points in two directions at once, toward the events being represented in the narrative and toward the act of narration itself” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 76). Because he both takes credit for and exposes how ineffective is his influence upon history, Saleem has created a narrative in which his grandiose claims are not even substantiated by his own version of events. Following Hutcheon’s claim that these postmodern novelists simultaneously install and subvert their construction of history, “Rushdie’s novel explodes the notion of the nation having a stable identity and a single history, then invites a sceptical, provisional faith in the nation it has exploded” (Kortenaar 42).

Günter Grass’ *Tin Drum*, a text which heavily influenced Rushdie,¹⁵⁹ is another novelistic version of history in which the reader’s perception is controlled by a first-person

¹⁵⁹ .” . . *Midnight's Children* mirrors Grass’s techniques in *The Tin Drum*: the structuring of historical memory through photos and newspaper clippings, the willful eroticism of dwarfs, magicians, gypsies and cripples; the mixing of ‘fairytale style . . . court evidence, school essay, public speech and other variations of the narrative mode’ until the effect is

narrator. Like Saleem, Oskar's fate is tied to that of Germany. Speaking retrospectively, like Winterson's Henri, from an insane asylum and under investigation for murder,¹⁶⁰ Oskar presents himself as a miraculous child who refuses to grow. He claims that he, "on his tin drum . . . 'beat out the rapid, erratic rhythm which commanded everybody's movements for quite some time after August, 1914'" (Hutcheon, "Postmodern Problematizing" 372). Metaphorically, Oskar is "an oblique and ironic expression of the trends of his time" (Thomas 144). Oskar symbolizes Germany by his stunted maliciousness and destructiveness before the war (a physical incarnation of a pre-war Germany), as well as—when he does grow—his crippled appearance (Germany's post-war economic distress).

As well as having a special relationship to Germany as a nation—which is expressed by Oskar's "carnival of amorality and infantilism which is paralleled by the grim saturnalian eruption of National Socialism and by the hedonism of the post-war economic miracle"—Oskar shares with Saleem a tendency to invent his questionable past (Thomas 144). This fictionalizing of self encourages the reader to question the narrator's sense of historical truth. In a text where "everything depends upon the level of historical consciousness, that is, on the vantage point, the horizon of consciousness of the narrator, Oskar's reporting becomes extremely suspect" (Roberts 178). If the reader believes

one of 'simultaneity of past, present and future' (Brennen 81). See also Rudolf Bader's "Indian Tin Drum."

¹⁶⁰ Like Saleem, Oskar is also relating his story to a less privileged listener, his asylum attendant, Bruno Münsterberg. Bruno has his own reasons, mainly curiosity, for becoming the receptacle of Oskar's version of historical events. In fact, Bruno even takes up part of the narration when Oskar briefly gives up on relating the tale.

Oskar's version of events—and he is his/her only entrance into the text—then Oskar's special stature gives him both the power to orchestrate historical events, as well as capacities like that of breaking glass with his voice. By his own claim, Oskar born fully formed intellectually and capable of speaking, but in order to meet normal parental expectation, he hides his ability. Instances such as these work to underscore the dubious nature of Oskar's claims. The reader of *Tin Drum* operates out of naturalized notions of the world, however, and therefore, in the first few sentences of the novel, does not quite suspend his/her disbelief. The reader suspects that Oskar cannot know what is normal for a child and is therefore restructuring his memory in order to suit his present version of events.

Oskar's refusal to grow is similarly coloured by his own version of events. His narration associates his choice to stay a child with a fall through a trapdoor into the cellar. Although Oskar claims to have orchestrated this fall in order to give his parents an explanation for his dwarfism,¹⁶¹ the accident gives the reader an equally good explanation for his stature. Likewise, when at his father's funeral Oskar decides to grow again, he receives a blow on the head from a thrown rock. The association of these physical actions upon his body have more than a coincidental relationship, the reader suspects, to Oskar's change in stature. Oskar's vain desire to have control over his life is also linguistically undermined by his dubious presence in the novel:

Oskar's dispersal in language is, of course, evident on every page of the novel in the circumstance which no reader can overlook, that he is sometimes encoded in the first-person *Ich* but just as often in the third

¹⁶¹ The use of the dwarf, argues Hatfield, is a deliberate evocation of that character in German folklore (130-1). The dwarf is associated with the use of drums, the size Oskar accords himself, a high piercing voice, and a mischievous nature.

person *Er*, or in his proper name: 'Oskar'. This grammatical scattering reduces, quite possibly to zero, the effectiveness of Oskar to manipulate and control language. For all his *claims* to be in charge of his life, he is manipulated and controlled not only by the circumstances of his biography, but by language itself. (Minden 154-5).

Just as the historical events that Saleem relates are reworked by his own desires, Oskar's version of his own personal history, as well as that of Germany, is inevitably contaminated by his megalomaniac intersection of self. The "whole problematic of confronting the past must pass through the prism of [Oskar's] first-person narrative" (Roberts 178). Like Saleem, Oskar's stunted nature, his growing corruption and post-war status as a hunchback, are associated with Germany as a country:

. . . the objective world of Danzig, Düsseldorf and the historical period is visible to us only through the tissue of self-defensive and self-deluding lies offered us by Oskar, narrating (drumming) his own story from within the temporary and unfortunately ever more precarious haven of a hospital bed in an insane asylum. It is accessible to us only via Oskar's remarkable linguistic performance. (Minden 150)

Like Saleem, Oskar's life representation of Germany's wartime years is expressed by how actions and events in his private life are associated with national events. For example, Oskar's seduction of Lina, the grocer's wife, corresponds both chronologically and imagistically with Germany's attempt to invade Moscow:

VYAZMA AND BRYANSK; then the mud set in. In the middle of October, 1941, Oskar too began to wallow extensively in mud. I hope I shall be forgiven for drawing a parallel between the muddy triumphs of Army Group Center and my own triumphs in the impassable and equally muddy terrain of Mrs. Lina Greff. Just as tanks bogged down; just as the wheels went on spinning, churning up the mud of Russia, so too I kept on trying—I feel justified in saying that I churned the Greffian mud into a foaming lather—but neither on the approaches to Moscow nor in the Greff bedroom was any ground gained. (Grass 305)

The role that Oskar plays in the battle over the Polish post office is likewise confused with his personal concerns. He goes to the post office ostensibly to get a drum—an action that foregrounds the self-centred nature of his concerns—and stays to attend the battle and thus provide a firsthand report inevitably mingled with the import of Oskar's real concerns. The German attack becomes an attempt to get Oskar's drum—"slowly the thought took root in me: it's not Poland they're worried about, its my drum" (Grass 226). Similarly, the threat that drives Markus the toy merchant to suicide is rewritten as "they took away my toy merchant, wishing with him to banish all toys from the world" (Grass 205).

The choice of Oskar as a narrator is a strategy which works to Grass' advantage in a number of ways. This choice allows Grass to have a narrator who is "considered to be intelligent, obviously immature and also freed from the need to act in accordance with an adult concept of responsibility," as well as shows the difficulty involved in sorting the myopic nature of the personal history from the official record (Thomas 141). Both Saleem and Oskar are narrators who "share the limitations of the individual unable to perceive historical events as a whole, and, at the same time, draw our attention to this limitation" (Ryan 65). Oskar "is obviously an artificial construct" and "you cannot read the book without seeing that he is not a realistic character in the traditional sense" (Minden 151). As I have argued above, his "function is to supply the aesthetic focus for the representation of the epoch" (Ibid.). The "key characteristic of this function [is] Oskar's seemingly amoral stance" which places the responsibility for the interpretation of "the real meaning of *the Tin Drum*" upon the reader (Ibid. and Ryan 67):

Grass chooses the path of indirection: not a narrative of integration but of disintegration which demonstrates the power of the past to split the self into a first and third person. Grass's apparently amoral estrangement of moral memory undoubtedly contributed to the success of the novel. Oskar's infantile evasion of responsibility and guilt became itself the most effective means of evading the resistance of readers and of breaking taboos. (Roberts 176)

More generally the nature of "Oskar's dissembling, his chief characteristic, is to be taken as a swerving away from the truth, but as a particular instance of properties which condition all utterances, regardless of the truthful intention or otherwise of the speaker" (Minden 156). Thus, just as Nazism is a figure for the depravity of human behaviour in this novel, Oskar becomes a figure for, and a questioning of, the voice which would narrate historical events.¹⁶² Narrator functions such as Oskar expose the performative nature of their utterances. As Minden argues, "[l]anguage and literature are always performance, taking place in the real world in a specific context, implicating not only what is being spoken about, but, at every turn, also the person who is speaking" (156).

Like postmodern poetry, what Rushdie and Grass' two texts do more than anything else is undermine the stable and unified self that narrates historical events. Using strategies common to the literary text, these authors have constructed a subject who is relating a tale coded as historical in order to question the assumptions which underlie the historical narration. This historiographic metafictional strategy forces a comparison between the questionable subject and 'objective' historical narration:

But history cannot do *without* subjectivity nor vice versa. . . . Seen from the subject, history is always the same, cyclically meaningless. Seen from history, the subject is irreducibly particular. The individual on his

¹⁶² Oskar foregrounds this by saying both that this text is "the recording of my memories" and "I only hope they are accurate" (Grass 16).

[her] own is a banal phenomenon, whose whole secret is the desire for the return to the womb balanced in lifelong contradiction with the terror of extinction which that would entail. But history, the single monumental historical, narrative, is similarly banal in its centripetal homogenisation of the infinity of selves which constitute the actual space of reality. It is only in relation, in dialogue with each other, that either makes sense. (Minden 162)

All of these eccentric narrators, either because they are nearing insanity, or self-reflexively undermine their validity, cannot be relied upon to deliver a 'true' story. Saleem disintegrates at the end of the text ostensibly leaving his textual version of events in the hands of an illiterate Padma. Oskar is similarly a querulous and untrustworthy thirty-year old in an asylum whose claims of former grandeur are coupled with an attachment to a version of history which only undermines his supposed avidity for truth. The obvious nature of their untrustworthiness as narrators draws the reader to question the narrator who stands behind¹⁶³ historical objectivity. Neither these texts nor formalist reading conventions provide a definitive grid against which to make sense of the narrator function. Instead they leave the reader confronted both by the paucity and growing opacity of *readerly* conventions and the vulnerability of a real constructed by textual strategies placed within the context of the postmodern text. The fragile medium of history, dependent upon the even more fragile medium of the narrator construct and the language exposed by these disruptions, is held in place only by the reader's thinly veiled collusion. Confronting that collusion with these subversive techniques both de-naturalizes and foregrounds a type of ideological collusion necessary to maintain dominant ideologies.

¹⁶³ In the sense of hiding behind rather than backing authoritatively.

The Construction of the Historian

*The facts of history do not exist for any historian
until he [she] creates them.* Carl Becker

The construction of a historian figure who collects, collates, and interprets historical information (texts in which “where the protagonist of the language-act is the same person as the protagonist of the historical event—where, in short, the actor turns historian”) is a structure which is peculiar to historiographic metafiction (Barthes, “Historical Discourse” 149). In their questioning of historiography some of these texts, notably Hodgins’ *Invention of the World*, Rees’ *Beneath the Faceless Mountain*, Kroetsch’s *Badlands*, and Swift’s *Waterland*, use the character of a historian to parody historiographical method as well as to question the notion of a singular historical past. These historiographic metafiction construct a situation in which “we are epistemologically limited in our ability to know that past, since we are both spectators of and actors in the historical process” (Hutcheon, “Pastime” 302). These texts foreground that “the utterer of the discourse is at the same time a participant on the events described” (Barthes, “Historical Discourse” 149).

In Hodgins’ *Invention of the World*, “the recuperative, totalizing agent Foucault labels the ‘historian’” is played by Strabo Becker (Jones 10). A combination of the names of two historians from different time periods (which I have discussed above), Becker wishes to master the story of the House of Revelations Colony of Truth founded on Vancouver Island by Donal Keneally. Condescendingly described by an omniscient

narrative voice as a “busy racoon of a man” who “has pretensions,” Becker “has chosen to nest on a certain piece of this world and to make a few years of its history his own” (Hodgins 8):

The debris of history is around him and he will reel it in, he will store it in his head, he will control it; all of it will be inside, all of it will belong only to him. Becker wants to be God. . . .

He hauls scrapbooks and shoeboxes of newspaper clippings and cardboard boxes of old photographs out from under the little cot and from behind the bedroom door and from the dusty boards that lie across the ceiling beams. He pulls crates of cassette tapes out of the closet. He takes dozens of notebooks down from the shelf over the fireplace. He gathers all of it, collect it around him, he lays it out on the table, on the chairs, on the floor around his feet. Touching, brooding, gloating, he thinks that what he has here is at least the equal of all that exists outside his walls. (Hodgins 8-9)

Becker’s suspect methodology is paired with his god-like wish to control his story, and thus works to question the ego that is implicit in all accounts which would posit a final version of an event. Behind Hodgins’ intentional parody of the “closed authoritarian tale” lies a more serious questioning of history, however (Davey, “Disbelieving Story” 196). Coming to grips with a singular story means that Becker must sift the contradictory accounts of the participants. Becker’s collected material is presented to the reader in a separate section (coded as different from the rest of text by the use of the vehicular courier typeface) appropriately entitled “Scrapbook.” This section’s introduction by the declaration “this book belongs to Strabo Becker” is an authoritative statement which both parodies Becker’s wish to appear responsible for his story and foreshadows the story’s questionable veracity (Hodgins 214).

Becker’s series of interviews and newspaper clippings, the reader quickly discovers, does not lead any closer to the ‘truth’. In fact, the diversity of these conflicting

versions act to further confuse the original story. The search for an original story—such as that evident in Becker’s attempt to return to the legendary hilltop of Keneally’s birth in Ireland—is doomed to failure by the participant’s desire to mythologize their own past. Realizing the suspect nature of his sources, Becker betrays that he is cognisant of the historical story’s tendency to multiply:

Trust me or not, believe what you want, by now the story exists without us in air. I am not its creator, nor is any one man; I did not invent it, only gathered its shreds and fragments together from the half-aware conversations of people around me, from the tales and hints and gossip and whispered threats and elaborate curses that float in the air like dust. . . . Believe what you want. (Hodgins 93)

Like Wade Powers’ phoney fort—which Powers built by “copying a sketch he’d found in a history book”—the history that Becker’s methodology uncovers is a reconstruction which only convinces those who have a vested interest (just as the tourist’s passion to view a ‘real’ history cause them to ignore a disclaimer telling them that the fort is a copy) in historical veracity (Hodgins 166). By the end of the text, Becker, upon returning from Ireland, confirms the reader’s growing suspicions that Becker’s, and thereby all historiographical, attempts to limit story to one version are doomed to failure:

Believe what you want, trust me or not, this story exists independent of both of us. Donal Keneally is dead. His story has returned to the air where I found it, it will never belong to me, for all my gathering and hoarding. This is the true story of what happened when they finally admitted it. (Hodgins 437)

Calling upon “we as reader who have to assemble the fragments,” Hodgins exposure of this arbitrary selection process makes a historian/judge out of the reader (Davey,

“Disbelieving Story” 197). In much the same way, the reader of Wiebe’s *Temptations of Big Bear* is encouraged to become a courtroom judge:

Strabo Becker’s problems as historian—how to speak of a man who enclosed his life within an assumed pattern without creating narrative that is similarly enclosed, how to honour the fragmentariness and confusion and subjectivity of one’s records, how to ‘tell’ while disbelieving in story—are also Hodgins’s problems here as a novelist. (Davey, “Disbelieving Story” 197)

The fragmentary nature of Becker’s evidence—based as it is upon ambiguous clippings and interviews with participants who have diverse reasons for obscuring their own part in the Revelations Colony—suggests that the final version offered by traditional historiography is similarly suspect. The problematic nature of Becker’s motivations, his wish for power over story, the fragmentariness of his evidence, and the pack-rat nature of his methodology, simultaneously asks the reader to share Becker’s wish for coherence and question his conclusions. By the end of the novel, Becker learns, and through him, the reader, that history is as impossibly multiple as the urges which drive its investigators.

Like Becker, the narrator of Rees’ *Beneath the Faceless Mountain* is an amateur who is interested in uncovering the history of a particular place. Rees’ narrator’s methodology is quite different from Hodgins’, however. Like Nicole Brossard’s protagonist in *Mauve Desert*—who wishes to put herself in touch with physical reality by refusing to drink on her cross-desert road trip—Rees’ narrator travels to the area of the Crowsnest Pass mining disasters and spends one long night tentatively attempting, by “listen[ing] with [her] whole body,” to uncover its historical past (Rees 9). The reader accompanies the narrator on this sleepless night, and therefore shares the narrator’s

attempt to piece together the past by extrapolating blatant fabrication from the historical record's paucity.

Rees does not suggest, by positing a seemingly essentialist interaction with the natural/historical environment, that the reader accept this version, however. Rees' nameless narrator instead demands that the reader "[q]uestion, question, remember to question what you read or hear or write or say or think or do" (Rees 21). Rees combines the "voices speaking to you from the river, the mountains, the wind, the bones under the earth" with a self-reflexively questioning of traditional historiographical methodology: "History. Herstory. My story. Your story. Their story. Who's telling? Who's listening?" (Ibid. 8). Including segments of narration which read like a Greek chorus, Rees' narration constantly reminds the reader of the process of textual construction. As well, by juxtaposing essentialism and an interrogation of historiographical theory, as well as beginning her text with a apostrophe to the reader, Rees asks for the reader's active involvement in the past event:

Roll down your car window, taste the wind. Pine, polar, sweet wolf willow. And river mixed in. Run your fingers of your right had over the cover of the book lying against your thigh, frayed cloth you have touched and opened again and again. Run the tips of your fingers into embedded letters. Trace the words, *History of the Crownsnest Pass*. Trace mountains pressed into cloth. (Rees 5)

Rees' narrator also attempts to recover history by a kind of imaginative re-visioning. By writing her narrative by reference to another text, for she carries with her a history with her of the mine and town, she goes beyond the essentialist urge "to breathe this place in" (Ibid. 8). Since the *History* she carries with her does not include her intuited

sense of Hillcrest's past, she must imaginatively "project" a history. Inspired by the inherent limitations of a grainy photograph and "the history given with the picture" which tells of a native family, she projects a history which blatantly contradicts the "official" record (Ibid. 20). For instance, she makes the son mentioned in the caption of the photograph a daughter misnamed Henry and, so that the reader can share this intuitive leap, both this recuperative "herstor[ical]" gesture and the caption are included (Rees 8). This metafictional inclusion both exposes to the reader the provisional nature of the narrator's historical reinterpretation and encourages the reader's own imaginative reconstruction.

Rees' recovery of history goes beyond the observations of an eccentric native girl confusingly labelled Henry, however. Rees' text constantly shifts the narrator's singular focus to a multiple narrative by mingling the highly self-absorbed narrator's gestures toward the present with the novel's multiple narratives. Rees' inclusive strategy incorporates Henry's tale, the story of Evan Thomas, a miner who moves (191?) to the Crowsnest pass area in order to work in the mines and dies in the Hillcrest mining disaster, the story of a historical fire in Bellevue, the death of Dolores Divine the stripper, and the fears of the neglected child Allyn Davis. This encyclopaedic strategy is an attempt to investigate those history has forgotten or ignored: "There are always voices missing. There should always be more voices. And more questions" (Rees 81). Rees would counter the singular monologic voice of traditional historiography with the many stories of "the voices we haven't heard yet. Voices we may never hear" related and interpreted by her narrator (Ibid. 203).

This attempt to recover the past through multiple story both installs and deflates a reading of its narrative as traditional historiography. For example, the only dated sections, and they are obsessively dated, are those referring to the historical mining disaster. The official nature of these public narratives ignores the presence of Evan Thomas and his love of the married Susan McRae, the confusion of Henry's gender, Dolores' final moments and Allyn's childhood. The untrustworthy nature of the official version is foregrounded early in the text by the different versions of a historical fire in Bellevue, Alberta. Although the text explicitly dates the fire, "TUESDAY, AUGUST 28, 1917, 7:30 a.m.," the disaster's questionable origin is problematized by the inclusion of four different versions (Rees 56). According to this multiple historical record, the fire was caused simultaneously by a mute child with a magnifying glass, a horse spilling fermented mash, a case of arson, and by spontaneous combustion. Rees' text is an attempt to relate the multiple narrative of these amorphous stories (Rees' version of the fire is delivered by the numerous versions offered by the people who were involved and affected) which is overlooked by the public historical record. Rees further underscores these stories' lack of verifiability by foregrounding how the narrator's deliberate fabulation is mixed with a relation of events which cannot be verified and which the narrator herself even questions. For example, Dolores' exclamation while she is dying¹⁶⁴ in her truck at the bottom of a lake, is heard by a ghostly child which the narrator cannot—although the child is ostensibly her creation—identify: "'Who,' you start to ask the wind and the mountains, 'who was the child?'" (Rees 100).

¹⁶⁴ "Look, I got three kids at home, a husband. Shit" (Rees 97).

Technically, Rees' *Beneath the Faceless Mountain* is a more radical re-visioning of historiography than Hodgins' *Invention of the World*. She juxtaposes and thereby compares an essentialist yearning to uncover the 'real' story and the aridity of the official record with a radical re-working of historical fact. As well she combines these juxtapositions with a layering of multiple stories, which themselves cover generations of settlement in the Crowsnest Pass. Rees' encyclopaedic urge to both encapsulate the historical past and radicalize its presentation, becomes a text which not only examines—like Hodgins' *Invention*, the historiographical enterprise—but also creates, from myth and the urge to fictionalize, a vivid historiographical document.

The provisional narrator (Anna Dawes) of Kroetsch's *Badlands* is also a character who attempts to make sense of her past. Anna both hopes to understand her emotionally remote father (William Dawes), and trace the palaeontological investigations his fieldbooks recount. Like Hodgins, Kroetsch is working out of the narrative of a quest for origin,¹⁶⁵ but his relation of Anna's attempt to uncover her palaeontologist father's 'true' nature is complicated by the text's investigation of the position of the female in reference to the male phallic control over language. Through William's self-conscious statements, *Badlands* makes the reader aware of the power implicit in the male phallic manipulation of language:

“I am anourous,” he added, savouring the secret word, the word that exiled the girl from sharing his pleasure. Without a tail. Without tail.
(189)

¹⁶⁵ A similar quest narrative is written by the speaking voice's obsession with poem and place in Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue*.

Although William's attempt is comically undermined by his unintentional self-castration, he is aware of the power in his ability to manipulate the linguistic register—a power which semiotically creates female lack. Because Anna is the narrator investigating her past, however, this linguistic control of William's fieldbooks is Anna's to manipulate. *Badlands* thus becomes a dual narrative. It exists both as a present tense account (Anna Dawes' self-reflexive mediation¹⁶⁶ of her father's fieldbooks) and the historical chronicle those texts, as well as the apparatus of a prefatory chronology, represent. As in Hodgins' *The Invention of the World*, every event in *Badlands* is recounted by several radically different narrators, but their story is explicitly mediated and ultimately rejected by Anna's provisional voice. Anna mediates the multiple narratives offered by William Dawes' field notes and makes this cacophony of multiple and mutually exclusive stories of the male quest narrative—overlapped with the discourse of palaeontological discourse, and tangled with both Freudian-inspired male libidinal fantasies and the tall tale—one with her narrative search for truth. Employing the trappings of traditional historiography (the chronology, scientific jargon, the legitimizing strategy of allusions to other historical expeditions, as well as an implied mediation of the archive), *Badlands* overturns all attempts to install historical objectivity by the use of Anna's self-conscious and deliberately provisional narrative. *Badlands* enacts historiographic metafiction's intra-discursive stance on the level of narrative/history by encasing both Anna Dawes' mediation and that of a classic realist omniscient narrator who traces by land and river Dawes' quest for origin (the 'land of the dead'). As well, Anna's search for origin, enacted by both William Dawes' palaeontological

¹⁶⁶ "Why it was left to me to mediate the story I don't know: women are not supposed to have stories" (*Badlands* 3)

urge to discover and Anna's archival attempt to find father/origin, is mirrored by the reader's simultaneous discovery of the narrative.

Ultimately, just as Dawes' principle discovery is 'anourous,' so is the male tale tail-less. Origin is never discovered and full knowledge (the field notes and photos, with their implied metaphysics of presence) is thrown by Anna into a lake. In one grand ebullient scene, Anna Dawes and Anna Yellowbird (William Dawes' lover and Anna's spiritual mother) discard both the explanatory power of the ignored field notes and photos after viewing from below the ridiculous grand phallus of male discourse:

The grizzly had stirred itself awake against the tranquillizing shot, had kicked itself loose, was foaming at the mouth, was shitting. . . . we laughed; we could see now the grizzly's crotch; he was suspended upright by his head and upper limbs in the tangled net; his hind legs swung free in the air, galloped straight at us in the empty air, his sharp claws scratching for the gone earth, his testicles following crazily after.

. . . we laughed ourselves into a tear-glazed vision of the awakening old grizzly, lifted into the sun, his prick and testicles hung over us like a handful of dead-ripe berries. (Badlands 268-9)

Because these Annas reject the lack which informs the transcendental signifier of male discourse—the lack which supports science, history, sexual prowess—they are able to navigate a path through these varying discourses. Both Anna and the reader come to occupy a space (which we may locate as within the Post-structuralist episteme) from which to view these discourses' lack of explanatory, transcendental referent. By forcing Dawes' vaunted objectivity to confront the provisionality of his narration, and then metafictionally exposing that confrontation to the reader, both Annas take up a position outside of male discourse from which to view the preposterous swinging genitals of transcendence.

Swift's *Waterland* is a text in which the questioning of the provisional nature of historical discourse which inform *Badlands* and *The Invention of the World* is posited as essential to the historiographical enterprise. *Waterland* is the only text in this study that uses a historian who has been trained in the craft. Swift's text uses a problematized¹⁶⁷ history instructor, Tom Crick, to theorize about the advantages of a highly personal, and by times suspect, provisional story. Employing a strong sense of narrative control over his material, Crick delivers to one of his students¹⁶⁸ a personal history which for him informs all historical knowledge. More importantly, however, Crick offers his narrative's comforting coherence as a contrast to the terror of history which his students experience as a result of living subject to the textual reality of nuclear armament and pollution.

Freed from his attachment to traditional historiography because of his wife's growing mental illness and her subsequent kidnapping charge and, since he is soon to be dismissed from his teaching position, Crick both wants to uncover for himself the origin of his wife's current behaviour and comfort his fearful students. In an attempt to substantiate his concern with history—mainly inspired by Price, a disruptive student who has that “old, old feeling, that everything might amount to nothing”—Crick begins to stray from ‘real’ history teaching into the telling of stories (Swift 233). By defining a history teacher as “someone who teaches mistakes,” Crick rejects “history as offered as a lesson” in order to

¹⁶⁷ For he is on the brink of psychic disintegration.

¹⁶⁸ This is a gesture which makes us onlookers, not in the sense of the Romantic voyeur, but rather like all instances of perceived historical veracity, foregrounds that the reader only enters into the conversation by means of text and that he/she is not necessarily the addressee.

offer a theory of history which suggests that the narrative desire that drives story universally informs history's duty (Swift 203 and Barthes "Historical Discourse" 148).

History, Crick claims, is about the telling of stories in order to evade fear: "I began, having recognised in my young but by no means carefree class the contagious symptoms of fear: "Once upon a time . . ." (Swift 6). By placing himself in the historical scene and relating history's impact upon the individual, Crick, like a self-reflexive version of one of Morante's characters (*History, a Novel*), would attempt to make a narrative sense of the chaos of perceived events:

In the middle of explaining how, with a Parisian blood-letting, our Modern World began, he breaks off and starts telling—these stories. Something about living by a river, something about a father who trapped eels, and a drowned body found in the river, years ago. And then it dawned on you: old Cricky was trying to show you that he himself was only a piece of the stuff he taught. In other words, he'd flipped, he'd gone bananas . . . (Ibid. 5).

Crick does not mean to imply, by his valorization of story, that history is fictitious, however. He is attempting to strike a balance between fiction and the social/personal relevance of truth-telling: "But all the stories were once real. And all the events of history, the battles and costume-pieces, once really happened. All the stories were once a feeling in the guts" (Swift 257). By wrapping his notion of historiography in visceral images, Crick demands, like Rees' narrator, that history must touch its purveyor personally. Crick would counter this bodily interaction with the alienating surround of traditional historiography. Crick's highly personalized history compares traditional history's staged and static events remote from the concerns of their participants and impossibly distant from his students,

with a vision of events—coupled with evidence (such as the bottle which killed Freddie Parr)—that leads inevitably to present events:¹⁶⁹

Once I toyed, once I dabbled in history. Schoolboy stuff. Harmless stuff, textbook stuff. But it never got serious—my studies never began in earnest—until one August afternoon, a prisoner myself of irreversibly historical events, I unlocked the past inside a black wooden chest . . .”
(Swift 276)

This attic history is for Crick the key to historical relevance. It is both narratively (Hodgins’ writing of a historian attempting to cope with a mythological history) and viscerally (Rees’ bodily incorporation of both the reader and her nameless narrator) true. History, which is dependent upon the interaction between its teller and its listener, is—like all stories—a tidy explanation of events (which in Crick’s case keeps at bay the terror of history’s end) subject to reader desire and ideological control.

The Reader as Judge or, the Historical Omniscient

*Do not weep Kateri, We do not see well through
tears, and although that which we see through tears
is bright it is also bent.* Leonard Cohen

The problematized first-person narrator does provoke the reader to question its historical accuracy. But the reader knows through his/her internalized notions of the unreliable narrator, that you “might as well look for diamond tiaras in the gutter” as for an

¹⁶⁹ We can see a similar movement in Irving’s *Prayer for Owen Meany*, a text in which the existence of fate, once the premise is accorded value, is an inescapable conclusion.

accurate account through such a questionable source (Vonnegut, *Mother Night* 167). The omniscient narrator by contrast, is a structure that is coded as objective and yet, in its postmodern incarnations, remains just as suspect as any first-person account.

Historiographic metafiction uses the omniscient narrator, in the form of a suspect omniscient voice, to undermine the supposed objectivity of the traditional historical account by exposing the narrating voice's deliberately provisional nature. This calls attention to this voice's otherwise ungrounded veracity. In texts such as Barth's *Sot-Weed Factor*, Fowles' *French Lieutenant's Woman*, Findley's *The Wars*, and Bowering's *Burning Water*, this controlling voice speaks self-reflexively of its mastery over the story—or exposes the provisionality of its narrative control by such devices as multiple endings—in an effort to draw upon the historical coding that the objective narrator invokes as well as question its status as construct.

Although the omniscient narrator that historiographic metafiction offers may also be a collector of information, like the historian we see in Rees' *Beneath the Faceless Mountain*, postmodern texts deliberately problematize that construction in order to estrange the reader's naturalized expectations. On the historical front, "historians such as Le Roy Ladurie have shocked their establishment colleagues by refusing to hide their interpretative and narrative acts behind the third-person objectivity that is so common to both historical and literary critical writing" (Hutcheon, "Postmodern Problematizing" 369). In postmodern writing this self-reflexivity is foregrounded by historiographic metafiction's attempt to trace the naturalized nature of the objective voice's construction of the 'meaning' behind historical events. Transparently narrating as though it were—

paradoxically—either absent or omni-present, this omniscient voice obscures its part in the creation of the historical narrative in order to conceal the difficulty of closing with a singular history:

At the level of discourse, objectivity, or the absence of any clues to the narrator, turns out to be a particular form of fiction, the result of what might be called the referential illusion, where the historian tries to give the impression that the referent is speaking for itself. This illusion is not confined to historical discourse: novelists galore, in the days of realism, considered themselves 'objective' because they had suppressed all traces of the *I* in their text. (Barthes, "Historical Discourse" 149)

The transparency of the narrating *I* accords historical discourse truth value by relying upon the reader's knowledge of naturalized historiographical codes. Because this is a relation of events which is not contextualized by its narration, "the referent is detached from the discourse and becomes primordial to it" (Ibid. 154). The events of history, so coded, become 'objective' verities which write themselves naturally into the historical artifact. This 'objective' history becomes "an unformulated meaning sheltering behind the apparent omnipotence of the referent" (Ibid.):

This new significance extends to the whole discourse, and in the last analysis constitutes what distinguishes historical discourse from all others; it is reality, but surreptitiously changed into shamefaced meaning: historical discourse does not follow reality, it only signifies *I*; it asserts at every moment: *this happened*, but the meaning conveyed is only that someone is making that assertion. (Ibid.)

Wiebe describes this distancing tactic as an attempt, on the part of the narrative strategy, to mimic objectivity:

A prime method for giving us a convincing impression of life is for the maker himself [herself] not to appear to speak; in other words, the story seems to reach the audience through no maker at all, but rather it simply seems to happen. (*The Story-Makers* xxiv)

Using an mechanized image of this dispassionate narrator, Wiebe appropriately compares this wish for objectivity to the recording potential of the camera: “The camera whirs. It makes no comments, it simply stares, listens, and records” (Ibid. xxv). To theorize about the “convincing impression” of objectivity that the camera makes is to ignore the camera operator, however. This politically questionable pretence of an unbiased access to a monolithic history hides the “maker” upon which the historical referent is predicated and presents knowledge “as if there were a consensus that this is the truth, that there is only one version of history” (DuBois 82).

Working out of Post-structuralist notions of reality’s constructedness, historiographic metafiction—by baring the artificiality of the omniscient narrator device—foreground the impossibility of closing with a ‘real’ version of a historical circumstance. The limited omniscient narrators that historiographic metafiction uses—which we may call the problematized omniscient—divert attention from a traditional *readerly* interest in the historical account, to a questioning of the codes which underlie the narration’s ostensible transparency. Like many postmodern techniques, the defamiliarization that this structure offers calls attention to itself as technique in order to investigate the ideological implications of its use.

Barth’s narrator in *The Sot-Weed Factor* performs this function in a peculiar way for a postmodern text. Barth’s text “announces the artifice of literature” by exposing the naturalized nature of the intrusive eighteenth-century narrator and contrasting this prose

style's transparency¹⁷⁰ with a questioning of textual content (Stark 161). Rather than calling attention to the narrator structure, his attempt to hide its operation through a "parodying of the language of the eighteenth-century English novel" foregrounds the naturalized assumptions which inform this omniscient voice (Barth in Schulz xvi):

. . . what I meant by "pastiche" is something that is not just a parody but neither is it a kind of serious attempt at replication or imitation. The problem in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, since it was written in the third person, not in the first-person, was to find a language that the author could speak in as apart from the dialogue, which had to remind one more of the dialogue of the eighteenth-century novels than narrative lines. I had to find a language for the third person narrative which would echo some of the conventions and attitudes of the eighteenth century prose, without committing myself to a kind of Oxford English Dictionary sent from the eighteenth-century . . . This is what I meant by pastiche: something that was partly a parody but mainly an echo and not an imitation. (Barth in Glaser-Wöhler 59)

Evoking "simultaneously the origin of the novel as a genre and the development of the worldview out of which that genre grew," Barth makes his highly stylized omniscient narrator assume the traditional explanatory role which interprets the textual events for the reader (Harris 55). Traditionally, the eighteenth-century narrator is a moralistic and officious voice which directly addresses the reader by such stilted statements as "dear reader" and situates character and plot development by reference to dominant social values. Although this action is somewhat evident in such devices as the chapter headings (such as the title of Chapter One: "The Poet Is Introduced, and Differentiated From His Fellows"), Barth's narrator is not obtrusive (Barth 13). In fact, as the much more

¹⁷⁰ Barth "elects to write his novel in the eighteenth-century manner, using no words, images, illusions, metaphors, or other figure of speech not current and available to the English novelist writing in Fielding's time" (Rovit 120).

transparent supporting prose indicates (“Ebenezer said shortly . . . Burlingame Shrugged . . . Burlingame replied”), it is a structure which is almost invisible (Barth 145). This mediating prose is meant to function entirely below the reader’s threshold of comprehension in order to deliver specific textual information (such as the character’s positioning). Eighteenth-century practice established this device so thoroughly that although it still belongs to a particular historical period, it remains so naturalized that its transparency is unnoticed even by a modern reader.

A simple duplication of the eighteenth-century’s prose style is not all that Barth accomplishes in this text, however. Barth installs this narrative voice only to problematize its use. Barth counters that traditional role with the blatant manipulation exposed by his tale’s content. He attempts to call attention to the formulaic nature of this artificially unobtrusive prose in order that the reader correlate the text’s historical accuracy with his/her manipulation by the narrator:

In *The Sot-Weed Factor* he produces an effect like the layers of Troy, with the newer obscuring the older. He wrote this novel during the twentieth century, but from the present it goes back to the eighteenth century for its technique, then further back to the late seventeenth century for its main action and finally back to the seventeenth century for the action described in the journals of John Smith and Henry Burlingame I, for which the main characters search throughout most of the book. Once the reader sees these three overlays covering the “events” described in the journals, he [she] cannot deny his [her] inability to understand history directly. That is, people cannot conceive directly of history, it is a construct, just like literature. (Stark 131)

Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor* manages both to play “fast and loose with Clio” by both debunking and creating a history of Maryland “grounded on meagre fact and solid fancy” for its reader (Barth 793 and 794):

The novel itself is a virtual collection of histories, written and oral, read and imagined, published and private. Barth, for example, includes information from the Maryland Archives, quotes from John Smith's *The Generall Historie of Virginia*, and uses the actual poetry of the historical Ebenezer Cooke, whose writings provide historical portraits of colonial Maryland. (Gladsky 260)¹⁷¹

Barth's rewriting of history by "either alter[ing] the facts or link[ing] them together in the shape of a plot" (Holder 127). Barth's rewriting of history takes "considerable liberty—sometimes inventing characters and events, sometimes parodically inverting the tone and mode of his intertexts, sometimes offering connections where gaps occur in the historical record" (Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction" 15-6).

Barth uses his text's narration to interrogate the set of codes his narrator evokes and relies upon and encourages the reader to question the text's historical accuracy. Barth's reworking of the historical record's raw material is belied by such tactics as his over-exuberant language use (such as that evident in the swearing contest between two scullery maids) and sexually explicit descriptions. The questioning of historical narration is made most evident by Barth's "rudely pornographic metamorphosis of an incident [John Smith's relationship with Pocahontas] so far seen in an idealistic light" (Müllenbrock 166):

Contrary to the school book version, Barth offers his own bawdy reading of the events. . . . Barth's treatment of the episode draws attention to the fact that alleged historical truth is not as unambiguous as we tend to think. (Puetz 142)

¹⁷¹ For a more comprehensive examination of Barth's use or misuse of the Maryland archives, see Holder's "'What Marvelous Plot . . . Was Afoot?': John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*."

Barth does not offer the John Smith of the American colonial mythology, which extends itself through synecdoche to all such contact between unequal groups. Instead Barth forces the reader to confront, “on the one hand his [her] nostalgia for the legendary past and for a spiritual reality and, on the other hand, his [her] painful awareness that he [she] lives in a meaningless universe” (Safer 426). Barth gives the Pocahontas legend “a farcical and even lustful connotation” (Glaser-Wöhler 83). He rewrites this “historical meeting of Smith, portrayed as a lecher, liar, boaster, and Pocahontas, depicted as an insatiable wanton” as a confrontation between a self-serving man who is fully ready to take advantage of native hospitality, and a native woman whose intentions are equally sincere (Gladsky 263). Barth takes advantage of the notion that “departures from fact—by judicious (sometimes egregious) departures from fact—provide more insight into historical truth than the historian constrained by fact” (Coward 59). Barth uses the contrast between the transparent narration of the artificiality of the eighteenth-century narrator device, and his rewriting of a primary American mythological writing of white/native contact, to question the “premises and practices of historiography itself” (Müllenbrock 164). This “use of historical and legendary material, especially in a farcical spirit, has a number of technical virtues, among which are aesthetic distance and the opportunity for counter-realism” (Barth in Glaser-Wöhler 85). For Barth, by having his narrator unabashedly offer his/her “own history of the world,” problematizes and foregrounds all textual/mythological attempts to code as fact the received version (Barth in Holder 130).

Although Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* shares with *The Sot-Weed Factor* its “fictional conventions as the ‘good story,’ nineteenth-century authorial

intrusions and high rhetoric, and the heroic quest,” its architecture is different in several ways (Begiebing 41). For example, his narrator’s use of “a collective contemporary ‘we,’” is punctuated by such devices as the use of anachronistic statements, which both refer to the text’s construction and thus operate as an authorial direct address to the reader, and foreground the narrator’s presence (Arlett 153). The “right-sounding, authoritarian voice of a knowing, collusive narrator’s” commentary on the textual action is littered with reminders that the text, although ostensibly written out of an eighteenth-century style, is written by a self-reflexive author of the present century (Burden 271):

. . . the protagonists of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* may well be no one of the story’s characters but rather its narrator, its voice. “In a real sense,” Peter Conradi argues, “this voice is the book’s true hero: its heroic work is no less than the simultaneous Faustian reclamation of an imagined historical epoch as well as the exposure of its own compositional resources and historical premises (67). The speaker tells a story about a Victorian love triangle, and he talks like a chatty, intrusive, nineteenth-century narrator . . . (Neary 162-3)

Like the narrator in Rees’ *Beneath the Faceless Mountain*, the reader of Fowles’ text is called upon by a direct address which demands that the reader “get the taste of that from your mouth” (*French* 426). The visceral nature of this interpellation calls attention to—and thereby creates—the narrator’s physicality. This narrator even cajoles the reader to join in its voyeuristic examination of the character’s lives: (“let us see how Charles and Ernestina are crossing one particular such desert”) and offers such anachronistic statements as “those gaslit hours that had to be filled, and without the benefit of cinema or television” (*French* 113). The narrator’s intrusive suggestions of his/her own existence, such as “let me quote a far greater poem—one he committed to heart, and one thing he and I *could* have agreed on,” work to distort *readerly* assumptions which are the

foundation of the traditional omniscient narrator's effectiveness (Ibid. 426). Fowles' text "invites the reader to collaborate with a narrator in the guise of a typical Victorian gentleman novelist opinionating about the world on which he casts his knowing eye" (Burden 271):

. . . the reader is asked to participate in the educated view of the world offered by the narrator who steps out of the past. But we realize that 1867 is an historical perspective, and the narrative voice a contrived guise, when the illusions is momentarily fractured by the casual intrusion of knowledge from the Twentieth-century . . . (Ibid.)

Instances of the narrator's intrusive presence such as these foreground the similarity of the reader and author's shared cultural background when it is compared to the Victorian past. These comparisons culminate in the narrator's explicit comparisons of the past to the textual present:

One of the commonest symptoms of wealth today is destructive neurosis; in his century it was tranquil boredom. (Ibid. 12)

His feelings were perhaps not very different from an Englishman in the United States of today. (Ibid. 435)

By these playful gestures, Fowles constructs a

narrator who, ariel-like, can adopt the guise of a type of historically defined novelist, only to break the illusion at will, and in so doing introduce another historical dimension: not only does this narrator want to play at being a Victorian novelist, but also he [she] wants to be the historian calling upon his [her] powers of hindsight to judge one age in the terms of another. (Burden 275)

The narrator breaks this "guise" by "intrud[ing] upon his [her] narrative to the extent of invalidating his [her] characters and plot: 'They begat what shall it be—let us say seven children,'" in order to expose the narrative's constructedness (Arlett 157). Fowles' anachronistic metafictionality peaks in the novelist's appearance in the novel itself: "in the

first appearance he is on a train with Charles, trying to decide how to resolve the story; in the second he is a clownish magician who turns back time in order to usher in an alternative ending” (Neary 174).¹⁷²

These devices would seem to indicate that Fowles’ narrator exerts a great deal of textual control, however arbitrary, over the reader’s entrance into the text. Fowles’ strategies are only evoked through instances of narrator control in order that they may be dismantled, however. This dismantling takes place by his use of narrative inconsistencies and ironic juxtapositions. The narrator confirms his/her inability to describe Charles’ thoughts, “[h]is thoughts were too vague to be described. But they comprehended mysterious elements; a sentiment of obscure defeat not in any way related to the incident on the Cobb,” by relating exactly what obscure sentiments Charles is feeling, and thereby foregrounds the reader’s dependence upon the narrator for textual knowledge (*French* 11).

Fowles similarly foregrounds the text’s mediation by the narrator/editor/author by the use of paratextual markers which code his text as a valid historical document. These are metafictional reminders of the text’s, and thereby all historiography’s, status as construct. For example, each chapter is introduced by a contextualizing quote. Although this is a strategy employed by nineteenth-century texts, in Fowles’ case, his selection of

¹⁷² .” . . the author characterizes himself, so to speak, appearing in the novel as firstly ‘a successful lay preacher—one of the bullying tabernacle kind’ (p.346), and later as a foppish, ‘Frenchified’ and successful impresario who ‘looks very much as if he has given up preaching and gone in for grand opera’ (p.394)” (Burden 282).

quotes works to interrogate the narrative as well as to confront the narrative with the inserted text:

“Most British families of the middle and upper classes lived above their own cesspool . . . E. ROYSTON PIKE, *Human Documents of the Victorian Golden Age* (18)

As well, by using introductory chapter quotes from Twentieth-century works—such as Manchester’s *Death of a President*—Fowles achieves a distancing effect. This effect, coupled with an ironic opposition—complete with its bibliographical reference—does not allow the reader of the text to wallow in his/her *readerly* assumptions. Likewise, Fowles uses academic style footnotes which both install the text as an edited document and call attention to the reader’s incorporation by a historical text’s transparent readerly codes. For example, the narrator uses the word agnostic and positions Charles’ inability to understand its use, by telling the reader that this word common today was unknown in Charles’s time: “Though he would not have termed himself so, for the very simple reason that the word was not coined (by Huxley) until 1870; by which time it had become much needed” (*French* 15).

Although these examples would seem to suggest that the narrator exercises a kind of draconian control over the text, Fowles undermines that notion by showing that the text’s narration is in flux: “I said “in wait”; but “in state” would have been a more appropriate term” (*Ibid.* 91). This relinquishing of textual control over story in part expresses Fowles’ deep suspicion of the traditional tale’s transparent narration. He employs a wilfully playful narrator whose hard edge of sarcastic social commentary,

delivered under the guise of the traditional narrative, frustrates traditional *readerly* expectations as well as makes social commentary:

For those that had a living to earn this was hardly a great problem: when you have worked a twelve-hour day, the problem of what to do after your supper is easily solved. But pity the unfortunate rich; for whatever licence was given them to be solitary before the evening hours, convention demanded that then they must be bored in company. (*French* 113)

Fowles asks that the “reader is active on the ethic and the aesthetic levels. He [she] is asked to judge his [her] society and himself [herself], as well as the constructions of a previous historical period” (Burden 282). For example, Fowles’ narrator “is at his [her] most ironic and self-conscious when he [she] talks about sex. Fowles pedantically, but also archly and wittily, tells us facts about the Victorian Era that he knows no Victorian novelist could acknowledge” (Neary 166):

What are we faced with in the Nineteenth century? An age where woman was sacred; and where you could buy a thirteen-year-old girl for a few pounds—a few shillings, if you wanted her for only an hour to two. Where more churches were built than in the whole previous history of the country; and where one in sixty houses in London was a brothel (the modern ratio would be nearer one in six thousand). (*French* 266)

Although these politicizing gestures work to alert the reader to social concerns, it is Fowles’ narrative innovations—paradoxically—which call the most attention to the more suspect aspects of transparent narration. By incorporating three mutually exclusive “endings that more directly involve the reader in the art of fiction,” Fowles uses the reader’s expectations to force the reader to acknowledge their own collusion in narrative construction (Kane 105). Fowles asks that the reader compare each ending in terms of its realistic, as versus fictional, nature:

. . . the dewy ending of Victorian convention where Ernestina and Charles pledge their troth; the hardly less sentimental ending where Sarah, Charles, and child are finally united to the tortured sounds of a lady practising Chopin; and

the final and most ethically challenging ending where Sarah and Charles part company and we are left with Charles as he is about to reenter the world like a child who must learn to live all over again . . . (Begiebing 45)

The reader of these different versions, suspended at the level of device, is encouraged to acknowledge how his/her own suspect *readerly* assumptions demand from the text an ending whose transparency hides implicit ideological constructions.

Findley's *The Wars* explores the connection between the reader and the omniscient narrator by combining a "pseudo-objective" narrator with a historian figure who—like Rees' narrator—investigates the textualized past "through the researcher's jumble of photographs and documents" of archival research (Bailey 90 and York, *Front Lines* 50).¹⁷³ Findley draws attention to his narrator's address of the reader as well as the text's suspect delivery of textual information in several different ways. Findley's narrator's research uncovers a hopelessly chaotic past which is inspired by visions which the narrator cannot confirm. Likewise, the purpose of the narrator's archival work (which is traditionally meant to satisfy a disinterested search for knowledge) is myopically driven by the narrator's urge to make sense of his/her recurring and unverifiable visions of the death of the First World War soldier, Robert Ross:

His eyes are blank. There is mud on his cheeks and forehead and his uniform is burning—long, bright tails of flame are streaming out behind him. He leaps through memory without a sound. . . . You lay the fiery image back in your mind and let it rest. You know it will obtrude again and again until you find its meaning—here. (Wars 8)

¹⁷³ . . . the third-person narrator of *The Wars* adopts a pseudo-objective stance, often dating his [her] episodes and journalistically reporting the events of Robert Ross's life (Bailey 90).

That this vision ostensibly becomes the reason for the researcher's interest in the 'truth' behind Ross' death, foregrounds the possible biases which inform the narrator's—and by extension—all historiographic research. Moreover, the fragmentary nature of this vision mirrors the fragmentary nature of archival work: "As the past moves under your fingertips, part of it crumbles. Other parts, you know you'll never find. This is what you have" (*Wars* 6). This collection of fragments, interpreted simultaneously by the reader and the narrator, construct the Ross story, and this narrator self-reflexively reports the meagre nature of the archive's documentation for those in pursuit of a holistic vision/version:

In the end, the only facts you have are public. Out of these you make what you can, knowing that one thing leads to another. Sometime, someone will forget himself and say too much or else a corner of a picture will reveal the whole. . . ." (*Wars* 5)

As this quote implies, Findley's narrator does not hide his/her voice, but rather draws attention to himself/herself—like the narrator in Rees' text—by directly addressing the reader. The narrator's apostrophic address, evident in such statements as "You begin at the archives with photographs," performs two functions (*Ibid.* 5). This dialogic construction constantly reminds the reader of the narrator's presence as well as foregrounds the reader's lack of access to the archival material, in this case represented by photographs.¹⁷⁴ "[l]ike the researcher, we are presented with a 'corner of a picture'—Robert Ross and the horses—from which we must deduce the whole—that is, the reason for Robert's act" (*York, Other Side* 79). The absence of photographs in Findley's text

¹⁷⁴ We are left with descriptions of photographs such as that which ends the text: "ROBERT AND ROWENA WITH MEG: Rowena seated astride the pony—Robert holding her in place. On the back is written: 'Look! You can see our breath!'" (*Wars* 226). This annotation is confirmed by the narrator: "And you can" (*Ibid.*).

forces the reader to realize that his/her access to the archival texts and interviews is equally mediated:

The Wars, however, like so much fiction of the last few decades, demands that the reader participate in the construction of the narrative, which in this case is the reconstruction of a life. “You begin at the archives with photographs” (5), and a principal narrator who has several roles as historian, biographer, diarist, and fictionist, who establishes the “authenticating” documentary forms from the archives (photographs, letters, newspaper clippings, et cetera), who introduces you to other narrators and other forms of documentation, and who goes beyond the documentary modes of biography into fictional biography. (Pennee 39)

The narrator’s suspect mediation, through statements such as “It could not be told. . . . Robert appeared to be the sole survivor. . . . they appeared to be cattle cars” and “[h]ere is where the mythology is muddled,” confirms, like Fowles’ multiple endings, the reader’s limited access to the archival data (*Wars* 4 and 217). As well, this control implies—through statements about the mechanics and effect of the narrator’s report—the narrator’s control over textual information:

. . . this part of the narrative is told by Lady Juliet d’Orsey, whose memories of Robert Ross—for reasons that will soon become apparent—are the most vivid and personal we have (*Wars* 109)

This is perhaps a good place to introduce Miss Turner, whose importance lies at the end of this story but whose insights throws some light on its beginnings (*Ibid.* 11)

These examples are minor instances of narrative intrusions compared to two particular ways in which the novel blatantly foregrounds the questionable history that this narrator ascribes to Ross. The narrator’s description of Ross’ thoughts in certain situations show a

knowledge that a narrator could not possibly have known.¹⁷⁵ For example, upon seeing two men having sex, the narrator delivers what can only be a fictionalized version of Ross' internal dialogue and actions: “. . . his mind began to stammer the way it always did whenever it was challenged by something it could not accept. . . . He picked up a boot and held it in his hand. Its weight alarmed him and the texture of its leather skin appalled him with its human feel” (*Wars* 45). Likewise, the voyeuristic description of the scene in which Ross is raped by his fellow soldiers—as well as Ross' emotive responses—show an access to information which the narrator of an objective researched account would not be able to verify.¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, Findley was pressured to excise this scene from his text on the grounds that it was too disturbing and unnecessarily distracting from his text's portrayal of what he sees as Robert's metaphorical rape by the war machine:

People have been asking me to cut the rape scene and I can't.

They don't want it cut because they are squeamish. At least, I trust that isn't why they're concerned. They're concerned, I assume, because they think it will get the book in trouble. . . .

Margaret [Lawrence] phoned just yesterday and said: “it would be tragic if something went wrong because you're being pig-headed. . . . Tell me why it has to be there,” she said.

¹⁷⁵ This is a version of the historical past which works out of “history's dark areas,” or that which the historical record could not record and therefore is open to a liberal interpretation (McHale 90).

¹⁷⁶ As Bailey's examination reveals, the narrator's construction of Ross is further complicated because the narrator reports mere physical descriptions: “[a]t crisis moments, the narrator notes that Robert's ‘mind beg[ins] to stammer’ (45), which blocks any psychological examination of Robert's emotional experience. The narrator often resorts to physical descriptions of Robert's actions, as though they can adequately explain his feelings. This is most apparent in the scene which occurs immediately after Robert is raped. The narrative, itself, begins to stutter, listing a long series of twenty-one discrete, simple sentences, each one forming its own paragraph, recording Robert's actions without psychological interpretation” (Bailey 90).

“It has to be there because it is my belief that Robert Ross and his generation of young men were raped, in effect, by the people who made the war. . . .

Margaret said: “yes I agree with you. But surely that’s implicit in the book already. You don’t have to *say so*.” (Findley in Hastings 85)

On a metafictional level, the description of this rape has another effect, however. The reader of Findley’s text is tempted to compare this description’s impossibly explicit detail with the narrator’s inability to make sense of his/her vision of Ross’ death: “The researcher-narrator and the reader implicated by readerly response to the Prologue, by “you,” and by the present tense of the narrator’s address, move between various forms of documentary knowledge of Robert Ross and the imagined Ross” (Pennee 40-1). The narrator’s accumulation of information—ostensibly in order to close with this vision—does not bring him/her any closer to Ross’ motivations. Even though this historian figure uncovers inaccessible information, his/her inability to close with a final version of Ross’ motivations for saving the horses foregrounds both Findley’s use of a controlling narrator and historiography’s inability to close with story. Just as all historical texts are situated by the reader’s cultural positioning, our knowledge of Ross is, like that of the vehicular prose of Morante’s *History, a Novel*, contextualized by its narration.

Not coincidentally, the text argues that the narration of the official account of the war is similarly inaccessible:

A exactly 4:00 a.m. on the morning of the 28th, the Germans set off a string of land mines ranged along the St Eloi Salient. . . . This was the beginning of the second phase of a battle the Canadians had thought was already over. But it was to rage for five more days. In it 30,000 men would die and not an inch of ground would be won. (*Wars* 121)

By examples such as these, Findley's third person narrator parodies a *readerly* faith in the official record's accuracy:

So far, you have read of the deaths of 557,017 people—one of whom was killed by a streetcar, one of whom died of bronchitis and one of whom died in a barn with her rabbits. (Ibid. 185)

Although *readerly* expectations would suggest that this information could be meaningfully collated, Findley's use of this questioning narrator exposes that the cohesiveness (which is based more in alienating statistics than in a connection to its reader) such texts possess is illusory. Likewise Findley argues that the narrator's presence offers a coherence the events themselves do not possess.¹⁷⁷

In order to firmly position himself as an author/mediator of the text in the novel's creation, Bowering's limited omniscient narrator in *Burning Water* takes Findley and Fowles' overt narrative intrusion many steps further. Creating a self-conscious authorial intrusion similar to Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* and the narrator's apostrophe to the reader in Rees' *Beneath the Faceless Mountain*, Bowering foregrounds his narrator's existence as a mediating authorial presence—like the narrative voice of Sproxtton's *Headframe*—to encourage the reader to collapse the problematic narrator with an intrusive author as a “full protagonist” (Scobie, *Signature* 125):

When I came to live in Vancouver, I thought of Vancouver, and so now geography involved my name too, George Vancouver. . . . what could I do but write a book filled with history and myself, about these people and this place? (*Burning* 7)

¹⁷⁷ “The novel demonstrates through its archivist, researcher, readers, and writers how we seek identity, meaning, permanence, stability, and knowledge, even as (perhaps because) we recognize (through repeated experience) their opposites” (Pennee 41).

Bowering uses this prefatory material to situate the narrator/author's chance relationship to his [her] material:

In the prologue Bowering attempts to present himself as an innocent observer of history, one who has not consciously pursued the story of Vancouver's expedition but who has seemingly had the subject brought before him through a series of chance coincidences: name, place, and literary profession have happily mixed to provide him with the opportunity to write of George Vancouver. (Deer 365)

In this "book filled with history and myself," Bowering's narrator both takes credit for the creation of Vancouver in history: "[w]ithout a story teller, George Vancouver is just another dead sailor," and involves the reader in the process of textual construction (*Burning 7*):

Even when there is no direct reference to Bowering as a character, he reminds us of his presence in the jokes, the literary allusions (especially the references to Coleridge's theories of Fancy and the Imagination), the anachronisms, the caustic commentary of the observing Indians, and the increasingly drastic distortions of historical fact. (Scobie, *Signature* 125)

Bowering's text incorporates the reader into the process of this "strange fancy that history is given" by expanding upon his textual material (which the novel's prefatory statement lists as journals and historiographical texts) (*Burning 7*).¹⁷⁸ As well, Bowering imaginatively interrupting his narrative with frequent reminders to the reader that the author as narrator is mediating this text. These interruptions take the form of anachronistic

¹⁷⁸ Bowering writes this historical search metafictionally into his text, for while "collecting empirically accurate evidence, the narrator of *Burning Water* visits museums, galleries, and archive; yet he realizes that here, too, image-making becomes self-generating and takes place in a world without exit; instead of approaching reality, the narrator finds himself caught up in the dilemma of his own characters: it is almost impossible to avoid "yet another sequence of rooms filled with artifacts" (Kröller 88).

commentary—such as that used by Fowles in *French Lieutenant's Woman*—as well as the inclusion of material neither the narrator or the historical record could have recorded (like Findley's *Wars*). By this device, these interruptions code the text as fabulation, and most significantly, as sarcastic and politicized jabs at contemporaneous racism.

Bowering first involves the reader in the process of textual construction by intruding upon the narrative to foreground the text as an artificial construct: “*He stopped writing and went out for a while in the Triestino sunlight. When he came back this all seemed crazy*” (*Burning* 15). The “this all” that the narrator refers to, whether the novel, the writing process that demands leaving his native Vancouver and writing in Trieste, or the specific interactions between the two natives directly preceding this quote, foregrounds the narrator/writer’s involvement in the writing process and the fact that this text is a created document. The scene which has the narrator/author pacing “the deck of a B.C. Government ferry on the way across the strait to Nanaimo” in an effort to ascertain the size of Vancouver’s H.M.S. *Discovery* is a similar device (*Burning* 23). This action both reaffirms the exploratory nature of the narrator’s investigation and writes the author into the novel:

The implied author hopes to curry favour with the reader, as well, by attempting to convince us that we are participants in this fiction, participants who stand beside him looking at the creation of this historical fiction: he promises to reveal his own history-making process by putting himself into the story as a third person “He.” (Deer 367)

Kröller’s suspicion that “[r]eviewers of Bowering’s book have generally been irritated by the sections dealing with Trieste (and those referring to Florence, Venice, Guatemala, and Costa Rica), because they appear to be superfluous interpolations distracting the reader

from the main narrative,” confirms both the extant nature of *readerly* assumptions and the defamiliarization that Bowering’s technique enacts (94). Likewise Deer argues that “[t]he implied author’s other first-person intrusions into the story are calculated to display his distrust of authorial omniscience and objectivity.”¹⁷⁹ Bowering’s text has the effect of producing a history for the reader while simultaneously estranging its reader’s naturalized sense of the historical text:

Bowering creates a fictional universe which bears strong historical resemblance to the records from the voyage it is actually contemplating. The dialogue simultaneously draws the actual events closer through an enhancement of identification for the reader, while the humour and familiarity of dialogue text a late Twentieth-century audience draws attention to the fictionality of historical rewriting. Bowering has no desire to reconstruct a real historical situation, his response is fictional, emphasizing the subjectivity of historical rewritings and ultimately the post-colonial view of many histories rather than one history. (Jensen 112)

Bowering inserts anachronistic references to semiotics¹⁸⁰ and Twentieth-century

¹⁷⁹ “There are various addresser-addressee levels in *Burning Water*. Bowering is true to his hostility against “transparent” fiction by drawing attention to his own acts of narration: the implied author steps forth in the prologue in the form of an “I” narrator who introduces the reader to his fictional procedures in a casual, affable tone. He prefers to avoid the “I” narrator in the rest of the novel, but he still repeatedly enters in the rest of the novel in this “I” narrator’s voice. The prepositioned author attempts to move away from the “you-I” addresser-addressee relationship by referring to himself or dramatizing himself in the third person: he reduces himself to the level of his characters, a “he,” while drafting his readers into an intimate company of “we.” The levels of addresser-addressee relations include an “I” narrator who is explicitly identified as the implied author, a “he” character who is also the author, and a series of other discourses assigned to characters like Vancouver, Quadra, and Menzies which are mediated by the implied author/narrator” (Deer 364).

¹⁸⁰ “I cannot help thinking that languages have purposes beyond allowing one man to tell the other his demands upon his behavior. There is song, for instance . . . there is also, I venture, a language that is neither spoke nor writ” (*Burning* 42).

dialogue into the mouths of his characters,¹⁸¹ and thereby “draws attention to the fictionality of historical rewriting” (Jensen 112). Bowering “makes the very notion of historical time both arbitrary and irrelevant. By fusing variants of a present-day idiom with blatant fakery of an idiom of the past, his prose insists that time has no dimension at all, that everything is *now*” (Moss, *Paradox of Meaning* 132). Bowering’s self-conscious evocation of Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” similarly calls the reader’s attention to his story’s, and by extension all historical accounts’, literary and historical antecedents:

Menzies kept the carcass of that brown albatross around for weeks

. . .

Not that they were superstitions about the albatross. They didn’t give two hoots about an albatross. Unless there was a literary person about, they let on about how the great spread albatross over the quarter-deck was the source of supernatural calm, and the dead albatross was a source of supernatural dread. . . . If they had been superstitious, and especially if there had been a literary person on board, they might have looked at the decaying bird and said things such as:

“I don’t like it.”

“It makes me uneasy.”

“It’s an unholy thing he is doing.”

“No good can come of it.”

“We shall be paying for his affront, mark my words.”

“I fear him and his glittering eye.” (*Burning* 163)

The narrator unnecessarily confirms this obvious reference by directly addressing the reader: “[i]n case anyone was wondering: yes, this happened on the same day that the English poet was composing his Christian ballad” (Ibid. 87). This passage works to enact

¹⁸¹ “If you imagine yourself seeing a Frenchman with a weapon and killing that Frenchman before he can kill you, you both may be instrumentalizing national policy, but you are also both as well repeating the games you played in childhood” (*Burning* 28).

the working life and mind of the historical sailor—and thus is an attempt to recover a historical past—as well as suggests that the literary/historical artifact is intertextually informed.

As these anachronistic examples reveal, Bowering's narrative does not pretend to deliver a full story. Like Findley, Bowering also exposes—through the narrator's relation of information he/she could not have known—the novel's blatant fabrication of events such as Vancouver's unrecorded dream. Similarly, his description of Vancouver as a homosexual is a blatant distortion of historical 'fact'. Bowering mixes fabrication and the historical record in order, by the evident nature of his narrator's self-reflexivity, that the reader is made aware of the text's fictive nature. Even Bowering's more 'factual' *Bowering's B.C.*, is written in the idiom of the Twentieth-century and is not overly concerned with factual representation:

In the following days the two commanders grew to like each other as no other representatives of their respective empires could have been expected to. (59)

Neither would agree to making an official document on terms agreeable to the other. But they had formed a great friendship. They had opted for love not war. (60)

Bowering is attempting to expose the contemporary signifier's problematic association with the historical signified (through his writing of a literary Vancouver's "white man's obsession to know" and categorize) (Wiebe, "On Being Motionless" 12). This writing suggests Bowering's "postmodernist scepticism toward the mimetic ability of language has been placed at the service of defining the role of fiction in a post-colonial context" (Kröller 92). Vancouver's need to categorize—which expresses itself in the wish to document and

map all the inlets on the west coast and in his desire to penetrate to the furthest point of Puget Sound in hopes of discovering its source—exposes the white wish to categorize and thereby control. In Bowering's text, however, though names are left draped all over the land, the price of Vancouver's extreme urge to totalize is his own death, as well as the death of the final version or story.

Although Bowering's attempt to problematize his reader's innocent entrance into the text includes politicizing gestures of this sort, his desire to overturn naturalized ideological constructions culminates in his anachronistic writing of white/native interaction:

. . . Bowering is preoccupied with specific types of power conflicts: he has mounted a critique of male modes of competition, militarism, and pride that reflects an ideologically interested position, not an ideologically innocent one. Bowering's postmodern playfulness and ideological innocence—rhetorically constructed through first-person interventions and self-dramatization in the third person—are constantly undermined by a psychological probing of Vancouver and by the highlighting of certain type of authority problems. (Deer 364)

As Deer suggests, Bowering is not providing either an innocent or covert reading of white/native interaction. In fact, Bowering has specific ideological purposes which his choice of literary strategy makes explicit. I have examined above *Burning's* characterization of Canada's colonialization as a brutal rape of a dying native man, but this vivid rendering—although it may be the most extreme—is merely the most extravagant way in which Bowering politicizes his text. Bowering also uses his third person narrator's Twentieth-century prose to confront stereotypes of native people:

A lot of people think that Indians are just naturally patient, but that's not true. Before the white "settlers" arrived there were lots of impatient

Indians. It's only in the last two hundred years that Indians have been looking patient whenever there were any white men around. (*Burning* 92)

The first Indian remained impassive, the way Indians liked to do in front of white men, to suggest that they were patient. (Ibid. 143)

The third Indian shifted uncomfortably, despite all the people who think that Indians are always fully comfortable in their natural environment. (Ibid. 93)

Bowering's re-visioning of white/native interaction also questions white superiority by presenting a parodic version of native stereotypes which resembles those of our contemporary media:

A Yankee named Magee stepped out of the nearby copse with a donkey loaded with supplies. He held his hand up, palm forward.

'How!' he said, in a deep voice.

The two Indians made their faces look patient.

'What is this "How"' asked the first Indian of his companion.

'Search me,' said the second Indian. But we may as well go along with him. He put his hand up in his best imitation of the skin-covered stranger.

'Aeh, shit" he said. (*Burning* 199)

Bowering is attempting to

. . . draw attention to or foreground the fiction-making process in order to convince the reader further that his method is 'honest' and authentic, not a transparent "window," but an open activity in which artifice is exposed. This theoretical self-reflexivity is designed to let the reader know that the author is being open and honest concerning the motives of his fiction, and that the reader will not be entranced by any "illusions" of epistemological authority and objectivity. (Deer 369)

Bowering subversion of "the discourse of the ruler" writes the white conquest of the west and its associated dishonest treaties as an encounter between a greedy white and a erudite native (Kröller 84):

"You want to trade some waterfront property for some mirrors and necklaces?"

“I wouldn’t mind having one of those mirrors,” said the first Indian to the second Indian.

“Offer him a fish,” said the second Indian. (*Burning* 200)

By this gesture, Bowering makes his natives canny and philosophically-minded observers of white folly as well as rewrites the ‘founding’ of North America:

“You are telling me that these people from the sun will eat all our clams.”

“And oysters and shrimp.”

“And we will then become the Indians with nothing,” said the first Indian, picturing their fate mainly in terms of his wife and children. (*Burning* 93-4)

Bowering’s strategic inclusion of anachronistic details, coupled with the narrator’s questioning of their own enterprise, keep the reader’s attention at the level of technique in order to call attention to a prose which would transparently (which is to say dishonestly) narrate a historical past. Just as Barth’s *The Sot-Weed Factor* distracts its reader from his/her collusion with the text’s transparent coding, in Bowering’s text the reader is encouraged to simultaneously create with the narrator/author a history for Vancouver which places a problematic and provisional creator at its centre and questions the official records of historical events. Similarly, Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* constantly reminds its reader of the text’s inevitable mediation through the grid of contemporaneous culture and textual voice and Findley’s *The Wars* compares the narrator’s professed ignorance with a knowledge they could not have known.

History's Many Voices

In many ways historiographic metafiction's multiple narrator ends up accomplishing a very different task from its omniscient narrator. David Roberts argues that in the novel, "the narrator's consciousness becomes the unifying medium for a polyphony of voices" (178). Instead of relying upon this supposition and presenting text as mediated by this singular narrator, however, the historiographic metafiction that use a multiple voice attempt—by their encyclopaedic coverage—to include normally excluded groups and to present all sides of a story. Not coincidentally, these texts typically concern the reporting of a particular event and use multiple narrators to present the many sides of the story in order to simulate a type of accuracy, or at least full reportage. This inclusiveness aims to force the reader to make their own analysis of a text (which encourages a reader/text interaction like that of the problematized omniscient) while the text itself pretends to make no judgement. Texts such as Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*, Sweatman's *Fox*, and Gutteridge's postmodern attempts to write white/native interaction through *Coppermine*, *Riel* and *Borderlands* counter the singular narrative of a monolithic history with their multiple provisional narratives. These attempts to evoke naturalized notions of reality, codes their texts as unmediated reality as well as writes history's many alternatives.

The strategy of using multiple narrators, although seemingly not a historiographical device (although it is spiritually present in the plethora of different readings of a 'single' event that I examine above), is historiographic metafiction's attempt to mimic historical veracity. This use of multiple voices is a strategy which codes the

contingent reality of the text as 'real' by textualizing story's inherent multiple nature. Received as though it were lived experience, those multiple versions of events encourage the reader's active participation in the construction and interpretation of a historical event. These texts position the reader/historian as a judge of the historical debris that makes up the raw material of the received historical account. And, as in all of these constructions of a narrator(s), the reader is asked to compare and question both the literary or fictional and historical or factual account in terms of the ideological impact of its strategies.

This movement is perhaps best seen in the provisional narrative that Johnston's *Colony of Unrequited Dreams* offers of Joey Smallwood's life. By combining a first-person narrator (Joey Smallwood presenting his own story) with the voice of Smallwood's life-long friend (Fielding) in order to narrate a version of Newfoundland's confederation, Johnston offers a version which is both internally contradictory and runs counter to the official record. Johnston's text is constructed by interspersing Fielding's narrative with Smallwood's own idiosyncratic—although in many ways standard—autobiography. The combination of the historical Smallwood mixed with Fielding's journal/memoir/biography makes for a text which offers two central versions of this particular historical time. Fielding's tale (which Smallwood wishes to be his biography) is more ambitious in scope than Smallwood's. Her text attempts—like Johnston's—to write a history of Newfoundland. This history, which begins with "[t]he earth's crust cools,"¹⁸² contains

¹⁸² This is an intertextual nod to such texts as Wells' *A Short History of the World*, which begin with an evocation of geological time.

unverifiable reports which undermine the reader's trust in her version, however (Johnston 67).

The reader remains sceptical of reports such as that of John Guy (1610), who “wakes up screaming in the middle of the night, refusing to go back to sleep until his wife assures him he no longer lives in Newfoundland” (Johnston 67). These suspicions are far from being allayed by the text's claim that Fielding's highly anachronistic and largely apocryphal history interprets many historical events without “bolstering [her argument] by numbers, photographs, footnotes or illustrations” (18). As this example suggests, Fielding's historical record is concerned with personal motivations which are difficult to determine. Unlike the official account, Fielding claims that Smallwood was largely inspired by a wish to compete with Prowse younger and that Newfoundland's historic events were largely driven by such personal narratives. Indeed, both Fielding and Smallwood attempt to explain historical events in terms of conflicting personal/emotional influences which the official record does not reveal. Fielding's love for Smallwood and Smallwood's obsession with uncovering the source of the letter which caused him to be expelled from school, are both narratives which—by their idiosyncratic and personal nature—cannot enter the public record.

For example, under this type of interpretation, Smallwood's international business meetings become “pedalling” sessions:

They are a lively, fun-loving pair who betimes will wile away hours playing “pedals,” a Latvian children's game in which two participants lying flat on their backs at opposite ends of the bed, with their hands behind their heads, place the soles of their bare feet together and “pedal” each other like bicycles, the object of the game being to pedal one's opponent off the bed, though my premier and the Latvian are so evenly matched that neither can

budge the other and they pedal themselves into a state of mutual exhaustion, then fall asleep. (Johnston 515)

The tenderness of this scene is made more than humorous by the status of those involved. Likewise, under Fielding's journalistic account, the chase of Sir Richard by disgruntled members of an anti-government march is written as a carnivalistic instance of the "Nones":

"Everyone chases the Nones, shouting at him all manner of abuse, calling him names and even threatening of murder him. On the night of the Nones, once the chase is over, a kind of anarchy prevails throughout the settlement, with citizens wandering the road and setting one another on to acts of mischief, while consuming great quantities of liquor. It is a strange custom and a strange spectacle to witness." (Johnston 327)

Although Fielding and Smallwood's dual narrative does not exhaust the possibilities of the postmodern multiple narration, it provides an example of how a postmodern text may sufficiently confuse—through use of more than one provisional voice—the reader's interpretation of the historical record.

Wiebe orchestrates his writing of the prairie native and Canadian history in *The Temptations of Big Bear* through an account which also includes a "multiplicity of fragmented narratives" (Lecker 347). Wiebe's "meditation on the past" rejects the coherence that the omniscient narrator offers Dempsey's more traditional historiography, *Big Bear* (Wiebe, "Translating Life" 129). Wiebe instead uses the multiple voices of Big Bear—a native from the 'real' historical record—as well as court records, diary-type entries, long passages of over-determined prose, and beautiful semblances of oral speech's fluidity on paper. Wiebe incorporates this material in order to evoke, from beneath "the giant slag heap left by the heroic white history of fur trader and police and homesteader and rancher and railroad

builder,” the Canadian historical moment which is the white colonization of the plains (Wiebe, “Translating Life” 134).

Like Bowering’s account of western Canadian exploration, Wiebe’s “orchestration of voices and perspectives”¹⁸³ relies upon and even faithfully follows the court records of Big Bear’s trial (Grace 149). As well, Wiebe uses other transcripts of public record: “The courtroom scene . . . is taken straight out of the actual report except for details, shaping and cutting things out” (Wiebe, “Translating Life” 129). In fact, the voices of Wiebe’s text are not just limited by the novel’s reporting of the historical moment. Wiebe’s narration includes “compositionally marked dialogues between the characters, the implicit dialogues between narratorial voices, the dialogue between the text and its reader, the dialogue between the author and the narrating characters, and the novel’s dialogue with other texts and discourses sounding the wider Canadian cultural arena” (van Toorn 99-100). These textual inclusions perform a specific ideological purpose:

In addition to these anonymous narrators exists a cast of about eight private or individual voices, each of which, except in the case of Big Bear, represents a strictly White point of view. A religious outlook characterizes the voice of the missionary, John McDougall; politics has its say in the person of the Indian Affairs Commissioner, Edgar Dewdney; and the military point of view is presented by the Canadian volunteer. The rest of the chorus is made up of such as Robert Jefferson, the farm instructor, Mrs. Delaney and George Stanley, both settlers, and Big Bear himself.

¹⁸³ “*The Temptations of Big Bear* is Big Bear’s Story in that it centers on this “small-sized weazen-faced chap, with a cunning restless look,” but it is controlled by an impersonal third-person voice that presents the point of view and frequently the stream of consciousness of people as different in attitudes and experience as “The Honourable Alexander Morris, P.C., Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, the North West Territories and Keewatin”; John Delaney, farming instructor at Frog Lake; Kitty McLean, daughter of the Hudson’s Bay Company factor, taken captive at Fort Pitt; the compliant Chief Sweetgrass of the Wood Cree, who has signed a treaty; and Big Bear himself” (Grace 149).

Each narrative voice is true to the characters from whom it issues, and the most outstanding example of this occurs in the journals of Kitty McLean. (Whaley 142-3)¹⁸⁴

By using a “journalist—though at times a fairly unreliable one in his documentation of facts—and the artist revealing the private truth behind the public event,” Wiebe attempts to “lend the story a psychological realism which is more authentic than any social realism could be” (Whaley 134):

. . . the truth, Wiebe contends, must lie somewhere between private consciousness and public declaration. Several levels of narrative inform these two visions, and the success of each voice is in turn dependent upon the quality of language in which it is spoken. Wiebe is concerned with wringing a sense of the past from the essence of those facts which have shaped it. (Ibid.)

In Wiebe’s text, “the private truth behind the public event” which is exposed by this technique encourages the reader to compare the clashing discourses of the white and the native. He evokes Government documents so that the reader may compare Big Bear’s “biblical cadences, the simplicity and clarity of his speeches” to “the aridity and callousness of the white historical documents, so profusely integrated into the narrative” (Schäfer 82-3). Wiebe’s interpolation of these documents—which, because italicized, are coded as narrative intrusions—operates in the text as “menacing reminders for the Indian [as well as the reader] that their time of buffalo hunting is limited” (Whaley 142):

NOW THIS INSTRUMENT WITNESSETH, that the said “Big Bear,” for himself and on behalf of the Band which he represents, does transfer, surrender and relinquish to Her Majesty the Queen. Her heirs and successors, to and for the use of Her Government of the Dominion of

¹⁸⁴ As well, “Big Bear’s sojourn in prison is told through pastiche, by juxtaposing three newspaper clippings from *The Globe* (December 9, 1885), *The Saskatchewan Herald* (January 11, 1886), and *The Toronto Mail* (February 27, 1886)” (Morley 104).

Canada, all his right, title and interest whatsoever, which he has held or enjoyed . . .” (Temptations 132)

The “increasingly inhuman” prose of White discourse, which is responsible for the vehicular nature of the White Man’s Law, underscores the violent nature of white/native interaction (Lecker 341). Wiebe uses this diction which informs “the essence of the Victorian success story in Canada: *empty land, stock business, progress,*” to highlight the dissimilarity of the “diffident yet eloquent simplicity and a visionary, metaphoric quality that manages to combine mystery with lucidity” that marks Big Bear’s speeches (Schäfer 84 and Keith 71).

Although Wiebe’s narrator does venture opinions, the purpose of Wiebe’s juxtaposition is not to valorize one view at the expense of another. Instead, Wiebe wishes to offer both versions in order that the intentions of each voice may contextualize themselves. Wiebe juxtaposes Big Bear’s “prose style that is rich in cumulative, circling sentences and unusual, complex metaphors drawn from nature” to encourage its comparison with white discourse (Grace 151). Wiebe intends that the reader will conclude through his/her inevitable comparison that “the official records tell only one side of the story—they are invariably white records compiled for white purpose and intended for white readers” (Keith 67).

Perhaps the most vivid rendering of this strategy is an incident early in the text which exposes the white intentions as well as presents the clash of the two opposing discourses:

Big Bear: “Councillor?”

Governor Morris: “Yes. I am her Head Councillor.”

Big Bear: “The Queen speaks to us?”

Governor Morris: "Yes. You have heard her voice, whom God bless and preserve long to reign over us."

There was a momentary silence.

Big Bear: "The White Queen is—a woman."

The last English syllable vanished as in a deep underground rumble that burst into immense laughter bouncing from person to person until the hillside was rocketing with sound. Even the inner circle of chiefs grinned. . . . The Governor swung about to Erasmus, his voice shivering,

"Tell that—that—I didn't come here to have my Sovereign Queen insulted by some bigmouth savage. Either they stop immediately or—

"My friend," he [Sweetgrass] said in his soft clear voice to Big Bear, "this is the one who speaks for the Queen. She is the Grandmother. . . . We have accepted his hand, and we wear her red coats." (*Temptations* 21-2)

As this humorous example suggests, Wiebe's attempt to rescue the "genuine voices of those people" from "the vacuum called history" is best expressed a comparison between the two discourses voices (Wiebe, "On the Trail" 134 and "Where the Voice" 153). This dissociated stance allows the narrator to seem to represent rather than mediate a reality. This tactic manages to avoid an impression of polemic sermonizing: "the moral teaching certainly relates to man [humanity], but the precise comment on justice is not stated. The mind must infer it" (Wiebe, *The Story-Makers* xix).

Implicit in this example as well—and it is one of the driving forces behind Wiebe's work—is the suggestion that such texts must have a moral imperative. He argues that a textual writing of the past "can never be simply an impartial recounting, but must be a blend of documentary presentation and subjective creation as well" (Lecker 335). For Whaley, this "certain moral dimension" with which the novel's "multi-levelled" narrative voice embellishes historical facts with opinion, creates a situation in which "we are never permitted to forget that the narrator is also human; he [she] frequently allows himself [herself] to judge events" ("Narrative Voices" 136).

A comparison of Wiebe's didactic and seemingly mercenary technique with the prose of Cameron's ostensibly honest first-person/omniscient account reveals the suspect nature of the typical literary alternative. In *The War Trail of Big Bear*, Cameron—who is a survivor of the Frog Lake conflict and was imprisoned by Big Bear for two months—tells the story of “the savage author of [Frog Lake's] desolation” (10). This “red man whose home this wilderness was” arises “with his fierce blood galloping in his ears” (Ibid.). Cameron's exaggerated prose is not only a product of his time but is also emblematic of western culture's writing of the white/native interaction.¹⁸⁵ Since it is coded as a ‘true’ account of his own personal history, his prose also rhetorically discourages the reader from questioning its veracity.

For his own part, Wiebe does not attempt to hide his text's didactic nature: “my book is my way of looking at the world, and that's why I call it a novel and I don't pretend that it's a history which is written impartially. It's written in a very biased way. (Wiebe, “Where the Voice” 152). Even though critics such as Craig would argue that Wiebe “bends over backwards to show the Indians in a better light than the whites, a didactic exaggeration that mirrors his sympathy for the Indians and shows his strong desire to highlight the racial conflict,” they also grudgingly admit that the ethical points of Wiebe's text are driven home by way of his rhetorical device (Craig 133):

The whites are contemptuous of the Indians in such a way that the reader turns their contempt back on them. They are aggressively lying to gain land. Their speech alone is dishonest, vulgar, and bluntly awkward,

¹⁸⁵ Cameron's rhetoric simultaneously bespeaks particular value systems which his text cannot, by way of its technique, foreground.

compared to the direct statements of the Indians, expressed with dignity and accompanied by natural metaphors. (Ibid.)

Wiebe's text relies upon the reader to make sense of the historical event and affirms that

these (seeming) documents placed side-by-side allow the reader to make various personal interpretations. And this of course makes for difficult reading. Many readers find the book difficult because they must participate so much in the reading, to bring so much of their own understanding to it. (Wiebe, "On Looking at Our Particular World" 7)

One of the ways in which Wiebe has chosen to express his "biased" narrative is by valorizing Big Bear's voice. If we are not convinced by the text's implicit comparison between white and native discourse (for there is indeed an argument behind Wiebe's text), the sheer textual space given Big Bear far outweighs that spent on any other character. Big Bear's presence is principally expressed by "the enormous, strange depths of that incomprehensible voice"—the rhythms of which recall the Christian bible—which is a "structure to Wiebe's fiction more determining than the sequence of historical events" (*Temptations* 19 and Moss, *Sex and Violence* 262):

Big Bear spoke more deliberately than ever, his voice as loud. The buffalo robe built him huge against the sun.
 "Yes, you wear her red coats. And you have given your hand. . . . I throw back no man's hand, but I say I am fed by the Mother Earth. . . ."
 Big Bear's voice was a tremendous cry echoing over the valley, and again with the interpreter; as if again and again in any language the words of themselves would refuse to stop sounding. (*Temptations* 22-3)

Moreover, the precedence that Wiebe gives Big Bear's voice has a particular didactic purpose. The reader of Wiebe's text is called upon to act as a jury, and thus evaluate the historical evidence, thus mimicking the text's jury, which convicts Big Bear:

Readers of Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* are left to pull together the various and fragmentary points of view we have been offered

and, like the jury at the end of the novel, we (also at the end of the novel) must make an evaluation and interpretation of all we have been told. (Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* 65)

The court records that Wiebe's text delivers, written in the alienating white discourse that Wiebe chooses to insert—because they are juxtaposed with Wiebe's other textual voices—inevitably lead the reader to a judgement. His strategy is presented as a form of realism which offers multiple accounts and yet, because of his rhetorical positioning of the white, valorizes a particular view:

the inordinate lust of the white for land is very gravely revealed in their own speech. Where one White man assures Big Bear that “We are not coming to buy the whole country, we came here to make certain it is kept for you” (p. 199), another, in the guise of the Court, announces: “This land never belonged to you. The land was and is the Queen's. She has allowed you to use it” (p. 399). True to his bureaucratic self, the White Man has betrayed his weakness to the Indian, ironically through mismanagement of his words. (Whaley 145)

Wiebe's use of multiple narrators, stream of consciousness, juxtaposition of styles and story lines are narrative strategies which expose their own writtenness. As well, both his deliberate selection and exclusion of detail and the fragmentariness of his historiographical project do more to encourage the reader's politicizing of text than the historical desire for coherence of Dempsey's objective account. Wiebe ultimate “surrender[] to the temptation [of] the possibility of meaning” creates a reader-controlled meaning, in which the reader of *The Temptations of Big Bear* must choose from the multiple representations the historical version that which most appeals to him/her (Kroetsch, “Unearthing” 233). This circumstance places the political onus ultimately upon the reader as well as undermines traditional notions of historical objectivity.

Although stabilized by an overarching omniscient narrator, Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* writes multiple versions of history by portraying the many hidden, and largely immigrant,

voices which lie behind the faceless construction of Toronto's great works. His narrative traces a character named Patrick Lewis, who gives voice to the workers about whom "there was no record kept" and who participated in the construction of the city Waterworks (*Skin* 236). When he is investigating the public record in a city library, Patrick gradually becomes aware that "the configurations of public history" define "those who worked on the monuments of public history [as] the anonymous" (Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* 99): "We know of the rich Ambrose Small and the powerful R.C. Harris, the city commissioner, but history has not necessarily recorded the names of . . . the anonymous workers who built the structures commissioned by Harris" (Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* 94). Betraying Marxist concerns with economic inequality, Ondaatje uses the ethnic diversity of his characters and the unhistorical (in the sense that they hold manual labourer positions which are not recorded by traditional historiography) nature of their professions/societal positions to question the dominant writing of Canada's multilingual and multi-ethnic diversity. Ondaatje gives voice to the silenced participants of history by presenting the tales of characters (such as the nameless Finn Skaters, Alice, Caravaggio, and Nicholas Temelcoff) who are marginal ethnically, legally, socially, and linguistically.

Although ostensibly Ondaatje's work is at least partially about giving a voice to the dispossessed,¹⁸⁶ certain thematic predilections prevent his text from accomplishing his goal. He destabilises traditional historiography by relating a voice "from the viewpoint of the . . .

¹⁸⁶ "Immigrant workers in *In the Skin of a Lion*, for example, perform illegal, agit-prop drama that allegorically mimes their own essential powerlessness resulting from their silence, from their inability to articulate injustice, to speak out effectively with their own voice against official ideology" (Bök 120).

dominated, minority groups,” and knows that “whoever controls discourse, controls official truth” (Vauthier 105 and Bök 120). Ondaatje’s focus upon the humanist value of art, however—which we also see in *Collected Works of Billy the Kid*—which allies all (in both of these cases) men, makes his novel a cohesive and disturbingly parochial paean to a societal status quo. All the male artists of the novel, Caravaggio, Patrick, the Finn Skaters, and even Harris, share this creative ambition. Although he may be speaking out of his own concerns—“I certainly don’t feel any kind of duty to society as an ‘artist’ as all”¹⁸⁷—Ondaatje undermines his opportunity in this “so-called ethnic novel” to write about the politically marginalized (Ondaatje in Bök 112 and Vauthier 105). Instead of working against the stable notion of a Canadian ethnic identity, Ondaatje’s focuses—by the stability of his narrator’s voice and the similarity of his character’s creative concerns—upon the artist.

Sweatman’s *Fox* similarly uses multiple voices to tell the tale of the Winnipeg strike. She confines the major parts of her tale to the first-person narrative of Eleanor and MacDougal—and spends part of the text relating a traditional love story written partially through obtrusive and inventive poetic intrusion. Sweatman’s attempt to include the many voices of the people involved in the Winnipeg general strike (1919) allows her narration to switch between differing, and by times, antithetical points of view. Sweatman’s strike—like Ondaatje’s Toronto—becomes the story of the immigrant (who is written as “anyone with a zed in his name”) and the dispossessed, juxtaposed with that of the rich (Sweatman 192). Like Ondaatje’s *Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, Sweatman also—in order to evoke a discursive richness—includes multiple documents. A conciliatory letter from the

¹⁸⁷ “I avoid reading books on . . . politics” (Ondaatje in Bök 112).

president of Eaton's, Strike committee broadsides, the mercenary advertisements of insurance companies hoping to capitalize on the strike's mayhem, food budgets, list of police weaponry, and excerpts from diaries combine with the first-person narration of more than fifteen different people. This potentially confusing multiplicity does become an effective evocation of a historical moment, however. Sweatman's text gives voice to Winnipeg's multiplicity by incorporating diary entries, strike slogans, along with sections of italicized prose—which like that of Wiebe's *Temptations*—signify narratorial intrusion. Through this multiplicity of discourses (poetic, mythic, bureaucratic and rhetoric), she evokes the dispossessed “band of Bolshevik spellbinders, a dangerous crowd of illiterate foreigners,” as well as the historical time (Sweatman 33). Furthermore—like Ondaatje's portrait of Harris—Sweatman's *Fox* also offers, without devaluing the concerns of the poor, a sympathetic image of the wealthy people who are also affected by this crisis.

One of the effects of Sweatman's multiple voices, however—and this is not lessened by the possible coherence offered by the death of a male striker, Stevie, at the end of the novel—is that it lacks cohesion. Although her textual material is tied to a particular historical event, without Ondaatje's modernist concern with artistry and Wiebe's moralistic re-visioning of the past, Sweatman's egalitarian determination to present all views equally results in a novel which is a vivid reminder of contemporaneous media. It becomes a multitude of stories which have an equal—which is to say, little—impact upon their readers.

By valourizing the multiplicity inherent in both the inevitably idiosyncratic poetic/lyric voice as well as signification's intrinsic instability, contemporary poetic

discourse also disrupts history's singular 'truth' by writing the multiple historical narrative: "Through its incorporation of other texts, other perspectives, other voices, the documentary long poem moves to drown out the singular represented subject in a chorus of voices" (Godard 315). This challenge to singular history undermines traditional historiography's unconvincing claim of objective representation and enables the construction of alternative versions:

"I want to read 'documentary' not simply as a term of reference that may be used unequivocally to categorize and label literary works, but as itself situated at the intersection of the various voices/texts that have been drawn into discussion on the very issue of reference . . ." (Godard 5)

Gutteridge's multiple voice strategy, which he employs in *Riel, A Poem for Voices*, *Coppermine*, and *Borderlands*, both subtly relies upon a continuous narrator who relates a historical circumstance and makes the use of his/her voice uncertain. Gutteridge's clearly delineated voices and objective history's singularity paradoxically install an impossibly diverse storyteller who relates many exclusive points of view. Although Gutteridge's *Riel: A Poem for Voices* foregrounds its incorporation of voices by giving references for its use of other textual sources, it is *Borderlands* and *Coppermine* which especially use a multiple voice structure to relate their version(s) history. *Borderlands* even begins, like a play, with a list of the "cast, who have made their way, almost at random, into the drama" and is told through the voices of eight different narrators (*Borderlands* Preface). Likewise, *Coppermine* situates its voices by brief italicized introductions to each poem. The prefatory remarks which position *Borderlands'* cast makes the reader aware that *Borderlands* is mediated by some authorial force. The italicized expositional prose which

parodies *Coppermine's*¹⁸⁸ historical objectivity, situates the historical surround of Gutteridge's heavily researched¹⁸⁹ historical account as well as calls attention to historical referencing.

By use of these techniques, Gutteridge betrays his ideological commitment to a cacophony whose many vantages and interests cannot be represented by traditional historiography's singularity: "Through its incorporation of other text, other perspectives, other voices, the documentary long poem moves to drown out the singular represented subject in a chorus of voices." (Godard in Jones 11). Undermining the hold that dominant discourse has upon historical representation, this polyphonic voice "counters the notion of a monologic 'formal voice' both by offering a multiplicity of alternative discourses, and by drawing out alternate readings of official texts" (Ibid. 69).

Like Wiebe's project in *Big Bear*, Gutteridge does not limit his narration to just white voices, but rather attempts to give more than one side of the story of the explorer's landing. This encourages the reader—as if an observer of the event—to judge the fitness of the people's actions. The reader is encouraged to make this choice—again like in Wiebe's *Temptations*—on the basis of language. Gutteridge's "uses history as a point of departure" in order to expose the impossibility of historical coherence in *Borderlands* (Garebian 31). He confronts the evaluative nature of his plain descriptions (which are

¹⁸⁸ "Further sufferings on the Barrens. Mr. Hearne observes many cruel customs on the part of the Indians" (*Coppermine* unnumbered). Mr. Hearne recalls his first two journeys in search of *Coppermine*—each of which ended in abrupt failure" (*Coppermine* unnumbered).

¹⁸⁹ "In retrospect, it is clear that my use of excerpts retrieved from the archives of the period I was exploring was compulsive" (Gutteridge, "Old Photographs" 254).

written as the journals of the different white voices) with—like Wiebe—the poetic nature of the native, Maquina. *Borderlands*' attempt to tell Maquina's "story—and the places, real or imagined, that he inhabited"—"develops a dialectic out of two contrasted ways of life" by contrasting the "eloquent" Maquina's narration with Jewitt's "strong clipped . . . diction" (*Borderlands* Preface and Garebian 36). This "clipped" diction is far from harmless, however, for it records the whites giggling "as the / little pudding of their / brains dribbled out, / we took turns pissing / on their last smiles" (*Borderlands*). Likewise, *Coppermine*'s deliberately political juxtaposition of prose styles demonstrates to the reader the qualitative difference between Matonabee's mythic poetic diction and Hearne's vehicular and alienating prose. The reader accustomed to rely upon the implicit reading assumptions of historical discourse must struggle to make a coherent narrative from the mutually exclusive voices which refuse to coalesce into historical singularity.

The multiple narrative which is liberated by historiographic metafiction's multivocal voice foregrounds the ideological implications behind truth production and political practice by working against the monolithic history taught in the established education system. Undermining the hold that dominant discourses have upon historical representation, this polyphonic voice compares its alternative reading(s) of history to the official version offered by the politically sanctioned document. Likewise, as a discussion which theorizes about a repressed or ignored history, the historiographic metafiction which foreground their awareness of the arbitrary nature of their narrative choice through use of a problematic omniscient, are a presentation of history as "slanted, being a deliberate appraisal, affirmation, or negation" (Foucault in Bogue 161). Viewing history as

a series of luminous moments, like Vonnegut's Tralfamadorians,¹⁹⁰ these historiographic metafiction self-reflexively write as much about the process of historical construction, and the exposure of the motivations and agenda of those that would construct, as they do about the historical narrative.

¹⁹⁰ *Slaughterhouse Five*.

**Chapter 6 ~ Politicizing Your History
or, The Lie They Told You was the Truth**

The researches of many commentators have already thrown much darkness on this subject, and it is probable that, if they continue, we shall soon know nothing at all about it. Mark Twain

The texts that I have examined throughout this project suggest that historiographic metafiction links its politicized questioning of text to a similar interrogation of contemporaneous culture. By their use of particular strategies, historiographic metafiction attempts to overturn the popular and unexamined notion that postmodernism is apolitical as well as try to recreate a self-reflexive history out of a forgotten¹⁹¹ or deliberately neglected past.

Some critical traditions attack historiographic metafiction on the grounds that the relativistic questioning of reality enacted by such postmodern structures somehow indicates an inherent lack of political responsibility. For instance, traditional historiography, some Marxist stances, as well as critics who work out of a notion of textual accuracy and veracity gained from New Criticism's limiting conceptualizations, may attack historiographic metafiction on the basis of its connection to its political surround. These critical formulations may claim that historiographic metafiction's problematizing of textual sources and playfulness with data and document undermine its link to the 'real' world. As well, these critics argue that postmodernism's self-reflexivity does not enable it to make a firm political statement, and that its textual chaos make it unreadable and incoherent enough that even the most whimsical of

¹⁹¹ . . . as Mandel and Kroetsch have both done in *Out of Place* and *Field Notes*, the recontextual goal can be to write out of the absence of documents—out of a 'wiped-out world, a town that isn't there anymore, . . . a community which isn't there anymore; . . . people who aren't there anymore'" (Davey, "Recontextualization" 134).

readers will eschew its tenuous claims. Although whether historiographic metafiction is a textual performance that brings about change is more within the scope of a sociological study, I would suggest that—as a grouping of texts—historiographic metafiction is intensely politically concerned/involved. Postmodern works

... contest art's right to claim to inscribe timeless universal values, and they do so by thematizing and even formally enacting the context-dependent nature of all values. They also challenge narrative singularity and unity in the name of multiplicity and disparity. (Hutcheon, "Postmodern Problematizing" 368)

To suggest that truth is a multiple construct is not to imply either political inaction or the relative equality of all truths, however. Far the opposite. A notion of a constructed reality interrogates both the created versions we now have in place and positions those truths as manipulated/informed, maintained and suppressed by particular power structures. Post-structuralist theory counters the reactionary argument that postmodernism has no allegiance to 'reality' by questioning the nature of the 'truth' to which the desperate empiricist so eagerly clings. For even though truth appears to be verifiable, stable and eternal to the empiricist, Post-structuralist thought would argue that it is a construct of a particular time, place and culture. Furthermore, if such certainty were taken to its logical conclusion, this same naturalized 'truth' can be seen to have informed—and therefore allowed—the Nazi/American eugenics programs, and thus inspired the Holocaust. More recently, these same notions were the foundation of the media's portrayal of the Gulf War. The unexamined empiricist premise of the existence of an unshakeable truth is a problematic ideological presumption loaded with inherent contradictions.

Countering the empiricist construction of historical truth by investigating its genealogy, such examinations as Foucault's on the creation of madness as a medical condition, and sexuality/gender as a fixed social construct, would ask that the nature of these assumptions be

questioned. Contemporary theorists of historiography—such as Mink, White, and La Capra—have turned these investigations to the writing of history. Beginning by examining the intersection of history and fiction, these theorists investigate their structuralist suspicion that historiography's representation of truth is dependent upon systematized ways of codifying otherwise contingent events:

What post-modern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past (“exertions of the shaping, ordering imagination”). In other words, the meaning and shape are not *in the events*, but *in the* systems which make those events into historical facts. This is not a “dishonest refuge from truth,” but an acknowledgment of the meaning-making function of human constructs. (Hutcheon, “Postmodern Problematizing” 367)

Textual concerns with linearity and cause and effect are evidence of certain assumptions about narrative, for the meaningless collection which is the contingent events of history are themselves incoherent. That historians use narrative—and this is the interest of theorists on both sides of the historiography/fiction fence¹⁹²—exposes a desire to fill the gaps of contingency with a process like Iser's notion of concretization. The reader, in this case the constructor of history, fills the historical unknown¹⁹³ with the dictates of narrative. The desire for cohesion and closure—which is a desire that is created by the narrative form—demands its own interpretation. For instance, the claim that the events of history should be interpreted, selected, and some of it discarded, is itself a politicized gesture.

¹⁹² White, La Capra, Collingwood, and Lukács.

¹⁹³ What McHale calls the “dark areas” (90). This is a construction which is dependent upon those aspects of the historical record that are unknown and hence unknowable, such as Nixon's inner feelings in Coover's *Public Burning* or Mauberly's ‘real’ story in Findley's *Famous Last Words*.

Historiographic metafiction works within the dominant forms/political structures in order to overturn—by questioning the twin discourses of history and fiction—the methods/notions of veracity and authority upon which these societal structures depend. By investigating what these two discourses have in common—and momentarily putting aside the comforting and naturalized Aristotelian pretence that history tells the truth and fiction lies—historiographic metafiction suggests that these discourses are ideologically closer than they might appear. Historiographic metafiction undermines these dominant empirical assumptions by imaginatively recovering the past through the use of specific literary and historiographical strategies. This postmodern genre uses the legitimizing strategies of historiography (the paratextual conventions: explanatory prefatory material, footnotes, and parenthetical referencing) and fiction (characterization, juxtaposition of prose styles, use of mythological material, and manipulation of narrators) in order to question the constructed difference between these two discourses:

. . . historiographic metafiction . . . refuses the view that only history has a truth-claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both are discourses (human constructs or signifying systems) and both derive their “truth” from that identity. (Hutcheon, “Postmodern Problematizing” 371)

Historiographic metafiction uses reference to conventional narrative as well as historical markers to deliberately install and undermine such structures as causal linkage, narrative continuity, cohesion, and closure. In fact, historiographic metafiction questions all such structures which owe their existence and pre-eminence in part to the prominence of formalist assumptions about text in the discourse of textual interpretation:

Although every historian knows that our knowledge of history must always remain incomplete, the prevailing form of the narrative creates “the illusion, and

wants to create it, that we are faced with a complete process of historical things, a finished chain of events, motives and purposes” . . . (Jauss 53)

Historiographic metafiction does not stop there, however. This postmodern genre undermines its installation of these legitimizing strategies by using metafictional and anachronistic reminders (such as foregrounding its use of multiple narratives), that the text is mediated by a provisional authorial voice whose ideological makeup is suspect. This self-reflexive aspect of metafictional writing calls attention to itself as a construct—and thereby all textual constructions—in order to avoid the empiricist pitfall (which Davey finds in Bowering’s writing of Vancouver) that a seemingly transparent truth might be sought for successfully:

Vancouver’s positivist understanding of language correlates with both his empiricism and his zeal for military combat. To him, the world is a stable inheritance manipulated by accurate maps, gunfire and diction. His homosexual affair with the Spanish captain Quadra, and his attraction to the luxuries of Quadra’s ship, are to him inexplicable signs and eventually help to drive him mad. The narrator’s reconstruction of Vancouver’s story, in which he invents his affair with Quadra and murder by Menzies, is presumably an imaginative reading of historical signs—an exemplary reading achievable because of his freedom from any fixed point of view. (*Reading* 119)

This self-reflexivity does not indicate that historiographic metafiction is not politically motivated, however. Historiographic metafiction’s attempt to imaginatively recover the past uses fiction’s/historiography’s plastic nature in order to write an alternative version(s) which revitalizes history’s relevance to the present. This revitalization is of the utmost necessity, for not only does the delivery of the historical past—through institutions such as the public school system—reflect the cultural hegemony with which it is surrounded, but also, as Barth argues, “the world at large” is not reading historiographical texts:

. . . would the world at large know aught of Agamemnon, or fierce Achilles, or crafty Odysseus, or the cuckold Menelaus, or that entire circus of strutting Greeks and Trojans, had not great Homer rendered 'em to verse? . . . And who's to tell them? Not the historian, for he ne'er so dev'lish accurate . . . yet nobody reads him but his fellow chroniclers and his students—the one from envy, t'other from necessity. (86)

The traditional historiography taught in the public school system—as Foucault's analysis would suggest—is deeply problematic. Operating as an effective example of a vested power interest's manipulation of historical truth, the public school's version of the past pretends to incorporate world history by outlining a western history (from the Greco-Roman civilizations to the present) which is mainly concerned with men and their battles. These versions get delivered to the students as the full account, and are not acknowledged to be heavily censored/interpreted.

For instance, my first year English students—who for the most part graduated from secondary institutions in Canada—did not know about the Beothuk and Tasman genocide that was enacted long before the word genocide itself became created (1946) and applied to Hitler's campaign against the Jews. Of the Japanese internment by Canadian authorities during the Second World War they were—for the most part—likewise ignorant. Even their knowledge of the Holocaust, helped along by such dubious sources—as Wiebe suggests in *Voice*¹⁹⁴—as television documentaries and graphic photographs in school texts, did not include a knowledge of the many groups who were also persecuted and killed by the nazi war machine. That the ovens also took homosexuals, Poles, Gypsies, political dissidents, the mentally handicapped

¹⁹⁴ “Of course, thanks to our education system, I had been deprived of this knowledge [knowledge of Big Bear's historical presence] when I was a child: we studied people with *history*—like Cromwell who removed a king's head, or Lincoln who freed slaves . . . (134).

and infirm, is a history that does not enter the high school curriculum. This extreme example represents the logical extension of the way power is played out in contemporary culture. The power structures positioned against these groups did not stop in 1945, but rather are preserved in social structures such as contemporary education. Arguably, public school history cannot include everything, but these exclusions, I would argue, are significant exclusions. The massacre of natives and other oppressed groups is not *accidentally* left out of the historical record. The conjunction of power and its subsequent influence over discourses that Foucault talks about works to suppress, or at best, merely forget these—what it would call—less important groups. Historiographic metafiction would demand—and a postmodern, politicized, and provisional truth would demand—that the story of these groups—even though it is buried so deeply the empiricist could not find in their carefully selected archive—must be told. And the option to tell a story without a record is for postmodern literature, a literary option.

Lest the valorization of a textualized entry into the past seem arbitrary, it is worthwhile to remember that the recovery of the past is always enacted by media sources, for history provides no other entrance into the past except through its texts. For historical events older than a few generations—even excusing the faultiness and bias of human memory—the pursuer of the past must look to the documentation of the time. But a disinterested searcher after historical ‘truth’ who examines *all* of these documents is a hypothetical structure which we endow with more time and verve than is reasonable. The mass of history’s passive observers are those that the historical text comes upon by accident. For them, history is many, and questionable, portrayals of events, such as Alex Haley’s depiction of the American slave trade in *Roots*.

This textual instance was the first time that America was exposed to the atrocities which underlay its early economic development. By showing blacks imprisoned, chained, raped, killed, mutilated, and in other ways degraded, this television event became *the* history of slavery for the American viewing audience. Before *Roots*, the filmic version of *Gone With the Wind* was the only widely popular attempt to depict the treatment of the American slave. But *Gone's* portrayal of affable, if incapable, *Negroes*, cheerfully working alongside their philanthropic owners, rationalized for the American public not only the events of the past, but also contemporaneous political inaction.

The temper of the political surround of the sixties did lead to one, if rather oblique, attempt in the public media to investigate slavery, however. The *Planet of the Apes* series tried to explore the implications of historical American slavery, but bound by the temper of its times, it could only write a metaphorical version. Attempting to create a psychic distance from America's contemporaneous racism—by making the slave-owners ruling apes and the slaves humans—this reading of history tried to probe the institutional dehumanization of oppressed peoples. This allegorical reading of history proved to be too much of a logical leap for the American viewing public, however, and instead of the desired result of universal human suffrage, it led merely to an incomprehensible and widespread fear of monkeys.

Perhaps the best recent example of a media event which tries to recover history is *Xena, the Warrior Princess*. Just as Stan Roger's popular songs, "Barrett's Privateers" and "Northwest Passage" write Canadian historical events into public consciousness and Wiebe's *Big Bear* gives presence to plains Natives, for an entire generation of young people—

sundered from the historical past by a lack of interest in its apparent drudgery—this television show will supply all that they will ever learn of the historical events of ancient Greece, Rome, and the beginning of Christianity. This show follows the adventures of Xena, a doughty warrior, and Gabrielle, her trusty sidekick, as they attempt to right social wrongs and protect the weak, all at the tip of a sword. Ostensibly set in ancient Greece, although its settings vary from show to show to cover almost a thousand years of history, this show portrays Xena—perhaps for cohesion’s sake—as the sole mover of historical events. For example, the Old Testament confrontation between David and Goliath was orchestrated by Xena so that David’s lawful Israelites could overcome the Philistines. Xena pointed out the tragic flaw of Giants, the weak forehead, and instructed David in the use of his chosen weapon, the sling. Likewise, the part that Xena plays in Caesar’s wars of conquest is that of instigator. It is his hatred of Xena and wish to overthrow her that inspires much of Caesar’s action.

By Xena’s presence, history is—in large part—rewritten by this show. The weighty bias of the male-dominated historical record is at one fell stroke invalidated by the importance of this forgotten figure in world events. No more invalid or artificial than any historical figure of the ancient period would seem to the teenage viewer, Xena is introduced upon the stage of ancient history and many of the male characters are—for those versed in such matters—rewritten so much as to be almost unrecognizable. For example, Xena’s confrontation with Ghengis Khan is resolved by her turning his entire army—who number in the thousands—into stone. This action both evokes and writes Khan’s legendary presence in history as well as ‘explains’—to those viewers who have

heard of them—the thousands of life-size and individualized terra-cotta sculptures found in the Mausoleum of the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty (221 B.C. – 206 B.C.).

Although ostensibly *Xena* does not offer a political version of the past, the series itself is a gesture which is unavoidably politicized. Since we always write in a context, and inevitably write from a position, historic awareness is always a concern of text. The reader cannot either read from the innocence of a position outside history, or escape their writtenness by absorbing or being assimilated into narrative forms of understanding. The implicit sexism which lies behind the directorial choice of Xena's tight and revealing costume, and the show's placement on Saturday afternoon which positions it as a children's series, are all decisions which affect its viewer.

As my analysis of historiographic metafiction examines, one of the foremost effects of rewriting history in such politically effective ways—by either drawing attention to how that writing gets controlled by particular voices or by using and thus foregrounding how specific literary strategies are internalized or naturalized—is the exposure of the arbitrary and artificial nature of these constructions. Exposing the historical text as construct is to problematize the truth value to which an empirically informed history clings, and opens historiography's artificially constrained nature to alternative readings.

Although historiographic metafiction's alternative readings take many forms, perhaps the most politically efficacious ones are those that would recover a history which has been deliberately forgotten for specific hegemonic reasons. Many of these attempts work at recovering the importance of women in history (such as Coetzee's *Foe*, Swan's *Biggest Modern Woman in the World* and Marlatt's *Ana Historic*). Other texts, such as Kingston's

China Men, Kogawa's *Obasan*, Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Llosa's *The War of the End of the World*, Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *Scorched-Wood People* recover the history of a particular ethnic group which has been marginalized by dominant readings of history. Still other texts tell a story which political/media events of the time have obscured. Coover's *Public Burning*, Doctorow's *Book Of Daniel*, for instance, tell the tale of the Rosenberg trial. The effect of recovering these historical events is to create a history. And this telling of the untold story/creation of history makes versions of historical events the history for an entire generation of people who do not read traditional history.

This attempt to overturn traditional history is enacted—as I have suggested above—in a series of ways. By focusing upon the eccentric or marginalized figures in the historical record, texts such as Winterson's *The Passion* dissociate their vision from the dominant narrative paradigm by using eccentric characters to de-centre the narrative:

. . . fiction [and we might include film] has come increasingly come to assert the exceptional and hitherto marginal over and against the American or European default value of the WASP family, the bourgeois middle-class household. (Fludernik 94)

In *The Passion* both Henri and Villanelle's gender status is ambiguous, and Villanelle is supernaturally marked by webbed feet (a characteristic only possessed by boatmen). These magical characteristics—along with Patrick's telescopic eye, and Domino's former status as a circus midget—place us in the tradition of Bakhtin's de-centred

. . . spirit of carnival, that sort of outburst of exuberance where things are upended . . . subverted. . . They [carnivals] may be fictive, as in game or in literature, but at least while carnival takes place, it subverts the existing system; it is anti-repressive. (Wilson 35)

By being “hostile to all that was immortalized and completed,”¹⁹⁵ Winterson’s novel works against the totalizable narrative (Bakhtin in Kroetsch, *Treachery* 96). Winterson chooses to employ this Bakhtinian method in her subversion of the ‘completed’ story in order to parody the continuous narrative from within its own structure. Carnival is not just multiplicity, however, it is the dominant structure reversed. By reversing societal structure from within the framework of the novel, Winterson encourages our complicity in her subversion of cultural and textual myths. As well, Winterson calls attention to her problematization of traditional versions of reality.

Although many historiographic metafiction texts write the marginalized into existence, the most powerful of these becomes those—like Morante’s *History*—which also rewrite historiographical codes in an attempt to foreground the systematization of inequality. By referring to these textual codes—either by contextual placement, or by use of narrator—historiographic metafiction becomes a textual strategy which questions the means by which a story gets told, as well as, in Hutcheon’s words, “questions whose story gets told”:

What has surfaced is something different from the unitary, closed, evolutionary narratives of historiography as we have traditionally known it: as we have been seeing in historiographic metafiction as well, we now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few, and I might add, of women as well as men. (Hutcheon, *Politics* 66)

Not surprisingly, many instances of these historiographic metafictions enact this question of the marginalization by exploring the peripheral nature of non-white ethnic origin in white culture. These texts attempt to recover a forgotten history by focusing upon and

¹⁹⁵ This is especially evident in *The Passion*’s portrayal of Napoleon.

thereby creating the importance of a neglected people in the historical record. I have written above of Big Bear's presence in Canadian culture as due to Wiebe's writing, and certainly texts such as Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* speak to a growing concern in a culture that marginalizes over half of its population. These extreme examples serve to highlight historiographic metafiction's didactic purpose. Novels like Wiebe's *Big Bear* and *Scorched-Wood People* foreground and utilize traditional history's focus on war, victory,¹⁹⁶ and the central character—whose relation to reigning political and ethical values is suspect—in order to relate an officially silenced and ignored story. As I have said above, Big Bear did not exist (for more than a handful of people) in the Canadian consciousness until Wiebe wrote him there,¹⁹⁷ and established his reasoned eloquence into what white Canadians like to call their heritage. Wiebe writes Native oral culture's lack of written record in a seemingly contradictory fashion, however. Big Bear is written as voice and is valorized by the text while Riel embraces the necessity of written culture in order "to give his unwritten people a place on paper" (Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* 70). As well, Wiebe's use of the limited omniscient narrator (Pierre Falcon) is qualitatively different than his omniscient narrator of *Big Bear*. Despite these textual differences, Wiebe's obvious sympathy with the Métis/Native is felt in the sheer time his narrative spends upon their concerns.

Similarly, Kingston's *China Men* and Kogawa's *Obasan* write an alternative version of Canadian history which includes the presence of the Chinese and the Japanese. *China Men's*

¹⁹⁶ The cliché that history is written by the victorious betrays public acknowledgment of political practice.

¹⁹⁷ Substantiated by the CBC, *The Temptations of Big Bear* is now being favoured with a mini-series.

multiple narrative structure counters the singular nature of the official record—evident in texts such as Pierre Berton's *The Last Spike*—by focusing upon the Chinese workers who were actually responsible for building the railroad. *Obasan* similarly uses a problematized first-person narrator to write of the Japanese internment by the Canadian Government. These alternative versions avoid the pitfall of traditional history. They incorporate instead self-reflexive and self-examining narrative strategies which question both their historicizing urge and official history's static record. Like Morante's writing of vehicular historiography, Wiebe's incorporation of both 'real' and constructed court records in *Big Bear*, Kingston's multiple narrative, and Coover's incorporation of Eisenhower's presidential speeches into a poem about the "Sons of Light and Darkness," all work to overturn, albeit in radically different ways, a notion of an unquestionably verifiable history.

As Hutcheon suggests in *Politics*, the "histories . . . of women as well as men" are also included in historiographic metafiction's intentional subversion/rewriting of the official record (66). Acting out of an understanding of an institutionalized gender inequality, either in economic terms (see for instance the 63.8 cents a woman makes for every dollar made by a man)¹⁹⁸ or linguistically,¹⁹⁹ feminist oriented historiographic metafiction attempts to recover the position of women in culture.

¹⁹⁸ See Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 13-217-XIB: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/Labour/labor01a.htm>

¹⁹⁹ For example, when Fowles quotes Marx in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, he must clean up the quote in order to reflect more than one gender: "as Marx defined it—the actions of men (and of women) in pursuit of their ends" (466). Even in my project, I have had to alter many of the works I have cited, by inserting a [her] after a him, in order insert the presence of women into dominant critical discourse.

The lack of women in the official record is examined by Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and Marlatt's *Ana Historic*. Their exposure of the wilfulness of their narrator's historical selection of detail and events by self-reflexive statements about their narrator's truth value rewrites the notion of woman in western culture. Goto's narrator tells her history—some of it blatantly ridiculous and mythic²⁰⁰—while at the same time foregrounding her textual position in terms of historical truth: “this is a kind of truth,” “I’m making up the truth as I go along” (93 and 220). Marlatt's narrator informs the reader that she is mining the historical record for what she already knows she cannot find: the presence of women, and in particular Mrs. Richards (whom she calls Ana Historic). Marlatt foregrounds the minimal presence of women in official record in order to work against history's ideologically created silence. Citing the brief entrance of a woman into Vancouver's public record, Marlatt writes history's unsaid: “by 1873 she is there, named in the pages of history as ‘Mrs. Richards, a young and pretty widow’ who fills the suddenly vacated post of school teacher” (*Ana Historic* 21). Deliberately foregrounding *Mrs. Richards'* lack of name—as well as definitions of self by other—Marlatt's text does not attempt to examine official documents in order to construct a past, however. Instead, by self-consciously creating both name and life for this “unsung” woman, Marlatt's text reveals the absence which is woman in traditional historiography.

The similarity of the narrator's construction of Ana to herself—and the self-exposing paucity of the public record—foreground for the reader the narrator's vested interest in their created historical discourse. In fact, the narrator's self-interest resembles

²⁰⁰ Such as *Grandma's becoming the Purple Mask*, and telling Japanese folk tales while simultaneously and deliberately changing them.

the action of the ego psychology which informs the literary readings of Norman Holland, who conjectured that the reader finds in the text the match of his/her identity theme.²⁰¹ This identity equal cannot be found in the historical record, however—either for women or ethnic minorities—and therefore must be created. To create such an identity is both to foreground the questionable nature of identity creation as well as—in the particular instance Kroetsch's *Badlands*—the similarity of both Ana's story.

Cases such as these seem to expose themselves to charges of historical irresponsibility. For instance, in *Midnight's Children* Rushdie's writes that the purges in India were the result of Indira Ghandi's wish to excise the magical gifts of the midnight children. Such a wilful and frivolous rewriting seems to make light of what was a dark period in Indian history as well as takes the risk that those on the far right²⁰² and left²⁰³ will argue that Rushdie is using tragedy for personal gain rather than admitting a political 'truth'. Like the inherent political quality the sombre verities which underlie traditional historiography possess, Rushdie's "retrieval of subaltern consciousness" has a particular didactic purpose, however:

The two facets of Rushdie's rewriting of history—the recuperation of marginalized histories and the problematization of the position of the historian-narrator—have been identified by Gyan Prakesh as essential to the recent challenge set to Indian historiography by the *Subaltern Studies* project—although what I have been calling "recuperation," Prakesh prefers to think of as "retrieval." The retrieval of subaltern consciousness has involved the uncovering of "myths, cults, ideologies and revolts" which colonial and nationalist elites sought to appropriate and which "defy the

²⁰¹ ". . . all readers create from the fantasy seemingly in the work fantasies to suit their several character structures. Each reader, in effect, re-creates the work in terms of his [her] identity theme . . . he [she] shapes it so it will pass through the network of his [her] adaptive and defensive strategies for coping with the world . . . and re-creates from it the particular kind of fantasy and gratification he [she] responds to" (Holland 126).

²⁰² With a vested interest in a particular political stance.

²⁰³ For whom this might look like too much levity.

models of nationality and social action that conventional historiography uses" (9). (Mee 147)

Vonnegut's report of the Dresden firestorm (in *Slaughterhouse-Five*) as a luminous moment and its victims as dried grasshoppers, or Barth's writing of the Pocahontas myth, so dear to the American heart, as a case of colonial rape in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is a similar writing. These instances confuse those who believe history is constructed without an acknowledgment of source, selection, context, and the ideological interests which support one version of events. Foucault tells us in *Archaeology of Knowledge* that we cannot describe our own archive for we are implicated in it, and historiographic metafiction is a natural outgrowth of that understanding of the creation of historical knowledge. The much vaunted objectivity of traditional historiography hides the notion that facts are dumb without their 'objective' narrator who selects, constructs, and deletes those elements which will not benefit his/her construction of a harmoniously coherent narrative.

Overturing this ideologically suspect stance of history by replacing this objective voice speaking out of time with an individual located in a particular historical surround, historiographic metafiction uses narrative devices as a tool in order to make their ethical impact. In much the same way as Mandel's *Out of Place* uses the Romantic lyric 'I' in order to inscribe subjectivity into a theoretically objective historical discourse, historiographic metafiction uses the strategies of imagery and juxtaposition to affect the reader in ways that traditional history cannot. Traditional history cannot present the dust, starvation, and depravity of Llosa's war (*The War of the End of the World*) without relying on the personal narrative of a war-torn family like that in Morante's *History, a Novel*. Likewise, Ursell's incorporation of both world wars into one ongoing conflict effectively foreshortens history, and thus enables the

reader to draw a moral conclusion from the grand narrative which is his vision of human degradation²⁰⁴ spread out across centuries.

Findley splashes this degradation across the temporary walls of a soon-to-be deconstructed hotel by having his *Famous Last Words* operate as Mauberly's confessional. Moreover, with Quinn and Freyberg as audience, the reader is not only treated to a tale of the war's effect on the wealthy, but reads with Quinn's desire to exonerate Mauberly and his subsequent naiveté. This writings viscerally evokes Freyberg's vehemently anti-fascist-to-the-point-of-fascism fist in the reader's abdomen. Likewise, Freyberg's rejection of a history which he has not actually seen, enacts the entire debate between historiography's veracity and fiction's lies²⁰⁵ as a politicized and visceral punch to the stomach and its subsequent denial.

As these examples indicate—politicized both by their awareness of history and historical construction as well as its inescapable didactic conclusions—texts such as Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*, Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, and Wiebe's *Big Bear* hail the reader into a subject position from which political apathy seems untenable. By performing such recuperative historical actions, historiographic metafiction rejects the traditional dislocation of text with the world. This is done by engaging the text with its political surround. Since deliberately rejecting—or even more insidiously, accidentally and myopically ignoring—the history of the marginalized allows dominant cultural practice to remain in power, the implied political mandate of historiographic metafiction is subversion of dominant hegemony. Like Atwood's academics in *The Handmaid's Tale*, to insist on possession of the truth is to choose

²⁰⁴ Interestingly, this presentation of a complete record, if this is how we think of Ursell's project, is performed by traditional history's plethora of "objective" accounts.

²⁰⁵ A debate which recalls Aristotle's oft quoted statement about poetry and history.

deliberately—as an inherent part of the project—to ignore how this truth simultaneously comforts and blinds its believer. Such stances encourage a theoretical position which would allow Atwood’s academics to pretend that the position of woman in Gilead has nothing to do with their culture. As Grace notes, however, Pieixoto’s “apparent abdication of judgment [is] an excuse completely unnecessary if all we are concerned with is the facts, and not judgment” (490). And this ideological stance contains an inherent contradiction: “One cannot excuse Gilead without at least implicitly judging it” (Ibid.).

Rather than attempting to confirm a more complete and didactic truth of both archive and story, historiographic metafiction’s lack of confirmation has ramifications for all truth construction by encouraging reader creation of an alternative history out of the *writerly* text. In their interpretative process, the reading subject of such metafictional texts is forced to invoke a structure like Nietzsche’s “Critical History”:

Critical History, history approached in an effort to pass judgment, provides a counter-balancing effect to that inspired by antiquarian history. By judging the past, those engaged in critical history remain attentive to flaws and failures in the experience of their culture, thereby avoiding slavish blindness in their appreciation of it. (Higgins 26)

Acting out of a suspicion that “Who controls the past . . . controls the future: who controls the present control the past,” historiographic metafiction argues that without this politicizing force, text becomes the library of Wells’ Palace of Green Porcelain—a rotting chapel of old flags—and without a political/ethical relevance to its audience and their concerns, text might as well be (Orwell, 1984 51). In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault claims that “[w]e are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power

except through the production of truth,” and this claim has come to be a watchword for historiographic metafiction and the anathema of positivist empiricism (93).

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