

WAITING FOR THE APOCALYPSE:
THE DESPAIR OF AESTHETICISM IN THREE NOVELS
BY TIMOTHY FINDLEY

BY

STUART C. SMITH

A thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English
University of Manitoba
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Abstract

Timothy Findley's novels show aesthetic influences that can be traced back through the works of Oscar Wilde to those of Walter Pater. Findley grounds his love of beauty in Paterian pictorial impressionism; however, unlike Pater, Findley can not accept the failure of the aesthetic attitude to transcend the savagery of life. "Waiting for the Apocalypse: The Despair of Aestheticism in Three Novels by Timothy Findley" explores how Findley attempts to stave off despair by disguising the failure of the aesthetic moment through the privileging of beauty over truth.

In The Wars, an unnamed narrator uses photographs to bring the aesthetic moment to life and so preserve the memory of a W.W.I soldier. This aesthetic attempt works when it is applied to art; however, it cannot succeed when applied to reality, for aestheticism fails when it cannot make "ugly" actions, such as murder, appear beautiful. This same lesson is learned by the aesthetes in Not Wanted on the Voyage. When the escape into pictorial impressionism fails to change the patriarchal society on board the ark, the aesthetes wish for the end of the world. Famous Last Words sums up the attempt to solve aestheticism's failure by making the aesthete's life "become" art--however, this decadent attempt fails, as did Oscar Wilde's, and reveals the despair behind the failure of the cult of beauty.

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Introduction

"The perfect book goes by in a moment in your brain. And then you ask yourself, 'How in the name of God do I make that happen on a piece of paper?'"

(Timothy Findley, speaking with David Macfarlane)

Timothy Findley often describes the conception of his stories coming to him in brief scenes much like movies or photographs. He has described these mental images as "mind movies" which "consist of 'a flow of images' running through the writer's mind" (York 54). His novel, The Wars, for example, came to him as the moving image of "a young man in a uniform, walking away from a military encampment" (Macfarlane 6). Because these "movies" flash through the mind, Findley claims that, as a writer, "Your eye and ear ... are always poised upon the moment" ("Alice" 13). Writing, for Findley, is an attempt to get these "mind movies" down on paper so that the moment will be preserved. Given the dramatic "scenes" in which Findley conceives his fiction, it is not surprising that his earliest successes came as a writer of both plays and television dramas for the CBC and that he feels that this experience has "enormously influenced his fiction" (York 53).

Findley's first novel, The Last of the Crazy People (1967), demonstrates that the "image" quality of his writing is not limited only to the genesis of his fiction. The straight-forward story of a young boy who shoots his family out of love has many features that will develop in the later

novels. Hooker Winslow, the "seeing eye" (York 62) through which the story unfolds, tries to make sense of life through "a series of impressions" (Rosengarten 79) that he gathers from the members of his family. The young boy is like a "spotless, sensitive recording plate" (York 62) that simply collects impressions. Through unrelated events, the disturbed boy mistakenly comes to believe that unexpected death can bring escape from pain. Hooker then kills his parents and aunt because he believes that death is "a type of suspended state of happiness--a comforting still-shot" (York 67). By shooting his parents, Hooker hopes to bring them the same kind of peace that he saw reflected in the people in the old photographs of the town. The people in the photographs were "balanced on the edge of eternity forever, smiling and poised and dead" (Crazy People 253) and so they "seemed contented, pleased" (Crazy People 255). By taking them "out" of life as the people were in the photographs, his parents would no longer feel the pain of living.

The Butterfly Plague (1969) continues Findley's concern with pictures--although in this novel, Findley concentrates on the effects of moving pictures. The novel, as Hulcoop has noted, is about "movie-making and the impact of the 'talking pictures' on people's private lives and political dreams" (Hulcoop 40). The border between art and reality is constantly challenged, for many of the characters are attempting to make "real" the glamorous image of "life" that

the Hollywood of the 1930s is presenting. The distance between the expectations that the film industry presents and the reality the characters face proves to be a destructive one. The search for perfection that the Hollywood "art" inspires leads to the murder of an aging film star, who is trying to preserve the image of her lost beauty through making a new film. As well, a young starlet slowly destroys herself when she cannot maintain the beauty of youth. Throughout the novel, the characters are unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy--Ruth Damarosch, for example, experiences a fire in Alvarez Canyon--an event at which, she is told later, she was not present. Findley does not really privilege reality over art in The Butterfly Plague, however. As he explained in an interview, Ruth Damarosch discovers that "believing is all that matters" (Gibson 145), for she sees how the people around her cope with life by making "unreality" work for them.

These early novels indicate Timothy Findley's growing concern with pictorial impressions, with the framing and freezing of moments, and with inevitable loss, despite the mediating power of art, through the passing of time and death. Of course, these concerns are also the common heritage of twentieth-century literature as it developed from imagism and, ultimately, from nineteenth-century aestheticism. As Brian Trehearne has noted, "The school to which Imagism may be so compared, and to which it provides a direct positive corrective, is literary Impressionism, a

manifestation of Aestheticism that fixes the poet's attention on moments of visual beauty or intensity in the transient impressions received from the surrounding world" (Trehearne 40). Other critics as well have recognized the "line of descent" from Aestheticism through to Imagism: "[Hugh] Kenner also relates the roots of Imagism to [Walter] Pater's doctrines, in which the moments of life are seized 'for those moment's sake,' not for their spiritual or doctrinal ramifications" (Trehearne 41).

Literary impressionism can best be defined by contrasting it with the later Imagism; although both movements emphasized the visual aspects of art, as well as the "submission to perception" (Trehearne 40), Imagist art concentrated on the static image, while Impressionist art, in general, was characterized by its "accession to the flux" (Trehearne 46). More specifically, Impressionism had an inherent contradiction in its aims: the aesthete, in one instance, joyfully experiences life as fleeting moments streaming by--while at the same time, he wants to freeze those moments of beauty that he experiences (Trehearne 44).

Hooker Winslow's contradictory intentions in The Last of the Crazy People appear to be a rather extreme instance of such divisions in the aesthetic approach to life, although Walter Pater, the nineteenth century aesthete, could not have anticipated such a literal application of his ideas outside the realm of books and painting. In the "Conclusion" to The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry

(1873), Pater suggested that human beings experience life as "impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them" (Renaissance 235). These impressions are in "perpetual flight" (235) and so they are lost to the individual mind even as they are experienced. Pater suggests that the best way to prevent this loss is to expand the moment, by "getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time" (238). For Pater, the "love of art for its own sake" (239) is the best way to expand the fleeting interval, for "art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moment's sake" (239). Pater, then, was suggesting that an impression could be the "'virtue' that takes [experience] out of the 'permanent flux' and enables it to defy time by freezing the transient into a permanent image" (Iser 37).

Pictures obviously can play an important role in expanding the interval through art; Pater's own aesthete-protagonist in Marius the Epicurean tends to experience the world entirely through a medium of pictorial impressionism. The goal behind Marius's aesthetics is to make the world "perfect by the love of visible beauty" (Marius 53). If the aesthete tries to "keep the eye clear" in order to "meditate much on beautiful visible objects" (Marius 54), he may be able to avoid the ugliness in life. Unfortunately, Marius experiences the failure of the aesthetic moment in "keeping

the eye clear" when he is confronted by the brutality of the Roman Coliseum. Marius (and through him, Pater) comes to accept with "admirable integrity ... the failure built into the aesthetic attitude" (Iser 141) when he realizes that the worship of beauty cannot annul the brutality that exists in life.

While Timothy Findley may not have direct knowledge of Pater's pioneering exploration of these aesthetic questions, his fiction indicates that he is at least familiar with Pater's strongest aesthetic heir, Oscar Wilde. In The Last of the Crazy People, Findley quotes--without acknowledgement--the seventh stanza of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol": "Yet each man kills the thing he loves..." (Crazy People 46). In a later novel, one of Findley's characters makes a derisory comment about "Oscar and Bosie" (Wars 102). The later novels, as will be discussed in this thesis, show a pronounced Wildean influence. As well, in an interview after the publication of Famous Last Words, Findley in his own voice described art in terms that echo Oscar Wilde: "art is reality. The mind is reality. The imagination is reality. ... The marvellous is what you want" (Waves 11). Wilde had claimed that he "treated art as the supreme reality and life as a mere mode of fiction" (Wilde, De Profundis 151). Thus, Findley's aestheticism may be traced through Oscar Wilde back to the earlier influence of Walter Pater.

Findley's third novel, The Wars (1977), is in fact grounded in a pictorial impressionism very much like Pater's. Like Marius, the narrator/historian in the novel is interested in finding "visible beauty" in pictures. He tries to see Robert Ross's "mad action" of setting horses free during an enemy bombardment as a "beautiful" act, in order to counter the opinion of those who see it as an anti-social or even murderous act. Unlike Marius, however, the narrator of The Wars does not see the need to reconcile truth with beauty; he accepts the idea that beauty lives on in the frozen moment, as long as the ugliness of life is ignored for the sake of this beauty. The narrator presents his materials in such a way that the reader becomes involved in making the subjects of his story "come to life." Through the use of pictorial impressionism, the narrator attempts to "convince" the reader that the beautiful moment suspended in his photograph can be released into the imagination, thus forever preserving the people in the photograph. Unlike Pater, Findley obviously does not accept the failure of aestheticism, and so my discussion of the three novels that follows traces his varying attempts to compensate for the ultimate failure of this cult of beauty.

Not Wanted on the Voyage (1984), Findley's fifth novel, examines the same aesthetic questions, and their defiant solutions, with which The Wars dealt. While the earlier novel explores the imperialistic, Victorian attitudes which produced the violent and anti-aesthetic attitudes to life in

the early twentieth century, Not Wanted on the Voyage changes the focus slightly by identifying patriarchy itself as the source of violence against nature and beauty. Not Wanted on the Voyage, then, is a feminist re-vision of The Wars. Pictorial impressionism likewise continues to play a similar role in this more recent novel, for the characters on board Noah's ark attempt to use the aesthetic moment to transcend the brutality of the world. However, the aesthetes in Not Wanted on the Voyage do come to realize that pictorial impressionism can only be a temporary escape from brutality; yet, unlike Pater's Marius, these aesthetes are still unable to see beyond the failure of their aestheticism. When the aesthetes can no longer ignore the failure of their aesthetic approach to life, they long for an end to existence by praying for rain--preferring no existence at all to one that does not ensure the triumph of beauty over barbarism.

Because of the similarities between these two books, I am breaking the chronological order of the novels I am examining, for Findley's modus operandi will become more apparent by looking first at the novels which share a simpler aesthetics and then by moving to the more complex one. By looking at Famous Last Words last, the circular development in Findley's thought comes into focus; on a moral level, Findley moves from the compromised aesthete in The Wars who chooses the "lesser evil" of murder, to the decadent aesthete in Famous Last Words who cannot hide his

own corruption through his art, to the purely innocent aesthete in Not Wanted on the Voyage who experiences evil as a completely externalized force.

Famous Last Words, then, is aesthetically, morally and structurally different from The Wars. It introduces the Wildean complexities of "lying" as a solution to the aesthetic problems Findley had faced in The Wars and in this later novel, he uses a narrator who tries to justify his own guilt by re-inventing his life as a mere work of art. Thus, as Wilde would also have it, life becomes as "superbly sterile" (Wilde, Dorian Gray 228) as all art emotions are, without consequence, simply beautiful sensations. But because this attempt is so obviously a lie--Sir Harry Oakes's body denies the aesthetic response--Findley retreats to the more "innocent" aesthetes in Not Wanted on the Voyage who try to take political action in a world where evil is distinct from the love of beauty, and where they are even less compromised by their defence of the "natural" and the "momentary" than was Robert Ross who killed two soldiers to affirm his brotherhood with victimized animals. By interrupting the chronology, I try to distinguish between two versions of "aesthetic" action--one which offers a choice of the lesser evil (or a greater good), and one which "confesses" its own evil only to pretend that it was all make-believe, a story about making a story, a metafiction about self-invention. Famous Last Words is also reserved for later discussion because it marks a change in form, from

biography and third-person narration, to first-person mask-donning autobiography.

This latter story told by Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, while still relying on Pater's pictorial impressionism in dealing with ugly "truth," also inclines more toward the decadent aesthetics of George Moore and Oscar Wilde, those more capricious descendants of Walter Pater. Whereas Pater's Marius accepted the fact that pictures could not offer an ultimate escape from the brutality of life, the aesthetes in Famous Last Words follow George Moore's aesthetic view that the aesthete should find beauty in strength. The means of accomplishing this aim is, in Wilde's phrase, "the fine lie" ("Decay" 59) which is "the telling of beautiful untrue things" ("Decay" 87). All of Findley's aesthetes seem to agree with Wilde's dictum that the "object of Art is not simple truth but complex beauty" ("Decay" 68). However, problems occur in Findley's creation of "complex beauty" that no "fine lie" can cover. Most simply put, the problem of such wish-fulfillment is that the wish is not realized in action, and, after The Wars, it is no longer realizable in the internal and external readers' responses.

Critics such as Peter Klován and Gilbert Drolet fail, then, to see the despair that Findley attempts to hide in his novels. Although the narrator of The Wars is, indeed, "more visionary than historian" for he "imaginatively recreates the life behind the facts of history," he does not fashion "out of his material a prayer against despair"

(Klovan 69). Nor is the narrator's performance "too strong to support any but a strong positive pulse" (Drolet 154). If anything, the narrator's material suggests that despair is inevitable--unless art can be brought into some new relation to life. Wilde, of course, had already solved this problem in his dictum that "Life imitates Art" ("Decay" 87). The rest of this thesis is an explanation of what happens to art (and to the aesthete) when such reverse mimesis fails--when "Life" fails to transform itself into art. What sort of apocalypse then follows for art? and for the aesthete? On what terms do Findley's characters wait?

Although a number of critics have identified aesthetic elements in Timothy Findley's novels, none has fully developed this aspect of Findley's thought. George Woodcock comes closest to recognizing the function of aestheticism in Findley's novels, for he has identified the influence of Wilde's doctrine of the mask on Famous Last Words. However, he does not recognize the Wildean influences that are descended from Walter Pater, nor does he acknowledge the effects that pictorial impressionism has on Findley's novels. While Eva-Marie Kroller has noticed the pictorial aspect of The Wars, she sees the "pictures" as photographs which "expose the restrictions of any prefabricated aesthetic order in rendering truth" (Kroller 68). In other words, Kroller reads Findley as part of a postmodern project to question, rather than to affirm, aesthetic "truth."

Simone Vautier, on the other hand, says that The Wars "turns any reinterpretation, any mythical or dramatic enhancing of factuality into a triumphant assertion of fiction's peculiar power to build a model that rivals the world" (Vautier 16)--thus, describing Wilde's preference of art over nature without directly recognizing it. While John Hulcoop sees that Findley places an emphasis on style over substance as did Oscar Wilde (Hulcoop 41), he does not directly relate Findley's style to Wilde's own. Though a few critics, then, have identified aesthetic influences in Findley's novels, the next task of criticism is to explore the roots of Timothy Findley's thought in Pater and Wilde, and to evaluate the real effects of the heritage of aestheticism upon his literary technique and vision.

Chapter I

"Look! You Can See Our Breath!": The Reader's Reanimation of
the Aesthetic Moment in The Wars

Timothy Findley's The Wars is concerned, more than anything, with the fate of beauty in an increasingly perverse and brutal twentieth-century world. Yet several of his characters reveal themselves as being more like late nineteenth-century aesthetes who attempt to use their aesthetic vision as a defense against the barbarism of the material world. The most obvious of these is a soldier named Rodwell who, just before he commits suicide, leaves to Robert Ross a series of drawings with an implicit message for the man who loves animals and other kinds of natural beauty:

The likeness was good. Unnerving. But the shading was not quite human. There was another quality ... Robert could not decipher what that quality was--until he'd finished leafing through the book and glanced through the others ... In all of them, the drawings were of animals. Of maybe a hundred sketches, Robert's was the only human form. Modified and mutated, he was one with the others.

What had Rodwell meant by this? Or was it just the way he drew? (The Wars 138)

Rodwell is an illustrator of animals for children's books; and, although he claims to draw nature without embellishment, he sees these natural "creatures," be it animals or Robert, through his own aesthetic vision. After examining these drawings, Robert accepts Rodwell's vision of himself as a kindred spirit who sympathizes with a

perception of nature which is of a type with Kenneth Graham's Wind in the Willows. Robert's life-long affinity with animals, as shown by his boyhood activities on his parents' farm, marks him as one of many aesthetes in the novel who suffer increasing anguish as they experience the brutality of the world. Rodwell's art, then, is an aesthetic response that tries to avoid the harsh facts of existence by compensating with scenes of beauty in nature.

Rodwell himself would appear to represent an aesthetics similar to that described in Walter Pater's Marius the Epicurean--a late Victorian aesthetics which has as its goal to make the world "perfect by the love of visible beauty" (Marius 53). This aesthetic vision is rooted in the basic assumption of pictorial impressionism: as Pater puts it, the responsibility of the good man is "To keep the eye clear ... to meditate much on beautiful visible objects ..." and "... To avoid jealously, in his way through the world, everything repugnant to sight ..." (Marius 54). The surest means to avoid the ugly in life is to "trust the eye" (Marius 170). In a world which has become totally disfigured by war, the only hope of the aesthete, then, is to retreat to a substitute world of beauty which is not just "like a picture" (Marius 67), but is become the world of art itself.

The impressions received from pictures are essential to Pater's aesthete because "we are all under a sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve ... we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. ...[O]ur one

chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time" (Renaissance 238). The best way to expand the interval is through art, for "art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moment's sake" (Renaissance 239).

Trusting the eye to see only the beautiful in those passing moments is not a practical philosophy of life, as Findley's aesthetes subsequently discover. Of course, their dilemma had already been anticipated by Pater's own aesthete in Marius the Epicurean. Marius recognizes the limitations of his theory when he, "the humble follower of the bodily eye" (Marius 170), faces the horrors of the Roman coliseum. While his philosophy does not explain away the existence of evil and barbarism, its "sanction [has] at least been effective here, in protesting--'This, and this, is what you may not look upon!'" (Marius 170).

Although Marius eventually learns that art cannot prevent the ugly or the barbaric in life, the narrator/historian of The Wars does not follow Pater through to his conclusion that the aesthetic approach does not work. Instead, the narrator is closer in thought to George Moore, a disciple of Pater who could not accept the master's growing despair in his own philosophy of impressionism. Moore, in his Confessions of a Young Man, claims to share with Marius the "same glad worship of the visible world, and the same incurable belief that the beauty of material things

is sufficient for all the needs of life" (Moore 166). However, he is not at all disturbed by the "great pagan world, its bloodshed, its slaves, its injustice, its loathing of all that is feeble" (Moore 166), which had sent Pater's Marius scurrying from the Coliseum.

If the ultimate test of the cult of beauty had to be its power over the fleeting moment, then the Coliseum presented a double challenge: how to celebrate an instant of sudden death? or how to find beauty in bloodshed? Moore chose to find beauty in strength as an answer to the latter problem. As for the former question, the only answer was to make art independent of life, its own autonomous existence. The narrator must make his art of narration become, not represent, the life of the aesthete, so that art "makes permanent a life which has been transformed into an aesthetic object" (Williams 19).

Findley's narrator/historian, as we will see, cannot accept Moore's practice of aesthetic sensationalism, though he will try to adapt Moore's idea that the "picture" has a life of its own. Findley's narrator rejects the injustice and the ugliness that he finds in the story he is narrating, and so he, in Pater's words, must decide what photographs and documents he will allow the reader "to look upon" as he narrates his story. The fictive Rodwell's art may then be seen as an analogue for the narrator/historian's own act of narration in The Wars, since both artists are aesthetes who attempt to avoid the ugliness of the material world by

focussing their selective visions on pictures. Seeing life as an autonomous art object provides both an escape from the pain of the brutal world and prevents the aesthetic impressions that the aesthete has accumulated from being lost forever. Thus, Rodwell's picture of Robert is an attempt to give him a new kind of life, free from military destruction, and liberated back into natural existence.

The story, seemingly created by the narrator while sifting through old photographs at an archive, concerns Robert Ross, a soldier court-martialled in 1916 for desertion, murder, and removing horses from the front line. The task of the narrator, which becomes the reader's task as well, is "to take those few facts and pictures and find their meaning" (Pirie 79). However, meaning then becomes quite subjective, for as Eva-Marie Kroller notes, "the very structure of The Wars is informed by the chronicler's increasing doubtfulness about the ability of fiction (and, for that matter of writing in general) to recreate reality from the traces it has left behind in the form of ... masses of 'snapshots and photographs'" (Kroller 68). The narrator exploits the information missing in the documents by filling in the gaps of the story through impressions gleaned from the photographs of Robert and interviews with people who knew him.

The story created by the narrator describes the conflict between the world that Robert attempts to will into existence and the visible world that actually confronts him.

The narrator's goal is to deny the ugly conclusion to Robert Ross's story by showing the reader the beauty that, in the narrator's eyes, rises above the barbarism of the material world. The Wars, then, "is not primarily the story of Robert Ross, but the extension of that story into the story of the narrator, and into the storymaking of the reader" (Ricou 131).

The use of the narrator/historian in The Wars is central to Findley's purpose of privileging beauty of perception over truth to fact. Simone Vautier needlessly complicates her description of the narrative strategy that Findley uses in The Wars by splitting the narrator/historian into two: an "I-narrator" who is essentially the historian, and a "you-narrator" who is an anonymous researcher ("Narrative Strategies" 17). Her discussion of the roles of these narrators and of the scriptor, an "authority superior to both narrators" (Vautier 26), suggests that Findley's aim is to create an uncertainty about narrative authority. However, Vautier is mistaken in her identification of both Findley's methods and his goals.

No "I-narrator" is even evident in Findley's text; there is only a narrator who writes in the third-person omniscient voice, and who addresses the reader by the second-person "you." Thus, the "you" the narrator inscribes in his text is not, as Simone Vautier claims, "a character assigned a number of physical actions" who "handles the material of the past" ("Narrative Strategies" 37). Rather,

the "you" is simply the reader of The Wars. Findley states that "you is you, the reader, and as you search for Robert, as you are doing by the mere fact that you are reading this book, you find a little of him here and a little of him there" (Aitken 84).

Findley's aim in addressing the reader as "you" is to implicate the reader in both the action of the protagonist and the work of narration.¹ For example, Robert's presumed entrance into an Alberta whorehouse is first made by the reader: "On entering Wet Goods, you were greeted by a large, male mute ... Directly opposite the door, there was a wall that was covered with paintings of Odalisques and mirrors, so that the first thing you saw was yourself, intermingled with a lot of pink arms and pale breasts" (Wars 38-39). "You" are present in the mirror, and implicated in the sexual tangle represented in the paintings of the Odalisques.

So, too, the reader enters into the place of the narrator/historian: "You begin at the archives with the photographs" (Wars 11). Here, the narrator explicitly invites the reader to create his or her own mythology from the few historical traces that remain. "You" look at the first photographs and experience the narrator's impressions of the Edwardian age. Although they are still photographs, the narrator describes them as full of motion and music: "here are soldiers, arm in arm singing, 'Keep Your Head Down, Fritzie Boy!'" The narrator continues to add his

impressions to "your" first vision of Robert which follows immediately after these period photographs: Robert "comes riding straight toward the camera," leaping "through memory without a sound" (The Wars 13). However, there is no evidence here or later in the novel that a photographer was present when this event occurred (Hulcoop 33). The reader is thus warned that the narrator cannot be taken literally, for he actively makes his art suit his own impressions.

The narrator/historian nonetheless creates several allies to reinforce his strategy of inscribing the reader in the text. His historical prologue to Part Two declares that "the ridge was what you fought for ... this is where you fought the war" (Wars 71-72). The narrator continues his description of the battlefield by alternating between the second and the third persons, at first keeping to each "person" for a paragraph and then subtly shifting from one to another in the same paragraph: "They [Robert and his men] were coming from a town called Bailleul, which was known to the men as 'the last place in civilization.' There, you could actually sleep in a hotel ..." (Wars 72). By the time Levitt says, "you took the wrong turning and you've come out onto this dike ..." (Wars 78), Robert and the reader have become pronominally identical; the reader is now addressed directly with Robert at the dramatic level, as he or she was formerly addressed directly by the narrator.

There are other dramatic instances where the historian, not Robert Ross, is the subject of the action, but where the

reader is now addressed as well by the generic "you." When the narrator first visits Lady Juliet d'Orsey, he says, "Lady Juliet turns to you and says: 'I'll know you'll forgive me. I can't resist the Mass'" (Wars 99). Later, when the mass is over and Lady Juliet is being interviewed, she begins to identify the reader and the narrator as one, for she too switches to the "you" narration: "You cannot know these things. You live when you live. No one else can ever live your life and no one else will ever know what you know" (Wars 103).

Again, Lady Juliet becomes a reader, as well as an actor in the text, reading the diary accounts of her girlhood experiences of Robert Ross to the historian who might also be "you." As an inscribed reader, she reproduces the earlier experience of the reader when she says, "I see myself in the picture" (Wars 151), a mental picture in which she and Robert and Barbara remain frozen in time. The force of these continuing grammatical and dramatic substitutions is ultimately to insert the reader into both the dramatic and narrative levels of action, and to make the reader's identity co-extensive with these various collaborations in the action. In accordance with this practice, the narrator shares a belief with George Moore that "we do not want the thing but the idea of the thing. The thing itself is worthless..." (Moore 142). Findley himself is sympathetic to this view, for, like art, the "idea of the thing" will not perish or decay as "the thing itself" will, not as long

as the reader is entrusted with keeping the idea or the image alive.

The ruling "idea of the thing" which the narrator/historian wants his reader to share in is, of course, his contention that Robert Ross, adversely "impressed" by the horrors of war, does the only thing he can to affirm life and beauty in the midst of death and deformity: he sets free a troop of military horses even though he has to take two human lives to do so. The narrator, in other words, has either to affirm the "beauty" of a barbaric act, or to explain away its savagery in the interests of a higher good.

In Confessions of a Young Man, George Moore's narrator had written: "I came into the world apparently with a nature like a smooth sheet of wax, bearing no impress, but capable of receiving any; of being moulded into all shapes" (49). The narrator/historian of The Wars presents Robert's (not to mention the reader's) nature in terms of a similar "sheet of wax," contending that the cumulative effect of his war experiences moulded him in ways which have forced him to choose between the values of a Rodwell or of a crazed militarist such as Captain Leather. By tracing these "impressions" upon Robert's life in the allied experience of the reader, the narrator hopes to prove his belief that Robert, in these conflicting actions, chooses beauty over barbarism.

The people who impress themselves on Robert are divided into two diverse groups by the narrator. Nature-lovers such as Robert's sister, Rowena, and his fellow-soldiers, Harris and Rodwell, worship beauty although each finds "beauty" in different aspects of nature. Opposed to these aesthetes are "barbarians" such as Captain Taffler and Levitt, who might be said to worship different aspects of "the great pagan world" where "the weak shall be trampled upon" (Moore 123). Robert experiences the natural world through both these opposing views which leads to his seemingly contradictory actions when releasing the horses.

The earliest and deepest impressions on Robert's nature are made by Rowena, his hydrocephalic sister, as the narrator shows by having Robert constantly reminded of her when on the battlefield. Rowena was also an aesthete of sorts, for her entire life was spent in savouring beauty. The "beautiful" experiences that Robert had shared with Rowena, such as petting rabbits on sunny afternoons, give him an empathy towards nature. Her death, significantly, becomes the first of many instances where aesthetes die through the actions of those who worship the barbarous; Rowena falls to her death in the stable because her youngest brother is cruelly teasing a horse instead of looking after her.

The sister's death now exposes Robert to the barbaric "pagan" world, for Mrs. Ross insists that Rowena's rabbits must be killed. A "Neanderthal"-like handy man is brought

from town to do the job (Wars 25) when Robert refuses to kill them. Robert's attempt to save the rabbits obviously anticipates his removal of the horses from the front line. In both circumstances, Robert fails and is badly hurt--in this case, when the handyman beats him.

The brutality of the "pagan" world becomes even more apparent to Robert when he sees that a soldier brings the handyman to do the job. He accuses the man of not protecting the weak (Hulcoop 33) by screaming, "you bastard! Bastard! What are soldiers for?" (Wars 25). This soldier's example nonetheless gives the traumatized boy a reason to reject his own weakness by joining the army, thereby rejecting the purely aesthetic life he had led at his parents' home before Rowena's death. This new experience, Robert hopes, will help him to escape the pain of losing his sister and give him the role model he yearns for: "So what he wanted was someone else who had acquired that state of mind: who killed as an exercise of the will" (Wars 28). Robert hopes to acquire such strength of brute will, for he has learned that aesthetic vision is not enough to escape pain in a brutal world.

Robert finds the role model he desires in Captain Eugene Taffler, a "man to whom war wasn't good enough unless it was bigger than he was" (Wars 35). Their first meeting occurs during basic training when Robert is looking for missing horses and he discovers Taffler keeping his arm in shape by "killing" bottles (Wars 34). Robert admires the

captain's attitude, where "killing wasn't killing at all but only throwing" (Wars 35). Taffler's ideal vision of war and the reality of trench warfare do not match for he wants the war to be more than just battles between "stone throwers" (Wars 35). Taffler revels in the brutality of the "pagan" world and tries to exercise his will to control life through constantly killing something. At their first meeting, for example, when Taffler's offer to help find the horses is refused, he smiles, "Good ... There's still an hour till sundown. The dog and I can go and kill some rattlesnakes" (Wars 35).

Robert soon discovers that he suffers pain when he tries to emulate Taffler's exercise of will. When Robert is forced to kill a horse with a broken leg during the trip overseas, his vision of the goodness of the world is shattered in a way similar to what it was when he was to kill Rowena's rabbits. While Robert has been given the technical knowledge of where to point the pistol (from literature with such differing aesthetic values as the works of Joseph Conrad, Chums, and Boys' Own Annual), Taffler's role model has not given him the strength of will to do the job right. He has never killed before and it takes several shots to finally kill the horse. If the "execution" of the horse destroys Robert's own innocence, it nonetheless makes him realize that the exercise of mere will cannot prevent suffering.

While Taffler represents the invulnerable strength of will to Robert, his shipmate Harris represents an aesthetic desire to escape the material world. Harris is a soldier whom Robert befriends on the voyage overseas. He reminds Robert of Rowena (Wars 95), and when Harris has a fatal bout with pneumonia, Robert visits him constantly. During these visits, Harris delivers long monologues that fascinate Robert by inviting him, as a "you" participant, to share another world:

Where I swam, there was a shelf ... Sitting on the shelf at low tide, my head was just above the water. Then I'd slide. Like a seal. Out of the air and into the water. Out of my world into theirs. And I'd stay there hours. Or so it seemed. I'd think: I never have to breathe again. I've changed. It changes you. But the thing was, I could do it. Change--and be one of them. They aren't any friendlier--the fish, you know. But they accept you there. As if you might belong, if you wanted to. It's not like here. It's not like here at all. (Wars 95)

The transcendental character of Harris's aesthetic outlook attracts Robert, for Harris desires to escape the pain of the visible world by trying to imagine an ideal world under the ocean. Like Pater's aesthete in Marius the Epicurean, Harris has an "innate and habitual longing for a world altogether fairer than what he [sees]" (Marius 61). Although the world imagined is preferable to the one Harris is in, he recognizes that it is not perfect:

He told of having swum with schools of whales and claimed that underwater you could hear them sing ... Harris said that sometimes the whales would beach themselves and then the fishermen would come in boats

and slaughter them. Harris said he would sometimes lie offshore and let himself be carried in by tides that washed him up the sand--the sand was red and he told how he would float that way sometimes for hours, just to get the feel of landfall--sort of the way a million years ago or more we came ashore ourselves as fish or frogs or whatever it was we were--floating through slaughter. (Wars 105)

The narrator has identified Harris, the lover of beauty, with the slaughtered whales, thus giving the reader a precedent for identifying an aesthete with animals endangered by men--a situation that will be repeated before Robert is trapped in the barn with the horses.

The next stage in Robert's development occurs in an "inordinately civilized" dugout (Wars 87) near the front lines. Here, he meets a mixture of men, most of whom are inclined to "seek the beautiful"--although the "barbarian" vision of life has its representatives as well. Robert convinces himself that Rodwell aligns him with those who see only beauty in nature by the fact that he is made to resemble the animals in the drawings.

In Robert's mind, the menagerie in the barn-like dugout immediately links Rodwell with Rowena, while his preference for animals to humans links Rodwell spiritually with Harris. Rodwell and his animals are "two of a kind" (Wars 92) like Harris and his whales; significantly, his menagerie consists of a frog, a hedgehog, some birds and rabbits--all of which are defenceless "victims" of predators. But Rodwell himself has to share the fate of the defenceless animals when he is moved "up the line" to a unit that is starving. Here, the

men are so hungry that they are killing rats for food; when Rodwell tries to stop them, they make him watch while they kill a cat. This horror drives Rodwell to suicide, for the visible world has become too painful for such an aesthete.

In the same trench where Robert meets Rodwell, he confronts a man who is hostile to any attempt to retreat into a world of "beautiful" perceptions. Levitt is a new junior officer who has little use for the beautiful things in life, as his arrival at the dugout makes clear. The narrator tells us that Levitt lies when he agrees that the stained glass in the door is beautiful--"He thought it was the ugliest piece of glass he'd ever seen" (Wars 87). Levitt shares Taffler's longing for violence, for he believes that "a door should bear striking from time" (Wars 86), rather than be the receptacle for beautiful stained glass.

Levitt does not fit in well with this band of nature-and-beauty lovers, as his first attempts at conversation show. As the narrator tells us, Levitt "made himself thoroughly unpopular by quoting Clausewitz ..." (Wars 90). His belief in Clausewitz shows how his views are similar to Taffler's, for both would agree that "man to man combat is the only true test of what we're doing here" (Wars 90). Levitt has a negative influence on Robert, for he demonstrates the disagreeable aspects of the barbarian will; only, when he is finally exposed to battle, Levitt's will

deserts him, and he goes into shock, leaving the aesthetes to cope with the situation the enemy bombardment brings.

A very different relationship with Lady Barbara d'Orsey serves to remind Robert of how ineffective the will is in confronting the horrors of the material world. The relationship between the two develops during his convalescence at the d'Orsey estate in England. Lady Barbara shares with George Moore's narrator in Confessions of a Young Man the ability to worship both the strength of the "great pagan world" (Moore 123) and the "beauty of material things" (Moore 126). Hence, Lady Barbara seeks "beauty through perfection" (Wars 103) by giving her charms to a succession of soldiers, leaving each one only when he has become severely disfigured by the wars. Lady Barbara, like Marius at the temple of Aesculapius, is an aesthete whose "capacity of the eye" is "the determining influence in life", through which she would be "made perfect by the love of visible beauty" (Marius 53). The attention she pays to the beautiful soldiers with whom she surrounds herself is, in one sense, vampiric; she consumes the short-lived beauty of the soldiers in order to make herself impervious to the decay brought on by time and death. Like the war itself, Lady Barbara is a consumer of youth and beauty, and leaves each soldier mentally and physically "disfigured" by her attentions.

The supposedly "beautiful" moral acts that end Robert's military career--and eventually his life--come about through

a final series of brutal depredations that are more than the aesthete can accept. When Robert is returning to the front, he is raped by a group of his fellow soldiers (Wars 169). Shortly after this brutal attack, Robert burns his photograph of Rowena, not as an "act of anger--but an act of charity" (Wars 172). Robert now accepts Harris's contention that an escape into oblivion is a reasonable alternative for those who find the brutality of the world too painful. This attitude will partly explain his later actions, for as we shall see, Robert will come to see himself as a martyr for those aesthetes who have chosen to escape the brutal world through death.

The acceptance of this attitude gives Robert the strength to inflict some pain of his own on the brutal world; he kills his commanding officer for refusing to let him free the horses from their station yard during an enemy barrage. Because Devlin, a fellow nature-lover from the dugout, is shot by the commanding officer while obeying Robert's command to release the horses, Robert, in turn, shoots the officer. Then, after the shelling ends, Robert tears off his lapels and, in another act of charity, puts the wounded animals out of their agony. His actions show that Robert has rejected human society as his mentors, Harris and Rodwell, had done earlier. The "theft" of the horses by Robert is a vain attempt to re-make the world according to his will; Robert desires an escape to a world where neither pain nor brutal human beings exist.

The narrator admits that the next part of Robert's story is not well-documented: "Here is where the mythology is muddled" (Wars 183). This "muddle" works in the narrator's favour, however, for now he can re-imagine the barbaric act that Robert commits, after his "beautiful" act of setting the horses free. The repetition of the image described both in the prologue and in its proper chronological context is the key to the narrator's strategy in privileging beauty over truth. The prologue is a "picture" or image of Robert with a horse and dog in the bombed train yard. One hundred and seventy-two pages later, the image is repeated virtually word for word in its proper chronological position. The narrator has taken this "picture" out of context and used it as the prologue in order to set it up as the pattern of all beautiful and "innocent" action. Thus, beauty is preserved in a "freeze-frame" which the reader carries in mind throughout the next one hundred and seventy-odd pages: pages which reconstruct the context of the action and provide the image with a narrative frame which allows the reader to put the "freeze-frame" into motion. In one sense, the narrative background makes this image of Robert with the horse like a "snapshot" that is just on the point of being released, in the reader's imagination, into motion.

However, no matter how the narrator describes it, he still cannot escape the fact that Robert shoots an innocent soldier who attempts to stop him as Robert and the horses

make their way through a wood near the station yard. The murder leads to Robert and the horses being trapped inside a barn, surrounded by pursuing soldiers. In their zeal to capture Robert, the soldiers set the barn on fire in an attempt to force him out. However, the roof collapses in flames, killing the fifty horses that Robert had tried to save, as well as burning Robert so severely that he will never "walk or see or be capable of judgement again" (Wars 189).

Thus, the narrator must reconcile the ugliness in his story with the beauty he finds there. Because the narrator involves the reader in making Robert's actions seem sympathetic, many critics have accepted this version of events. M.L. Mckenzie claims Robert's actions "offer cautious hope for mankind" and that "a sense of the spiritual, sympathy for animals, and the possibility of protest by an ordinary individual" (Mckenzie 397) offer an alternative view of Robert's actions as being other than barbaric. However, Dennis Duffy takes the contrary view and sees the "negativity" (Duffy 188) in the novel as still making the strongest impression on the reader.

Because neither aesthetic beauty nor strength of will can help an individual to escape the harsh world unscathed, the narrator structures his story to show that art can be of some small recompense to the suffering individual; art can freeze an individual's impressions of life and, in so doing, can make that individual survive through art. The life of

the aesthete becomes an aesthetic object itself; as such an object, the life can be passed on through the imaginative response of like-minded readers.

Robert's response to Rodwell's packet of drawings summarizes the narrator's own attempt to show how individuals can live on through art, no matter how harshly the material world has treated them. In the package is a letter from Rodwell to his daughter that Robert is to pass on from the suicide:

To my daughter, Laurine;
 Love your mother.
 Make your prayers against despair.
 I am alive in everything I touch. Touch these pages
 and you have me in your fingertips. We survive in one
 another. Everything lives forever. Believe it.
 Nothing dies. (Wars 135)

The letter, in fact, rewrites the first epigraph of the novel: Euripides' statement, "Never that which is shall die." Thus, the author also identifies himself with those aesthetes in The Wars who would like to believe that art makes everything "live forever": hence, the placing of the Euripides quotation under the dedication of the novel to Findley's mother, father, P.M. Findley, and to the dead uncle after whom Timothy Findley is named (Aitken 83). Within the text as well, the narrator-historian reminds the reader that Euripides's words live on although the dramatist himself was killed by dogs (Wars 11). So the series of frames drawn round the picture of Robert's "natural" beauty

all confirm Rodwell's "plot" of making his "work" live forever.

The hope of keeping an individual "alive" through art is shared in the narrator's plot by Lady Juliet d'Orsey and Marian Turner, and so they help him to further his goal. The narrator uses Lady Juliet to demonstrate that the desire to escape to the world of the spirit, which many aesthetes have, is not the answer. While Lady Juliet's love of the Latin mass reflects her aesthetic quest of "seeking beauty through perfection" of form, it also suggests that she desires an escape from the painful visible world to the world of the spirit. When the narrator describes how Lady Juliet draws strength from the words of the mass, "Hear thou my prayer--unto thee shall all flesh come ..." (Wars 100), the narrator undercuts the comfort the reader may feel by stating "But you wonder." Art can offer an alternative to the brutal world in the narrator's view, but not through escaping from it into the world of the spirit.

However, Lady Juliet is the narrator's "most vivid and personal" source of memories of Robert, for she was twelve years old and in love with Robert Ross when the affair between Lady Barbara and Robert Ross began. More importantly, the narrator structures the story so that Lady Juliet continues the "lineage" of aesthetes that is traced from Rowena to Harris, and from Rodwell to Robert. Lady Juliet, rather than Laurine Rodwell, received Captain Rodwell's drawings (Wars 158), thereby keeping him "alive."

Lady Juliet is the source of Harris's conversations with Robert, thereby keeping Harris's influence alive--and, by telling what she remembers of Robert, he too will not be forgotten. As Lady Juliet tells the narrator when discussing Robert's affair with her sister, "Many times, I have wanted to destroy this portion of my diaries but I always remind myself it is part of someone's life: someone I loved and respected" (Wars 154). By telling the narrator about the affair, she is keeping that part of Robert's life from being lost in the flux of time by making it part of a more inclusive narrative act. In her own way, Lady Juliet confirms the words of Rodwell's legacy: "We survive in one another" (Wars 135).

Marian Turner has an important role in the narrator's story as well; as the nurse at the field hospital who treats Robert after the barn fire, she gives the narrator his "only first-hand account of [Robert]...aside from that of Lady Juliet d'Orsey" (Wars 15). Her aesthetic sensibilities are revealed by the narrator through her conversation about the fragility and beauty of the wounded human bodies she saw: "I guess you saw them all as beautiful because you couldn't bear to see them broken. The human body--well--it's like the mind I guess; terribly impressive til you put it in jeopardy. Then it becomes such a delicate thing--like glass" (Wars 16).

Marian Turner has the ability to see natural beauty even in the midst of total destruction. She not only saw

beauty in the shattered bodies she cared for, but she could find a moment of beauty in the act of a pure white cat cleaning itself after an enemy bombardment has destroyed the camp (Wars 187). Thus, she finds beauty in Robert's refusal of an overdose of morphine; Robert's words, "Not yet" (Wars 189), are for her the "essence of what it is to be alive" (Wars 189). Robert, by not agreeing to end his life, is suspending the "beautiful" moment in much the same way that a picture can, for he is prolonging the moment before time is released again, and before the "end" overtakes it.

Marian Turner not only passes on her story to the narrator, but she continues the "tradition" of handing on documents in order for the story to remain "alive": she sends the narrator a photograph of herself and a friend, taken while they were nurses at the field hospital. In the narrator's view, the picture suspends the "beautiful" moment in the same way that Rodwell's drawings of the animals attempt to. Through expanding "the interval" of the aesthetic moment in the minds of ensuing readers, the narrator himself endorses Rodwell's message that "We survive in one another." For, appropriately, the lover of beauty, Marian Turner, is holding the white cat in the photograph that now exists in many more minds than have actually seen it.

So, too, Robert's own life is translated out of its interval into an image which lives on in the mind. For this reason, the narrator relies heavily on pictorial

presentation; he is constantly describing the many photographs found in the archives. And, where no photographs are available for scenes he wants to describe, the narrator subsequently invites the reader to co-create with him, to "receive the beautiful impressions" through a collective act of imagination: "There is no good picture of this except the one you can make in your mind" (Wars 71).

By re-creating Robert's life in a series of "pictures," the narrator is attempting to make Robert's life an aesthetic object. But the narrator is also faced with the task of closing his narrative in such a way that the reader is convinced of the success of equating life with art. In support of such a view, the narrator provides three photographs.

In the main body of his narrative, just before the epilogue, the narrator describes the last photograph of Robert taken before his death. Although he admits that Robert's face is a mass of scar tissue, that his nose is bent, and that he has no eyebrows, he ends the description of the photograph with evidence that Robert has conquered the ugliness of the material world; Robert is holding Juliet's hand and "he is smiling" (Wars 190).

However, the narrator saves the final, and "most convincing" photographs for the epilogue. He describes two photographs of Robert, both taken before Robert went overseas. The first one shows Robert in boot camp, staring at the camera and holding the skull of a small animal

delicately between his fingers. The narrator suggests that the photograph reminds the reader of a quotation from the (fictional) essayist and critic Nicholas Fagan: "...Nothing so completely verifies our perception of a thing as our killing of it" (Wars 191). The irony of this quotation is underscored by the last photograph described in the narrative. The photograph was taken before Robert's loss of innocence, for it shows him holding Rowena on a horse. Thus, the end of the narrative returns the reader to Robert's earlier days when an aesthetic appreciation of life was still possible for him. On the back of the photograph is written, "Look! You can see our breath!" and the narrator stresses this image with his closing words, "And you can" (Wars 191). Robert himself has become the "You"-narrator, speaking from beyond the grave. And his image lives on--is animated--by the next "You"-narrator who, invoking our shared perception of the breath as living spirit, proves once and for all that "We survive in one another," and that the "dead" image in the photographs can be made to "breathe" again by releasing frozen time. Thus, Robert's "beautiful" act of setting the horses free is not an act of madness in the narrator's mind, for it lives on triumphantly in the reader's memory.

Overall, The Wars is an attempt by Timothy Findley to come to grips with the problems which the aesthetic approach to life has hitherto failed to solve. He does not arrive at the same conclusion that Walter Pater did when he put his

aesthetic theories to the test in Marius the Epicurean, for Findley does not accept the need to reconcile beauty with truth. As the ending of The Wars suggests, Findley is willing to close a blind eye to the murderous side of his hero's quixotic gesture, as long as he believes that it served the end of finding "visible beauty." Unlike Pater, in the midst of universal slaughter, Findley would insist that, "because time is frozen into art by this artifice of simultaneity, it has lasting power in life" (Williams 16).

The narrator relies on the reader to actively perceive and retain the "beautiful" moments that are in the narrative. The frozen opening "shot" in the prologue and the re-construction that explains its significance is a lesson for the reader in how to "read," or to co-create, the photographs and images that the narrator supplies. Thus, when the reader is left with the closing "shot" of Robert and Rowena, he or she understands that it is a picture now being released into permanent motion in the reader's imagination--"as if, indeed, life had been palpably preserved in Rowena and Robert's photograph, as if they had been salvaged from death" (Kroller 68). Beauty lives on in the frozen moment, for it exists to be released; time is thus defeated, since "[n]othing dies" (Wars 135). Apparently Robert's "mad" act can no longer be perceived as such, for it stands as a "beautiful" moment that defies both time and decay, not to mention "truth."

¹Much of the discussion of the "You-narrator" in The Wars was suggested to me by Professor David Williams.

Chapter II

"Praying for Rain": The Apocalypse of Aestheticism in
Not Wanted on the Voyage

Not Wanted on the Voyage (1984) continues Timothy Findley's exploration of the aesthetic questions he raised in The Wars, for in his version of the Old Testament story of Noah's ark, the aesthetic characters must fight once again against a barbaric society that places little value on beauty. As in The Wars, the aesthetes attempt to avoid the "ugliness" of their society--the animal-sacrifices, the patriarchal hierarchy, and the rationalist approach to life --by escaping to an alternate world where beauty is safe from barbarians such as Noah.

Like Robert Ross in The Wars, the aesthetes in Not Wanted look for beauty in nature and in animal "innocence." Therefore pictorial impressionism tends to play a similar role in their appreciation of the beautiful; the aesthetes often use "pictures" to escape the horror of their daily existence. Mrs. Noyes, perhaps the strongest representative of aestheticism in the novel, regularly attempts a retreat from the brutal world of her husband through "pictures": "Mrs. Noyes loved to sit and watch the sun, resplendent in its orange trance above the hills and the mists all rising up together--each from its separate valley--melding into one thick-scented bank above the heat. All the sounds of the birds flying up for one last meal of insects hanging over

the yard; the howling of the lemurs in the treetops, ... bee noise and cattle lowing--these were the hymns that Mrs. Noyes loved in the evening light Oh, it was grand in the evening, she thought--truly a kind of heaven" (Not Wanted 18).

This pictorial impressionism, complete with soundtrack, is much like Pater's "aesthetic moment" which he had outlined in The Renaissance as a "theoretical guideline for conceiving human life" (Williams 16). In Pater's conception, the aesthetic moment transcends the brutality of the world through expanding the interval of beauty and so giving the "highest quality" (Renaissance 238) to the fleeting moment. The "frozen" moment thus becomes a moment of eternity by which the viewer finds that time itself is transcended.

Mrs. Noyes's pictorial impressionism, like that of the "You-narrator" in The Wars, is another such Paterian attempt to transcend time through the "frozen" moment, as is shown through her reflections on the view of the evening landscape: "What else could heaven be, she wondered, but a world like this? ... Nothing connected; nothing distant, everything benign--just as it was in this painless dusk, forever. And if not forever, at least for what remained of this hour before the sacrifice--before the dreaded altar bell would start to ring" (Not Wanted 18). Mrs. Noyes longs for her "moment of eternity," but implicit in that longing is the recognition that pictorial impressionism

cannot escape the brutality of the world. The "dreaded altar bell" will ring eventually and so "forever" can only be "what remained of this hour before the sacrifice."

In general, Findley's aesthetes in Not Wanted on the Voyage--Mrs. Noyes, Mottyl the cat, and Lucy/Lucifer the rogue angel--all share the same sort of yearning for beauty as Pater's hero in Marius the Epicurean. Like Marius, whom Pater had used "to find out to what extent the aesthetic attitude could be sustained in life" (Iser 141), each of Findley's aesthetes experiences the constant failure of the aesthetic moment to make beauty permanent; however, unlike Marius, they are not equipped to see beyond the failure of their aestheticism to a life that must be lived in time.

As The Wars demonstrates, Findley is unable to accept "the failure built into the aesthetic attitude" (Iser 141) and so he does not allow for Pater's consolation in the failure of the aesthetic moment--the discovery that human generation is itself the answer to the problem of time. Pater's Marius realizes, through his attempts at preserving the aesthetic moment, that "expanding that interval" (Renaissance 238-39) of life cannot be accomplished through art, even though art can give the "highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake" (Renaissance 238-39). Instead, Marius's hope for the aesthetic sense "has shifted from a world of 'autonomous art' ... to a community of generations through time" (Williams 18):

Yes! through the survival of their children, happy parents are able to think calmly, with a very practical affection, of a world in which they are to have no direct share; planting with a cheerful good-humour, the acorns they carry about with them, that their grandchildren may be shaded from the sun by the broad oak-trees of the future. That is nature's way of easing death to us. It was thus too, surprised, delighted, that Marius, under the power of that new hope among men, could think of the generations to come after him In the bare sense of having loved he seemed to find, even amid this foundering of the ship, that on which his soul might "assuredly rest and depend."
(Marius 295-296)

Although there is in Not Wanted on the Voyage, as in Marius the Epicurean, a "continual shattering of the illusion into which [the characters] had fled"(Iser 150), there is a major difference in the way each author deals with the problem of the aesthetic moment being revealed as "the genesis of longing and anxiety" (Iser 141). Where The Wars allowed for successive readers as the true "community of generations through time," Not Wanted on the Voyage confronts the ultimate spectre of the annihilation of all life and concludes that further generation would only give the victory to the barbarians. For, ultimately, Mrs. Noyes realizes that the regime of the barbarians

... will never end. The voyage will never, never end.
And if it does ...

She prayed. But not to the absent God. Never,
never again to the absent God, but to the absent
clouds, she prayed. And to the empty sky.

She prayed for rain. (Not Wanted 352)

In the midst of the receding floods, Mrs. Noyes seeks paradoxically an end to the generations of human and mammalian life.

Not Wanted on the Voyage, as the title ironically suggests, is thus a truly apocalyptic work, since its heroine concludes that life itself is "not wanted" if it must be accepted on the old patriarchal terms. For Mrs. Noyes looks into the depths of the flood and sees a world transfixed in a moment of eternal beauty: "There below her was all the world: its valleys, hills and woods as she had never dreamed they could be seen. Not even the birds could have seen the world as she saw it now--with all its movement stilled and all its features perfectly limned and shadowless" (Not Wanted 342). This beautiful world--caught in the instant of "aesthetic arrest," is better, she thinks, than a world which is subject to blood sacrifices and to death:

And there were the altars--put down forever.
 "No more fires," she whispered. No more bloodied
 falls.
 It was the world she had always dreamed of.
 Real. (Not Wanted 343)

Such a picture is worth a thousand, nay a billion, lives, to a mind which, hating time, has plunged into the depths of eternity.

Mrs. Noyes is not alone in despairing of finding beauty in time in Not Wanted on the Voyage; the role of the narrator is really instrumental in promoting this pessimistic conclusion. Whereas the narrator in The Wars uses every means he can to freeze the moment and then to re-animate it through succeeding participations of a second-

person reader, the narrator of Not Wanted on the Voyage uses an impersonal third-person ["Everyone knows it wasn't like that" (Not Wanted 3)] to alienate the reader from accepted versions of the story of Noah's flood. But this parodic strategy depends upon a new conclusion to the story, a repetition which offers its own paradoxical freedom (Hutcheon, Parody 10). And yet the only freedom that Mrs. Noyes finds in Findley's fable is the sort of Paterian freedom from the moment which, in this case, would demand an end to the very history which we know succeeds the fable. History, in other words, is the threat of time in Pater now writ large in Findley; it is a rejection of time in favour of eternity, and a rejection, paradoxically, of the flux of matter in favour of its transcendent, "original" beauty. This is an aesthetic view that George Woodcock correctly identifies as having Gnostic roots; if the world will "perpetuate the cruelties and injustices that exist between men and men and men and animals, then we must reject it and pray for rain. Which [sic] is a conclusion that any good Gnostic or Catharist would have freely accepted" (Woodcock 237).

The shift from second-person narration in The Wars to third-person omniscience in Not Wanted on the Voyage now aids and abets the triumph of the very absolutism with which the novel contends. For Mrs. Noyes reveals a disappointment in the nature of creation which, if it is the perfect antithesis of the dying Yaweh's [sic] disappointment with

his creation, is still the fulfillment of her opponent's nihilism. Mrs. Noyes, in other words, is no less alienated from human history, on her side, than is Yaweh on his side: nor is her prescience of what is to come any less dangerous than the patriarchal deity's own prescience. Third-person omniscience, it would seem, alienates the reader from other possibilities, even as the narrative closure resists the reader's future.

Whereas the narrator in The Wars supplied frozen moments of action which the reader could release into "permanent motion" in the imagination--thus allowing beauty to live on out of the frozen moment--the narrator of Not Wanted sees only the death of beauty in the struggle against barbarism. And so the "remembered" world--framed and suspended in watery "animation"--is a better epilogue to beauty than anything life might have to offer.

Likewise, the prologue to each novel could stand as an analogue for each narrator's intentions. In The Wars, the narrator describes a short "beautiful" moment of Robert with the dog and horse--a scene that is ready to be released into permanent motion by the reader's imagination. In Not Wanted, the prologue begins with a quotation from Genesis 7:7: "And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his son's wives with him into the ark, because of the waters of the flood ..." (Not Wanted 3). Yet the narrator immediately undercuts this simple description by dictating to the reader

what his or her impressions must be when reading the passage from Genesis:

Everybody knows it wasn't like that.

To begin with, they make it sound as if there wasn't any argument; as if there wasn't any panic--no one being pushed aside--no one being trampled--none of the animals howling--none of the people screaming blue murder. They make it sound as if the only people who wanted to get on board were Doctor Noyes and his family. Presumably, everyone else (the rest of the human race, so to speak) stood off waving gaily, behind a distant barricade ... (Not Wanted 3)

The narrator continues to dictate the reader's response by supplying a brief impression of what he or she might have imagined Noah and his family doing as the ark is readied for its voyage: Noah and his sons might be relaxing on the poop deck, with port and cigars, yachting caps, white ducks and blazers; Mrs. Noyes and her daughters-in-law might be piped aboard while a band plays "Rule Britannia" and "Over Sea to Skye," as if it were an excursion. But this aesthetically pleasing image is immediately undercut with the warning: "Well. It wasn't an excursion. It was the end of the world" (Not Wanted 3).

The narrator then describes the image of what "really" happened as the Noyes' family prepared to board the ark. It is a scene of chaos: Mrs. Noyes, panic-stricken, runs through smoke as she hears the screams of burning animals; Noah, as the reader finds out in Book Two, is sacrificing all the animals in his "zoo" that are not needed on the ark. Unlike The Wars, the prologue of Not Wanted already predicts the triumph of barbarism over aesthetic beauty, and this

strategy is repeated throughout the novel, apparently to convince the reader of the necessity of opposing the barbarous inheritors of patriarchy itself.

The prologue of the novel indicates, as well, the true source of the conflict between the aesthetes and the barbarians: their differing attitudes toward nature. To Noah, the barbarian, all "excess" animals are merely fodder to burn for an absent god, whereas to Mrs. Noyes, the aesthete, they are practically "her children" (Not Wanted 4). The other aesthetes in the novel supplement Findley's own attitude, expressed in numerous interviews, that "we're at war with nature, and we have declared war on a defenceless enemy" (Cameron 50). For the sacrifice which occurs immediately after Mrs. Noyes's "impression" of the evening hills demands a political response from the devotees of beauty. Noah insists that Ham be the one to slit the lamb's throat, even though he knows that such an act is anathema to his sensitive son. Although Ham does have an appreciation for science and the "rational" pursuit of knowledge, his interest comes from a "love of life so great he could not bear to kill" (Not Wanted 25), and this attitude contrasts sharply with Noah's "scientific" experiments which mutilate or cause the death of animals. Though Ham offers the sacrifice, he purposely mutilates himself by cutting his own arm in protest against the "execution" of the lamb. This self-destructive protest is the first indication of the attitude that the aesthetes will

eventually take; they would rather see the world die (and themselves with it) than survive in a world that is so brutal.

In order to enlist the reader's empathy for an aesthetic appreciation of nature, Findley portrays the animal world itself through the sympathetic character of Mottyl the cat. Mottyl shares the same view of life that Mrs. Noyes does, for there are times when the cat believes that the aesthetic moment can bring peace: "Stillness could be the answer: just to lie here, listening to the squeaking of Mrs. Noyes' chair" (Not Wanted 19). However, the cat's use of the subjunctive "could" suggests that she too is "aware" of the inadequacy of the aesthetic moment to bring lasting peace. Mrs. Noyes's favourite animal has suffered, after all, from the hands of the barbarians; she has lost her eyesight as well numerous calico kittens to Noah's experiments.

Mottyl therefore provides a contrast between the brutal world of Noah and the seemingly more humane world of nature. Findley would agree that his animals "don't manifest any of the violence that characterizes the world of man" (Gabriel 33); and most obviously, his presentation of nature is more closely aligned with Kenneth Graham's Wind in the Willows than with the Darwinian view of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. Although Findley claims that "Voyage is very open and honest and absolutely direct about Mottyl and killing," he sees Mottyl's killing as part

of a natural process (Gabriel 33)--which suggests significant differences between Mottyl's killing for food and Noah's needless sacrifices.

The world of nature in Not Wanted on the Voyage is one of sanctity and innocence. Unlike Tennyson's presentation of nature as "red in tooth and claw" (Gabriel 33), the animals in Not Wanted on the Voyage have a mystical reverence towards nature: the "floor of the wood, some animals believed, was haunted by the dead; though not in any morbid way. It was a case of reverence and respect" (Not Wanted 43). The animals' respect for nature is extended to parts of the wood which are considered holy and serve as sanctuaries for wounded beasts. As well, the animals show a reverence for the dead that a truly Darwinian natural world lacks. Mottyl "prays" for her dead enemy, the dog, by leaving her scat--a "prayer" which says: "I, Mottyl the cat, have been here ... I knew this beast. My prayer is for his release to the buzzards" (Not Wanted 57). Findley extends the animals' respect for other creatures even to their living enemies. While Noah determines which human beings are wanted on the voyage and which are not, Mottyl the cat shares two of the five eggs she finds in a tree with an emaciated vixen who had attempted to catch her.

Some of Findley's animals in fact have a world view that Mrs. Noyes will come to share by the end of the novel: no world is better than a cruel world. Whistler the groundhog epitomizes this view when all the animals are

streaming by his hole in an attempt to save themselves. Rather than joining the mob of desperate animals, he stays in his burrow and tells himself:

... this is where I belong. Better to face the great death here, than to join the doomed horde and be trampled and pushed to one side ...

No. He would wait. In time, the mass would thin --and the panic lessen--and he would cross his field, moving upwards through the rain, and over to the east--and he would sit in his favourite burrow and watch the world's last days from there. (Not Wanted 191)

Whistler espouses a world view that is similar to the aesthete Rodwell in The Wars. When faced with overwhelmingly brutal circumstances, both "characters" choose to end their lives rather than exist in a hostile world. Whistler's stoicism thus allows him to remain an "aesthete" to the end, for he prefers to die taking in the last "pictures" of the world from his burrow than struggling for life.

While animals like Whistler are able to face stoically the harsh facts of existence, the human aesthetes in Not Wanted on the Voyage have a more difficult time. After Mrs. Noyes refuses to stay on the ark after the murder of the Lotte-child, she tries to escape into her memories of the old world. She "paints" her impression of the old way of life for the dead ape-child: "If only you had seen all this when all this was living and divinely beautiful. The porch--the view--my cat ... the yard without its dead ... the view across these lawns ... the hill--the wonder of

the floating trees! ... oh--Lotte! If only you had seen that world. It looked--it smelled so--it was so cool. Half an hour--an hour, every day--you didn't have to sleep to dream. It was all out there--as real as you and me. Wonderful!" (Not Wanted 174). Mrs. Noyes turns from her impressions of the past and attempts to lose herself in her old songs. However, as the last strains of music fade from the old organ she has played them on, the narrator tells the reader that there will be "no more music: forever" (Not Wanted 176), and Mrs. Noyes echoes the same belief when she turns to where she had left Lotte and says, "There. That's all the songs there are" (Not Wanted 176). The failure of the music and of her memories to keep the unpleasant present at bay strikes Mrs. Noyes when she realizes that the body of the Lotte-child has disappeared. This aesthetic moment has not only failed to keep back the horror of her position, it has also allowed the crows to carry the body away. Thus, although Mrs. Noyes finds the body and packs it away as if it were one of her "beautiful" Dutch brocades, she realizes that aesthetic memories of the past are useless against barbarity, and so her use of the aesthetic moment will change by the end of the novel.

The narrator likewise explores Lucy/Lucifer's faith in aestheticism only to show the failure of the beautiful moment. Unlike the Paterian Mrs. Noyes, Lucy is a Wildean aesthete, for "she" does not see nature as superior to artifice; like Vivian in Wilde's "The Decay of Lying," she

would agree that "Nature has good intentions ... but she cannot carry them out" ("Decay" 57).

In order to escape from nature's "intentions," Lucy/Lucifer uses a series of Wildean "masks" to create her/himself: first as Lucifer the fallen angel, then as the cormorant in the wood and, finally, as Lucy the tall Oriental woman (Not Wanted 33, 51, 107). Lucy's portrayal of Eve in Noah's creation masque also suggests her faith in the superiority of artifice over nature (Not Wanted 98)--or in other words, the superiority of the imagination over reality.

As any Wildean aesthete would do, Lucy turns to her imagination when the "real" world is not to her liking: When the world of the ark is too unpleasant for Lucy to deal with, she imagines a new world: "We have come upon this voyage together. And before this voyage, I heard another rumour--didn't you--of another promised land. Well--this is that promised land, right here, my friends. This is all we have and it may well be the only promised land we shall ever know ... this is a place without magic. All that was magical and wonderful has been left behind us ... So I am starting a rumour, here and now, of yet another world. I don't know when it will present itself--I don't know where it will be. But--as with all those other worlds now past--when it is ready, I intend to go there" (Not Wanted 283-84). This other world that Lucy seeks is one belonging entirely to her imagination, and, as such, can offer her

listeners no more than aesthetic comfort. Most clearly, in a moment as crucial as the end of the world, the old aesthetic division between art and life cannot guarantee the creation of new worlds.

Doctor Noyes's brutal murder of the unicorn provides the greatest test of the powers of Lucy's imagination, since Lucy tries to bring the beast back to life through imagining it as it once was alive. However, Lucy's "resurrection" of the unicorn only leads to despair for the aesthetes, for they see how the aesthetic moment cannot deny the death of the unicorn. Lucy is forced to exhort her fellow prisoners in the hold of the ark about this moment they are sharing: "Believe me; we could sit here forever--and all that would die would be our memory of this moment. But not this moment. I know this from where I have been and from what I have seen. Believe it. All the moments of this creature's life can be with us in an instant. All we have to do is remember it alive. If we can forget its death--it will live. Not forever: not beyond the moment of its death--but before its death, where life is constant. Look ..." (Not Wanted 280). She touches the unicorn's head and it rises to its feet and looks about in confusion. The aesthetes all begin to smile and Mrs. Noyes thinks to herself that "at last I have seen a miracle" (Not Wanted 281). All too soon, however, the miracle passes; the Unicorn's glow fades and it slowly expires.

The narrator's ensuing comment admits the failure of the aesthetic moment to add a sort of immortality to beauty, for "The Unicorn was truly dead. He had lived and died and lived again. And died. And as Lucy would say he would spend eternity living and dying. Just as people either did or didn't--could or couldn't--would or wouldn't return to the memory of the moment when the Unicorn was flesh and blood and lived in the wood at the bottom of Noah's Hill" (Not Wanted 281). The "success" of the moment depends on whether or not people choose to remember the unicorn's life. Mrs. Noyes' question after the miracle further undercuts the marginal comfort that the aesthetic moment gave, for she asks why, if Lucy could make him live, could she not keep him alive? Lucy's answer shows the ultimate failure of aestheticism in keeping death at bay, for all she can make in reply is a question in return to Mrs. Noyes: "I could ask the same of you, Mother Noyes, ... of all your dead children" (Not Wanted 281).

Lucy is aware of the inadequacy of her answer, for she offers the aesthetes only another vain hope, pretty "might have beens." Significantly, Lucy's whole speech is rendered through the aesthetic responses of the blind cat, Mottyl. Lucy and the aesthetes who are gathered around her in the semi-darkness of the lanterns make "a circular picture" (Not Wanted 282) in Mottyl's mind, and "this figure simultaneously floating in a blind cat's mind and sitting in the middle of a stable" (Not Wanted 282) begins to speak:

A long time ago ... in a place I have almost forgotten --I heard a rumour of another world. With all my heart--because I could not abide the place I was in--I wanted to see that world. I wanted to go there and to be there and to live there. Where I was born--the trees were always in the sun Always fair weather! Dull. I wanted storms. I wanted difference. And I had heard this rumour ... about another world. And I wondered--does it rain there?....I wanted, too, someone I could argue with And if I were to say: "I am not I--but whoever I wish to be" would I be believed--in this other world? ...

(Not Wanted 282)

Lucy's question echoes Wilde's advice to a friend: "Create yourself. Be yourself your poem" (cited in Williams 22). But her question also shows a hint of despair in the hope of other worlds--shows, in other words, her fear that self-creation might prove to be no more than wishful thinking.

The real test of imagination in Not Wanted thus occurs in the political arena, since Lucy's aestheticism is put into action in this world as a means for liberating the human spirit from social oppression, if not from the oppression of mortality. However, even Lucy's faith in the aesthetic moment as a means of deliverance begins to waver. Although Lucy is optimistic after the first failed revolt--she tells Ham that they will have to try "The next time and the next time and the next ... However many times it takes to win" (Not Wanted 304)--her optimism deserts her temporarily after a few weeks in the darkness of the ark. She goes into a trance and lists to herself all her failures: her revolts against the "forces of evil" (Not Wanted 321), both in Heaven and on the ark have failed; she

has not kept the unicorn and the demons alive; now even her magical powers are failing. Her unexpected conclusion is that she has been unable to fulfil herself in any form other than the one she has been given--knowledge which undercuts her previous Wildean statement that she could choose to be whomever she wanted to be. However, Lucy is able to put her despair aside for a while longer; for she comes up with a successful plan for escaping the hold of the ark.

Although her plan works and the aesthetes gain their freedom, the despair Lucy had felt in the hold returns. Contrary to all expectations, an overwhelming sense of futility strikes all of the aesthetes in turn as they enjoy the sun and the freedom of being on the top deck. Mottyl is the first to realize how freedom on the ark does not make much of a difference in existential terms. When she is told that her silver kitten is dead, she blames the system for the hard facts of mortality:

All that Mottyl could think was; another experiment, thank you ... and the hand of Doctor Noyes reaching down into her nest--into all her nests forever--removing this one and that one--this eye and that eye--these ears and that tail--the brain of this one and the testicles of that one--the head of this one, the intestines of that--this colour, that colour, white and yellow, silver and calico ... never, never, never, never ...

Never to end. (Not Wanted 330)

The blind cat retreats from her faith in the unchanging nature of life into her memories of the antediluvian world. Mottyl begins to sing her death song, and the world "whose

litany of praise and sorrow was the subject of her singing-- was also the world she watched inside her mind beyond her blindness" (Not Wanted 333). The cat thus tries to recreate the world in her mind through pictorial impressions that stress the teeming life in the old world and that diminish the dangers to the animals. But her selective memory only leads her to a sentimental, and nostalgic, conclusion:

Wasn't it wonderful here!

Goodbye. Goodbye.

The tall grass parted--and there before her was the whole of everything: alive. No one would ever know what she had seen--that she had seen the last of the world that was: of the world that could never be again. In blind Mottyl's mind was the last whole vision of the world before it was drowned.

Gone, now.

Under.

Forever. (Not Wanted 333)

Clearly this aesthetic moment of nostalgia is not a viable escape, for the cat comes out of her trance after this vision of the old world passes, and is actually worse off; for she now loses the power of speech.

Lucy also shares the cat's sense of the futility of future history. Even though Lucy has the success of a second revolt to buoy her spirits, she returns to the despair that she felt after the first failed revolution. She sees that the clouds have dissipated, and that the sun, the moon and the stars will return, and she thinks to herself, "Well, well, well. It all begins again" (Not Wanted 337). Ironically, these signs of a life returning to

normal cause Lucy to go to her cabin and ask herself what all her struggles have been for:

Lucy looked around her--bleakly, at first, and then with a modicum of tenderness. This is where she had slept with Ham. A man. A human ... All his answers were yes and no--and all his questions equally terse: why? he would say--and what for?

Nothing more.

He's been my "husband," here. The games; the pockets full of books; the walks; the answers and the questions have been mine ... for a while.

And now?

What for--the human race?

And why?

I heard a rumour--didn't you--another world ...

When?

When? (Not Wanted 338)

With the realization that the world is going to start again, Lucy recognizes that she is ready to put aside the human race as a child puts aside an old toy. She asks herself who will have control of this "new" world and she is unhappy with the answer--"the human race?"--because she knows that the same struggle undertaken by the aesthetes on board the ark will be re-played over and over again. This new beginning will not make a world any more appreciative of beauty than the first one; even Ham, after all, wants only simple answers to his questions and does not appreciate beauty in the same way that Lucy does. Lucy tries to hope for the existence of yet another new world to come, although her question as to "when" it will come suggests she despairs of its existence.

Contrary to Lucy, Mrs. Noyes no longer longs for another world when she sees the sun rise; instead, like

Harris in The Wars, she turns to the alternative world she sees beneath the sea as an escape from the reality of life on board the ark. As is the aesthetic practice, Mrs. Noyes sees the view below as a picture: "There were the farms--and all the white stone buildings--all the winding ribbons of the cowpath geography that had defined the place where she had lived her life. There were the terraced fields and the white stone walls and the tumbled fences over which and through which all the drowned cattle and all the drowned goats had finally managed to find their way ..." (Not Wanted 342). Now Mrs. Noyes compares the world she sees with the world she remembers; but, unlike Mottyl, she no longer ignores the pain and brutality that existed in the old world. Instead, she actually celebrates the fact that the world below is "emptied now of noise and commerce and community" (Not Wanted 343). Her ideal world, she now realizes, can only exist as a world that is removed from life. Thus, her outlook on life shares much with one version of Paterian aestheticism, since life must be "removed from other forms of human commerce in an effort to preserve their beauty and integrity" (Trehearne 14).

Given Mrs. Noyes' belief that brutality will exist as long as humans are in control of the world, it is not surprising that she comes to wish for an end to the existence of humanity. Mrs. Noyes is given the last words in the book by the narrator and she sums up the despair the aesthetes feel. For once, though she and Mottyl are sitting

on the deck beneath the moon, Mrs. Noyes does not appreciate the beauty of the scene. She thinks that

... It will never end. The voyage will never, never end. And if it does ...

She laid her hand on Mottyl's head. Here was this cat, whose sight had been taken by Doctor Noyes, and down below them all was the world that had been destroyed by Doctor Noyes (with a little help from his illustrious Friend), and ... now Noah wanted another world and more cats to blind. Well, damn them--no, she thought.

"No!" she said.

Mottyl heard her--and stirred.

Mrs. Noyes said; "I didn't mean to wake you. I'm sorry. Sorry--but not sorry. Watch with me, Motty--you blind and me with eyes, beneath the moon. We're here, dear. No matter what--we're here. And--damn it all--I guess we're here to stay."

Mrs. Noyes scanned the sky.

Not one cloud.

(Not Wanted 352)

Her final prayer for rain, however, renounces her claim that they "are here to stay." Instead, her prayer expresses the ultimate despair of the aesthetic attitude. It is an extreme instance of the doubt that life and art can be the same, or that aesthetic appreciation can survive the necessity of political action. Mrs. Noyes is too faithful, in other words, to Pater's vision of the "aesthetic moment" to accept the Decadent's confusion of life with art. But then even Lucy, the real decadent of Findley's voyage, is forced, as Wilde himself was finally forced to do in person, to doubt the wisdom of making "art the supreme reality" and of treating "life as a mere mode of fiction" (Wilde, De Profundis 151). The only alternative would be to find a truer mode of decadence.

Chapter III

"End Fact. Try Fiction":
The Decadent Aesthetics of Lying in Famous Last Words.

Famous Last Words (1981) offers a decadent approach to aesthetic questions that Findley had first dealt with in more Paterian terms in The Wars (1977) and then, belatedly, in Not Wanted on the Voyage (1984). Both these other novels, though inadvertently demonstrating the failure of pictorial impressionism, cling to Pater's solutions; the aesthetes in The Wars and Not Wanted on the Voyage either ignore the failure or succumb to despair. Famous Last Words, however, seeks a redemption of sorts in the decadent aesthetics of George Moore and Oscar Wilde.

In the first instance, Moore's narrator in Confessions of a Young Man insists that his pictorial impressionism has not failed him after all. Whereas Pater's aesthete in Marius the Epicurean could not face the brutality of the Coliseum, Moore's aesthete claims that he is not at all disturbed by the "great pagan world, its bloodshed, its slaves, its injustice, its loathing of all that is feeble" (Moore 166). Moore's narrator finds beauty in strength, and so he can glorify the brutality of the world. In Famous Last Words, Findley's aesthete attempts the same act--he uses art to make his own brutal actions appear beautiful.

To accomplish this aim, Findley uses two narrators; there is the "inner" narrator within the text as well as an

omniscient, "third-person," narrator who describes events that occur after the death of the "inner" narrator. The "frame" narrator (who may be Findley) and the inner narrator share the same goal of using the "fine lie"--"that which is its own evidence" (Wilde, "Decay" 59)--to make brute strength appear beautiful. In that sense, Findley's protagonist accepts Wilde's definition of fiction as the telling of "beautiful untrue things" ("Decay" 87).

The story recorded on the walls of a near-deserted chateau by Hugh Selwyn Mauberley--the inner narrator whom Findley "borrowed" from Ezra Pound's poem of the same name--tells ostensibly about a cabal that attempted to take over the world during the 1930s and 1940s. However, the story is rather more of an "Aesthete's Reply" to an age that saw Aestheticism as a "flawed ... sensibility" (Williams 297) than it is a simple story about conspiracy.

Mauberley's aim in writing his narrative is to immortalize himself in a beautiful work of art. Thus, this aesthete-narrator attempts to "freeze" moments of beauty in his narrative, much as a Paterian aesthete would do. However, Mauberley finds beauty in strength and so his presentation of the beautiful differs considerably from the Paterian aesthetes discussed so far.

Mauberley soon describes in his narrative what beauty is to him. While sitting in an Italian cafe in 1936, Mauberley finds a prime example of a "beautiful" object. Although one of Mauberley's oldest friends has just berated

him for supporting the fascists, Mauberley ignores whatever effect this conversation has had on him. Instead, Mauberley shifts his reader's attention to what happened next: "And now I must tell what followed" (Famous 90). But the event that he "must" tell about is simply his attraction to a young blackshirt of the Italian army:

... I could hear him excusing himself and I knew this young, exuberant man would have to pass my table. And I began to perspire. I wanted so desperately to follow him, but I could only think of what Allenby had said; "you are some kind of pilgrim looking for a faith ... under rocks."

And yet I turned in my chair and watched that young man going away. And I went away with him--in my mind. And knelt before his strength. And his victory.
(Famous 91)

Mauberley includes other examples of his worship of strength in his narrative as well. He is attracted to the "compelling menace" and "beauty" (Famous 120-121) of Harry Reinhardt, the hired killer of the cabal; this attraction will lead Mauberley to use Reinhardt's services--an act which, in turn, will eventually seal Mauberley's own death warrant.

Because Mauberley arranged a murder for the cabal, and because he wrote about the cabal in his notebooks, Mauberley knows that Reinhardt will be stalking him when the war draws to a close. Thus, he is faced with the fact of his own death to a much greater extent than was Pater when he wrote: "we are all under a sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve ... we have an interval, and then our

place knows us no more....[O]ur one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time" (Renaissance 238). Mauberley's only hope of "expanding the interval," before his sentence of death is carried out, lies in inscribing--even monumentalizing--his life in a way that will realize his ideal of beauty.

Mauberley, therefore, is in a position similar to the narrator of The Wars; both narrators are faced with making an ugly story beautiful, and both narrators use pictorial impressionism in order to give beauty its privileged position. For Mauberley, freezing the impressions of beauty is especially important, for he is literally--to paraphrase Pater--a man "under a sentence of death." Because he is being stalked by the cabal's assassins, his only chance is to immortalize his story on the walls of a grand hotel. Like the narrator of The Wars, Mauberley carefully selects the "impressions" he gives his readers, although his mode of portraying the impressions is slightly different. While the narrator of The Wars supplied descriptions of photographs which were the basis for his "filling in the gaps" of Robert's story, Mauberley creates his story with the help of his notebooks, which are "like the title cards of a silent film--without the film itself" (Famous 35).

Mauberley's choice of simile for his notebooks is most telling, for the aesthetes in Famous Last Words tend to see their impressions of the world through cinematic images

rather than still photographs. Like Findley himself--who acknowledges that "I could think like that man [Mauberley]. I could be that person" (Meyer 10)--Mauberley is fascinated with "movie making" and uses cinematic techniques and metaphors throughout the narrative.

The cinematic mode of telling the story allows Findley and his narrators to promote the aesthetic approach to life; how Mauberley relates his story is as important as what he relates. Although he has little time to get his story written before he may be found by the assassins, he takes time to give the reader many "camera shots" of views. As Williams suggests, "some of these scenes have an unusual degree of local colour if they are supposed to be etchings in plaster of a man pressed to finish his confession before he is murdered" (310). Whether he is describing scenes such as the view of the harbour at Nassau (Famous 324) or the port of Dubrovnik (Famous 61), Mauberley gives the reader pictorial impressions that seem unnecessary--unless his goal is to expand the interval of the Paterian "moment."

Findley gives a defence of the aesthete's reliance on pictorial impressionism early in the narrative. Ezra Pound is brought into the narrative as a means to contrast Mauberley's impressionistic love of beauty. The fictional Pound at the very least reflects Ezra's own distaste for "cinematographical" impressionism (Gaudier-Brzeska 89). As Pound argued in "Vorticism," there are "two opposed ways of thinking of a man: firstly, you may think of him as that

toward which perception moves, as the toy of circumstances, as the plastic substance receiving impressions; secondly, you may think of him as directing a certain fluid force against circumstance, as conceiving instead of merely reflecting and observing" (89).

Findley's Mauberley represents the first "way of thinking," for he follows Pater in wanting to freeze beautiful moments into art. Both the fictional and historical Pounds would prefer the second "way"; the historical Pound's "'imagism' never had anything to do with the passive reception of impressions" (Williams 304), and the fictional Pound certainly rejects the idea of passively receiving beauty: "You see? There's no place left for a man who writes like Mauberley. Mauberley's whole and only ambition is to describe the beautiful. And who the hell has time for that, any more? No one. Beauty will have to describe itself from now on. Words have more important work to do" (Famous 5). The historical Pound, in words that Findley's Pound might well agree with, disparages the cinematic impressions of beauty: "The logical end of impressionist art is the cinematograph. The state of mind of the impressionist tends to become cinematographical. Or, to put it another way, the cinematograph does away with the need for a lot of impressionist art" (Gaudier-Brzeska 89).

The "more important work" that Findley's Pound believes words must do is to reveal "truth." He pores "like an archaeologist" "through a dozen languages, phrase books and

dictionaries" because he claims that somewhere in them "is what we know already: forgotten and ignored. And I mean to find it" (Famous 5). Pound's desire for lost "facts" reflects, as we will see, one of the internal reader's desires to catalogue facts--a starting point for "Truth"--so that they will not be lost. Findley's Pound "never remarked on the beauty of the world" (Famous 77) and so he is an antithesis to Mauberley and the other internal reader, both of whom place more value on beauty than on truth.

True to Pound's theories, pictorial impressions come to Mauberley in cinematic images quite naturally, for movies, as he remembers from his childhood, present a more beautiful and less deadly version of reality.

... He had never even seen a gun when he was Hugo's age, unless it was up on the screen at the Bijou or the Nickelodeon. Movie guns and movie killers. Bang. With little puffs of white smoke that looked so harmless and innocent. Death at the end of a silent white cloud. And the printed word: Bang! With an exclamation point. Which is why, in his solitary games, he'd never made the sound of guns. But always said it: "Bang!" Walking home through all those summer Sundays--church in the mornings, movies in the afternoons. Choirboys and cowboys. Anthems and gunfights. Gone. (Famous 35)

With this memory as his guide, Mauberley proceeds to change his life into a written text: he sees his breath and says, "'Bang, bang,' ... But without exclamation points. The air was too cold to breathe that deep" (Famous 35). And with this thought, he soon begins to "create" his life on the walls.

His later experiences with the cabal have also shown him that "You make your own world" (Famous 137); as one of the readers in the text correctly realizes, Mauberley's aim is to "create another image of the world: innocent and smiling" (Famous 76). As Mauberley knows, neither photographs nor movies tell the truth about the world and so both are appropriate for him to use in his narration. His reflections on the photographs of King Edward VIII, Wallis Simpson, and their "retinue" of which Mauberley was a part, show how photographs "lie." As Mauberley realizes,

There was something in those photographs worth remarking on--a kind of signal only seen and recognized later. I saw it in myself, at first, more vibrantly than in the others. I had never looked better, never looked happier, never looked more fit. I did not even guess why this should be, though I suppose I thought it was just the age, the times, the excitement of the moment Everyone in all those pictures taken then was smiling; everyone was radiant; everyone was infallible. It was all a lie, of course We were all so willing to be there; thinking ours was the ultimate face of the age. And perhaps it was.

(Famous 98)

These "lying" photographs were to be used by the King to gain support for his proposed marriage to Wallis; the celebrities--the "beautiful people"--shown there would prove that Wallis was accepted by society and so would be a fit consort to the King.

However, these photographs also show how art can give an "improved" version of life. In this respect, they are like Mauberley's writing, and his attitude to both art forms shows Mauberley to be an aesthetic descendant of Oscar

Wilde. Wilde "had tried to establish the priority of art over life through his witty doctrine of the mask" (Williams 321) and, through his "The Decay of Lying," he would further claim that the "object of Art is not simple truth but complex beauty" (Wilde 68). Complex beauty is most easily obtained through the "fine lie" which provides "its own evidence" (Wilde 59).

Thus, it is not surprising that Mauberley prefaces his narrative with the caveat, "All I have written here is true; except the lies" (Famous 59). The narrative that follows is one long "fine lie" that attempts to hide the truth behind beautiful masks. Mauberley, after all, learns from Wallis Simpson that the "'truth' of the mask is how to create his own reality" (Williams 323). Mauberley realizes as he writes his story that the Duchess has the ability to "transform herself into an aesthetic object which transcends simple truth" (Williams 322)--which becomes one of Mauberley's goals for himself as he writes. As a lesson in how to accomplish this aim, he imagines how the Duchess is an expert at applying beautiful masks for the public: "The face she saw in her private mirror was a face no other human being had seen. It was her midnight face, and mostly in her mind. The true face--lifted and lacquered--was the one she showed to others and the world" (Famous 191).

The "public face"--the appearance that the world sees--is what matters to Mauberley, and he learns that this idea can be applied to history as well. In a sense, art can be

the "mask" that covers up what happened in history. As Oscar Wilde stated, "The fact is that we look back on the ages entirely through the medium of art, and art, very fortunately, has never once told us the truth" (Wilde 83).

Mauberley also learned this art of re-making history through narration from the Duchess. One night at a dinner party, "Wallis told the story of her life and left out China ... Then the Duke told the story of his life and left out having abdicated ... these stories told the temper of the times and the motto we had adopted: the truth is in our hands now" (Famous 177).

The lesson of how to create a beautiful "mask" for history is important to Mauberley, because he wants to present an image of a beauty which can accommodate the brutality he also celebrates. However, Mauberley has problems in presenting beauty in his narrative because, no matter how hard he tries, he cannot disguise the fact that the story he is relating is basically barbaric and ugly. The leaders in the cabal of which Mauberley is a part, for example, are historical figures such as Nazi Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop and industrialist-turned-Nazi collaborator Charles Bedaux. While the cabal also includes historically popular "characters" such as the Duke and Duchess of Windsor and pilot Charles Lindbergh, Mauberley (and Findley) cannot escape the fact that some of these barbaric characters are also aesthetes.

What is even worse for the aesthete-narrator is that he cannot tell his story without implicating himself in the brutal events that have occurred. Findley's aesthete wants to ignore the truth because his aim--unlike the narrator of The Wars, who merely wanted to escape the brutality of others--is to hide his own responsibility for the "ugly" actions he caused.

Writing his story on the walls of the chateau allows Mauberley both to create his own version of the story, and to immortalize his own life in a work of art. As Findley states in an article, writers "witness and record ... the cryptic passage of people and events that, otherwise, would gain no place in memory" ("Countries" 106). Findley's Mauberley does not want to lose the many "intervals" of his life, and so he has been a "compulsive witness" who has "never been able to refrain from setting things down on paper ... moment by moment--every word and every gesture instantly frozen in his private cipher" (Famous 21). However, Mauberley wants not only to preserve the moments of history that he has experienced, but also to preserve his own life through his aesthetic confession. As Findley himself phrases it: "Forgotten forever. This, of course, is everyone's fear: not to be one of those people chosen, en passant, to be hoarded in someone's memory ..." ("Countries" 106). Most obviously, Mauberley's writing on the wall is motivated by such fear.

"Some there are who never disappear" (Famous 173), Mauberley writes when he remembers the hand print he saw at the caves at Altamira: "This is my mark; it [the hand print] said. My mark that I was here. All I can tell you of my self and of my time and of the world in which I lived is in this signature: this hand print; mine ... I leave you this: my hand as signature beside these images of what I knew. Look how my fingers spread to tell my name" (Famous 173). Mauberley realizes that he can make himself "permanent" through the images he writes on the walls, and so he leaves his own hand print as a signature (Famous 51); he too shares in the "heart of the human race--which is its will to say I am" (Famous 173).

Mauberley's desire for permanence makes his "confession" similar in substance, if not in purpose, to George Moore's Confession of a Young Man, for the narrative shows Mauberley's attempt to make his art independent from life. By making his life an aesthetic object that has its own autonomous existence, Mauberley can escape the harsh fact of his own approaching death--and at the same time subordinate truth to beauty. His art could then "become, as it were, a life of the artist apart from his actual living of it" (Williams 19)--a fact that could give comfort to a man waiting for his executioner to arrive. Mauberley's treatment of his life thus refuses Oscar Wilde's warning in "De Profundis" about the dangers of treating life as "a mere mode of fiction" (Wilde 151). Mauberley accepts without

doubt Wilde's earlier idea that the life of the aesthete should become its own work of art.

If the aesthete wants to make himself live forever by inscribing his "aesthetic beauty" on the walls, this kind of "beauty" still proves to be the very opposite of moral beauty, for he must resort to telling a "fine lie" that will seem like a true confession, that will have the appearance of "moral beauty." Mauberley shows a keen awareness of the distinction between truth and lies throughout, and often he attempts to cover his lies by giving them the status of myth. Mauberley, in one instance, sees himself as Cadmus-- "the guardian of myth and literature" (Famous 62). As well, he compares himself to Homer: when the King and Wallis Simpson arrive at Dubrovnik, Mauberley sees them as "icons" for the people. "This is the new mythology, I thought. Homer might have written it" (Famous. 63). Mauberley, of course, is the one who is writing it and so he convinces himself that the "beautiful myths" he is creating will let him last as long as Homer.

The other roles from literature that Mauberley adopts throughout his narrative likewise help to "aestheticize" his life, so that it becomes a "mere mode of fiction" (Wilde 151). Mauberley's actions can only be seen as aesthetic acts in a work of art separate from life, for otherwise Mauberley's confession of arranging the murder of Harry Oakes will be seen for the barbaric act that it is. When Mauberley makes a desperate attempt to buy Oakes's silence

about the cabal, he thinks to himself, "I am playing d'Artagnan. And the Queen of France depends on my finesse" (Famous 369). Although he admits that Oakes is "hardly my image of the evil Lady de Winter, ... he would do as one whose machinations could destroy a Royal House" (Famous 369). When Oakes refuses to be paid off, Mauberley arranges his death and justifies his action by transposing himself into one of Shakespeare's plays: "Every death I had seen was played out before my eyes. And I thought of Beatrice in Much Ado: 'do you love me?' 'Yes' 'Kill Claudio ...'" (Famous 373). Thus, Mauberley re-writes his history in the "Wildean manner" (Williams 324), assigning roles to his "characters" which might put Mauberley himself in the best possible light.

Mauberley wants to make his history a work of art where he appears as a character written by a "greater author," and he openly admits this goal to his readers: "think of God as being Himself created by another being who one day whispered in His ear: 'begin'" (Famous 180). This analogue serves as well to illustrate the frame narrator's method, for the process of seconding truth to beauty that Mauberley uses in his own narrative is repeated in the frame narrator's story. The frame narrator gives two readers' responses to the words on the wall, and the question of how to receive the message there is debated within the text. Unlike The Wars, Findley does not allow the reader of Famous Last Words to "co-create" the story from the fragments that are provided; the

"outside" reader's response to the text is dictated by the "internal" readers' responses, all of which shows the true aesthetic effect of dictatorial politics on narrative technique.

The debate between truth and beauty here takes the form of a continuing discussion between two American soldiers who are part of a group that discovers Mauberley's body in May, 1945. The more sympathetic of the two soldiers, Lieutenant Quinn, is himself an aesthete. Like the dead writer whom he admires, Quinn imagines "movies" or dramas in his head in order to forget the transience of "beautiful" moments:

He selected a Phillip Morris and wetted his lips so the paper wouldn't stick. He struck the match and lit up, rounding the gesture by extinguishing the flame with his first exhalation. Perfect. If only someone had seen.

On the other hand, the match. Where does one put a burned-out match in an empty room? ...

Quinn put the match in his upstage pocket.

(Famous 45)

Quinn's appreciation of this "aesthetic moment," complete with cigarette in hand, marks him as a Paterian aesthete; however, he also demonstrates his own kinship with George Moore's narrator-aesthete through his appreciation of Mauberley: "Mauberley was here; he stood right here, like me; he felt this wax; he could see the same view; he could raise the same dust as he crossed the floor. It was a painful thought that all these things, mere things, had the privilege of being there with Mauberley during the final days of his life and could never tell of it" (Famous 65).

Moore's narrator had claimed, "I came into the world apparently with a nature like a smooth sheet of wax, bearing no impress, but capable of receiving any; of being moulded into all shapes" (49), and Quinn, with his reference to the wax that Mauberley "must" have touched, tries in his own person to mediate between Mauberley and Moore as aesthetes.

Quinn is given the assignment of reading Mauberley's tale and reporting what he finds to his commanding officer and nemesis, Captain Freyberg. Because Freyberg does not share in the aesthetic appreciation of life--his only desire is to document the horrors under the Nazis so that the "truth" will be known--the outside reader of the text is presented with two opposing viewpoints that seemingly give the reader no more than two ways to read the story.

Thus, the conflict between Quinn and Freyberg is basically an argument on whether or not beauty should be subordinate to truth. Quinn, who is determined to "exonerate" Mauberley--reading the walls being simply a "matter of interpretation" (Famous 58)--initially accepts Mauberley's vision even though he reads Mauberley's caveat: "All I have written here is true; except the lies" (Famous 59). Quinn believes that Mauberley is justified in telling the "fine lie" (Wilde 59) if it serves an aesthetic purpose. When Quinn reads of a sequence that Mauberley had written that dealt with the Duke of Windsor confronting himself in a set of mirrors, Quinn's response is, "How right and wonderful that Mauberley should have his king confront

himself in a dream. The kings in Shakespeare did the same" (Famous 254). Unlike Shakespeare's characters, however, Mauberley does not confront himself in a dream. Since he is not a disinterested actor in this political drama, he cannot claim the same aesthetic distance as an author such as Shakespeare. And so Quinn follows Mauberley too far in reading his "life as a mere mode of fiction" (Wilde 151), for Quinn tries to ignore Mauberley's real lack of moral beauty.

Freyberg, however, does not share Quinn's view, for he has seen the dangers that this kind of aestheticism holds. After all, the "bigger the lie, the more we are bound to believe it" (Famous 52), Freyberg reminds his lieutenant. Freyberg correctly sees that Quinn's approach can lead to beliefs such as these: "And Hitler was just an actor with a moustache made up to look like Charlie Chaplin. So, when Charlie says we should all fall down--we all fall down Pratsfalls. Yes? And no more war. How wonderful. Just to walk out into a lobby and leave it all behind us on a giant movie screen But I'd also like this movie to include the scenes at Dachau, Quinn--so you could walk back through the gates and tell me nothing happened there Playtime. Movie time. Make believe" (Famous 53-54).

Freyberg's points are valid, as Stephen Scobie notes: "Despite his obnoxious personality, and despite the manifestly paranoid nature of his obsessions, Freyberg is essentially correct in many of his arguments" (Scobie 210).

Freyberg, for example, provides a corrective view of the "new mythology." Whereas Mauberley would insist that one can change truth to beauty by elevating it to the level of myth, Freyberg discounts this view:

"It's just ... Mythology can have two meanings, that's all. I mean--The Iliad, The Odyssey, ... I mean ... there was a Trojan War. The Trojan War did happen."

Freyberg opened the door.

"I know that, Quinn. It's not the Trojan War I don't believe in ... it's the Trojan Horse-shit."

(Famous 150)

However, because of the frame narrator's presentation of Freyberg--his "paranoid nature" and crude attempts at argument, among other characteristics--Findley does not, in fact, force "the reader to go beyond the easy emotional identification with the sympathetic Quinn" (210), as Scobie would like to believe. Freyberg's arguments are undercut throughout the narrative, for his obsession with documenting the truth seems gradually to drive him insane. Before Freyberg even appears in the narrative the outside reader has Quinn's judgement on his commanding officer: Freyberg "had given up even the pretense of rationality" (Famous 44). Each time he appears in the frame narrator's story, Freyberg appears a little less stable, until finally he is relieved of duty by the Colonel from Munich: "Captain Freyberg ... sat up very tall in the Colonel's Jeep and appeared not to hear a word that was said to him. Quinn could not help but think the Captain looked like a prisoner" (Famous 393).

The frame narrator also records a conversation between Quinn and the Captain before Freyberg is taken away. This conversation demonstrates the danger inherent in elevating truth over beauty. Freyberg shows Quinn his collection of photographs from Dachau and asks the lieutenant if he remembers the horrors there. Quinn's response is typical of the aesthete. He prefers the images in his mind to the documents of hard fact, for the impressions, like Mauberley's memories of movie guns, are less dangerous than the hard reality. Quinn responds to Freyberg's prodding by rejecting the photographs:

"Yes; I remember. God damn it, sir. And I don't want to see those things again. I can see them in my mind. I don't need any bloody photographs."

"Everyone needs photographs, Quinn. You see this here ...? ..."

There was a photograph of Quinn himself. He was standing beside an open door--and inside the oven twenty bodies, or thirty, unburned.

"Yes. I know that, Captain. Can't you see I'm standing right there."

"Yes. But do you remember it?"

(Famous 390)

Freyberg obviously remembers all too well, for he begins to scream as he shows Quinn more and more photographs: "You see this? You see this? You see this? You see this?" (Famous 390). The hard facts--the ugly truth--drive Freyberg into a semi-comatose state. He doesn't "move a muscle" as Quinn slowly leaves the room, for he is paralyzed by the hard face of reality.

All that is left for the frame narrator to do, once Freyberg is dismissed, is to show how Mauberley's story will not be lost. For Quinn, like the narrator in The Wars, is well aware that aestheticism does not succeed in covering up the brutality of life. Yet Quinn's impressionism is only intensified in his reaction to Mauberley's prospects from the mountain peak: "he wished he did not know how much that view had meant to Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (Famous 394). Henceforth, it would seem, he accepts Mauberley's story at face value. Quinn's taking of Mauberley's scarf as a keepsake even suggests that Mauberley and his values will be his legacy. Worse, Quinn's final act of dating Mauberley's tale, as if he were the guarantor and witness of it, also makes him take an active part in Mauberley's explanation of fascism as being "a shape that passes slowly through a dream. Waking, all we remember is the awesome presence, while a shadow lying dormant in the twilight whispers from the other side of reason; I am here. I wait" (Famous 396).

In the end, Quinn sees fascism as no more than a brief impression of evil--an impression which he may even consider beautiful simply because of its "awesome presence." Quinn shows himself to be a true Paterian, for he clearly separates art from life and politics through his valorization of the brief "impression." Even though Quinn has seen Dachau and its horrors, he finally affirms Mauberley's suggestion that the creation of beauty in art can redeem an evil existence.

Although Findley would like to believe that "Mauberley is a hero because in writing what he does on the walls he must condemn himself and everything he stood for" (Meyer 6-7), it is plain that Mauberley and his fellow aesthetes "are sentimentally unable to look truth in the eye" (Williams 317). Far from condemning himself, Mauberley is creating a more beautiful vision of himself as an autonomous art object, the permanence of which will stand the test of time. And so Findley would seem to accept, with Quinn, the idea Wilde finally repudiated, that art is the "supreme reality" while life is "a mere mode of fiction" (Wilde, De Profundis 151).

Conclusion

Following Wilde, the aesthetes in Timothy Findley's novels clearly attempt to privilege "complex beauty" over "simple truth" ("Decay" 68). This aesthetic approach to life can only succeed in art, for pictorial impressionism seemingly "freezes" moments of beauty that are preserved for the observer/reader to bring to life. However, when this aesthetic vision is applied to reality, this approach to life leads ultimately to despair.

Each of the three novels discussed in this thesis attempts to reconcile the failure of the aesthetic moment when it is applied to reality rather than art. The Wars shows a narrator/historian using photographs to bring the aesthetic moment to life, thus preserving Robert Ross's life from inevitable loss. When the narrator attempts to preserve the past of this one individual through pictorial impressionism, he is seemingly successful; through the reader's participation, the narrator is able to redeem the aesthetic moment--Robert Ross's life is preserved through the story that the narrator and the reader co-create. However, the narrator/historian's aestheticism fails when he realizes he must portray Robert's "insane" actions of murder, while setting the horses free, as acts of beauty. As the later novels also inadvertently demonstrate, this aesthetic approach to life fails because historical

narrative is not merely the "telling of beautiful untrue things" ("Decay" 87).

Findley applies his aestheticism to a larger context in Not Wanted on the Voyage. By using a feminist approach to the story of Noah's ark, Findley identifies the sources of violence in patriarchy itself, rather than in one man's response to the savagery of a First World War battlefield as in The Wars. But the aesthetes in Not Wanted on the Voyage discover the impotence of the aesthetic approach to life when they attempt to change the patriarchal society on board the ark. When the aesthetes realize that their pictorial impressionism is only a temporary escape from reality, they are unable to see beyond this failure. Rather than accept the challenges that exist in the world outside the imagination, the aesthetes prefer to pray for an end to existence, because they will not accept a world where complex beauty is not privileged over political reality.

Famous Last Words sums up the attempt to solve the opposition of art to politics. The love of beauty is an inadequate response to existence outside of art, and so Mauberley, the aesthete/writer in Famous Last Words, attempts to make his life into a work of art which encapsulates his age. He tries to "end fact" and "try fiction" by turning to the "fine lie" ("Decay" 59) which justifies his fascist politics. However, Mauberley is convicted by the very story that he creates, for his "history" on the walls of the Grand Elysium Hotel shows how

the aesthete "dirties" himself and then tries to cleanse himself through a deceptive confession. Mauberley's attempt to make the real and "ugly" actions that he performed become part of a "beautiful" story fails--for even though Mauberley tries to make his murders aesthetic by likening them to murders in art, he cannot disguise the fact that he is really a killer. Likewise, the internal reader's response to this "fiction" is no more compelling. Quinn, the American soldier who reads Mauberley's chronicle, actually dates and endorses this last will and testament, in spite of the obvious lies and moral degradation.

Thus, Findley asks the reader of these novels to accept the dictum that Wilde himself repudiated, that "art is the supreme reality" and life a "mere mode of fiction" (De Profundis 151). However, the aesthetic approach to life is successful only in the realm of the imagination; aestheticism ultimately fails when it is applied to history and to politics. When this artifice does not succeed in coping with reality, Findley can only offer an escape into beauty by using "the fine lie" to blur the line between reality and art. Yet, in Findley's eyes, this escape into the imagination must be attempted no matter how high the cost is to truth, for if the aesthetic approach to life should ever falter, all that remains, for Timothy Findley at least, is utter despair.

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